

# **Educators' experiences and perceptions of teacher absenteeism**

*by*

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this research study was to investigate teachers' understanding and perceptions of teacher absenteeism. A sample of principals, deputy principals, HODs, teachers, support staff and union members from seven different schools in Middelburg in the Nkangala District of the Mpumalanga Department of Basic Education participated in the investigation.

The study was motivated by the escalating teacher absenteeism being experienced within the Mpumalanga Department of Basic Education.

The abuse of teacher leave, which takes the form of various leave privileges, is being accelerated primarily by the unacceptably high occurrence of unauthorised absence on the part of teachers at schools. These unauthorised absences includes arriving in class late and leaving class before time, late arrival and early departure from school, poor time management and poor monitoring of absenteeism by the SMTs at schools.

The study adopted a qualitative research approach in the collection and analysis of the data with interviews and document analysis being used in order to collect the required data.

The study utilises the conceptual lens of transactional stress model and occupational stress model in order to analyse the findings and identify the various stress factors that impact on teacher absenteeism in South Africa. It concludes that the causes of teacher absenteeism are being ascribed to the following: teachers are highly stressed by their own personal lack of financial management, family problems and their ever-increasing responsibilities and the curriculum changes being imposed on them.

The primary value of this research investigation, therefore, lies in the belief that the study findings may help to shape the policies that direct the management of leave of absence in the department of education while simultaneously trying to uproot the perceptual misunderstandings about teacher absenteeism. It is essential that suitable policies be formulated to obviate the underlying causes of teacher absenteeism while identifying the stressors that promote teacher absenteeism and trying to provide solutions that will reduce the escalating absence of teachers at school.

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Kgale Bethuel Mampane (student number 25551371), hereby declare that this dissertation for a Magister of Education on 'An Investigation into educators' experiences and perceptions on teacher absenteeism' represents my own work, both in concept and in execution. All sources and material used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged.

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**K.B. Mampane**  
**2013**

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the following men and women in recognition of the educational inspiration they instilled in me. Despite all the financial difficulties and hardships throughout my life up until now, their perseverance carried me through my studies:

- My late mother, Thoko Mampane, and my late maternal grandmother, Ivy Mokoena (Themba), who strongly believed in my success.
- Bongani Maria Mampane, my wife, for her outstanding support, care, love and encouragement and Boikanyo, my son, who always sees me as his role model.
- My late paternal grandfather, Kgale Mampane, and my late paternal uncle, Alex Mampana, who always instilled in me that perseverance is the mother of success.
- My entire family and friends who believed in me.

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## LIST OF ABBRVIATIONS

CDE:	Centre for Development and Enterprise
EAP:	Employee assistance programme
EEA:	Employment of Educators Act
ELRC:	Education Labour Relations Council
FLC:	Foundation for Learning Campaign
HIV:	Human immune deficiency virus
HSE:	Health and Safety Executive
HSRC:	Human Science Research Council
NEPA:	National Education Policy Act
PAM:	Personnel Administrative Measures
PFMA:	Public Finance Management Act
PILLAR:	Policy and Procedure on Incapacity Leave and Ill-health Retirement
QLTC:	Quality Learning Teaching Campaign
SACMEQ III:	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality
SADC:	Southern African Development Community
SASA:	South African Schools Act
SGB:	School governing body
SMT:	School Management Team
WBNAS:	World Bank National Absence Survey

## KEY WORDS

teacher absenteeism

occupational stress

transactional stress

excused absenteeism

unexcused absenteeism

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## CHAPTER 1

### 1.1 Introduction

*Citizens' reaction to teacher absenteeism has been increasing. Teacher absenteeism is an issue that goes deeper than many stakeholders may imagine. It is an issue that affects developing as well as developed countries, their economies, their schools, and their students. Researchers claim that it strongly affects school effectiveness; that it results in the loss of school days, which in turn has been found to diminish student academic achievement; that it helps to damage a school's reputation; and that it creates and sustains a ripple effect on student absenteeism (Hackett 2009:1).*

Teacher absenteeism is a serious problem in all educational systems worldwide. The notion that some teachers receive pay without being in the classroom constitutes a waste of resources. In addition, most educational system and schools then incur heavy costs by having to employ substitute teachers (Usman, Akhmadi& Suryadarma 2007:207).

While the financial costs are important, the educational costs are the most significant. Usman et al (2007:207) use the phrase that “an absent teacher often means no schooling for the children”, to illustrate the impact of teacher absenteeism on learners and learner performance. Children’s desire to learn is adversely effected by teachers who are often absent from school (Jacobs 2007). Suitable substitute teachers are not always available and this, in turn, means learners’ time is wasted as they are not learning. The amount of time lost with no actual teaching constitutes a significant proportional loss, which in most cases, will not be recovered.

The current Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, believes that the Department of Education does not receive the full details about the extent of teacher absenteeism. She has identified many instances of late arrival and early departure from schools, revealing that “there were 1000 absent teachers in 451 schools visited in one day and most of the teachers were not teaching” (Motshekga2013:5).

Mthombeni (2010:1) describes the South African school culture as being characterised by a lack of action against irresponsible teachers, stating that teachers who absent themselves are not dealt with. Although teacher absenteeism in South Africa may be attributed to the decline in the status and desirability of teaching, Mthombeni (2010:1) also indicates other critical areas including a clear demonstration of school infrastructural shortages and a lack of learning material which, in turn, results in a demoralised teacher workforce, promoting teacher absenteeism.

While there are no reliable statistics on teacher absenteeism, anecdotal evidence illustrates the seriousness and impact of teacher absenteeism in South African schools. In a recent article in the South African newspaper, the *Daily Sun*, dated the 22 August 2011, parents in Port Elizabeth vented their anger about a teacher who was always absent from school. The parents, through the school governing body (SGB), had handed over a petition to the Department of Education in the Port Elizabeth District citing the absenteeism of a Natural Science educator.

The gravity of this issue of teacher absenteeism requires that parents, church leaders, government officials, business people, teacher unions and political organisations, come up with possible solutions. These sentiments were echoed at an Education Conference held in Soweto on 8 April 2011 (*Daily Sun*, 11 April 2011). The recommendations, amongst others, were that teachers must be punctual in going to class and that they must prepare for their lessons. According to the report entitled 'Schooling reform is possible,' by the Centre for Development and Enterprise (Bernstein 2011), the point is made that underperforming teachers are failing the education system, primarily as a result of a lack of lesson planning, late arrivals at school and teacher absenteeism. It is, thus, evident that, in order to reform schools, we need "teachers in class, on time, teaching ..." (DBE 2009).

Teacher absenteeism has been perceived to be a top priority for the government. In the State of the Nation Address presented to the joint sitting of Parliament in Cape Town on 3 June 2009, the president of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Jacob Zuma, stated that "Education will be a key priority for the next five years. We want our teachers, learners and parents to work together with government to turn our schools into thriving centres of

excellence” (3 June 2009). He was recently quoted by the *Daily News* (19 Feb 2013) to have promised that if teachers are not in class on time and do not reverse high rates of absenteeism, he will be forced to bring back school inspectors.

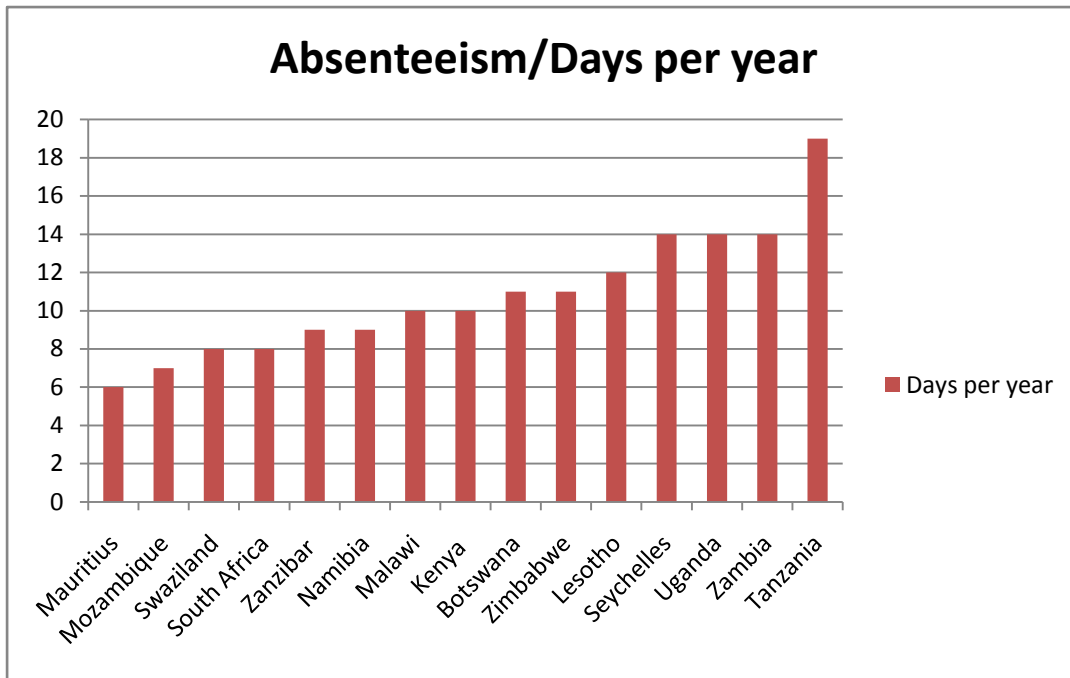
The Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC) (DBE2009), which is spearheaded by President Jacob Zuma, was initiated by the Foundation for Learning Campaign (FLC) and clearly spells out in its document that teachers must be in class, on time and teaching (DoE2008). The QLTC set targets for time frames and time allocations for specific activities which have been designed to improve teaching and learning. Among these specific activities is the enforcement of the presence of the teacher in class.

There have been some attempts to measure the extent of teacher absenteeism. However, the findings are inconclusive and there are differences between various reports. The report of the Commission on Educator Leave of Absence 2009 and published in 2010 analysed the data on the leave taken from the PERSAL of sampled schools and also concluded that the absentee rate is estimated at approximately 8% for the entire country (Reddy et al 2010).

Due to inconsistency in the data accumulated, research shows through

... [a] analysis of the 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools datasets and proxy calculations from other studies estimate that between 10% and 12% of educators are not at school on any day. Therefore our consecutive, optimistic estimate is that, on average between 20 and 24 days a year of regular instructional time being lost by each educator. South Africa is higher than the rate in higher income countries, but lower than the rate in many low income countries, calculated in the WBNAS (Reddy et al 2010).

The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) conducted a study of teacher absenteeism in 2007 and revealed that approximately 20 days of teaching and learning had been lost. Spaul (2012:17) suggests that 2007 was a difficult year for South Africa because of the teacher strike and therefore these findings do not represent teachers' absenteeism in South Africa.



**Figure 1.1: Regional Teacher absenteeism**

Source: SACMEQ 2011a

The graph above demonstrates the extent of teacher absenteeism in the SADC region of Africa. According to SACMEQ III REPORT (2010), South Africa and Swaziland are both third out of 15 countries in the region with a teacher absenteeism rate of approximately eight days a year. The best performing country is Mauritius where teachers were absent for an average of six days. This is followed by Mozambique with seven days of absenteeism (Spaull 2011a).

Table 1.1 below, as provided by the Department of Basic Education in 2010, shows that on average absenteeism rate is about 8% and that it is the highest in the Eastern Cape and KZN, but low in the Free State. It is clear that “there are variations in the extension of educator leave rates between provinces” (Reddy et al 2010).

**Table 1.1: Provincial rate of teacher absenteeism**

No	Province	Absenteeism rate %
1.	Mpumalanga	8
2.	Eastern Cape	10,5
3.	Free State	7,2
4.	Gauteng	9,4
5.	KZN	10.3
6.	Limpopo	8.8
7.	Northern Cape	8,5
8.	North West	8,9
9.	Western Cape	8,2

Source: DBE 2010

The above teacher absenteeism rate covers all forms of absence which include leave taken in terms of the leave prescripts, attendance of official activities such as workshops and meetings, undertaking official duties away from schools excursions and sports trips. The 8% rate was reached after discounting 0,5% representing maternity leave after finding that schools were generally successful in finding replacement educators. This translates on average to 16 days of instructional time being lost by each educator per school calendar year (DBE 2010).

So far I have demonstrated that, while there is recognition that teacher absenteeism is rife, there is little knowledge about the phenomenon beyond various attempts to measure the rate of absenteeism. The aim of this study is to move beyond the statistics and to reflect on what is actually happening in the schools and in the classrooms.

The studies on teacher absenteeism are often conducted in conjunction with research into teacher stress. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore educators' experiences and perceptions of absenteeism in Mpumalanga using various stress models as a theoretical lens. It is a basic qualitative case study of secondary schools in the Middelburg circuit in the Nkangala District in Middelburg.

Middelburg, the area under investigation, lies 162 kilometres east of Johannesburg and 138 kilometres north-east of Pretoria and, thus, the journey takes approximately 1hour 50



minutes, from either Johannesburg or Pretoria. The map below illustrates the distance between Middelburg in Mpumalanga and the major cities in Gauteng.



**Figure 1.2: Middelburg Mpumalanga area**

Source: Google Earth (Maps)

## **1.2 Aims of the study**

In view of the problem of teacher absenteeism discussed above, the aim of this study is to explore the perceptions and experiences of educators and other stakeholders of teacher absenteeism and also to investigate the reasons given by educators for their absence at school. The study will highlight the impact of stress on teacher absenteeism. Accordingly, the research objectives of this study are based on the following research questions:

## **1.3 Research question**

- 1.3.1 How do educators and other stakeholders in South Africa experience and perceive teacher absenteeism?

## **1.4 Sub-questions**

- 1.4.1 What are the views of teachers and other stakeholders of teacher absenteeism?
- 1.4.2 How does teacher absenteeism impact on teaching and learning?

1.4.3 How do school principals and heads of department (HODs) manage absenteeism in schools?

1.4.4 To what extent and in what way does stress impact on teacher absenteeism?

The theoretical frameworks that underpin this basic qualitative study are the transactional stress model and the occupational stress model. Mark and Smith (2008) state that changes in the work environment affect individual reactions through the perceived circumstances, leading to physical and psychological responses brought on by external stimuli. They further indicate that a certain amount of stress imposed on the individual or an institution may ultimately lead to individual absence at the workplace. Both the transactional stress model and the occupational stress model involve job satisfaction, career commitment, ability to cope with challenges and cognitive appraisal of event and/or environment (Jackson & Rothmann 2006).

## **1.5 Rationale behind the study**

Since the researcher started teaching 19 years ago, he has noticed that teacher absenteeism is the most serious and common challenge that most principals and school management team (SMT) members face on a daily basis. The researcher's experience is that, in his entire teaching career, there has never been a single week in which all the educators were present in schools.

He further realised that this recurring absence of educators take place despite relevant departmental policies that regulate leave of absence. These policies include the Determination on Leave of Absence in the Public Service (2005), which encapsulates matters relating to leave of absence from school. For example, it states that teachers are entitled to 36 working days' sick leave with full pay over a three-year cycle and that the unused sick leave credits lapse at the end of that cycle. However, it seems that the numbers of days teachers are privileged to utilise are often exceeded within a short space of time.

In common with Chaudhury, Hammer, Kremer, Muralidharan and Rogers (2006:96), the researcher is of the opinion that the excessive absence of teachers hinders the learning and

teaching process and becomes worse for poor people who require services and are not able to afford alternatives. The significance of this study will be in its enquiry into the teachers' reasons for and views on absenteeism and it is envisaged that this understanding will better inform policy makers and decision makers on ways in which to reduce teacher absenteeism. Studies on teacher absenteeism are often conducted in conjunction with research into teacher stress.

According to Van Tonder and Williams (2009:206), studies on teacher stress and burnout are focused primarily on the developed English-speaking countries and little is known about the developing countries, including South Africa. A noticeable exception is a study in South Africa which was undertaken in the North West province by Van Tonder and Williams (2009:206), who focused on exploring the probable reasons for burnout among secondary educators. Reddy et al (2010) focused only on the investigation of educator leave of absence, in order to make recommendations towards decreasing leave rates and improving administrative practices, thus they looked into:

- the extent of leaves
- the recording of leaves
- the leave patterns and their reasons, and
- the administrative and management of leaves(Reddy et al 2010).

Olivier and Venter (2003) focused on the impact of stress on teachers. Their objective was to ascertain those aspects of the teaching profession which are stress related. This study was conducted in the George area in the Western Cape in South Africa and it used both a questionnaire and a stress inventory. The statistical data on teacher absenteeism lacks explanatory, in-depth, knowledge and expertise on the experiences and perceptions of teacher absenteeism.

An effective international study has been conducted by Steyn and Kamper (2006) in an effort to understand the causes of stressors experienced by educators and which cause teacher absenteeism. However, their research study provides only an overview of stress

among teachers using various models of occupational stress. Their study was quantitative in nature and they used a survey design method.

Research in South Africa also indicates that stress has a significant impact on absenteeism (Jackson & Rothmans 2006). Nevertheless, there are very few qualitative studies that have explored the sources of stressors and the way in which they impact on teacher absenteeism. In addition, in most research studies available the researcher uses a survey design method to investigate teacher absenteeism and, thus, explanatory information is lacking.

It is, thus, clear that the reasons for teacher absenteeism have not been adequately explored by educational researchers. This research study intends to explore this gap in the literature using a qualitative case study method to investigate the experiences and perceptions of educators of teacher absenteeism. It is, therefore, the intention of the researcher to carry out a qualitative case study in the Middelburg Circuits of Mpumalanga Province.

## **1.6 Research methodology**

The study uses a qualitative research approach. In qualitative research the data are presented in the form of a narration with words (McMillan & Schumacher 2001:15). The data were collected in order to ascertain how teachers and other stakeholders understand and view teacher absenteeism. The research was intended to provide an in-depth knowledge of the way in which teachers perceive and experience teacher absenteeism at various schools. Structured and semi-structured interviews as well as a document analysis were used to collect the relevant data.

### **1.6.1 Qualitative study**

This qualitative case study took place in seven schools in Mpumalanga Middelburg circuits, Nkangala District.

Forty-three stakeholders involved in the schools were interviewed in their natural settings. These included

- one retired circuit inspector
- one current circuit inspector
- three retired principals
- seven current principals
- two deputy principals
- five heads of department
- twenty teachers
- five support staff
- two union representatives

### **1.6.2 Basic qualitative study design**

The researcher decided to use a basic qualitative research design because he wanted to investigate how teachers and other relevant stakeholders understood teacher absenteeism. Basic qualitative research design attempts to uncover the participants' experiences and the meaning thereof, while taking into account practices and processes that subscribe to perceptions related to the phenomenon (Merriam 2009: 22–24, 38). The researcher focused on the emerging findings from the participants' beliefs, opinions, attitudes and the ideas.

Purposive sampling was used to handpick the cases which, in view of their judgement and typicality, were to be included in the sample. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2002:103), it is essential that a sample is chosen for a specific purpose. All the interviews were digitally tape-recorded, transcribed and coded for the purposes of authenticity.

The study examined teacher absenteeism and analysed the data through the theoretical lens of stress.

### **1.7 Limitation**

According to Punch (2006: 69), the fact that the study focused on specially selected individual participants from seven schools in a particular location means that it is not possible to generalise the findings of the research to other provinces, districts, circuits and school situations and cultures.

In view of the fact that the study involved a document analysis, some of the principals became sceptical and refused to make their school documents available for perusal, for example the attendance register (Z8) and log books.

## **1.8 Significance of the study**

The study aimed to explore the reasons for teacher absenteeism as well as the teachers' experiences of teacher absenteeism. Thus, the study aimed to develop possible ways in which to increase the understanding of teacher absenteeism in order to reduce its occurrence.

The study contains a flexible structure of reporting, according considerable space to the data collection and research findings. In addition, the study contains a rich description of the settings and the participants' quotes, supported by explanations from the researcher, elaborating on the teachers' experiences and perceptions. Maree (2007:301) supports the notion that a rich description of the school setting enhances the researcher's explanation of the experiences of the phenomenon under discussion.

The individuals and institutions interested in the results of the study and its recommendations should include policymakers, educators, principals, school management teams, circuit inspectors, parents, school governing bodies (SGBs), scholars and regional officials. This qualitative study provides a rich, 'thick description' of the data which was collected in the seven schools which were investigated and this may be of benefit to other educators in their judgement of the applicability of the findings and the recommendations to their various situations.

In their field report, Usman and Suryadarma (2004:19–23) state that it is essential that policy makers be equipped with relevant information in order to make an input into policy shaping, both national and international, to solve the problems in the education system.

Throughout the study, the researcher tried to gain a better understanding of the concept of teacher absenteeism as well as the teachers' perceptions and experiences of teacher

absenteeism. The management of teacher absenteeism by school managers, through various tools, has already been explored and this has resulted in significant information.

This study extends the broad scope of the existing studies on teacher absenteeism by exploring the views, perceptions and experiences of teachers with regard to teacher absenteeism from a South African perspective.

The results and findings of this research study are presented in the form of a summary of the participants' responses to the questions which the participants answered during their individual interviews. The findings of this research study may also assist the Department of Basic Education to gain a greater insight into the teachers' experiences and perceptions of teacher absenteeism. Thus, the study has the potential to provide feedback and pose challenges to the Department of Basic Education with regard to the escalating teacher absenteeism in schools. It is envisaged that an increased understanding of the phenomenon will help to provide possible solutions and strategies to curb teacher absenteeism. The findings will be presented in chapter 5 of the dissertation.

## **1.9 Preliminary findings**

Although a more detailed account of the research findings will be provided in chapter 5, the study demonstrates, similar to Mkhwanazi (1997) and Mthombeni (2010), that the causes of teacher absenteeism include but not limited to, feeling of irresponsibility, truancy, transport and distance from the school, demoralisation by workload, number of students in a class, teachers' working conditions, the ever-changing school policies, depression and stress.

Stress emerged in this research study as a major primary cause of teacher absenteeism, confirming that it is a primary hazard for workers (Blaug, Kenyon & Lekhi 2007). According to Brown and Uehara (1999) teaching is an unpleasant career which is dominated by elements such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger and depression. Similarly, in this research study, all the mentioned elements dominate and motivate teachers not only to be absent from their respective classes but absent from school. The pressure imposed on teachers through teacher workload, policy change and curriculum change surfaced from this research study as most of the primary stressors that contribute positively to undesirable

responses from teacher resulting in them absenting themselves from their workplace. The pressure that is exerted through the expectations and the employer's demands is of serious concern to the unions.

This research reveals that union members are not assisting principals to deal with teacher absenteeism as they only enter the picture when there is a problem, in defence of their members. A strong sense of re-shaping the policy to curb teacher absenteeism emerged very strongly from all the participants, including the support staff and the union members.

It would seem that teachers are tired of hearing of other teachers arranging medical certificates from their trusted medical doctors. Thus teachers propose that the doctors' medical certificate (the attachment) needs to be scrutinised for authenticity by departmental officials at the district level, otherwise, according to Mthombeni (2010), there will be a decline in public confidence as well as mistrust in the public schooling system.

The existence of certain conviction emanates from the element of positivism that there are possible solutions even if there is constant leave abuse, which is seen in high unauthorised teacher absenteeism (Mthombeni 2010). Amongst other cited solutions identified by the participants are the following:

- the call for teachers to be loyal to the profession
- that there should be serious policy enforcement to guard against teachers selling items that benefit them financially
- that principals should be empowered through various departmental policies
- that the assistance of unions in working with the principals on teacher absenteeism is essential.

### **1.10. Breakdown of chapters**

This study comprises of six chapters which are organised as follows:



## **CHAPTER 1**

Chapter 1 discusses the background to the study, the rationale behind the study, the main research question and the sub-questions. The chapter also discusses the methodology used, the limitations of the study as well as the significance of the investigation.

## **CHAPTER 2**

Chapter 2 includes the literature review on the broad understanding of the concept of teacher absenteeism.

## **CHAPTER 3**

Chapter 3 provides a theoretical framework of stress through which the perceptions and experiences of teacher absenteeism are viewed.

## **CHAPTER 4**

Chapter 4 presents the research design and methodology used in the study. The chapter also justifies the research design that was used for the sampling procedure utilised in the study. In addition, the chapter describes the data collection instruments and discusses the issues of trustworthiness, reliability and data transferability.

## **CHAPTER 5**

Chapter 5 presents a thick description of the interpretation of the data collected at the seven schools. The data is organised into the following themes: the understanding of teacher absenteeism, the impact of teacher absenteeism on teaching and learning, the role of the unions, instruments that regulate teacher absenteeism, control of teacher absenteeism, reasons for and causes of teacher absenteeism and a possible solution to teacher absenteeism.

## **CHAPTER 6**

Chapter 6 contains a summary of the study itself as well as the main findings. The chapter also offers recommendations on ways in which to curb teacher absenteeism in secondary schools through policy changes. Suggestions for further studies on teacher absenteeism are outlined.



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

*“...attitude manifests themselves in high teacher absenteeism.” Belle (Unisa, 2009),*

then

*“Work absence has been traditionally considered a major problem of human resource management” (Rosenblatt, Lishcinsky&Shiron2010:247).*

### 2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 provided the background to and the context of the study, its purpose and significance. This chapter presents the literature review on the nature and meaning of the problem being investigated.

Literature review is an investigation that involves extensive reading of the findings of other researchers on the research topic in question (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche&Delpont 2002:65). Accordingly, the review of relevant literature should help the researcher to answer the following questions:

- What is already known about either the issue in particular or in general?
- Which theories are used and discussed in the area of the study?
- What concepts are either used or disputed?
- What questions are still unanswered?
- What has not yet been studied? (Flick 2006:56).

As regards the literature review, the researcher focused on the nature and the meaning of teacher absenteeism, starting with the definition of the concept of teacher absenteeism and continuing with a discussion on the nature and the characteristics of educators in the educational system. The researcher will then review the literature on the reasons for teacher absence, the impact of teacher absenteeism and ways in which to combat teacher absence at school. Concentration will also focus on the role of managers in teacher

absenteeism, including the tools they use to combat teacher absenteeism, the various policies on teacher absenteeism and how these policies are implemented.

## **2.2 Concept definition**

Before beginning the literature review, the study will explore two basic concepts used in the research study, namely, absenteeism and stress.

### **(A) Absenteeism**

Absenteeism is the term which is generally used to refer to unscheduled employee absences from the workplace. Rosenblatt and Shirom (2006:364) consider teacher absence to be part of withdrawal behaviour in terms of which employees distance themselves from work because of undesirable working conditions. Ivatts (2010:3) defines teacher absenteeism as any failure of an employee to report for or to remain at work as scheduled, regardless of reasons. Traditionally, absenteeism has always been viewed as an indicator of poor individual performance and as a habitual pattern of behavioural action which breaches the contract between employee and employer.

The common understanding of teacher absenteeism is perceived as a teacher who is physically not present at school or within the institution concerned. However, Mthombeni (2010:21) argues that the concept of teacher absenteeism includes teachers who are at the work institution but who are not engaging in actual teaching. This implies that teachers may be physically present at school or even in class but mentally absent.

Mbonambi (2002:23–24) sees teacher absenteeism as a factor that may possibly lead to abscondment. The absence of an individual teacher for a period of 14 consecutive days may lead to the self-dismissal of a teacher in the system because the primary objective of a teacher is to render service. In the absence of a teacher in class, no service will be rendered.

### **(B) Stress**

Although there is no single definition of stress most of the relevant research literature indicates that stress is the failure to respond to a certain demand and this leads to a state of emotional, intellectual and physiological disequilibrium. Teacher stress is an unpleasant

teacher experience which creates tension, frustration, anxiety, anger and depression (Brown & Uehara 1999).

According to Jackson and Rothmann (2005), work-related stress is a product of an imbalance between the environment and individual capabilities. In their argument, they emphasise that most researchers use the term 'stress' to describe either an external stimulus or an individual response. On the other hand, 'stress' is simply defined by Olivier and Venter (2003) as a word that is derived from the Latin word *strictus*, which literally means taut or tightly strung.

Schlebusch (1988) defines stress as an interaction of several variables involving a particular relationship between a person and the environment. Mousavi (2007:33) sees stress as a direct response to a certain stimulus which may be defined in terms of the level of pressure and demands made on an individual. De Bruin and Taylor (2006) identify one of the negative outcomes of stress as job dissatisfaction which, in turn, may have a detrimental effect on the organisation for which people work.

Jackson and Rothmann (2005:107) emphasise the positive correlation between burnout, health, job demands and job resources as contributory factors which lead to stress and which, subsequently, result in teacher absenteeism.

Burnout occurs when an individual feels overwhelmed and unable to meet constant demands. With continuous stress a person may begin to lose the interest or motivation that led him/her to take on a certain role in the first place. Burnout reduces productivity and saps energy and eventually burnout will result in feelings of increasing hopelessness, powerlessness and resentment. The effects of burnout may have an adverse effect, resulting in a threat to the individual's job, relationships and health. Burnout may be construed as a persistent, negative, work-related state of mind which develops over time and which is characterised by physical, emotional and psychological exhaustion (Rothman & Jackson 2005:108). The person concerned often becomes de-motivated, less effective, and developmentally dysfunctional.

### **2.3 Teacher absenteeism in developing and developed countries**

While teacher absenteeism is a global phenomenon, research has found that there is a difference in the absenteeism rates in developing countries as compared to developed countries.

The developing countries are those countries that are characterised by a low level of affluent citizens, high levels of unemployment and low education rates. On the other hand, the developed countries are those countries that are technologically advanced and advantaged, and have stable government.

Miller, Murnane and Willett (2007:3) found that, on average, teachers in public schools in the United States are absent for five to six percent of the school days. However, this rate is low as compared to that in the developing world, where teacher absenteeism rate is approximately 20%.

A high rate of teacher absenteeism is found in most of the developing countries, for example: "on a typical day 11% of teachers are absent in Peru, 16% are absent in Bangladesh, 27% in Uganda and 25% in India. Chaudhury et al (2006) argues that the problem of teacher absenteeism is one of the biggest threats to the effective delivery of education to learners because even when teachers are present at school, they are often not attending to their classes.

