

# **The management of teacher absenteeism in independent primary schools in Gauteng**

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**The management of teacher absenteeism in independent primary schools in  
Gauteng**

by

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PRETORIA

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**DECLARATION**

I, Gonasagarie Naidoo, hereby declare that this MEd thesis:

*The management of teacher absenteeism in independent primary schools in Midrand, Gauteng Province*

is my original work and that all the sources I consulted have been acknowledged.



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Signature

13 April 2017

## ABSTRACT

Teacher absenteeism is a huge concern both internationally and nationally. If it is not well-managed the resulting consequences can be disastrous for schools and most important, the students. While there have been many studies regarding the reasons teachers get absent and the impact this has on student achievement, there is very little information available on the actual management practises of teacher absenteeism, especially in independent, primary schools. Therefore my study will focus on how teacher absenteeism is managed in independent, primary schools in Midrand, Gauteng Province. The purpose of this study is to investigate and procure a basis for understanding how teacher absenteeism is managed in independent, primary schools in South Africa, and in doing so, deliver a perspective into the effective and gainful management thereof. My study made use of a qualitative, case study approach. Numerous data collection techniques like interviews, document analysis and observations were utilised to produce the following results:

School managers play a pivotal role in managing teacher absenteeism. The climate and culture they create within the school environment is fundamental to the manner in which teacher absenteeism is managed. If school managers adopt a strong stance against offending teachers and the immediate penalties are opposed, as well as, rewarding the teachers who work in a committed manner and a key component of this is for teachers to attend school regularly and on time, then that specific school will experience low levels of teacher absenteeism. Independent schools in particular exert enormous pressure on their teachers to perform at their best due to parents paying a high amount in school fees and due to the fact that independent schools have direct control over their teachers' salaries, the teachers feel compelled to fall in line with the schools' expectations. As a result of my study, these strategies now become available to the schools that experience high rates of teacher absenteeism.



## KEYWORDS

- management
- school leaders
- school managers
- teachers
- absenteeism
- independent, primary schools
- strategies
- climate
- culture
- management styles
- leadership styles

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

*“When asked about the problem of absenteeism among teachers, most principals tend to shrug and write off the practice to the unreliability of public transport, a lack of teacher commitment, or union militancy. The failure on the part of these principals to exert a tight time management regime in their schools is symptomatic of a general failure to take responsibility and to exercise control over their own work environment. It would seem that South African teachers, managers and officials have not transcended the dependency culture fostered by successive authoritarian regimes over the last three centuries. Elmore (2004) notes that a culture of passivity and failure is present in schools where managers, teachers and pupils assign causality for success or failure to forces outside their control” (Taylor, 2009).*

#### 1.1 Introduction

Teacher absenteeism, a matter of severe distress internationally that rightfully warrants much attention (UNESCO, 2005), is becoming an increasing concern in developing countries (OECD, 2004). School principals have long been concerned with reducing the increase in teacher absenteeism, but often without the benefit of really understanding the condition they are trying to remedy (Jacobson, 1990).

It emerged from a state-wide study of US school directors conducted by Norton (1998) that 71% of the directors reported teacher absenteeism as a main problem to contend with. A study undertaken by the Council for Educational Priorities highlighted that the school principal was the most important factor in the success of teacher attendance programmes (Foldesy & Foster, 1989). The Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCFS, 2008) in England revealed that 58% of the education workforce took sick leave in 2008. Researchers such as Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor (2007); Corallo and McDonald (2001); Miller, Murnane, and Willet (2008) all concur in their studies that teacher absenteeism has an impact on student achievement.

According to Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Rees and Ehrenberg (1991) and Finlayson (2009), this situation has caused an expensive financial drain on many school districts since billions of dollars are spent annually on hiring substitute teachers as well as paying the teacher who is absent. Miller *et al.* (2008) remark that teacher absenteeism has increased drastically, especially in urban areas with a high population of African American or Latino students. Based on the Hechinger Report, nationally, a female teacher is more likely to be absent if she teaches in a middle school (Perrillo, 2012).

Tabarrok (2012) argues that five to six percent of the teachers in the United States are absent from school every day, which basically amounts to one teacher being absent every twenty days. During the 2009/2010 school year, the Philadelphia School District employed around 11 000 teachers (School District of Philadelphia, 2010). Thus, if we were to apply Tabarrok's formula, it would mean that approximately 660 teachers are absent on a daily basis. Teacher absenteeism in the School District of Philadelphia could well add up to 25 % of the 11 000 teachers that were employed during the 2009/2010 school year. Even though teacher absences differ from one state to another and from one year to another, Toppo (2013) claims that one in three teachers are absent for ten days per year.

Collectively, teachers exceed the rate of absenteeism in comparison to employees in most other professions (Clotfelter *et al.*, 2007). According to Kronholz (2013), teacher absenteeism is responsible for the average, public school student having to settle for a substitute teacher for more than six months of that student's school life. Students spend an average of six to thirteen days with substitute teachers each year (Zubrzycki, 2012). Edelman (2003) and Pitkoff (1993) are of the opinion that the services of substitute teachers are inferior when compared to the regular teachers.

In South Africa, the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, revealed that there were many occasions where teachers arrived late or left early from schools. She remarked that "there were 1000 absent teachers in 451 schools visited in one day and most of the teachers were not teaching" (Motshekga 2013:5).



Mrs Motshekga stated that South Africa has the worst teacher absenteeism rate in the South African Development Community (SADC) region, amounting to almost 7.5 million days lost which is more than double the average in the SADC region (Motshekga, 2013:5).

In a 2010 report commissioned by the United Nations Children's Fund, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) found that the average teacher is away from school or the classroom between 20 and 24 days a year. This figure was based on an analysis of the Khulisa Consortium Audit of Ordinary and Independent Schools that had been conducted in 2008.

Mthombeni (2010: 1) feels that the South African schooling culture may be complacent about teachers who act irresponsibly since there is a lack of enforcement of corrective action against those who abuse the leave system. He came to this conclusion when, as part of his studies, he focussed on shortages in the school infrastructure and a lack of learning materials which further aggravated teacher absenteeism.

The "climate and leadership" ethos within any school influences the rate of teacher absenteeism (Reddy, Prinsloo, Netshitangani, Moletsane, Juan, & Janse van Rensburg, 2010). Curbing teacher absence within schools is reliant on the school's organisational structures in terms of how the school reacts to and deals with teachers who are continually absent. Schools that ignore this issue, or deal with the matter lightly, are more likely to experience higher rates of teacher absenteeism (Reddy *et al.*, 2010). The school principal who supports his/her staff by adopting a strong stance against those teachers who are frequently absent and thus adds to the workload of the teachers who are present, helps to decrease the absenteeism rate in that school (Dworkin, Haney, Dworkin & Teschov, 1990).

Reddy *et al.* (2010) found that there are a number of strategies or interventions in place to manage teacher absenteeism in public schools in South Africa. These include: (i) laws such as the Constitution of South Africa, 1996, providing for the right to education; and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997, providing for fair labour practices and leave measures as well as (ii) departmental and school policies and procedures, such as employment contracts and human resource management governing terms and conditions of employment, including leave taking and performance management (Reddy *et al.*, 2010).

This study is intended to provide empirical data on independent primary schools with regard to the management of teacher absenteeism, and in doing so, undertakes to share all strategies and interventions employed as well as their effectiveness.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Teacher absenteeism is a continuing and growing concern both locally and internationally, and the high rate of teacher absenteeism suggests that there are gaps in the effective and strategic management of teacher attendance, despite institutional interventions to manage it. A World Bank study in 2005 indicated that an average 19% of teachers were generally absent from schools in Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Peru and Uganda. In India, one out of four school teachers who taught in government schools were absent and when the survey team visited these schools, they found that only half of the teachers were actually teaching (Kremer, Chaudhury, Rogers, Muralidharan & Hammer, 2005).

One aspect that contributes to the high teacher absenteeism rate is lack of proper supervision which makes it easy for teachers to miss classes without repercussions (Banerjee, King, Orazem & Paterno, 2012). This problem is prevalent in rural areas where supervision usually requires extensive travel, but teacher absenteeism can also become a grave issue in cities (Banerjee *et al.*, 2012). Attending to other duties such as training, meetings with superiors, and administrative responsibilities (Banerjee *et al.*, 2012), also keeps teachers away from the classroom.

According to Hackett (2009:1), teacher absenteeism affects the effectiveness of a school because school days that are lost have an adverse effect on student achievement. The school's reputation is at stake and when it becomes tainted, this may eventually influence the students to stay away from school.

Usman, Akhmadi and Suryadarma (2007: 207) argue that "an absent teacher often means no schooling for the children", which only serves to emphasise the effects of teacher absenteeism on students and their performance. Children's willingness to learn can be dampened by absent teachers (Jacobs, 2007). Schools often struggle to find appropriate substitute teachers and the students' learning is affected. The missed

instruction time is massive and in most instances it cannot be made up for (Mampane, 2013).

Grady (2004) proposed that principals can strengthen their positions if they are honest, give accurate feedback and learn key lessons from the mistakes they make when running their own schools. Effective teachers are committed to their learners (O' Hanlon & Clifton, 2004). According to Bush (2007), the standard of leadership in a school has a direct bearing on the school and its set outcomes. He adds that in order for South African schools to be effective, managers and leaders need to be at their most efficient.

