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Exploring School Leadership Strategies for Supporting Teachers to Address Learning Gaps of Progressed Learners: A Case Study in Selected Secondary Schools in Gauteng Province

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Exploring School Leadership Strategies for Supporting Teachers to Address Learning Gaps of Progressed Learners: A Case Study in Selected Secondary Schools in Gauteng Province

SUBMITTED BY

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Submission in accordance with the requirements of:

Master of Education with a specialisation in:

Education Leadership and Policy Skills (ELPS)

At the

University of the Witwatersrand

July 2024

Under the Supervision of Dr P. E Mthembu

DECLARATION

I, **Sara Seopetsoa**, declare that:

i. This research report, submitted in candidature for the degree of Master of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand is the result of my independent work and investigation.

ii. All sources used have been duly acknowledged and referenced.

iii. This report has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification at this or any other university.

iv. The views and opinions expressed in this report are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the university or any other institution.

Signature:  Date: ___**18 July 2024**____

Sara Seopetsoa

STATEMENT BY SUPERVISOR

I hereby confirm that I have reviewed and approved the submission of the research report titled **Exploring School Leadership Strategies for Supporting Teachers to Address Learning Gaps of Progressed Learners: A Case Study in Selected Secondary Schools in Gauteng Province**

Signature:  Date: _____05 August 2024_____

Supervisor: Dr P. E. Mthembu

DEDICATION

To my family, whose constant support and encouragement kept me afloat throughout this research journey. Your belief in my capabilities has inspired me to push beyond my limits. I am grateful for the love and sacrifices made to ensure that this research becomes a success. As such, this research report is dedicated to you.

To my late mother, continue to rest in peace *Mosebjadi!*

Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. - **Matthew 6:34**

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My leader, **Tumelo Makua,** your presence is therapeutic, and conversations with you are always fruitful…an individual can learn a lot from engaging with you.

Teachers, departmental heads, and principals who participated in my study, their time and insights are highly appreciated. This study would not have been a success without their contribution.

To **God**, words will fail me.

ETHICAL CLEARANCE

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

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

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

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2023ECE053M**
PROJECT TITLE	School Leadership Strategies for Supporting Teachers to Address Learning Gaps of Progressed Learners: A Case Study in 3 Secondary Schools in Tshwane South (D4)
INVESTIGATOR	**Sara Seopetsoa**
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	Wits School of Education
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RISK LEVEL	No risk
EXPIRY DATE	Date of submission of the Research Report
ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE	**CHAIRPERSON** Mbokane
21 August 2023	Dr. Batseba Mofolo-Mbokane

cc: Dr Pinkie Mthembu

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

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

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

Signature **Date** 22 / 08 / 2023

ABSTRACT

The study explores the challenges that teachers face when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners and the school leaderships' understanding of their roles in relation to supporting these teachers. When learners are progressed from one grade to another, due to not meeting the promotion requirements, they are to be provided with the necessary support by their teachers. As such, this implies that teachers need to have the necessary skills and knowledge to address the learning needs of these learners. This then necessitates the need for school leaders to support teachers as they work to support the progressed learners academically. This further highlights the importance of school leadership in the schooling context and its impact on ensuring school improvement.

An interpretive research paradigm was used for this study since the rationale was to gather deeper insights into the learner progression phenomenon. Further, this study employed a qualitative research approach applying the research design of a case study. Twelve (12) participants from selected six (6) secondary schools in Gauteng were purposefully sampled. Data was gathered through eleven (11) face-to-face interviews and one online semi-structured interview. Thereafter, the data was thematically analysed through transcribing, coding, and re-reading to identify and discuss apparent themes. For this study, the theoretical framework used was the Instructional Leadership Theory and Bandura's (1977) concept of Self-efficacy.The findings of this study reflect that teachers face numerous challenges when seeking to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. These challenges include firstly that progressed learners exhibit a deficit in motivation. Secondly, teachers face time constraints, which imply that they do not have enough time to attend to the progressed learners. Additionally, there appears to be a lack of proficiency among teachers in identifying progressed learners. Moreover, in schools, there seems to be a lack of teacher collaboration and effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Lastly, another challenge that emerged is the low level of school leadership support that is apparent in schools. On that, the findings suggest that school leadership has a greater understanding of their leadership role with regards to supporting teachers navigate these challenges and thus address the learning gaps of progressed learners. As numerous scholars assert, school leadership plays an enormous role in the improvement of their schools. Thus, the findings of this study outline school leadership strategies that could be employed by school leaders to support their teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners. As such, the recommendations as stemming from the findings are that,

when policies are implemented in schools, there should be follow-ups to assess their effectiveness and thus address their ineffectiveness. Moreover, school leaders need to ensure that their school culture aligns with the school's vision. On that, in schools, it should be made mandatory to do frequent assessments of policy knowledge. This will be to ensure that implementers have a thorough understanding of what practices are expected of them. In addition, from the findings of this study, it is highly recommended that there be training and development programmes for school leaders to ensure that they are adequately prepared on how to support teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ATPs	Annual Teaching Plans
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DH	Departmental head
DBE	Department of Basic Education
ELPS	Educational Leadership and Policy Skills
NPPPPR	National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements
NSC	National Senior Certificate
PLCs	Professional Learning Communities
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
SPP	School Progression Policy

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction and Background

This study aimed to explore the challenges teachers encounter while addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners and how school leadership understands their role in supporting these educators. The reason for this focus is that poor performance by learners reflects on a country's education system, leading to questions about the capabilities of teachers as curriculum implementers. Spaull (2013) strongly contends that South Africa's persistent low learner performance can be attributed to factors like inadequate teacher quality and insufficient knowledge of the subject matter. However, it is worth noting that achieving high academic performance in schools requires more than just the efforts of teachers. It is primarily the leadership within schools that can drive school improvement. Özdemir (2020) supports this by asserting that school leadership significantly enhances teaching and learning in educational institutions. In this context, Spaull (2013) highlights that inadequate leadership skills among school leaders can also be the reason for this poor performance.

Considering the escalating issue of low learner performance, the South African education system attempts to mitigate this challenge by implementing policies such as the School Progression Policy (SPP, 2015). Makhanya (2021) states that the SPP was instituted to counteract significant grade repetitions and learner dropouts resulting from poor academic performance. Equally, Khobe (2021, p. 2) explains that the SPP was designed as "a systematic intervention [aiming] to limit the retention of learners by [preventing] schools from [holding] struggling learners in the school system for more than one year in any three-year phase." Essentially, this policy operates on the principle that learners, despite failing to meet the promotion criteria for their current grade, should be '*progressed'* to the next grade while also receiving ample support to enhance their performance and subsequently be '*promoted'* to the next grade (Makhanya, 2021). It is crucial to note that this support primarily falls on teachers, as highlighted by the Department of Education. This underscores the need for teachers to possess the necessary skills and knowledge needed to effectively address this responsibility. Consequently, it becomes crucial to assess the capability of South African teachers to navigate the complexities accompanying the policy's implementation. To enable teachers to perform optimally, school leaders must offer comprehensive support and guidance. Such assistance will enable teachers to effectively help progressed learners enhance their academic performance.

When academically struggling learners move up a grade, they often face challenges in meeting the academic expectations of the higher level (Nyathi, 2022). Consequently, teachers are responsible for adapting their lesson plans to accommodate diverse learners in their classrooms. Hence, supporting progressed learners in improving their academic performance requires providing teachers with the necessary support to enhance their instructional practices. While Nyathi (2022) contends that teachers' instructional practices should bridge the learning gaps for progressed learners, Moagi (2020) argues that teachers lack adequate training to teach these learners effectively. This lack of training suggests that teachers may struggle with addressing the consequences of implementing the SPP. To effectively deliver content that meets the needs of all learners, teachers must understand the diverse learning requirements. As such, for teachers to execute this effectively, they need substantial support from school leaders.

Meanwhile, Özdemir (2020) strongly asserts that effective leadership is the cornerstone behind high-achieving schools. Likewise, Bellibaş, Gümüş, and Liu (2021) also emphasise the significant role of school leaders among various factors contributing to school effectiveness. Consequently, it falls upon school leaders to empower teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners by employing effective leadership strategies to enhance teachers' instructional practices. When teachers' instructional practices are sufficiently enhanced and they have access to necessary educational resources, there exists a potential for improving learner performance (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Muedi, Kutame, Ngidi & Uleanya, 2021). In essence, teachers' instructional practices play a pivotal role in enhancing learner performance, thus, school leaders should prioritise constantly sourcing for effective leadership strategies that will afford them the platform to strengthen teachers' capabilities to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. Therefore, this study sought to contribute to the body of research by exploring and investigating effective strategies that school leaders could employ to support teachers in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners.

Lakomski, Evers, and Eacott (2016) assert that the duty of school leaders involves supervising the growth, both personal and professional, of teachers. This support from school leaders entails meeting the needs of teachers to strengthen their performance, engaging in supportive activities that cultivate a sense of worth among teachers, and nurturing positive relationships between school leaders and their team members (Özdemir, 2020). Similarly, Kiral (2020) argues that the support provided by school leaders to teachers encompasses various facets, such as professional and personal help, creating conducive environments, allocating time, providing

educational assistance, and ensuring access to essential resources. Conversely, Günbayı, Dağlı, and Kalkan (2013) have outlined school leadership support as inclusive of emotional, instrumental, and informational aspects. Ertürk (2021, p. 185) strongly underscores the significance of these dimensions:

> Emotional principal support refers to the type of support demonstrated when principals/supervisors accept their employees as they are, value them by showing respect and affection, and helping them to cope with conflict, stress, and difficulties they encounter (Bhanthumnavin, 2000). Instrumental support refers to the provision of materials, resources, space, and time needed by teachers, while informational support refers to principals' constructive and ongoing feedback on teachers' work, support for teachers' professional development, and the provision of current and useful information and guidance to teachers regarding effective instructional practices.

Recognising these dimensions, school leaders must offer strong support to teachers. This further includes creating a school setting, that values teachers and cultivates a peaceful, comfortable work environment. This support includes actively valuing teachers' thoughts, attending to their needs and concerns, and acknowledging their achievements. As Bellibaş et al. (2021) correctly argue, past research extensively illustrates that support from principals or supervisors profoundly improves organizational performance.

1.2 Policy Stipulations

As stipulated in Chapter 2 of *the South African constitution*, education is made available to all individuals, ensuring that no child is excluded (The South African Constitution, 1996). Consequently, when school leaders empower teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners, they are enabling equal access to education for all learners. While ensuring accessibility is crucial, the quality of education is equally important. Therefore, school leaders must ensure the enhancement of their teachers' instructional practices and provide adequate support to enable them to fulfil this responsibility. Therefore, it is equally crucial that school leaders fulfil their roles to the best of their abilities. *And what specific responsibilities or tasks would they have?* The *South African Standard for Principalship* policy outlines the duties of school principals and the competencies expected of them. As per this policy, principals are tasked with developing and executing strategies, policies, and protocols that translate the school's vision and mission into tangible actions and results (Government Gazette, 2016). They

are also responsible for continuously assessing the school's performance, fostering its ongoing development and improvement. Moreover, principals hold the responsibility for creating a conducive and supportive learning environment that facilitates effective teaching and learning (Bellibaş et al., 2021).

1.3 Personal motivation and professional motivation

Being a full-time Masters' degree candidate and a part-time teacher of the Saturdays and Holidays School programme can imply that I have insufficient knowledge of what transpires in schools entirely. Briefly, upon my completion of 12 years of schooling, I enrolled for the Bachelor of Education Senior Phase and FET, which was completed in 2021. In 2022, I enrolled for the Bachelor of Education Honours in the Educational Leadership and Policy Skills (ELPS) division, which I have completed. Moreover, I got the opportunity to study an online course called 'Policy and Practice in Global Education' with the American University of Central Asia. As such, when it comes to what transpires in schools, my theoretical knowledge is more than my practical knowledge of teaching practices in schools.

As such, from being exposed to extensive literature, as a researcher, I discovered that the existing literature highlights how teachers can support progressed learners to improve academically. However, much is not highlighted when it comes to the leadership in schools and how they can go about supporting teachers who are aiding these learners. This realisation then prompted me as the researcher to review the content of the School Progression Policy. What stood out from the policy of *promotion & progression of learners in public schools* (The Equal Education Law Centre, n. d., p. 2), was that:

> Progressed learners must receive support to learn, this may include support in the classroom with the curriculum, as well as support with assessments. A learner cannot be progressed to the next grade without the provision of support.

The above sparked my interest in engaging with the phenomena of the study as what seemed to be overlooked was the question of whether teachers are trained, guided, and supported to enhance their capabilities to support progressed learners. This interest was further fuelled by the policy's failure to outline what forms of support school leaders should provide teachers to ensure that they are fully equipped to address the learning gaps of these learners. Notably, the policy focuses much on learners being supported, neglecting that teachers also require support in their journeys of supporting these learners.

Moreover, through having informal conversations with colleagues who are fully practising on the ground, I discovered that as teachers, they lacked the necessary knowledge and skills needed to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. Moreover, through academic debates around this field of study, I learnt that progressed learners are rather neglected, which then implies that the idea of school leaders supporting teachers in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners is one that is not active. Perhaps the absence of teachers' support to progressed learners is because they also do not receive adequate support to capacitate them with tackling this task.

Thus, all that, in its entirety, motivated me as the researcher, to explore the challenges that teachers face in relation to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners and the school leadership's comprehension of these challenges and their roles in mitigating them. This in turn afforded me the platform to explore effective strategies school leaders could employ to support teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Teachers, as being on the receiving end of the SPP, are challenged to deal with underperforming learners who are progressed in accordance with the content of this policy (Makhanya, 2021). Amid their differing learning needs, teachers are expected to ensure that all learners in their classrooms acquire knowledge and in turn, pass. As such, supporting progressed learners adds to the already demanding workload shaped by the extensive content of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Mogale & Modipane, 2021).

The Department of Basic Education highlights the necessity for teachers to be equipped with the essential knowledge required for effectively imparting curriculum content (Muedi et al., 2021). Undoubtedly, school leaders must ensure an efficient curriculum delivery process. However, this being the case, there is limited guidance on how school leaders can provide support and enhance the capabilities of teachers' instructional practices, especially in catering to the educational needs of all learners, including progressed learners. As highlighted by Muedi et al. (2021), due to the presence of progressed learners, teachers are confronted with the challenge of refining their teaching practices to accommodate both promoted and progressed learners within the same classroom. This raises the pertinent question: Are teachers adequately supported and equipped to undertake this task?

Empowering and enabling teachers to instruct progressed learners is an essential part of a school's improvement strategy, which school leaders should prioritise. Constantly seeking effective strategies to enable teachers to teach progressed learners is vital. According to Bojuwoye, Moletsane, Stofile, Moolla, and Sylvester (2014), learner support involves various forms of assistance aimed at resolving learning challenges and bridging gaps in knowledge. However, within the South African education system, there appears to be a disconnect between teachers' instructional practices and the specific needs of progressed learners. In essence, teachers lack sufficient guidance from school leaders on how to teach progressed learners. This lack thus emphasises the issue of school leaders not having detailed knowledge on how to support these teachers.

As highlighted by Nyathi (2022), teachers' instructional practices significantly influence the teaching and learning process. Therefore, it falls upon school leaders to implement leadership strategies that enhance teachers' instructional practices, enabling them to effectively carry out their teaching responsibilities (Özdemir, 2020). Furthermore, school leaders, as the catalysts for change within schools as organisations, must implement effective strategies to enhance teachers' instructional practices and subject knowledge. This enhancement will enable teachers to offer the necessary support to progressed learners.

Acknowledging the issues as alluded above, there is a scarcity of research exploring how school leaders can enhance teachers' abilities to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. While previous studies by Bertram, Mthiyane, and Naidoo (2021), Bhagwonparsadh and Pule (2023), and Msane, Murimo, and Chani (2020) focus on how teachers can assist progressed learners, they overlook the crucial support teachers themselves need, to tackle this issue effectively. Hence, there arose the necessity for conducting this study.

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore strategies on how school leaders can enhance teachers' instructional practices, enabling them to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. Consequently, school leaders who engage with this study could potentially address the challenge of low performance in their schools.

1.6 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were:

i. To explore the challenges that teachers encounter when addressing learning gaps of progressed learners.
ii. To explore how school leaders comprehend these challenges.
iii. To explore school leaders' perspectives concerning their leadership roles in supporting teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners.
iv. To explore strategies that school leaders could implement to support teachers in enhancing their teaching practices, enabling them to effectively address the learning gaps of progressed learners.

1.7 Research Questions

The research questions of this study were as follows:

i. What are the challenges encountered by teachers when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners?
ii. How do school leaders comprehend these challenges?
iii. What are the perspectives of school leaders concerning their leadership roles in supporting teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners?
iv. What strategies can school leaders implement to support teachers in enhancing their teaching practices, enabling them to effectively address the learning gaps of progressed learners?

1.8 Significance of the study

The significance of this study rests in addressing the existing gap in literature by extending the understanding concerning effective strategies school leaders can employ to potentially advance the instructional practices of teachers. The significance further rests in furnishing school leaders, who peruse this research report, with recommendations aimed at enhancing their teachers' instructional practices, consequently improving the low performance of learners in their schools. Ultimately, this improvement could positively impact Grade 12 results, which are currently at risk due to insufficient support for progressed learners. Essentially, the school leadership strategies recommended in this study, if implemented, have the potential to facilitate teacher development, enhance learner performance, and elevate matriculation results.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

As per Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018), a study's limitations are regarded as potential weaknesses that are beyond the researcher's control and may hinder the findings or

conclusions. Simply put, limitations represent obstacles that impact a study's outcomes. In this study, the sample size stood out as a plausible weakness due to its inability to facilitate generalisations or definitive conclusions regarding the studied case. This limitation arose from the inclusion of only 12 participants, which is notably small when considering the substantial number of affected individuals. Thus, the limitation of this study was found in its exploration of a phenomenon that had a significant impact on a substantial population of teachers, department heads (DHs), and principals using a relatively limited scale.

1.10 Delimitations of the Study

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018) assert that the delimitations of a study involve the researcher defining specific boundaries or limits within which their work operates, ensuring that the study's aims and objectives remain achievable. Put simply, they emphasised that delimitations clarify the reasoning behind researchers' methods. Therefore, researchers themselves consciously establish these delimitations. In this study, the research was carried out specifically within 6 selected township secondary schools in the Gauteng province, at the same time recognising the unique challenges faced by teachers in these settings compared to those in rural areas. Acknowledging this context, the school leadership strategies recommended in this study are applicable to any school leader, irrespective of context. By narrowing and confining the study to this particular setting, it allowed the researcher to accomplish the study's objectives successfully.

1.11 Clarification of Concepts

Although certain concepts in this study may be widely known, there is a possibility that some readers might misconstrue or interpret them differently. This section seeks to address and clarify any potential misconceptions that may arise during the study. The subsequent discussion focuses on key concepts, namely, leadership, learning gaps, and leadership strategies.

1.11.1 Leadership

There are various conceptualisations of leadership by many scholars. To date, leadership remains a concept that is highly contested and contextually dependent. As Rosari (2019) argues, scholars define leadership based on their individual perceptions and their research interest areas. According to Bush and Glover (2016), leadership is the process of social influence in

which one maximises the efforts of those involved to ensure that their practices are geared towards the attainment of shared goals. Huber and Mujis (2010) share the same views with the understanding that leadership is the process of influencing and mobilising individuals to work towards achieving shared intentions of the organisation. Similarly, Rost and Smith (1992) state that leadership is the influence that lies between leaders and followers who share the same goals in relation to improvements and effectiveness. Conversely, Özdemir (2019) argues that leadership implies the capacity to create innovative visions for an organisation to be able to translate them into realities. In all, Leithwood and Riehl (2003, p. 4) assert that, while there may be many definitions of leadership, at the core remain two functions, which are "providing directions and exercising influence". Indeed, from the conceptualisations of leadership outlined above, it can be deduced that leadership is the ability of one to influence others into ensuring that their efforts are towards achieving shared goals. Similarly, this study shares the same views. In this study, leadership in schools as organisations refers to the process in whichindividualsare tasked with ensuring that all members involved in the process of teaching and learning are putting all their efforts into ensuring productivity. As such, in the schooling context, this refers to principals, deputy principals, departmental heads, and subject leaders. In a nutshell, this study understands leadership to be a process of which to come to life needs the involvement of individuals who employ differing leadership theories.

1.11.2 Learning gaps

This study conceptualises learning gaps as generally referring to the breach between what a learner has learnt as compared to what they should have learnt in reference to the content of their previous grade. As Devi (2022) correctly argues, a learning gap refers to the difference between what a learner has learnt in comparison to what they were expected to learn at that particular level in their education. Similarly, Torres (2021, p. 76) asserts that learning gaps refer to the distinction between "what learners are expected to have learned by a certain grade level versus what they have learned up to that point." Torres (2021) argues that these learning gaps thus need to be addressed promptly to ensure that learners do not fail further due to the knowledge and skills that they did not acquire. According to Torres (2021), learning gaps transpire when learners do not acquire the necessary knowledge and skills and proceed to a new phase without any redress. These learners encounter challenges in that next phase as unmastered knowledge and skills hinder learners from mastering those of the next grade which then creates a learning gap. As such, Reddy, and Nair (2015) argue that teachers in these circumstances must play a vital role as they have a direct influence on the learning of the

learners. However, to be capacitated to play this enormous role, Reddy, and Nair (2015, p. 108) correctly argue that "the teachers themselves must be competent and knowledgeable in the subjects they are specialised to teach." This argument justifies the need to ensure that teachers on the ground are supported and trained so they are competent and capacitated to address the learning gaps of progressed learners.

1.11.3 Progressed Learners

Progressed learners are those who are moved from one grade to the next regardless of not meeting the promotion requirements of that particular grade. This, however, excludes Grade R. According to the Department of Education (DBE, 2011), progressed learners are those who are prevented from being retained in a phase for a period exceeding four years (Government Gazette 36041, 2012). This simply implies that learners who have failed the same grade for the second time cannot be retained but should be allowed to progress to the next grade (DBE, 2015). However, this being the case, it is worth noting that the progression policy does not apply in Grade 12, thus, progressed learners are expected to meet the promotion requirements of Grade 12.

1.11.4 Leadership Strategies

According to Johnson and Scholes (2003), strategy determines the direction and scope of an organization over the long term, and it should determine how resources should be configured to meet the needs of markets and stakeholders. In the schooling context, leadership strategies refer to the plans and methods that school leaders employ in attempts to address challenges faced in their schools as organisations. In simplicity, leadership strategies are the thoughtful ways leaders plan and act to help guide, influence, and encourage others to reach shared goals. These methods include various practices that successful leaders use to oversee problems, motivate teams, and help their organizations to succeed. As Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013) assert, prior research suggests that school principals can have a profoundly deep impact on instruction and student learning. Therefore, effective leaders must be capable of promoting and sustaining an environment stable enough to attract, maintain, and support the further development of good teachers (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016).

1.12 Overview of the chapters of the study

This study consists of five chapters, with their content summarised in the following section:

Chapter One establishes the study's framework, encompassing the introduction and background, problem statement, the purpose of the study, personal and professional motivations, research questions and objectives, significance of the study, clarification of concepts, as well as the study's limitations and delimitations.