While teacher absence is often cited as one reason for poor performance in the developing countries, there is also a lack of good administrative data with which to assess the level of absenteeism. It is only recently that low income countries have developed a systematic study in terms of which to calculate the rate of teacher absence (Reddy, Prinsloo, Netshitangani, Moletsane, Juan & Van Rensburg 2010:19).

According to Chaudhury et al (2006), the World Bank National Absence Surveys (WBNAS) of teacher absence and health workers in low income countries found that the average teacher absence rate in Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Peru, Uganda and Namibia was 19%

for primary school teachers. The absenteeism rate ranges from 11% in Peru to 27% in Uganda.

Reddy et al (2010:20) maintain that it is not possible to study absence rate outside of the policy context of a particular country and, thus, they indicate that, although the national teacher absence is high in the developing countries, there may in a particular country be a high degree of variation among different groups. It is, thus, essential that the conditions underlying these differences must be understood within the policy perspective.

In developed countries, absent teachers are often replaced by substitute teachers and, therefore, the impact of the teacher absenteeism on teaching and learning is lower than in the developing countries (Usman et al 2004). However, although the developed countries have high numbers of teacher substitutes, research reveals that there are a high number of teachers in the United Kingdom experiencing a high level of stress (HSE 2006). For example, “stress remains the primary hazard of concern for workers” (Blaug, Kenyon&Lekhi2007).

The literature reveals that high income countries do not conduct national surveys on the extent of educator absence but rely, instead, on the direct observation of teachers (Reddy et al 2010:17). At various schools, in developed countries, teacher absence is often disruptive and leads to a high loss of instructional time, in particular, a high number of short-term leave days. In view of the fact that short-term leave days do not necessarily require that the services of a substitute be engaged, it would appear that learners lose tuition. Brower (2001) indicates that short teacher absences; create more managerial problems than the prolonged periods of absence of teachers from schools.

In a study conducted by Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Rees and Ehrenberg (1991) in the state of New York, it was found that, in 700 school districts between the academic years 1986 and 1987, on average teacher absence of slightly less than 5% as compared to Miller’s (2008) finding of a teacher absence of 5,3% in one district between the academic years 2002 and 2005. Of all these teacher absences, the most frequent reasons were illness and out-of-school official duties.

## **2.4 Voluntary and involuntary absenteeism**

Rosenblatt (2010: 3) categorises teacher absenteeism into voluntary and involuntary absence based on the circumstances which cause a teacher to be absent– circumstances over which a teacher may not have control and over which a teacher may have direct control. Abeles (2009:31–49) defines these types of teacher absence as excused absence and unexcused absence. These two types of absence defined by these researchers illustrate the nature and circumstances which cause a teacher to be absent from the workplace.

### **2.4.1 *Unexcused absence or voluntary absence***

Unexcused absence refers to an absence without an official or recognised reason (Abeles 2009:33). Similarly, Rosenblatt defines voluntary absence as teacher absence that is “normally under the direct control of the employee ... frequently utilised for personal issues” (Rosenblatt 2010:3). Voluntary absence often reflects a teacher’s negative attitude towards the work and/or the institution. The notion of negative work attitude among teachers is often reflected within the teaching system, through teacher absenteeism and lack of morale amongst teachers (Rosenblatt 2010:248). Voluntary absence is typically a short period of absence from school. Rosenblatt et al (2010:248) view teacher absenteeism as a behavioural attitude on the part of teachers who are exhibiting signs and symptoms of stress. Rosenblatt (2010) also relates the voluntary absence of teachers to an unethical school climate.

Research reveals that teachers are often absent on the day following a holiday but that teachers are not often absent on the day preceding a holiday.

However, voluntary absenteeism may sometimes be the result of planned activities and behaviour and be backed up by a genuine and valid reasons for the absence (Abeles 2009:34). In such cases, the advantage is that a possible substitute may be arranged in time. According to Abeles (2009:34), employees have the right to use the days to which they are entitled by law.



### **2.4.2 Excused absence or involuntary absence**

Excused absences are defined by Abeles (2009) as planned behaviours which that the employer knows about in advance, for example study leave, and also less planned behaviours, for example for personal reasons (family relocation etc.), absenteeism due to illness, and personal religious observances (Abeles, 2009:33). Rosenblatt (2010) also defines excused absence as involuntary absence of teacher “which are beyond the employee’s control” (Rosenblatt 2010:3). Involuntary absence includes sickness, death in the family, taking a child to the doctor and other urgent private matters. All these examples of involuntary absences results to a typically long period of absence from school, depending on the nature and circumstances causing the teacher to be absent.

There is a relationship between stress outcomes and work absent behaviour among teachers, showing clearly that teacher absence is a direct result of stress. According to Rosenblatt et al (2010:250), “work-related stressors could lead teachers to misuse their absence prerogatives”. Thus, in most cases, absenteeism may be regarded as a direct consequence of stress.

Both Rosenblatt (2010) and Abeles(2009:33–36) conducted studies on teacher absenteeism and provided an extremely clear picture of approximately 600000 hours being wasted by teachers in Israeli schools annually, hours which are difficult to recover. This time lost is often as a result of the following:

- work overload
- stress
- poor social support
- ill health (two-thirds of absenteeism is due to ill health) (Abeles 2009:33).

## **2.5 Teacher absenteeism in South Africa**

*“Teacher absenteeism is one of a range of disruptive school-related behaviours that has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years in South*

*Africa ... It would appear as if the effects of absenteeism are largely ignored”*

*(Mkhwanazi1997:3).*

There is no reliable data on teacher absenteeism in South Africa, but most recently in 58 schools observed in the North West province about 60% of teachers did not teach their lessons they were scheduled to teach (Carnoy & Chisholm et al. 2012). Reddy et al (2010: 21) used various calculations to estimate the national educator leave of absence that ranges from 10 to 12%.As stated earlier, the SACMEQ report estimated the rate of teacher absenteeism to be 8%.This may be compared to the absence rate in other occupations as it is reported that, in the private sector, particularly in manufacturing, mining and financial companies, the absence rate is between 3,5% and 6%(SACMEQ 2011a:19).

Teacher absenteeism has been identified by most researchers, including Mbonambi (2002:v), as a serious problem within the teaching fraternity. Mbonambi (2002:v)states that, among the many cases dealt with by the Witbank District Departmental tribunal during the period 1994 to 2001, teacher absenteeism was the most dominant phenomenon under scrutiny. However, many of these teacher absences are considered as having being excused and are permitted by the conditions of teacher employment with the conditions of teacher employment entitling teachers to take various categories of leave, including leave for health, family and personal reasons.

The next section will explore the policy context, legislation and types of leave in South Africa with regard to teacher leave of absence.

## **2.6 South African school policies/legislation and types of leaves**

All teachers in the public schools are required by law to be at either the school or the workplace for a minimum of seven working hours, while their absence from either the school or the workplace constitutes a breach of their employment contract. Thus, in terms of common law, educators have a legal duty to render a teaching service to learners (Mthombeni 2010:29–30).

Section 29(i) (a) of the South African Constitution states that “everyone has a right to basic education” and, thus, there is an obligation on the part of the educator to be in the classroom and teaching on a daily basis. Pendlebury (2009:24) indicates that, as the compulsory age period for attending school places the National Department of Education together with the provincial departments of education under an obligation to provide education, teachers must be in class teaching. Pendlebury (2009:24) further indicates that, through the National Education Policy Act of 1996, the National Minister of Education is empowered to set standards to evaluate and monitor the provincial educational departments on the effectiveness of the learning and teaching in class.

South Africa has a range of educational policies that regulate the work of teachers. These Acts and policies include the following:

- The Employment of Educators Act of 1998 governs the employment of educators. This legislation, which was enforced by Circular No. 19 of 2004, entitled ‘New Leave Provision’, regulates the leave measures for institution-based teachers.
- Section 3 (2)(a) of the Employment of Educators Act of 1998 states that teachers must be at school for seven hours and it is only for a special reason and with the prior permission from the principal that a teacher may leave the school/institution. The core responsibility of a teacher is to engage in class teaching and, thus, any absence from school means that the teacher concerned is not fulfilling this core duty, as it is enshrined in the Employment of Educators Act (EEA) section 4(5)(e). This Act confers on the Department of Education the right to dictate to a teacher that he/she must be in class during a specified time, performing his/her duties. Accordingly, any unauthorised teacher absence from work during the specified time constitutes teacher absenteeism.
- Section 18(i) (j) of the Employment of Educators Act no. 76 of 1998 regulates teacher absenteeism by stating that a teacher is committing misconduct when he/she absents him/herself from work for 14 consecutive days, without a valid reason and without permission. The Act makes provision for 36 days paid sick

leave, within a 36-month leave cycle. This is also enforced by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act no. 75 of 1997 that makes provision for sick leave and enforces the submission of a valid medical certificate in cases in which a teacher is absent for more than two consecutive days. The Employment of Educators Act, through the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM), also makes a provision for an eight-week cycle in which teachers who have exhausted the 36 days sick leave cycle require a medical certificate from a doctor for any absence. In this case, a teacher is granted the right of temporary incapacity.

Teacher absenteeism is regarded by Mbonambi (2002: 57) as unprofessional behaviour that directly violates the rights of learners to education. The SACE code of ethics is also against such behavioural misconduct.

### **2.6.1 *Types of leave***

#### *Excused leaves in South Africa*

In terms of the teacher employment conditions, teachers in South Africa are entitled to take leave according to various categories.

The certain types of leave that may be taken by teachers are enshrined in the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM), G.N. 222 of 1999, published in *Government Gazette* No. 19767 dated 18 February 1999 and amended in 2003 as published in *Government Gazette* No. 24948 dated 21 February 2003.

The types of leave of absence to which teachers are entitled are summarised in the table below:

**Table 2.1: Leave summary**

<b>No</b>	<b>Leave type</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
1	<b>Special leave for quarantine purposes</b>	The type of a leave granted to a teacher who has been exposed to a medical condition or a situation that warrants his/her being placed under quarantine.
2	<b>Normal sick leave</b>	Educators are entitled to 36 working days sick leave with full pay over a three-year cycle. Unused sick leave shall lapse at the expiry of the three-year cycle.
3	<b>Maternity leave</b>	An educator is entitled to four consecutive months' maternity leave on full pay to commence at least 14 days prior to the expected date of birth but not later than the actual date of birth in the case of a premature confinement.
	<b>Temporary incapacity leave</b>	An educator who has exhausted his/her sick leave credit in a three-year cycle and who, according to the relevant medical practitioner, needs to be absent as result of an incapacity that is not permanent may be granted additional sick leave with full pay.
	<b>Permanent incapacity</b>	Educators whose degree of incapacity has been certified by a competent medical practitioner as permanent shall, with the approval of the head of department, be granted a maximum of 30 working days paid sick leave, or such additional number of days required by the employer to finalise the processes of incapacity.
	<b>Leave for occupational Injury and diseases</b>	Educators who, as a result of their work, suffer occupational injuries or contract occupational diseases, shall be granted occupational and disease leave for the duration of the period they cannot work.
	<b>Leave for adoption</b>	An educator, who adopts a child younger than two years, qualifies for adoption leave to a maximum of 45 working days.
	<b>Family responsibility leave and special leave for urgent private affairs</b>	An educator shall be granted three working days leave per annual leave cycle if the educator's partner gives birth, spouse or life partner is sick, immediate family member dies or child, spouse or life partner dies.
	<b>Special leave for professional and personal development and for religious observances</b>	Special leave with full pay may be granted to an institution-based educator for professional development and personal development and also for religious observances.
	<b>Special leave for study</b>	Special leave may be granted for an approved course

No	Leave type	Explanation
	<b>purposes</b>	of study and for a period approved by the employer either with full or partial pay or without pay.
	<b>Special leave for examination purposes</b>	Special leave may be granted for examination purposes with full pay plus one additional day which may be taken on the working day immediately prior to the day of examination.
12	<b>Special leave in extraordinary circumstances</b>	Special leave for a period and on conditions approved by the head of a department for the purpose of participating in sports as well as cultural, local council and other relevant activities.
13	<b>Unpaid leave</b>	When an educator has used all his/her accrued annual leave, the head of department may grant unpaid leave up to a maximum of 184 consecutive days.
14	<b>Unpaid leave for continuity of services</b>	Unpaid leave for a maximum of 120 consecutive days may be granted to an institution-based educator who was previously employed as an institution-based educator by the same or another education department for the purpose of retaining the continuity of the educator's service.
15	<b>Annual leave</b>	Teachers are considered to be on annual leave during school holidays.
16	<b>Prenatal leave</b>	From 1 January 2013, an eligible employee will be entitled to eight working days prenatal leave, per pregnancy in order to enable the employee to attend medical examinations.

### **2.6.2 Handling of leave**

The procedural system used by principals to handle leave forms and leave of absence includes the obligation by law that the principal must forward the application of leave form to the district office, via the circuit office, for approval. This circuit submission needs to be done within a month and this procedure is randomly audited annually, by the Auditor-General as regulated by the Public Finance Management Act of 1999. Noncompliance is regarded as misconduct.

### **2.7 The impact of teacher absenteeism on learner performance**

Teacher presence in school does matter and there is no doubt that teacher absence has an impact on the achievements of the students (Miller et al 2007). When a teacher is away,

time is lost in terms of teaching and learning, while teacher absence also impacts directly on learner misbehaviour and learner absence (Reddy et al 2010:24). According to Mbonambi (2002:57), in an extreme case the impact of teacher absenteeism is evident in those learners who aimlessly roam the streets during school hours.

Research reveals that, when regular teachers are not in the classroom, the opportunities for students to learn are curtailed (Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor 2009:28). Usually teachers who are absent are replaced by less experienced or less qualified teachers and this, in turn, further impact on the students' achievements.

Researchers also argue that, if teacher absences adversely affect students' learning, then more absences may cause more damage to the process of teaching and learning and this, in turn, would result in poor performances (Clotfelter et al 2009:11–16). An absence that occurs early in the year would probably be less harmful than absences occurring in the second half of the year, as examinations and tests are written in the second half of the year. Several studies, including a study conducted by Van Nuland (2009:15–18), reveal that the influence of teacher absence on students includes student absenteeism, student tiredness and a decline in student performance. It would appear that students use their teachers as role models. In their quantitative study, Miller et al (2007:13) found that there is a strong positive connection between low student attendance and high teacher absenteeism.

Clotfelter et al (2009:28) found a correlation between teacher ability and effort and higher rate of teacher absences. A teacher who struggles to teach may often be absent from work. Clotfelter et al (2009:28) further argues that teachers whose students are struggling academically may tend to take more sick days out of frustration or discouragement.

Bennell and Akyeampong, (2007:19) argue that the management of teachers significantly affects teacher quality. This, in turn, implies that the work and competency of teachers in terms of performance are influenced by the quality of both internal and external supervision. Thus, teachers who are ill disciplined tend to absent themselves regularly from work.

It is clear that teacher absences will impede the progress of students. Clotfelter et al (2009:24–28) and also Mbonambi (2002: 57) attribute poor matriculation results to teachers who do not spend their time in class. If teacher absences adversely affect student achievement, then the severity and the impact of teacher absenteeism on vulnerable learners is a matter of grave concern.

## **2.8 Reasons for teacher absenteeism**

There are various acceptable reasons for teacher absences and which could not be determined by the principals in various schools. This includes involuntary and/or excused absences (Usman et al 2004, 17) as opposed to unexcused or voluntary absences. A common reason for absenteeism is the educators' outside responsibilities including professional development, excursions and attending sporting, religious and cultural activities (Reddy et al 2010:78). In addition, these types of teacher absences are considered basic teacher rights as civil servants.

The next section will discuss the research findings on excused absences, including absences as a result of ill health, official school duties and other commitments.

### **2.8.1 Ill health**

*“The projected number of daily deaths among HIV/AIDS related sicknesses was approximately 1000, in South Africa,” (The Pretoria News 1 December 2003), which leaves classes without teachers.*

It has been found that the most dominant category of leave usually taken by teachers is absence due to ill health and that the most common reasons for such absences is short-term personal illness, medium-term illness, death in the family, maternity and, lastly, critical family issues (Miller 2008).

Research reveals that HIV/AIDS related illnesses cause low morale, high rates of absenteeism among teachers in South Africa (DoE 2010). According to Theron (2004) there is about approximately 12, 7% prevalence of AIDS and this increases teacher absenteeism due to illnesses related to HIV but in most cases victims simply disappears leaving classes without supervision.



*“the negative implications of the AIDS pandemic for school wellness is not as a result of negative educator perception, but is as a result of grim reality of AIDS. Increase educator absenteeism, educator and learner attrition and declining quality of education are intrinsic to the actuality of AIDS” (Theron 2004)*

The global picture of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, as indicated in the Department of Education Draft on HIV/AIDS (DBE 2010: 27), includes its negative impact on schools’ systems and procedures and that this automatically leads to dysfunctional behaviour in the school. The epidemic is continuing to disrupt schools because of the teacher absenteeism which is the result of various factors including lack of condom usage, multiple partnerships, alcohol abuse and intergenerational sex (DoE 2010:27).

In light of this situation, SMTs and school principals are faced with a serious shortage of human resources, as well as the complex process of teacher substitution. While the principals are stressed by the process of teacher substitution, the sick teacher is stressed by his/her ill health (DBE HIV/AIDS 2010:2–6).

Kiragu, Mackenzie, Weiss, Kimani and Gachuhi (2007:7) state that “prolonged teacher absenteeism due to AIDS related illness leads to a loss of learning time amongst students and an overall decrease in the quality of teaching”. This degree teacher stress results directly in a loss of time while also adversely affecting the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom (Kiragu et al 2007:7).

### **2.8.2 Official school duties**

Research conducted by Usman and Suryadarma (2004:18) in Indonesia reveals that approximately 18,7% of teacher absences were as a result of official school duties outside of the school.

Union activities, particularly on the part of site steward members, branch members and regional office bearers, involve participation in meetings, congresses and workshops and result in the teachers’ concerned being taken out of class. In particular, prolonged

gatherings and meetings of union members have a negative impact on teaching and learning.

Nevertheless, such impacts may be avoided by teacher substitution because the headmaster should be informed in advance about a particular teacher absence.

### **2.8.3 Training and workshops**

Some educators may be absent from school as a result of training and workshops organised by the department of education. In most cases these training workshops, take place during learner contact time while the training programmes may, in some instances, provide inadequate or irrelevant information which may create anxiety and stress in teachers leading to teachers deciding to be absent from school. In addition, the required skills, appropriate for teaching, are not provided to the teachers (Schulze & Steyn 2007:694) during the training workshops and teachers find them inappropriate to use in their respective classes. These training workshops contribute directly to teacher absenteeism.

### **2.8.4 Governmental duties**

Chaudhury et al (2006:101) indicate that, in South Asia, some of reasons for the high absenteeism include governmental duties outside of the school premises, for example, voter registration and public health campaigns. In such cases, the headmasters do not report these absences. Thus, Kremer et al (2005) also attributes these teacher absences to non-education-related official duties.

## **2.9 Societal and cultural values**

This section examines factors that contribute to teacher absence, including societal and cultural values, personal characteristics of teachers such as age, gender and status and the teachers' levels of competence.

Societal values may explain work behaviour which either promotes or reduces absenteeism at schools. Studies have shown that absenteeism is a socially based behavioural pattern. In their study, Rosenblatt and Shiron (2006:379) used Arab and Jewish ethnic groupings and

examined the differences in teacher absences between the two ethnic groupings. They found that the workload of the individual promotes opportunities for teacher absence. However, even more striking was their finding that the teacher absenteeism of Jewish teachers was 60% higher than for Arab teachers. The Arabs showed more commitment to their work as a result of their societal collectivism which, in turn, reduces their teacher absenteeism.

In their study, Rosenblatt and Shiron (2006:361–363) examined the extent to which school ethnicity (Jewish and Arab), affiliated schools and site-based management affected the absentee rates of teachers and school administrators. They found that the higher the administrative position of the teacher, the lower the absentee rate. They also showed that ethnic affiliated schools with their lack of resources and the marginalisation they experienced in the society tended to create teacher withdrawal at school and increase behavioural absences.

## **2.10 Impact of teacher characteristics on absenteeism**

Teachers who are ill disciplined tend to absent themselves regularly from work. Effective teaching is a direct result of planning and, if planning is not done, this leads to absenteeism. The supporting argument for this is given by Van Nuland (2009:8–10) who states that teacher absences are the result of personal ill-discipline and a lack of classroom management and that these two aspects have a severe impact on the lack of learning at schools.

Research indicates that certain teacher characteristics correlate with high or poor rates of absenteeism. Female educators have a lower absentee rate than male teachers while teachers with a low level of formal education usually have a lower absentee rate while those teachers with a higher level of education tend to have higher absentee rates. According to Usman et al (2004:5–6), this may be the result of the latter's ability to obtain extra jobs in order to supplement their incomes.

While teacher absence is an individual matter, there are also schools (institutions) and structural (environmental) factors that impact on the extent of teacher absence. In high

income countries, the female teachers are more likely to stay at home to take care of either a sick child or a dependant adult than the male teachers (Scott &McClellan1990). Miller (2008) found that, other things being equal, in the United States of America, on average, those teachers with either the least or most experience were absent less often than those teachers with intermediate levels of experience. An important driver of this pattern may be that the teachers in the intermediate experience range are more likely to have young families. Also, once teachers gain permanent status, they may be more aggressive about exercising their leave privileges. However, in the lower income countries, the patterns are different and the more powerful teachers are absent more often than the lower ranking teachers while men are absent more often than women. In addition, the head teachers are absent more often than the regular teachers and, in many cases; it would appear that the better educated teachers absent more often than their less educated counterparts (Chaudhury et al 2006). The characteristics of gender, age and marital status were not significant predictors of teacher absence in the lower income countries.

In developing countries, higher ranking teachers are likely to be absent from school more often than lower ranking teachers, while principals are more frequently absent from school than ordinary teachers. Chaudhury et al (2006) also emphasise the notion that the better educated teachers are absent from school on a regular basis and that the teacher lack of morale defines individual teacher characteristics that eventually predict teacher absence. Reddy et al (2010) cites a predictor of absence as the distance at which teachers live from the school, with such distance being positively related to the absentee rate. In lower income countries, poverty also determines teacher absences and may be linked to the poor working conditions which depress both the teachers and the learners (Reddy et al 2010). Thus, poor working conditions are related to a higher absentee rate.

## **2.11 The impact of demotivated teachers on teacher absenteeism**

Bell (2007:26) indicates that many teachers show the signs and symptoms of poor motivation with poorly motivated teachers being unable to carry out their duties effectively. For effective teaching and learning to take place, the teachers need to be motivated and, thus, it is essential that low morale on the part of teachers is raised. Institutions and the departmental officials must identify a lack of motivation from the following signs:

- teachers are always concerned about the working conditions,
- teachers show repeated concern about their salaries,
- teachers generally show no interest in their jobs,
- teachers fail to carry out their stipulated duties which are, for the most part, clearly outlined by the Department of Education in the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) and
- teachers constantly need reassurance about their individual job security (Smith 1992:2–3).

### **2.12 The impact of burnout on teacher absenteeism**

Burnout in teachers is a condition of depersonalisation and deep exhaustion caused by a lack of ability on the part of teachers to deal with threats which may, ultimately, affect their self-esteem. Although burnout causes physical and emotional instability, it also increases the possibility of high rates of teacher absenteeism (Haberman 2004).

According to Jackson et al (2005), the concept of burnout may be viewed as having a direct connection to exhaustion derived from the work environment, revealing elements of persistent, negative work-related symptoms in an individual.

In one way or another, burnout may be a direct result of the stress emanating from the feeling of incompetency, negative job aspects, less productivity within the workplace and a lack of achievement in terms of the daily job description. As with stress, burnout produces in an individual emotional and cognitive instability, resulting in a lack of interest in the job and poor performance (Jackson & Rothmann 2005).

### **2.13 Impact of stress on teacher absenteeism**

A further reason for teacher absence is the stress that most teachers experience on a daily basis as a result of stressors such as workload, the type of learners, a lack of recognition on the part of employers and a poor working environment. These stressors may be either internal or external in nature. Most of the studies on teacher stress have tended to focus on the external causes of stress, thus neglecting the effects of the internal causes of teacher

stress (Haberman 2004). The most dominant research on the stress related to teacher absenteeism cited a lack of resources, disruptive learners, unreasonable demands over a short space of time and salary issues as the causes of stress (Brissie, Hoover-Dempsey&Bassler1988, Dunham 1977, Lortjie1975, Gritz&Theobold1986).

Van Tonder and Williams (2009) believe very strongly that it is burnout and work-related stress in the work situation that causes educators to resign, creates high absenteeism and low teacher morale and reduces job satisfaction. Stress may also be the direct cause of heart attacks, marital conflict and an increase in the use of alcohol and drugs. According to Van Tonder and Williams (2009), many studies show that sleeplessness and depression are the direct results of teacher stress and teacher burnout. While Blase (1986) cites a correlation between stress and burnout, Haberman (2004) identified “strong, insensitive” individual teachers who remain in teaching for long periods of time but who subsequently resigns a result of accumulated stress. The nature and the persistence of teacher stress make teaching a highly stressful career and it is made worse by the accumulated environmental stressors in various schools (Haberman 2004). It is, thus, clear that all these aspects impacts negatively on teacher work performance and production.

According to Van Deventer and Kruger (2012:53), school stressors play a vital role in causing teacher absenteeism at school. Various researchers indicate the following stressors:

- large classes with no support in disciplining learners, coupled with an exorbitant amount of administration work for teachers,
- poor school maintenance, a lack of adequate resources and overcrowded classrooms,
- time wasted by fruitless meetings, unnecessary, bureaucratic procedures and the conflicting roles and responsibilities of teachers,
- the unbearable workload as well as the planned, departmental in-service workshops and training all demand extra time from teachers and,
- change emanating from the Department of Basic Education and demands for teachers to acclimatise to certain pressures which should change the teachers perceptions and responsibilities within a certain community (Van Deventer

&Kruger 2012:53). These pressures cause stress and confusion within the teaching fraternity.

In view of the fact that stress is the major cause of teacher absenteeism, this study aims to view the teachers' understanding and perceptions of school absenteeism in South Africa through the lens of various stress theories. These theories will be explored in chapter 3.

Brown et al (1997) identified that, in many counties, teaching is the most stressful job there is and that this stress frustrates teachers and leads to teacher absenteeism. This stress is experienced within the school environment, thus confirming the notion that many in the teaching fraternity are working under considerable stress (Van Deventer &Kruger 2012:49). Most of the stressors are caused by change and increased responsibilities.

A survey conducted in the United Kingdom reveals clearly that teaching is extremely stressful and frustrating. Nattras (1991) regards stress as the primary health problem among teachers. Brown et al (1997) estimate the total annual costs of stress amongst educators in Britain to be as high as £230 million.

It is argued that the repeated curriculum changes in South African schools over the last decade have caused significant teacher stress, anxiety and depression (Van Tonder & Williams 2009) with stress in teachers being the direct result of their workload. For example, the introduction of the Annual National Assessment (ANA) and the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) has disrupted classes and created extra work, thus leading to teacher absenteeism. Jackson and Rothmann (2005: 107) found a positive correlation between burnout and health with job demands and job resources as contributory factors which lead to stress and resulting in teacher absenteeism. Burnout, teacher exhaustion and stress are global concerns in the teacher profession and they are major contributory factors to the unaccountable absenteeism of teachers at schools (Jackson and Rothman 2005).

## **2.14 Strategies to reduce teacher absenteeism**

The literature review suggests a number of strategies that are used in schools in order to reduce excused or voluntary teacher absenteeism

### **2.14.1 *Understand the causes of teacher absenteeism***

Narayan and Mooij (2010) argue that, in order to find solutions to teacher absenteeism, it is necessary to explain the causes of voluntary teacher absence, for example a lack of motivation on the part of the educators, overcrowded classrooms, poor infrastructure, unfilled vacancies, lack of adequate training and institutional contextual issues. Smith (2000:10) suggests that a district could determine the extent of teacher absenteeism by looking at the following factors:

- lack of direction from the school board and school superintendent
- incomplete and/or conflicting board policy
- failure on the part of the school administration to recognise the problem
- job dissatisfaction
- incomplete records
- lack of attendance monitoring
- failure to recognise good attendance
- Obsolete leadership.

### **2.14.2 *Policy development and implementation***

The enforcement of an attendance policy may reduce teacher absenteeism (Marbuger 2007:148–149). According to Usman et al (2004:15), in order to deal effectively deal with teacher absences, it is necessary to use disciplinary sanctions which include a formal warning, suspension of salary, demotion, transfer to another school and temporary dismissal.

### **2.14.3 *Provision of incentives for attendance***

According to Usman et al (2004:14), the best way in which to promote teacher attendance is through financial incentives. These financial incentives may take the form of overtime teaching payments and substitute teaching payments. The education department in Indonesia have instituted non-cash incentive programme which includes medals/awards



and participation in educational studies. Usman et al (2004) confirm that the non-cash incentives also motivate teachers to be present at school.

#### **2.14.4 Increase in teacher morale**

In order to promote teacher attendance, Smith (2000:12) suggests that teacher morale must be improved. This would be an important factor in increasing teacher attendance as it would make teachers feel that they were

- Being treated fairly and equally,
- Being valued and appreciated for their work,
- Being recognised for their work,
- Being paid a fair wage for their work and
- Doing work that is important.

#### **2.14.5 Official school business**

It is essential that the Department of Education reduce the number of days on which teachers are obliged to attend official school duties, meetings and workshops (Reddy et al 2010:87–88). In addition, the coordination of these gatherings must be organised by the provincial directorate far in advance so as to give the principals sufficient time to arrange for substitutes. It is also recommended that teaching time or contact time with the learners must not be compromised. This may, in turn, be achieved through planning and the allocation of responsibilities according to the teachers available.

- *Principals' meetings*: The principals must promote a culture of teaching and learning at schools and, thus, attending meetings on a regular basis hinders them in their daily management of their schools.
- *Leave of absence*: It is recommended that schools manage discretionary leave taking, particularly on Mondays and Fridays. Accordingly, schools must study leave patterns by means of a managerial system that checks on leave of absence abuse.