The fact that teacher absenteeism is a priority problem for the South African government was signalled by President, Jacob Zuma, in his State of the Nation Address (Parliament, Cape Town, 3 June 2009), when he stated the following: "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." He was also quoted by the *Daily News* (19 Feb 2013) to have reassured all stakeholders involved in education that if the teachers were not in class on time and did not reduce their high rates of absenteeism, he was going to reinstitute school inspectors (Mampane, 2012).

### **1.3 Rationale and significance of the study**

There is a paucity of literature that focuses primarily on absenteeism among teachers (Jacobson, 1990). This is a significant finding as Jacobson's study is almost 25 years old, and yet UNICEF has been vindicated its finding to be currently relevant. Hence the South African Department of Education commissioned a research study to investigate the extent of teacher leave in the South African public school system, which was undertaken by Reddy *et al.*, (2010).

With regard to the administration and management of educator leave, Reddy *et al.* (2010), found that sufficient strategies and interventions were in place to address teacher absenteeism. These included strategies and interventions aimed at enhancing working conditions to encourage teacher attendance and improve leave administrative systems. However, Reddy *et al.* (2010: 20) concluded that "schools

have not engaged with the strategic management of leave taking in order to reduce the extent of educator leave”.

Dworkin *et al.* (1990) believe that principals or school managers must foster a leadership ethos that will help to reduce teacher absenteeism. According to Mampane (2012), the management of teacher absenteeism can be controlled via the proper administration of leave taking. Such administration should correspond with the school's ability to effectively utilise the appropriate tools. The Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga deems one of the main factors that contribute to teacher absenteeism as the lack of supervision over the entry and exit of teachers to and from schools (Mampane, 2012). Her proposed solution towards combatting the issue of teacher absenteeism is to install biometric machines in schools that will accurately record the time teachers come to and leave school, as these will eventually expose those teachers who are apathetic towards their jobs and either come to work late, leave early or simply bunk classes (*Sowetan b*, 11 February 2013).

Not many studies have been conducted regarding teacher absenteeism in independent primary schools in South Africa. Information relating to absenteeism in these schools appears to be a closely guarded secret as may be elicited from the unavailability of such information in the public domain. However, the general perception is that teacher absenteeism is lower and does not pose a major problem in independent schools – probably owing to the more effective management of teacher attendance.

I am currently employed at a private school where the issue of teacher absenteeism has to be managed, but it is nowhere close to the statistics revealed for public schools. I have been employed in the education sector for more than 18 years, and have occupied the position of teacher, Grade Head, Head of Department, Deputy Principal and Principal, both in public and independent primary schools in South Africa and particularly Gauteng. Therefore I have had first-hand experience regarding the management of teacher absenteeism.

The current study is significant as it attempts to investigate what management practices are being utilised by independent primary schools, and how effective these are in addressing teacher absenteeism. The assumptions on which I based my study are: (i) the lack or paucity of reports or studies on teacher absenteeism in independent

primary schools in South Africa can be attributed to the fact that it is better managed and therefore not a source of concern; and (ii) the high rate of teacher absenteeism that has been described as a symptom of its poor strategic management.

#### **1.4 Aim of the study**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate how independent, primary schools manage teacher absenteeism. The research will focus on analysing the management practices employed in the sample of independent primary schools, and presenting research outcomes that may contribute to a further study into the management practices related to teacher absenteeism.

#### **1.5 Research question**

- How do South African independent, primary schools manage teacher absenteeism?

##### **1.5.1 Sub-questions**

- What factors influence teacher absenteeism in independent, primary schools?
- How do independent, primary schools implement processes to track teacher attendance?
- What strategies are used in independent, primary schools to manage teacher absenteeism?

#### **1.6 Theoretical framework**

“A useful theory is one that tells an enlightening story about some phenomenon. It is a story that gives you new insights and broadens your understanding of the phenomenon” (Anfara & Mertz, 2014). In any scientific field, theory should provide a useful framework that will offer explanations for the relationships that exist among the different phenomena being studied and give insight that will lead to the discovery of new relationships (Tudge, Mokrava, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009). The following

conceptualisation of Christopher Hood's Cultural-Theory Framework served as a lens through which I conducted my research.

### **1.6.1 Christopher Hood's Cultural-Theory Framework**

Christopher Hood's Cultural-Theory Framework for enabling effective public management will therefore be used as the theoretical framework for this study to determine how the strategic management styles of principals (authority) in respect of teachers (subordinates) affect teacher absenteeism.

School managers play a pivotal role in combatting teacher absenteeism. Dworkin *et al.* (1990) explained that principals or school managers must establish an environment where effective leadership would result in reduced teacher absenteeism. "The school principal is responsible for managing discretionary leave...but schools have not yet engaged with the strategic management of leave taking in order to reduce the extent of leave" (Reddy *et al.*, 2010). Studies have shown that teacher absenteeism is lower where teachers report directly to the principal. Finlayson (2009: 33) agrees with the notion that when teachers had to personally account to the principal and not to the administrative personnel for their absences, the rate was reduced.

Usman and Suryadarma (2004: 23) argued that in schools where the principals themselves were often absent, the teachers followed their example. Marsh (1998: 1) conducted a survey that revealed that absenteeism may be further aggravated by poor skills and weak policy implementation exhibited by the principal. Hood (1998) differentiates between four options for dealing with public management, namely the hierarchist, the egalitarian, the individualist and the fatalist. These approaches all relate to exercise of control and regulation in public management but each approach engages a different method to achieve this.

#### **1.6.1.1 The hierarchist approach**

The hierarchist approach, according to Hood (1998: 73-79), is defined by strict relations of authority whereby organisations operate in accordance with pre-determined hierarchical structures and a clear division of responsibilities. The thinking behind this approach is that organisations that operate within this rigid structure would

guarantee - against the backdrop of clearly defined parameters of responsibility and accountability - that everyone will perform to his/her best, without there being any recklessness towards, or dereliction of, duties.

#### **1.6.1.2 The egalitarian approach**

The egalitarian approach is defined by co-operation and participation (Hood, 1998) and it is based on inclusiveness that promotes the desirability and possibility of self-organisation and self-steering. Egalitarians control their organisations through mutuality and “maximum face to face accountability” (Hood, 1998), and use a bottom-up participatory management style.

#### **1.6.1.3 The individualist approach**

The individualist approach, according to Hood (1998), is based on the assumption that humans are “rational egoists” (Hood, 1998). This approach envisages the quest for personal interests, but the manner in which this quest is achieved may be directed by the institutional context, such as providing or revoking perks for a defined type of behaviour. The first act would be to inspire people who work together to compete for better positions, more money or the highest rewards, by providing the best individual service.

#### **1.6.1.4 The fatalist approach**

In the fatalist approach, there are no proper checks on the actions of public officials (Hood, 1998). This approach envisages disorganisation and a very low standard of productivity. No effort is made to create a stimulating incentive structure for officials, and this ultimately leads to corrupt and unaccountable practices. Whilst this approach has been criticised for being negative, Hood (1998), claims that it is common.

### 1.6.2 Using Hood's cultural-theory framework

Hood's Cultural-Theory Framework pre-supposes the defining human behaviour patterns within organisations. In utilising this framework, it must at all times be borne in mind that the possibility exists that one or more (or even all) of Hood's approaches may manifest themselves in a single organisation, as human behaviour (referring to all employees) may be different as much as it may be similar within that single organisation. South Africa is a culturally diverse society where the impact of this diversity is likely to be more pronounced in the school environment given the numerous influence factors such as parent bodies, board of directors, governmental inspectors, etc.

Reddy *et al.* (2010: 20) conclude that whilst "schools have been compliant in adhering to the administrative requirements regarding leave taking, they have not engaged with the strategic management of leave taking in order to reduce the extent of leave". Given the foregoing, it is important to first establish where the level of control begins and ends within the sample school organisation so that the study may be more focussed and the findings perhaps more accurate and reliable.

Hood's Cultural-Theory Framework was considered relevant to the present study where diverse cultures manifest themselves in a single organisation. This approach took into account not only the varied cultural, historical and contemporary experiences of all participants within the educational context but also all external factors that influence a teacher's behaviour and choices within the school environment. The context within which Hood's Cultural-Theory Framework for enabling effective public management was used would also determine how the strategic management styles of principals (authority) in respect of teachers (subordinates) affect teacher absenteeism.

It was expected that as a consequence of Hood's Cultural-Theory Framework being based on approaches that relate to human behaviour patterns, this approach might provide a uniform approach and consistent base from which to conduct an analysis of the management of teacher absenteeism in South African independent primary schools. Whether it was a single or a combined approach towards the management of teacher absenteeism, using Hood's Cultural-Theory Framework, this would be established by the participants' responses based on historical and contemporary



experiences in their work and personal lives. From the afore-going, Hood’s Cultural-Theory Framework will be used in the manner and context depicted in Table 1.1 below.