Chapter Two addresses and examines the relevant literature used to support and position the research within the academic discourse. This chapter delves into the contributions of numerous scholars in the field of progressed learners, student achievement, school improvement, leadership, and teacher development strategies.

Chapter Three introduces and explores the theoretical and conceptual framework guiding the study, specifically focusing on the Instructional Leadership Theory and Teacher Efficacy and their relevance to the research. Additionally, this chapter outlines the research design and methodology, encompassing the research paradigm, approach, design, sampling technique, data collection methods, instruments employed, data analysis approach, the trustworthiness of the study, and ethical aspects related to the study.

Chapter Four presents the findings resulting from the conducted research, integrating direct quotations sourced from data gathered in the field. The viewpoints of the participants are merged with discussions and supported by relevant literature.

Chapter Five concludes the study by reflecting on the challenges encountered by teachers in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners and examining the school leadership's comprehension of these challenges and their responsibilities in alleviating them. Subsequently, the chapter offers recommendations for potential actions and outlines ideas for further research derived from the study's findings.

1.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter set the mood for the study and offered a detailed summary. It started by introducing the study's background and reasoning, then moved on to detail the problem being investigated. It then explored the study's purpose, encompassing its main research questions and objectives. Additionally, it delved into the motivations - both professional and personal - driving the researcher to conduct the study. Finally, the chapter explained the fundamental concepts used in the study and discussed its limitations and delimitations.

The forthcoming chapter explores the literature relevant to the subject matter examined in this research.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The focal point of the education system revolves around the academic success of learners (Goni & Bello, 2016). This emphasises the significant influence of teachers' instructional practices, which significantly affect learner achievement. Therefore, it becomes essential for school leaders to consistently explore ways to assist and improve teachers' instructional practices, enabling them to elevate learner performance. Consequently, it is the responsibility of school leaders to guarantee that teachers possess the necessary skills to effectively handle the difficulties stemming from the implementation of the SPP. This chapter examines literature related to the SPP, the challenges teachers face in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners, strategies for teacher development, and the leadership's role in developing and implementing those strategies.

2.2 School Progression Policy (SPP)

The Department of Education implemented the SPP in 2013 aiming to reduce high dropout rates (Madani, 2019; Mogale & Modipane, 2021). As per this policy, students should not remain in a particular phase for longer than four years (NPPPPR, Government Gazette No. 34600, 2011). The content of the SPP as stated in Munje and Maarman (2016, p. 187-188) suggests that:

> Since a learner is only allowed to repeat a grade once in each phase, the learner is liable for promotion once [they have] already repeated a grade in a phase. In effect, the policy ensures that a learner is given the opportunity to progress with the age cohort. [This is regardless of whether the learner fulfils the promotion requirements or not]. The assumption is that…the learner will be assisted to acquire the necessary content knowledge that [they lack] in the new grade, in order to assist that learner to cope in the current grade, as well as, to progress to the next grade (Department of Basic Education, 2012).

As per the guidelines for the promotion and progression implementation, schools are entrusted with the duty of assisting progressed learners and to monitor their academic advancement (Mogale & Modipane, 2021). Consequently, the effective execution of the SPP relies heavily on the support extended to progressed learners by their teachers (Munje & Maarman, 2016). In

light of this situation, Ramputla (2020) contends that the SPP has resulted in frustrations among teachers. Although teachers are expected to aid progressed learners, they receive no specific training on how to execute such policies. Despite this, the Department of Education asserts that the success of the SPP centres entirely upon teachers' comprehension of the policy and its thorough implementation. This underscores the critical need for supporting teachers in comprehending and navigating the implementation of the SPP.

2.3 Policy implementation

The execution of a documented policy is termed policy implementation (Green & Nasser, 2017). Being a process, it suggests potential difficulties inherent in its execution. As highlighted by Mogale and Modipane (2021), despite the development of policies aimed at tackling educational challenges, the actual implementation remains problematic, a trend observed globally. In the South African context, Moodley's (2014) study corroborated this, revealing that teachers faced obstacles in implementing the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) due to insufficient training. Ramputla (2020) outlines that in implementing educational policies in this country, teachers face challenges, including resource shortages, inadequate training, and curriculum overload exacerbated by issues within school leadership. Moreover, teachers were provided with resources to navigate the implementation process, particularly in overcrowded classrooms (Ramputla, 2020).

In contrast, in Turkey, teachers successfully implemented educational policies because they had a clear understanding and received appropriate training. In Kenya, the ineffective implementation of inclusion policies in secondary schools resulted from overlooking certain crucial factors during the implementation phase (McCarthy, Wiener & Soodak, 2012). Conversely, in Botswana, challenges arose in implementing the language-in-education policy due to oversight regarding language barriers and diverse learning styles during the implementation process (Mokibelo, 2016). This supports the argument presented in this study that, for teachers to effectively implement policies, such as the SPP in this context, they need robust support and access to essential educational resources.

2.4 Progressed Learners in SA context.

According to the National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R – 12, learner progression is "…the advancement of a learner from one grade to the next, excluding Grade R, despite the learner

not having complied with all the promotion requirements" (Department of Basic Education, 2013: xi). Within the South African education system, learners are either promoted or progressed, aligning with the National Policy for Assessment (2011). When a learner is promoted, it means they have met the promotion requirements for that particular grade. In a case where a learner is progressed, it implies that that particular learner did not meet the promotion requirements, but due to reasons as per the SPP, that learner is moved to the next grade. These two approaches to grade advancement recognise the diversity among learners. According to the Department of Basic Education (2011), learners exhibit varying cognitive abilities, with some excelling academically while others face learning obstacles. Consequently, those encountering challenges in learning are progressed to the subsequent grade as specified in the SPP. In essence, as Nyathi (2022) states, progressed learners are those who did not perform well in a grade but were moved to the next grade with the expectation of receiving the necessary support.

Yet, Nkosi and Adebayo (2021) posit that progressed learners encounter difficulties in the succeeding grade due to inadequate foundational knowledge of the subject matter. This presents a challenge for teachers who must cover the curriculum while also addressing the needs of these learners. Mamphela (as cited in Makhanya, 2021) contends that progressed learners are moved from one grade to another, and later encounter obstacles when attempting to gain entry into higher education institutions. Similarly, Nyathi (2022) asserts that learners are progressed to the next grade without sufficient support to comprehend the curriculum content, resulting in high dropout rates. Ramputla (2020) aligns with this perspective, arguing that while learners are progressed, they are still expected to meet the National Senior Certificate (NSC) requirements to obtain a matric certificate, a challenge that these learners struggle to achieve.

As indicated by Mogale and Modipane (2021), the aforementioned point finds validation in the notable decline in matriculation results in the year (2015) when the SPP was fully enacted. Both Mogale and Modipane (2021) and Ramputla (2020) are of the view that progressed learners contributed to the decline in matric results of 2015 as it was the year in which the first group of progressed learners reached Grade 12. To put this into perspective, the national matriculation results were 75.8% in 2014, dropping to 70.7% in 2015, marking a national decline of 5.1%. This underscores that progressed learners did not experience advantages from the implementation of the SPP. Implying that although the SPP had been implemented, the outcomes were not fruitful, suggesting that the progressed learners did not benefit from the

implementation of the policy. On that, Musitha and Mafukata (2018) argue that progressed learners can only derive benefits from the SPP if they receive supportive learning environments encompassing essential scaffolding tools to enhance their academic performance. Consequently, the Department of Education has urged schools to offer these learners assistance in addressing their specific subject-related deficiencies in empowering them to meet the requirements of the subsequent grade (DBE, 2013).

2.5 Challenges encountered by teachers when addressing learning gaps of progressed learners

Teachers' lack of essential knowledge and skills to cater to diverse learning needs impedes the successful implementation of policies such as the SPP. Consequently, the exclusion of teachers from policy development results in challenges during policy implementation. As asserted by Werts and Brewer (2015), policy failures often stem from disregarding teachers' real-life experiences and the practical challenges they encounter when implementing these policies. Undoubtedly, teachers face difficulties when attempting to implement educational policies effectively. The research conducted by Mogale and Modipane (2021) supports this contention, citing obstacles faced by teachers, such as resource shortages and overcrowded classrooms when providing curriculum support to progressed learners. Musitha and Mafukata (2018) further reinforce this notion, highlighting that inadequate resources limit adaptable curriculum support, hampering teachers' abilities to employ innovative strategies to assist progressed learners. Notably, public schools in South Africa grapple with overcrowding, making it difficult for teachers to address struggling learners individually to bridge their learning gaps. Mogale and Modipane (2021) stress that overcrowded classrooms disrupt the teaching and learning process, thereby limiting effective support. Knight (2010) echoes these sentiments, arguing that inadequate teaching materials hamper the effective implementation of the SPP. Similarly, Rammala (2009) contends that insufficient resources hinder the efficiency of everyday school activities.

Apart from dealing with overcrowded classrooms and insufficient resources, teachers confront the additional challenge of covering the curriculum, which significantly increases their workload, especially when supporting progressed learners. Bertram et al.'s (2021) study elucidates that the extent of curriculum coverage is assessed based on the Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs). These ATPs outline the weekly activities and scheduling of assessments in schools but do not consider the diverse learning needs of students.

As per Bertram et al. (2021), teachers find themselves caught between the imperative to cover the curriculum and the need to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. Moagi (2020) emphasises that this rush to cover the curriculum leads to limited time for teachers to engage with progressed learners effectively. Moreover, the challenge of curriculum coverage extends to lesson planning. Moagi (2020) contends that teachers struggle to structure lesson plans that accommodate the diverse learning needs of all students. Although the CAPS attempted to provide lesson plans to alleviate teachers' heavy workloads, Moagi (2020) argues that these plans are somewhat rigid and do not account for individual learning profiles as assessed by teachers. Moreover, while teachers strive to cover the curriculum comprehensively and ensure inclusive instructional practices, their subject proficiency becomes another crucial factor. Moagi (2020) highlights that teachers' proficiency in the subjects they teach can pose a challenge when instructing progressed learners. This underscores the importance of continuous training to enhance teachers' proficiency, enabling them to effectively teach and address the learning gaps of progressed learners.

The challenges stemming from overcrowded classrooms, insufficient educational resources, teacher proficiency, and overwhelming workloads hinder teachers from effectively overseeing the implementation of the SPP. Consequently, as highlighted by Mogale and Modipane (2021), the challenges teachers encounter in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners compound the existing challenges within schools. Weiner (2009) underscores the necessity for schools, as organisational entities, to be adequately equipped for policy implementation. This entails the development of teachers' instructional practices, ensuring sufficient resources, and establishing a robust support structure within the organisation. Until these elements are in place, the implementation of educational policies for sustained educational improvements will remain ineffective.

2.6 The role of school leaders in the educational context

Consistently, leadership pertains to an individual's ability to influence others, aligning their practices with shared organisational goals and the greater good. In a similar vein, Özdemir (2019) posits that leadership involves expanding the efforts of others to empower them toward achieving collective organisational objectives. Correspondingly, Leithwood and Riehl (2003) strongly affirm the pivotal role of leadership in the educational context, particularly in enhancing learner performance. This significance is rooted in leaders' capacities to ensure teachers' development and, consequently, improvements in learner performances. As noted by

scholars such as Bellibaş et al. (2021), Bichi (2017), and Özdemir (2019), the engagement of school leaders in the teaching and learning process yields positive outcomes. Similarly, Mkhuma (2012) asserts that within schools, principals hold the responsibility of setting the stage for transformation. This change should be underpinned by an authentically inclusive philosophy, entailing support for teachers and learners through skills development, mentorship, resource provisions, and, when necessary, external services.

As per the Department of Basic Education (DBE) guidelines in 2010, these responsibilities also encompass ensuring the comprehensive practices of school policies, improvement plans, programs, and ethos. Additionally, this entails the establishment of a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment for parents, teachers, learners, and staff members. This inclusive approach extends to creating collaborative frameworks within school schedules, allocating time for teachers to plan care and support programs, distributing resources effectively, maximising staff utilisation, and offering learner support services, among other tasks (Mkhuma, 2012). Similarly, Mestry (2017) strongly advocates for the principal's responsibility to foster and maintain teams within the educational setting. Mestry (2017) emphasises the need for principals to facilitate team meetings, ensure team flexibility, provide space for gatherings, create and store resources generated by teams, encourage cooperative work, and acknowledge and evaluate group efforts. If properly established, these teams should aid teachers in identifying learners facing learning barriers and provide high-quality support. This viewpoint aligns with Memela's (2022) argument that effective leadership can prepare teachers for change by fostering environments that naturally encourage change as teachers observe the impact of new practices on student learning.

2.7 School leadership strategies for improving teachers' instructional practices so they are capacitated to address the learning gaps of progressed learners

The discussion below outlines effective strategies that school leaders can employ to improve teachers' instructional practices. These strategies have the potential to develop teachers and equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills needed to address the learning gaps of progressed learners.

2.7.1 Teacher performance evaluation

Achieving educational goals relies heavily on effectively evaluating teacher performance (Özdemir, 2019). Özdemir (2019) contends that the instructional practices employed by teachers significantly impact learners' academic success. Therefore, regular classroom

observations conducted by school leaders can serve as an effective means to assess teachers' instructional practices. Similarly, Bichi (2017) underscores the importance of evaluating teacher performance through maintaining that it is as crucial as assessing learner achievement. Bichi (2017) strongly asserts that a teacher's competence directly correlates with the quality of education learners receive. Ineffectiveness in a teacher's performance is likely to impact the learning outcomes of the learners they instruct. As such, the evaluation of teacher performance facilitates professional development by enabling school leaders to witness teachers in action and assess their abilities.

Similarly, Bellibaş et al. (2021) echo the notion that classroom observations serve as a legitimate method to appraise a teacher's performance. They suggest that school leaders can discern both the strengths and weaknesses of teachers through direct observation, critical aspects crucial for a leader aiming to foster their staff's development. Conversely, Firestone and Cecilia Martinez (2007) advocate for coaching as a catalyst for positive teaching impacts. Thus, they emphasise that school leaders should not only observe and assess teachers but actively engage in coaching them. According to Firestone and Cecilia Martinez (2007), the coaching and supervision provided by school leaders serve as primary avenues through which most teachers acquire new instructional practices. This underscores the importance for leaders to possess diverse teaching strategies and remain updated with current research on guiding teachers effectively and providing constructive feedback on their instructional practices. Additionally, Al-Thani, Ari, and Koç (2021) share similar perspectives, suggesting that school leaders should leverage internal assessments, specifically teacher evaluations, to conduct a thorough analysis of teachers' instructional practices. This implies the necessity for a comprehensive examination of how teachers execute their instructional practices.

Corresponding scholars such as Özdemir (2019), Bichi (2017), Bellibaş et al. (2021), Al-Thani et al. (2021) also maintain that a regular visit to the classroom is a necessary component of evaluating a teacher's performance to observe them in action and provide them recommendations on how to improve. While visiting the classrooms, school leaders should carefully evaluate their teachers' abilities and ensure that the criticism they give is helpful enough to support teacher development. The significance of feedback is also emphasised by Özdemir (2020), who views the evaluation of teacher performance as a crucial component in fostering professional growth in assessing and raising school quality. School leaders can thus observe classes and give feedback on the practices, which can be seen to assess the work of teachers. By providing feedback, school leaders may assist teachers in integrating their

practices with the school's academic standards (Thoonen, Sleegers, Oort, Peetsma & Geijsel, 2011). Correspondingly, Thoonen et al. (2011) assert that evaluation feedback can enhance teachers' instructional practices, subsequently strengthening teachers' self-assurance and efficacy. Simply said, feedback from evaluations serves as a road map for teachers as they develop their pedagogical approaches.

In line with scholars such as Özdemir (2019), Bichi (2017), and Bellibaş et al. (2021), Al-Thani et al. (2021) also advocate for the necessity of regular classroom visits as an essential element of evaluating a teacher's performance, allowing for direct observation and the provision of recommendations for improvement. During these classroom visits, school leaders should meticulously assess their teachers' capabilities and ensure that the critique offered is constructive and aimed at supporting teacher development. Özdemir (2020) highlights the importance of feedback, emphasising that the evaluation of teacher performance plays a pivotal role in fostering professional development and appraising and elevating school quality. Consequently, school leaders can observe classroom sessions and offer constructive feedback on instructional practices, effectively evaluating teachers' work. This feedback, as noted by Thoonen et al. (2011), enables school leaders to assist teachers in aligning their practices with the school's academic standards. Similarly, feedback from evaluations can enhance teachers' instructional practices, subsequently strengthening their confidence and effectiveness. Essentially, evaluation feedback serves as a guiding tool for teachers as they refine their instructional practices.

2.7.2 Creating Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Özdemir (2019) advocates for school leaders to establish Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) within their institutions to enrich teachers' instructional practices. PLCs enable teachers to support each other through coaching, mentoring, and guidance. Additionally, Özdemir (2020) asserts that school leaders play a pivotal role in improving educational quality by cultivating a positive learning environment. Conversely, Shirrell, Hopkins, and Spillane (2019) argue in favour of school leaders endorsing and nurturing both formal and on-the-job learning opportunities, as these significantly influence changes in teachers' instructional practices and effectiveness. Formal learning opportunities encompass professional development, which, as indicated by Özdemir (2020), constitutes an ongoing process for teachers to acquire new knowledge, skills, and values to enhance high-quality instruction.

As per Özdemir (2020), teachers tend to adapt and refine their instructional practices significantly due to their involvement in professional development initiatives. This exposure to formal learning opportunities equips teachers with diverse instructional practices that they can subsequently share with peers through observations (Shirrell et al., 2019). The authors also emphasise that PLCs can facilitate meaningful pedagogically oriented interactions among teachers. Similarly, Botha and Nel (2022) contends that PLCs are crucial in supporting professional development, offering a platform for teachers to collaborate, brainstorm, and collectively enhance their instructional practices. Consequently, it becomes a school leader's responsibility to encourage and motivate teachers to actively participate in these communities. Al-Thani et al. (2021) rightly assert that nurturing teachers' professional growth areas is fundamental for sustainable improvement. Thus, this study underscores the significant impact school leaders have on enhancing the overall quality of the teaching staff.

2.7.3 Fostering teacher collaboration

Hauge, Norenes, and Vedøy (2014) argue that teachers enhance their competence by exchanging teaching ideas and best practices, a process known as teacher collaboration. This collaboration is the key to refining teachers' instructional practices Lyna, Loong Hung and Chong (2016). They also emphasise that the core of teacher collaboration lies in teamwork, incorporating elements like peer coaching and mentorship. Collaborative environments among teachers foster growth, allowing them to develop new educational approaches collectively. Conversely, Hauge et al. (2014) assert that a school leader's role involves elevating teacher engagement, enhancing their competence, nurturing community growth, and encouraging collaboration. They further advocate for school leaders to create an environment where teachers feel comfortable openly sharing their instructional practices.

Enhancing teacher collaborations is crucial if school leaders aim to elevate learners' academic achievement (Özdemir, 2019). Thoonen et al. (2011) support this notion, emphasising that fostering collaboration and interactions among teachers contributes to teachers' professional development, which in turn impacts learners' academic performance. This sentiment is echoed by Quinn (2002), who asserts that teachers can improve their instructional practices through collaboration and cooperation. Therefore, it is noteworthy that school leaders advocating for teacher collaboration concurrently reinforce teachers' self-efficacy.

2.7.4 Improving teachers' self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is concerned with how confident an individual feels regarding their ability to succeed at a specific task in a particular situation (Waddington, 2023). This implies the extent to which an individual has beliefs in their practices and their capabilities to ensure the attainment of designated goals. On that, Thoonen et al. (2011) assert that teachers' efficacy plays a pivotal role in influencing their engagement in professional development activities, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of instructional quality. Similarly, Thompson, Warren, and Carter (2004) suggest that professional development is crucial to boosting teachers' efficacy, citing studies that indicate a correlation between teachers' expectations and their perceived effectiveness.

Likewise, Botha and Nel (2022) contend that school leaders should endorse teachers' leadership development and value diverse perspectives, positing that this approach elevates teachers' self-efficacy. Elevated self-efficacy, as suggested by Thoonen et al. (2011), motivates teachers to pursue professional development opportunities to refine their instructional practices. This then highlights the importance of high teachers' self-efficacy when it comes to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. When teachers' self-efficacy is improved, their practices are enhanced, and they tend to have strong beliefs that their practices will be successful in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners and, thus, the attainment of common goals in the school context. Consequently, school leaders must ensure that teachers have ample resources to enhance their instructional practices and align with the school's elevated academic standards (Al-Thani et al., 2021).

2.8 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework represents a coherent arrangement of interconnected concepts and principles that a researcher constructs, drawing upon one or multiple theories to underpin a study. Essentially, it embodies the researcher's effort to apply a theory within each study (Varpio, Paradis, Uijtdehaage & Young, 2020). In this study, the adopted theoretical framework integrates the Instructional Leadership theory alongside Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy. These frameworks complement each other by illustrating how instructional leaders can enhance teachers' self-efficacy. A comprehensive explanation and discussion of these frameworks is presented in the subsequent section.

2.8.1 Instructional Leadership theory

At the core of this study lies the focus on supporting teachers by school leaders, primarily adopting the Instructional Leadership theory. Robinson (2010) contends that leaders adhering to this theory are equipped to collaborate with teachers to enhance their instructional practices, aiming to enrich the academic performance of underperforming learners. Instructional leaders prioritise the seamless execution of daily academic operations within schools, offering vital support to teachers for successful curriculum implementation. The domains of this leadership theory include areas such as the creation of positive school culture, the provision of feedback, and the promotion of professional development of the staff and school leaders, ensuring that they foster a collaborative environment amongst other domains (Özdemir, 2020) as such, Munna (2023) emphasises that these leaders are dedicated to enhancing the teaching and learning process, a viewpoint corroborated by Weber (1996), who highlights that these leaders focus on curriculum delivery and teachers' instructional practices. Weber (1996) outlines the elements of Instructional Leadership as follows:

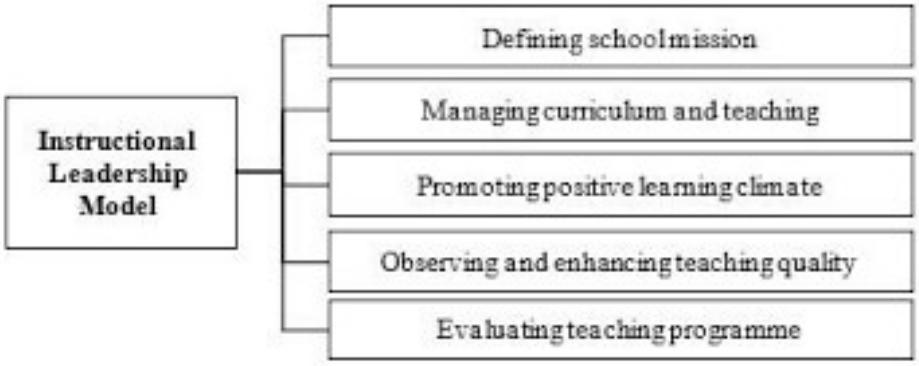


Figure 1: Weber's Instructional Leadership Model (1996)

Weber's (1996) framework of instructional leadership highlights that school leaders are tasked with **defining the missions of their schools**. This implies that school leaders collaborate with stakeholders to develop common vision goals for their schools. Further, according to this framework, instructional leaders **manage curriculum and instruction** by coordinating the curriculum, supervising of instructional practices, and monitoring learner performances (Weber, 1996). In this domain, school leaders ensure that the practices in schools align with the school's mission, and further provide resources and support to enhance teachers' instructional practices. Moreover, this framework highlights that instructional leaders are those who **promote a positive learning climate** by clearly articulating the goals of the school and creating

a school culture that values learning. In addition, Weber's (1996) framework highlights the importance of leaders **observing and improving instruction**. Instructional leaders observe and improve teachers' instructional practices through the employment of classroom observations, providing constructive feedback and professional development opportunities. As highlighted by Özdemir (2020), school leaders wield significant influence in school improvement efforts.