- *Discretionary leave of absence*: Schools must take measures to reduce discretionary leave of absence. In addition, incentives should be introduced for not using the discretionary leave of absence in order to reduce any disruptions to the running schools (Reddy et al 2010:87–88).

#### **2.14.6 Biometrics**

A biometric system may be used for the authentication and management of the identification of workers within a system and is considered to be extremely cost-effective. The system allows individual workers entrance to their respective institutions and is able to exit, without the need for an individual to provide personal information (Gelb & Clark 2013). As regards gaining access to premises the system records the individual's time in and time out because it would have programmed the relevant data pertaining to the individual and linked it to the individual's fingerprint.

*“Using biometrics for identification means assessing an individual's identity based on a unique physical or behavioural trait; something that they are”*  
(Gelb & Clark: 2013.62).

The advantages of a biometric system include the following:

- unique to every individual,
- cannot be misplaced or forgotten, and is extremely difficult either to fake or to steal,
- does not require literacy,
- may help to create an audit trail for transactions and,
- increases anonymity when used in place of personal details (names, addresses, etc.)(Gelb & Clark 2012).

It would appear that the developed countries are extremely advanced in the use of the biometric system because:

*A number of countries, including Pakistan, India, and various Latin American countries, offer good examples for South-South learning. By sharing and*

*framing key lessons and trade-offs, countries and donors can learn to strengthen identification systems, including the application of biometrics which is advantageous, through the use of alternative technology (Gelb & Clark 2013:53).*

This biometric system for attempting to curb teacher absence at school seems to be working effectively and it has had good results in the various teaching domains.

All the above mention strategies to reduce teacher absenteeism concur with the measures that should be taken to deal with miss-use of leave in schools. Reddy et al (2010), provides a range of key recommendations in reducing leave taking which ultimately will reduce teacher absence in class and at school, as follows:

- Time away from regular school and classroom activities can be reduced.
- Reduce educator leave rates in schools where it is higher than 10%.
- Improving working conditions to encourage educators and learners to attend.
- Improve the systems to record leave onto PERSAL systems
- Improve leave administrative systems and support in schools.
- Record leave for official business on a central database.
- Monitor the national leave rates (Reddy et al 2010).

All the above leave measures and strategies to reduce teacher absence at school and even in class will not be effective without the role of the school manager.

## **2.15 The role of the school manager**

The research on teacher absenteeism tends to emphasise the decisive role of the school managers in combating the phenomenon. It is essential to note that *“the school principal is responsible for managing discretionary leave and potential miss-use of leave taking on Mondays and Fridays....but schools have not engaged with the strategic management of leave taking in order to reduce the extent of leave”*(Reddy et al 2010).

Dworkin et al (1990) state that principals or school managers must create a climate of leadership ethos which would reduce teacher absenteeism, although in maintaining this

good leadership enthuses the principals must not tolerate teacher absenteeism. Thus, improved teacher attendance is a direct outcome of job satisfaction as well as high motivational levels and clear goals (Reddy et al 2011:23).

Research reveals that there is less teacher absenteeism in those institutions in which the teachers report directly to the principal. Finlayson (2009:33) concurs with the notion that, when teachers report directly or telephonically to the principal and not to administrative clerks about their absences, the absenteeism rate tends to be lower. Although policy implementation needs to be revisited in the PAM, Miller et al (2007:3) emphasise that advanced administrative record keeping may facilitate studies on teacher absence.

In the survey study conducted by Marsh (1998:1), he found that while truancy was considered to be a problem issue, absenteeism may be as a result of lack of skills on the part of the principal and poor policy implementation rather than problematic learners. Marsh used quantitative research methods to drawing upon literature that focused on the relationship between the student and the school. He showed clearly by means of the correlation method the relationship that exists between absenteeism/truancy and learner performance.

In some schools, the school managers are sometimes absent from school. In their research, Usman and Suryadarma, (2004:23) indicate that, in schools in which the headmasters are frequently absent the teachers were likely to be absent as well, as compared to those schools where the principals were not frequently absent. There are also other reasons that discourage educators, including managers, from attending school regularly. These include inadequate classrooms and toilets and/or a lack of proper sanitation. The same reasons that discourage teachers from attending schools also discourage principals from attending and also include a lack of classrooms or toilets or a lack of sanitation facilities. Emerging evidence shows that schools that are visited by departmental officials have a similar absentee rate to those schools that are not visited by officials (Reddy et al 2010).

According to the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, one of the main reasons for teacher absenteeism is a lack of control over the comings and goings of teachers. This

explains why her solution to the problem of absenteeism, which she describes as “lazy teachers who do not report to work on time, knock off early and bunk classes,” is to install biometric machines in schools so as to ensure that teachers clock in and out (*Sowetan b*,11 February 2013).

The management of teacher absenteeism is regulated primarily through the administration of leaves of absence and this depends on the schools effectiveness in using relevant tools, accuracy in administering the tools and the school type. South African research shows that schools generally comply with the administrative requirements on leave taking but they lack the strategic management of leave taking which should reduce the extent of leave taking (Reddy et al 2010:86).

## **2.16 Conclusion**

The literature review on teacher absenteeism highlighted the most important factors pertaining to teacher absence from school. It is evident that stress has a significant impact on the both the voluntary and involuntary absenteeism of teachers. The literature also contains information about the causes of the stress that leads to teacher absenteeism and provides the reasons for teacher absenteeism from school although there has been no in-depth qualitative exploration of the perceptions and experiences teachers as regards teacher absenteeism.

In view of the fact that stress is the major cause of teacher absenteeism, this study aims to view teachers’ understanding and perceptions of school absenteeism in South Africa through the lens of various stress theories.

These stress theories will be explored in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*... Job stress and burnout appear to be amongst many reasons teachers give for dissatisfaction, which can contribute to teacher absenteeism (Ntho-Ntho, 2009:174).*

### 3.1 Introduction

Stress has been identified as a major cause of teacher absenteeism. Accordingly, this chapter will explore teacher absenteeism in light of various theories on stress in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of the sources of pressure that impact on the work of teachers. The study concentrated on 'sources of pressure' from both the external and internal environments, including job characteristics and working conditions. Hence, the theoretical framework will rely on the interaction between two models of stress, namely, the transactional stress model and the occupational stress model.

*"The persistent and pervasive nature of teacher stress studies makes it clear that teaching has become a high stress occupation" (Haberman 2004).*

#### 3.1.1 Stress

Stress means different things to different people. A simple definition of stress may be that stress refers to an occurrence of pressure which exceeds the individual's ability to cope. Stress may also be viewed as merely an external pressure, for example not attaining deadlines, which then results in accumulated stress (Palmer & Cooper 2010:7). However, it is a physiological and psychological imbalance which arises as a result of demands and a person's inability to meet those demands. This view is confirmed by Steyn and Kamper (2006:119), who regard stress as a complex phenomenon which involves stressors which emanate from the environmental demands and perceptions of an individual. Stress also involves the coping skills required for the purposes of survival.

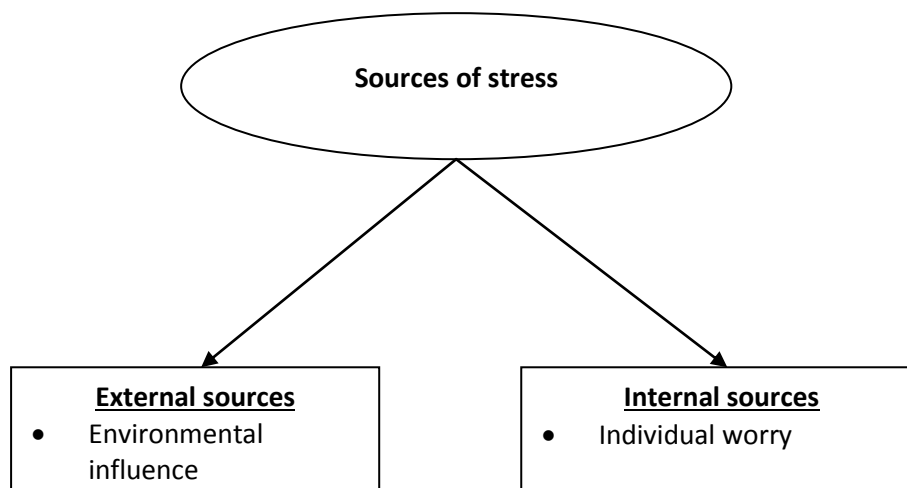
*Strictus* is a Latin term which gave rise to the English word "stress" and which means to press together (Van Deventer & Kruger 2012:49). Stress manifests as a result of stressors and stressful situations. Although, according to Hebert (2004), some stress is inevitable but stress can be used as a predictor of absenteeism (West & West 1989).

Mark and Smith (2008:3) described the nature and origin of work stress. They formulated the following three approaches to stress. These approaches are based in the nature of stress:

- The engineering approach refers to the engineering of stress which arises as a result of environmental stimuli.
- The physiological approach defines stress based on the physiological and biological changes that a person undergoes during the process of stress. This also involves the reaction to internal human biological forces which manifest in the form of the secretion of extra neuroendocrine.
- The psychological approach views stress as involving an individual's interaction with the environment (Mark & Smith 2008:3).

### 3.1.2 *The nature and source of stress*

The sources and nature of stress are twofold and may best be illustrated in the diagram below:



**Figure 3.1: Sources of stress**

### **3.1.2.1 External sources of stress**

In this case the stress arises as a direct result of the environmental influences on an individual. Such stressors include stress from family, work, loud noise, extreme work environmental temperatures, a lack of resources, peers and friends.

### **3.1.2.2 Internal sources of stress**

In this case the stress arises from individuals worrying about matters which are beyond their control. The individual personality plays a vital role in managing the stress which arises from internal sources.

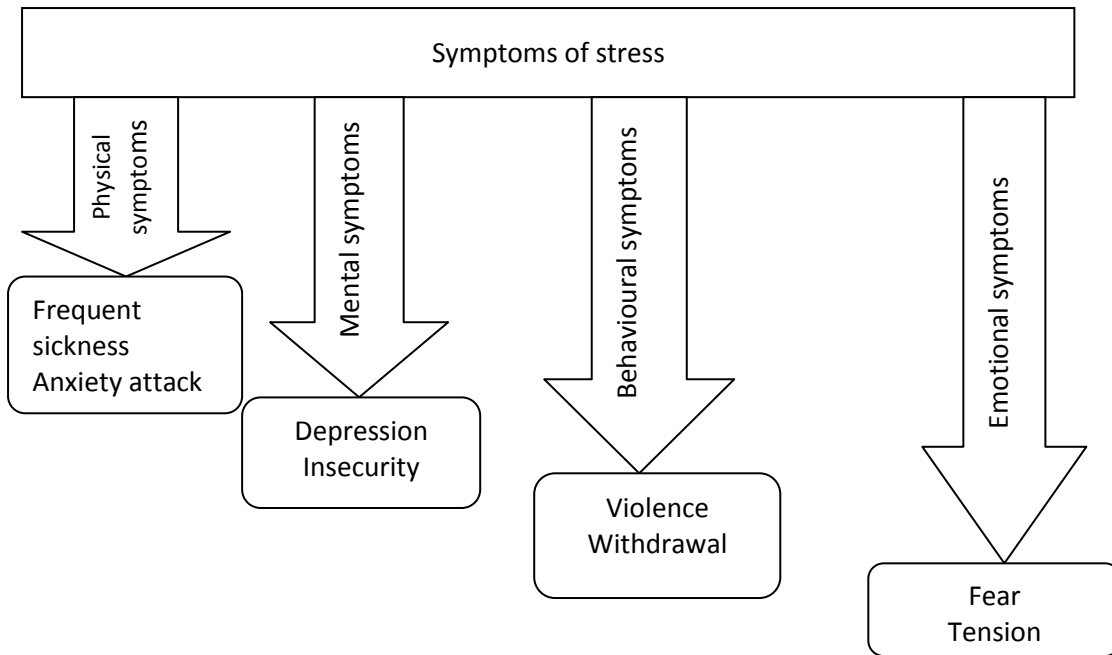
The individual response to stress depends on the individual's coping mechanism which rests on the difference between pleasant stress and unpleasant stress (Steyn&Kamper2006:119–120). The cost of stress may be high and stress may trigger a various health problems, including:

- heart attack/stroke,
- hypertension/high blood pressure,
- ulcers,
- diabetes,
- angina,
- cancer,
- rheumatoid arthritis,
- psychological disorders (anxiety and depression)(Palmer &Cooper 2010:10) and
- Most common illnesses.

### **3.1.3 The symptoms of stress**

It is important to identify the symptoms of stress if these stress-related symptoms are to be managed. The figure below depicts the symptoms of stress which contribute directly to and promote teacher absenteeism:

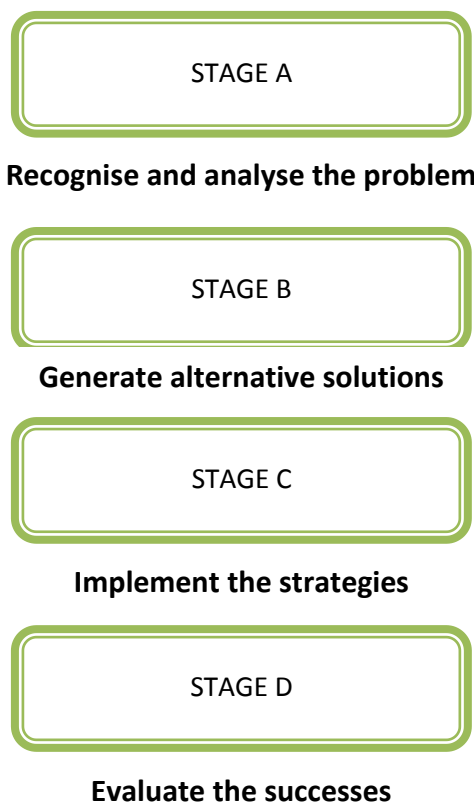




**Figure 3.2: Symptoms of stress**

### 3.1.4 Dealing with work-related stress

The individual response to stress depends on the individual's coping with the stress. This, in turn, involves a stress management plan (see diagram in fig. 3.3):



**Figure 3.3: Stress management plan**

Source: adapted from Van Deventer and Kruger (2012)

The illustration above depicts coping strategies and managing stress within the working environment by recognising and analysing the stress problem. Palmer and Cooper (2010:10) maintain that it is important for employers and managers to identify the various symptoms of stress at work and then reduce the stress. Palmer and Cooper identified the following symptoms of stress:

- low morale,
- high absenteeism,
- increase in long-term illness,
- increased litigation,
- reduced efficiency,
- poor performance in tasks,
- poor quality control,
- deadlines not being reached,
- increased bullying,
- increase in accidents and
- long hours of doing nothing.

If it is clear that if the employees of any institution are experiencing a range of the symptoms listed above, then it is essential that the institution address the work-related stress. Research also reveals that high levels of stress are reported by employees when they become anxious about income, workload and job insecurity (Palmer & Cooper 2010:142).

## **3.2 Models of stress**

The models of stress to be discussed and which form part of the research framework used in this study are the transactional stress model and the occupational stress model.

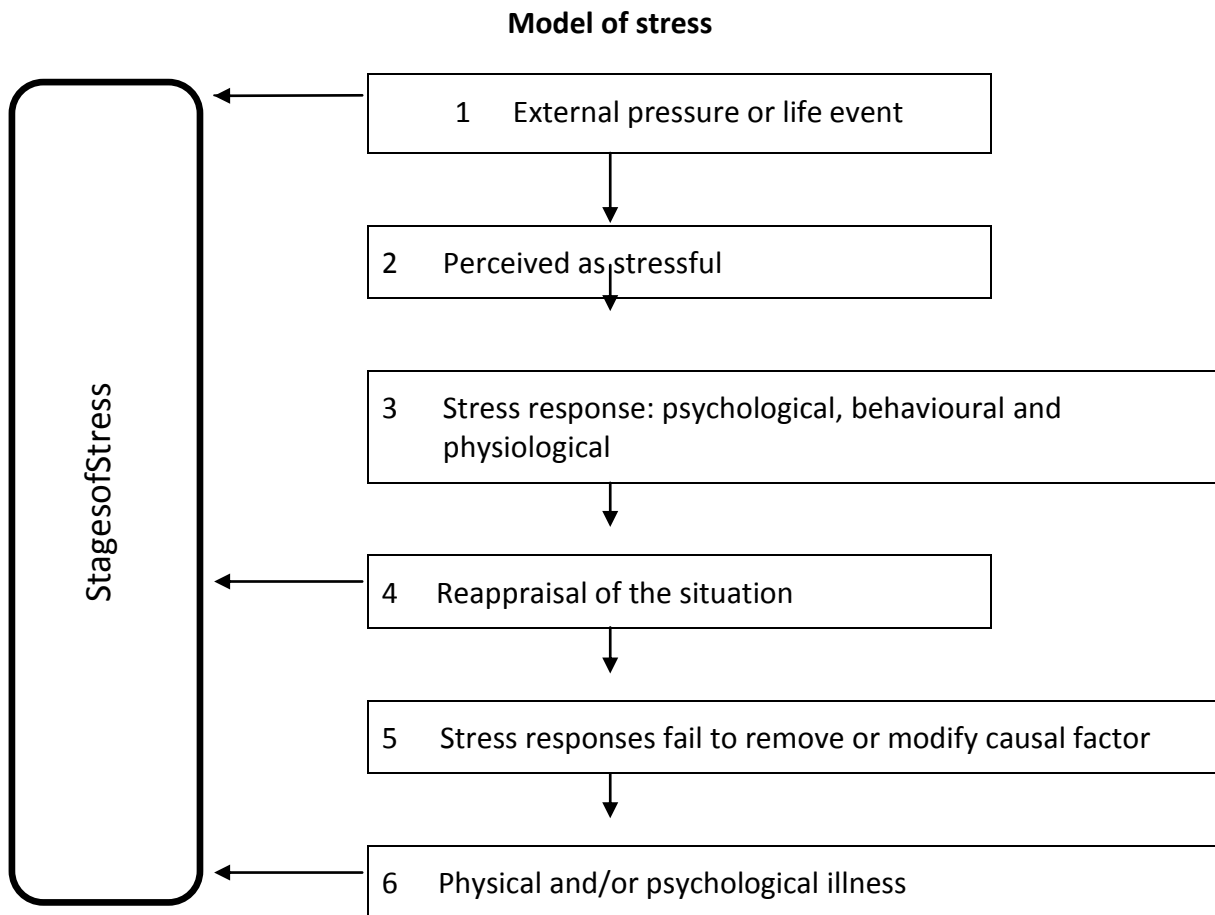
### **3.2.1 *Transactional model***

In terms of the transactional theory, stress is the result of a perceived imbalance between the demands of a person's environment and the resources available to the person as well as the person's response to them (Miller & McCool 2003). Leonova (2009:8) maintains that the

transactional stress model is a practical model in terms of its applicability and it is suitable for assisting a person to fit into the environment. The model has its own input, that is, the environmental variables that interact and produce a balanced and/or an unbalanced individual outcome.

The transactional model indicates that stress depends on an individual's cognitive appraisal of events and circumstances and the individual's ability to cope (Jackson & Rothman 2006). Thus, stress is conceptualised as a transactional interaction between a person and the environment. The valuable importance of this model is based on its productivity when it is used for analytical purposes in interpreting cognitive data and creating a foundation for new diagnostic methods (Leonova 2009:8). Transactional theory often places the emphasis on the role of subjective perceptions of the environment while it acknowledges the possible impact of various individual factors, including differences in coping, appraisal, personality and focus of control (Mark & Smith 2008:3–4).

The individual's cognitive ability and circumstances result in the individual's transactions with the environment. Individual coping depends on cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage external and internal demands which often arise in conflict situations. Palmer and Cooper (2010) use a stress model which is similar to the transactional model and which provides a useful framework. As depicted below, this framework may be divided into a number of stages:



**Figure 3.4: Model of stress, coping and resilience**

Source: Adapted from Palmer and Cooper (2010)

**Stage 1** refers to the external pressure or demands which a person faces. These external pressures may include giving a presentation in front of people, the inability to complete a project and/or trying to cope with bereavement, accident and illness. Therefore, an individual perception which enables the individual to cope when faced with the degree of stress arising from the external force, for example, a job promotion, old buildings, changing curricula and personal financial matters and management. The impact of such external pressures depends solely on the individual response to the external pressure. Some people would be excited about a job promotion but somebody else maybe demoralised and anxious about it (Palmer & Cooper 2010:28–29).

**Stage 2** of the model in figure 3.4 refers to the person’s perceptions of the pressure exerted and which triggers the ‘fight or flight’ stress response. The person may judge the situation as negative or appraise the challenge or situation as positive. This stage may either encourage

or discourage the person concerned. It may trigger coping skills strategies and awaken the knowledge required to face the predicament (Palmer & Cooper 2010:32).

**Stage 3** refers to the three key responses which become activated psychological, behavioural and physiological.

- **Psychological**–This response includes the release of stress hormones such as adrenaline, which prepares the heart, lungs and major muscle groups for action—either to fight or flee. For example, when given a task by senior management, instead of wasting time, the individual may focus on the task immediately and, by drawing up a priority list and strategy to complete the tasks in advance and within the deadline, the individual would reduce any stress (Palmer & Cooper 2010:33). The direct psychological responses to stress are caused by anger, anxiety, embarrassment, depression, guilt, mood swings, and feelings of being out of control, helplessness, suicidal thoughts, paranoia, inability to concentrate, nightmares and mental pictures of the situation going wrong.
- **Behavioural**–This response triggers different types of behaviour which include passive behaviour, aggressive behaviour, irritability, procrastination, increased alcohol consumption, increased caffeine consumption (tea or coffee), comfort eating, withdrawal behaviour, compulsive or impulsive behaviour, poor time management, reduced work performance, increased absenteeism from work and nervous tics.
- **Physiological/physical**– This response to stress may trigger the following in an individual, namely, dry mouth, palpitations or thumping heartbeat, breathlessness, tension headaches, backache, indigestion, diarrhoea, asthma, change in menstrual pattern, rapid weight change and migraines

**Stage 4** During this stage, individuals reappraise the original situation and decide whether they have been successful in dealing with the situation. If work is being correctly managed or successfully completed, then the stress response is switched off. However, if a person is

unable to cope, some elements of the stress scenario may persist, including some of the responses discussed in stage 3 (psychological, behavioural and physiological). Thus, coping comprises problem focused coping strategies as well as emotional focused coping strategies which are mitigated through cognitive coping strategies (Leonova 2009:8–10).

**Stage 5** This stage happens over a period of time. During this stage the focus is on whether the person has modified, removed or dealt with the external forces of stress. If the stressful life events or the external pressures have not been dealt with, then psychological, behavioural and physiological disorders may arise as a result (Palmer & Cooper 2010:36).

**Stage 6** If the psychological and physical disorders persist, then a person's situation is likely to deteriorate even further. For example, a lack of performance at work will result in negative feedback from the employers. Leonova (2009:12) argues that the negative stress outcome is, in essence, a result of the conflicting human responses within the job environment and may be triggered by prolonged working hours, shift fatigue and/or, emotional imbalances caused by the stress related to examinations. In addition, negative feedback from the employers may adversely affect the person's self-esteem, resulting in a depressed employee whose work will deteriorate and this, in turn, may lead to absenteeism.

Mark and Smith (2008:8) consider the transactional stress model as depicting the cognitive process involved in the interaction between individuals and their environment and which manifests through mental and emotional processes. The main process in the interaction involves subjective individual perceptions and the environmental challenges as impacting on the individual's system of coping, appraisal and personal philosophical world view.

### **3.2.2 Occupational stress model**

In the occupational stress model a distinction is made between the elements of the working environment which cause job stress and the individual's response to the impact of the stress. This occupational stress is referred to job strain. According to the model, the stress

which teachers experience is a combination of the effects of the environmental demands and the decision-making latitude teachers have in their discretionary absenteeism.

Thus, the occupational stress model may be defined in terms of the job and environmental characteristics that trigger the individual's behaviour in response to the environment. The outcomes of the various behavioural indicators may result in negative stress which, in turn, may compromise the individual's competency as a result of the job and environmental demands (Leonova 2009:3-4). It is further argued by Leonova (2009:4) that the negative outcomes of stress may be grouped according to work output, mental health and physical health, with all the negative stress output within the working environment.

Occupational stress may range from individual to group related stress which manifests itself through interactive participation. According to Brown et al (1997), an individual's experience of stress is subjective and depends on the individual's personal interpretation of a situation. Occupational stress may cause health problems and also reduce the effectiveness of the work performance in the teaching process. Quick and Quick (1994) state that increased absenteeism, poor job satisfaction and lowered self-esteem are all direct results of occupational stress. In their job strain model De Bruin and Taylor (2006) identify the following factors which may impact negatively on the interactions of employees within the working environment:

#### **(A) Relationships**

Good relationships among colleagues and supervisors at work are essential because, in the work environment, an individual always works with the same people and is surrounded by the same people. De Bruin and Taylor (2006) indicate that poor interpersonal relationship at work contribute to work-related stress.

Work-related stressors may have a wide range of negative effects on individuals. According to Jackson and Rothmann (2006), in the teaching environment the correlation between job dissatisfaction and behaviour is proof of the impact of negative stress.

**(B) Physical demands**

In a teaching environment, employees spend most of their time performing activities which are related to the process of educating learners, including: teaching, standing in the classroom, writing on the blackboard, marking and controlling learners' work, illustrating, and demonstrating concepts to be known by the learners in class.

**(C) Career choice**

Sutherland and Cooper (1988) maintain that career choice and career development are both sources of stress to educators and that such stress is manifested in job insecurity, lack of performance, under promotion and over promotion.

**(D) Potential hazards that create stress**

***Stress creators***

Palmer and Cooper (2010) identify the following demands that are potential hazards in the workplace and may directly trigger stress:

- different groups demanding things that are difficult to combine or to perform
- unattainable deadlines
- working very intensively
- neglecting some tasks because there is too much to do
- inability to take sufficient breaks
- pressure to work long hours
- working very fast
- Being faced with unrealistic time pressures.

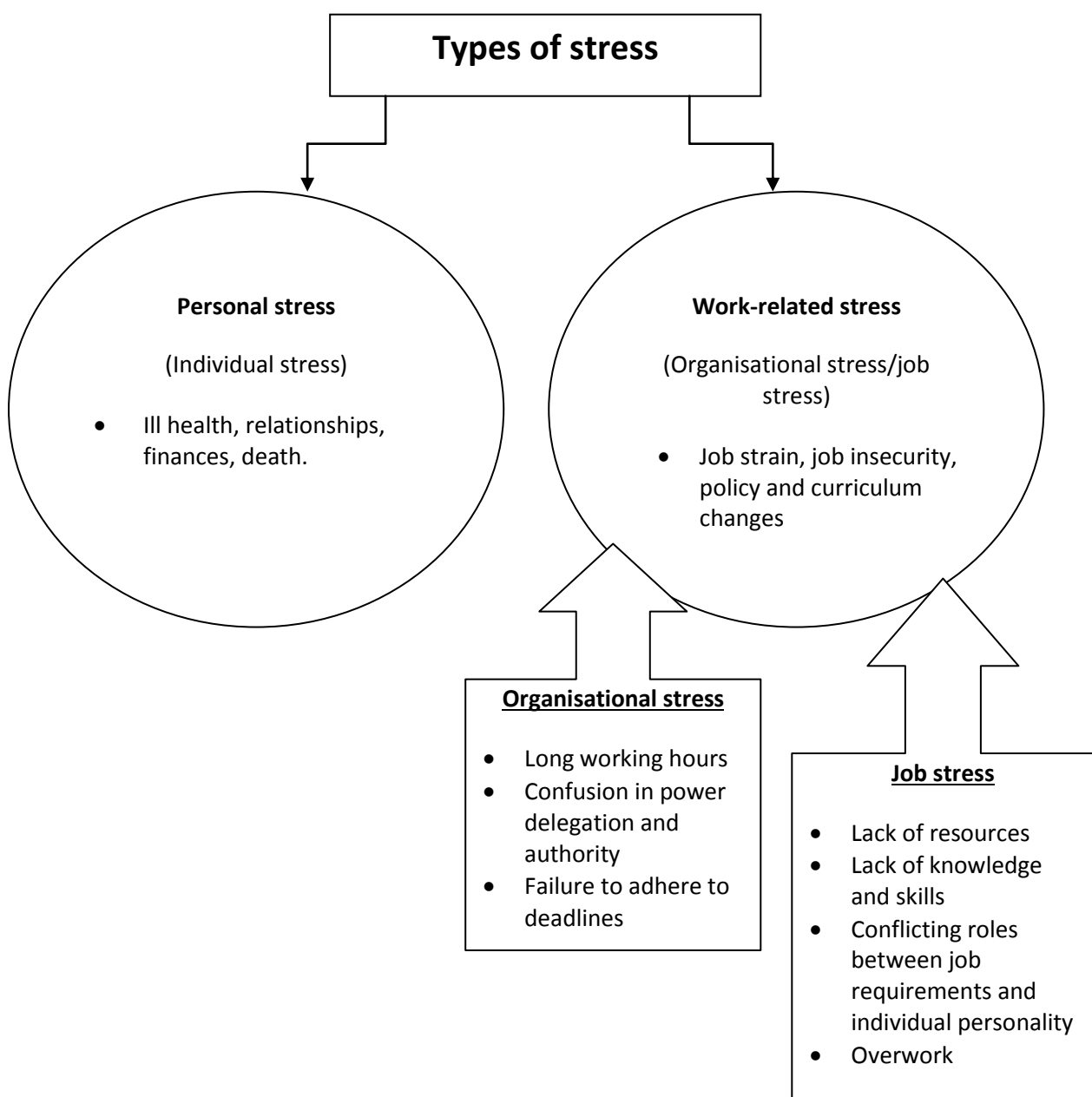
These risk factors may be used as early detectors of work-related stress. Palmer and Cooper (2010:159) state that, in order to identify the risk factors, it is essential that managers take into account the following six key points: demands, control, support, relationship, role and change.