**Table 1.1: The plan of action for my study, using Christopher Hood’s Cultural-Theory Framework**

<b>STEP</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
1	Identify sample schools, make contact, explain purpose of study, explain confidentiality and ethical considerations applicable, obtain permission, and schedule and conduct interview
2	Establish the levels of control for the management of teacher absenteeism
3	Establish the extent of authority over teacher absenteeism at each determined level of control
4	Establish the rate of unauthorised teacher absenteeism
5	Establish the frequency of repeat teacher offenders
6	Establish rate of unauthorised management absenteeism
7	Establish frequency of repeat offenders at management level
8	Through a series of pre-designed questions, interview a sample group of non-offending members at the level of management who exercises control over teacher absenteeism to determine into which category of Hood’s Cultural-Theory Framework each may fall
9	Through a series of pre-designed questions, interview a sample group of offending members at the level of management who exercises control over teacher absenteeism to determine into which category of Hood’s cultural-theory framework each may fall
10	Collate results and formulate findings
11	Correlate findings against the pre-determined positions in Hood’s Cultural-Theory Framework
12	Compile and submit research

## **1.7 Research Design**

The intention of this study was to investigate the management of teacher absenteeism in independent primary schools. I will explain the choice of the research design, the research methodology and instruments used, as well as the participants in the sample, data collection and analysis.

The research design was based on the qualitative method as it entails an interpretative and naturalistic approach (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005). The latter was expected to complement the use of Hood's (1998) Cultural-Theory Framework which pre-supposes human behaviour patterns within an organisation and the impact of such behaviour on how the organisation operates. The interpretive and naturalistic approach was beneficial in analysing a participant's response as it was directly related to the participant's personal experience within the sample organisation and provided a basis to better understand the participant's world within the sample organisation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

### **1.7.1 Research approach**

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies can be used as data gathering measures. These methodologies characterise various epistemological frameworks for conceptualising the nature of knowing, social reality and procedures for understanding the issue at hand (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000:12). Berg (1998:3) differentiates between quantitative and qualitative methodologies in the following manner: Quantitative research involves using numbers and statistical models to explain and verify data, whilst qualitative research entails interpreting social realities through meanings, concepts, definitions, and descriptions of things.

For the purpose of determining the scope of management practices scope, the qualitative approach was used in this study to allow me to better understand how people function and operate within the workplace. By studying the management styles used to address teacher absenteeism, the study explored the experiences of Heads of Departments, Deputy Principals and Principals through a construction of reality by means of interviews. Qualitative research returned a first-hand, holistic understanding

of the functioning of the different schools by means of conducting and recording interviews (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, Poggenpoel & Schurink, 1998).

Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano and Morales (2007: 258) support the idea of exploring and understanding of a central theme as a goal of a qualitative research study. The qualitative research design was therefore ideal for use in this study as it allowed me to explore my understanding of the management of teacher absenteeism through a broad and general understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Qualitative research allowed the selection of a small sample size of participants who could share their views and experiences about the manner in which teacher absenteeism was managed. Furthermore, this approach allowed the researcher to collect data in the natural setting of educators, namely the school environment (Creswell *et al.* 2007: 258).

### **1.7.2 Basic qualitative research design**

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:29) explain research design as a carefully thought-out and planned framework for action that serves as a connecting link between the research questions and the execution of the research. It is a plan that directs the manner in which conditions for the collection and analysis of data are maintained to ensure relevance of the research. Berg (1998: 27) defines a research design as a plan of how the study should be conducted. It entails thinking about, imagining and visualising how the research will be conducted from beginning to end. It focuses on what type of information or data will be collected and the various forms of data collection techniques that will be utilised.

Researchers consider the case study approach to be an effective, qualitative approach because it focuses on experiential knowledge and the social context of individuals (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010: 256). The study in hand therefore used a case study research design to better understand how the issue of teacher absenteeism was managed in independent, primary schools.

The main purpose of any case study research is to acquire “a thick description”, which takes into consideration the social context of the individual (Yin, 2013). Crabtree and Miller (1999) indicated that they appreciate the significance of the case study approach

in research as it allows the researcher to integrate educational theory with the real-life experiences of individuals.

### **1.7.3 Interviews, Document analysis and Observations**

From earlier studies that were conducted, I have determined that the appropriate research methodology for my current study would be interviews, document analyses and observations. Johnson and Johnson (1999) define interviews as a social encounter between two people that have a particular focus and purpose. Interviews were used in my research to obtain a detailed understanding of the participants and their responses to the given questions. According to Rubin and Rubin (2011) the advantages of interviews include the following: being flexible and adaptable; presenting the interviewer with the opportunity to re-phrase and amend questions should the need arise; being able to fully utilise non-verbal clues to better understand verbal responses, and the respondents themselves being free to answer the questions as they feel.

#### **1.7.3.1 Interviews**

De Vos *et al.* (1998), consider interviews a primary source of data collection. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) explain that the manner in which participants perceive and make sense of the world is vital in an interview while Cohen *et al.* (2000: 267), state that an interview is not just about gathering data about life but it is a part of life itself. Melville and Goddard (1996: 44), explain that interviews are a one-on-one interaction between the researcher and the participant, and that it is important for interviews to be planned. Therefore, interviews were requested, scheduled and conducted within the set time-frames with the identified sample participants. They adhered to a standardised and pre-determined set of interview questions that were relevant to the research question and steered the participants' experiences to the management of teaching and absenteeism.

### **1.7.3.2 Document analysis**

McMillan and Schumacher (2006) see a document as a record of past events in a written or printed format. Creswell (2002: 209), states that documents provide useful information that will help the researcher to better understand the key focus of the study, and it is a solid source of text or words for qualitative studies. Documents may include policies, minutes of meetings, reports, diaries, and letters. For this study, the research entailed an examination of all available documents that were in place to manage teacher absenteeism. Where possible, copies of such documents were collected as points of reference.

### **1.7.3.3 Structured observations**

Maree (2007) explains that in structured observations, the researcher needs to design the data collection tool prior to the data collection day as it will then serve as a compass to direct the researcher while collecting the information needed. Hence, this study made use of structured observations to establish the management style of the principal and the resulting impact it had on teacher absenteeism.

Berg (1998) identified a number of problems that could be encountered while conducting interviews. Arranging and confirming appropriate times for visits are often problematic. Requesting and gaining the necessary permission to conduct the interview, and postponing set appointments due to unforeseen circumstances can also become difficult and time-consuming. These considerations will be accounted for by advanced planning to mitigate their impact and, in the current research, I made use of semi-structured interview questions, document analyses, and observations whilst focussing on my core set of predefined questions. Interviews were conducted in the participants' natural setting.

### **1.7.4 Sampling selection**

Melville and Goddard (1996: 29), refer to a sample as a representative group of respondents/participants from the population being studied because it is not possible or practical to study an entire population. Merriam (1998) stated that a researcher must take into consideration where to observe, when to observe, whom to observe

and what to observe. According to Patton (1990), purposive sampling, allows the researcher to select subject participants according to their individual character traits. The selection of the participants needed for the study began with a description of the profiles of people who had the same knowledge of the chosen field of study. Therefore, a non-probability sampling technique known as purposive sampling was utilised as it allowed the researcher to handpick the participants based on the needs of and reasons for the study. This also enabled the researcher to choose participants who would add value to the study based on their knowledge and background. Because the management of teacher absenteeism is a concern, and the responsibility of HODs, DPs, principals or persons in authority with similar titles, involving them made it possible for the researcher to select relevant participants in the stipulated area to be a part of the study.

This study focussed on five, independent primary schools in Midrand, Gauteng where semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted. The participants who were interviewed were selected because they had been uninterruptedly employed as teachers for a period of five years or longer and had occupied a management position at their schools for a period of three years or longer. They were also involved in the management system utilised by their particular school when teachers were absent. The interviews were conducted in English. Five schools were selected with the expectation that such a concentrated sample might provide a better source of data - studying a larger pool of participants within a smaller sample organisation pool was expected to deliver more truthful data, as opposed to a smaller number of participants in a larger sample organisation pool.

Since I reside and work in the Midrand area, I managed to establish a rapport with the staff and principals in these schools, prior to my study. The following criteria applied in my selection of the schools and participants:

- The schools have been in existence and fully functional for ten complete years;
- The range of cultural diversity among participants covered as far as possible quite a wide spectrum of the population;
- The majority of teachers and management must have been employed at the sample school for more than three years,

- The majority of teachers and management have been permanently employed in the teaching profession for at least five years.

The basis for applying these selection criteria was that they provided a consistent approach to the identification and selection of the sample organisations. They also identified participants with a minimum term of history within the sample organisation who would be able to provide relevant and reliable responses, given their established historical and contemporary experiences within that organisation over a period of time. This information was personally obtained from the different schools when I approached them prior to the commencement of my actual research. A reasonable time-frame within which to collect the necessary information was provided.

### **1.7.5 Data Collection**

Data collection is a comprehensive explanation of the information gathering procedures used in the study. This description includes the exact methods that were used and the detailed tools for making the measurement (De Vos *et al.*, 1998). Information was collected by means of semi-structured interviews. As a fail-safe tool, two Dictaphones were used to digitally record the interviews for later analysis. By making use of this device, I was able to focus primarily on the responses of the participants rather than on making hand-written recordings of the interviews. In-depth probing was used if I needed to better understand the management of teacher absenteeism.

According to Creswell (2002), the following five steps are needed in the data collection process in a qualitative research study: (i) selecting participants and identifying the site for the research; (ii) gaining access to the data; (iii) working out which data needs to be gathered; (iv) developing data collection forms; and (v) applying ethical considerations in the research process. This study entailed using a series of open-ended and in-depth interviews to gather all necessary data. As outlined in my research question and aims, data was collected from five independent, primary schools in Midrand, Gauteng, utilising the above data collection steps.