As established, teachers face numerous challenges when seeking to meet the objectives of the SPP, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of the diverse learning needs of progressed learners. Moreover, they further need to possess expertise in the subjects they teach. The knowledge and instructional practices of teachers must meet high standards to effectively improve the learning of struggling learners. In these instances, teachers require consistent support from instructional leaders to continually refine their instructional practices. Thus, instructional leaders play a crucial role by ensuring that teachers acquire the essential skills and knowledge necessary to cater to the learning requirements of progressed learners.

Instructional leadership is primarily centred on the realm of 'teaching and learning' within a school environment. Leaders embracing this style of leadership focus their efforts on enhancing the efficiency of teachers' instructional practices. This viewpoint is in harmony with the understanding put forth by Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (2021), emphasising the importance of behaviours and instructional practices of teachers directly influencing learner achievement. Similarly, Boyce and Bowers (2018) and Shaked (2022) contend that instructional leaders consistently prioritise the improvement of 'teaching and learning' for optimal effectiveness and productivity. This stance finds additional support in Cotton's perspective (as cited in Heaven & Bourne, 2016), highlighting that effective instructional leaders actively engage with curriculum and instructional matters. Instructional leaders advocate for proficient teaching methods and actively participate in discussions concerning curriculum and instruction. Hence, according to Hallinger (2005), effective instructional leaders possess the ability to synchronise the school's activities with its academic mission. This mission would have been clearly defined by the school leadership, as highlighted by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), who characterise instructional leaders as individuals who define the school's mission, oversee 'teaching and learning', and cultivate positive learning environments. In essence, this study aimed to comprehend the challenges teachers face in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners, seeking to explore and recommend

leadership strategies that instructional leaders could employ to assist teachers in this attempt. This underscores the relevance and significance of the instructional leadership theory within this study's context.

2.8.2 Self-efficacy

Coined by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in their capacity to execute assigned tasks proficiently. Simply put, the domains of self-efficacy encompass different aspects of life where a person assesses their confidence in their ability to succeed, such as academics, work, social interaction, and personal challenges. In the educational realm, teachers' self-efficacy significantly influences their effort and their resilience when encountering challenges while fulfilling these responsibilities (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Teachers are pivotal in driving and facilitating learning, and their ability to enhance teaching quality and effectiveness is linked to their self-efficacy (Budiharso & Tarman, 2020; Otara & Niyirora, 2016). Bandura (2012) and Damayanti and Musafik (2022) rightly emphasise that self-efficacy embodies the belief in one's capacity to influence situations and achieve favourable outcomes. Özcan (2022) echoes this viewpoint, defining self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their capability to exert control over their functions and circumstances within their environment. Consequently, self-efficacy stands as a fundamental aspect of individuals' self-awareness in daily life, impacting their ability to navigate actions required to attain goals amid diverse situations (Noviani & Kuswandono, 2022).

Bandura (1977) outlines sources that influence one's self-efficacy. To outline a few of those that underpin this study, firstly, is **mastery experiences**. According to Bandura (1977), the past experiences of an individual can influence their ability to successfully tackle a given task. In this context, Bandura (1977) strongly argues that if an individual performs a task well at some point, they are likely to feel competent and capacitated to tackle a similar task again. Secondly, Bandura (1977) highlights **verbal persuasion** as one of the aspects that influence one's self-efficacy. In this domain, the argument is that self-efficacy is influenced by the encouragement concerning the performances of an individual. This encouragement is done through coaching and the provision of constructive feedback to individuals regarding their practices. Moreover, Bandura (1977) outlines **vicarious experiences** as an influence on one's self-efficacy. In simple terms, this implies that an individual can improve their self-efficacy through observing the practices of others. When one observes others in practices of similar activities, they are then motivated to modify their practices.

As such, the significance of this framework in this study is underscored by Sandaraj and Hashim's (2022) argument that self-efficacy in teaching significantly influences teachers' capacity to effectively instruct learners. Teachers' self-efficacy pertains to their confidence in employing instructional practices to engage learners in educational activities, especially when facing learning challenges (Sibagariang & Pandia, 2021). Correspondingly, Hasselquist, Herndon and Kitchel (2017) posit that teachers' self-efficacy reflects their perceived competence in fulfilling their roles as classroom instructors. Teachers with high self-efficacy demonstrate enthusiasm and robust self-assurance, emphasising the importance for instructional leaders to enhance teachers' self-efficacy, among other priorities. Moreover, Odanga and Aloka (2022) assert that self-efficacy influences the level of effort put forth in problem-solving. Thus, teachers must possess high self-efficacy as it profoundly impacts the quality of student learning. This then underscores the necessity for teachers to be confident in their abilities to provide high-quality education to their learners (Krasniqi & Ismajli, 2022; Suico, 2021).

The rationale behind the employment of both the above-mentioned theoretical frameworks rests in the link between school leaders who employ the Instructional Leadership theory and their capabilities to improve teachers' Self-efficacy. These two frameworks complement each other in a way that when school leaders define schools' missions, communicate goals, manage instruction, and promote professional development opportunities, they, in turn, increase the confidence teachers have in their instructional practices. As such, these two frameworks influence each other as it is through the employment of Instructional Leadership theory that Self-efficacy gets increased. For instance, as instructional leaders define the goals and teachers with high Self-efficacy implement those desired goals, then there is a high chance of attainment regarding those goals.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This literature review encompassed insights from various scholars regarding progressed learners and the role of school leaders in facilitating teacher development. It delved into pivotal aspects of the study, notably the examination of the SPP and the challenges teachers confront while addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. Additionally, it explored diverse teacher development strategies proposed by scholars, highlighting the leadership's responsibility in articulating and executing these strategies.

Moreover, this chapter introduced the Instructional Leadership Theory and Bandura's concept of self-efficacy as critical lenses through which this study's discussions are framed. Instructional Leadership theory is embraced by leaders who prioritise the teaching and learning process, ensuring the seamless delivery of the curriculum and addressing factors impacting this process. Conversely, self-efficacy, when elevated, correlates with heightened motivation and dedication to tasks. Teachers demonstrate better performance when possessing high levels of self-efficacy, underscoring how teacher efficacy influences their active engagement in professional learning opportunities, ultimately enhancing the efficacy of their instructional practices.

The following chapter will detail and analyse the chosen research methodology and design considerations aimed at exploring the primary research questions of this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces and explores the research methodology and design employed in addressing the primary research questions of the study. In this context, it covers the research paradigm, approach, and design, encompassing sampling strategies, procedures for data generation, and data analysis strategies. Additionally, the chapter addresses matters concerning the trustworthiness of the study and outlines the ethical considerations undertaken to honour and safeguard the rights of the participants involved.

3.2 Research Methodology

Research methodology refers to the way a research problem is to be tackled systematically (Kothali, 2004). It includes the various steps a researcher is to follow and engage with in their journey of studying and addressing their research problem and the rationale behind those steps. On the other hand, Flick (2015) asserts that a research methodology implies a theory entailing how an investigation should move forward. This implies that a researcher must know the methods and techniques they will employ in their studies and how they are relevant in aiding with tackling the research problems. Fundamentally, what is essential in the research methodology is the logic behind the choice of techniques to be employed in the study (Kothali, 2004).

3.2.1 Interpretive Research Paradigm

Every researcher needs a lens to use to perceive and comprehend the world, and that is what a research paradigm offers. As such, Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) provide a classification of research paradigms as emancipatory, critical, positivist, constructivist, transformative, and interpretive. With this study seeking to explore and understand the challenges teachers encounter when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners and the leadership's understanding of their roles in supporting these teachers, the research was rooted in the interpretivism paradigm. This paradigm was considered to be appropriate for this study because the researcher sought to comprehend the case from the experiences and perspectives of teachers, departmental heads, and principals. In a qualitative study, the researcher seeks to understand meanings by engaging with the participants and their environments (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Therefore, this paradigm allowed the researcher to understand the challenges

teachers face in navigating around the SPP and addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. Essentially, these challenges were comprehended from the viewpoint of teachers and school leaders, which in turn aided in achieving the objectives of this study.

3.2.2 Research approach

The qualitative approach to research is concerned with the in-depth understanding of phenomena, which implies that it is subjective (Kothali, 2004). According to Creswell and Poth (2016), this research process involves tackling a problem and answering research questions by gathering data from participants in their settings. As such, data analysis involves the researcher interpreting the gathered data to make meaning and conclusions. Similarly, Busetto, Wick, and Gumbinger (2020, p. 1) assert that qualitative research implies "the study of the nature of phenomena [including] …their quality, different manifestations, the context in which they appear or the [standpoints] from which they can be perceived". This study employed a qualitative research approach since the researcher sought to comprehend a phenomenon in-depth through the employment of qualitative gathering technique/s.

As such, the rationale behind a qualitative research approach in this study was to gain deeper insights into the experiences of participants about the SPP. This research approach allowed the researcher to explore the richness and diversity of perspectives through the interviews with participants. As such, qualitative research in this study was able to provide nuanced interpretations of which quantitative research approach alone may have not been able to capture. The Qualitative research approach was found to be flexible and adaptable, further allowing the capture of emergent themes and the exploration of unexpected findings.

3.3 Research design

Research design refers to how a study is to be conducted (Maxwell, 2012). It pinpoints how a researcher will go about answering their research questions. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) assert that a research design is a plan of the study which details the frameworks to be employed for collecting data. As such, to comprehend in-depth the research problem of this study and to gain thorough insights into the matter at hand, a case study was the strategy of inquiry employed. Creswell and Poth (2016) maintain that case studies are a method of investigation in which a researcher seeks to comprehend a phenomenon in depth. Correspondingly, Merriam (as cited in Yazan, 2015, p. 139) understands a case to be "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a

bounded context…as long as the researchers can specify the phenomenon of interest and [be precise] on what they are [to] inquire, [then it is a case]".

In this study, the focus was on examining the challenges teachers encountered when dealing with the learning gaps of progressed learners. Gaining a thorough understanding of these challenges was crucial for investigating and recommending strategies that school leaders could employ to support and empower teachers in enhancing their instructional practices, enabling them to effectively address the learning gaps of progressed learners. The choice of employing a qualitative case study was driven by the necessity to deeply comprehend the areas requiring attention concerning teachers aligning their instructional practices with the requirements accompanying the implementation of SPP. And to further explore how school leaders could address these specific needs and empower teachers to effectively meet the learning requirements of progressed learners.

3.3.1 Sampling Strategies

it is impossible to conduct a study with all the members of the population in a case where a phenomenon affects a large population (Stratton, 2021). As such, the researcher is tasked with employing sampling strategies to gather data from those who are to be regarded as the representative group of the target population. Similarly, Landreneau and Creek (2009, para. 2) assert that sampling strategies are plans the researcher "set forth to be sure that the sample [they] use in [their] research study represents the population from which [they] drew [their] sample." In simplicity, sampling implies the researcher's decisions about choosing the setting and the individuals to include in their study.

3.3.2 Research Sampling Strategies

In this study, non-probability purposive sampling, which, according to Taherdoost (2016), refers to a researcher deliberately selecting the research site and sample, was employed. This sampling strategy was convenient for the researcher as it was less time-consuming (Taherdoost, 2016). Landreneau and Creek (2009, para. 1) argue that a research sample refers to "a subset of [the researcher's] population by which [they] select to be the participants of [their] study." As such, while acknowledging the great population of this study, the sample comprised six teachers, three departmental heads, and three principals. The rationale behind diversifying the participants was to gather detailed distinctive data since the three categories have differing roles and practices within the school context. As such, totality, 12 participants in selected public

schools in the Gauteng province contributed to the tackling of this study's research problem and attaining the outlined objectives. The six selected secondary schools included in this study comprised a combination of well-performing, average-performing, and underperforming schools. The performance level of the schools was determined based on the matric results of the previous year, 2022. In total, six secondary schools were selected: two well-performing schools that obtained 96.9% and 87.6%, two average-performing schools that obtained 73.8% and 73.0%, and lastly, the two underperforming schools obtained 69.0% and 59.3%. The rationale behind this purposive sampling was to comprehend and engage with the differing experiences and challenges faced by teachers about addressing learning gaps of progressed learners at the different levels of school performance.

3.3.3 Recruitment Strategies

A recruitment strategy comprises a plan for identifying and getting hold of participants of the study (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen & Guest, 2005). This plan needs to detail thoroughly the process of screening potential participants, the research site, and the number of individuals to be recruited. In this study, the researcher identified the selected schools from the Department of Education database concerning the criteria specified above. Once the schools were identified, the principals were contacted electronically to request permission to conduct research in their schools. Upon their agreement, the researcher visited the respective schools in person to recruit participants to be included in the study. The participants were approached and provided with the participant information sheets to inform them of the purpose of the study and request their voluntary participation. Interested participants were then narrowed down, while the researcher engaged with each to schedule days of conducting semi-structured interviews. All participants involved were provided with consent forms (see Appendix 4) to sign before engaging in the data-gathering process of the study.

3.4 Data generation techniques

The data of this study was generated through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to share their experiences and perspectives on the challenges faced when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners.

3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews allow the researcher firsthand information directly from the participants (Zohrabi, 2013). With this data- gathering technique, the researcher gets to interview the participants and

understand how they perceive the world (Merriam, 2002). Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, and Turner (2007) assert that interviews are beneficial as they allow for the provision of in-depth information and are useful for exploring and confirming a phenomenon. Specifically, this study employed semi-structured interviews, which Zohrabi (2013) argues are flexible and allow participants to provide additional information.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selected small sample, which included a teacher and a school leader, departmental head, or principal. This meant that in each school, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 2 participants, which in totality implies 12 participants from 6 schools. All interviews were scheduled to take place in person, however, for personal reasons, one participant opted for an online interview, which was held through a Microsoft Teams meeting. All interviews were conducted at times that were convenient to the participants. Essentially, considering that the semi-structured interviews were mostly conducted in person, I ensured that no learning activities were disrupted and that participants engaged in the study after school hours.

Regarding the semi-structured interviews, open-ended questions were used, allowing participants to fully engage and go in-depth with the issues at hand. As Yazan (2015) argues, interviews in a study aid in allowing the participants to fully express their comprehension of a case from their viewpoint. On that note, the researcher had core questions that served as a guide, while undocumented questions related to the study's objectives were asked for probing purposes. This served to align the responses of participants with this study's research objectives. Ultimately, all the semi-structured interviews held were recorded, with the permission of the participants and later transcribed for data analysis purposes. The semi-structured interviews took about 20-30 minutes.

3.5 Data analysis strategy

Data analysis implies converting the data collected into the findings of the study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). This process allows the researcher to transform the data into findings that are structured and have meaning. The data set of this study comprised 12 recorded interviews. As such, the first step of data analysis of this study involved manually transcribing the recorded interviews. This was done through the researcher listening to the recordings and transcribing them on a Word document. Edited transcription, which implies the deletion of repeated words and the correction of grammatical errors to ensure that what was being said was clear, was applied. The responses of the participants were thoroughly edited so they were readable since

some parts were to be included for the audience of this study. In that, while the recordings were being manually transcribed, patterns were identified, which alerted the researcher to be vigilant in identifying apparent similar themes that were unfolding.

The completion of the edited transcription was then followed by the researcher thoroughly reading the transcripts to gain a deep understanding of each session. The purpose of engaging with each session was to make sense of the findings as a whole before breaking them into parts. Therefore, when reading each session, the researcher was able to identify recurring patterns and similarities in the responses of the participants. This then allowed for the detection of apparent themes. As such, thoroughly reading through the transcripts then allowed for the employment of the thematic analysis. Dawadi (2021, p. 62) asserts that thematic analysis implies "a search for themes that capture the narratives available in the account of data sets…and involves the identification of themes through careful reading and re-reading of the transcribed data". Thus, to search for themes, coding was employed.

3.5.1Open coding

The first stage was open coding, which included rereading the data to have an idea of how the patterns could be coded. Opening coding includes naming the identified patterns and closely engaging with them. As such, derived names and emerging patterns formed the summary of the findings. Thus, the name assigned to each theme was logically related to the data it presented (De Vos, De Hauw & Willemse, 2011).

3.5.2Axial coding

Upon the completion of open coding, six core themes and 21 sub-themes were identified. As such, axial coding was undertaken. This phase involves looking into the connection between the themes so that themes that are related can be merged into one (De Vos et al., 2011). This then reduced the number of core themes to 3 and core themes to 11. As such, the responses of the participants were then moved to the new categories. The merging of the themes then allowed for the consolidated meaning of the data to be rich and clear.

3.5.3 Selective coding

The final process of coding was selective coding, whereby all the core themes and sub-themes were now divided into a selected number that comprised the final presentation. This then involved the reduction of the data to 3 core themes and 11 sub-themes, which were now a manageable set of themes that allowed for the final presentation of the findings of the study.

3.5 Trustworthiness of the study

As Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007) assert, the trustworthiness of the study is established when the findings reflect the meanings as they are described by the participants of the study. As such, the trustworthiness of this study was guaranteed through the use of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Schwandt et al., 2007).

3.5.1 Credibility

According to Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012), credibility is aimed at ensuring that the study tackles what is sought and that the findings are in correspondence with the research objectives. Thus, to ensure credibility, this study underwent reviews by academics who are experts in the field. The research report was first proofread a few scholars in the Division of Education Leadership and Policy Skills before being transferred to a language editor. These experts, employed they expertise toncritically evaluate the findings of this study to assess whether they were in alignment with the research questions and objectives.

3.5.2 Dependability

Dependability has to do with ensuring that the findings of an inquiry are repeatable, be it that the same inquiry transpired with the same participants in the same context (Schwandt et al., 2007). To guarantee dependability, this study was compared with previous studies that employed mixed methods research approaches. This implies that multiple data gathering sets were used in different studies, with similar findings to corroborate the findings of the study and guarantee credibility. With the findings from these differing data sets corresponding, dependability is assured.

3.5.3 Transferability

Guest et al. (2012) maintain that transferability refers to the degree to which the findings of a study can be generalised or rather applied in other contexts. Since this study was a case study with a limited sample, the findings cannot be entirely generalised. However, to guarantee transferability, the findings of this study were compared with those of existing literature. Similarities and differences with these studies were identified to assess whether this study allows for potential comparisons with previously conducted research. In addition, although the proposed school leadership strategies for supporting teachers to address learning gaps of progressed learners were guided by the data collected in selected contexts, it is worth noting

that these strategies could be employed in any context by any school leader who seeks to support teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners.

3.5.4 Confirmability

Tobin and Begley (2004, p. 392) outline that confirmability refers to the process of "establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not [fabrications] of the [researcher's] imagination but are derived from the data [gathered]." As such, to ensure confirmability by the researcher, during the data analysis and interview transcription process, I ensured that the data did not lose its originality and my perspective did not influence my interpretation of the data. To guarantee this, participants were given the transcribed data to confirm the accuracy and address any errors or misconceptions. This allowed the findings of the study to align with the experiences and perceptions of participants, thus resulting in the reliability of school leadership strategies that were recommended.

3.6 Considering ethical issues

Madanayake and Ganiyu (2018, November) argue that all the studies are bound to adhere to ethical requirements as stipulated in their differing school's ethical guidelines. It is of paramount importance that researchers be conscious of the ethical issues, as such, to guarantee this, ethical approval is needed, where the researcher will be asked ethical questions concerning their research (Madanayake & Ganiyu, 2018, November). Since this study involved human participants, according to the Wits School of Education Ethics Committee, no data collection can commence without obtaining ethics clearance. Thus, an application for ethics clearance was submitted by the researcher to highlight that the study would adhere to the rules of ethical behaviour and ensure that it did not violate any of the participants' rights. As Madanayake and Ganiyu (2018, November, p. 7) strongly maintain, "the essence of the ethical application is to ensure that the researcher is aware of all ethical issues surrounding the research and is well equipped on how to address them."

Concerning adhering to ethical issues, the participants of this study were given a consent form to sign to ensure that they understood and agreed to partake in providing data for the case being studied. Additionally, the procedure of data collection was thoroughly explained to participants, and since the interviews to be conducted were recorded, participants were informed prior and signed the audio consent forms. Moreover, the identity of the participants remains anonymous, and they were informed of how they could choose to withdraw their participation in the study

at any given time. Anonymity was ensured by not referring to participants using their identities but rather by the numbers as per the sequence of the interviews held (e.g. Teacher 1-6, DH 1-3, Principal 1-3).

3.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the research methodology and design appropriate to the study's execution were presented and deliberated upon. The study employed an interpretive research paradigm using a qualitative case study approach. The selection of 6 public schools in the Gauteng province was conducted through purposive sampling. Data collection involved using 11 face-to-face interviews and one online semi-structured interview. The resulting data were analysed using an inductive approach. Moreover, to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, measures were taken to address credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Essentially, the study followed all important ethical rules thoroughly.

The following chapter examines and explains the collected data and findings to address the main research question, aim, and objectives of the study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter detailed the research design and methodology employed to obtain essential data. This chapter delves into the presentation, discussion, analysis, and interpretation of the data derived from closed-ended questionnaires administered to thirty teachers and semi-structured interviews conducted with six teachers, three departmental heads, and three principals. The data gathered resulted in the identification of three themes, which will be systematically presented and examined in alignment with the following key research questions of the study:

1. What are the challenges encountered by teachers when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners? How do school leaders comprehend these challenges?
2. What are the perspectives of school leaders concerning their leadership roles in supporting teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners?
3. What strategies can school leaders implement to support teachers in enhancing their teaching practices, enabling them to effectively address the learning gaps of progressed learners?

4.2 Profiling the Participants

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six teachers, three departmental heads, and three school principals in 6 selected secondary schools in the Gauteng province. Although the participants are designated under the same department of education, their experiences in this field and their relation to the implementation of the SPP, in particular, vary. Table 4.1 presented below, offers information on each participant.