In the study, the researcher used the stress models for the purposes of the theoretical framework which was utilised in order to view the phenomenon of teacher absenteeism. According to Hiebert and Farber (1984:24), the interaction between the environment and the coping mechanism are of vital importance to both human interaction and the alleviation



of teacher stress. Stress levels may be determined by the interaction between the stress events which occur within the environment. The emotional response and personal characteristics of an individual interact at the level of intrinsic and extrinsic behavioural traits. In his most recent study, Tahir (2011) further states that this interaction may include the stages of stress and also the potential hazards that create stress amongst people.

Both the transactional stress model and the occupational stress model mitigate the various types of stress which manifest as personal stress and work related stress (see diagram in fig 3.5).



**Figure 3.5: Types of stress**

Work-related stress and personal stress both contribute significantly to teacher absenteeism at schools.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

In the literature review, stress was identified as a major cause of teacher absenteeism. Thus, for the purposes of this study, two model of stress, namely, the transactional stress model and the occupational stress model were discussed in depth.

The next chapter will discuss the research design and the research methodology used in the study.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

*“...process and the kind of tools and procedures used to answer the research questions” (Kolawole 2012:55).*

### **4.1 Introduction**

This study aims to explore the experiences and perceptions of educators of teacher absenteeism as caused by the interaction between internal and external environmental factors. The study explores the reasons given by teachers for absenteeism and views them through the lens of the theory of stress. Specifically, the study uses the occupational model and transactional model of stress in exploring and investigating teacher absenteeism and its reasons.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the way in which the study was approached by explaining the research design and the research methodology which was utilised in the study. Thus, this chapter will discuss the research instruments used, the participants in the study, sampling procedures, data collection, data analysis, reporting and ethical issues.

### **4.2 Research methodology**

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:44–45), methodology refers to the range of approaches used in research in order to gather the data to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation and for explanation and prediction. Cohen et al (2000:4) state that the aim of methodology is to help to promote an understanding of, not only the product of scientific inquiry, but the actual process itself. Thus, research methodology is a process during which specific tools are used in a certain particular procedure in order to answer the research questions as well as gather and analyse the data required to solve a specific problem. The table below depicts the research strategy used in the study.

**Table 4.1: The research strategy process**

<b>PARADIGMATIC ASSUMPTION</b>	
Meta-theoretical paradigm	Socio-constructivism
Methodological paradigm	Qualitative, exploratory research design
Strategy of inquiry	Case study research design
<b>SELECTION OF CASES</b>	
Purposeful sampling	Selection of seven schools in the Mpumalanga Department of Education Nkangala District, Middelburg circuits. Interviews with various stakeholders were held and a document analysis was performed.
<b>DATA COLLECTION</b>	
Data collection methods	Interviews, document analysis and field notes.
DATA ANALYSIS	
<b>QUALITY MEASURES</b>	
trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.	
<b>ETHICAL CONSIDERATIOS</b>	
Permission from the authorities for access, informed consent, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity.	

### **4.3 Research approach**

The study used a qualitative research approach. Nieuwenhuis (2007:55) maintains that qualitative research acknowledges an interactive relationship between the researcher and the participants, the participants' environment and their construction of experiences.

In a qualitative study, the researcher presumes that the world is made up of people with their own understanding of concepts, attitudes, values and belief systems (Maree2007:58). In order to investigate the reasons for teacher absenteeism, the study explore the educators' experiences by constructing a reality by means of interviews. My interaction with

the participants enabled me to construct concepts regarding the reality of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell et al. 2007:59).

The qualitative research design was deemed to be an appropriate approach in enabling the researcher to explore the understanding of teacher absenteeism because the questions were based on a general and broad understanding of the perceptions and experiences of the participants. Creswell et al (2007:157) confirm the notion of the exploration and understanding of a central theme as a goal of a qualitative research study.

In qualitative research it is possible to purposefully select a small sample size of participants who, in this study, shared their experiences and perceptions of teacher absenteeism. Thus, this approach allowed for data collection in the natural setting of educators in a school environment (Creswell et al 2007:258).

Qualitative research presents data as a narrative (McMillan & Schumacher 2001:15). According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research involves an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context. The researcher used the qualitative method for the purposes of this study because the study aimed to explore phenomena in depth. In addition, the study used flexible instruments such as semi-structured interviews.

The following are features of a good qualitative study:

- The study focuses on the field.
- The study relies on the researcher as an instrument.
- The study is interpretive.
- The language usage and the voice are of the utmost importance.
- The study is particular in nature.
- The study is believable and trustworthy (Janesick 1998:8–9).

The qualitative research approach was appropriate for this study as the case study explored teachers' individual experiences, understanding and perceptions of absenteeism. Certain assumptions guided the research as regards the perceptions and experiences of teacher absenteeism.

For the purpose of this empirical study research investigation, a qualitative research design was used rather than a quantitative research design because it was the researcher's intention to attain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and experiences of teacher absenteeism. A qualitative research design may be viewed as a collection of approaches to an investigation study or inquiry. Ramphele (2000:41) states that, in ensuring deep understanding of a phenomenon in a study, the researcher ought to rely on verbal, visual, auditory and olfactory data.

#### **4.4 Basic qualitative research design**

In the construction of any empirical study, a researcher has a choice as regards the research design processes. The researcher should choose the research design which may best answer the research question which has been formulated.

Chabalala (2005:42) explains design as the plan and structure of the investigation and which is used to obtain evidence in order to answer the research question. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:166) define a research design as a plan for selecting subjects, research sites and data collection strategies and procedures to answer the research question(s). The research design provides a direction and a clear focus to the research activities and will alert the researcher to possible problems with regards to the phenomenon under investigation. According to Creswell et al. (2007:70) the research design is a plan or strategy which moves from the underlying philosophical assumptions to specifying the selection of the respondents. On the other hand, McMillan and Schumacher (2001:30–31) describe research design as a procedure which is used in conducting a study, including when, for whom and under what conditions the data will be gathered. Huysamen (1995:10) considers a research design as a blue print according to which the research questions being investigated will be answered through the data collection. In addition, despite the fact that there are certain

limitations and cautions associated with each research design the research design provides an indication of how the data should be analysed (McMillan &Schumacher 2001:31).

This study used a basic qualitative research design. In a basic qualitative research study a particular individual, programme or event is studied in depth for a defined period of time (Leedy&Ormrod2005:135). According to Merriam (2009:23), the basic qualitative research study is derived philosophically from constructionists through phenomenological symbolic interaction because it is used by teachers who are interested in:

- How people interpret their experiences,
- How they construct their world, and
- What meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam 2009: 23).

The overall purpose of the basic qualitative research study is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences (Merriam 2009: 23), but in the educational qualitative research domain, it intends to improve daily practices through in-depth understanding of effective educational processes (Merriam 1992).

This research study involves a basic qualitative research methods to uncover reasons that propels teachers to be absent in the seven secondary schools in Middelburg, Mpumalanga.

#### **4.5 Research methods**

The research methods that were used in this research study included interviews and a document analysis.

In this exploratory, qualitative research study the researcher interacted with the respondents in their natural setting. This approach rests on the phenomenological approach. Interviews, semi-structured interviews and a document analysis were used in order to collect the required data. The phenomenological approach is directed towards an understanding of the views by the participants in terms of their day-to-day understanding of the concept under investigation (McMillan &Schumacher 2001:36)

### **4.5.1 Sampling selection**

According to Melville and Goddard (1996:29), sampling refers to a group from the population under study and which is the subject of the research because it is often neither practical nor possible to study an entire population. The selection of the participants to interact in the investigation begins with a description of the profiles of those persons and who all possess the same knowledge of the topic under investigation.

Teacher absenteeism is a phenomenon which is lived and experienced by teachers. This meant that it was possible to select teachers in the area under investigation to participate in the research study. According to Merriam (1998), as a researcher one needs to consider where to observe, when to observe, whom to observe and what to observe. In short, a researcher needs to select time, people, site and events.

#### **4.5.1.1 Purposive sampling**

A non-probability sampling known as purposive sampling was used in the study. Purposive sampling was, thus, the method of sampling which the researcher used to handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of the researcher's judgement of their typicality.

Purposive sampling involves a series of strategic choices about, with whom, where, and how a researcher will conduct his/her research. Thus, purposive sampling is directly linked to the researcher's objectives. This, in turn, implies that there is no single or best sampling strategy. Patton (1990) maintains that purposive sampling enables the researcher to select subject participants based on certain individual characteristics.

The researcher in this study interviewed teachers from seven different school backgrounds, sampled from both rural and urban areas in the same circuit. The schools were selected on the basis of the rate of teacher absenteeism within the last two years and which was drawn from the annual survey of each school in the circuit. The following demographics were considered, namely, gender, age and race.

Using both urban and rural schools enabled the researcher to obtain a clear picture while also providing the researcher with valid experiences across two different environments in



one circuit. The seven different school environments also revealed the differences between affluent schools and less affluent schools in terms of the resources available with which to address the issue of teacher absenteeism.

Twenty teachers from both rural and urban schools were interviewed. The twenty teachers included a number of females and males, five HODs (heads of departments), two deputy principals and seven principals. The study also included three retired principal and two circuit inspectors. Non-teaching staff members were also interviewed and included five support staff and two union members. The aim of the interviews conducted with the participants was to explore the reasons for and the impact of teacher stress related absences. Thus, a naturalistic method of data collection was used (Cohen et al 2007: 167).

In order to sample the participants, the document analysis of Z8—the document which both teachers and non-teaching staff sign every day in order to clock in and out— was of the utmost importance. Of the 20 educator participants in the seven schools, their information was drawn from the Z8 document that is used on a daily basis. This ensured that the data gathered was rich with information from teachers who were often absent as well as those teachers affected by their absence.

#### **4.5.1.2 Snowball sampling**

Snowball sampling was used when the researcher experienced a ‘hidden population’ in terms of which the participants become inaccessible to the researcher. However, some of the participants referred other participants to the researcher. According to Maree (2007), snowball sampling is also known as chain referral sampling. In this case study the researcher asked participants to suggest one or two members of the staff who were always absent and/or one or two whose rate of absenteeism was low.

The researcher interviewed the seven principals primarily in order to collect their views on handling and dealing with teacher absence at school. In order to gain more information from the principals the researcher also requested relevant documents that pertained to teacher absenteeism.

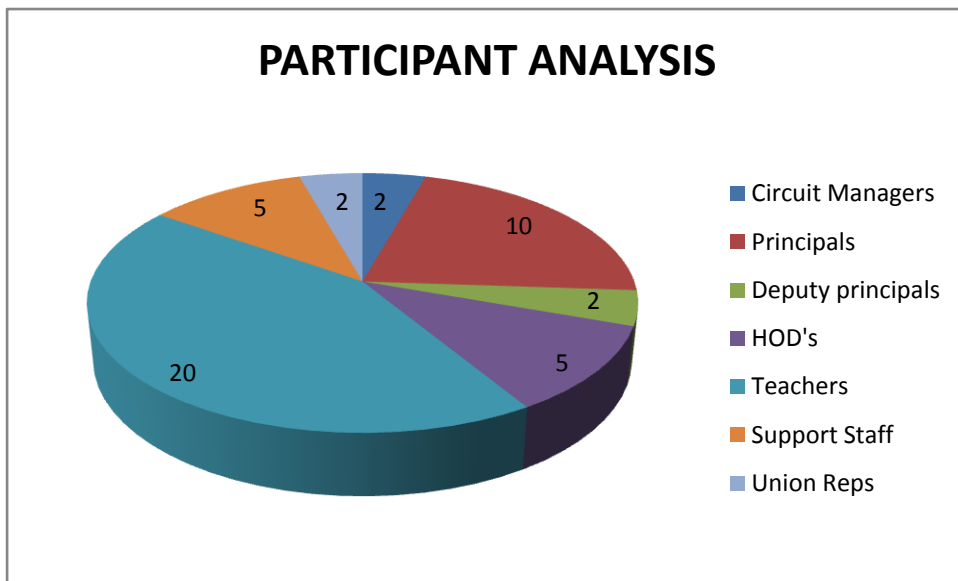
The researcher also interviewed three retired principals who were able to provide valuable information without compromising the reputation and credibility of schools, teachers and the Department of Education.

#### **4.5.2 *Summary of participant sampling***

As part of the data collection strategy, in-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted. White and black participants, both male and female, from seven rural and urban schools participated in the study. These participants included one retired circuit inspector, one current circuit inspector, three retired principals, seven current principals, two deputy principals, five HODs, twenty teachers, two union representatives and five support staff.

For the purposes of the data analysis, the responses were divided into different sets, categories and symbols and, therefore, the following codes were used:

- Retired Circuit Inspector = RCI(1)
- Current Circuit Inspector=CCI(2)
- Retired Principal=RP
- Union Representative =UR
- Current Principals=CP
- Deputy Principal=DP
- Head of Department=HOD
- Teacher =T
- Support Staff=SS



**Figure 4.1: The number of participants per category**

The table below presents a summary of the participants who contributed to the study, depicted in various categories, using pseudonyms, showing their experience in the teaching field and their qualifications, race and gender.

**Table 4.2: Participants' experience and qualifications**

No	Participants	No	Name	Experience in the profession	Qualifications	Race	Gender
	Retired circuit inspector	1	RCI(1)	36 years in teaching 10 years as a circuit inspector 14 years as a principal 12 years as a PL 1 teacher.	Bed(Hons) Management	Black	Male
	Circuit inspector	1	CCI(2)	12 years as a school inspector in Middelburg No1	BCom (Hons) Diploma in Public. Management	Coloured	Male
	Retired principals	3	RP1	33 years in the profession and 23 years as a principal.	Bed(Hons) Education	Black	Male
RP2			36 years in the profession and 20 years as a principal.	Bed(Hons) Zulu	Black	Male	
RP3			40 years in the profession and 5 years as a principal.	Bed(Hons) Sepedi	Black	Male	
	Principals	7	CP (A)	33 years in the profession	PTC Diploma In Teaching	Black	Male
CP (B)			28 years in the profession	Med (Zulu)	Black	Female	
CP (C)			33 years in the profession	BA	Coloured	Male	
CP (D)			24 years in the profession	BSc(Hons)/Chemistry	White	Male	
CP (E)			26 years in the profession	MEd in Education	Black	Male	
CP (F)			21 years in the profession	Bed(Hons)	Black	Male	
CP (G)			15 years in the profession	BA	Black	Male	
	Deputies	2	DP 1	18 years in the profession	Bed(Hons) Management	Black	Male

No	Participants	No	Name	Experience in the profession	Qualifications	Race	Gender
			DP 2	18 years in the profession	BA/HED	Black	Male
	HOD's	5	HOD 1	17 years of teaching	BA/HED	Black	Male
			HOD 2	14 years of teaching	ACE in Education	Black	Male
			HOD 3	32 years of teaching	BEd(Hons)	Black	Male
			HOD 4	19 years of teaching	PGD(HIV)	Black	Male
			HOD 5	33 years of teaching	NPDE	Black	Male
	Teachers	20	T 1	23 years in the profession	ACE in Physics/Diploma	White	Male
			T 2	23 years in the profession	Degree	Black	Female
			T 3	27 years in the profession	Bed(Hons)	Black	Male
			T 4	2 years 9 months in the profession	BSc	Black	Male
			T 5	14 years in the profession	Diploma	Black	Female
			T 6	11 years in the profession	BTech	Black	Female
			T 7	12 years in the profession	Degree in Education	Black	Female
			T 8	4 year 6 months in the profession	BSc (Chemistry)	Black	Male
			T 9	12 years in the profession	BEd(Hons) Agriculture	Black	Male
			T 10	17 years in the profession	PGD(HIV/AIDS)	Black	Male
			T 11	3 years in the profession	Degree in Education	Black	Male
			T 12	28 years in the profession	HED	Black	Male

No	Participants	No	Name	Experience in the profession	Qualifications	Race	Gender
			T 13	10 years in the profession	STD	Black	Male
			T 14	7 years in the profession	ACE in English	Black	Female
			T 15	7 years in the profession	B.Sport Science	White	Female
			T 16	30 years in the profession	Diploma in Electronics	White	Female
			T 17	21 years in the profession	BA	White	Female
			T18	10 years in the profession	HED	Black	Male
			T 19	12 years in the profession	National Teacher Diploma	Black	Male
			T 20	3 years	Degree	White	Male
	Support staff (admin staff)	5	SS 1	15 years	Matriculation Exemption	Black	Female
			SS 2	6 years	Diploma in Management	Black	Female
			SS 3	23 years	Diploma	Black	Female
			SS 4	18 years	Human Resource	Black	Male
			SS 5	21 years	Diploma in Public Management	Black	Female
	Unions	2	UR 1	5 years in the regional office	Labour Law Diploma	Black	Male
			UR 2	5 years in the provincial office	B.Ed(Hons) Management	Black	Male
	Total participants	43					

## 4.6 Data collection strategy

Data collection refers to the process of gathering data about the phenomenon under investigation. Thus, the data collection strategy refers to the way in which the researcher gathers the information or data. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:39), research may be classified through examining the strategy used in a study in order to collect data. The data collection strategy, through interviews, enabled the researcher to engage in semi-structured conversations. These conversations, in turn, fostered a good relationship between the researcher and the participants. The in-depth probing of any emerging issues was used during the in-depth, open-ended interviews so as to enable the researcher to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of teacher absence.

Kajornboon (2005:1) views the data collection strategy as an essential component of conducting a research study. In the section on the data collection the researcher will address how and when the data for this study was gathered. Creswell (2005:202) lists the following five steps involved in the data collection process in a qualitative research study:

- selection of participants and site identification for the research,
- gaining access to the data,
- determining the data to be collected,
- developing data collection forms and
- using ethical considerations in administering the research.

In order to collect rich data from the participants, a series of interviews in the form of open-ended and in-depth interviews was conducted.

### 4.6.1 Interviews

According to De Vos et al (2002:300), interviews are regarded as a primary source of data collection. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) further state that the way in which individuals perceive and make sense of the world is extremely important in an interview. Cohen et al (2000: 267) argue that the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life but that it is part of life itself and its human embeddedness is inescapable. On the other

hand, Melville and Goddard (1996:44) consider interviews to comprise one-on-one verbal interaction between the researcher and the respondent and they state that it is essential that interviews should have a plan.

Through the interviews the teachers shared their individual views in response to the questions the researcher posed to them. A research journal was kept in order to record everything the researcher had observed during the process of collecting the data. The researcher also noted down the feelings, experiences and impressions from the participants.

Kajornboon (2010:2) regards interviews as a systematic way of talking and listening to participants and states that interviews may also be regarded as a way in which to collect data through individual conversations. Thus, an interview is a research instrument which is used in order to elicit desired answer. The researcher decided to use the interview as a research instrument tool for the following reasons:

- the need to acquire personal data,
- the opportunities for probing and
- the envisaged positive response (Kajournboon 2010:3).

Based on the above reasons for the interviews, as provided by Kajournboon (2010:3), the researcher decided to interview 46 participants who all provided rich data through their personal experiences and perceptions.

As suggested by Opie (2004:231), the interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to probe for the in-depth experiences and perceptions of the participants about teacher absenteeism. The researcher also focused on body language of the participants throughout the various interviews. In short, therefore, the interviews enabled the researcher to

- understand experiences of the teachers with regards to teacher absenteeism
- understand perceptions of the teachers with regards to teacher absenteeism



- explore the reasons that were provided by teachers for their absence from school
- explore the root causes of teacher absenteeism
- explore possible ways in which to curb teacher absenteeism at school.

Through the medium of the interviews, the teachers shared their individual views in response to the questions that the researcher posed to them. In addition, the researcher kept a research journal in order to record everything that the researcher had observed during the process of collecting data, particularly feelings, experiences and impressions from the participants.

#### **4.6.2 Document analysis**

According to Bell (1993:68), documents may be regarded as the written impressions left by human beings on physical objects. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:42) argue that a document is a record of past events that is written or printed. Documents may include letters, diaries, reports, policy statements, and minutes of meetings, Z83s, anecdotal notes and documents.

According to Creswell (2002:209), documents provide valuable information to assist the researcher to comprehend the central theme being studied while representing a good source of text or words in qualitative studies.

For the purposes of this study, the following documents were studied over a period of two months:

##### **1. Z8(Daily attendance register/time book)**

This is a departmental/official document that teachers sign in the morning and when they leave work. The information in this document has a record of arrival and departure times and the methods used by principals to control teacher absence and teacher movement in and out of the school. According to Reddy et al (2010:38), these documents controlled by the principal and kept in his/her office.

## **2. Daily report register**

Some schools use report register to record those teachers who inform the administration clerks of the reasons for their absence and late arrival telephonically. The researcher scrutinised this document in order to uncover the various excused and unexcused reasons for late coming and absenteeism.

## **3. Daily period register**

Most of the schools in the Nkangala Region in Mpumalanga use a period register as proof that a particular teacher has been to class to deliver the subject content. Briefly, the period register contains columns for a subject, lesson topic and the teacher's signature. The purpose of scrutinising this document was to find proof that learners have been attended and to check whether contact time has been honoured.

## **4. Leave forms**

A leave form is a form that must be filled in by a teacher who intends to take a leave for absence from an institution. According to Reddy et al,(2010:39), this form must be kept available in either a clerk's office or the principal's office. It is completed either in triplicate or in duplicate, depending on the province. These forms were essential for the purposes of this study because they indicated who had been absent on particular day and date. It is possible to use this form to conduct an analysis of lost contact time.

## **5. Movement register**

This register records the movement of teachers in and out of school. Teachers indicate their time of leaving and their reasons for leaving the school after permission has been granted by the principal. The researcher checked for the regular movement of teachers from school to their various destinations and also for the time spent outside of the school.

## **6. Relief register for absent teachers**

According to Reddy et al (2010:40), this register was created specifically in connection with the supervision of classes where a colleague is absent and it may, however, be determined every morning. The researcher checked for the principal's provision on classroom attendance and the supervision of learners who were not attended by a teacher. The

researcher also checked the appropriateness of the substitute and the promptness in arranging for a substitute.

## **7. Incident reports/log book**

This is a book in which incidents pertaining to the school are recorded daily. Reddy et al (2010:40) give the following examples of the information noted in this book, namely, warnings to teacher on any serious matter, school visits by the departmental officials, unusual incidents, violent incidents and school robberies. The researcher also checked the way in which the principals managed the log book and whether the principal indicated or recorded teacher absenteeism as a serious matter.

## **4.7 Data analysis**

According to Cohen et al (2007:86–87) data analysis involves the reduction and interpretation of data. For the purposes of this study the researcher reduced the body of data which had been obtained from the participants and the document analysis by coding the data into cluster or categories. The data generated by the participants was structured into a manageable format before being analysed. In structuring the data, the researcher took into account what Creswell (2009:183) has said on the structuring of qualitative data for analysis purpose and, thus, he analysed each participant's response.

In order to avoid drawing preliminary conclusions and influencing the type of data collected, the researcher began the data analysis during the interviewing process and was backed up by an extensive literature review on teacher absenteeism. According to Leedy and Ormrod, (2005:134–136), the following steps are required to analyse data:

- *Categorisation of data*: Data categorised into clusters for meaningful interpretation
- *Detailed organisation of each case*: Each case is studied specifically in its own context in order to arrange the specific details and occurrence of activities.

- *Interpretation of each case:* In each case, the relevant documents were interpreted to ascertain the occurrence of certain activities in relation to certain meanings and perceptions.
- *Patterns identification:* Themes were established through the identification of certain patterns that occur within the school system. The interpretation of data leads to the characterisation of each case, thus enabling the building up of the information required to accomplish, through the data analysis, the relevant information needed.
- *Generalisation through each case synthesis:* The construction of each case under investigation was given an overall picture thus providing a clear conclusion that lacks doubt.

## **4.8 Ethical considerations**

The study was directed by the ethical guidelines which form the standards according to which both the researcher's conduct and also the participants' conduct are evaluated. These ethical guidelines formed the basis of the research interaction between the researcher and the research participants throughout the research study.

Melville and Goddard (1996: 113) consider ethical issues in terms of a morally acceptable research topic as well as morally acceptable methods of researching a particular topic. Cohen et al (2000:56) state that ethics is "a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others. Ethics says while truth is good, respect for human dignity ...respect for human nature" is important. Thus, ethics deals primarily with what is right or wrong and what is good or bad.

The following ethical considerations guided this research study:

### **4.8.1 Voluntary participation**

The principle of voluntary participation requires that the research participants not to be forced to participate in the research study (Trochim 2001:24). Accordingly, the participants were informed that their participation in the research study was purely voluntary and that

they had the freedom to withdraw at any time, should they wish to do so (Creswell et al 2007:298). After obtaining permission to interview teachers from the Mpumalanga Department of Education, the participants were visited at their workplace to request that they participate in the study.

#### **4.8.2 *Informed consent***

A letter of consent in which the research procedure and process were described was given to each prospective participant (see attached Appendix D). The prospective participants were given the opportunity to read through the letters of consent and also to request the researcher for further clarity if they needed to do so. Thus, the prospective research participants were given a chance to familiarise themselves with the contents of the informed consent form before committing themselves to participating in the research study (Creswell et al 2007:298).

Farnham and Pilmlott (1995:47) define informed consent as the knowledge of participants that they have the right to exercise their choice, free from manipulation, to engage in a particular study. Trochim (2001:24) further argues that informed consent means that the participants must be informed about the procedures and the risks involved.

Weldeman and Kruger (1994:172) are of the opinion that participants need to be informed of the research intention and the effect it may have on them as participants. In this study the prospective participants were informed of the researcher's intention not to mention either their names or the institutions involved as measures to ensure their anonymity in this research project. All the participants knew and understood what the research entailed, why it was being conducted and the effect it may have on them.

#### **4.8.3 *Protection from harm***

The researcher assured the participants that they would not be harmed in any way nor would they be exposed to physical or psychological harm during the study.

#### **4.8.4 Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality**

Anonymity and confidentiality are two concepts that protect the privacy of the research participants while implying that information that would identify them will not be divulged to any person (Trochim 2001:24).

In an effort to protect the participants, their identities were kept unknown. In other words, the researcher did not use their real names or the names of the institutions to which they were attached. Creswell (2009:88–90) argues that the anonymity of research participants in social research must be respected and, thus, the researcher used pseudonyms for both the participants and the institutions.

Personal participant information, transcripts and audio-tapes were kept safe by the researcher.

The researcher provided a rich description of the data but the researcher ensured that it was not possible to identify the schools depicted in the area under investigation.

#### **4.9 Limitations and delimitations**

Potential challenges in the study came about as a result of various limitations. Limitations are acknowledged to be constraints that may be imposed on a study and to understand the context in which research claims are made (Vithal&Jansen 2004:35). Potential limitations that were encountered in this study included the fact that it may have been difficult to gain access to various institutions despite the Department of Education granting permission, the time available did not allow the researcher to expand the research even to other provinces, resources may not have been available or else they were limited, the credibility of the information from the respondents, the availability and non-availability of information and the exaggeration of information provided by respondents in an attempt to impress the researcher. It sometimes happens that participants will try to withhold important information.

The fact that the study focused on a case study of selected individual participants in particular schools in a particular province in a particular district and in a particular circuit, means, according to Punch (2006: 69), that the findings of the research will not necessarily be generalisable to the other provinces, districts, circuits and school situations and culture.

In view of the fact that the study involved document analysis, some of the principals became sceptical and refused to make their school documents available for perusal, for example, attendance registers (Z8) and log books.

The reflections of the participants in the case study were not necessarily the feelings and assumptions of other participants elsewhere, in this country or even in the rest of the world.

The researcher may have been biased in the interpretation of the data and the findings as a result of the fact that the data was collected in a few schools in Mpumalanga Province only. The limitations of participants as a source of information may also have jeopardised the generalisability of the findings.

#### **4.10 Trustworthiness and transferability**

Bell (2004:139) indicates that there is always a sense of bias that may dilute the trustworthiness and the credibility of research because the researcher is a human being who may influence the participants' responses.

In order to ensure the credibility and the trustworthiness of the research findings it is essential that the researcher

- tape record all the interviews and transcribe them verbatim and
- ensure that the participants verify the transcribed data.

In qualitative research, unlike in quantitative research, the researchers do not generalise the findings. However, their aim is to expand the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Schumacher & McMillan 1993:394). Thus, the results of this study may be

informative for other teachers, school managers and departmental officials in Nkangala District in Mpumalanga, and the Middelburg circuits.

According to Maree (2007:113), trustworthiness is regarded as the most important procedural aspect in the qualitative research method and it involves checking the credibility of the findings that are deduced from the data analysed. In this study the researcher applied the following strategies in order to ensure trustworthiness:

#### ***4.10.1 Validity and verifications***

The outcome of any research study findings is of the utmost importance (Creswell et al. 2007:113–114). However, the fact that the data is processed by means of data analysis assists the researcher to validate the findings.

Copies of the draft report were given to the participants for their comments. According to Maree (2007:114), this helps to verify the validity of the data analysis process. Each transcription was verified by the respective participant. Babbie (2005:314) supports the notion that the verified transcription must be included into the final story.

#### ***4.10.2 Transferability***

The concept of transferability refers to the degree to which the research results may be generalised to the wider population (Cohen et al 2002:109). Readers should be able to generalise the research findings to any situation similar to the situation to which the findings refer. The provision of in-depth descriptions with details of the research findings assists the reader to find commonalities in situations.

Sufficient rich data provided by the researcher assists the reader and the user of the research findings to determine whether the study is transferable. Lincoln and Guba (1985:316) state that the researcher must not provide the paradigm for transferability but that readers must create it through their conclusions.



### **4.10.3 *Triangulation and credibility***

The credibility of the study was also demonstrated through the triangulation which was used to check for concurrence of data. Methodological triangulation was the type of triangulation used in this research study and it refers to the use of two or more methods of data collection (Cohen et al 2007:141). In this research study, the researcher conducted interviews and analysed school documents.