### **1.7.6 Data Analysis**

Maykut and Morehouse (1994: 127), explain data analysis as a process used by the researcher to more fully comprehend the phenomenon being studied and to thereafter describe what was learnt with minimal interpretation. The proposed procedure entailed conducting an analysis of the data after each interview session. The data was examined to identify concepts and themes that would best describe the world of participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Creswell (2002) argues that in order to structure and analyse the data collected, each participant's response must be analysed. Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 134-136) list the following steps to help the researcher to analyse data: (i) categorise data into clusters for valued interpretation; (ii) organise each case in detail; (iii) interpret each case; and (iv) identify and generalise patterns via individual case synthesis.

It was suggested that the above data analysis steps would best suit the selected research approach. Data analysis commenced during the interview process to avoid the risk of making assumptions or drawing conclusions at a later stage, as well as, relying on the information that was gathered from the literature review. Data obtained from the interviews was coded through a process of separating the participants' responses into what was common and what was unique, and highlighting any themes that may have emerged. Recorded interviews provided the researcher with an opportunity to analyse the pauses between the different questions and responses, the exact words used, and the order and context in which they were used. After the coding was done, the data was re-grouped to consider the comparisons in the participants' responses, the different themes that emerged, and to understand the various concepts (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

### **1.8 Addressing Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Validity is referred to as trustworthiness in qualitative research and can be "...addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher." (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). According to Creswell (2002), triangulation is the "...process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative



research”. Throughout my study, trustworthiness was addressed through a “...constant search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information...” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b: 81), in conjunction with my endeavour to opt for impartiality and add to the trustworthiness of the data by establishing what was true.

When Nieuwenhuis (2007b: 80) describes research “validity and reliability”, he refers to research that is credible and trustworthy. He explains that when a study makes use of different methods of data collection, it increases its trustworthiness of the findings. This study attempted to establish the trustworthiness of the results through scrutinising the information gathered, and reflecting on the various approaches utilised to manage teacher absenteeism.

### **1.8.1 Criteria for Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba (2007: 299) highlight four criteria that guarantee the trustworthiness of a research study and maintain that the data should be credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable. Merriam (in Shenton, 2004: 299) says that credibility refers to the qualitative investigator’s equivalent concept of internal validity and it asks the question: “How congruent are the findings with reality?” Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that credibility is crucial component in establishing trustworthiness.

Transferability refers to external validity and focusses on whether the results also apply to people who did not play a role in the actual study. External validity involves the generalisability of the findings obtained from the sample population to the population that the sample is meant to represent. To achieve this, the researcher must select a population sample that reflects the real and practical situations, and that represents not just a unique once-off case but rather the way things are and the way people function on a daily basis.

Reliability refers to an indicator’s dependability. A reliable measure will generate the same result whenever the same thing is being measured. Drost (2011) supports this view by stating that reliability refers to the ability of a measuring instrument to produce the same results in succession when no changes have been made to the thing being measured. Bendat and Piersol (2011) refer to reliability as a matter of consistency of

measure; there must be a strong chance that the same results will be obtained if the procedure is repeated.

The concept of confirmability applies when another individual, not the original researcher, carries out the exact same study and obtains the same results. Trochim (2006) considers confirmability to be the extent to which the results can be confirmed by others. This means that the information obtained from the interview does not change based on the personal traits of the interviewer, the instrument or the measurement device that was utilised. The credibility and trustworthiness of this study was maintained by adopting a qualitative research approach,(supported by the research design), and collecting data by means of a single standardised interview questionnaire for all sample participants.

## **1.9 Ethical aspects of the study**

According to De Vos *et al.* (1998), ethics is a set of moral principles recommended by an individual or a group. The principles should be widely accepted, and offer rules and behavioural expectations about appropriate conduct when working with experimental subjects, respondents, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students.

Ethical principles were part and parcel of this research to the extent where every step pursued in the study was guided by the norms and values as dictated by these principles.

I, (the researcher), abided by the following ethical prescripts:

### **1.9.1 Voluntary participation**

Trochim (2001: 24) explains that the principles of voluntary participation simply mean that participants should not feel any pressure to participate in the research process. The identified participants must choose to be a part of the study without being forced or manipulated. Voluntary participation is closely linked to the aspect of informed consent.

### **1.9.2 Informed consent**

Farnham and Pimlott (1995: 47) explain informed consent as the knowing consent of individuals to play a part in an exercise that is free from any element of fraud, deceit or similar unfair inducement or manipulation. According to Trochim (2001: 24) informed consent means that all research participants have been fully informed of the procedures and risks involved in the research and must give their consent to participate. This informed consent requires from the researcher to provide adequate information regarding the purpose of the investigation and its credibility to possible participants. Informed consent is essential and mandatory even if the prospective participants are not actually listening to the researcher or they don't really want to know (De Vos *et al.*, 1998).

### **1.9.3 Deception of respondents**

Deception refers to a scenario where facts are distorted to the extent that respondents believe to be true that which is not. It entails not providing all the relevant information to the participants, or presenting incorrect information to convince them to willingly play a role when they might have refused to do (De Vos *et al.*, 1998). Under no circumstances may the participants be deceived, and if this happens, even if it was unintentional, the matter must be corrected.

### **1.9.4 Confidentiality and anonymity**

According to Trochim (2001: 24), confidentiality and anonymity are two standards that help to protect the privacy of the participants in a research. Farnham and Pimlott (1995: 48) explain that confidentiality is a real attempt to erase from the research records any elements that might reveal the identities of the participants, whilst anonymity means that there are no names attached to the participants. Trochim (2001: 24) also states that participant confidentiality is a guarantee to participants that people who are not directly involved in the study will not be privy to the information given. Anonymity is even more secure, as the identity of the participants remains anonymous throughout the study, even to the researchers.

### **1.9.5 Securing data**

All necessary precautions are taken to ensure that the information obtained is safely and securely stored away. Access to the information gathered is restricted to the researcher who needs to ensure that the information gathered in the course of the study shall not be made public. Precautions are also taken to ensure that the information gathered during the research process is not casually and carelessly mentioned (Farnham & Pimlott, 1995).

### **1.10 Relevance of the study to Educational Management**

This study of the management of teacher absenteeism in independent primary schools is pertinent to education management as a whole on the basis of its relevance to the most effective management styles, operational processes and the different laws that govern the right to education. Management in education encompasses various aspects, of which teachers constitute an integral part. Various laws and institutional policies (of schools and education departments) stipulate how much leave a teacher is entitled to. If the taking of leave by teachers is not properly managed, it could lead to an abuse of leave privileges, which may result in inferior education standards for the affected schools. It was intended that this research and its findings should create interest and encourage future study into the management practices related to teacher absenteeism.

### **1.11 Outline of the study**

This thesis is made up of five chapters.

#### **Chapter 1: Introduction and orientation to the study**

The first chapter gives a general overview of the relevant literature that underpinned this investigation. The problem statement, purpose and research design are also included in this chapter.

## **Chapter 2: Global perspectives on teacher absenteeism**

The second chapter explores in detail the literature that pertains to this study according to the management styles outlined in Christopher Hood's Cultural Theory Framework.

## **Chapter 3: Designing and conducting the research**

The third chapter provides the layout and implementation of the qualitative research methodology selected for the study which includes the chosen research design, the selected participants, and the data collection procedure. It also covers pertinent issues like credibility, trustworthiness and the ethical components of the study.

## **Chapter 4: Data analysis and findings**

In the fourth chapter, I present the data that was gathered from the interviews, document analyses and observations. The interpretation and analysis of the results are based on the information submitted by each of the chosen participants.

## **Chapter 5: Results and recommendations**

In Chapter 5, conclusions are made and recommendations are proposed. The successful strategies for managing teacher absenteeism are discussed, and the recommendations are made for further study.

### **1.12 Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to give a general overview of what the study entailed, and to provide evidence of the need for research into this topic as claimed in the problem statement. The purpose, specific aims and value of the study were also discussed. The research methods used to investigate the phenomena, the population and the sampling, as well as, the field of study were described. The next chapter will focus on the challenges of teacher absenteeism in different countries.

## CHAPTER 2

### GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHER ABSENTEEISM

#### 2.1 Introduction

According to De Vos *et al.* (1998), a literature review entails extensive research and a study of the work already done on the subject matter concerned. It may also include an investigation of that which has not been studied (Flick, 2009). In the current study, the research question contains the key words of “management”, “teacher absenteeism” and “independent, primary schools”, and therefore I found it prudent to research - as extensively and relevantly as possible - studies that have incorporated these key words.

I am conscious of the fact that the focus of my study is on the management of teacher absenteeism and not the causes and effects of teacher absenteeism. However, I am likewise cognisant that the latter may have an impact on the management of teacher absenteeism. As will be elicited from what follows, there is an abundance of existing research on teacher absenteeism, contributing factors and their effects.

Since the identified studies focussed primarily on public schools, and hardly any such studies (mostly untested media reports) have been conducted on independent schools, I have reached the assumption that the lack of research in respect of independent schools may be attributable to the following:

- Independent schools do not form part of the public (government) schools' domain and do not utilise public funds. As such they are not accountable for how they perform and manage their operations, except to their respective school communities;
- They represent a comparatively smaller sector of the community, and are generally deemed elitist due to the high costs to attend such schools. These costs are for the personal or family account as opposed to public schools where government bears the bulk of the cost of education;
- Due to the competition between independent schools, there is no desire to generally make public any research that has been carried out on matters related to a specific independent school.