Table 1: Profiles of the participants

PARTICIPANT	NUMBER OF YEARS IN PRACTICE	KNOWLEDGE OF SPP (On a scale of 1-10)	% ACHIEVED (2022)	SCHOOL QUINTILE	DISTRICT
Teacher 1	4 years	2	73.0%	5	Johannesburg East
Teacher 2	2 years	3	87.6%	2	Johannesburg East

Teacher 3	7 years	3	59.3%	4	Tshwane South
Teacher 4	3 years	2	69.0%	3	Tshwane South
Teacher 5	6 years	3	96.9%	4	Tshwane South
Teacher 6	3 years	4	73.8%	4	Tshwane South
DH 1	10 years (teacher) 7 years (DH)	5	69.0%	3	Tshwane South
DH 2	7 years (teacher) 2 years (DH)	6	87.6%	2	Johannesburg East
DH 3	14 years (teacher) 5 years (DH)	6	73.0%	5	Johannesburg East
Principal 1	20 years (teacher) 11 years (principal)	8	73.8%	4	Tshwane South
Principal 2	32 years (teacher) 13 years (principal)	7	59.3%	4	Tshwane South
Principal 3	19 years (teacher) 10 years (principal)	8	96.9%	4	Tshwane South

Table 1 comprises information on the interview participants in selected sampled schools in the Gauteng Province. Before commencing with scheduled interviews, participants were asked to rate their knowledge of the SPP on a scale of 1-10, 1 being less knowledgeable, 5 being average and 10 implying thorough knowledge of the policy. Based on the table, it can be concluded that teachers, regardless of the number of years they have been practising, have limited knowledge of the SPP. No teacher at all rated 5 and above, which implies close to inadequate knowledge about the policy. On the other hand, the levels of the departmental heads remain on the borderline, suggesting that they know however it is not rich. Lastly, the principals have, to some extent, knowledge of the SPP, which can be a result of their number of years in the field of education.

4.3 Themes

The identified themes stemmed from the data obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with participants. The aim was to uncover the challenges teachers encounter while addressing learning gaps among progressed learners. The study also sought to assess the school leadership's comprehension of their responsibilities in addressing these challenges. The purpose was to subsequently investigate and recommend strategies that school leaders could implement to support teachers in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. The proceeding discussions in this chapter will be organised around the following three core themes and sub-themes:

Table 2: Core and subthemes identified in the study

CORE THEMES	**SUB-THEMES**
The leadership's understanding of their role in supporting teachers address the learning gaps of progressed learners.	
Challenges faced by teachers in relation to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners: *teachers and school leaders' perspectives.*	*i. Progressed learners exhibit a deficit in motivation* *ii. Time constraints* *iii. Lack of proficiency among teachers in identifying progressed learners* *iv. Lack of teacher collaboration and effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in schools* v. *Low level of school leadership support*

School leadership strategies to support teachers in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners	*i.* *Supporting Teachers: Identifying Progressed Learners and Assessing Teacher Performance through Classroom Observations* *ii.* *Foster an Environment of Openness, Approachability and Teamwork* *iii.* *Facilitate Teacher Inclusion in Meetings and Workshops for Effective Communication, Collaboration, and Professional Development* *iv.* *Actively Engage and Demonstrate Enthusiasm in Teaching and Learning to Foster Positive Teacher-School Leadership Relationships* *v.* *Encourage extra classes to enhance learning opportunities* *vi.* *Acknowledge hard work and explore incentives and compensation structures*

4.3.1 The leadership's understanding of their role in supporting teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners

Support from school leaders implies the extent to which school leaders make decisions in their institutions, make judgements regarding their teachers, and further encourage and facilitate teacher development opportunities (Honingh & Hooge, 2014). As the response of Teacher 1 reflects: "School leaders need to ensure that they provide teachers with resources and guidance." This response highlights that it is the role of school leaders to ensure that teachers are adequately guided and provided with the necessary resources to allow them to support progressed learners. This is in alignment with Weber's (1996) model of Instructional Leadership, which ssay that instructional leaders are tasked with providing the needed resources to ensure that the process of teaching and learning runs effectively. As such, when as if whether they understood their roles as school leaders in supporting teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners, all six school leaders seemed to have a thorough understanding of their roles. To confirm the preceding assertion, DH 1 had the following to say:

> *When you look at myself in particular, I look at myself as a person who was supposed to, please, you must understand when I say supposed to…help or to assist teachers.*

> *Remember your progression policy is a new policy, it was not there in the past. Therefore, hence I was saying earlier that both of us as managers of the school, us as departmental heads and the teachers, we are still trying to grapple with this policy. We want to understand how to actually tackle it. And as a result, we are like all of us not having a clear picture of what it is that is expected of us.*

What DH 1's response highlights is that, as a leader, they are aware of their leadership role when it comes to supporting teachers. However, when it comes to the progression policy and how they should go about navigating its implementation, they seem to have a bit of a challenge. From this response, the apparent argument is that school leaders also have limited knowledge of this policy, as such, it becomes difficult for them to provide teachers with the needed support. As the response of Teacher 5 emphasised:

> [Teachers] *need to be educated about these whole progressed learners and the whole progression policy. Because I feel like most teachers don't even know what is to be progressed. From there on, school leaders can introduce more workshops in enlightening teachers about progressed learners and the importance of progressing learners.*

This being the case, the responses of DH 1 and Teacher 5 further highlight that it is the role of school leaders to then ensure that teachers are encouraged to attend workshops for professional development purposes and that there is in-service training to capacitate teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. When attending workshops, teachers stand to elevate their self-efficacy as Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy model argues that workshops grant teachers the platform to gain mastery on how to go about improving the academic performance of struggling learners.

On the other hand, regarding the comprehension of their leadership role, DH 2 had the following to say:

> *In my department, there are about 5 teachers who are all teaching English for the entire school. So as the HOD, I take it upon myself that I know the strengths and weaknesses of my teachers. Like for instance, one teacher is good in language, the other teacher is good with teaching comprehension, another one poetry and so forth. So that will allow me to then enforce collaboration and combine those strengths for the benefit of the learners.*

DH 2's response highlights that it is important for school leaders to know the strengths and weaknesses of their teachers. This helps in delegating educational tasks so that institutional goals can be attained. As such, for school leaders to be able to be informed and be up to date with the strengths and weaknesses of teachers, they need to be hands-on with the process of teaching and learning. In a nutshell, they need to be instructional leaders who are interested in the academic day-to-day activities in their schools. Furthermore, this response highlights that it is essential for school leaders to ensure that their teachers collaborate for the greater good and the improvement of the academic performance of learners. In a similar vein, on understanding their leadership role, DH 3, in a nutshell, had the following to say:

"*It is important as a leader to know what exactly the problem is, before providing solutions. Understand the problem."*

What DH 3's response implied was, that school leaders before introducing interventions, need to analyse the gaps and be well informed where there are challenges. DH 3's response thus emphasises that before a school leader can talk of interventions, they need to know exactly what the problem is. Basically, what this response suggests is that school leaders need to be thoroughly informed of any challenges that affect the process of teaching and learning. similarly, Principal 1 understood their role as follows:

> *... [ensuring] that these learners are motivated, because when the learners are motivated, so will my teachers. It is my duty to meet my teachers halfway and not expect them to achieve this issue alone. As their leader, I need to ensure that I understand the problems that they are facing, and I also make sure that I search for ways I can mitigate those problems. I should be the go-to man of my teachers.*

The response from DH 3 and Principal 1 corresponds in that they both argued for the necessity of school leaders being knowledgeable of the challenges that teachers face so they are able to employ effective remedies. On that, Teacher 4 correspondingly alluded that:

"*I think if the school leaders, could come with me to class and see what I encounter alone during those courses of teaching and learning, things could be easier*."

This response further emphasises that school leaders need to have knowledge of the challenges that teachers are facing in the classrooms. For them to be aware of those challenges, they need to make frequent visits to the classroom and observe teachers in practice so that they are able to guide them thoroughly.

As such, the response of DH 3, Principal 1, and Teacher 5 as mentioned above strongly highlights that school leaders need to first understand and comprehend the problems on the ground and then, take it upon themselves to source out ways to address those problems. Principal 1's response went further to assert that school leaders are the ideas men, and the teachers are the implementors of those ideas. What this assertion implies is that school leaders need to always do research on how certain issues can be effectively addressed, so that they can in turn guide and support their teachers as they implement those researched ideas.

Corresponding with the above-mentioned participants, Principal 2, on their leadership role, argued that:

> *The critical support involves firstly, me being aware of the challenges that they are facing in the classrooms, or rather when it comes to addressing the learning gaps of these learners. I mean I have to first understand what they are going through so that it becomes easier for me to source out measures that needs to be taken. So, it is upon me to ensure that I support my teachers throughout.*

Principal 2's response highlights that school leaders should engage with teachers so they can be able to learn about the challenges that they face when attempting to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. Teachers are the ones who get to experience the realities that accompany the implementation of the progression policy, as such, they know more of what transpires in the classrooms more than school leaders. This then suggests that school leaders need to work hand-in-hand with teachers so that the academic goals of their institutions can be attained.

Lastly, Principal 3 understood their leadership role as:

> *I think as a leader, I should make sure that my teachers…like for instance, work together to be able to take note of these struggling, or rather progressed learners in this case. It is my role to enforce collaboration and teamwork among these teachers since we are working towards the common goal, which is to ensure that these learners succeed academically, and they be on the same level with their peers.*

Principal 3's response advocates for teacher collaboration. Their response suggests that it is the responsibility of the school leaders to ensure that there is teacher collaboration and teamwork apparent in their institutions. Teachers need to be encouraged to work together and share best practices to address the learning gaps of progressed learners so that the common goal of

improved learner academic performances can be attained. As such, school leaders need to ensure that they create an environment that allows for teacher collaboration. As in Weber's (1996) Instructional Leadership model, school leaders need to promote collaboration, thus, self-efficacy gets to be boosted as Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy model argues that collaboration allows individuals to learn through others. On that, in their response, Principal 3 added to say that the most important thing as a principal is to "*understand fully your responsibilities as a leader of an organization*". Principal 3 further strongly argued that as a principal:

"*You need to understand your role and that you definitely cannot achieve anything without any form of support, be it from the community, teachers, and the department*".

Principal 3's response implies that ensuring that progressed learners improve academically, it takes more than the school leaders. As such, it takes teamwork and collaboration from all the stakeholders.

What emerged from this theme is that school leaders have a thorough understanding of their leadership roles when it comes to supporting teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners. School leaders understand that it is their responsibility to comprehend the challenges that teachers face and make means to address those challenges. Moreover, the responses of the participants highlight that they are aware that their leadership practices are of paramount importance when it comes to supporting teachers. School leaders are aware that it is one of their duties to ensure that teachers are equipped with the necessary skills to attend to progressed learners.This then corresponds with the argument of Harris, Day, and Hadfield (2003) that it is the responsibility of school leaders to ensure that teaching in their schools is of good quality. As noted by scholars such as Bellibaş et al. (2021), Bichi (2017), and Özdemir (2019), positive outcomes in the process of teaching and learning are yielded by the engagement of school leaders. Similarly, Mkhuma (2012) asserts that within schools, principals hold the responsibility of setting the stage for transformation.

4.3.2 Challenges faced by teachers in relation to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners: teachers and school leaders' perspectives.

From the findings of the study, it is evident that teachers face numerous challenges when seeking to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. These challenges are discussed below and elaborated with the views and arguments offered by the participants of the study.

The following challenges are explored: progressed learners exhibit a deficit in motivation; time constraints; lack of proficiency among teachers in identifying progressed learners; lack of teacher collaboration and effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs); and low level of school leadership support.

4.3.2.1 Progressed learners exhibit a deficit in motivation

When questioned about the challenges teachers encounter while addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners, some participants pointed to the progressed learners' apparent lack of motivation. Their responses commonly emphasised that while teachers are willing to dedicate time to help these learners, the latter often display disinterest in enhancing their academic performance and closing existing learning gaps. In this regard, Teacher 1 voiced out the following:

> *The problem with these learners is that they are not interested in their learning. Usually, when it's like this, we offer them afternoon classes, so that we can engage with them one-on-one because we can't do it during the day. So now, when it's after school and they must come to class, they don't come, they don't pitch up. It becomes difficult for us teachers to locate these learners. These learners don't care. So, it becomes difficult for me as a teacher to care.*

Similarly, Teacher 2 alluded that teachers face a challenge of getting these learners "*motivated to study because they are used to being pushed and they lose motivation to learn*". What Teacher 1 and Teacher 2's responses suggest is that teachers do wish to see these learners improve academically, however, it becomes very hard for them to achieve that goal when the learners do not want to engage. Precisely, Teacher 1's response suggests that when learners are not motivated, it becomes a challenge for teachers to in turn be motivated in attempting to assist these learners. As a result, their principals

is lowered. In a similar vein, Principal 1 shared the same views with the assertion that:

> *To be honest, these learners themselves lack motivation. So, it becomes very difficult for our teachers to really attend to these learners. How can a teacher address the learning needs of learners who lack motivation? There are learners who are keen to learn, so our teachers cannot be chasing these learners to get them motivated. So basically, these learners' lack of motivation to improve in their schoolwork poses as a challenge teachers face as they attempt to help these learners.*

From the above response, it can be deduced that school leaders have an understanding of this challenge which prevents teachers from effectively addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. This is so as it is not practicable for teachers to have plans and interventions put in place to address the learning gaps of individuals who are not keen to learn. Moreover, it is worth noting that teachers have a huge workload on their hands, so sparing time for progressed learners is quite a great deal. As such, they cannot also spare time to be "*chasing these learners*" (Principal 1).

As such, in correspondence with the response of Principal 1 who raised a very critical question: *How can a teacher address the learning needs of learners who lack motivation?* DH 1 strongly argued that when these learners are not motivated, it becomes very difficult to motivate teachers. In their own words, DH 1 stated that:

"*It becomes very difficult to say, "soldier on Meneer" because you would want to do certain things to assist, yet the learner is not at school"*.

As such, from these responses, it can be deduced that as much as teachers might attempt to make the time within their busy schedules to attend to these learners, the learners tend to be nowhere to be found. This implies that the learners do not appreciate the help and are not keen to improve academically. On this, DH 2 had this to say: "*Most of these progressed learners are those learners who are unwilling to be assisted*". While on that, Teacher 6's response took a turn by bringing in the issue of discipline concerning the lack of motivation of progressed learners. What emerged from the response of Teacher 6 is that progressed learners are the very same ones who are troublemakers in the schooling context. The argument of Teacher 6 was that "*most of these progressed learners are the ones that are disrespectful, they are bunkers, they don't do their schoolwork*". From Teacher 6's response, it can be concluded that, while teachers are still battling the issue of these learners' lack of motivation, they have to also deal with other issues that these learners bring with them, such as ill-discipline.

In all the above-mentioned responses, the response from DH 3 offered what could be understood as a different lens to the matter. DH 3 strongly argued that:

> *One thing that I will say is the challenge is the learners themselves, some learners feel like when you separate them and you identify them as those learners that need that intervention, they feel like they are being diminished. They don't respond positively; they don't take it in a positive way. So probably it emanates from the stigmatization that we give them to say, "You are the progressed learner", that language exists in schools.*

So, I believe that maybe that is one of the challenges that will make them not cooperate so much in that aspect.

DH 3's response prompts one to shift paradigms to say that progressed learners lack motivation due to the stigma that is attached to them being progressed. It may be due to how they are treated, that leads to them not having the eagerness to improve academically. This response then further implies that it is imperative to pay attention to the language that we use when it comes to dealing with progressed learners. Additionally, as much as they are progressed, this response further suggests that the learners need to be treated the same way as other learners. What DH 3's response suggests is that there are factors that lead learners to lack motivation when it comes to improving their academics. This then implies that school leaders need to ensure that the language that DH 3 speaks of in their response, does not exist in schools so that learners can be motivated instead of being stigmatised.

What has emerged from this sub-theme is that progressed learners lack motivation to improve academically. Their lack of motivation thus affects teachers to lack motivation in addressing the learning gaps of these learners. Progressed learners tend to lack motivation due to the knowledge of the SPP, knowing that at the end of the day, they will be progressed to the next level. This response is in alignment with the argument of Makhanya (2021) that progressed learners are demotivated to put effort into their academics as they know that they will be progressed despite not meeting the promotion requirements. Additionally, when teachers attempt to attend to these learners, their lack of motivation affects their availability to be assisted. As confirmed in the study conducted by George (2019), teachers mentioned extra classes as being a critical tool that allows teachers to support progressed learners. However, in the study, the attendance of these learners remains poor. Thus, the attitude of these learners matters when it comes to their willingness to learn and improve (Moagi, 2020). As such, some of these learners do take responsibility for their learning while others do not (Moagi, 2020).

4.3.2.2 Time constraints

Addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners implies that teachers need to spare time within their busy schedules to specifically give these learners attention. That being the case, when teachers were asked if they were facing any time constraints that hindered their abilities to give progressed learners sufficient attention, most strongly agree with that. This is what Teacher 6 had to say:

I always face time constraints because I am working on the ATP, I am trying to make sure that I am covering everything. While I am trying to do that, I am also trying to make sure that the learners understand. So that clash is really bad…

Teacher 6's response suggests that amid addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners, teachers are tasked with ensuring that they cover the curriculum and adhere to the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP). In a similar vein on time constraints, Teacher 5 alluded that:

We are struggling to keep up with the curriculum with the 'normal' kids. So, for me, teachers are already facing a lot of time constraints and already they cannot meet the curriculum needs of learners who are academically strong. So, imagine now if we have to concentrate on the learners who were progressed.

While acknowledging that curriculum coverage is a challenge, Teacher 5's response further pointed out that it is already difficult to deal with the '*normal kids',* referring to academically strong learners, as such, it becomes more of a challenge to dedicate sufficient time to the progressed learners.

It is undeniable that teaching is more than just standing in front of learners. Teachers have multiple duties that demand their attention, for example, administration. This was supported by Teacher 1 with the assertion that:

"*If I tell a progressed learner to stay behind in the afternoon, I will end up rescheduling because I have to meet marking deadlines. The paperwork is a lot, recording marks and everything. So that's a challenge*".

What Teacher 1's response implies is that teachers do not have enough time to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. Emphasising this challenge, Teacher 2's response also highlighted that teachers face time constraints which makes it difficult for them to support progressed learners. Teacher 2 stated:

…it goes back to the number of learners we have in classrooms and the time that is actually given to you as per the CAPS document, the policy itself and the ATPs. It is time framed, and that time will not allow you to be able to cover the content that you have to teach at that specific moment in time and be able to address any misconceptions that may be in that lesson. And also, that means that you will not have time to really

outsource issues that are actually faced by progressed learners. In addition to that, you would not have enough time to be able to assist them in any way.

Teacher 2's response brings out the issue of overcrowded classrooms as being the challenge and hindering teachers to attend to progressed learners individually. This issue then overlaps with the lack of time to support these learners. Teacher 2's response asserts that teachers need sufficient time to be able to "*Outsource issues that are actually faced by progressed learners*". This implies that teachers need enough time to be able to understand the academic challenges that their learners have and come up with effective strategies to address those learning gaps. This then highlights that school leaders need to ensure that teachers are able to cover the curriculum and also help these learners improve academically.

Agreeing with the teachers mentioned above, Principal 1 when asked about the main challenges that teachers face when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners, responded:

…time. Remember, this profession is more than just teachers standing in front of learners and teaching. There is more that teachers have to do, there is a lot of paperwork in this profession, which is why time becomes a challenge as they do not have enough time to dedicate to these learners. Addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners is something that requires time and skill.

Principal 1's response suggests that school leaders are aware of the significant challenges that teachers face when attempting to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. School leaders understand that for academically struggling learners to be assisted to improve greatly, teachers need to be competent and have sufficient resources, inclusive of time. As Weber's (1996) model of Instructional Leadership outlines, school leaders need to manage the process of teaching and learning. This implies ensuring that besides teachers being well-skilled, resources should be adequate and that the time of instruction is effective.

With the above-mentioned participants' responses emphasising that teachers face time constraints, Teacher 3's response presented a significant turn. When asked whether they faced any time constraints when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners, Teacher 3 responded: "*Sometimes, but sometimes I tend to just move on. Sometimes I neglect those progressed learners and just move on*". Teacher 3's response leads one to now question the motivation of teachers and their interests in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. Are teachers motivated? What is the level of their self-efficacy? Do they believe in their capabilities to improve the academic performance of progressed learners? Most importantly,

do teachers want to help these learners? Teacher 3's response prompts one to ask, do teachers lack time or motivation? This is where Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy comes in, to highlight that teachers need motivation: verbal persuasion. Instructional leaders need to be reminded that there is power in encouragement, thus, they need to constantly provide teachers with comments, feedback, or advice that will impact their beliefs in their instructional practices and their capabilities to address the learning gaps of progressed learners.

What emerged from this sub-theme is that teachers face time constraints which affects their availability to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. Moreover, the issue of overcrowded classrooms does not allow teachers to attend to these learners individually. On the issue of overcrowded classrooms, Mogale and Modipane (2021) argue that they disturb the flow of the teaching and learning process which in turn does not allow for sufficient support. In a nutshell, addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners requires time, which Musitha and Mafukata (2018) assert that a lack of time as a resource prohibits teachers from offering progressed learners academic support. there is not enough time to employ innovative and creative academic support interventions. Additionally, Moagi (2020) outlines that the issue of curriculum coverage leads to limited time for teachers to engage with progressed learners effectively.

4.3.2.3 Lack of proficiency among teachers in identifying progressed learners

A critical aspect in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners is firstly being able to identify these learners. As such, teachers need to be expert and knowledgeable when it comes to the identification of progressed learners. However, the findings of this study suggest that teachers in schools do not possess the necessary skills and knowledge to identify progressed learners. On that, Teacher 5 had the following to say:

> *...the main challenge is … we don't know who is progressed. I can therefore say I have a challenge…how can I identify my challenges in supporting progressed learners whereas, I myself as a teacher don't know who is progressed. So, by that I mean you know teachers are not given the list of who is progressed, teachers are not made aware. All we do is discuss the learners at the end of the year, those who maybe short of 2%, we then discuss if we should give them or not. Then once that is finalized, there is no follow up, no nothing. The following year, as a teacher, you don't know who got promoted and who got progressed, the first thing you just come to the classroom and teach everyone, you assume that everyone passed. You don't know how to identify or*

help learners who are progressed because you don't know who they are, everyone is just everyone.

What Teacher 5's response highlights is that teachers are not made aware of the learners who are progressed. Therefore, it becomes difficult for the teachers to then provide academic support to these learners. Teachers are uninformed when it comes to effectively identifying the progressed learners. This finding then suggests that it is essential for school leaders to ensure that teachers are kept informed of the learners who are progressed so that the teachers can in turn be able to look out for those learners and support them. This will imply, as Weber's (1996) model of Instructional Leadership pinpoints, school leaders clearly defining the school's vision and mission. School leaders need to clearly highlight the goals and plans of action, so that the implementation phase can be effective.

In this case, Teacher 5's response pointed out how it is a challenge to provide progressed learners with academic support if, in the first place, teachers do not have the knowledge of those learners. While on Teacher 5's response, similarly, Principal 3 argued that:

…most of our teachers, for instance of those in the next grades receiving those progressed learners, do not necessarily have knowledge of the state in which those learners were moved to the next grade. I think this usually happens when a particular learner is in critical states because that is when the teacher of the next grade will be alarmed of that learner. But apart from that, honestly, teachers in the next grades will receive the learners and the train will move. So, without being given a full report prior, the teacher of the next grade cannot be able to identify those learners.