### **4.11 The role of the researcher**

In the qualitative research design the researcher plays a major role in the data collection process in trying to obtain valid data with which to answer the research questions. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995:59–60), the researcher is an instrument because the researcher enters into the lives of the participants. However, the researcher's role may vary in terms of the amount of time spent in the field. Sidhu (2001:275) states that the researcher's role may vary depending on the effects of the researcher's impact on the social interaction and the participants' social interaction with the social aspect of life. The researcher's role in data collection may be as a complete observer, a full participant, a participant observer and/or an insider observer. In this research study the researcher became a full participant.

The researcher understands of teacher absenteeism as a deputy principal in a township school and had been based on a lack of information about the causes of absenteeism and a misunderstanding of the daily experiences of teachers in the system. As regards the phenomenon of teacher absenteeism, the researcher's understanding was that teachers absented themselves at school because of the number of days available to them and because they did not want to forfeit these days if they were not utilised. However, the reality is that teachers are stressed and overworked and this contributes directly to their absence from school. The researcher's experience during the study was an eye opener to a new worldview as it emerged from the feelings expressed by the teachers about the system for which they work.

#### **4.12 Research reflection**

The strategies outlined above assisted the researcher to avoid being bias and not to express personal feelings. Thus, these strategies enabled the researcher to correct certain social assumptions and philosophical perceptions about teacher absenteeism (Creswell et al 2007:113–114).

#### **4.13 Conclusion**

This chapter explained the research design and the research methodology applied in the study. In addition, the chapter discussed the research instruments and the purpose for which they were used; the participants, sampling procedure, data collection and analysis techniques, as well as ethical issues.

Chapter 5 presents the data analysis and data interpretation in order to determine the way in which teachers understand and perceive teacher absenteeism from school.

## CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter on the data analysis begins with a thick description of the seven schools that the researcher visited and the state of absenteeism in each school. This is followed by a narrative that aims to answer the following questions:

#### 5.1.1 *Research question*

- 5.1.1.1 How do educators in South Africa experience and perceive teacher absenteeism?
- 5.1.2 Sub questions
  - 5.1.2.1 What are the views of teachers and other stakeholders' of teacher absenteeism?
  - 5.1.2.2 How does teacher absenteeism impact on teaching and learning?
  - 5.1.2.3 How do school principals and HODs manage absenteeism in schools?
  - 5.1.2.4 To what extent, and how, does stress impact on teacher absenteeism?

### 5.2 Data analysis

The data were collected by means of a document analysis and interviews. All the transcripts of the interviews were typed and coded. The understanding of data which was collected in the research field was examined in detailed and themes and sub-themes were created (Creswell, 2002: 265). Based on the questions above and as a result of the interviews which were conducted during the process of data collection, the following themes were developed:

- an understanding of the concept of teacher absenteeism,
- the impact of teacher absenteeism on teaching and learning,
- teacher absenteeism and the unions,
- policies, directives and instruments that regulate teacher absenteeism,
- teachers' reasons for their absenteeism from school,
- the causes of teacher absenteeism and
- possible solutions to teacher absenteeism.

The researcher also examined certain documents at each school in order to explore the following:

- the Acts and policies that are applicable to schools,
- the implementation of various leave policies at schools and
- measures for controlling teacher absenteeism at schools.

### 5.3 Description of the schools visited and the documents analysed

The seven schools at which the data was collected were given the following pseudonyms: School A, School B, School C, School D, School E, School F and School G and the case of each school was established through the perusal of each schools documents that relates to teacher absenteeism to analyse and investigate the impact teacher absenteeism has on teaching and learning. The principals were identified as Principal A, Principal B, Principal C, Principal D, Principal E, Principal F, and Principal G. The data from each school was then compiled using data from the document analysis and the interviews.

The following table presents a summary of the participants per school and the documents analysed:

**Table 5.1: Participants and documents**

School	Principals	Deputy Principals	HODs	Teachers	Documents
A	1		1	3	Z8, movement register
B	1		1	4	Period register
C	1		1	3	Administrative periods (substitute roster)
D	1		1	5	Z8, 'Toesigrooster'(substitute programme)
E	1	1		2	Period register, SMT monitoring tool and class attendance control sheet
F	1	1		1	Leave form and medical certificate
G	1		1	2	Z8, leave form, movement register and period register
Total	7	2	5	20	

For the purpose of understanding the participants' codes and the data analysis, the participants' codes are provided below:

**Table 5.2: Participant coding**

No	Participants	Coding
1.	Retired Circuit Inspector = RCI(1)	CI 1
2.	Current Circuit Inspector=CCI(2)	CI 2
3.	Retired Principal=RP	RP
4.	Union Representative =UR	UR
5.	Current Principal=CP	P
6.	Deputy Principal=DP	DP
7.	Head of Department=HOD	HOD
8.	Teacher =T	T
9.	Support Staff=SS	SS

### 5.3.1 *The schools*

#### **School A–rural mine school (30 km out of town)**

School A is a rural school with old, dilapidated buildings, insufficient classrooms and few learners. The school has 187 learners' enrolled, six teachers and is situated 30 kilometres from town. The school has a principal and one HOD as members of the SMT. The school operates under the auspices of the Department of Education but is within the jurisdiction of a mine. It is a combined school which caters for Grades 1 to 9. The multi-grade classes are a challenge because of the lack of sufficient teachers.

While the school boasts of a general atmosphere which promotes teaching and learning, it is threatened by the possibility of closure as the mine intends to restructure its infrastructure. Another challenge is the looming possibility of teacher redeployment since the number of learner enrolment is decreasing on an annual basis.

The school's Z8 reflect that the teachers sign on their arrival and their departure from school. If a teacher does not sign this is highlighted in a different colour by the principal and this, in turn, indicates that that particular teacher has been irresponsible. The Z8 also indicates which teachers are absent as a result of ill health and other commitments. It would

appear that the principal is consistent in the monitoring of the Z8. The only challenge with the Z8 is that teachers seem to sign at exactly the same time which may indicate an automatic, repetitive, fill in exercise rather than a real time capturing of their comings and goings.

The movement register shows that the teachers frequently leave the school on private matters rather than on official business. In most instances, when they request to leave the school they do not come back and, if they do come back, they come back at the departure time. The movement register reflects that teachers sometimes leave the school between 8h30 and 12h30.

According to the teachers, teacher absenteeism is due to matters beyond their control, including transportation to the school because it is located far from the town. The school principal is convinced that teacher absenteeism is primarily due to the official leave to which teachers are entitled.

#### **School B—rural agricultural school (40 km from town)**

School B is a rural agricultural school which is situated on a farm. The school has 376 learners with 14 teachers and is located 40 kilometres from the town. It is facing a lack of teachers due to the lack of resources and dilapidated school infrastructure. Teachers in this school are attracted to urban area schools because of better working environment and close proximity to town. Most of teachers are enthralled by what the town offers in terms of personal improvement and development.

The period registers reflect good teacher attendance in class except where a teacher is physically absent from school for the following reasons: union matters, urgent matters at home which include taking care of a child who is sick at home, and/or a funeral of a close member of the family. The perusal of the Z8 showed that the teachers always arrive at school on time. The school is facing the challenge of a shortage of teachers in some subjects.

### **School C–Semi-urban school (8 km from town)**

School C is a multiracial school situated in the coloured community but with predominantly black learners. The cultural dominance of the coloured community plays a vital role in the school which has 1413 learners with 56 teachers. The school is categorised as a semi-urban school and is located 8 kilometres out of the town. The school prides itself on good results as, according to the information provided and evidence pasted on the walls, from 2007 to 2012 the school's matriculation pass rate was between 70 and 95%.

The medium of instruction is English and Afrikaans and learners are encouraged to use both languages, although there are few learners in the Afrikaans classes.

The document entitled '*Toesigrooster*' (substitute roster or administrative periods) reflects that teachers are able to substitute for each other when a particular teacher is absent from school. The document reflects period numbers and the RCL (learner council representative) who takes the initiative to call a teacher who is on standby. It would seem that this instrument helps to overcome the problems encountered when a teacher is absent from school. Although the document does not curb teacher absenteeism it directly addresses the learners' needs at school.

The teachers view teacher absenteeism as linked directly to a lack of motivation and the ever changing curriculum while the school principals ascribe teacher absenteeism to the political and policy changes which have taken place within such a short space of time

### **School D-Urban school in the middle of town**

School D is an urban school, situated in the middle of the town and, thus, it is close in proximity to all activities of interest to the school and the community. The school is multi-racial with 1069 learners and 42 teachers. It is a former Model C school and has sufficient financial and human resources. The staff is dominated by white teachers whose culture of teaching and learning does not include teacher absenteeism.

This school uses the instrument document '*Toesigrooster*' (substitute rooster) which is used by the teachers who are available to stand in for those who are absent on a particular day. In addition, there are always student teachers available who are doing their teaching practices. As a result of its good financial standing, this school is able to employ teachers who are paid by the school governing body. According to the principal, he is informed telephonically about a teacher's absence before 7h00 in the morning and, thus, he is able to plan for the day's substitution for that particular subject.

The school's Z8 reflects that the teachers are present on a daily basis and that, in most cases, they report between 7h00 and 7h16 in the morning.

### **School E– Township School**

School E is a township school that has been characterised by poor Grade 12 results in the past six years, that is the years between 2007 and 2012. The school has 589 learners with 20 teachers and is classified as an urban school. The school is situated in a predominantly black community. The principal is constantly visited by the departmental officials who are trying to assist with the school's Grade 12 results. The school has an old building but it is well maintained.

The school's period register reflects that the teachers' classroom attendance and actual teaching are monitored by the LRC (Learner Representative Council) in various classes and this, in turn, makes it easier for the SMT to take care of those learners who do not have a teacher. The teachers sign in daily and appear to respect the importance of this document. The learners (RCL) make subject or learning area entries as well as the time of the teachers' arrival in the classroom and their departure time. These entries reflect good classroom attendance, almost every day, on the part of the teachers.

The SMT class monitoring timetable tool is utilised strictly by the SMT members in controlling and monitoring classroom attendance by the teachers. It contains the names of the SMT members as well as the periods and days on which a particular SMT member has to monitor teachers' classroom attendance and provide feedback to the principal.



The school also uses the class attendance control sheet on a daily basis to check on aspects, such as time on task, in order to curb teacher absenteeism at the school. Most of the documents reveal that the teachers appear to respect time and this, in turn, means they take care of the learners. This document (tool) is properly controlled by the SMT members on a daily basis.

### **School F–New township school**

School F is a township school in newly occupied buildings although there is a shortage of classrooms. The school has 936 learners and 36 teachers. It appears that the principal is sick for most of the time and the school discipline and order is maintained by the SMT. The teacher absenteeism is attributed to a lack of effective management while the Grade 12 results reflect a decline in percentage since 2008. The authority of the SMT is, for the most part, undermined by the teachers and this directly promotes teacher absenteeism at the school.

The school movement register shows that the teachers are permitted by the office of the principal to leave the school between 8h45 and 12h30 and they usually do not come back to school. The teachers' reasons for their leaving the school, as stated in the movement register, include consulting a doctor, union matters, teacher workshops, personal matters, meetings outside of the school and the moderation of teachers' work at venues outside of the school premises.

The period registers present a positive picture of good teacher attendance in class and are controlled effectively by the learner class representatives on a daily basis. Most of the teachers arrive in class on time and also leave class on time.

### **School G–Urban school (11 km out of town)**

School G is located on the outskirts of the town and it has a newly appointed, young and vibrant principal who is eager to transform the school. The school has 576 learners and 19 teachers and it is approximately 11 kilometres out of the town. The school is classified as an urban school. It boasts a culture which is conducive to teaching and learning and teachers and the learners appear to be highly motivated.

The school's Z8 reflects that there is a good attendance of teachers at school. This is supported by the period register. If a teacher is absent from school the principal indicates the reason for the teacher's absence in the Z8. These reasons include absent without a reason, family matters, finance, workshops, etc.

The movement register is properly controlled and monitored by the principal through the individual teacher movement register. The movement register indicates late arrivals and early departure times with the reasons for such late arrivals and early departures. The procedure for making entries in the movement register starts with a request to the principal and the principal then uses his discretion either to permit or deny a teacher the opportunity to leave the school campus.

The period register is used to check teacher attendance in their classrooms. The period register in this school depicts clearly the times in and times out of the class, unless a teacher is absent from school. The principal controls this period register on a weekly basis with class monitors being responsible for the entries and ensuring that the teachers sign where applicable.

Judging from the document analysis and the researcher's personal observations in the seven schools, it would appear that the documents often indicate a low rate of teacher absenteeism, although there is some sense of an automatic, repetitive, fill in exercise in some cases rather than an accurate monitoring. There are differences between the rural and urban schools and between the well-resourced schools (such as former model C schools) and poorly resourced schools (such as some schools in the locations).

However, the interviews with the various stakeholders provided a better insight into the reasons for teacher absenteeism and these will be discussed in the next section.

In order to understand the reasons for teacher absenteeism, it is important, firstly, to clarify the way in which the different stakeholders perceive teacher absenteeism.

## 5.4 The understanding of the concept of teacher absenteeism

The general understanding of teacher's absenteeism is that it refers to teachers not being at school. However, there are different levels of absenteeism, namely, being away from school, being at school but not in class, and being physically at school but mentally absent. These understandings are captured in the following excerpts from the interviews with various principals:

*The concept teacher absenteeism means the absence of the teacher at school, whether with reason or without a reason. (P2)*

*It is a teacher who is not at school and a teacher who is present and the one who is not in class but is bunking classes. (P6)*

*It is a teacher who is not at work and it is a teacher who is not in class. Teachers can be absent minded but he/she is in class. For instance, you find a teacher hiding behind group work while he/she is literally doing nothing in class. In some instances, teachers would be thinking about problems at home and about their salaries, usually month ends. (P4)*

*Teacher who is absent minded: for instance, a teacher may be physically present at school but mentally absent, especially at the end of the month.(P5)*

It is evident from the above excerpts that principals have linked teachers' absenteeism to stress; especially stress related to living conditions and 'end of the month' problems. However, teacher absenteeism is also related to pedagogy and the ability of the teachers to implement teaching methods such as group work.

According to one retired principal, there is no difference between the various levels of absenteeism and they all have an equally negative impact on education:

*Both the definitions of absenteeism that I have provided are dangerous and detrimental to the school downfall because a teacher who is at school but not in class is the same as a teacher who is absent at school. In fact, a teacher who is at school but not in class is like a thief (somebody) who steals from the department of education. Teachers bunking classes are dangerous to the system because they roam around the school gossiping and contributing to chaos. (RP3)*

In other words, the principal is referring to absenteeism as “quiet corruption” (Pettillo2012:14), a form of stealing time from the time scheduled for teaching and learning.

However, the teachers understood absenteeism in a slightly different way with some understanding teacher absenteeism as “referring to teachers who are absent at school”; others referring to teacher absenteeism as only those teachers who “stay away from work without a reason” and others maintaining that the term refers to those “who are not at school with a reason.” There were a few only who extended the definition to include those teachers who are at school but not in class:

*Is to be physically not at school and/or physically not in class, whether I have reported or not. (T4)*

*It is a teacher who is not at work or a teacher who is not taking care of learners when she or he is supposed to do so. (T11)*

There were similar responses from the union representatives and the support staff. The union representatives understood teacher absenteeism as “a teacher who is not at school or a teacher who is not in class” with the support staffs sharing the same sentiments:

*Is a teacher who is absent at school and/or a teacher who is not in class. (SS2)*

A senior manager in the department of education and at the circuit level had a similar understanding of the concept of teacher absenteeism as a teacher who is not at school and who is not in class.

*Is a teacher who is not at school and a teacher who is at school but not in class, is also absent. (RCI1)*

Thus, some of the teachers viewed teacher absenteeism as the teacher not being at school while the principals clearly demand much more from the teachers than just being physically present at school. They must also be in the classroom, both in a physical sense and mentally. The next section focuses on the way in which the various stakeholders view the impact of teacher absenteeism on the learners.

## 5.5 The impact of teacher absenteeism on teaching and learning

Two only of the seven schools in the study indicated that they had a substitute roster which catered for learners who did not have a teacher as a result of teacher absence. In these schools the teachers report directly to their respective principals by telephone and very early in the morning. This early notification enables the principal to review the substitute roster and to allocate an available teacher to substitute for the teacher who is absent from school. However, this substitution roster is made possible by the financial good standing of these two schools which makes it possible for these schools to pay substitute teachers. In addition, the presence of student teachers provides schools with a greater possibility of substituting where needed and where possible.

*Student teachers substitute the teachers who are absent from school. (T17)*

*Substitute teacher takes over the classes, as indicated by the timetable. (T18)*

*Substitute teachers are arranged according to substitute roster. (T19)*

*The school has a substitution programme done by student teachers. (T20)*

### 5.5.1 Caring for learners without a teacher

In the absence of a teacher in the classroom, this study found that the various schools experience chaos, noise, bullying and a lack of tuition. It would appear that most teachers assume that, in their absence from school and, in particular, from the classroom, the remaining teachers will take care of their learners who are not attended to. However, some schools do not have sufficient teacher human resources to substitute for an absent teacher and, thus, learners are often left unattended to. Nevertheless, in some cases, the teachers are aware that their classes will either not be attended to or will be attended to only partially by other teachers who happen to be free and, thus, in cases in which a teacher has planned for his/her absence, the learners are given work for that particular period or that day.

*I assume that those who remain behind will take responsibility. (T1)*

*No one (attend to the learners) because, we do not have enough teachers due to lack of substitute teachers.’ (T4)*

*No provision is made. In most cases they are left alone because we do not have enough teachers. (T3)*

*Sometimes teachers who are free but, in most cases, learners are alone. In a planned absence I give them (learners) work in advance. (T6)*

The unions’ representatives claim that the department has a policy on teacher substitution and that it is incumbent on schools to implement this policy so as to ensure that the learners are attended to at all times. However, the reality is that most schools do not have a substitution timetable, let alone a policy in place that makes provision for substitution. In addition, a lack of financial resources is often a significant reason for schools not being able to provide teacher substitution. Although circuit managers, through their experiences, provide strategies which include combining classes to babysit those learners who are without a teacher, a lack of control is evident in such a situation.

*According to the policy learners must always be attended (to) by the teachers, so a substitute timetable must be available but most schools do not have. (UR1)*

*Schools must arrange for a substitute. In well-to-do schools, they have parents who are ready to substitute in case a teacher is not there (absent). Other teachers who were at school, by combining classes in the lower grades and or an available teacher, who is free according to the timetable, would babysit those learners. (UR2). The school must make arrangement/there must be a provision on the timetable.*

The teachers often show little interest in what happens when they are absent from either school or the classroom because they shift their responsibilities to take care of their classes to the School Management Team (SMT).

*The deputy principal will attend to my classes in case he/she is free or available. (T11):*

*“SMT members” will take care of the learners, without any arrangement. (P12)*

Thus, there is a heavy burden on the school principals, deputy principals and HODs to ensure that learners are attended to or babysat at all times. Despite the fact that, according to some principals, Learner Representatives Council (LRCs) may be utilised to facilitate the work of a particular teacher, not all the principals would delegate their responsibilities to learners.

*HODs and senior teachers take care of the learners who are not attended because of a teacher who is absent at school. (P2)*

*We have a system in the school, it is called administrative periods where RC’s members collect learners (a class that has no teacher) who do not have a teacher for that particular period and takes them to a teacher who is free. It helps to avoid loitering and noise making around the school. (P3)*

*The class monitor/class representative takes care in the absence of a teacher. (P4)*

*“The deputy principal and or the HODs” must take care of the learners in the absence of a teacher. (P6)*

## **5.6 Teacher absenteeism and the role of the unions**

The role of the union, as regards teacher absenteeism, is somewhat implicit because the union is not directly involved in the managerial aspects of controlling and monitoring teacher absenteeism and, thus, all the union is able to do is to motivate its members not to be absent from school.

The opinion of the union of teacher absenteeism is clarified by the union’s interaction with its members in terms of the professional handling of matters affecting teaching and learning. The union vehemently oppose teacher absenteeism and, although most teachers are not sure of the role of the unions in teacher absenteeism, the following extracts illustrate their viewpoints:

*Our union is a learner-centred union which means we always advocate for professionalism in schools. We motivate teachers not to be absent because it will affect the learner performance. (UR1)*

*We are against teacher absenteeism– that is why we advocate for teaching and learning campaigns. (UR2)*

Most of the teacher participants stated that they were “*Not sure*” of the role of the unions as regards teacher absenteeism. However, one teacher stated that, *as unionist, we encourage teachers to be present at work always. (T8)*

Nevertheless, most teachers stated vehemently that “*the unions play a very minimal role in trying to curb teacher absenteeism*”. (T13)

The retired principals regarded the unions as problematic structures that become relevant only when there is an issue to be solved while the deputy principals perceived this structure as a reactive structure rather than a proactive force. There is also the view that the unions always support their members even if they commit wrong, including being absent from school.

*Unionist would only come in the office when there is a problem. (RP2 and RP3)*

*The unions are quite and only react when there is a challenge. (DP1)*

It would appear that the notion exists within the teaching profession that there is, seemingly, implicit misleading information circulating about some of the unions that their members are able to commit misdemeanours and they will still be defended. Although, there are other unions, that frankly proclaim their disassociation with teacher absenteeism. The following extracts from various interviews reveal the impartial role played by the unions:

*The unions are on the side of the teachers. They always support the teacher even when the teacher is wrong. (DP2)*

*Unions seem to have informed their members, either explicitly or implicitly, that they will always defend them when they experience problems with the employer. (HOD2)*



*Union leaders mislead their members by indirectly promising them to defend them when they are in trouble. They sometimes advise them wrongly so that they gain popularity among their members. (HOD3)*

However, some of the managers believe that the unions are supporting them, at least officially, in their fight against absenteeism. The following excerpts are evident of the notion that the unions support the SMTs in encouraging their members not to be absent from school:

*The unions are supporting the managers in implementing various policies at school. Where possible, they also advise their members accordingly. HOD3*

*Unions do not want teachers to absent themselves. They are not in favour of absenteeism. HOD5*

The members of the support staff, as observers and the administrators of the leave forms, were “not sure of the (union’s) role in teacher absenteeism” (SS2; SS4; SS3). One member of the support staff made the following categorical statement, which echoes the SMT’s point of view:

*“Unions wait for the problems, and then they defend their members.” SS2*

It emerged that, for most of the participants, the role of the unions is not clear. This is also confirmed by the Daily Sun (Sept 2011) when it stated that “we can’t have teachers talking on the phone all the time or being absent for days and still getting paid ... .is a trend in our schools today,”.... and the union is quiet on these matters (City PressSept.2012).

## **5.7 Policies, directives and instruments that regulate teacher absenteeism**

According to Du Preez (1998:32), school policies and school Acts refer to rules, procedures, guidelines, codes and directives that regulate the ongoing activities within a teaching institution and the human interactions in these institutions. These policies and directives communicate and dictate a certain culture as regards the way in which things are done within a given system. The documents in the various schools all indicated the processes and procedures involved in completing tasks in various school systems. Although most of the

policies are designed by the Department of Basic Education and cascaded to the various schools, they are intended for implementation by the teachers via the school management teams (SMTs). In view of the fact that these policies and procedures become entrenched within the system they ultimately become embedded in the individual school culture, thus resulting into a particular procedure and/or a norm.

## **5.8 Control of teacher absenteeism**

### ***5.8.1 Measures to control teacher absenteeism***

The researcher found that teacher absenteeism is controlled through the keeping of records of the leave forms submitted by the teachers. As demanded by the Department of Basic Educational most all the principals kept records of the leave forms at their school for submission while they also kept records of the submissions at schools. The following school documents were available for perusal by the researcher and they proved to be extremely valuable to the investigation into the experiences and perceptions of teachers of teacher absenteeism.

- leave register
- period register
- Z8/time book
- Z1(a)/leave form

However, although this research study suggests that documents in respect of teacher absenteeism are available, there are, nevertheless, numerous challenges as regards the submission of leave forms by the teacher to the school principal and by the school to the circuit offices. The following excerpts from the circuit managers provide an indication of the challenges which schools face as regards trying to follow the departmental directives and school instruments in their dealing with teacher absenteeism:

*We tried to follow the stipulated policies, then. Teachers would not submit in time and, in most cases, they would be followed up. (Submit only after a follow-up). (CCI 1)*

*We are trying and we are assisted by the sub-directorate of wellness that takes care of teachers' well-being and their health. Teachers do not submit in time their leave forms... (CCI 2)*

In practice, this research study discovered in the interviews that some principals and SMT members do not complete, let alone submit, their own leave forms. In addition, some teachers who are close to the principals or SMT members also do not complete the leave form. It would appear that some teachers refuse to complete the leave forms or intentionally delay their submission to the principal.

The principals, including the SMTs, acknowledged that they are aware of the above mentioned policies, instruments and directives that must be implemented in schools. It would appear that they are implementing the policies according to the department specifications and as stipulated in the policies but the principals also seem to be experiencing challenges in terms of leave form submission to which the circuit managers alluded.

The SMTs maintain that the tools provided for teacher absenteeism are sufficient to curb teacher absenteeism. In the following excerpts the SMT members acknowledge the availability of the relevant documents that deal with leave of absence from school but they indicate that measures to deal with teacher absenteeism in practice are lacking:

*I also use the time on the task tool to check the following measures: Number of hours a teacher spends at school is not the exact 7 hours that the department wants from teachers because some teachers will arrive late and leave early before knock off time. You will, therefore, realise that there will be more than enough time that will be lost for teaching. I wanted a tool that checks on the time lost because, to me, it is also teacher absenteeism from class. (P4)*

*The department does not provide a tool good enough to curb the time lost, I wanted to design it but I was advised not to. Departmental policies do not provide adequate measures to deal abruptly with teacher absenteeism. The other tools I use, is to keep records of leave forms through the 8 week leave cycle and keep copies thereof. (P5)*

*(EEA) Employment of Educators Act/8 weeks leave cycle. Other tools that can be used to regulate teacher absenteeism include leave register, leave forms, temporary incapacity and incapacity leave form. (P6)*

Of the seven principals who were interviewed, only one offered a practical solution to the problem of teacher absenteeism. This solution takes into account the role of other SMT members and also includes some kind of motivation. Some of the principals also have their own incentive systems for those teachers who are always present at school.

*I use "School policies which indicate that teachers must phone before 7h00AM. Other tools that can be used are: Z8 which is checked by the HODs, leave forms and I also use the reward system, for instance, providing lunch for teachers who are always present at school." (P7)*

The union representatives showed a clear understanding of the various tools and instruments that are available to curb teacher absenteeism although there is very little difference between their knowledge and expertise and that of the circuit managers and principals. The only valid contribution from the union representatives was the fact that they regularly initiate and organise workshops to address teacher absenteeism. The following excerpts illustrate the expertise and knowledge of the union representatives and provide evidence of workshops addressing teacher absenteeism:

*Our union is a learner-centred union which means we advocate for professionalism in schools. We motivate teachers not to be absent because it will affect the learner performance. We run workshops on a number of topics, including teacher absenteeism, and they are effective for our members. (UR1)*

*We are against teacher absenteeism –that is why we advocate for teaching and learning campaign. I recently was running a workshop on labour law, training teachers and other officials on section 14 of EEA. (UR2)*

#### **A. Leave forms**

A significant number of leave forms are returned to schools by circuit office to school for the following reasons:

- Omission of either the school principal's signature or even the applicant's signature.
- Wrong dates which do not correspond with the dates indicated in the medical certificate.
- Employee personnel number not indicated or wrongly written.

This, in turn, indicates that there is also clearly a problem as regards the teachers filling in the leave forms. This may be because of either a lack of skill in filling in the leave form, ignorance or a deliberate act on the part of the teachers.

## **B. Movement register**

The movement registers in all the seven schools visited revealed that teachers often moved in and out of school during the teacher learner contact time. The movement registers reflected that the teachers would go out for the following reasons: personal and private matters, banking, family commitments, union matters and official school matters. The length of time spent away from school was usually a maximum of between forty five minutes to approximately two hours, depending on the nature of the errand.

The study also established that there were teachers who would leave the institution without the permission of the managers and that this created problems as regards classes that are not attended to.

There was clearly an abuse of '*private urgent matters*' when teachers ran their quick errands. This was evident on the leave forms submitted by teachers. The use of '*urgent private matters*' by many teachers recently is as a result of the fact that this reason for absence is not questioned by the department. However, the following excerpt offers a quick solution to the escalating teacher absenteeism under the pretext of urgent private matter:

*Private urgent matters must be dealt with after-school and without interfering with the contact time of the learners. (T18)*

## 5.9 Teachers' excused and unexcused reasons for absenteeism at school

Numerous reasons for teacher absenteeism were identified and cited by the participants when referring to their absence from school. Most of the reasons they offered for their absences were cited as reasons beyond their control– involuntary absence (Rosenblatt 2010:3) – and which are justifiable in terms of the working conditions which teachers are entitled to. These include

- ill health,
- personal matters and family responsibility.

The members of the SMT, including the principal, are sometimes held up by managerial tasks and activities which result in their being absent from class and learners then lose teaching time. The following excerpt indicates the frequency with which SMTs are held up:

*When I am busy with management tasks at school, I may be absent from class. When I am attending meetings, I cannot see my classes. My HOD duties frustrate me and, sometimes, I feel I am behind schedule with my work and that creates stress. That can motivate me to be absent from school. (HOD2).*

As opposed to involuntary leave of absence, in terms of which a teacher is forced to be absent and which may, for example, be as a result of a death in the family, there is also the unexcused absence which is difficult for principals to detect and uproot. This type of absence presents itself in a form of truancy, negligence and a lack of motivation on the part of teachers in the teaching fraternity.