## 2.2 What is teacher absenteeism?

The Oxford Dictionary defines absenteeism as “the practice of regularly staying away from work or school without good reason”. Casio (2003), cited in Ivatts (2010:4) defines absenteeism as “any failure of an employee to report for or to remain at work as scheduled, regardless of reason”. Strickland (1998) explains that in the context of education “absenteeism is where a period of time was spent not being at school” and this was cited in (Ivatts 2010: 4). This simple definition can become complicated. In some studies conducted by Chaudhury *et al.* (2005), reference was made to teachers attending schools but not going to their classes to teach, or according to Castro (2007) “not being able to teach the children in a productive manner” which was also cited in (Ivatts, 2010: 4).

Researchers differ with their definitions, for example, Corallo and McDonald (2001) cited in Ivatts (2010: 4) define teacher absenteeism “by looking at it as a determinant of low performing schools”. In the argument, Abeles (2009) made the differentiation between pardoned absence and absence that is not pardoned, while the World Bank (2007) differentiates between authentic absence and absence that is not authentic. Based on the various definitions, I will for the purpose of my study, focus on the teacher not being physically present at school when he/she is supposed to be there.

The word “absent” dates back from the fourteenth century and is defined as not being present, not attending, or missing (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Workplace absences have been of grave concern for employers, with the term “leave of absence” originating in 1756 (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The military term “absent without leave (AWOL)” dates back to 1793, and the term “sick leave” came into operation around 1820 (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Teacher absenteeism has a huge impact in terms of financial costs, and missed educational opportunities for students (Pitts, 2010). Clay (2009) also admits that there is a complex relationship between teacher absenteeism and student achievement.

As stated earlier, there is an abundance of research information on the topic of teacher absenteeism but not on the management of teacher absenteeism. Given that this study is on the management of teacher absenteeism and not the reasons for teacher absenteeism, I elected to distinguish between authorised and unauthorised teacher absenteeism. The reason for the distinction is that there is an inherent implication that

authorised absence, such as maternity leave or study leave, is planned for and therefore managed by the prior appointment of a substitute teacher or the re-allocation of teacher workload so that the curriculum requirements are fulfilled.

It is the management of unauthorised absence that is the focus of my study, as it inherently means that such absence was not planned for and therefore posed difficulties in managing it. I chose to define teacher absenteeism as follows: *a teacher who does not physically attend school for the duration of an official school day, and whose absence is unauthorised*. In the South African context, a school day shall not include any school activity that is conducted over a weekend.

### **2.3 Understanding the concept of teacher absenteeism**

Teacher absenteeism can manifest in different ways. Some teachers may be at school but if they are not in their classes teaching when they are supposed to, they are considered absent.

Harrison and Price (2003) define absence as the actual physical presence of someone being missed at a place where that person is expected to be (Shapira-Lishchinsky & Rosenblatt, 2008). According to Bridges (1980), absenteeism is a temporary but voluntary time off from work. Pattillo (2012:14) states that absenteeism can be seen as “quiet corruption”, as the learners are robbed of their instruction time due to their teachers not being at school and in class.

Casio (2003) as cited in Ivatts (2010:4), defined absenteeism as any failure of an employee to report for or to remain at work as scheduled, regardless of a reason. Strickland's (1998) education-specific definition explains that absenteeism is a period of not attending school (Ivatts, 2010:4). This simplistic definition is not free of complications. In some studies (e.g. Chaudhury *et al.*, 2005), reference is made to teachers being present at school but failing to visit their classes to teach, or as suggested by Castro (2007), not being in a fit condition to teach the children effectively (Ivatts, 2010:4). Not all researchers agree with this definition. In the debate surrounding the definition, Abeles (2009) made a distinction between excused absence and unexcused absence, while the World Bank (2007) made a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate absence from school. For the purpose of the



current research, teacher absenteeism refers to a teacher who is not physically present at school when he/she is expected to be there.

## **2.4 Using Christopher Hood's Cultural Theory Framework**

Hood (1998) proposes in terms of his Cultural-Theory Framework that there are four approaches to deal with public management problems. Since a detailed description was given in Section 1.6, the approaches are only briefly summarised below:

- The hierarchist approach is defined by strict relations of authority;
- The egalitarian approach is defined by co-operation and participation based on inclusiveness that promotes the appeal and prospect of being self-organised and self-steering;
- The individualist approach envisages the quest for personal interests;
- The fatalist approach contains no thorough checks on the actions or performance of officials.

Hood's (1998) Cultural-Theory Framework was used by Narayan and Mooij (2010) to study the impact that the proposed teacher interventions had on teacher absenteeism. The latter found that whilst interventions such as increased monitoring were in place to address the problem of teacher absenteeism, none of the interventions were really successful. In order for such strategies to work well, they stated that certain pre-conditions had to be fulfilled.

The pre-conditions for remedies to work well under each management style were found to be the following:

**Table 2.1: Christopher Hood’s four approaches to dealing with public management problems**

APPROACHES	PRECONDITIONS FOR REMEDIES TO WORK
Hierarchist	Hierarchical authority perceived as legitimate
Egalitarian	Goal of mutuality and participation shared by all participants Level playing field
Individualist	Ruly competition Availability of multiple suppliers
Fatalist	Ad hoc or parallel solutions should be accepted They should also trigger the right effects

## 2.5 Demographic variables and teacher absenteeism

According to Price (2001), “absenteeism and turnover are important social processes in organisations.” Rosenblatt and Shirom (2005) explain that studying demographic variables is appropriate when it pertains to absenteeism as a causal relationship that may reveal underlying information linked to other variables that may cause absenteeism. They suggest that researchers should use the demographic data to their benefit by adding it to the models they will be using to predict absenteeism, and by inferring the effects of the underlying variables associated with demographic data.

Kallio (2006) set out to identify personal traits and environmental factors that influence attendance patterns in order to develop suitable strategies for improving teacher attendance. Information was gathered for the following teacher variables: age, years in district, gender, marital status, number of dependents, regular or special education,

and grade level taught. Kallio (2006) presented statistically vital results which included teachers taking special leave and the number of dependents in the home of the teacher.

Pitts (2010) gathered biographic information such as age, gender, and race, as well as demographic details such as the following: years of experience, degree earned, day of the week of absence, absences after or before the start and end of holidays, absences during teacher workdays, absences from professional development days, school leave assignments, teacher assignments, and the type of leave that was taken by teachers. According to Pitts, the most common day of the week which teachers were absent was Friday and the leave taken by teachers was mostly for sick leave and personal leave. Pitts also discovered that ethnicity, teaching assignments, age, years of experience, and level of education had no impact on teacher absenteeism.

Rosenblatt and Shirom (2005) suggest that gender affects absenteeism rates as there is a difference in absentee rates between male and female teachers. Kallio (2006) like Rosenblatt and Shirom (2005) state that the leave taken by female teachers is mostly for maternity leave which is covered under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Pitts (2010) remarked that female teachers are more likely to be absent than male teachers, speciality schools that have the highest overall absence rate, and that high school teachers are least likely to be absent. An interesting fact revealed by Pitts is that family responsibility leave increased over the three years of his particular study.

According to Scott and Wimbush (1991), female teachers were absent from school more often than were male teachers and yet female teachers indicated that they had experienced greater job involvement, satisfaction with their colleagues and job satisfaction as opposed to the male teachers they worked with. They did, however, also experience more role conflict than their male counterparts. Bonner (2006) claims that there are fewer male teachers in primary schools and that the number of female teachers always exceeds the number of male teachers. Even in district meetings and regional or national education conferences, there are always more female teachers attending as they are in the majority. This situation can become problematic for primary schools that are affected by high rates of teacher absenteeism due to teachers taking maternity and family responsibility leave.

## 2.6 School culture and leadership style

Studies that have been conducted regarding the impact of absence owing to sickness can be arranged into two core groups. One set of studies centred on structural thinking and utilised psychometric-survey tools to emphasise established rules or a non-attendance ethos (Nicholson & Johns, 1985; Gaziel, 2004; Martocchio, 1994; Imants & van Zoelen, 1995; Rentsch & Steel, 2003). These studies generally incorporated the leadership style in their measures of the absence culture. The absence culture concept which dates as far back as the 1950s (Hill & Trist, 1953) was utilised to better explain how communicative forms were linked to non-attendance in institutes and the mutual themes that emerged from these patterns. The concept of an absence culture involves a mutual comprehension of reasonable explanations for non-attendance, as well as how and when non-attendance is tolerated within an organisation. An absence culture was considered a negative phrase for institutions with a low tolerance for non-attendance based on illness.

Researchers quite often examine school culture and leadership style closely in order to establish if these variables have any impact on teacher absenteeism (Bradley, Green, & Leeves, 2007; Gaziel, 2004; Imants & Van Zoelen, 1995; Miller *et al.* 2008; Norton, 1998). According to Bradley *et al.* (2004), “teachers in schools with a history of high absenteeism take between 24% and 38% more recorded days of absence than teachers in schools which have a history of low absenteeism” Gaziel (2004) also discovered that organisational factors at any school, in conjunction with whether it was okay for teachers to miss voluntary days or not, had an impact on teachers’ attendance patterns.