From Principal 3's response, it can be deduced that teachers are unable to attend to the progressed learners because they do not have the knowledge of those learners. As such, this implies that the unsuccessful implementation of the SPP can be tied to the teachers being kept in the dark about progressed learners and their lack of proficiency to identify these learners. In similar veins, DH 1, in their response also argued that the challenge that teachers encounter with regard to supporting progressed learners is that: "*They are not actually being prepared*", however, DH 1 went on to add that: "*much as managers in schools are not prepared on how to deal with progressed or learners who are having learning barriers*".

DH 1's response gives rise to another issue to say that school leaders also face the challenge of not being adequately prepared to attend to the progressed learners. Which then implies that it becomes a challenge for them to support teachers as they support these progressed learners. As

such, the responses of Principal 3 and DH 1 emphasise that it is essential for school leaders to first be knowledgeable about the SPP and how they can support progressed learners so that they can in turn be able to support teachers as they seek to address the learning gaps of these learners.

As such, what has emerged from this sub-theme is that one of the challenges that teachers face when it comes to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners is the issue of identifying these learners. As Mkhuma, Maseko, and Tlale (2014) argue, the critical step in providing academically struggling learners with effective support is identifying them. Thus, failing to identify them implies failure in providing the necessary support to these learners. When teachers fail to address the learning gaps of progressed learners, this implies that the objectives of the SPP cannot be attained.

4.3.2.4 Lack of effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in schools

When asked about the effectiveness of PLCs in their school, the responses of teachers suggested that PLCs are not commonly held. Initially, when asking about the effectiveness, the assumption by the researcher was that they were being held, however, the findings of this study suggest otherwise. Thus, the lack of effective PLCs in schools poses a challenge that teachers encounter as they seek to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. This then prompted the researcher to then ask if whether PLCs were facilitated in schools and, whether would they aid in teacher development. With regards, Teachers 1 and 3 correspondingly said the following:

Teacher 1

> *I have never been to any professional development workshop ever since I started working, I have been working for 2 years now. If these opportunities were available, I think they would develop me big time. Cause now I don't know anything about how to approach progressed learners and I would like to know. Development opportunities are not there…*

Teacher 3

> *No, we don't…nothing at all. If there was something that was somehow helping us to somehow know how to cater to those learners, I'm sure it will be much easier. But right now, we just have to deal with them in class, just do whatever we can to make sure that we deal with them in class. There is nothing else that is helping.*

The above-mentioned responses highlight that there are no effective or rather no professional learning spaces in these schools. There is no platform that allows teachers to grow professionally so that they are capacitated to attend to these progressed learners. For instance, Teacher 2 is a novice teacher who has been working for 2 years, however, in those 2 years, they have never encountered any space that seeks to enhance the capabilities of teachers. This then raises the question such as: How are novice teachers expected to adequately and effectively support progressed learners academically? This then becomes a problem as scholars such as Vescio, Ross and Adams (2008) argue that at the core of PLCs is the improvement of student learning through the improvement of teachers' instructional practices. Then, how will student learning be improved if teachers are not afforded the opportunity to learn and advance their professionalism through these professional learning communities?

The above-mentioned issues emphasise the importance of school leaders employing the Instructional Leadership theory in their practices as one of its aspects includes providing teachers with professional development opportunities. It is through these opportunities that teachers will increase their self-efficacy and improve their instructional practices. Furthermore, it is within PLCs that teachers get to come together and learn from one another. As Bandura (1977) correctly argues, vicarious learning involves observing the strategies of others and how they approach certain challenges and thus learning from their practices to improve those of your own. When observing someone successfully perform a task you would like to complete, your self-efficacy increases (Bandura, 1977).

As such, the preceding sub-theme highlighted that one of the challenges that teachers face when seeking to address the learning gaps of progressed learners is the issue of lack of PLCs. PLCs are platforms that afford teachers the space to collaborate and learn from each other. In this situation, these spaces will allow teachers to share best practices for addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. As DuFour, et al. (2010) argue, PLCs are the best and least expensive tools to use when seeking to improve schools. As such, if they are not held, then the chances of school improvement get to be limited.

4.3.2.5 Lack of teacher collaboration

As teachers work together towards attaining common goals, they support each other, and this increases the chances of attaining those goals. However, the findings of this study show that there is a lack of teacher collaboration that is apparent in schools. This suggests that teachers are working as individual entities despite working towards achieving the shared goals. To

substantiate this finding, Teacher 2, when asked whether teachers collaborate in their school, this is what they had to say:

> *That is actually not viable in my line of work, my space…is like every teacher is on their own regardless of whether you teach the same subject or not. And the only time we actually come to talk we don't talk about the resources that we can use or the content itself, we talk about how far are you with marking, are you done marking? Have you submitted your marks already? So, that also goes back to the issue of time, the ATP as it is progressed, and the time system that is used at school, doesn't allow for teachers to have time where they meet and discuss content*.

Concerning the response from Teacher 2, there seems to be a contradiction in their response as they firstly stated that when teachers come together, they talk about other aspects but the content of the subjects they are teaching. Which is something that will enhance their subject matter and capacitate them in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. However, in their response, they went in to add that the reason teachers do not collaborate is due to time constraints. This then raises a concern because Teacher 2's response highlights that time to discuss other aspects is available, yet there is no time to discuss academic matters which will result in the improvement of the academic performance of these learners.

On the other hand, with regards to teacher collaboration, Teacher 4 alternatively mentioned that there is evidence of teacher collaboration in their school. When asked if whether teachers collaborated in their school to share best practices to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. Teacher 4 responded as follows:

> *We do it a lot, we talk about them. We employ strategies such as expanded opportunities. When we give all learners a test, they write the test all of them. So, we know our learners, then we make another easy test to give it to the progressed learners so that they can pass. We also give these learners more activities, some of these learners in later stages they become better, and they can pass, some of them are eager to learn.*

From Teacher 4's response, it can be deduced that teachers, when supported and afforded the platform, can be able to collaborate and share best practices that are geared towards effectively addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. As such, what school leaders need to do is to ensure that teachers do work together and support each other. As corroborated in Weber's (1996) model of Instructional Leadership, school leaders need to ensure that they promote teacher collaboration through ensuring that the environment is created, and the school culture

supports collaboration. In a nutshell, school leaders need to support teachers, as they support each other, so they can in turn support progressed learners. Teacher collaboration comes in many ways, not strictly through the sharing of ideas. For instance, Teacher 3, in their response outlined that teachers in their school do not necessarily share ideas, however, they collaborated with each other through sharing the learners. In their own words, Teacher 3 alluded:

> *…we just share learners…okay can you take these learners from my class and have an extra class for them probably they would understand you better. And I take yours those who are struggling…that is what we have done only. So, we somehow think that if they are taught by someone else, they would understand as we employ different teaching strategies. We then come together to say, "Did they understand?", we do ask each other those questions, what happened in class? If it is practicable and doable, I would advise school leaders to encourage teachers to exchange learners…*

What can be extracted from Teacher 3's response is that school leaders need to encourage teachers to share learners so that these learners can be exposed to differing teaching strategies. This then encourages teacher collaboration and teamwork in the organisation. This will then address the issue of lack of teacher collaboration, as the findings of this study suggest that there is ineffective collaboration and communication between teachers and school leaders regarding the learning gaps of progressed learners. Therefore, Hauge et al. (2014) assert that a school leader's role involves elevating teacher engagement, enhancing their competence, nurturing community growth, and encouraging collaboration. Özdemir (2019) similarly argues that the enhancement of collaboration is crucial if school leaders aim to elevate learners' academic achievement.

4.3.2.6 Low level of school leadership support

One of the challenges that arose when conducting the interviews with the participants was the low level of school leadership support. Teachers are unable to address the learning gaps of progressed learners because there is insufficient support received from school leaders. When asked whether they received support from school leaders, Teacher 4 responded that:

> *I have never received any support. As I said, in my school we are teaching overcrowded classes, we go to them and tell them that this is what we are facing in class and ask how we deal with the challenges. They would just sit in their offices, they never come to class to see what I am facing, the frustration I am facing. One teacher went to the extent of*

begging the principal to come and see what was happening in the classroom. They must come and see what we are facing so they can understand and seek help, assist us.

Teacher 4's response highlights that school leaders sometimes are not supportive. From Teacher 4's response, it can be deduced that teachers do inform their school leaders of the challenges they face. however, the school leaders seem to not be interested as they just sit in their offices. This is problematic, as the teachers do inform the school leaders that they are facing certain challenges however, they do not get any help or advice from them. In support of Teacher 4's argument, Teacher 2's response also highlighted that there is a low level of school leadership support in their school. Sharing similar sentiments, Teacher 3 when asked if whether they have received support from school leaders responded: *"... [school leaders] have done nothing. Is just you as the teacher doing something with those learners. They don't care"*.

Teacher 3's response, in correspondence with the responses of Teachers 4 and 2, pinpoints that teachers do not receive adequate support as they attempt to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. This then suggests that teachers fail to navigate through the demands that accompany the implementation of the SPP. As such, it can be deduced that teachers are not satisfied with the support and guidance received from school leaders in relation to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. The quality of the support teachers receives from their leaders in relation to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners is poor. This finding can thus imply that school leaders are not showing any kind of interest in the efforts their teachers put into addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. It is essential for school leaders to give their teachers the attention that they need as they navigate the demands that accompany the implementation of the SPP. While on that, differing from previously highlighted responses, Teacher 1 in their response, argued for school leadership being present in their school. When asked if whether they have ever received any kind of support from their school leaders, Teacher 1 responded:

My HOD…when I started working, I took note of this learner who was struggling. I told my HOD, and he said to me maybe I should try a different teaching approach. My HOD enlightened me on the different teaching strategies to employ, I did that until one strategy was effective. I did not only apply the knowledge I got from my HOD with that learner, now when I went to class, I went there with the plan to employ various teaching strategies in one lesson.

From Teacher 1's response, it can be deduced that the support from the school leaders can be effective and can contribute to the improvement of the academic performance of learners. As such, school leaders should constantly seek effective ways in which they can support and guide teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners. This is in correspondence with Memela and Ramrathan's (2022) argument that in effective schools, principals are the ones who are tasked with ensuring a supportive work environment.

What can be derived from the preceding sub-theme is that school leadership plays an enormous role in the process of school improvement. As Weber (1996) outlines, school leaders need to ensure that, within their responsibilities of managing instruction, they adequately support teachers. It is imperative that they improve the self-efficacy of their teachers, and this can be done through showing interest in the teachers' efforts. School leaders need to motivate teachers by highlighting the capabilities that these individuals possess, that is verbal persuasion. If school leaders frequently and constantly persuade their teachers that they are capable of addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners, teachers are more likely to do so as their self-efficacy would have been increased.

As Orphanos and Orr (2014) argue that school leadership has been confirmed to have a positive, although indirect, influence on the academic performance of learners, thus, it is important for school leaders to ensure that all the academic activities in the school context run smoothly. This includes supporting teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners. From the findings of this study, it is evident that in some schools, there is a low level of school leadership support available for teachers. In this context, when teachers are not offered support, they struggle to navigate the implementation of the SPP (Mogale & Modipane, 2021).

4.3.3 School leadership strategies to support teachers in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners

One of the objectives of this study was to investigate and recommend strategies that school leaders could implement to support teachers in enhancing their teaching practices, enabling them to effectively address the learning gaps of progressed learners. The school leadership strategies uncovered are discussed in detail below and these include: Supporting teachers to identify progressed learners and assessing teacher performance through classroom observations; fostering an environment of openness, approachability, and teamwork; facilitating teacher inclusion in meetings and workshops for effective communication, collaboration, and professional development; actively engage and demonstrate enthusiasm in

teaching and learning to foster positive teacher-school leadership relationships; encourage extra classes to enhance learning opportunities; acknowledge hard work and explore incentives and compensation structures.

4.3.3.1 Supporting Teachers: Identifying Progressed Learners and Assessing Teacher Performance through Classroom Observations

It is through identification that teachers are able to be informed of the type of support that progressed learners require as per the reasons for their progression. As such, when asked about the school leadership strategies that could be employed to support teachers in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners, the critical strategy that emerged was to assist teachers in identifying these learners and further assessing the performance of teachers through classroom observations. With regards to identifying progressed learners, Teacher 2 had the following to say:

> *I think a detailed report to understand how each progressed learner has been progressed from one class to another. And with regards to which particular subjects they were struggling with. So that as a teacher I will know if I am teaching this particular subject and the school leaders have prepared me beforehand that these numbers of learners will need a little bit of extra push so that when I structure my lessons, I actually have that in mind.*

Teacher 2's response suggests that school leaders need to provide teachers with a detailed report that informs them of the progressed learners. The detailed report should thus include the subjects that they lacked in. Since it is a detailed report on how they have been progressed to the next grade, this report will then help teachers to prepare on how they will go about addressing the learning gaps of these learners since the detailed report will include the strategies that teachers can employ as advised by the school leaders. Rather than teachers commencing the academic year not knowing which learners were progressed, school leaders should ensure that this is addressed through assisting teachers in identifying them and providing teachers with a detailed report. On that, Teacher 5 correspondingly stated that:

> *The first thing will be having to help with the identification of these learners. Teachers need to be given a list or data of who is progressed and who needs support. And also, not just who is progressed, also give us more information on why they failed, or which subject they failed.*

Teacher 5's response corresponds with Teacher 2's as they both strongly argued that school leaders need to help teachers with the identification of these learners. From these two responses, it can be deduced that the process of identifying these learners takes more than providing teachers with a list that comprises the names of the learners. The data or rather the report needs to be detailed to include all the necessary information that teachers will need as they address the learning gaps of these learners. As such, following Weber's (1996) model of Instructional Leadership, it is essential that school leaders clearly articulate the academic goals of the school. This will imply providing teachers with detailed reports concerning struggling learners and how to go about addressing their learning gaps.

On that, an effective practice can be derived from Principal 2's response as they shared what they practiced in their school to say that:

> *Every year end, as we reflect upon how the academic year went, teachers are given a detailed report of learners who are progressed. This report is per learner and includes the aspects that they struggled with in their previous grade. This then allows for teachers to plan their next year accordingly as they are aware of these learners and their struggles. Basically, what is done is, when teachers are given these reports, they then work together and discuss how to best approach these learners in the following year. So, these reports guide the improvement plan that is put in place for the next year.*

Principal 2's response highlights that it is essential to plan prior, this includes providing teachers with a detailed report on progressed learners in time so that they can plan accordingly. These reports will basically allow teachers to have a thorough knowledge of their learners and how they can go about addressing their learning gaps. Furthermore, in assisting teachers with the identification of progressed learners, DH 2 responded as follows:

> *…I showed them at the beginning how we mark. When we mark, we put the marks at the front. I show them with my own class that this is how I do it. Then we then have a diagnostic analysis tool where we will now identify the numbers. That then allows the teachers to be able to detect how many learners are struggling and with which questions specifically. We then write their names down so that we can address their needs individually. So, we use those diagnostic tools to set our targets, to say how many learners are struggling and how can we reduce that.*

What DH 2's response suggests is that school leaders need to guide and direct their teachers on how to go about identifying academically struggling learners. The diagnostic tool in this regard assists teachers in being informed of where their learners are lacking so that they can employ individual strategies to address those learning gaps. This further highlights that school leaders need to take the role of leading teachers in this process of teaching and learning and thus be the academic guides.

With regards to assessing the performance of teachers, conducting classroom observations for teacher performance evaluation purposes emerged as one of the leadership strategies that school leaders could employ when seeking to support teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners. This is the strategy that most teachers alluded that will be effective regarding their professional development. With regards, Teacher 4 phrased it in this way:

> *I think if the school leaders, like the principal, vice principal, and HODs would come with me to class and see what I encounter alone during those courses of teaching and learning. If only they could come with us, and observe, and not only hear from me about what really transpires in classrooms. Cause sometimes I would even take the essays and show the vice principal that I can't read this, all they say is "Find the mark and make them pass".*

What can be deduced from Teacher 4's response is that school leaders need to do classroom observations so that they get to see and witness the challenges that teachers encounter in the classrooms, so they are able to support these teachers thoroughly. It is essential that school leaders, as instructional leaders, have knowledge of these challenges as they are the ones who are tasked with ensuring that the process of teaching and learning runs smoothly. As Weber (1996) correctly pinpoints, one of the tasks of instructional leaders is to observe and enhance the quality of instruction. When school leaders observe teachers in practice, they are able to guide and support them where necessary. In similar veins, Teacher 2 correspondingly responded that:

> *[School leaders] need to come in the classroom so that not only the teacher is saying what they have seen but the principal is also aware of it. And that in itself will actually create an environment where the dynamics of the relationship or the power issues is not actually minimized but rather allows for everyone to be open to learning, be open to being guided where they lack certain things.*

Teacher 2's response emphasises the need for the creation of a school culture that prioritizes the observation of the process of teaching and learning. This response suggests that this will allow the school leaders and teachers to work together. Moreover, in this culture, teachers will be open to being guided and directed. As Weber (1996) highlights, school leaders need to promote a positive learning climate. it is in this kind of environment that learning will take place and also, teachers will develop professionally. As such, school leaders need to ensure that they observe the practices of their teachers, so they are able to guide and support them where needed. With regards to this, Teacher 6 phrased it this way:

> *The principal needs to maybe observe since they have experience. If they observe me teaching that child on academic Monday, during that progressed learners' session, maybe he will see that maybe there is something with my teaching and advise me on alternative teaching approaches to employ. So, I think by the school leaders supporting me, I can also be able to support the child.*

Teacher 6's response suggests that school leaders need to observe teachers in practice, so they are able to evaluate their performances. From Teacher 6's response, it is suggested that school leaders visit the classrooms so that they are able to detect the shortcomings of their teachers and address them on the spot. As such, when school leaders comprehend where their teachers lack, they will then be able to guide and support them. Thus, this finding pinpoint that when teachers are supported, so are the academically struggling learners. In a nutshell, if school leaders seek to improve academic performance in their schools, they should support teachers who are on the journey of supporting underperforming learners. In supporting teachers, DH 1 also strongly advocated for school leaders doing classroom observations to evaluate teacher performance. They alluded that:

> *...And then after you have done your monitoring and moderation, you need to give feedback. And then usually we are saying that feedback should be developmental. You should see that this is missing, the teacher did not do 12345 but now you need to encourage the teacher by giving them a report on their practices…you are not going there to police and be like "Meneer does not have subject matter", you are going there to try and assist and develop a teacher.*

DH 1's response suggests that when school leaders do classroom observations, the most critical aspect of it is the provision of feedback. The feedback to be provided needs to be effective and developmental, in which a teacher develops professionally. As Bandura (1977) strongly asserts,

constructive feedback increases one's self-efficacy and expands one's perception of what they can achieve. As such, school leaders need to be able to advise teachers on their practices, what was done correctly, and what could be done differently with the centre of the attention being the improvement of the academic performance of underperforming learners. In similar veins, DH 3 correspondingly stated that:

> *I do lesson observations, in the lesson observations, when I realise gaps, I sit down one-on-one with the educator to say according to my opinion, I would have wanted to teach in this way or that way. Or…there were shortcomings in your teaching at this point and at that point. That helps at least to make sure that we move together as a department.*

DH 3's response highlights that it is crucial for school leaders to sit one-on-one with their teachers after classroom observations to provide them with feedback regarding their practices. This then implies that is it crucial for the communication between teachers and school leaders to be open, so that the process of guidance can be effective. Fundamentally, what the responses of DH 1 and DH 3 emphasise is that school leaders need to provide teachers with constructive feedback that will build them and enhance their instructional practices.

What can be derived from this sub-theme is that one of the strategies for supporting teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners is through assisting teachers to identify these learners and further assessing the performances of teachers in the classroom context. As Mogale and Malatji (2022) argue, the crucial stage when it comes to the progression policy is the identification of these learners. As such, when teachers are assisted with identifying these learners through the provision of a detailed report, then they will be informed on how to go about attending to these learners. Moreover, the findings under this sub-theme emphasise that school leaders need to normalise evaluating the performance of their teachers in the classrooms. As Özdemir (2019) asserts that attaining educational goals relies heavily on effectively evaluating teacher performance. Thus, scholars such as Özdemir (2019), Bichi (2017), Bellibaş et al. (2021), Al-Thani et al. (2021) maintain that regular visits to the classroom are a necessary component of evaluating a teacher's performance to observe them in action and provide recommendations on how to improve.

4.3.3.2 Foster an Environment of Openness, Approachability and Teamwork

Another strategy that emerged was for school leaders to create an environment of openness in their schools. An environment that allows teachers to safely approach their leaders and voice

out their concerns. An environment that allows for teamwork. On that, Teacher 2 said the following:

> *Leaders must stop using power as a form of a weapon or a tool to instil fear in teachers or threats of sort. They need to use power as a means of negotiation, communication, and easy access for everyone. So that the relationship in that environment can be smooth. And that in itself, once that relationship is established, teachers will not go to class bitter, they will have the motivation to teach effectively and be willing to identify learners who are at risk, so that they can try and work with them in the best way possible.*

From Teacher 2's response, it is suggested that school leaders need to ensure that they do not misuse the power that accompanies their positions as this will affect the attitude teachers have towards addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. It is essential that school leaders foster an environment that allows for smooth effective conversations. In this way, teachers' self-efficacy will be improved, and they will have the motivation to ensure that the learning gaps of progressed learners are addressed. If a healthy relationship is not established in schools, teachers will not show interest in the process of teaching and learning. Correspondingly, DH 2 also argued for open communication in schools as they alluded that: "*…there shouldn't be a wall…leaders should lead by example, to show their subordinates how things are done. Do not just instruct your people 'do this!*'". What DH 2's response implies is that a leader should not be an authoritarian leader but be an instructional leader. One that is interested in the process of teaching and learning. One who is interested in working together with teachers to ensure that learning objectives are attained. Basically, the spirit of teamwork and collaboration between school leaders and teachers needs to be apparent in schools. On that, Principal 1 had the following to say:

> *What I do is consult the teachers first. As much as I lead them, the truth is, they guide me. They know much about what they need to be able to assist these learners more than I do. Consulting with them gives me the roadmap. As I consult with the teachers, I then learn of the resources and the support that they need.*

The response of Principal 1 suggests that it is essential for school leaders to be approachable and listen to their teachers actively. This is so because in most cases; it is the teachers that have a thorough knowledge of what happens in the classrooms more than school leaders do. As such, school leaders need to listen and respect the suggestions that teachers put forward. However,

before teachers can be able to make any suggestions, the environment needs to be conducive. Principal 1's response highlights that consulting teachers provides school leaders with a roadmap. This is so as the challenges teachers encounter, and their suggestions will guide the school leaders on the strategies or remedies that need to be implemented. Sharing the same sentiments, Principal 3 also advocated for consulting with teachers as they stated the following:

> *Apart from being hands on, I consult with teachers. Remember teachers are the implementors of whatever classroom instruction interventions we put in place in the school. They are the ones with the firsthand experience of their effectiveness and downfalls. So, what I normally do is schedule meetings with them where they will update me with the progress of the interventions. I will hear from them if whether they see any light or not, they will be the ones to inform me if alternatives are needed. Basically, the teachers are my guides…*

Similar to Principal 1, Principal 3 perceived teachers as "*guides*". What the responses from these two leaders imply is that teachers are at the centre of it all. They are the ones who have knowledge about academically struggling learners more than the school leaders. And in the case of any interventions put in place, they are the ones who get to witness their effectiveness and ineffectiveness. As such, it is mandatory for school leaders to ensure that they foster an environment that allows teachers to approach them and inform them of the progress of the interventions put in place. As such, Weber's (1996) model of Instructional Leadership emphasises that school leaders need to foster an environment that allows them to be able to share their views and also be able to listen to the views of their teachers so that there can be mutual understanding.