The retired principals noted with concern the alarming prevalence of unexcused absences that exist within the education system. The following excerpt provides evidence of their observations, based on their experiences:

*I have observed that teachers sometimes give the above reasons whilst they engage in other money making businesses outside the school and within the school. For instance, they sell Table Charm, Tupperware, Avon etc. These*

*businesses are done during the contact time; they sell to others, count their money and their stock. All these activities are done in their cars, sometimes even in their various offices. All these unwanted business leads to lack of preparations, lack of focus and vision. Since their concentration is on making money, learners are not attended to, which compromises the teachers duties and their responsibilities to learners. (RP3).*

The validity of a doctor's sick note is questionable because of the frequent submission doctor sick notes by some teachers although principals find it difficult to question the authenticity of a doctor's sick note. Approaching a doctor to question the authenticity of a doctor's note would constitute contravention of doctor-patient confidentiality. The following excerpt reveals the element of indolence within the education system:

*Some other teachers fake illness and arrange doctors' certificates. (RP3)*

*Teachers would always say they were sick, even if they were not sick. (RP1)*

In addition, the document analysis indicated a number of irregularities in the documents submitted to the schools, for example, the sick notes written by some doctors for their patients in order to provide a reason for their absence from school. One sick note read as follows:

*"He/she consulted me on 15/02/2012 and said he was ill as from 10/02/2012."* The medical doctor writes.

There is the difference in the dates—10/02 and 15/02 – which may imply that the teacher was at home and had never consulted the doctor, although subsequently claiming to be ill. This, in turn, implies that the patient, who is a teacher by profession, has instructed the medical doctor to write a sick note, indicating and covering the day's prior the date of the consultation. This also, suggests a lack of authenticity in the medical certificates that are submitted to the department via the principals.

The following excerpt suggests drunkenness as another reason for teacher absenteeism

*At my school we had one teacher who used to be absent on Mondays but he was called to order and we realised that there was a serious problem because he was playing truant. (The main reason was that the teacher was addicted to drugs and alcohol and he would drink during break time and come back to school drunk)(HOD 3).*

### **5.10 The causes of teacher absenteeism**

The circuit managers quoted below listed the following range of reasons for teacher absenteeism, including truancy, irresponsibility and a lack of commitment to the profession.

*Lack of lesson preparation and, in most cases, teachers are playing truant. Ill health, family problems, irresponsibility of teachers, teacher stress and the lack of love for the job.(C1)*

It appeared that the retired principals were more prepared to speak openly about teacher absenteeism than the current principals. They indicated that indolence and apathy plays a vital role in teacher absenteeism:

*Indolence, mostly would say I was ill or my child was ill and, as a principal, you cannot deny that fact. Relationships with other people and drinking problems which create social problems and misunderstanding. (C2)*

The current principals also indicated that truancy plays a vital role in teacher absenteeism but they also identified a number of factors within the school environment that result in teacher stress and cause teacher absenteeism:

- A. Irresponsibility but also a feeling of inadequacy and an avoidance of evaluation.

*Some teachers play truant, particularly at the end of the month they absent themselves. Some teachers are irresponsible (they just absent themselves without valid reasons), particularly when they know that they will be class visited for IQMS, they play truant. (P 4)*

- B. Transport and distance from school.

*Transport from our homes since our school is a farm school and is located away from town. (P1)*



*Tiredness/fed up/personal issues/stress related issues at home and at school. (P2)*

C. Demoralisation as a result of the workload and redeployment of teachers.

*Shifting of teachers (redeployment) demoralises teachers, yes, and it can cause a lot of absenteeism. (P3)*

*Teachers are de-motivated by the number of periods and workload given to them. (P4)*

D. The workload, in terms of the number of classes, the number of learners in class and the paperwork.

Teaching different classes at school also creates problems because the teachers have to prepare several lessons and the teachers become de-motivated, ultimately losing interest in the actual day-to-day teaching. But that increases the possibilities and enhances chances of teacher absenteeism, at school.

*Teachers are de-motivated by teaching different phases within the school*

*They are also discouraged by the number of learners that they have to teach daily (pupil teacher ratio). (P4).*

According to (P5) there is *'a lot of paperwork which makes teachers to be de-motivated and, eventually, bunk classes. Overloaded (overcrowded) classrooms which can cause teachers to be stressed and end up not coming to school.'*

E. Teachers' working conditions.

*Teachers engage in discussions during contact time. For instance, a period after salary negotiations, you will find teachers discussing the outcomes of salary negotiations and forgetting classes that need to be attended to. (RP3)*

F. Changing school policies.

*Policies which are confusing, for instance, even now the teacher cannot use the alternative to corporal punishment. The ever changing curriculum frustrates teacher, daily. Lesson planning: a teacher who cannot cope with*

*the new methods of planning may end up not coming to school. The socio-economic factors and teacher relationship lead to teacher absenteeism. (RP3).*

The participants indicated the necessity for an urgent radical policy change to take place within the school system.

*There must be radical changes in the policy that deals with teacher absenteeism and, if left unattended, I am seeing a collapse of the system that I am working for. (HOD2)*

The participants expressed strong views that the teachers often lie about the reasons for their absence and that absenteeism in schools is mostly either unexcused or voluntary. In most cases teachers lie to their subordinates and it is extremely rare that the principals and the SMT members ever prove the authenticity of the teacher absences. The following excerpt provides some indication of the untrustworthiness of certain teachers:

*Teachers play truant by lying most of the time and they are sometimes irresponsible. For instance, a teacher claiming to have been attending a family funeral, whilst he/she was at other places, family responsibility where a teacher indicates that my father passed on, then after a month he/she forgets and states again that he/she needs family responsibility leave where again he/she indicates 'my father passed away, again.' Thus, 60% of teachers are liars and irresponsible individuals who do not have an interest in their daily activities of teaching. (HOD1 and DP2)*

The personal reasons for teacher absenteeism included financial problems and appeared to be the major contributory factor to stress and leading eventually to teacher absenteeism at school. Often teachers would resort to drinking alcohol in order to deal with their financial problems.

*Other teachers could be absent because of financial problems leading to drinking (abuse of alcohol), since we see regularly teachers displaying certain trend, for instance, not coming to school on pay days. (DP 1)*

However, most of the participants were not able to separate the excused from the unexcused reasons for absenteeism and related the absenteeism to stress. For example, in the following extracts from the interviews with the HODs, the participants refer to teachers' insufficient content subject knowledge, financial problems, relations with other teachers, inadequate professional development (cascade type), work overload, personal problems and poor management as stress factors that all contribute to teacher absenteeism.

*Laziness of teachers promotes teacher absenteeism. Tiredness. Teachers are de-motivated. Stress. Work overload. There is lack of subject knowledge or skills amongst teachers. (HOD1).*

*When managers/principals are deprived of authority to manage the institution, of course there will be teacher absenteeism: for instance, principals these days only cascade information to teachers and learners. Long procedures or a process in resolving issues related to absenteeism create stress and further promote teacher absenteeism. (HOD2).*

*Problems at home which are personal in nature do make teachers absent at school. Poor management style makes teachers to be absent from work. Unhappiness at workplace creates teacher absenteeism. Salary and financial standing of an individual teacher. Teachers' overload in terms of work/too much work given to teachers and too many learners to take care of. Unhappiness at work and poor relationships amongst teachers contribute to teacher absenteeism. Stress plays a major role in making a teacher to be absent at work or to be absent from class. (HOD3 and HOD4).*

*Lack of involvement of teachers in various decisions taken at school, it demotivates teachers and leaves them without a sense of identity within the school. They, therefore, feel less important and they have good reasons to be at home rather than to be at school. (HOD3).*

*Teachers are highly stressed these days and it results in anger. They also have lack of interest in their work. Most of the young teachers are not caring. Some teachers drink a lot during the weekend which makes them to have a problem in attending on Mondays. Truancy and irresponsibility on the side of teachers (total negligence). (HOD5).*

The union representative was of the opinion that teacher absenteeism was a result of depression and also teacher overload which eventually lead to teacher stress. The union

representative blamed the environment as well as poor relationships amongst teachers and other stakeholders. The abolition of corporal punishment, the constantly changing curriculum and the issue of teacher salaries all cause stress and lead to teacher absenteeism. The following excerpts show clear evidence of relationship problems and teachers frustrations:

*Poor relationships amongst teachers cause depression and can lead to teacher absenteeism. Teacher workload stresses most teachers. It seems that most teachers are always sick (they are unhealthy) because of depression. (UR1).*

*Teachers are stressed by the abolishment of corporal punishment because learners are no longer disciplined because teachers do not know the alternatives to corporal punishment. Curriculum change over the years discourages teachers from attending regularly to their classes. (UR2).*

*There is a serious financial stress on teachers recently which makes them to be outside the classroom than to be at school. Teachers are always seen running around to settle their debts or negotiating to pay later. (UR2)*

In the following excerpts the teachers also cited the problems of drunkenness as major contributory factors that promote and are a direct cause of teacher absenteeism:

*Drunkenness, we used to have a teacher who was always drunk. He caused tension and frustrated us as a school because his classes would make a noise and become uncontrollable. There is also social pressure from friends in the community which leads to drinking problem. (T4)*

*Our work is too much as teachers because of a lot of paperwork and many learners in class and this can make teachers to be absent from work. Personal issues can make teachers to be absent from school. Teachers' salary and the financial pressures that exist in the social lives make them to be absent from work. Thus most teachers will resort to loan sharks from various institutions which loan money. This situation will make teachers to concentrate on the shortage of money rather than teaching in class. In other instances teachers will dodge at school to go and pay quickly those he/she owes money. Social issues can make a teacher to be absent at work because, in this case, a teacher will concentrate on things and issues outside the school rather than focusing on teaching. Relationships amongst stakeholders*

*at school is important– if it is not in good shape then it can make a teacher to be absent from work. (T6)*

Recently there has been growing concern about learner discipline in most schools and this, in turn, leads on to the question of the lack of disciplinary measures available with which to address the problem of learners who misbehave at school. Thus, teachers are stressed by learners who are ill disciplined and, according to the teachers, this is the direct result of the abolition of corporal punishment. SASA (South African Schools Act) Section 10 stipulates that a teacher must not administer corporal punishment to a learner or inflict any pain in order to enforce discipline at school and that the Alternatives to Corporal Punishment are to be used. However, it would appear that the Alternatives to Corporal Punishment, as measures with which to deal with learner discipline at school, are not welcome by teachers and also they have proved to be ineffective in terms of their implementation. Thus, teachers are without solutions for controlling learners appropriately and the resultant stress ultimately leads to burnout which, in turn, eventually leads to teacher absenteeism as a last resort.

*Teachers can be absent from school because of stress that emanates from children who are not disciplined, practically children who are not doing their work. (T5)*

*Teachers are also stressed by parents who do not care about their children's performance. Ill health can make teachers to be absent. Some other teachers are always tired; most of them are overloaded by their work. (T6)*

In the summary provided in this study, the data reveal that almost all the stakeholder groups identify stress as the major contributory cause of teacher absenteeism with the stressors ranging from external sources, which include the school environment, and internal sources and which are revealed through individual personal conflict. However, the lists of stress symptoms were also given in the various individual interviews with the interviewees mentioning physical, mental, behavioural and emotional stress symptoms. The interaction of stressors that creates teacher absenteeism may be summarised in terms of the

transactional and occupational stress models. This will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

The next section will suggest possible ways in which to reduce teacher absenteeism.

### **5.11 Possible solutions to teacher absenteeism.**

The escalating problem of teacher absenteeism calls for an urgent solution and this implies that all stakeholders and all who are involved in the education sector must join hands to fight teacher absenteeism.

There is no doubt that, in order to combat teacher absenteeism, it is crucial that teachers will need to:

*“to be loyal to the profession” [and] “take teaching as a calling” (C12) because “it is evident that teachers need to have the correct values and appreciation of their job and a sense of professionalism(C12),” is important.*

The managers expressed the view that the policies that regulate the leave of absence must be looked into (amended) so as to obviate directives that create opportunities for the abuse of leave of absence at schools. This includes empowering principals through policies so as to enable them to regulate teacher absenteeism. It is, thus, essential that principals be provided with a clear job description.

*Some principals (SMTs) are not sure of their work or duties and how to perform them. They must know their duties i.e. principals/deputies and HODs must be trained on how to execute their duties and they must not neglect their responsibilities. (RP3)*

It is essential that at least one member of the school governing body be informed about and trained on aspects of school governance. In addition, participants strongly feel that the department must be prompt in dealing with teacher absenteeism while the unions must assist the department of education and the SMTs. The SACE could also assist.

*SGBs must also be trained in assisting principals (SMTs) to govern the school effectively because they still do not understand what they are doing (their roles). People without knowledge or who cannot read or write are still governing schools and, in some instances, they are still manipulated by principals and, therefore, they cannot make policies to help build the school with regards to teacher absenteeism. (RP3)*

It is also imperative that the system of leave be reappraised and, if possible, teachers must be made responsible for their leave through keeping their personal record of their absence at school, in a form of a journal or personal file which can be kept at home. This notion can be achieved through the unions' cooperation in this regard:

*Teachers must be made responsible for the leave of absenteeism and they must know that absenteeism is punishable. Unions are also responsible for assisting when teachers are absent at school because they come in between the department and the principal in case there is a case of misconduct due to teacher absenteeism. For instance, there was a case where a teacher became absent throughout the year due to drunkenness and a particular union assisted the teacher to get away with it by recommending rehabilitation. (RP3)*

The distances from school to home may also disadvantage teachers as regards regularly attending school, let alone attending to their classes, as teachers often have to travel long distances between the school and their homes. While this is sometimes unavoidable, the rate of teacher absenteeism may be lowered if

*The school would be relocated to a central place where it is accessible by many learners, parents, and teachers. (P1)*

This research study revealed that employees in the private sector submit a medical certificate for each day they are absent from work. However, in the education sector, teachers submit a medical certificate when they have been absent for three consecutive days. Although there have been amendments to the eight week leave cycle, the participants

indicated that submitting a doctor's medical certificate for each day an employee is absent from work may be a solution to the problem of teacher absenteeism.

The incapacity leave provides a clear directive and the procedure to follow when teacher has used up all his/her available leave days, but monitoring of the processes of taking leaves is critical and keeping records assist the human resource sub-directorate accordingly and make possible referrals, where needed.

*Monitoring is critical; particularly classroom attendance and the actual teaching in class. Leave process have a loophole because it takes time to be processed at the regional office. It must be done quickly and in quarterly periods to alert a teacher on the number of days available for him/her. (P4)*

The union representatives argued that the rate of teacher absenteeism may be improved if there were:

*'Capacity building workshops on teacher absenteeism, on a continuous base, then the condition of service will be improved.'*(U1) Teacher absenteeism can also be dealt with if the *'learner discipline methods are improved and if teachers will be remunerated for their well attendance of their classes.'*(U2). There was also a suggestion that sport be brought back into schools to stimulate am 100% attendance by the teachers.

A number of teachers interviewed in this study expressed the view that the policy which shapes learner discipline was frustrating and that it was demoralising teachers.

*Policies must be made clear and understandable to everyone. The government must improve policies that deal with learner discipline at school because it frustrates to have learners who are not disciplined. Learners' rights are causing tension and it d-moralises teachers. (T5)*

Although most of the school management teams are highly qualified in terms of management, most of the principal participants interviewed in the study referred to other



principal managers who do not manage effectively their institution because it would appear that they are not listening to the needs of their subordinates. It is, thus, clear that senior managers at the various schools lack the strategies and skills that would enable them to be effective in the management of their respective schools.

*Managers must correctly manage their schools. The Department of Education must award teachers and recognise them for their roles in their various institutions. Managers must also listen to what the teachers say and try to identify teachers' needs and their individual challenges within their schools.*

*A principal must use tricks and strategies to deal with teacher absenteeism, such as engaging teachers on their daily activities and motivating them. (P5)*

It would appear that principals and deputy principals are confronted with the challenges brought about by teacher absenteeism on a daily basis at school. Accordingly, they suggested a more radical approach to curbing teacher absenteeism, for example, the deputy principals recommended deducting a day's salary if a teacher is absent from school for a day.

*There must be salary deductions when a teacher is absent at school (no work, no pay). There must be a follow up to each teacher who is absent at school. Union meetings must not clash with the learner contact time. My recent observation is that, since the DoE is making an audit on leave forms, teacher absenteeism is slightly improving. (P7)*

*The government must play its role by capturing leave form at regional level and implement a 'no work no pay' instantly so that teachers must see the seriousness of trying to deal with the problem. The government is not assisting the managers at school. The policy is not clear because teachers are entitled to leave of absence but the only problem is that most teachers are abusing their privileges. So, the department needs to close the gap that exists between the reality at school and the policy that regulates teacher absenteeism. (DP1)*

Although the Department of Basic Education, through its sub-directorate and line-function, trains and inducts teachers, there is a feeling that support is still required from the department of basic education and that teachers need training, supervision and constant monitoring on matters of curriculum and teacher welfare.

*There must be adequate support for teachers and it must be provided by the employer. Teachers must be retrained to deal with the curriculum change and these trainings must be effective and adequate. It will assist in closing the learning gaps that exist within the teaching fraternity. There must be effective counselling of teachers who need that service and support them where possible. Although the department is doing it through the wellness office, it is not sufficient. (DP2)*

*The department must take care of its employees financially; most educators just joined teaching because there was no other alternative. We need to be rededicated as teachers to our profession. The department must organise workshops and train educators about the importance of being always present at school. (T6)*

Budgeting is clearly a serious challenge for teachers and the urgent need for a salary increase was strongly voiced by the participants. This concern with salary consumes teachers' time and focus, thus definitely presenting a challenge to the policy that regulates teacher absenteeism at school.

*Teachers must be motivated. They must be taught on how to budget. The government must increase teachers' salaries. The working conditions must be improved. Improvement of work ethics must be done. (HOD1)*

It emerged that rewarding excellence and giving teachers' accolades was an extremely effective intrinsic motivational tool in a former model C school. This positive act on the part of the principal had worked wonders in that particular school as regards ensuring that teachers were present at school every day. It may, however, not be a practical solution for the other schools that participated in this study because of their financial constraints as, although effective, it is expensive and its sustainability relies strongly on the school budget.

*Teachers need to be motivated through rewarding their good work. Accolades/awards/trophies need to be given to teachers through incentives at school to show appreciation of their beautiful work. The department of education and the school managers must show appreciation by acknowledging the role played by teachers in schools. (HOD3)*

*Principals must manage their schools and monitor absenteeism. Give prizes for those who attend regularly and deduct money from their salaries for those who absent themselves. (T9)*

It is essential that senior educators/school managers and the SMT members motivate teachers to attend school. In addition, teachers need to communicate with their peers and supervisors. There should be trust within the working environment, so that teachers are free to be part of the system. Good managerial styles may improve the teaching system and this, in turn, would make teachers feel secure within the teaching environment.

*Principals must do record keeping, checking a certain pattern from occurring and must reprimand immediately. A teacher must be counselled if he/she has a pattern. Warnings must be given to teachers who absent themselves. The government, through circuit managers, must always visit schools regularly, to check operational matters and policy adherence. (HOD5)*

The union representatives, support staff and teachers also indicated that a “salary increase” and a more balanced teacher-pupil ratio would curb teacher absenteeism. However, they also offered other suggestions for improving working conditions including employing, “extra teachers which will allow for substitute to be available, when needed” (T4), and the fact that government must “provide better housing subsidies.”(T3).

*Unions must not protect their members. The department must improve policies that should guard against teacher absenteeism at school. In a way policies must be made to be strict. (T4)*

*Principals must be considerate in identifying teachers who are not well and give them latitude to consult doctors. (T19)*

It appeared as if a finger was being pointed at the management of schools as indirectly promoting teacher absenteeism. This emerged from accusations of incorrect control and a lack of consistency in dealing with teacher who are absent from school. According to teachers the system needs an adequate revamp and restructuring.

*Some principals do not understand teachers' problems and their attitudes which are created by stress, so, principals must learn to be considerate when managing schools and managing teachers. (T19)*

*A proper system needs to be installed for control purpose, which includes witnesses and must be followed by disciplinary hearings. Teachers must start caring for what they are doing at school, this would also include motivation. (T20)*

The system and the instruments used in schools for monitoring and controlling teacher absenteeism need either to be changed or reappraised as a matter of urgency. The recent intention of the national minister of basic education to introduce a new clocking system may provide solution to the problem of teacher absenteeism although some of the unions are accusing the national minister of a lack of consultation in this matter.

## **5.12 Conclusion.**

It is evident from the findings of this research study that, in most cases, teachers absent themselves from their duties and/or from their work environment as a result of the stress that prevails within the teaching system. Teachers are exposed to various stressors such as the ever-changing curriculum, teacher workload, ill-disciplined learners, lack of resources, unfriendly teaching environment, personal problems and a lack of knowledge of subject content.

The research participants' personal feelings and their individual experiences with regard to teacher absenteeism were explored in depth. The participants also provided individual solutions that may help to reduce teacher absenteeism at school.

The next chapter presents a summary of the findings, recommendations and the conclusion on educators' experiences and perceptions of teacher absenteeism

## CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

*“Absenteeism is explained by teachers who give ‘reasons’ for their absence or who rely on the fact that the negotiated conditions of service give them the ‘right’ to make use of all the leave privileges” (Mthombeni 2010:1).*

### 6.1 Introduction

This final chapter concludes the study on the perceptions and experiences of teacher absenteeism at school. The study set out to answer the main research question, namely:

*How do educators in South Africa experience and perceive teacher absenteeism?*

A document analysis was undertaken and semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to answer the above mentioned research question. The data which had been collected by means of the document analysis and the interviews was analysed and the results were presented in chapter five of the research study. The interpretation of these findings is discussed in chapter 6.

The chapter begins with a summary of the views of the teachers and other stakeholders on teacher absenteeism in the light of the literature on the topic. The chapter then discusses how teacher absenteeism impacts on teaching and learning and how school principals and HODs manage absenteeism. Finally, using the theoretical framework, the chapter discusses the extent to which and also the way in which stress impacts on teacher absenteeism.

### 6.2 The view of the stakeholders and the educators of teacher absenteeism

Although Mkhwanazi (1997:20) views teacher absenteeism as “the practice of not being present at school,” the respondents in this study identified different levels of absenteeism, namely, being away from school, being at school but not in class, and being physically at school but mentally absent. Absenteeism is generally understood to be a form of truancy, or stealing time from the employer and this corresponds with Pattillo’s (2012) concept of

“quiet corruption” which, in turn, vindicated the seriousness and the impact of teacher absenteeism on teaching and learning.

According to Mkhwanazi (1997), Rosenblatt et al (2006) and Ivatts (2010), teacher absenteeism is regarded as any failure to report to work. This was indeed the finding of this study, based on the interviews with the various participants and supported by the document analysis. Thus, this research study agrees with what Mthombeni (2010) says when he argues that teacher absenteeism also includes a teacher who is at school but not in class, thus taking into account a teacher who is at school but mentally absent.

The deputy principals regarded teacher absenteeism as a direct contributory factor to the poor performance of learners. As suggested by Palmer and Cooper (2010) the behavioural attitude which triggers absence at school is shown by teacher withdrawal behaviour.

In accordance with both the transactional stress model and the occupational stress model, this research study reveals an inexorable link between the intrinsic and extrinsic stressors that cause teacher absenteeism.

According to Haberman (2004), intrinsic and extrinsic occupational job stressors affect teachers and result in teacher absenteeism. Accordingly, the theoretical framework of stress plays a significant role in understanding and in explaining teacher absence at school. The individual environmental demands and ineffective coping mechanisms are the primary causes that trigger teacher absenteeism and are reflected through stress (Palmer & Cooper 2010).

The next section will present the findings regarding the causes of teacher absence and which help to inform the understanding of why teachers are absent from school.

### **6.2.1 Causes of teacher absenteeism**

In the research which Mkhwanazi (1997: 156) conducted in KwaZulu-Natal on the effects on teacher absenteeism, he found the following eight major reasons and causes of teacher

absenteeism, namely, ill health, memorial services, teacher stress, party politics, transportation, cultural activities, excessive use of liquor and the upgrading of teacher qualifications.

This study, which comprised a document analysis and interviews which were conducted in order to uncover the participants' views and understanding of teacher absenteeism, revealed the following causes for absence from school:

A. *Ill health.*

Although ill health is considered as excused absenteeism, according to Abeles (2009), the transactional stress model indicates that the environment and the individual's coping mechanisms to deal with stress (Miller and McCool 2003) may also create ill health among teachers. This research study found that ill health was a major contributory factor to teacher absenteeism from school. As indicated in the literature study, Miller (2008) states that the most dominant category of leave taken by teachers is leave as a result of ill health.

However, it is not always possible to prove the authenticity of the sickness as, in some cases; the medical certificates from doctors are unreliable. The document analysis revealed that teachers tend to abuse their leave days as, when they have used up their available leave days; they resort to use their temporary incapacity leave.

B. *Urgent private matters.*

Most recent research studies do not refer to the issue of urgent private matters that teachers are currently using. However, this study established that the existence of this type of leave provides scope and allows individual teachers to be absent from school.

This type of leave allows a teacher to attend to urgent matters, including taking a child to a doctor. However, it emerged from the document analysis that teachers would take this kind of leave to avoid giving reasons for their absence from school while it appeared that teachers tend to abuse this type of leave because it is not necessary to provide proof when taking this type of leave.

Leonova (2009) points out that, in terms of the transactional stress model, there are different variables that interact and that may promote an internal emotional imbalance within an individual. Thus, there are various reasons, although not indicated by the teachers, which may be the cause of their absence from school.

C. *A significant degree of irresponsibility among teachers.*

Palmer and Cooper (2010) indicate that, in terms of the transactional stress model, responses to pressure trigger behavioural inclinations. The most common of these behavioural attitudes is manifest through increased teacher absenteeism. The participants maintained that absence was prevalent among a number of irresponsible teachers who also report late to school and sometimes even do not come to school. There are surfacing trends among teachers to absent themselves on Mondays and Fridays without a valid reason and to hide behind the pretext of private urgent matters at home. However, this amounts to truancy as the teacher is absent without a valid reason. In addition, it is noticeable that this trend escalates at the month end.

Another aspect of teacher absence which has been related to a lack of responsibility on the part of teachers is the teacher who may be at the workplace but not in class to attend to the learners. According to Mthombeni (2010), lack of responsibility is related to teacher absenteeism in class and, according to Clotfelter et al (2009); it leads to poor learner performance. These irresponsible teachers dillydally between their classrooms and the staff room and waste time as a result of a lack of preparation and a lack of dedication to the system.

D. *Transport and the distance from the school.*

There has been a growing concern about teachers in the rural area and the surrounding farm schools as regards the distance between the schools and their homes. In the rural and farm schools a major cause of teacher absenteeism is the inadequate transport and the distances the teachers have to travel do not allow easy accessibility and being on time.



Although there are school cottages and teacher accommodation on the farms and in the rural schools, many teachers feel that they are remote from the cities and towns with their better facilities and communal amenities. *“Distance from work stresses us, thus we become mentally absent from school.”* Travelling and the distance between school and home may be regarded as a transactional stressor because it involves environmental factors and the individual’s inability to cope with the challenge (Jackson and Rothmann 2006).

E. *De-motivation.*

A lack of motivation on the part of teachers is in line with the occupational stress model in terms of which an individual teacher is reckoned to endure job strain (Leonova 2009). This job strain may, in turn, trigger internal conflict in teachers. According to Bell (2007), a number of teachers exhibit clear signs and symptoms of poor motivation and this, in turn, leads to poor performance in class. The researcher found that teachers were demoralised and de-motivated because of their workloads, the number of students in class and their working conditions. The evidence shows that there are a high percentage of teachers within the teaching system who are severely demoralised as a result of the poor conditions of services offered by the Department of Basic Education. There is little doubt that a de-motivated teacher will be irresponsible, neglect learners and neglect his/her primary duties which include going to class and engaging in actual teaching (Smith 1992). In most cases a demoralised teacher would be easily tempted to skip classes and be absent from the workplace. Thus, Smith (1992) emphasises the point that teachers need reassurance about job security and this would probably increase motivation.

This research study identified that teachers are stressed by relationships, physical demands and career choice. These findings are also confirmed by the findings of Quick and Quick (1994). All the aspects mentioned and which relate to occupational stressors confirm the issue of lack of motivation.

F. *The unstable curriculum.*

According to the occupational stress model, the impact of a curriculum change in a school environment is a direct cause of stress amongst teachers (Palmer and Cooper 2010). This research study found that work related stress contributes to teacher absenteeism from school.

The ever changing curriculum content is a major cause of teachers being absent from class and even from the workplace. This unstable curriculum both creates and promotes a lack of subject content knowledge and results in inappropriate, inadequate skills. This, in turn eventually disables teachers in class. The researcher found a teacher who is inappropriately skilled will avoid going to class because he/she may be embarrassed by able learners who may challenge the teacher's subject knowledge. This lack of knowledge content may create depression and stress among teachers and also make it impossible for teachers to deliver the content matter in class, eventually leading to teacher absenteeism from school.

G. *Lack of commitment.*

The retired circuit manager emphasised the issue of school culture as a cause for the increased absenteeism. With the benefit of hindsight, the retired manger offered a clear understanding of teacher absenteeism, describing a perceptual change over a period of time which encompasses prior 1976 and post 1994. According to him, the phenomenon of teacher absenteeism has always been regarded as a challenge, throughout the years but it has become worse recently "*because teachers these days lack commitment to their work and do not care about the learners*". These behavioural attitudes are in line with the transactional stress model which suggests that individual behaviour in a school maybe triggered by poor work management and increases teacher absenteeism (Palmer & Cooper 2010). The school principals also indicated strongly that absenteeism is an old phenomenon and that it appears to be common as it is because there are always teachers who are sick and teachers always have to deal with a range of personal matters. This notion would justify the excused absenteeism (Abeles 2009) of teachers since teachers, as in any other profession, are entitled to take leave.

H. *Depression and stress.*

According to Palmer and Cooper (2010), both transactional stress and occupational stress are major causes of teacher absenteeism. The origin of the stress may be personal and it may be triggered by factors at home or factors within the work environment.

This research study found that stress is a major cause of teacher absenteeism, particularly in view of the fact that stress often results in illness. While stress causes teacher absenteeism, this research study has also established that stress appears to be the primary source of all problems experienced by teachers, in the field of teaching. The participants in this research indicated that they believed that the functional bureaucratic system and the procedures of the Department of Basic Education were imposed on them rather than being democratically negotiated and their opposition to this state of affairs amounts to undesirable teacher stress. These 'stressors' will be discussed in detail in section 6.5.