Nicholson and Johns (1985) identified different types of absence cultures, and incorporated the workers’ extent of trust in the leadership of the different organisations. Heywood, Jirjahn and Wei (2008) discovered that collaboration among co-workers could be linked to a decrease in absenteeism. There is still a lack of empirical evidence based on an in-depth scrutiny of how procedures of engagement between workers and the people who supervise them increased or decreased the rate of non-attendance in an institution (Bamberger & Biron, 2007; Manski, 2000).

Studies that were conducted internationally have elevated variations in the absence levels at different schools (Imants & van Zoelen, 1995), in spite of real evidence that

absent teachers have an adverse impact on students' performance (Bowers, 2001; Miller *et al.*, 2008; Woods *et al.*, 1997). Bradley *et al.* (2007) used Australian roll statistics of teachers that moved from one school to another and realised that their non-attendance had a ripple effect, and was linked to the regular non-attendance rates in the schools they were currently working for. Imants and van Zoelen (1995) classify schools as "healthy" or "sick making" and consider the principal's attitude towards teachers that are ill as an integral aspect of the non-attendance ethos. When Gaziel (2004) piloted a study in Israel of specific forecasters of teachers' non-attendance due to illness, he discovered that biographical variables barely explained non-attendance, but the teachers' approach, the school's policy on non-attendance and the principal's attitude provided a more accurate explanation of the teachers' sickness absence.

## **2.7 Teacher absenteeism – an international perspective**

I will now present information regarding teacher absenteeism from an international perspective.

### **2.7.1 Teacher absenteeism in Norway**

Carlsen (2012:129-136) conducted a study with the belief that growing or diminishing non-attendance levels in various schools may be attributed to the self-enforcing procedures of shared communication between teachers and school management. An explorative case study was conducted involving three schools with dissimilar non-attendance accounts in Norway. School A had a low rate of non-attendance due to illness, School B had a low rate of non-attendance that gradually increased and School C moved from a high rate of absence to a low rate. Schools A and C were paired as being one since School A had a rate of low absence and School C moved from a high to a low absence rate. In these two schools, the management, including the head teacher, appeared to distance themselves from the teachers and their work. The teachers at these schools experienced a sense of freedom that counteracted sickness absence.

Some teachers felt that the fact that management adapted the timetable to accommodate those teachers who could not work full time and those who replaced them, as well as the fact that management found suitable substitutes, helped to curb

unnecessary absence. The Norwegian teachers in Schools A and C enjoyed working as a team and they supported one another. Some of the teachers felt that being distant from management allowed teachers to become more helpful and sympathetic towards each other and this helped to reduce the absence rate. The teachers adopted a high threshold for sickness absence, which meant that they rarely stayed away due to illness, and when it also emerged that they had no other choice, their colleagues realised that they must really be sick. These teachers also felt a huge sense of responsibility towards their students, so they did not stay away from school often.

The management at School B in the Norwegian study was considered weak, incompetent and lacking the authority to carry out the necessary course of action. They were also criticised for not following up, for poor handling of the timetable and for being suspicious about teachers who took sick leave. In general, the teachers got along well, and only experienced problems when their schools got substitute teachers who had been declared redundant. These redundant teachers were seen as having real health issues and a poor work ethic, and so their inclination to stay away from school was quite great. Only one of the eight teachers at School B who were interviewed felt any kind of responsibility towards the students. In fact, five of them mentioned that their students' demands made them want to stay at home even more often. They did worry about other teachers being overworked when they got absent but also believed that the teachers got absent even when they did not feel that ill. Majority of the teachers made a deliberate choice to stay away from school even though they were of the impact it would have on the teachers who came to school.

### **2.7.2 Teacher absenteeism in The Netherlands**

When Imants and Van Zoelen (1995) conducted research in The Netherlands to investigate the relationships among teacher absenteeism, school climate, and teachers' sense of efficiency, they found that directive leadership resulted in low teacher absenteeism while democratic leadership resulted in high teacher absenteeism. They made use of the Organisational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ-RE) to conduct their research. When Gaziel (2004) conducted research in Jerusalem and also made use of the OCDQ-RE he found that the levels of teacher commitment and organisational culture of a school influenced teacher

absenteeism. He went on to say that the more committed teachers stayed away less frequently as opposed to the less committed teachers. Gaziel therefore concluded that there was a positive relationship between restrictive principals and higher rates of teacher absenteeism.

### **2.7.3 Teacher absenteeism in Pakistan**

A study was conducted in Northwest Frontier Province in Pakistan (NWFP) by Banerjee *et al.* to review the relationship between teacher attendance and student attendance. Altogether 257 primary schools were selected from a population of over 20 000 schools in NWFP, Pakistan. Sixty-eight percent of the schools that were selected came from rustic areas, and the school management was distributed among government schools (82%), mosque schools (4%), and private schools (14%). Due to the low number of mosque schools and the fact that their attendance patterns were similar to those of government schools, the mosque and government schools were categorised as one body for the purposes of this study. Random spot checks were conducted and teacher attendance averaged 84% in the government and mosque schools and 93% in the private schools. Although civil service salaries were double the salaries of private school teachers, teacher attendance at the private schools were higher when compared to government schools. Government teachers would be penalised in the form of a cut in salary or disciplinary action if they were absent 16% of the time in spite of quite generous leave policies that apply in Pakistan. Teachers were allowed 25 days of casual leave per year without being penalised.

Not much action was taken against the teachers who were absent because the recorded teacher absences were considered an inaccurate reflection of the actual absence rates. When spot checks were made, it was discovered that the official rate of teacher absenteeism was lower than the spot check rates found in both public and independent schools, however, the government schools still had a higher rate of teacher absenteeism. Civil service teachers had a lower rate of reported teacher absence in the form of casual days as opposed to private school teachers. Government teachers did not take more than their 25 days of casual leave which if they did would have resulted in a cut in salary. In private schools, however, at least 10% of their teachers took more than their allotted 25 days of causal leave. Even

though the reality is that the absenteeism rate for government teachers is more than double that of private school teachers, the official registry is not a true reflection of the actual teacher absenteeism rates.

When parents were asked whether they felt that teachers' absences were hurting their children's education, 79% of the parents whose children attended private schools said "yes" and 93% of the parents whose children attended government schools said "yes". When the teachers were questioned about whether the absence of fellow teachers had a negative impact on them, 62% of civil service teachers said "yes" and 35% of private school teachers also said "yes". The differences in the responses between government and private schools emphasise the inaccuracy of the official attendance registry. It was also found that the male teachers' attendance rates were determined by whether they had supervisory or other official duties in school, outside the classroom. The absentee rates of women educators on the other hand were determined by whether they were married had children, and especially if they had children of pre-school age (Banerjee *et al.*, 2012, 563-574).

#### **2.7.4 Teacher absenteeism in India**

Research by Chaudhury *et al.* (2005) conducted in India found that teacher absenteeism varied from 15% in Maharashtra to 42% in Jharkand. The study found that on any random school day, 24.8% of public primary school teachers were absent across India. Taking harsh action against the teachers who are absent might be expected to resolve the issue but this seldom occurs in India (Chaudhury *et al.*, 2005). Although policy in India tries to address the issue of accountability through training, motivation and offering incentives to teachers teacher absenteeism rates still increase and absent teachers do not accept the consequences of their actions. Teacher absenteeism continues to burden the country at all levels of the profession. Chaudhury *et al.* (2005) found that non-attendance was fairly widespread rather than concentrated among a small group of teachers.

In their study, Kremer *et al.* (2006) revealed that based on research at a typical government-run primary school, India has the second-highest average absence rate (25%) among the eight countries they studied, namely Peru (11%), Ecuador (14%), Papua New Guinea (15%), Bangladesh (16%), Zambia, Indonesia, India and Uganda.



Despite India's 25% teacher absence rate, only one principal in the sample survey reported a case where a teacher had been dismissed for being absent continuously (Chaudhury *et al.*, 2005). Apparently the absent teachers generally got transferred to other districts. Studies revealed that while 35 out of 600 rural private schools in India reported cases where teachers were suspended on the grounds of being absent or negligent, only 1 out of 3000 teachers in rural public schools got suspended for the same reasons (Kremer *et al.*, 2006).

In the state of Rajasthan in India, where the schools were required to produce a daily photograph of the students and their teacher, by using a digital camera that showed the time and date, attendance improved (Duflo, Hanna, & Ryan, 2012). Teacher absenteeism halved from 44% to 21% in the schools that used this approach. The time that the average child was taught by a teacher increased by 30% and the overall student performance increased by 0.17 standard deviations (Banerjee *et al.*, 2012).

### **2.7.5 Teacher absenteeism in the United States of America**

Although teacher absenteeism in the United States is lower when compared to developing countries, the projected non-attendance level in US schools lies between 6-8% (Clotfelter *et al.* 2007). It is, however, on the increase and becoming a serious issue for the education authorities. Ehrenberg *et al.*, (1991); and Duflo *et al.* (2012) all agree with these projected figures. Bowers (2001) and Bradley *et al.*, (2007), however, believe that teachers in highly industrialised countries are absent less often than their counterparts in America.