Furthermore, effective solutions tend to emerge in situations that involve teamwork. As such, what has commonly emerged from the gathered data is that school leaders need to foster an environment that encourages teachers to work together. With regards, Teacher 2 correctly argued that:

> *… [school leaders] need to also ensure that they in a way they actually enable teachers to meet with each other and discuss content to a certain extent. That will help teachers to have multiple approaches to teaching. And to a certain extent, even if teachers that are not teaching the same subjects but if they meet under the dorm to say like how are you finding your learners and which learners are you having issues with, which ones*

do you think are struggling? That will also help leaders as well, to identify these learners who are struggling long before they actually even progress them.

Teacher 2's response highlights that it is the responsibility of the school leaders to ensure that teachers collaborate and work together to ensure that the teachers share best practices on how they address the learning gaps of progressed learners. As Bandura's (1977) model of self-efficacy highlights, we enhance our beliefs in our own practices through observing others succeeding in tackling similar tasks. When teachers meet under one roof, they get to have fruitful conversations and build each other for the benefit of these academically struggling learners. On collaboration, DH 3 argued that departments in schools should collaborate. For instance:

Technology and science should be working together, they should not be divorced. So, if there are resources in the technological department, I should have access to them. But what normally happens is, we tend to monopolize our resources. I can't even go and borrow an ammeter from the technological department. They would say "No, no, this one is ours, is not for the science department". So, there should be a link within the departments.

What DH 3's response implies is that school leaders need to then ensure that they facilitate the link between the departments to ensure that there is no competition and that the departments understand that they should work together for the greater good of the academic performance of the learners in their school. As DH 3 further stated: "*If you remove that competition and we know that we are working together for the sole of making a child pass, then that is going to be good."* This then highlights that school leadership has a critical role to play which is to ensure that departments work together, and they further have adequate resources needed to ensure that teaching and learning become productive, realistic, and fun. In a similar vein, Principal 1 argued that:

Teamwork is key, that is something that I always tell my teachers. You know where there is teamwork, issues are very manageable. What I do to ensure that teachers work together is to hold meetings whenever challenges arise. In this case, what I do is invite teachers to meetings. I see meetings as platforms where rich planning is done. In meetings everyone is there, everyone contributes, everyone is heard. It is through gatherings that teachers are able to work together, support each other and share ways on how to deal with challenges they face in classrooms.

What Principal 1's response suggests is that school leaders need to hold meetings where teachers come together to help and guide each other. Moreover, school leaders should employ ways that ensure that attending these meetings becomes mandatory and that teachers are held accountable for not attending. the deduction from this response is that it is through teamwork that teachers get to professionally develop each other. And also, it is through collaboration that effective ideas on how to address the learning gaps of progressed learners emerge. With regards, Principal 3 correspondingly argued that in their school, they implement what they call 'peer-coaching'. How it is done, is that teachers are paired, and they work together to coach and guide each other. In their response, Principal 3 stated that these teachers "*observe each other in practice and then give each other feedback on aspects that they need to address*." What this strategy does according to the principal is that it allows teachers to learn from each other.

On the other hand, when it comes to collaboration, DH 3 alluded to the following:

> *In Science I would say we are basically dependent mostly on two departments, that is the Mathematics and English department. I say in Mathematics probably because in calculations, manipulation of data, when we find that our learners cannot manipulate data especially in the mathematical background, we go back to the Maths department and say please can you teach maybe fractions because our learners are not able to the subject of the formula or something. Then if they address it from that end, when it comes in, [learners] would say "Yes we have done it Maths". And then in English, our learners cannot communicate, basically if you say, "define a term", they cannot, you say read this passage, they cannot read. So, we go back to the English department and say please can you make them read in class because we also want them to read in our subjects. So, there is that link between the Maths, the English and Science departments. I am leaving other departments out but however the basics, the two departments that I normally liaison with are the English and the Mathematics.*

What emerged from DH 3's response is that it is essential for departments in schools to work together. As such, school leaders need to ensure that there is clear communication between departments in their schools as at the end of the day, they need each other for the academic goals of the schools to be attained. School leaders need to ensure that the departments in their schools meet to discuss these learners and work together on how they can address the learning gaps of learners. For learners to improve academically, the departments in schools need not to

monopolise resources. They thus need to understand that everything that is done in the school context is for the benefit of learners.

The preceding sub-theme emphasises that in schools, an environment of openness, approachability, and teamwork needs to be fostered. Thus, it is the responsibility of school leaders to ensure that such environments are created. Moreover, school leaders need to ease the process of teachers approaching them by being approachable. As Hauge et al. (2014) assert, if school leaders wish to have a positive impact on the improvement of the academic performance of their learners, then they must surrender some of their authority. When school leaders are approachable, teachers will be able to communicate the challenges that they face when seeking to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. in these kinds of spaces where teamwork is guaranteed, teachers and school leaders will work together towards attaining shared goals.

4.3.3.3 Facilitate Teacher Inclusion in Meetings and Workshops for Effective Communication, Collaboration, and Professional Development

From fostering an environment that allows teachers to approach their school leaders and also for their views to be heard, emerged the importance of including teachers in important meetings that involve the teaching and learning process. It has been established that effective communication and collaboration are the most critical aspects of schools as organisations. As such, for the challenges teachers encounter to be heard when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners, they need to be invited to meetings. These meetings are the ones that will allow school leaders to listen to the proposals made by the teachers. On that, Teacher 5 had the following to say:

> *School leaders need to allow teachers in important meetings. Teachers need to be part of the SMTs, they need to open up the doors for the teachers as well. I am not saying that leaders should not have their own meetings but let's not neglect having regular meetings for the school whereby we discuss on how we can go about certain things. And also, educate teachers, it is your responsibility as a leader to educate your colleagues. Most teachers are not educated and if we are not educated, we are not aware. If we are not aware we will not help or assist these learners.*

What Teacher 5's response argues for is the inclusion of teachers in meetings. As emphasised, Teacher 5 is not disputing the idea of school leaders having their own school leadership meetings. However, from their response, it can be deduced that there should be regular meetings in schools which allow the school leaders to educate their teachers on how to go about

addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. Similarly, Teacher 4 also argued that school leaders need to invite teachers to meetings. They further alluded that: "…*tell us this is the problem, how can we resolve this and we, as we are seating in one table as teachers, we may have strategies which may be combined to come up with the solution at the end*." What the response from Teacher 4 implies is that inviting teachers to the meetings can be an effective strategy in a way that when teachers come together, productive ideas are shared. This exactly corresponds with Teacher 3's response that:

> *If [school leaders] could somehow have a session where we sit down and discuss, have sessions probably almost every week where we discuss those learners, how each teacher is dealing with them and if that teacher is winning, then they tell us how we deal with them so that we can also implement their strategy.*

Teacher 3's response implies that when teachers meet to talk about how to go about addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners, effective solutions are bound to emerge. As such, through the inclusion of teachers in meetings, the concept of collaboration will be fostered. This is so as teachers will work together for the greater good of these learners.

On that, in some schools, there was evidence of teachers being afforded the opportunity to participate in meetings. For instance, DH 1 alluded that:

> *How we do things in this school…we do them through meetings. We meet as teachers, not me as a manager but I am a teacher also. So, we meet and then we actually educate each other on how to deal with these progressed learners or underperforming learners. It is all in gathering together.*

DH 1 argued that "*It is all in gathering together*", this implies that when members of the organisation gather together, they tend to have fruitful conversations for the benefit of that organisation. As DH 1's response emphasised, the purpose of these meetings should be to ensure that teachers educate each other and share best practices on how to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. As such, it is the responsibility of school leaders to ensure that teachers have regular meetings with them and each other. On that, Principal 3 stated the purpose of these meetings thoroughly as they responded that:

> *At the beginning of the year, departments as per their subjects and specific teachers hold meetings where they discuss progressed learners and their challenges. These meetings serve to prepare the next teacher of what to prepare and how to best*

> *approach these learners. In our school, we have this system that ensures that for instance, the grade 10 and 11 Life Sciences teacher is not the same person. The rationale was that when learners are progressed, perhaps they should then be taught by a different teacher who perhaps employs differing teaching methods if that makes sense. So, these meetings then allow these two, for example, teachers to talk and discuss these learners. I would say the strategy that is effective, and I can attest to, is holding departmental meetings.*

Principal 3's response suggests that these meetings allow teachers to prepare and work together on attaining the common goals of the school. In their school, Principal 3 went to the extent of asserting that they ensure that the teachers of the previous and next grades differ. This is to ensure that progressed learners experience different teachers who employ differing teaching approaches. This is with the hope that these learners will then perhaps improve academically. As such, these kinds of meetings then afford teachers the platform to discuss these learners in detail. As DH 2 also argued: "*Meetings must be like something that happens regularly so that we discuss as educators in that particular subject…maybe we can share ideas that we can come up with that can work for us*."

Upon the facilitation of teacher inclusive meetings are the facilitations of workshops that seek to develop teachers professionally, so they are capacitated to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. As such, it is essential that school leaders facilitate workshops that are geared towards ensuring that teachers are capacitated to effectively conduct teaching, more precisely to progressed learners. Workshops are platforms that allow teachers to gather and learn about ways in which they can improve their instructional practices. As Bandura's (1977) model of self-efficacy shows, workshops can promote vicarious experiences as they allow individuals to gather and learn through each other and in turn develop professionally. Therefore, participants of the study argued that for school leaders to support teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners, they need to facilitate workshops for teachers' professional development purposes. In their own words, Teacher 1 responded that:

> *…school leaders can facilitate workshops and invite people who know more so they can jump in to help us. They must get in touch with district officials to check in if they can help with these workshops. We need more of professional development sessions.*

From Teacher 1's response, it can be deduced that school leaders need to ensure that they seek help when it comes to the facilitation of workshops that will enhance the capabilities of their

teachers. However, alternatively, from Teacher 5's response, it can be derived that most school leaders believe that school leaders think that the only people who can hold workshops are the district officials. As such, it is key to note that, that is not the case as school leaders can also facilitate internal workshops in their schools. In their own words, Teacher 5 stated that:

> *I believe that a workshop would help a lot where in this workshop the school leaders are educating, they are helping us, they are giving us the lists of the learners who are progressed, they are giving us ways on how we can assist, they are giving us a platform on how we can voice out our suggestions and then on a monthly basis the leaders come and they check on us, they check on the learners' progress so they can see how they are doing.*

Teacher 5's response suggests that workshops can be facilitated by school leaders, who will be able to use these sessions to educate and train their teachers on how to go about addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. It is through these workshops that school leaders will then be able to get the suggestions that the teachers have with regard to improving the academic performance of these learners. This is in accordance with Teacher 3's assertion that:

> *I think workshops do work…we have specialists who deal with different kinds of learners all around. If they can somehow create or come up with those people to come to school, create workshops where they will teach us on how to deal with different types of learners, especially progressed learners. Because right now is not about dealing with disabilities but is just dealing with learners who are lacking in class. The workshops can be held monthly, then we go and implement, we come back with feedback. How is it going? And they assist again…that since it's going this way, this is what you need to do.*

The response of both Teacher 5 and Teacher 3 correspondingly emphasis that these workshops will afford the school leaders the space to educate and equip their teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. In addition, school leaders need to work closely with district officials to also jump in and hold workshops that develop teachers professionally. However, as Teacher 5's response correctly pointed out, school leaders are also able to facilitate internal workshops. For instance, Principal 1 alluded that they hold workshops in their schools. They responded that:

> *…concerning professional development opportunities, I, together with HODs, facilitates workshops. What we do is every month we hold sessions that are specifically*

designed to develop teachers professionally. Although they are not precisely for them to address the learning gaps of progressed learners, but they are applicable. I say so because the sessions are to develop teachers generally, like for them to be competent in teaching all learners.

Although the workshops that Principal 1 facilitates in their schools seek to develop the competencies of teachers generally, the participant argued that they also apply when it comes to capacitating them to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. As such, from their response, it can be established that it should be made mandatory for school leaders to facilitate workshops that seek to enhance the capacity of teachers and improve their teaching. Principal 1, in their response, went further to say they do hold the sessions, although he stated that: "*we do not hold them under the 'progressed learners' umbrella, which is something that we should look into.*" What this response suggests is that school leaders need to consider facilitating workshops that strictly seek to develop the competencies of teachers and enhancing their capabilities to address the learning gaps of progressed learners.

With regard to facilitating workshops as a strategy for supporting teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners, Principal 3 had the following to say:

When it comes to the development of our teachers, I always encourage the HODs to ensure that their teachers attend workshops and that they also hold what we normally call 'local' workshops, meaning workshops held by us, for us. When resources are accumulated and the teachers have access to develop professionally, addressing the learning needs of progressed learners becomes an easy task.

What Principal 3's response suggests is that it is essential for school leaders to encourage their departmental heads to then encourage their teachers to attend both internal and external workshops. When teachers attend workshops, they then develop professionally which then translates to them becoming more capacitated to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. As Harwell (2003) articulates, professional development opportunities afford teachers the platform to advance their knowledge of the subject matter and their skills to teach. This is in correspondence with Tuytens and Devos' (2010) assertion that workshops that seek to develop teachers professionally help in increasing the teachers' knowledge of engaging with learners in the classroom context.

In all, if school leaders seek to support teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners, they need to allow teachers to partake in academic related meetings. School leaders

need to ensure that teachers are invited to meetings as they have direct interactions with these learners. On that, Honingh and Hooge (2014) argued that the involvement of teachers in the decision-making process in the schools promotes their commitment and further improves their motivation when it comes to implementing those decisions. This is so as these meetings will thus allow teachers to then share best practices on how to go about attending to these learners. The meetings will further afford teachers the opportunity to develop professionally. On professional development, it is further highlighted that school leaders need to ensure that they facilitate internal workshops in their schools. These workshops will then train and guide teachers on how to address the learning gaps of progressed learners.

4.3.3.4 Actively Engage and Demonstrate Enthusiasm in Teaching and Learning to Foster Positive Teacher-School Leadership Relationships

For school leaders to effectively support teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners, they need to be instructional leaders. This implies that they need to show interest in the process of teaching and learning. As Teacher 2 argued:

> *…[school] leaders need to be hands on with teaching and learning. Not necessarily as teachers but they need to be there to really follow up on teachers' teaching and learning times to better understand where the differences lie.*

Teacher 2's response implies that school leaders need to check up on their teachers to be able to comprehend and be knowledgeable on the challenges that they encounter as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners. School leaders need to show that they care about these teachers and that they seek to see the academic performance of their schools improve. On that, Teacher 1 argued that in their school, school leaders do not care. This then becomes a challenge as the participant further argued that:

"*So now as a teacher, I know that a learner is struggling but I am not doing anything because the school leaders are also not doing anything. Why should I care because they don't care?*".

What Teacher 1's response implies is that it becomes very difficult to show interest in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners when school leaders do not portray signs of interest when it comes to helping these learners. Therefore, school leaders need to demonstrate enthusiasm and engage actively in the process of teaching and learning. On that, Teacher 1 further alluded that: "*If school leaders could force us, by showing a little interest, then we will attend to these learners*."

On the other hand, the findings of the study highlight that for teachers to be motivated in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners, school leaders need to take them seriously. In this regard, Teacher 4 responded by saying: "*...when we say we have a problem in class, they must take us seriously because they have no idea what we are facing."* What Teacher 4's response emphasises is that school leaders need to listen to their teachers and show interest in helping them. From Teacher 1 and Teacher 5's responses, it can be concluded that school leaders' enthusiasm in the process of teaching and learning affects teachers' level of motivation in doing their duties. The findings further highlight that school leaders need to be a part of the interventions that are put in place to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. This implies that school leaders should not only instruct teachers to have interventions, but they should also be a part of it. As Teacher 6 argued: "*the principal himself needs to come and engage with these learners so that he can see what the challenges are*." What Teacher 6's response implies is that school leaders need to also be on the ground. They should not only assist teachers on paper, but in their practices also there should be evidence of active participation.

On that, in some schools, there was evidence of school leaders actively participating in the process of teaching and learning. For instance, Principal 1 responded that:

> *I support [teachers] and also make sure that I engage with them. To foster a collaborative environment, I have to be a part of that environment and not outside it. When I am part of that environment, I am then able to encourage my teachers to work together and come up with effective strategies that they can use to collectively attend to progressed learners. So, I can say, it is all in my leadership practices, I am not leading from the front or behind, rather I am leading while in the middle.*

Principal 1's response suggests that as a leader, it is essential to be inside the circle of ensuring the academic improvement of their learners. This implies that school leaders should not only observe interventions from a distance but rather be a part of those interventions. When the school leader is in the middle, therefore teachers will be motivated to give their practices their all. From this response, it can be further established that school leaders need to vouch for collaboration and teamwork when they are a part of that team. Principal 1 further alluded that:

> *What I normally do is to walk with the teachers through the implementations of strategies. In that way, it becomes easier for me to track the progress and instantly notice any challenges. In a way, I fully engage and take part in any interventions that*

we put in place to professionally develop our teachers. I think I find it very easy that way than having to monitor the effectiveness of these interventions through the teachers.

Principal 1's response emphasises the importance of school leaders in walking alongside teachers when it comes to the implementation of strategies geared towards their development, so they are able to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. It is essential for school leaders to engage and be active participants in the process of teaching and learning. This will then allow school leaders to be able to track the level at which the implemented strategies are progressing. In this way, shortcomings will be immediately picked up and addressed. This is in correspondence with Principal 2's argument that:

It is always easier to monitor the effectiveness of something when you are a part of its implementation. When interventions are implemented, I make sure that I engage from the beginning as that also allows me to track and evaluate the effectiveness. If anything arises, since I am actively participating, I am able to deal with it on the spot. If there are any modifications needed to those interventions, they would be prompted by something that I also would have observed.

The response of the two school leaders suggests that they are actively engaging in the process of teaching and learning in their schools. This is an effective strategy to support teachers as they seek to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. When school leaders show interest, they are able to then notice issues and be able to provide teachers with effective feedback immediately. However, for all these to transpire, there is a need for a positive relationship between school leaders and teachers.

The positive teacher-school leadership relationship in the school context allows for the day-to-day activities in the school to run smoothly. Furthermore, they allow for what Bandura (1977) refers to as vicarious experiences. This is so as when this relationship is positive, learning through others will be effective and efficient. School leaders will coach and train their teachers on best practices to employ when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. As such, it is the responsibility of the school leaders to ensure that the relationship between them and teachers together with learners, and parents is connected. On that, Teacher 2 stated that:

School leaders need to stop being dictators. They need to understand they are our leaders, and their positiveness is also our positiveness. So, when they stay positive, we stay positive. And it's about teamwork, they need to allow me access to address my

issues to them when I have issues before it's too late. And they need to also be willing to guide me where necessary, as to like if this is not working, this is an alternative. So, the leader and teacher relationship need to be similar to when a teacher and a learner there is that form of trust…

What Teacher 2's response highlights is that when school leaders are positive, so will the teachers. As such, it is critical for school leaders to ensure that they stay positive. Teacher 2's response emphasises that there should be evidence of teamwork in schools. The relationship between the school leaders and teachers needs to allow the two entities to work together. The relationship should allow school leaders to be able to guide their teachers where necessary. Additionally, when being guided, teachers need to be able to perceive the guidance positively and not as a form of an attack on their profession. With regards, Teacher 2 went further to state that:

…If I fear my leader, I will not actually do my work. Everything that I will be doing will be based on fear, but if I am free to teach in class and be able to share my shortcomings from the class with my leader, then it will actually make my life a bit better.

What Teacher 2's response suggests is that it is essential to ensure that school leaders are not feared by their teachers. This will then ensure that teachers are free to approach their school leaders when they need support regarding the learning gaps of progressed learners. This finding suggests that when teachers are able to communicate their shortfalls to their leaders, then teaching will be easier for them. School leaders, as the ones who are knowledgeable, need to be able to guide teachers on how things are run. Thus, Teacher 2 argued that: "…*we need to eradicate fear between the teacher and the leader and that will be the first step and then we work as a team."* According to Teacher 2's response, when this fear is eradicated, then positive relationships will be established. On ensuring positive relationships, DH 1 on the other hand responded as follows:

I address educators individually…if you call a colleague in front of others, you are embarrassing them., I never do that. When time allows, I approach the educators and make them aware of the wrongs that they may have done. I make sure that I approach them with facts, and I show them. If I am also wrong, my educators are allowed to go above me…they can speak to the deputy principal or the principal. They can have an open forum meeting with my superiors in addressing the problem that we have. But I

would like to believe that up to so far, I've never had a major challenge that would take us that far.

What DH 3's response indicates is that school leaders need to ensure that they respect their teachers so they can also be respected in return. As such, to ensure that teachers effectively address the learning gaps of progressed learners, the channels of communication need to be positive and productive. When providing teachers with feedback on their practices, there should be some evidence of respect. DH 3's response further suggests that school leaders need to be able to guide their teachers and for them to do that effectively, they need to ensure that they have positive relationships with teachers.

In a nutshell, the findings under this sub-theme highlight that school leaders need to be instructional leaders. Leaders who are interested in the process of teaching and learning. School leaders need to actively engage in the academic activities of the school. In the case of interventions, school leaders need to also take part as this will motivate teachers to then put all their efforts into those interventions. For instance, in their study, Tuytens and Devos (2010) argued that one of their participants (school leader) portrayed signs of enthusiasm in the process of teaching and learning and they were actively participating through taking part in meetings and providing teachers with informal feedback. And this was effective as teachers also in turn showed signs of being interested. Therefore, school leaders and teachers need to have a positive relationship that allows them to work together for the greater good of their school's improvement. As Hauge et al. (2014) assert, leadership that is geared toward school improvement includes the involvement of school leaders and teachers as a joint entity that seeks to attain the common goals of the organisation.

4.3.3.5 Encourage extra classes to enhance learning opportunities

The process of teaching and learning requires time. As such, it is important for school leaders to ensure that time is respected within their institutions. One of the school leadership strategies that emerged to support teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners was through the school leaders encouraging extra lessons. These extra lessons are to allow teachers to engage with these learners thoroughly so that they can guarantee academic performance improvement. On that, Teacher 2 phrased it this way:

...school leaders need to dedicate maybe a specific day within the schooling calendar, maybe weekly there is a specific day where now we actually have a shorter day but within that shorter day we have an extra time, maybe let's say on a Friday with the 6

periods, the first 3 periods are for normal time and the last 3 are dedicated to progressed learners and the ones who are struggling as well, to be able to strictly focus on them and then look into what issues are they having and how can we try and mitigate that before it becomes an issue as they move forward.