It would appear that the understanding and experiences of absenteeism relate to the respondents' personal roles and status. The next section will demonstrate how the various stakeholders had slightly understood the impact of teacher absenteeism on teaching and learning.

### **6.3 The impact of teacher absenteeism on teaching and learning**

The study echoes the sentiments of Usman et al (2007:207) to the effect that "*teacher absence is one of the most serious problems in any education system*".

The effect of teacher absenteeism at schools poses serious challenges to schools, whether or not there are valid reasons for the absences. In most cases these challenges may be clearly observed in the learner performance and their discipline (Mkhwanazi 1997:155). The following major effects of teacher absenteeism on the schools in the area under investigation were observed:

### **6.3.1 Learners not attended to**

Often in the black schools, particularly in the township school, there is no one who takes care of the learners in the absence of their respective teachers as a result of the lack of teacher substitutes. The findings of this study confirm that teachers in the participating schools absent themselves from school without a valid reason and, worse, *“they do not inform the principal beforehand,”* Mbonambi (2002:81) so that class supervision may be arranged.

### **6.3.2 Lack of discipline**

When a teacher is absent from either class or school the learners will not be disciplined. This lack of discipline, in turn, creates disruptions in the schools as well as disorder because of the noise made by the unattended learners. In the absence of a teacher in class the learners often fight amongst themselves with this causing chaos and a culture of no discipline in the school. This lack of discipline is similar to what Mkhwanazi (1997: 155) regards as a negative attitude amongst pupils and is related to the element of learner defiance. Thus, fighting, as part of violence amongst learners, is also one of the effects of teacher absenteeism.

### **6.3.3 Chaos and disruption**

With the teacher not being in class, the learners become disruptive and chaotic and, thus, learning and teaching do not happen.

*“There will be a lack of discipline and there will be chaos”* in classes that are not attended and this, in turn, will eventually affect the tone of the school.

### **6.3.4 Teacher frustrations**

While the general school discipline is affected by teacher absenteeism, the individual teachers become frustrated by other teachers' absences from school.

One of the HODs expressed the feeling that the absenteeism of other teachers from school frustrates the school managers because they have to take care of the learners who are without a teacher. They then feel abused and misused because of the extra efforts they have to make to assist the principal to maintain order and discipline around the school.

Having to control classes that are not attended is *“time consuming and frustrating, affects the plan for the day, eventually affecting the future plan of my work.”* In the model of stress presented in chapter three these feelings of frustration are encapsulated in the three phases, namely, psychological, behavioural and physiological. This, therefore, confirms that internal stress feeds on the external stressors (Mark & Smith 2008).

The managerial duties of the HODs may also frustrate the HODs in such a way that they cause stress them and promote absenteeism amongst the HODs. This research study found an ongoing element of frustration among HODs as a result of having to perform duties the duties assigned to them. *“My HOD duties frustrate me and sometimes I feel I am behind schedule with my work and that creates stress.* Thus, the major symptom of stress as indicated in the theoretical stress models used in chapter 3 reflects a direct outcome that creates anxiety and depression, eventually leading to frustration.

In small schools where there are few teachers, monitoring and controlling the learners who are without a teacher *“is a challenge,”* because it is difficult for the other teachers to give the unattended learners work to do.

### **6.3.5 Teacher-to-teacher relationship**

The teacher to teacher relationship is emphasised by both the theoretical framework of occupational stress and the transactional stress model. To a great extent, this teacher to teacher relationship affects the teachers’ responses to various stressors and that is shown through individual teacher behavioural attitudes, amongst teachers themselves. These behavioural attitudes manifest as a lack of respect among teachers and are accentuated by a lack of stress management (Deventer & Kruger 2012). This research study found poor relationships between teachers. In most cases, this adverse relationship is grossly affected by those teachers who neglect their duties by absenting themselves from class and from school. The HODs feel that it, *“is really unfair and it frustrates us who are always present at school. This tendency promotes conflicts amongst teachers and learners.”* Thus, there is a strong feeling that *“there must be radical policy changes in the policy that deals with teacher absenteeism”* because, if the problem of teacher absenteeism is left unattended, *“a collapse of the system that I am working for will be seen.”*

The next section will examine various managerial methods and tools that assist the managers to deal with teacher absenteeism.

## **6.4 The management of teacher absenteeism**

The principals saw their role as crucial in monitoring and controlling teacher absenteeism at school. One participant observed that *“I motivate teachers because some educators think that they are making me a favour in coming to school.”* It would appear that some teachers feel they have a right to use their leave days as they wish, because these days are no longer used for retirement capped days. Prior 2003, leave days were exchanged for money at the retirement age if they were not utilised, then the accumulated days were called capped days. Recently, these days are no longer capped thus the notion of forfeiting days motivates teachers to be absent from school. As a result, teachers often abuse leave because they think that the department owes them leave days whilst the department emphasises the point that annual leave is covered by the school holidays.

The following sub-themes discuss the various tools and procedures used to deal with teacher absenteeism.

### **6.4.1 Various tools are used to regulate teacher absenteeism**

Principals are using various tools to deal with teacher absenteeism at school. However, regardless of the numerous tools that they are using, it would appear that teacher absenteeism is not controlled to any degree. The principals use the *“Z8 and leave forms”* to deal with teacher absenteeism.

These control measures are also linked with the procedure involved in arranging for leave of absence at school. However, these are also difficult to implement.

- A.** Reporting absence to school: A number of teachers report telephonically to the administrative clerks or even the school principal in order to arrange for their absence from school. However, a significant number of teachers do not notify the principal or the school of their absence.

- B.** Filling of leave forms: It has been found that, although *“leave form must be filled in”* in advance, most teachers would prefer to fill in the leave forms retrospectively after returning from their leave of absence. Occasionally, teachers would claim to have forgotten to fill in the leave forms after their leave had been taken and they needed to be reminded.
- C.** Signing Z8: The Z8 assists the principal as it is a tool that may be used to check and verify the presence of a teacher at school. The perusal of this document reflected correct entries although sometimes teachers would forget to sign in on time.

In general, it emerged that the union members are not assisting in regulating teacher absenteeism and the principals, to some extent, are sometimes deprived of the authority and power required to manage their respective institutions effectively as a result of political interference from the unions. The study found that a sense of lack of identity on the part of individual teachers is created by a lack of teacher involvement in decision making bodies within the schools and that this destroys teacher morale and promotes teacher absenteeism. However, in the main, this study found that if, a principal does not possess effective managerial skills, then teachers tend to absent themselves and take advantage of the fact that the leave procedure and processes take too long to be implemented.

The next section will demonstrate the impact of stress on teacher absenteeism, at school.

## **6.5 The impact of stress on teacher absenteeism**

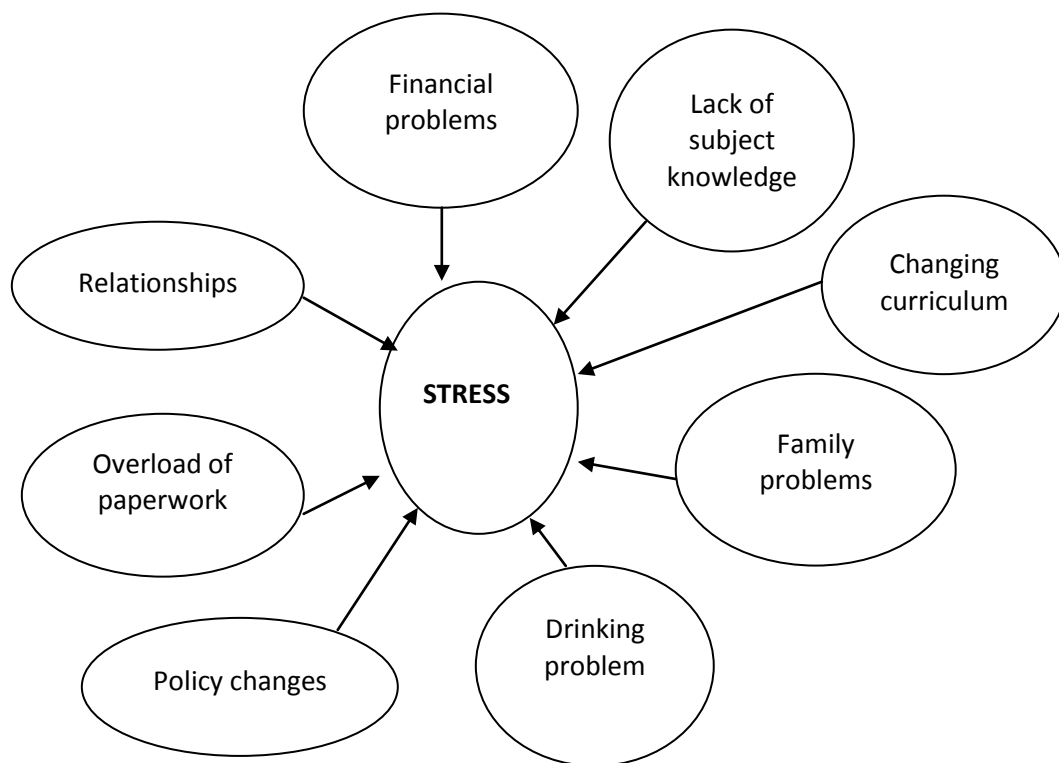
*“Stress has certainly become strongly linked to discursive constructions of identity and value”* (Blaug et al 2007:37).

This research study found that almost all the participants referred to stress more often than to any other cause of teacher absenteeism.

Stress was identified as a major contributory factor that promotes teacher absenteeism in the schools that were visited. The principals the various schools all confirmed a strong presence of stress amongst teachers. In addition, the principals are also affected by impromptu departmental visitors who insist on the enforcement of departmental

procedures and policies. *“For instance departmental officials (district/region) may come abruptly without a notice,”* demanding unrealistic answers and causing misunderstanding and stress. According to Palmer and Cooper (2010), these work-related stressors have a direct bearing on the teachers’ presence at school. According to Hiebert & Farber (1984), human interaction and the individual coping mechanism are of vital importance in stress alleviation.

The diagram below depicts the factors that contribute to the development of stress in the work environment at school.



**Figure 6.1: Factors contributing to the development of stress**

Throughout the study the participants related teacher absenteeism to stress. The literature reviews also stressed the fact that, nowadays, the teaching profession is the most stressful career (Jackson & Rothmans 2005). *“A teacher who is stressed prefers to be alone, whether at home or at school”* and, usually, such a teacher will find it difficult to teach. This research study found an inability on the part of teachers to cope with the threat of stress and that this promotes the mental and physical instability of amongst teachers. According to



Haberman (2004), the behavioural inclination of teachers is that of “paid employees” and not professionals. This study revealed a behavioural attitude that was indicative of sense of detachment on the part of teachers from their essential daily job services, particularly as regards irresponsible and less accountable teachers.

The retired principals emphasised the point that there has been an increase in teacher stress which has been fuelled by curriculum changes, teacher workloads, human relationships and poor financial management. These stressors manifest themselves through emotional and physiological imbalances and this, in turn, directly promotes teacher absenteeism at school. Teachers are “stressed by family problems (husband and wife), relationships, drinking problems and financial problems” (RP1). The principals are subjected to severe strain because it is incumbent on them to keep order and provide direction.

It emerged that teachers experience severe stress as a result of financial problems and teachers often have to resort to other means of making money, including selling during school learner contact time. In trying to come up with solutions to their financial problems, amongst other things, teachers engage in selling products at school because *“most of the times they are stressed by their financial problems at home”*. They also often take micro loans with these micro money lenders then taking their bank cards. Although the study found that teachers often engage in selling at school the study also found that they are often compulsive buyers as well. For example, if anyone comes to the school selling anything, the teachers will buy and end up in the financial trap of being unable to pay.

The study found that the majority of teachers do not know how to draw up a financial plan and, thus, they need assistance on financial management because they are often experiencing financial problems. This, in turn, affects them and they resort to other running private small businesses, for example selling at school and in the community (Table Charm, Tupperware etc).

The South African education system, with its constantly changing curriculum over the past decade, has deprived teachers of sufficient time and opportunity to learn new methods and skills of teaching. A lack of time is depriving teachers of skills and information. The resultant

lack of professionalism and diminished interest in teaching lead directly leads to teacher absenteeism. *“Most teachers are not equipped methodologically to handle their teaching content (lack of methodology).”* Some teachers missed were under trained in the process of becoming teachers and, thus, they have information gaps. As a result they are not comfortable with their daily teaching which results in high teacher absenteeism. According to Jackson and Rothman (2006), stress depends on the cognitive appraisal of events and circumstances and the ability to cope. The lack of methodology in the actual teaching of a particular subject and the content information gap create teachers stress which then leads to teacher absenteeism from school.

There is a serious challenge in handling different grades in a single class. These occupational stressors in the workplace constitute occupational stress which, according to Leonova (2009), triggers individual behavioural responses. The research participants indicated that the practice of mixing grades (multi grades in one class) which takes place in schools where there are few teachers is extremely strenuous because of the multi lesson preparations and, thus, the teachers *“stressed by their work. Mixing grades in one class is frustrating and can lead to absenteeism. Different lesson preparation in various grades and different subjects is strenuous. We are overloaded.”*

The policy changes, particularly the learner discipline policy, in the Department of Basic Education over the past decade are frustrating teachers and creating stress with this, in turn, leading to teacher absenteeism at school. The South African School Act (SASA) Section 10 states that teachers are prohibited from administering corporal punishment at school. Although there are alternatives to corporal punishment the teachers feel that they are no longer in control and, thus, there is *“stress at work due to learner discipline.”* The participants felt that the use of alternatives to corporal punishment is a serious stressor to educators because teachers are not able to implement them, due to time and the processes involved.

The existence of stress, as a cause of teacher absenteeism, was emphasised the principals and the deputies who interact personally with teachers on a daily basis. In the main the study revealed that teachers are stressed by their finances and, recently, teachers have

wanted to leave teaching in order to receive a pension fund to pay off their debts. However, the reality is that their individual pension pay-outs are too little.

It emerged that the HODs, like the principals and deputy principals, also perceive the element of stress as a major contributory factor to teacher absenteeism. However, to the HODs, the causes of this stress include family problems, problems at school, social interactions, and financial problems.

The delay of the Department of Basic Education's filling the vacant posts is also creating both stress and a difficult situation for teachers because of the lack of human resource to cater for those classes that are without a teacher.

The study also found that redeployment contributes to teacher stress and, ultimately, to absenteeism. However, there are numerous aspects of the teachers' life that trigger stress and, eventually, cause teacher absenteeism from school.

#### **6.5.1 *Stressors that cause teacher absenteeism.***

This research identified various stressors that lead to teacher absenteeism. These stressors, which were identified in chapter five of the study, are highlighted in this chapter for the purpose of accentuating the negative contribution that these stressors make to teacher absenteeism. These stressors include financial problems and teacher debts, ill health, teacher work overload, lack of subject knowledge and skills, family problems and personal relationships, drinking problems and the ever changing curriculum.

Most teachers are not able to draw up a financial plan. In addition, teachers need assistance with financial management as they have financial problems. Teachers are affected by this lack of financial planning and, thus, they resort to running other private small businesses e.g. selling at school and in the community during school hours (selling items like: Table Charm, Tupperware etc.).

*“Teachers are stressed by financial matters, directly causing teacher absenteeism.”* Thus, they resort to selling the above mentioned items in order to improve their financial situation.

The work overload is a direct cause of a sense of unhappiness in the workplace and this, in turn, manifests itself through poor relationships amongst teachers and contributes directly to teacher absenteeism.

One major reason for teacher absenteeism is a lack of subject preparations with teachers who do not prepare for their lessons being reluctant to go to class (Mbonambi 2002: 58).

Stress causes illness amongst teachers. Most teachers are absent from school because of their personal health and they take a leave of absence from school as stipulated in the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM). These absences, although permitted by departmental policies, contribute significantly to teacher absenteeism (Abeles. 2009).

Individual problems that emanate from personal issues at home escalate at school and contribute to teacher absenteeism in various ways with problems at home and other family related issues at home contributing significantly to teacher absenteeism. Although these issues and problems are of a personal nature they may affect a teacher at the workplace, leading to absence from school.

Some teachers drink a lot during the weekend, thus, they have a problem attending on Mondays and Fridays.

*Teachers are stressed by financial matters, and they resort to drinking over the weekend and having bad company of friends.*

Not only do some teachers resort to drinking but they are also often not equipped methodologically to handle their teaching content (lack of methodology). Some teachers missed steps in the process of becoming a teacher and, thus, they have information gaps. As a result they are not comfortable with their daily teaching and this, in turn, result in high teacher absenteeism. These teachers tend lack a love for and an interest in their work, both

professionally and otherwise while to some, teaching was the only employment option available to them. They feel lost in the profession and, hence, some of them resort to daily absenteeism. It is, thus, fitting that this research study offers tentative solutions to try to overcome the challenge of teacher absenteeism from school.

## **6.6 Solutions to teacher absenteeism**

The participants suggested various solutions to curb teacher absenteeism. Among the many strategies suggested, the participants strongly believed that loyalty to the profession and the empowerment of school managers are of the utmost importance. The participants also suggested a practical solution in favour of a biometric system. In addition, the participants suggested a perceptual change of the role of the teacher unions in teacher absenteeism. It is essential that the promotion of referrals to the sub-directorate of wellbeing be advocated and speedily implemented in the case of teachers who are always absent because of ill health. The honest participants also came out strongly against fraudulent medical certificates that required validation for authenticity by the district officials.

According to Usman et al (2004), the best way to motivate teachers to be present at school and be loyal to the profession, is to provide incentives for attendance. However, the findings in this research emphasise the point that teachers must start caring and showing a love for the profession.

This research study found that loyalty to the profession is directly linked to both the transactional stress model and the occupational stress model in a sense that there are triggering factors that impede loyalty in the occupational environment of teachers.

It is essential that teachers be encouraged and motivated to honour their respective classes by going to class early and preparing in advance (FLC: DoE, 2008). Thus, *“principals must motivate their teachers.”* Loyalty to the teaching profession involves love, interest and caring although the research participants indicated that *“Teachers lack love and interest in their work.* Most of the research participant indicated that they are lost in the profession and, hence, some of them resort to daily absenteeism. However, loyalty to the system would help solve the problem of the estimated 10% to 12% of educators who are not at

school on a daily basis (Reddy et al: 2010). Although teachers may be loyal, the system would best be supplemented by a biometric system to monitor teacher absenteeism.

The literature on the biometrics system in terms of teacher absenteeism reveals that the system has been widely used in the developed countries with Gelb & Clark (2013) indicating that it is essential in the reduction of teacher absenteeism:

The technology has been particularly popular in India, where a diverse group of states and cities is using biometrics to reduce teacher absenteeism (Gelb & Clark 2013:28).

Although the current National Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, intended to introduce the biometric system in South African schools in order to reduce the 8% teacher absenteeism (*Sowetan*2013.5 a), this was not well received by SADTU. However, this research study reflects that the biometrics system of clocking in through a computer system could be a proper and appropriate solution to the highly destructive problem of teacher absenteeism.

As indicated in the literature review, it would appear that there is a series of hidden advantages to the biometrics system (Gelb & Clark 2013) although these advantages were clearly not made known to SADTU. The implementation and the use of this system would expose the lazy teachers who do not go to class or even come to school. One major advantage of the system is that it would ease the managerial burden of the principal and the SMT in controlling and monitoring the Z8. Thus, the SMT would be free to focus on other managerial duties, including resource maintenance and resource utilisation.

Although the participants in this research are quiet on the use of the biometric system the literature and the current Minister of Basic Education attach great significance to the utilisation of the system in trying to reduce teacher absenteeism at school. The main reason for the use of biometrics is that “statistically, biometrics is by far the most accurate method” (Gelb & Clark: 2013.65) with which to deal with teacher absenteeism at school. However, it

is essential that, as regards any system and procedures to curb teacher absenteeism, principals are empowered to be able to implement the correct procedures.

Such empowerment of the principal would definitely lead to the effective management of teacher absenteeism as the monitoring of classroom attendance and the actual teaching in class is critical. Thus, the principals and SMT members must be trained to deal the systems and procedures that relate to leave measures, particularly in view of the fact that this research study identified that the *“leave process have a loophole, it takes time to be processed at the regional office.”*The suggested remedy was that the process must be completed quickly and in quarterly periods to alert a teacher to a number of days available to him/her. In addition, the principal should promote the notion that there must be salary deductions when a teacher is absent at school, in other words, *“no work, no pay.”* The research participants suggested that the *“no work, no pay,”* system be implemented as a means of a follow up to each teacher who is absent from school.

The empowerment and re-skilling of principals and the SMT members will provide SMTs with the assurance that they are capable of handling the issues and challenges caused by teacher absenteeism. However, SMT members would need the assistance of the union representatives in order to overcome the challenges brought about by teacher absenteeism.

Motshekga (*Sowetan*2013:5a) states that *“we have the highest level of teacher unionization in the whole world, but their focus is on rights, not responsibilities”* and it is exacerbated by a *“lack of responsibility”* amongst teachers.

Most of the teachers interviewed indicated that absent teachers often have no valid reasons for their absence from school. Mbonambi(2002:58)offers a clear solution to the effect that school policies must make provision for teachers to report their absence from school a day before such absence when they know that they will be absent from school. This provision would enable principals to make arrangements for the classes that would not be attended.

The participants stressed that the unions must cooperate and assist the principals on in regulating teacher absenteeism. The unions representatives did indicate that *“we motivate*

*teachers not to be absent because it will affect the learner performance.*” Nevertheless, the unions protect their members when they face a hearing despite the fact that the unions openly state that *“we are against teacher absenteeism that is why we advocate for teaching and learning campaign.”* Unfortunately the unions play a minimal role in teacher absenteeism in terms of assisting the principal and in the development of the school in general. It would appear as if *“unions seem to have informed their members, either explicitly or implicitly, that they will always defend them when they experience problems with the employer.”* Thus, it may be said that the unions and union representatives are responsible for assisting teachers to be absent at school because they come in between the department and the principal in any case of misconduct as a result of teacher absenteeism. Thus, the department must be strict in this matter while the unions must assist the department and the SMTs in trying to curb teacher absenteeism. The unions are considered by the principals to be less than helpful in dealing with teacher absenteeism: *“The unions are silent on teacher absenteeism”* and, thus, the principals have to *“use tricks and strategies to deal with teacher absenteeism.”*

It is surprising that most of the teachers who participated in this research study were prepared to substitute for teachers who are absent at school although they become frustrated by those teachers who are frequently absent without a valid reason. In general, the participants appeared to regard substitution as a form of a team work with most of them claiming that *“it is the school culture to work together and we believe that learners must not be left unattended.”*

However, it is clearly imperative that the issue medical reports be investigated and that medical certificates must be scrutinised for authenticity by departmental officials at the district level. If there is any form of suspicion then the issue must be addressed adequately and in time to reduce the loss of time as regards contact with learners. While addressing the validity of the medical certificate, it is also suggested that the need to categorise sick leave as excused absenteeism be looked into. Thus, in order to curb teacher absenteeism, referrals to wellbeing sub-directorate office must be done by the doctors and motivated by the principals.



There are cases that require special attention and referral to the wellbeing directorate office in the Department of Education, either because teachers are drunkards, terminally or occasionally ill due to unqualified illness. Unqualified sickness includes teachers who are mentally unstable and those who are psychological unfit to work. Such teachers may be a danger to both the learners and the other teachers because they sometimes hallucinate. The school climate and cultural philosophy may be adversely affected by the above mentioned issues.

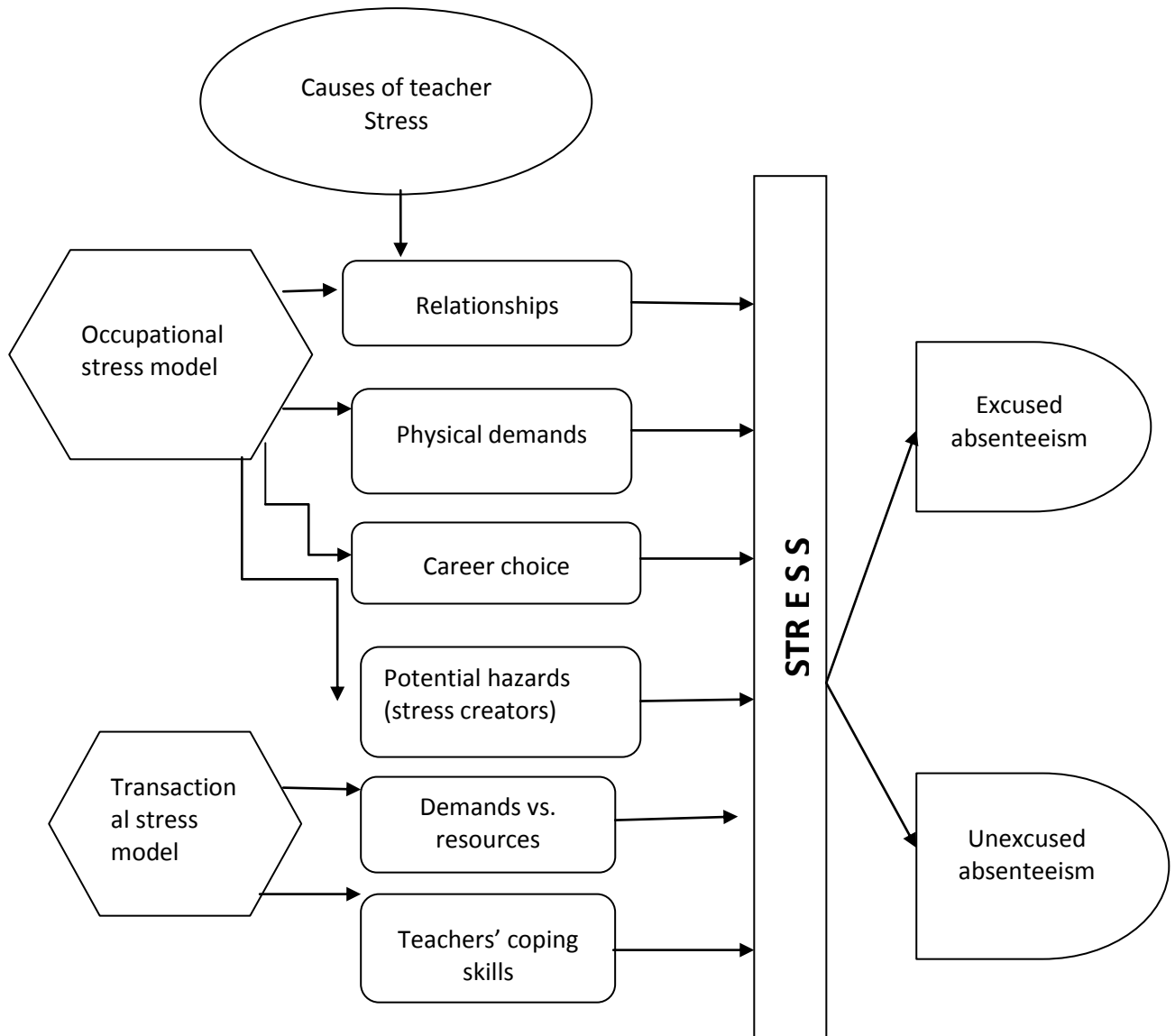
It was noted by this study that the current circuit manager regards the school climate and cultural philosophy as major solutions to the seriousness of teacher absenteeism at various schools—*“The school climate must be conducive for teaching and learning. The school climate depends on the school values and the school culture. One participant believed that “Improving the school climate will automatically improve classroom attendance by the teachers.”* The quality of teaching also depends on teacher morale and individual teacher discipline. However, the theoretical background that underpins the culture of doing things rests on both the transactional and occupational stress models and there are various elements in the school environment that creates a culture of doing things. Palmer and Cooper (2010) support this notion by stating that these elements include good relationships, physical demands and career choices.

### **6.7 Policy and perceptual changes with regards to teacher absenteeism.**

It is essential that teachers be made responsible for their individual leave of absence from school and that they must know that absenteeism is punishable. Policies that regulate leave of absence must be looked into (amended) to avoid directives that create the latitude to abuse leave of absence from school. There is a serious need for the policy, directives and instruments that regulate teacher absenteeism to be reshaped.

The model of work stress that emanates from this study includes various causes of teacher stress that lead to both positive and negative outcomes to work related stress. These stressors are both occupational and transactional in nature. The researcher is of the opinion that the following model of work stress, which is directly related to the occupational stress

model, demonstrates the potential hazards within the workplace and symptoms of stress as follows:



**Figure 6.2: Model of work stress**

## 6.8 Recommendations for further studies

- challenges experienced in handling leave forms at schools
- the impact of teacher substitution on South African schools
- the impact of an absent teacher on the work of his/her colleagues
- the implementation of policies that regulate teacher absenteeism
- impact of late-coming to class (time on task) on learner performance
- the introduction of a biometric system to curb teacher absenteeism.

## 6.9 Conclusion

In studying the relationship between the themes emerging from this research study it became evident that the reaction of teachers to stress and the elements of stress appear to give rise to teacher absenteeism.

The researcher applied some of the concepts from the transactional stress model and the occupational stress model in order to gain insights into the causes of teacher absenteeism in schools. The common factors between the two stress models were applied in relation to the concept of teacher absenteeism and authenticate the application and the validity of the theory of stress as regards teacher absenteeism.

It emerges from the transactional stress model that stress is a result of environmental demand and that the individual reaction to the stress imposed depends on the individual's cognitive development. The occupational stress model confirms to a great extent the job related stressors which were highlighted by this research study.

The study of teacher absenteeism in Middelburg, Nkangala District, Mpumalanga through the perceptions and experiences of the participants shows that teacher absenteeism is a complex phenomenon that is determined by a series of interrelated factors that must not be considered in isolation. These factors includes the internal and external forces which motivate teachers to be absent from school.

The general findings of this research study reveal that teachers are "stressed" by their work and that this may be linked directly to both occupational stress and transactional stress and, ultimately, teachers resort, in ever greater numbers, to being absent from school.