Recent studies revealed that a high rate of teacher absenteeism exists in the Pacific Region (Duflo *et al.* 2012). In 2011/2012, it was discovered that in the Federated States of Micronesia, elementary school teachers attended on average 90% of the school year while secondary school teachers attended around 85% of the school year (Federated States of Micronesia, National Department of Education, 2012). It was reported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2010), that in 2010, children in the Pacific Region, including the Republic of Marshall Islands, were being deprived of between 850 and 1000 hours of instruction time per year as stipulated by law, due to teacher absenteeism.

A study was conducted by Carter (2010) in the south-eastern United States to establish the leadership styles of school administrators, and subsequently compared them to the teacher attendance data from four schools in Georgia. Carter utilised the Managerial Philosophies Scale (MPS) for his study. He also made use of Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y to help him clearly classify the principal's style of leadership. Carter revealed that as leadership X score increased, teacher absences increased and as leadership Y score increased, teacher absences decreased. This basically meant that the strong and positive leaders who displayed leadership Y qualities helped to decrease teacher absences.

Norton (1998) advised that school districts should formulate clear guidelines regarding teacher attendance, carefully supervise teachers' requests for leave, insist that teachers who were absent report directly to their supervisors, and seriously look into using incentives to improve teacher attendance. Norton (1998) suggested that one such incentive could be for the school districts to buy back unused, sick leave from their employees when they were leaving the school. This could change teachers' perspectives because the present custom was that if they did not use their leave within a specified period, they lost the right to use it.

### **2.7.6 Teacher absenteeism in the West Indies**

Research conducted in October, 2009 by the Jamaican Teaching Commission (JTC) established that the number of teachers who stayed away from schools was increasing and suggested that the Jamaican government should set up a standby teacher agenda to curb the increase in absenteeism (Reid, 2012).

In Trinidad and Tobago, the issue of teacher absenteeism has been of extreme concern for the community and has resulted in an increased awareness by most key stakeholders to hold teachers responsible for their frequent absence from schools (Hackett, 2009). The government of Trinidad and Tobago, in its Strategic Plan 2011-2015, advanced several measures to alleviate the problem of teacher absenteeism. Hackett (2009) contends that there is a serious lack of concern for identifying the inherent causes and impact of the increasing trend of teacher absenteeism that continues to plague the current school system in Trinidad and Tobago.

### **2.7.7 Teacher absenteeism in Queensland, Australia**

When Bradley *et al.* (2004) studied teachers in Queensland, Australia, they revealed that teacher behaviour associated with teacher absenteeism was determined by the organisational culture that existed at the different schools. According to Owens and Valesky (2007), organisational culture can be defined as the norms about what is acceptable, the values practised by the organisation, the beliefs and assumptions of its people, the rules that one needs to abide by to belong to that organisation, and the organisation's policies and regulations. Miller *et al.* (2008:6) consider the professional culture of a school as "the norms, formal and informal, that guide teachers' behaviour". They also refer to the norms that are associated with teacher absenteeism as the school's absence culture and describe it as "largely an informal, undocumented phenomenon" (2008:6).

### **2.8 Teacher absenteeism in South Africa – a local perspective**

Different experts who were consulted at the University of South Africa (UNISA) regarded absenteeism as an alarming issue as far as its effective management was concerned (Mogobe, 2011). In 2009, 30 996 workdays were lost due to absenteeism, costing the institution an estimated R36 million (UNISA sick leave report, 2009). Van Niekerk (2010) believes that employees abuse their sick leave because absenteeism is poorly managed. In order for managers to effectively manage absenteeism, they need proper training and guidance (Mogobe, 2011). Paton (2006:1) agrees with the fact that managers need to be committed and highly responsible for managing absenteeism at the workplace and that they should utilise well-structured interventions. Grobler (2010) argues that line managers do not have the training that is required to effectively manage absenteeism and suggests that managers needed to focus on policies, rules and programmes to deal with absenteeism. Pierce (2009) studied the impact of absenteeism in the workplace and discovered that poor management styles and poor working conditions were some of the reasons for people being absent.

According to Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011), the leadership style of the principal includes being able to influence others' actions to achieve the set goals. School principals need to clearly define the goals of their schools and motivate their staff and

students to perform at their best. Bush *et al.* (2011) explain that principals are not always sure of whether they are leaders or managers; they simply perform their duties as required by the schools they serve. Principals are required to provide leadership and management in all spheres of school life in order to establish and support those situations where superior teaching and learning can take place (DoE: 2014:47).

According to Spaul (2013), the school culture in an effective school is identified by its strong accountability; good management; culture of learning; discipline and order; adequate learning; teaching and support material; adequate teacher content knowledge; coverage of the curriculum; adequate learner performance and low repetition of dropout rate. Hoadley, Christie and Ward (2009) explain that principals in well-run schools realise the importance of social relations within the school, especially when it pertains to professional exchanges between the staff regarding the curriculum and instruction. The organisational culture in effective schools encourages consensus, participative decision-making, harmony and solidarity among teachers (November, Alexander & Van Wyk, 2010).

In Mkhwanazi's (1997: 3) opinion, teacher absenteeism is one of the major factors that disrupt schooling and although it has come under immense scrutiny in South Africa it seems as if the effects thereof are not given the proper attention they deserve. In 2011, the SACMEQ report estimated teacher absenteeism to be around 8%, yet in the private sector, especially in manufacturing, mining and financial companies, the absenteeism rate then ranged between 3.5% and 6% (SACMEQ 2011a: 19).

Mbonambi (2002:v) suggested that teacher absenteeism was becoming a huge problem in South Africa and teacher absenteeism featured high on that list of many issues that were given priority by the Witbank District Departmental tribunal from 1994 to 2001. According to Reddy *et al.* (2010), the whole notion of teachers taking leave should still be comprehensively and methodically studied in South Africa as very little is known about the degree, nature and forms of leave taken by educators. Fakie (2005) indicated that the Auditor-General was quite stressed about the degree, supervision and administration of leave taken by public servants. No structured instruments were available for managers to utilise when excessive leave taking occurred and Reddy *et al.* (2010) considered it imperative to take these factors into consideration when conducting their study.

### **2.8.1 The management of teacher absenteeism in South Africa**

As was stated, research into the management of teacher absenteeism is scant at best from a South African perspective. A recent study commissioned by the South African National Department of Education and undertaken by Reddy *et al.* (2010), is perhaps the closest this topic has come to being investigated. The control and supervision of teacher leave in South African ordinary public schools were among a number of other matters investigated. With regard to the administration and management of teacher leave, Reddy *et al.* (2010) found that sufficient strategies were in place to address teacher absenteeism for example the improvement of working conditions to encourage teacher attendance and the improvement of leave administration systems.

However, having strategies in place to manage teacher absenteeism does not imply its successful management. This notion is supported by Reddy *et al.* (2010) who conclude that whilst “schools have been compliant in adhering to the administrative requirements regarding leave taking, they have not engaged with the strategic management of leave taking in order to reduce the extent of leave”. Principals should be present more often in schools as they play an instrumental role in managing teacher absenteeism as it happens. This charge alludes to a lack of fulfilment of duty on the part of principals or equivalent administrative heads.

## **2.9 Some factors influencing teacher absenteeism**

### **2.9.1 Illness**

Abadzi (2007) found that “illness in general and in particular, HIV/AIDS have become major causes of absenteeism in certain countries”

In clarifying the concept of absence due to illness Ehrenberg *et al.* (1991) suggest three categories of illness: (i) “serious illness”, defined as “unambiguously preventing” the teacher from coming to work, (ii) “minor illness”, where the teacher has the option of reporting for work and (iii) “paid vacation” where the teacher calls in and does not come to work due to being ill despite there being no manifested health problems. Bowers (2001) uses the terms “sickness absence and absenteeism”, interchangeably. He considers an absentee as one who absents himself/herself from work due to illness

or incapacity. Jacobson (1990) views absenteeism as “an expression of employee choice”.

### **2.9.2 School leave policy**

Many schools’ leave policies promote regular non-attendance of teachers. Pitkoff (1993) found a related tendency in leave policy adopted by the district schools in Connecticut. Teachers take time off simply because leave days form part of their contract (Podgursky, 2002; Clotfelter *et al.*, 2007; Pitkoff, 1993). Generous leave policies permit teachers to miss 10% or more of class days. Many other duties that keep teachers away from their classrooms are training, meetings with their line managers, and administrative work. In their studies about the countries they chose, Chaudhury *et al.* (2005) revealed that between 25% and 86% of teacher absences were as a result of official leave and work obligations.

### **2.9.3 Stress**

There is also a strong belief that the school administration does not provide sufficient help for teachers. Thus, teachers become dejected and strained, and they take time off work through authorised leave channels. Haberman (2005) as well as Ervasti, Kivimäki, Pentti, Suominen, Vahtera, and Virtanen (2011) reinforced this opinion by acknowledging that teaching is very demanding and that the teacher is required to be highly attentive to carry out his/her responsibilities efficiently.

### **2.9.4 Management style**

The system of associations that exist among teachers, principals, vice-principals or such other designated authority figures inside the school setting can add to low teacher self-esteem and fluctuations in their levels of anxiety. It is therefore fair to accept that a strong connection in school is essential to reduce the anxiety levels of teachers as it could add to teacher exhaustion and adversely affects teacher attendance (Gold & Roth, 2013).