Teacher 6's response suggests that there should be time that is strictly dedicated to attending and addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. It is important to take note that when these learners are progressed, they are combined with the learners who got promoted. As such, that might be a challenge for teachers to be able to then attend to those learners during normal school hours. Thus, Teacher 2's response emphasises that time dedicated to these learners should be made. The extra lessons will then afford teachers the opportunities to mitigate the learning gaps that these learners are having. Similarly, Teacher 6 also argued that:

...Monday to Friday it is already packed, like learners have sports and other stuff. I think the only way it could work is by having interventions during school holidays. Because during the term, things are hectic that if you plan to add an extra hour, the learners are tired. If a learner was progressed, and you already know that this learner has learning gaps, and you still want to add an hour to their learning hours and periods during the term, it is not going to make any effect. So rather, they need like a particular day when like they are strictly attending for academic support.

In a similar vein, Teacher 5 also argued for extra classes as an effective strategy that could be employed to ensure that teachers have enough time to attend to progressed learners. In their own words, they alluded that:

I believe that teaching is a passion, a calling, and we should be willing to go above and beyond to help these learners. I believe that if teachers could come on Saturdays…cause let's face it, I think is basically impossible for us to squeeze in Monday to Friday schedule to assist these learners. So, I think that stretching our working hours could really benefit.

Teacher 5's response highlights the realistic aspect of things to say that it is not practicable to attend to progressed learners during hours that are dedicated to the process of teaching and learning. As such, school leaders need to make sure that they encourage their teachers to go the extra mile if that means coming to school even on Saturdays. Therefore, school leaders need to make sure that they ensure that their teachers can see the bigger picture, which is for these progressed learners to improve academically. The question then will be: are the extra classes

effective? On that, Principal 1, who has been encouraging extra classes in their school, had the following to say:

> *…the truth is…they do work. As a school, we understand that the times that are stipulated by the ATPs are quite not enough to allow teachers to attend to progressed learners. So, with these extra classes, teachers and learners who are academically strong, work together to help struggling learners. We do ensure that the extra time is used wisely and not to catch up with the syllabus. The time is for assisting struggling learners. To ensure that the practice of extra time is sustained, we have made it a school culture, it is our norm…our shared interest, so everyone is respecting that.*

Principal 1's response suggests that extra classes do work when they are used effectively for specific purposes. As such, when school leaders encourage extra classes, it means they need to be there to ensure that the times are used effectively and to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. Furthermore, extra classes should be made part of the school culture, so it can be a norm within the school that there are extra classes that are held for academically struggling learners. This then implies that the schools need to be consistent in facilitating extra classes. It is the consistency in these extra classes that will make it possible for these learners to improve academically. As Principal 3 also argued:

> *Nothing ever beats time…everything works for the best with time. Time is the most valuable gift a person can ever give you. I have the most committed and passionate staff that is dedicated to ensuring that these learners have a bright future. In this school, I am not the one who suggested that we facilitate Saturday classes…my staff did. And trust me, this has been working and it is a practice we are planning on using for many more years to come. We remain consistent in holding these sessions, the teachers are always available to help these learners.*

From the responses of the two principals, it can be concluded that extra classes do work. However, it is essential that there be consistency in their facilitation. As Weber (1996) highlights, instructional leaders are tasked with managing instruction in their schools and, therefore also the time of instruction. Thus, when school leaders encourage their teachers to facilitate extra classes, they should also make it upon themselves that these extra classes are held regularly. From Principal 3's response also emerged the importance of ensuring that teachers are dedicated and understand their roles in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners.

In all, the findings under this sub-theme highlight that for school leaders to support teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners, they need to encourage extra classes. These extra classes will afford teachers the platform to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. As established and confirmed by scholars such as Mogale and Modipane (2021), South African classes are overcrowded and on the other hand, teachers are challenged with covering the curriculum. Thus, it becomes very challenging for teachers to attend to progressed learners during the normal times of teaching and learning. As such, in this case, encouraging extra classes can come in handy for teachers seeking to attend to these learners.

4.3.3.6 Acknowledge hard work and explore incentives and compensation structures

Teachers addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners have a difficult task to perform. As such, one of the strategies that emerged with regard to supporting teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners is through acknowledging the efforts that they make. School leaders need to ensure that they appreciate the hard work of teachers. This also includes providing teachers with tokens of achievement. On that, Teacher 5 had the following to say:

> *You know it's the basic things. Issuing out of certificates, like maybe if I taught a learner and there is progress, issuing out certificates for me and that learner. Recognition. Medals and maybe also create 'the most improved learner' rewards. I always say that human beings, we are so easy to manipulate, validation, give people validation and I promise you they will work for you 24/7. As long as they feel valid, important, and valued, they will work for you. A thank for working hard, will encourage a lot of teachers to continue trying again.*

What Teacher 5's response advocates for is the recognition of the efforts that teachers put in, in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. As such, teachers should be awarded certificates that show that the school is aware of the good work that they are doing. In addition, the findings further highlight that not only should the teachers' efforts be recognised, but those of the learners too. Their willingness to learn and improve should not go unnoticed. With efforts being recognised, then teachers and learners would want to do more as their self-efficacy improves. In correspondence, Teacher 4 also asserted that school leaders can motivate teachers by recognising their efforts. In their words, they responded that:

"*You know when you go an extra mile and you are not recognized, sometimes you just lose that energy. The leaders must recognize their teachers and thank them for going the extra miles*."

What Teacher 4's response implies is that recognising the little efforts that teachers put in, will encourage them into doing more that will aid these struggling learners. When an instructional leader recognises the efforts of teachers, their self-efficacy improves as they will then have a strong belief in their practices which contributes to the greater good of the organisation. This highlights the interrelatedness of Weber's (1996) model of Instructional Leadership and Bandura's (1977) model of Self-efficacy. In a similar vein, Teacher 6 also argued for recognition as they stated:

> *I think we should have recognition…we love recognition I don't want to lie. Personally, I love being recognized for hard work. So, like if there is like 10% increase in the academic performance of learners, recognize us for that.*

What can be established from the responses of the above-mentioned participants is that school leaders need to ensure that they recognise any little effort that is made towards ensuring that progressed learners improve academically. In this regard, Principal 3 alluded that in their school, recognition efforts are evident. They argued that:

> *One thing that I do is to show them that I care about their development. I celebrate their professional growth. When a teacher attends these professional development sessions, I ensure that I recognize their hard work. So, it is more like I am holding their hands in this journey, and I only want what is best for them. When the success and improvement of teachers is acknowledged and celebrated, they become motivated to take part in professional development sessions that come their way. Which is good for the organization don't you think?*

Principal 3's response highlights that teachers get motivated to do more when their practices are recognised and appreciated. For instance, acknowledging teachers' participation in professional development workshops encourages them to attend more of those. Thus, if school leaders seek to see their teachers addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners effectively, then they need to recognise the efforts that teachers make. On that, Principal 2 also practices this aspect as they mentioned that they hold workshops in their schools and to ensure that there is a great turnout of teachers, they reward their participation and engagement. As they stated in their own words: "*the rewards are not much but enough to encourage teachers to pull through.*"

On that, while some saw teaching as a passion and a calling, others perceived it as a job. Which implies that a salary is bound to be at the centre of it all. As such, the findings of this study further suggests that an effective school leadership strategy that could be employed in

supporting teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners is through exploring incentives and compensation structures. When asked how school leaders could support teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners, Teacher 1 responded: "*Incentives, time is money! I have extra classes on Saturdays which gives me money, So, as a teacher it becomes hard to sacrifice that and attend to progressed learners."* What Teacher 1's response suggests is that most teachers have side hustles that give them money, as such, pulling them out of that for them to come to attend to the progressed learners will be unprofitable on their ends. Teacher 3 also echoed the same sentiment, arguing that if the extra time was compensated for, things could be better. This is so as the participant argued that teachers sacrifice their own time to ensure that these learners improve academically. In their own words, Teacher 3 responded:

> *If we need to somehow come on Saturdays, after school, and we get compensated for that, that will be wonderful because everyone would buy-in, everyone will do something about it. Some people have extra jobs that they do and learners that they teach afterschool, so if I am going to sacrifice my learners that I am teaching for pay, and go focus on progressed learners who I was complaining about in the first place and not get anything in return…I would rather continue with the learners that I know I would benefit something in the long run.*

The responses of Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 suggests that teachers will be highly motivated to participate in extra classes if there is some form of compensation. This then indicates that school leaders need to consider these structures and the extent to which they can be effective in ensuring that the academic performance of struggling learners is improved. This leadership strategy is not a must but rather one that school leaders need to consider. On that, Teacher 4 offered a suggestion to say: "*If the school does not have money, they can try to fundraise for teachers to get that small amount of money in those extra classes*." What this response implies is that school leaders need to consider this aspect and further source out sponsors who could assist in compensating these teachers for going an extra mile. For instance, in Tuytens and Devos' (2017) study, one of the teachers was appreciated and that according to the teacher made them feel good and empowered. According to the teacher, being explicitly appreciated motivated them to do even better.

In all, the findings from the preceding sub-theme highlights that it is essential for school leaders to appreciate and acknowledge the efforts that teachers make as they attempt to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. It was found that when teachers are recognised for their

hard work, they thus do more in their work. While on recognising hard work, other participants advocated for school leaders considering incentives and compensation structures. This was so as some teachers have side hustles, as such, it becomes very difficult to pull them out of their side jobs and not compensate them in return. On that, it is advised that school leaders seek sponsors who will assist in compensating teachers for their extra work.

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter presented and discussed the data gathered to respond to the key questions of this study. The findings of this study were presented in this chapter, which were in respect of the insights and perspectives of the 12 participants involved in the study. The key points discussed in this chapter included the challenges that teachers faced when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners, the learnerships' understanding of their roles in supporting teachers in this regard. The chapter concluded by recommending school leadership strategies that school leaders could employ in the case of supporting teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners.

The next chapter will present the summary of the study, conclusions, recommendations, and implications for further research. All will be presented in respect of the findings of this study as presented and discussed in detail in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIVE STUDY SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the study is concluded, and a summary of key issues and considerations is provided. The research questions of the study serve as the foundation for deriving conclusions from the principal findings of the study. Connections will be established between the study's findings and existing literature to emphasise key issues. Conclusively, informed by the findings of this study, recommendations are provided.

5.2 Summary

Overall, this study, in selected 6 schools in the Gauteng province, explored the challenges that teachers face when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners and the school leadership comprehension of their roles in supporting teachers in this regard. These were explored with the purpose of investigating effective leadership strategies that school leaders could employ to support teachers as they address the learning gaps of these learners. The study was conducted with teachers, departmental heads, and principals in 6 selected secondary schools in the Gauteng province. This study takes the view that school leaders are responsible for ensuring that their teachers are capacitated and well equipped to address the learning gaps of progressed learners (Kruse, 2013).

The findings of this study suggests that leadership plays an enormous role in the improvement of school performance (Özdemir, 2019). As found, it is within the powers of the school leadership to ensure that the day-to-day activities in schools run smoothly. In this case, the teachers being at the centre, implies that school leaders need to ensure that their teachers are skilled and knowledgeable to tackle those academic activities – teaching and learning. As Mogale and Modipane (2021) point out, teachers face challenges in the day-to-day academic activities, especially when it comes to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. On that, the findings of this study suggests that school leaders do understand those challenges and their roles in seeking to mitigate those challenges. Moreover, literature reveals the role of school leaders in ensuring school improvement through supporting and advancing teachers' instructional practices (Mkhuma, 2012).

This study's limitations were discussed in Chapter 1, and they arose from the inclusion of only 12 participants, a relatively limited scale when considering the large number of teachers in Gauteng schools as a whole. Regardless, the findings of this study are significant as they contribute to the investigation of school leadership strategies that all school leaders can employ in their school if they seek to support teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners. The findings of this study are also useful in informing the department of Education about the challenges that teachers are facing regarding navigating the implementation of the progression policy. As such, the findings can serve as a guide for policy planning. The challenges that teachers are facing when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners and the school leaderships' understanding of their roles in regard were explored through the following key questions:

i. What are the challenges encountered by teachers when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners? How do school leaders comprehend these challenges?
ii. What are the perspectives of school leaders concerning their leadership roles in supporting teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners?
iii. What strategies can school leaders implement to support teachers in enhancing their teaching practices, enabling them to effectively address the learning gaps of progressed learners?

A literature review was conducted to address issues concerning the key questions posed by this study. These key issues in the literature review included a thorough understanding of the progression policy and the challenges that teachers face when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners (see for instance, Mogale & Modipane, 2021). The literature review further revealed that policy implementation is a challenge in most countries and thus needs thorough consideration (Moodley, 2014). According to the literature, learners are progressed to the next level, with the assumption that they are to be supported so they could be promoted to the next level. However, teachers somehow do not have a thorough understanding of how to go about addressing the learning gaps of these learners (Musitha & Mafukata, 2018). On top of that, there are challenges that teachers encounter when attempting to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. According to Rammala (2009) and Mogale and Modipane (2021), these challenges include a lack of resources and over-crowded classrooms. Moreover, Bertram et al.'s (2021) study highlights that amongst other challenges, teachers are faced with ensuring that they cover the curriculum within the stipulated times, as such, it becomes very difficult for teachers to attend to progressed learners. This was further substantiated by Moagi (2020) with

the assertion that this issue of curriculum coverage leads teachers to have limited time dedicated to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. Thus, the literature review emphasised the role of school leaders in ensuring that teachers are supported as they seek to address the learning gaps of progressed learners.

Bellibaş et al. (2021), Bichi (2017), and Özdemir (2019) share the same sentiments to say when school leaders are engaged in the process of teaching and learning, positive outcomes are yielded. In supporting teachers to advance their instructional practices so they are able to address the learning gaps of progressed learners, Bichi (2017) advocates for school leaders evaluating the performance of teachers. This will ensure that they guide them thoroughly on the changes that need to be made so the teachers are capacitated to address the learning gaps of these learners. The literature further revealed that school leaders need to create PLCs within their schools to afford teachers the platform to use to guide and coach each other on the best practices that could be employed when seeking to address the learning gaps of progressed learners (Özdemir, 2019, 2020). On that, Hauge et al. (2014) correspondingly advocated for the sharing of best practices through what is known as teacher collaboration, something that school leaders need to foster in their schools. As Lyna, Loong Hung and Chong (2016) assert, collaboration is the key to enhancing teachers' instructional practices. In a nutshell, the literature review confirmed that there are effective strategies that school leaders could employ to support and advance the capabilities of teachers through improving their instructional practices so that they are able to address the learning gaps of progressed learners.

This study employed the Instructional Leadership Theory and Self-efficacy theoretical frameworks to analyse and comprehend the findings of this study. The rationale for choosing these two frameworks lies in the comprehension that instructional leaders, who Munna (2023) argues are dedicated to enhancing the teaching and learning process, are thus dedicated to improving teachers' self-efficacy. This can be done through advancing teachers' instructional practices and capacitating teachers to be able to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. School leaders who employ the Instructional Leadership Theory consistently prioritise the improvement of 'teaching and learning' for satisfying effectiveness and productivity in their schools (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Shaked, 2022). In their process of prioritising school improvement, school leaders improve the self-efficacy of teachers. When teachers' self-efficacy is improved, they become motivated to address the learning gaps of progressed

learners. As Sandaraj and Hashim (2022) argued, self-efficacy in teaching significantly influences teachers' capacity to effectively instruct learners.

This study was a qualitative case study situated within the interpretive paradigm. Teachers, departmental heads, and principals from selected Gauteng secondary schools were purposefully selected to provide detailed interpretations of understanding of the progression policy. Participants were asked to provide detailed accounts of their experiences concerning the implementation of this policy, the challenges that teachers encounter when navigating the implementation of this policy, and the leadership's role in supporting teachers. Participants were further encouraged to share leadership strategies that could be employed by school leaders with the purpose of supporting teachers as they address the learning gaps of these learners.

In response to the key research questions of the study, the data was gathered through semi-structured interviews that were conducted with 6 teachers, 3 departmental heads, and 3 principals. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, with one being held online due to reasons that cannot be disclosed. The data gathered through the interviews was transcribed and analysed inductively. Emerging themes were highlighted and discussed. The trustworthiness of this study was ensured through measures that ensured credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of this research study. With regards to the ethical considerations, measures were taken to ensure that the rights of the participants were protected. Further, all the participants signed consent forms to guarantee that they were keen to be part of the study (see Chapter 4).

The findings of this study were discussed and organised as per the following themes and sub-themes:

CORE THEMES	**SUB-THEMES**
The leadership's understanding of their role in supporting teachers address the learning gaps of progressed learners.	

Challenges faced by teachers in relation to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners: *teachers and school leaders' perspectives.*	*i.* *Progressed learners exhibit a deficit in motivation* *ii.* *Time constraints* *iii.* *Lack of proficiency among teachers in identifying progressed learners* *iv.* *Lack of teacher collaboration and effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in schools* v. *Low level of school leadership support*
School leadership strategies to support teachers in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners	*i.* *Supporting Teachers: Identifying Progressed Learners and Assessing Teacher Performance through Classroom Observations* *ii.* *Foster an Environment of Openness, Approachability and Teamwork* *iii.* *Facilitate Teacher Inclusion in Meetings and Workshops for Effective Communication, Collaboration, and Professional Development* *iv.* *Actively Engage and Demonstrate Enthusiasm in Teaching and Learning to Foster Positive Teacher-School Leadership Relationships* *v.* *Encourage extra classes to enhance learning opportunities* *vi.* *Acknowledge hard work and explore incentives and compensation structures*

5.3 Conclusions

This section includes the conclusion of this study based on the key findings. The conclusions are presented in correspondence with this study's key research questions. Furthermore, the conclusions are presented as per the frameworks of this study, Instructional Leadership Theory and Self-efficacy. School leaders can adopt the instructional leadership theory and employ strategies that are geared towards enhancing teachers' self-efficacy. Instructional Leadership Theory is adopted by leaders who are concerned with the process of teaching and learning (Bichi, 2017). They ensure that the academic performance of learners is improved. This amongst many ways, is done through the improvement of teachers' instructional practices and the advancement of their knowledge concerning their profession.

5.3.1 What are the challenges that teachers face when attempting to address the learning gaps of progressed learners?

Teachers encounter challenges when seeking to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. This study was prompted by the literature that argues that teachers are finding it hard to navigate the implementation of the progression policy due to existing challenges in schools (see for instance, Mogale & Modipane, 2021). The findings of this study corroborated this as participants outlined various challenges that teachers encounter when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners.

According to the findings of this study, one of the challenges that teachers encounter is the progressed learners' lack of motivation to learn. Teachers and school leaders argue that these learners do not show any signs of interest in improving academically and this becomes a challenge for teachers who are tasked with addressing their learning gaps. As Makhanya (2021) argues, progressed learners lack motivation to improve as they know they are bound to be progressed again in case they do not meet the promotion requirements. The responses of the participants further suggested that when these learners lack motivation, so will the teachers.

Another challenge that emerged was the issue of time constraints. Teachers in this study argued that they are facing time constraints that impact their ability to give progressed learners sufficient time. As Musitha and Mafukata (2018) argue, the lack of time prevents teachers from employing effective and creative strategies that could address the learning gaps of progressed learners. This then highlights the importance of the employment of Weber's (1996) model of Instructional Leadership in schools as one of its domains is for school leaders to manage instructional time effectively. Moreover, teachers find it hard to identify progressed learners. What happens is that learners are moved from one grade to another without teachers being properly informed and trained. Teachers reported that at the beginning of the year, they fail to identify these learners and thus do not employ differing teaching methods with the aim of accommodating any progressed learners.

DuFour et al. (2010) assert that PLCs are good tools to use when seeking to improve schools. However, teachers in this study reported that PLCs are hardly facilitated in their schools. This poses a challenge for teachers as there is no platform that allows them to advance their instructional practices. The lack of PLCs implied the lack of teacher collaboration in this study. As such, participants highlighted that there is a lack of collaboration among teachers. This is amid the confirmation made by Hargreaves (2021) that teacher collaboration is an effective

tool when it comes to the development of teachers. With regards, Bandura (1977) also adds that one's Self-efficacy is improved through vicarious experiences when one observes and adopts effective practices of other people. Therefore, it is essential that teachers be encouraged to collaborate so they can share their best practices.

Another issue that teachers faced was the level of school leadership support apparent in schools. Teachers reported that there is a low level of school leadership support in their schools. Some teachers argued that they have never received any form of support in relation to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. This then highlighted that teachers have difficulties when navigating the implementation of the progression policy as they lack guidance from school leaders.

5.3.2 Do school leaders understand their leadership roles in supporting teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners?

The school leaders in this study depicted a thorough understanding of their role in supporting teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners. In reference to the data presented findings, it can be concluded that school leaders do employ means that seek to guide their teachers. For instance, DH 2's response highlighted that it is essential for a school leader to know the strengths and weaknesses of their teachers so they can use that to their advantage. This includes maximising the strengths and addressing the weaknesses. Furthermore, the findings of this study confirmed that school leaders understand their responsibility to ensure that teachers collaborate. School leaders understand that for teachers to share best practices to employ as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners, they need to work together. As such, it remains their responsibility to foster teacher collaboration. Collaborations in schools will allow one of the constructs of Bandura's (1977) Self-efficacy, vicarious experiences, to come into play. This is so as teachers will collaborate and observe each other in practice, then ultimately guide each other. This is in line with Weber's (1996) model of Instructional Leadership, to say school leaders need to promote a positive learning climate and foster collaboration. As Hulpia and Devos (2010) correctly assert, school leaders play an enormous role when it comes to encouraging teachers to collaborate.

In this study, the school leaders further attributed that the most important thing for a leader is to understand first the challenges that teachers face when it comes to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. School leaders understood that it was their responsibility to ensure that they comprehend these challenges so that they can be able to employ effective measures

to address those challenges. This according to Weber's (1996) Instructional Leadership model will imply school leaders clearly articulating their goals. As Harris et al. (2003) argue, the responsibility of school leaders is to ensure that teaching in their schools remains effective and of good quality. Moreover, the school leaders in this study understood that it was their responsibility to ensure that they create an atmosphere that allows for positive relationships and teamwork. As Weber's (1996) Instructional Leadership model outlines, school leaders need to ensure that they foster a positive learning climate. The school leaders emphasised the importance of leading from the middle rather than employing the authoritarian leadership style. This implied that the school leaders did not use their powers to instil fear but rather, to work together with teachers for the benefit of the progressed learners. On that, the school leaders understood their role as guides. The school leaders advocated for leading by example and guiding teachers through demonstration. They alluded that it is important for the school leaders to have knowledge of the classroom operations, so they can demonstrate, guide, and assess the practices of teachers. As Weber (1996) outlines, school leaders are tasked with ensuring an effective evaluation of the teaching program.

5.3.3 What effective school leadership strategies could be employed to support teachers as they seek to address the learning gaps of progressed learners?

Since teachers face challenges when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners, there are effective strategies that school leaders can employ to support them. According to teachers, the most critical support that they require is assistance in the identification of these learners. This is the critical stage when it comes to the progression policy (Mogale & Malatji, 2022). Teachers argued that it is through identification that they will be able to be well-informed of the specific remedies that the progressed learners require and in turn, their Self-efficacy will be increased. As such, it is essential for school leaders to provide teachers with detailed reports regarding progressed learners. Teachers in this study highlighted that these reports would serve as a guide for teachers as they adequately plan their year. This is in alignment with Weber's (1996) model of Instructional Leadership as one of its aspects is that school leaders need to communicate the schools' goals clearly so that the implementation process can be effective.