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## APPENDIX A: A LETTER OF REQUEST TO THE MIDDELBURG CIRCUITS



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  

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Faculty of Education

Enq: Mampane K.B  
Cell: 082 821 8297

P.O.Box 1114  
Mhluzi  
1050  
10 February 2012

The Circuit Manager  
Mpumalanga Education Department  
Middelburg Circuit No1  
Private Bag 1824  
Middelburg  
1050

Dear Sir

### RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN MIDDELBURG 1 CIRCUIT

I humbly request your permission to conduct a research in Middelburg 1 circuit schools.

I am currently a Master of Education (Education Management Law and Policy) student at the University of Pretoria. My research topic is: Educators' experiences and perceptions of teacher absenteeism.

The process of collecting data will start as soon as my ethical application has been approved by the ethical committee of the University of Pretoria. My research findings will be made available to the Department of Education.

I hope that my request will receive your favourable consideration.

Yours sincerely

Mr Mampane K.B. (Researcher)  
Cell: 082 82 18297  
Student No: 25551371

Prof C. Herman (Supervisor)  
(013) 420 5665

E-mail: kgale@webmail .co.za

Chaya.Herman@up.ac.za

## APPENDIX B: A LETTER OF REQUEST TO THE MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  

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Faculty of Education

Enq: Mampane K.B  
Cell: 082 821 8297

P.O.Box 1114  
Mhluzi  
1050  
12 February 2012

The HOD  
Mpumalanga Department of Education  
Private Bag X11341  
NELSPRUIT  
1200

Dear Sir/Madam

### **RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN MIDDELBURG 1 CIRCUIT**

I humbly request your permission to conduct a research in Middelburg 1 circuit schools. I am currently a Master of Education (Education Management Law and Policy) student at the University of Pretoria. My research topic is: Educators' experiences and perceptions of teacher absenteeism.

My research project involves accessing certain administrative documents for analysis, which includes: Z8 (daily attendance register/time book), daily report register, daily period register, leave forms, movement register, relieve register for absent teachers, and incident report/log book.

I intent interview seven secondary school principals in the Middelburg circuits and educators in the identified schools. During my interview, I will use a tape recorder which will help me to organise my data after the completion of the interview process. The exercise will last for Two weeks, at most, and will take 30- 45 minutes per identified individual participant teacher.

The identified participants will receive letters of notification for participation including time frames and they will be briefed about the fundamentals of the research project prior the commencement.

The process of collecting data will start as soon as my ethical application has been approved by the ethical committee of the University of Pretoria. After the completion of my research project, my research findings will be made available to the Department of Education. The research, in my opinion, will assist or help the principals and circuit inspectorate in understanding perceptions and experiences of educators with regards to teacher absenteeism.

I hope that my request will receive your favourable consideration.

Yours sincerely

Mr Mampane K.B. (Researcher)  
Cell: 082 82 18297  
Student No: 25551371

Prof C. Herman (Supervisor)  
(013) 420 5665

E-mail: [kgale@webmail .co.za](mailto:kgale@webmail.co.za)

[Chaya.Herman@up.ac.za](mailto:Chaya.Herman@up.ac.za).

## APPENDIX C: A LETTER TO PARTICIPANT



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  
Faculty of Education

Enq: Mampane K.B  
Cell: 082 821 8297

P.O.Box 1114  
Mhluzi  
1050

Dear Participant

### RE: REQUEST FOR YOUR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

You are humbly requested to participate in the research project aimed at collecting data on perceptions and experiences of teacher's on teacher absenteeism.

I am currently a Master of Education (Education Management Law and Policy) student at the University of Pretoria.

#### **My research topic is:**

Educators' experiences and perceptions of teacher absenteeism.

Your participation in this research project remains voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity is guaranteed and if you decide to withdraw from the project you may discontinue, at any stage. The purpose and the process will be fully explained and you will not be placed at risk or harm of any kind.

#### **The aim of the research project**

The aim of the study is to investigate experiences and perceptions of teacher's with regards to teacher absenteeism at school.

#### **My expectations from you as a participant**

I will meet with you to explain the purpose and the aim of the study and I will as well give clear information about the following:

- The title of the research project
- The purpose of this study
- What is expected of you in this study?
- Your rights as a participant in this study



In the meeting, you will be given a chance to ask questions and clarity will be given to avoid misunderstanding. If you are willing to participate, then you will be requested to sign a declaration in a form of a consent form.

An arrangement of 30-45 minutes interview will be made for the individual participant.

### **Benefits**

The research project is important because it will benefit School Management Teams, and educators in harmonising relationships and dealing with perceptions with regards teacher absenteeism. The study will also contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of Education Management Law and Policy studies. Recommendations will assist principals and SMT's on how to deal with teacher absenteeism and by participation in this research project, you are given a chance to contribute to the policy development.

### **Declaration of your consent**

If you are willing to participate in this research project, please sign the attached letter as a declaration of your consent. If you have any questions, misunderstanding or need clarity, do not hesitate to contact my supervisor or me at the numbers given below, or via the E-mail. You must know that your acknowledgement to participate in this study is out of your free will, knowing that you may withdraw from the research project at any time. Therefore, under no circumstances will your identity be made known to any party or organisation that may be involved in the research processes and or which has some form power over you.

I hope and trust that my request will receive your favourable consideration as I will wait patiently to receive a positive feedback from you.

Yours sincerely

K.B. Mampane(Researcher)  
Cell: 082 821 8297  
E-mail: [kgale@webmail.co.za](mailto:kgale@webmail.co.za)

Dr C.Herman(Supervisor)  
(012)420 5665  
[Chaya.Herman@up.ac.za](mailto:Chaya.Herman@up.ac.za)

## APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (your name),

Agree      Do not agree

(Cross the relevant choice),

To take part in the research project entitled: Educators' experiences and perceptions of teacher absenteeism. I understand that I have to give information relevant to the study and I will be interviewed using an audio-digital tape recorder.

I understand that the researcher subscribe to the following principles that governs research:

- **Voluntary** participation in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
- **Informed consent**, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.
- **Safety in the participation**, to be precise, human respondents should not be placed at risk or harm of any kind e.g., research with young children.
- **Privacy**, meaning that the confidentiality and anonymity of human respondents should be protected at all times.
- **Trust**, which implies that human respondents will not respond to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature of a participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E: A LETTER OF REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT SCHOOL



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  
Faculty of Education

Enq: Mampane K.B  
Cell: 082 821 8297

P.O.Box 1114  
Mhluzi  
1050

The Principal

.....  
.....  
.....

Dear Sir/Madam

### RE:REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL

I humbly request your permission to conduct a research in your school.

I am currently a Master of Education (Education Management Law and Policy) student at the University of Pretoria. My research topic is: Educators' experiences and perceptions of teacher absenteeism.

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the experiences and perceptions of educator's with regards to teacher absenteeism. I intend to interview the principal, three educators who are always absent and three educators who are always present at school, in secondary schools, per school. Data will be collected using interviews and document analysis. The interviews will last for about 45 minutes and will be conducted at any time and any date that suits you. The process of data collection should be completed on or before the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2012. The venue for the interviews will be at your school.

The identified participants will receive letters of notification for participation including time frames and they will be briefed about fundamentals of research project prior the commencement of the interviews.

I subscribe to the following Ethical Principles:

- Voluntary participation in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
- Informed consent, meaning that research participants must all times be informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent for their participation in the research.
- Safety in participation, human respondents shall not be placed at risk or harm of any kind.
- Privacy means that confidentiality and anonymity of respondents should be protected at all times.
- Trust, which implies that respondents will not contribute to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research processes or its published outcome.

Attached, find a copy of permission from the Mpumalanga Department of Education. I hope and trust that my request will be considered as I am looking forward to receive a feedback from you.

Yours sincerely

Mr Mampane K.B. (Researcher)  
Cell: 082 82 18297  
Student No: 25551371

Prof C. Herman (Supervisor)  
(013) 420 5665

E-mail: kgale@webmail .co.za

Chaya.Herman@up.ac.za

## APPENDIX F: A LETTER TO UNIONS, FOR UNION PARTICIPATION



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  
Faculty of Education

Enq: Mampane K.B  
Cell: 082 821 8297

P.O.Box 1114  
Mhluzi  
1050

.....

.....  
.....  
.....

Dear Sir/Madam

### RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I humbly request your permission to conduct a research with one of the Union member. I am currently a Master of Education (Education Management Law and Policy) student at the University of Pretoria. My research topic is: Educators' experiences and perceptions of teacher absenteeism.

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the experiences and perceptions of educator's with regards to teacher absenteeism. I intend to interview the principal, three educators who are always absent and three educators who are always present at school, in secondary schools, per school. Data will be collected using interviews and document analysis. The interviews will last for about 20 minutes and will be conducted at any time and any date that suits you. The process of data collection should be completed on or before the 30 October 2012. The venue for the interviews will be at a convenient place for the respondent.

The identified participants will receive letters of notification for participation including time frames and they will be briefed about fundamentals of research project prior the commencement of the interviews.

I subscribe to the following Ethical Principles:

- Voluntary participation in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
- Informed consent, meaning that research participants must all times be informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent for their participation in the research.
- Safety in participation, human respondents shall not be placed at risk or harm of any kind.
- Privacy means that confidentiality and anonymity of respondents should be protected at all times.
- Trust, which implies that respondents will not contribute to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research processes or its published outcome.

Attached, find a copy of permission from the Mpumalanga Department of Education. I hope and trust that my request will be considered as I am looking forward to receive a feedback from you.

Yours sincerely

Mr Mampane K.B. (Researcher)  
Cell: 082 82 18297  
Student No: 25551371

E-mail: kgale@webmail .co.za

Prof C. Herman (Supervisor)  
(013) 420 5665

Chaya.Herman@up.ac.za

## APPENDIX G: A LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**education**  
DEPARTMENT: EDUCATION  
MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

Private Bag X 11341  
Nelspruit 1200  
Government Boulevard  
Riverside Park  
Building 5  
Mpumalanga Province  
Republic of South Africa

*Litiko leTefundvo umnyango weFundo Departement van Onderwys umnyango wezemfundo*  
Enquiries: A.H Baloyi (013) 766 5476

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**MR. K.B. MAMPANE**  
**P.O. BOX 1114**  
**MHLUZI**  
**1050**

**RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN THE  
MIDDLEBURG NUMBER ONE CIRCUIT OF NKANGALA DISTRICT.**

Your application (Dated 12 February 2012) to conduct educational research for **M.ED program** on the topic: "An investigation of the experiences and perceptions of educators' on teacher absenteeism" was received on the 19 March 2012.

Your research proposal, research questions, objectives, aims and the background gives an impression that your study will benefit the department especially the School Management Teams (SMT). Given the motivation and the anticipated report of the study, I approve your application to conduct your research in the designated institutions of the Middleburg One Circuit of Nkangala District.

You are further requested to read and observe the guidelines as spelt out in the research manual which was forwarded to you earlier. The importance of this study cannot be overemphasized as solutions towards improving Physical Science and Mathematics Education in the Province is a standing priority of the Department;

*M.A.*

therefore you are expected to share your findings with the Department and all affected stakeholders. It will be appreciated if you can present your findings in electronic form and make formal presentation to the strategic planning's' research unit and the Teacher Development Sub-directorate. For more information kindly liaise with the department's research unit @ 013 766 5476 or [a.baloyi@education.mpu.gov.za](mailto:a.baloyi@education.mpu.gov.za).

The department wishes you well in this important study and pledge to give you the necessary support you may need.

**RECOMMENDED/NOT RECOMMENDED.**

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**MR. A.H. BALOYI**  
**RESEARCH SUBDIRECTORATE**

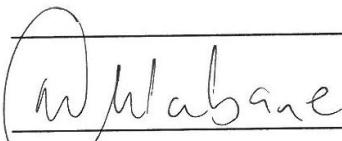
26/03/2012

**DATE**

**APPROVED/~~NOT APPROVED~~:**

---

---



**MRS MOC MHLABANE**  
**HEAD OF DEPARTMENT**

26/3/12

**DATE**



## APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE DEPARTMENTAL CIRCUIT MANAGER

Rank of the departmental official (pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of a departmental Official (pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_

### Biographical Information:

- What is your designation/rank?
  - How many years have you been in this post/position?
  - What are your daily duties?
  - What are your highest qualifications?
  - Describe the challenges that you face daily in this position.
1. What do you understand by teacher absenteeism?
  2. How prevalent is teacher absenteeism within the department?
  3. How do you rate the teacher absenteeism? Between 1-10/ 10% - 100%.
  4. What kind of leave do most teachers take?
  5. How long do they take it?
  6. What procedure do they do when they arrange for a leave?
  7. How do teachers notify/ inform the school of their leave of absence?
  8. To whom must teachers report their leave of absence at the school level?
  9. Is that kind of communication effective?
  10. When a teacher is absent who is supposed to take care of learners?
  11. What are your personal feelings about teachers who are always absent?
  12. Does teacher absenteeism affect learner performance? If yes, explain how?
  13. What are the teacher's reasons for their absence?
  14. What are the challenges that are experienced in handling leave forms?
  15. Mention the policies that regulate teacher absenteeism?
    - a. Are these policies followed by the schools?
    - b. What are the challenges experienced by the schools in dealing with leave forms?
  16. In your opinion, what causes teacher absenteeism?
  17. In your opinion, what could be done to curb teacher absenteeism?
  18. Briefly comment on teacher absenteeism in general?

## APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – PRINCIPALS/DEPUTIES/HOD's

Name of school (pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_

### Biographical Information:

- How long have you been a teacher?
  - How long have you been a principal at this school?
  - How long have you been a teacher at this school?
  - How many teachers are at this school?
  - How many learners are at this school?
  - From which grades does the school start?
- 

1. How prevalent is teacher absenteeism in your school?
2. How do you rate the teachers in your school?

If 1 is most of the teachers are always at school, or 10 most of the teacher miss school often.  
How do you rate your school between 1 to 10?

Explain...

- 2.1. How long do teachers usually take the leave of absence, at most?
  - 2.2. What is usually the teacher's explanation to their absenteeism?
  - 2.3. How do they let you know?
  - 2.4. Do you find that one group of teachers is more absent than the other? (age, gender, subject teachers, etc...)
3. How do you monitor absenteeism?
  4. What kind of challenges do you experience when a teacher is absent?
  5. What is your role, with regards to teacher absence, as a principal?
  6. What measures do you use to regulate teacher absenteeism?
  7. In your opinion, what causes teacher absenteeism?
  8. In your opinion, what can be done to combat teacher absenteeism?

## APPENDIX J: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE - TEACHERS

Name of school (pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of teacher (pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_

### Biographical Information:

- How many years have you been teaching?
- How long have you been in the school?
- What are your highest qualifications that you have?
- What subjects do you teach?
- What grade do you teach?
- How would you describe the school's atmosphere? Explain.
- Have you worked in another school prior to the one you are working at?
- If, yes then describe your experiences at the previous school.

1. How prevalent is teacher absenteeism in your school?

2. How do you rate yourself?

If 1 is I am always at school, or 10, I miss school often.....

Where would you rate yourself between 1 to 10? Explain...

3. What kind of leave do you usually take?

3.1. How long do you usually take that leave?

4. What is the process or procedure involved in arranging for a leave at school?

4.1. Is there procedure or system working? Explain (give example)

1. Working                      Not sure                      Not working

5. Do you notify your school in advance about your absenteeism?

5.1. If yes, how do you report your absence at school?

SMS                      Telephone                      Via colleague

5.2. To whom do you report your absence?

5.3. Why do you choose this kind of communication?

6. When you are absent, who takes care of the learners?

7. When you come back from your leave, particularly after losing day/s of teaching time, what do you do?
8. Are you always ready to substitute a teacher who is absent?
9. What are your personal feelings towards teachers who are often absent from work?
10. To what extent the absence of your colleagues impact on your work?
11. In your opinion, what causes teacher absenteeism?
12. In your opinion, what can be done to combat teacher absenteeism?

## **APPENDIX K: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE SUPPORT STAFF (SCHOOL ADMIN CLERKS)**

Name of school (pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of support staff (pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_

### **Biographical Information:**

- What is your job description?( Admin Clark/ General Assistant/ Secretary)
- How many years have you been in that post?
- How long have you been at this school?
- What are your daily duties?
- What are your highest qualifications?
- Describe the school's atmosphere in terms of discipline

1. What do you understand by teacher absenteeism?
2. How prevalent is teacher absenteeism at this school?
3. How do you rate the teacher absenteeism? Between 1-10.
4. What kind of leave do most teachers take?
5. How long do they take it?
6. What procedure do they do when they arrange for a leave?
7. How do teachers notify/ inform the school of their leave of absence?
8. To whom do teachers report their leave of absence?
9. Is that kind of communication effective?
10. When a teacher is absent who takes care of learners?
11. What are your personal feelings about teachers who are always absent?
12. Does teacher absenteeism affects learner performance?
13. What are the teacher's reasons for their absence?
14. In your opinion, what causes teacher absenteeism?
15. In your opinion, what could be done to curb teacher absenteeism?

## APPENDIX L: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE UNION REPRESENTATIVE

Rank (pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of a union rep. (pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_

### Biographical Information:

- What is your position in the union?
  - How many years have you been in this position?
  - What are your daily duties?
  - What are your highest qualifications?
  - Describe the challenges that you face daily in this position.
- 
1. What do you understand by teacher absenteeism?
  2. How prevalent is teacher absenteeism within the department?
  3. How do you rate teacher absenteeism? Between 1-10/ 10% - 100%.
  4. What kind of leave do most teachers take?
  5. How long do they take it?
  6. What procedure do they do when they arrange for a leave?
  7. How do teachers notify/ inform their schools of their leave of absence?
  8. To whom must teachers report their leave of absence at the school level?
  9. Is that kind of communication effective?
  10. When a teacher is absent who is supposed to take care of learners?
  11. What are your personal feelings about teachers who are always absent?
  12. Does teacher absenteeism affects learner performance? If yes, explain how?
  13. What are the teacher's reasons for their absence?
  14. What are the challenges that are experienced in handling leave forms?
  15. Mention the policies that regulate teacher absenteeism?
    - a. Are these policies followed by the schools?
    - b. What are the challenges experienced by the schools in dealing with leave forms?
  16. What is your Union stand point on absenteeism?
  17. D you sometimes run workshops on teacher absenteeism?
  18. In your opinion, what causes teacher absenteeism?
  19. In your opinion, what could be done to curb teacher absenteeism?
  20. Briefly comment on teacher absenteeism in general?

Thank you

## **APPENDIX M: TYPES OF LEAVES CATEGORIES SET OUT BY PAM**

### **4.6.1.1. Special Leave for Quarantine purposes**

- It is type of a leave granted to a teacher who has been exposed to a medical condition or a situation that warrants him/her to be placed under quarantine.
- Special leave with full pay may be granted to an educator who has been exposed to a medical condition that requires such person to be placed under quarantine.
- Application for such leave must be accompanied by a certificate from a medical practitioner stating the period of quarantine as well as the reasons necessitating such leave.

### **4.6.1.2. Normal sick leave:**

- Educators are entitled to 36 working days sick leave with full pay over a three-year cycle. Unused sick leave shall lapse at the expiry of the three-year cycle.
- If an educator is unable to report for duty due to sudden illness, she or he must immediately notify his/her immediate supervisor of her or his inability to report for duty.
- Educators who apply for three or more sick leave days must submit a certificate from a registered and recognized medical practitioner as defined by the Health Professionals' Council of South Africa, citing the reason for and duration of absence.
- In instances where a pattern in the utilization of sick leave has been established, a certificate may be required for absences of less than three working days. Notwithstanding the submission of a certificate, the employer may, on the grounds of further medical advice, refuse to grant sick leave for any absence from duty to which the certificate relates, and the absence shall be considered as leave without pay.
- For every 15 consecutive days' leave taken without pay, an educator's sick leave entitlement shall be reduced by 1/36th per sick leave cycle.
- If an educator falls ill whilst on annual leave with full pay, such leave may be converted to sick leave provided that a certificate from a registered medical practitioner is submitted within 30 days to substantiate the indisposition.
- Vacation leave without pay may not be converted into sick leave.

#### 4.6.1.3. **Maternity leave:**

- An educator is entitled to 4 consecutive months' maternity leave on full pay to commence at least 14 days prior to the expected date of birth but not later than the actual date of birth in a case of a premature confinement.
- Maternity leave may be extended upon application by one or more of the following:
  - the granting of sick leave as a result of a medical complication;
  - the granting of up to 184 consecutive days unpaid leave; and
- An Educator who experiences a miscarriage, still birth or termination of the pregnancy after starting paid maternity leave, shall be eligible for six consecutive weeks paid maternity leave. For at least six weeks after the birth, no educator may commence with normal official duty unless the attending practitioner certifies that the educator is fit to do so.
- Where it is practically feasible, an employer may allow an educator to interrupt her maternity leave by letting her return to work temporarily if the baby is hospitalized for a period longer than a month during the maternity leave due to premature birth or illness.

#### 4.6.1.4. **Temporary Incapacity Leave:**

- An educator who has exhausted her or his sick leave credit in a three-year cycle and who, according to the relevant medical practitioner, requires to be absent due to incapacity that is not permanent may be granted additional sick leave with full pay.
- Such a condition must have been certified in advance by the attending medical practitioner as a temporary incapacity except where conditions do not permit.
- The Head of Department may require the educator to obtain a second opinion before granting approval for additional sick leave. Expenditure in this regard will be met from the departmental budget.
- The Head of Department may grant a maximum of 30 consecutive working days leave with full pay during which period an investigation must be conducted into the nature and extent of the incapacity. The investigation shall be conducted in accordance with item 10(1) of Schedule 8 of the Labour Relations Act, 1995.



- On the basis of medical evidence, the Head of Department may approve the granting of additional sick leave days on conditions that she or he shall determine.
- If the educator is of the view that she or he has been unfairly treated as regards the granting of additional sick leave, she/he has the right to follow the grievance procedure and the relevant dispute resolution procedures in order to settle the matter.

#### **4.6.1.5. Permanent Incapacity**

- Educators whose degree of incapacity has been certified by a competent medical practitioner as permanent shall, with the approval of the Head of Department, be granted a maximum of 30 working days paid sick leave, or such additional number of days required by the employer to finalize processes mentioned below.
- The employer shall, within 30 working days, ascertain the feasibility of:
  - Alternative employment; or
  - Adapting duties or work circumstances to accommodate the educator.
- An educator, whose degree of incapacity has been certified as permanent but who can still render a service, may, in terms of the applicable measures, be redeployed horizontally with retention of her or his benefits.
- If the redeployment necessitates reallocation to a job of a lower grading, such action should be explained well in advance and the continued utilization of such an educator should, in this regard, be with her or his consent.
- In instances where the educator's redeployment entails retraining, the employer shall take requisite resources (time and financial) and potential returns into consideration before approving redeployment.
- The redeployment of an educator's services should ensure the optimal utilization of her or his competencies and should not compromise service delivery.
- If the employer or the educator is convinced that the educator will never be able to render an effective service at her or his level or rank, the educator may proceed with an application for termination of service due to ill health.

**4.6.1.6. Leave for occupational Injury and diseases:**

- Educators who, as a result of their work, suffer occupational injuries or contract occupational diseases, shall be granted occupational and disease leave for the duration of the period they cannot work.
- If an educator suffers a work-related injury as a result of an accident involving a third party, the Head of Department shall grant her or him occupational injury leave provided that the educator:
  - Brings a claim for compensation against the third party.
  - Undertakes to use compensation (in terms of the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act of 1993) received to recompense as far as possible for the employer's contribution to the cost arising from the accident.
  - The Head of Department shall take reasonable steps to assist an educator to claim compensation.

**4.6.1.7. Leave for adoption:**

- An educator, who adopts a child that is younger than two years, qualifies for adoption leave to a maximum of 45 working days.
- If both spouses and life partners are employed in the Public Service, both partners qualify for adoption leave provided that the combined leave taken does not exceed 45 working days.

**4.6.1.8. Family responsibility leave and special leave for urgent private affairs:**

- An educator shall be granted 3 working days leave per annual leave cycle if:
  - the educator's spouse or life partner gives birth; or
  - the educator's child, spouse or life partner is sick.
  - An educator shall be granted 5 working days leave per annual leave cycle if:
    - ✓ the educator's child, spouse or life partner dies; or
    - ✓ the educator's immediate family member dies.
- An institution-based educator may, during a scheduled working period, be granted special leave to attend to: an urgent private matter, the nature of which is such that it warrants such an educator's absence from work.
- [Para. 15.3 amended by G.N. No. 244 of 2002 published in *Government Gazette* No. 23187 dated 1 March 2002.], states that:

- The number of leave days taken in respect of an institution-based educator, must not exceed 12 working days in an annual leave cycle.
- An educator who has used all his or her leave may apply to:
- Use available annual leave, including leave accrued and can use up to 184 calendar days of unpaid leave.

**4.6.1.9. Special leave for professional and personal development and for religious observances:**

- Special leave with full pay may be granted to an institution-based educator:
  - to engage in activities aimed at his or her professional development;
  - to engage in activities aimed at his or her personal development where such personal development is also in the interest of the employer; or
  - For a religious observance.
- The total number of leave days granted to an institution-based educator may not exceed 3 working days per annual leave cycle.

**4.6.1.10. Special Leave for study purposes**

- Special leave may be granted to an educator for an approved course of study and for a period approved by the employer, on conditions as approved by the employer, including leave with full or partial pay or without pay.
- If special leave with full or partial pay for study purposes is granted to an educator, the employer may call for periodic progress reports in respect of the educator's studies and such educator shall enter into an agreement with the employer in a form approved by the employer in terms of which he or she undertakes to serve the employer immediately. Then, after the completion of the period of special leave for study purposes for a period, the educator shall, equal to at least the period for which special leave for study purposes on full pay has been granted to him or her, serve the department.

**4.6.1.11. Special Leave for examination purposes:**

- An educator may be granted special leave for examination purposes with full pay for each day on which such educator sits as a candidate for an examination approved for this purpose by the employer plus one additional day of special leave for study purposes for each such day of examination which may be taken on the working days immediately prior to the days of examination.

**4.6.1.12. Special leave for participating in sporting, cultural and other events:**

- Special leave for a period and on conditions approved by the head of a department, in terms of policy of such department, may be granted to an educator for participating in sports, cultural, local council and other relevant activities. Participation for which leave may be granted may include representation of the country, province or other comparable level as an actual participant, referee, adjudicator, course or group leader, or for participating in or attending a relevant conference, meeting or other event approved for this purpose by the employer.

**4.6.1.13. Special leave in extraordinary circumstances:**

- Subject to section 14 of the Act and notwithstanding any disciplinary measures that may apply, unauthorized absence by an educator shall be regarded as special leave in extraordinary circumstances and shall be without pay unless the employer in a specific case determines otherwise.
- If, in the opinion of the employer, circumstances justify it, it may grant or place an educator on special leave in extraordinary circumstances for any reasonable purpose and for any reasonable period, and such leave shall be without pay unless the employer determines otherwise.

**4.6.1.14. Unpaid leave:**

- If an educator has utilized all her or his accrued annual leave, the Head of Department may grant her or him unpaid leave up to a maximum of 184 consecutive days.
- Absences from work due to arrest, imprisonment or appearance in court on a criminal charge that leads to a conviction must be recorded as unpaid leave.

#### **4.6.1.15. Unpaid leave for continuity of services:**

- Unpaid leave for a maximum of 120 consecutive days may be granted to an institution-based educator who was previously employed as an institution-based educator by the same or another education department for the purpose of retaining the continuity of the educator's service.
- The unpaid leave shall commence on the day immediately following the date on which the educator last received salary from his or her previous employer and shall expire on the day preceding the date of assumption of duty with the present employer.
- The limitation of 120 days referred to, above, shall not apply to an educator in cases where the period concerned extends from the day immediately following the last day of a term to the day immediately preceding the first day of the term after a full term has elapsed.
- Where unpaid leave for continuity of service has been granted to an educator, the service of the educator is regarded as continuous for all purposes of determining his or her period of service.

#### **4.6.1.16. Annual leave.**

- Teachers are considered to be on annual leave during school holidays. The annual leave existed before 2004 and teachers thereafter never enjoyed annual leave thus recently teachers do not accrue any money on leave that are not used but forfeit the days.

#### **4.6.1.17. Pre-natal leave:**

- Collective Agreement of 1 of 2012, states that with effect from 1 January 2013, an eligible employee will be entitled to a 8 working days pre-natal leave, per pregnancy, allowing the employee to attend medical examinations by a medical practitioner or mid-wife, and tests related to the pregnancy. An employee can utilise a full day or part of the day for pre-natal leave. The application for pre-natal leave should be supported by reasonable proof that the employee attended a doctor's appointment and or went for a test related to the pregnancy. An employee who has used all her pre-natal leave may, subject to the approval of the Head of Department, apply to use available annual leave and/ or unpaid leave. Absences related to medical complications during the pregnancy will be covered by sick leave. All other maternity leave provisions, as defined in the Determination on Leave of Absence, remain unchanged.

## APPENDIX N: ETHICS APPROVAL



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA  
Faculty of Education

### RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

**CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

**DEGREE AND PROJECT**

**INVESTIGATOR(S)**

**DEPARTMENT**

**DATE CONSIDERED**

**DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE**

**CLEARANCE NUMBER :**

EM 12/03/03

M.Ed

Educators' experiences and perceptions of teacher absenteeism

Kgale B Mampane

Education Management and Policy Studies

03 September 2013

APPROVED

Please note:

*For Masters applications, ethical clearance is valid for 2 years*

*For PhD applications, ethical clearance is valid for 3 years.*

**CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS  
COMMITTEE**

Prof Liesel Ebersöhn

**DATE**

03 September 2013

**CC**

Jeannie Beukes

Liesel Ebersöhn

Prof C Herman

This ethical clearance certificate is issued subject to the following conditions:

1. A signed personal declaration of responsibility
2. If the research question changes significantly so as to alter the nature of the study, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted
3. It remains the students' responsibility to ensure that all the necessary forms for informed consent are kept for future queries.

Please quote the clearance number in all enquiries.