In addition, the participants of this study highlighted the importance of school leaders conducting detailed research on the progression policy. This will then allow school leaders to be able to guide and support teachers thoroughly. According to teachers, when school leaders do research, they capacitate themselves with the knowledge to be able to then capacitate

teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners. This suggests that another school leadership strategy for supporting teachers is through being well-informed about how this policy works.

Moreover, teachers argued that school leaders need to do classroom observations so they can guide them based on their observations. This is also one of Weber's (1996) model of Instructional Leadership aspects, to say that instructional leaders are those who observe and enhance the quality of teaching. As such, teachers vouched for the evaluation of their performance as a key tool to assist them to redirect their practices and accommodate progressed learners. The teachers argued that since school leaders are experienced, they could observe them and be able to provide alternative approaches if needed. As such, participants argued for feedback with regard to being the most critical aspect of teacher performance evaluation. As Tucker, Stronge, Gareis and Beers (2003) state, the feedback given to teachers during performance evaluations has the potential to lead to the improvement of their instructional practices.

Additionally, if school leaders seek to support teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners, then they need to foster an environment of openness, where the fear of approaching the school leaders is eliminated. The school environment needs to allow teachers to be able to voice their concerns and challenges. For Instance, Teacher 2 argued that if a healthy relationship is not established, then teachers will lack interest in the process of teaching and learning, let alone addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. Thus, Weber's (1996) model of Instructional Leadership further highlights the importance of school leaders promoting a positive learning environment. On this, Hauge et al. (2014) assert that school leaders should surrender some of their authority if they seek to have a positive impact on the improvement of school performance.

In addition, school leaders need to further allow teachers to be part of important meetings that touch on the aspects of school improvement. When decisions are made in the schools, teachers need to be involved. As Honingh and Hooge (2014) emphasised, including teachers in the decision-making process improves their motivation when it comes to the implementation of those decisions. Moreover, the participants of the study alluded that it is key for school leaders to show their enthusiasm in the process of teaching and learning. According to Teacher 1, it becomes very difficult for teachers to be interested in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners when school leaders are not. As such, school leaders can support teachers

through showing that they care about the improvement of the academic performance of these learners.

The findings of this study further highlight the importance of school leaders facilitating workshops that are geared towards enhancing teachers' instructional practices, so they are capacitated to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. Teachers argued that school leaders should facilitate workshops which will train them on how to go about addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. This in turn, as Bandura (1977) asserts, will increase teachers' self-efficacy as they will get to learn through others. Moreover, Tuytens and Devos (2010) assert workshops increase the classroom knowledge of teachers. In addition, participants advocated for school leaders to encourage extra classes as a leadership strategy to support teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners. And with regard, the efforts of teachers need to be acknowledged and recognised. Teachers feel good and empowered when their efforts are appreciated (Tuytens & Devos, 2010).

Moreover, some teachers argued for incentives as being a means of encouraging teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. This proposal came after the argument that most teachers have extra work that they do which pays them. As such, attending to progressed learners will imply them withdrawing from their side hustles. Therefore, school leaders need to consider incentives and compensation structures. Lastly, the participants argued that for school leaders to support teachers as they address the learning gaps of progressed learners, they need to ensure that the relationship between the two parties is positive. The findings highlight that the relationship between the two should allow school leaders to be able to guide their teachers where necessary. As Hauge et al. (2014) argue, leadership that is directed toward school improvement includes the participation of school leaders and teachers as a joint entity that aims to achieve shared goals. In this case, being the improvement of the academic performance of progressed learners.

5.4 Recommendations

Upon the conclusion of this study and engaging with the study findings, emerged recommendations that could be the answer to issues affecting the education system in its entirety. The recommendations are as follows:

5.4.1 Policy implementation follow-ups to be conducted with implementors

It is undeniable that the people who witness the effectiveness of a policy are those who implement it. In this case, the Department of Education needs to do follow-ups on the effectiveness of the progression policy with the implementors – teachers. Teachers are the ones who get to interact with these learners closely, as such, they have a detailed understanding of what could be done. Much can be learnt from the teachers with regards to what can work when it comes to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. Teachers, as being on the receiving end of this policy, have much to reflect on; and through their reflections, the Department of Education can learn more about the implementation of the progression policy. These reflections can thus lead to effective amendments.

5.4.2 Align the school's culture with the school's vision

It is essential for school leaders to ensure that the culture in their schools aligns with the vision of the school. In a case where the vision is to ensure that the academic performance of the school is improved and sustained, then all the practices of those involved in the process of teaching and learning should be geared towards attaining the school's vision. This includes respecting the time of teaching and learning, supporting teachers who are constantly seeking ways to improve their instructional practices, a culture where collaboration and teamwork are not a question. This is just to name a few aspects that could be normalised in schools and contribute to the school's improvement.

5.4.3 Frequent assessments of policy knowledge

From this study, it can be concluded that it is possible for the supposed implementors of a policy to not have knowledge of that policy. As such, it is advisable for the Department of Education to conduct frequent assessments of policy knowledge, where they will be assessing the level to which the implementors are well-informed of the policy they are implementing. The results of these assessments will then inform the Department of Education of the training that the participants require to be able to fully understand the policy and their roles in its successful implementation.

5.4.4 Training and development programmes for school leaders

As DH 1's response highlighted, school leaders, similarly to teachers, are hardly trained on how to go about addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. As such, it becomes difficult for them to in turn support teachers to address the learning gaps of these learners.

Therefore, it is highly recommended that the Department of Education consider training and developing school leaders' skills and knowledge when it comes to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners. These programmes will then capacitate school leaders to then transfer adequate knowledge to their teachers. When the school leaders are well-informed, so will their teachers. And in turn, the learning gaps of progressed learners will be addressed, and the academic performance of schools will be improved.

5.5 Implications for further research

The findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this study inform the implications for further research. The implications for further research below are to be well-thought-out:

i. As outlined in Chapter 3, the study was conducted in selected secondary schools in the Gauteng province, as such there is a need to expand and conduct a similar study in a different province to get a distinct experience as they might differ from province to province.
ii. With regard to the content and findings of this study, it has become necessary to investigate the role of the districts in supporting school leaders as they seek to support teachers who are attempting to address the learning gaps of progressed learners.
iii. As they were classified in this study - as progressed learners, it is highly recommended that further research investigates and explores the issue of having progressed and promoted learners mixed in one class. What are the challenges and what could be done with regard to the assistance given to the two different categories of learners?

5.6 Conclusion

Improving the performance of schools through adequately supporting progressed learners is rather a long journey that requires all affected stakeholders to be on board. With regards, the findings of this study did highlight that teachers face numerous challenges as they seek to address the learning gaps of progressed learners. However, the findings further provide promising strategies that school leaders could employ to effectively improve the instructional practices of teachers, and their self-efficacy and guide them on how to go about tackling this task. This implies that, although the challenges are apparent, there is a high chance of them being mitigated as school leaders employ the outlined strategies. The findings of the study highlight the importance of school leaders employing the Instructional Leadership Theory in their practices, as this practice will thus afford them the platform to ensure the improvement

of teaching and learning in their schools. As such, the findings of this study fundamentally offer a massive starting point for school improvement and the academic improvement of progressed learners.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: GDE permission to conduct research



GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	**10 April 2024**
Validity of Research Approval:	**08 February 2024– 30 September 2024** **2024/32**
Name of Researcher:	**Seopetsoa SM**
Address of Researcher:	**6547 Ext 6**
	Mamelodi East / Pretotia
Telephone Number:	**+27 79 961 3434**
Email address:	**1877917@students.wits.ac.za**
Research Topic:	**School Leadership Strategies for Supporting Teachers to Address Learning Gaps of Progressed Learners: A Case Study in Selected Secondary Schools in Gauteng Province**
Name of University:	**Wits**
Type of qualification	**Masters**
Number and type of schools:	**6 Secondary Schools**
District/s/HO	**Johannesburg East, Tshwane South**

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

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

10/04/2024

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

Making education a societal priority

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

Appendix 2: Permission to conduct research in school



Subject: Consent for Conducting Master's Research Study in your school

Dear Principal,

I am writing to seek your consent to conduct a research study as part of my Master's degree program at the University of the Witwatersrand within your school. Your support is invaluable to my academic pursuits, and I am open to discussing any conditions or requirements you may have regarding the research study.

The purpose of this study is to explore challenges teachers face when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners and how school leaders can support them.

The study will involve working with the staff members of your school. The study will be conducted with the utmost professionalism, adhering to ethical guidelines, and respecting the confidentiality of all participants.

Title: School Leadership Strategies for Supporting Teachers to Address Learning Gaps of Progressed Learners: A Case Study in Selected Secondary Schools in Gauteng Province

Objectives:

i. To explore the challenges encountered by teachers when addressing learning gaps of progressed learners, and how school leaders comprehend these challenges.
ii. To explore the perspectives of school leaders concerning their leadership roles in supporting teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners.
iii. To investigate and recommend strategies that school leaders could implement to support teachers in enhancing their teaching practices, enabling them to effectively address the learning gaps of progressed learners.

Duration: 5 days

I assure you that this research study will not disrupt the school's routine and will be conducted with minimal interference. I am committed to coordinating closely with the school's administration and staff to ensure a smooth process.

Thank you for considering my request. I am enthusiastic about the opportunity to collaborate with your school and contribute to the enhancement of knowledge in the field of Educational Leadership and Policy Skills. I am looking forward to your positive response.

Yours sincerely,
Sara

Researcher: Sara Seopetsoa, 1877917@students.wits.ac.za , +27 79 961 3434
Supervisor: Dr Pinkie Mthembu, pinkie.mthembu@wits.ac.za

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheets



Dear Educator

My name is Sara Seopetsoa. I am a Masters student in the Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Skills at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Pinkie Mthembu. I am conducting a research study about the challenges teachers face when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners and how school leaders can support them. The title of the research study is Exploring **School Leadership Strategies for Supporting Teachers to Address Learning Gaps of Progressed Learners: A Case Study in Selected Secondary Schools in Gauteng Province**

To help explore these challenges and investigate the school leadership strategies, **I am inviting you to take part in a semi-structured interview.** If you decide to participate, your participation in this research study will last about 20-25 minutes. The interview will take place in your school, during the time to be scheduled by you and the researcher.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored in a password protected computer and will be completely deleted after 5 years of research submission. Rest assured, only the researcher will have access to the data.

Take note, the interview will be anonymous. This implies that when I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study for academic purposes, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. In addition, you may stop partaking in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life, and this research study will be written up as a research report. 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 at 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,
Sara
Researcher:
Sara Seopetsoa, 1877917@students.wits.ac.za , +27 79 961 3434
Supervisor: Dr Pinkie Mthembu, pinkie.mthembu@wits.ac.za

Dear Departmental Head

My name is Sara Seopetsoa. I am a Masters student in the Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Skills at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Pinkie Mthembu. I am conducting a research study about the challenges teachers face when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners and how school leaders can support them. The title of the research study is Exploring **School Leadership Strategies for Supporting Teachers to Address Learning Gaps of Progressed Learners: A Case Study in Selected Secondary Schools in Gauteng Province**

To help explore these challenges and investigate the school leadership strategies, **I am inviting you to take part in a semi-structured interview**. If you decide to participate, your participation in this research study will last about 20-25 minutes. The interview will take place in your school, during the time to be scheduled by you and the researcher.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored in a password protected computer and will be completely deleted after 5 years of research submission. Rest assured, only the researcher will have access to the data.

Take note, the interview will be anonymous. This implies that when I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study for academic purposes, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

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Yours sincerely,
Sara

Researcher:
Sara Seopetsoa, 1877917@students.wits.ac.za , +27 79 961 3434
Supervisor: Dr Pinkie Mthembu, pinkie.mthembu@wits.ac.za

Dear Principal

My name is Sara Seopetsoa. I am a Masters student in the Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Skills at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Pinkie Mthembu. I am conducting a research study about the challenges teachers face when addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners and how school leaders can support them. The title of the research study is Exploring **School Leadership Strategies for Supporting Teachers to Address Learning Gaps of Progressed Learners: A Case Study in Selected Secondary Schools in Gauteng Province**

To help explore these challenges and investigate the school leadership strategies, **I am inviting you to take part in a semi-structured interview**. If you decide to participate, your participation in this research study will last about 20-25 minutes. The interview will take place in your school, during the time to be scheduled by you and the researcher.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored in a password protected computer and will be completely deleted after 5 years of research submission. Rest assured, only the researcher will have access to the data.

Take note, the interview will be anonymous. This implies that when I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study for academic purposes, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. In addition, you may stop partaking in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life, and this research study will be written up as a research report. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

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Yours sincerely,
Sara

Researcher:
Sara Seopetsoa, 1877917@students.wits.ac.za , +27 79 961 3434
Supervisor: Dr Pinkie Mthembu, pinkie.mthembu@wits.ac.za

Appendix 4: Informed consent forms to participants



Consent form: semi-structured interviews

Title of project: Exploring School Leadership Strategies for Supporting Teachers to Address Learning
Gaps of Progressed Learners: A Case Study in Selected Secondary Schools in Gauteng Province

Researcher: Sara Seopetsoa

Supervisor: Dr Pinkie Mthembu

I, _____, hereby grant my permission to **Sara Seopetsoa** (researcher) to conduct a **semi-structured interview** with me for the success of an academic research project with the title outlined above.

I agree with the following: (Please circle the relevant options below)

I understand what this study is about as the researcher has explained the research study to me.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study.	YES	NO
I understand that the interview will 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 understand that the researcher will maintain my anonymity (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
I understand that I can choose to withdraw from participating in the study at any time.	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

Names of participant: _____
Signature: _____

Date: _____



CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO RECORDING OF STUDY PARTICIPATION

Project Title: Exploring School Leadership Strategies for Supporting Teachers to Address LearningGaps of Progressed Learners: A Case Study in Selected Secondary Schools in Gauteng Province

I hereby consent to **audio recording** of the interview.

I understand that:

- The recording will be stored in a secure location (password protected computer) with restricted access to the researcher and the research supervisor.
- The recording will be transcribed and any information that could identify me will be removed.
- The recordings will be erased after 5 years from the submission of the final research report.
- Direct quotes from my interview, without any information that could identify me, may be cited in the research report or other write-ups of research.

Name of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Location: _____

Signature: _____

Witnessed by:

Name of Witness: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 5: Schedule of interview questions



Interview Questions for **Teachers**: The Challenges faced in relation to addressing Learning Gaps of Progressed Learners

1. What are the main challenges you encounter when trying to address the learning gaps of progressed learners?
2. What kind of support do you believe would be most beneficial from school leaders in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners?
3. Do you have access to professional development opportunities that focus on addressing the needs of progressed learners? If yes, how have these opportunities helped you? If not, what impact could they have on your teaching?
4. Do you face any time constraints or workload issues that hinder your ability to dedicate sufficient attention to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners?
5. Have you had the opportunity to collaborate with other teachers to share strategies and ideas for addressing learning gaps of progressed learners? If yes, how has this collaboration influenced your teaching practices?
6. How can school leaders help foster a collaborative environment among teachers to share best practices and insights in addressing learning gaps of progressed learners?
7. How do you think school leaders can facilitate ongoing professional development opportunities that focus on supporting teachers to address the learning needs of progressed learners?
8. How can school leaders provide you with the necessary time and resources to dedicate sufficient attention to addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners?
9. How can school leaders help you feel motivated and empowered in your role as you support progressed learners with significant learning gaps?
10. Can you share any specific examples of how school leaders have previously supported you in addressing learning gaps of progressed learners and the impact it had on your teaching?

Interview Questions for **Departmental Heads (DHs, previously HODs):** Supporting Teachers in Addressing Learning Gaps of Progressed Learners

1. In your opinion, what are the primary challenges that teachers face when addressing learning gaps of progressed learners, and how do/intend to assist them in overcoming these challenges?
2. As a departmental head, how do you perceive your leadership role in supporting teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners?
3. What strategies do you employ to ensure that teachers in your subject area are equipped with the necessary resources to effectively identify and address learning gaps?
4. How do you communicate and collaborate with other departmental heads to ensure a coordinated and holistic approach in supporting teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners?
5. How do you collaborate with teachers to develop subject-specific approaches tailored to the needs of progressed learners?
6. How do you encourage teachers within your department to continuously improve their teaching practices and meet the diverse needs of progressed learners?
7. How do you handle any challenges or obstacles that may arise when supporting teachers in addressing the learning gaps of progressed learners?
8. How do you provide constructive feedback and support to teachers to enhance their capability to address learning gaps in your subject?
9. How do you support teachers in analysing learner data and assessment results to identify individual learning needs and tailor instructional plans accordingly?
10. What role do you play in monitoring the progress and effectiveness of interventions aimed at addressing learning gaps within your subject area?

Interview Questions for **School Principals**: Supporting Teachers in Addressing Learning Gaps of Progressed Learners

1. In your opinion, what are the main challenges teachers face when addressing learning gaps of progressed learners, and how do you/intend to assist them in overcoming these challenges?
2. How do you perceive your role as the school principal in supporting teachers to address the learning gaps of progressed learners?
3. Can you describe any strategies that have been implemented in your school to support teachers in identifying and addressing learning gaps of progressed learners?
4. As the school principal, how do you ensure that teachers have access to the necessary resources and professional development opportunities to effectively address the learning needs of progressed learners?
5. How do you foster a collaborative and supportive environment among teachers to facilitate the sharing of best practices in addressing learning gaps of progressed learners?
6. How do you monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions or strategies employed to support progressed learners and ensure continuous improvement?
7. In your experience, what have been the most successful approaches in addressing learning gaps of progressed learners, and how do you ensure these practices are sustained?
8. Can you share any specific success stories or examples where targeted support and interventions have significantly improved the academic outcomes of progressed learners?
9. How do you encourage teachers to engage in continuous professional development to enhance their capacity to address learning gaps effectively?
10. What measures are in place to ensure that progress made in addressing learning gaps is sustainable and leads to lasting improvements in the academic performance of progressed learners?

Appendix 6: Proof of language editing

CERTIFICATE OF EDIT

Date: 15 July 2024

Issued to University of the Witwatersrand Student: SARA SEOPETSOA

STUDENT NUMBER: 1877917

Thesis Title: School Leadership Strategies for Supporting Teachers to Address Learning Gaps of Progressed Learners: A Case Study in Selected Secondary Schools in Gauteng Province

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To whom it may concern:
This letter serves to confirm that the thesis corresponding to the above information, was edited by a professional academic editor, Dr Nqobile Zulu at Professori Consultancy.

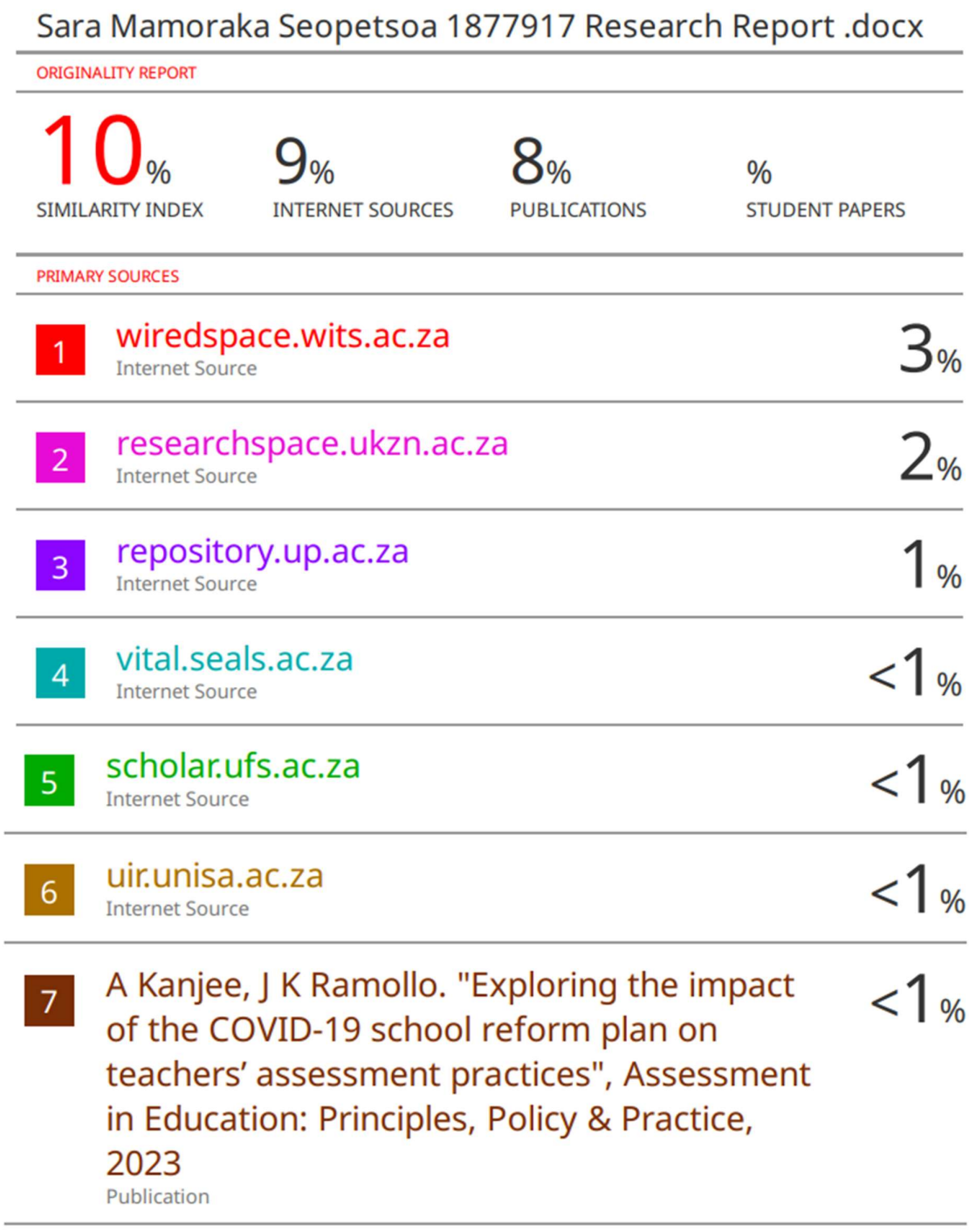
I guarantee language accuracy in the text as edited and delivered to the author on the 11th of July 2024. I make no claims as to the substantive matter covered by the thesis and have not altered the intent or research content drafted by the author.

It is the author's prerogative to accept or reject any of my comments or suggestions upon receipt of the document I edited.

Should you have any queries or concerns, please contact ***Dr Nqobile Zulu at +27 (0)739240208 or zulunqobile@gmail.com***

Sincerely,
Dr Nqobile Zulu,
Academic Editor,
PhD Development Studies, Wits

Appendix 7: Turnitin report



Sara Mamoraka Seopetsoa 1877917 Research Report .docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

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