## 2.10 Effects of teacher absenteeism

Using teacher-level data from a study conducted in North Carolina, Clotfelter *et al.*, (2007) established that teacher absence is associated with poorer student attainment in primary schools. A study into teacher absenteeism and student learning in Zambia found that a 5% increase in teacher absence rates reduced student learning by 4% to 8% of average gains over the year (Das *et al.*, 2007).

Chaudhury *et al.*, (2005) found that an increase in teacher absenteeism led to students performing poorly and caused a decline in student attendance. This finding was supported by a study conducted in rural Rajasthan by Duflo *et al.*, (2012). When the usual teachers stay away from school, little learning occurs and students become less inclined to attend school which leads to a diminished academic performance (Ehrenberg *et al.*, 1991).

Absent teachers have a direct impact on the achievement of their students, and the absent teachers may also affect the students of other teachers by interfering with planned grade or subject meetings (Miller *et al.*, 2008). “Teacher absenteeism is costly to school divisions both financially and educationally as opportunities are lost for the students” (Pitts, 2010). Clay (2009) also admits that there is a complex relationship between teacher absenteeism and student achievement.

Miller *et al.* (2008) also believe that regular school attendance by teachers is vital and that absent teachers have an effect on the achievements of their students. When a teacher is not at school, teaching and learning time is lost, and the absent teachers may even incite learner misbehaviour and learner absence (Reddy *et al.*, 2010:24). Mbonambi (2002:57) further emphasises the impact of teacher absenteeism by stating that in extreme cases, learners aimlessly roam the streets when they should be at school because their teacher is absent.

According to the study conducted by Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor (2009: 28), the opportunities for students to learn are limited when their usual teachers are not in the classroom. Researchers are also of the opinion that if teacher absences negatively affect the students’ learning, then an increase in teacher absences may cause more harm to the teaching and learning process, which would ultimately affect the learners’ ability to perform at their best (Clotfelter *et al.*, 2009:11 -16). Van Nuland and Poisson

(2009), revealed that teacher absence has an impact on student absenteeism, student tiredness, and a deterioration in student performance.

According to Bennell and Akyeampong (2007:19), the management of teachers influences the quality of teachers. Therefore, the management of teachers within any school environment is crucial in ensuring that a high standard of teaching and learning is maintained. Both Clotfelter *et al.* (2009:24-28) and Mbonambi (2002:57) claim that poor matriculation results are consequences of teachers being absent from their classes.

Teacher absenteeism is a huge issue for districts both from a monetary and scholastic perspective, as it influences monetary conditions, work-place confidence, student non-attendance, and student accomplishment (Bowers, 2001; Rosenblatt & Shirom, 2004; Woods & Montagno, 1997). Attendance of students and teachers has been of grave concern as far back as in 1870 when the United States government started gathering statistical information in this regard (Bamber, 1979). Teachers are regarded as the most important component of a school and they are difficult to replace (Woods & Montagno, 1997). Teachers are providers of instruction and continuity, which are crucial in ensuring that their students prosper (Bowers, 2001; Woods & Montagno, 1997).

## 2.11 Summary

The schools that had high rates of teacher absenteeism experienced the following:

- Lower student achievement
- Unsuitable substitute teachers
- Enormous pressure being placed on the teachers who are present at schools to help out/fill in
- Large amounts of money being spent on substitute teachers
- In some instances, this culture of absenteeism filtered down to the learners.

The increasing rate of teacher absenteeism both globally and locally is starting to feature high on the list of priorities for all education departments as it incurs huge expenses and compromises the quality of teaching and learning in schools.



My literature review presented different statistics about teacher absenteeism rates in different parts of the world, as well, as in South Africa. The reasons and the impact of teacher absenteeism were also discussed. I highlighted the importance of proper management of teacher absenteeism as the culture and climate that are determined by the managers' leadership styles basically determine how the teachers conduct themselves in their respective schools. Christopher Hood's Cultural Theory Framework was consequently utilised to establish what impact the management styles of the HODs, DPs and principals had on teacher absenteeism.

## **2.12 Conclusion**

From the discussion in Chapter 2, it is abundantly clear that the challenges regarding the management of teacher absenteeism are debilitating the school's teaching and learning vision. Leaders and managers in schools should therefore apply efficient strategies to manage teacher absenteeism. Through managing and controlling the absenteeism process, principals would greatly enhance the culture of teaching and learning in their schools.

The aim of this investigation was to analyse the management practices employed in the sample of five independent primary schools, and to present research outcomes that may generate future interest and further study into the management practices related to teacher absenteeism. Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology of the investigation.

## CHAPTER 3

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

The intention of this study was to investigate the management of teacher absenteeism in independent, primary schools. In this chapter, I discuss the research methodology that was used to fully investigate my chosen topic. This chapter will therefore encompass my research approach, design and context, the sampling method and participants, the data collection techniques, strategies for analysing the data, and the ethical aspects that I would need to be cognisant of. The role that the chosen methodology played in helping me to conduct a thorough investigation into the way teacher absenteeism was managed in independent, primary schools is also emphasised.

### 3.2 Research Approach

Since the purpose of my research was to gain a deeper understanding of how teacher absenteeism is managed in independent, primary schools, I selected a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research utilises a naturalistic approach that attempts to comprehend phenomena in context-specific settings, therefore I interviewed managers in independent, primary schools. This constitutes a “...real-world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 1990: 132). The qualitative approach basically studies people or systems by engaging with them, observing them in their natural environment and by zoning in on their meanings and interpretations (Holloway & Wheeler, 1995). According to Nieuwenhuis (2007a: 51), qualitative research is intended to focus on the description and understanding of phenomena within their natural settings whilst trying to make meaning of what the participants are doing and saying.

According to Cohen *et al.* (2005: 137) the paradigm of this research approach insists that humans find their own meanings in situations and that meaning emerges from social processes that are bound to interpretive processes. In my research, I aimed to fully understand how teacher absenteeism is managed within the context of

independent primary schools. Qualitative research is a research methodology that focusses on the understanding of processes and the social and cultural contexts that are associated with various behavioural patterns (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a: 51).

Nieuwenhuis explained that unobtrusive data-gathering techniques such as interviews that are conducted in real-life instances, are a key component in the naturalistic (interpretive) paradigm (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). I utilised interviews, document analysis and observations to better comprehend how teacher absenteeism is managed in independent, primary schools.

The research design, context, sample, participants, data collection and analysis, credibility and trustworthiness, and the ethical components of my study will be covered next.

### **3.3 Research design**

In my research I made use of a case study research design. Yin (2011) (in Nieuwenhuis, 2007b: 75) refers to the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a current phenomenon within its actual setting when the boundaries between occurrence and context are not clearly distinguished and where multiple sources of evidence are used. This design is suitable for my study as the statistics for teacher absenteeism rates at independent, primary schools have been hypothesised due to the lack of information that is available to the public. There is also not much information available on how teacher absenteeism is managed at these schools. Therefore, many instruments are utilised to gather pertinent information.

As noted by Cohen *et al.* (2005:182), case studies "... attempt to represent 'what it is like' to be in a specific condition, the close-up reality and 'thick description' of the participants' lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for, a situation". The people who participated in my study are responsible for managing teacher absenteeism at their respective schools and the information they shared was of immense value to my study. Creswell (2007: 465) explains that a case study is an in-depth study of a bounded system based on intense data gathering where that case is isolated for research with regard to time, place or a few physical boundaries.

The definitions discussed in the paragraph above are crucial to my study in that they helped me to answer the key research question of how teacher absenteeism was managed in independent primary schools. The study was conducted in five primary schools that function independently and with the managers who worked at these schools and were responsible for managing teacher absenteeism. I conducted an in-depth examination of the five participants from the five different schools and applied different data collection techniques.

My approach proved suitable because my aim was to perceive and gain an understanding of all the issues that relate to the actual case (Schwandt *et al.*, 2007: 28). The case study permitted me to answer “how” and “why” questions that offer a multi-perspective scrutiny in which the investigator takes into consideration the opinion and perspectives of contributors in a situation and the opinions of other pertinent groups of actors, as well as, the engagement between them (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b: 75).

### **3.4 Research questions**

The following questions guided my study:

#### **3.4.1 Primary question**

- How do South African independent primary schools manage teacher absenteeism?

#### **3.4.2 Secondary questions**

- What factors influence teacher absenteeism in independent primary schools?
- How do independent primary schools implement processes to track teacher attendance?
- What strategies are used in independent primary schools to manage teacher absenteeism?

A research question’s purpose is to direct the researcher to the appropriate literary resources, as well as, to provide the study with a focus for data collection (Jansen,

2007: 3). My research questions aligned themselves with the aims of my study, namely to provide a deeper understanding of how teacher absenteeism was managed in independent, primary schools. The knowledge that I gained highlighted and encouraged the use of successful management strategies in schools that experience high rates of teacher absenteeism.

### **3.5 Research Context**

#### **3.5.1 Interpretive paradigm**

Nieuwenhuis (2007) refers to a paradigm as a set of beliefs about crucial aspects of reality which can result in a specific view of the world. A paradigm also entails thinking about something but being unable to provide proof for it (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 15). This implies that a paradigm can be used as a lens to make sense of reality.

I chose to use an interpretive paradigm in order to make sense of the reality of my study which focussed on how school leaders managed teacher absenteeism. The epistemology of my study will be based on the interpretive paradigm which attempts to "...understand the subjective world of human experience." (Cohen *et al.*, 2005: 147). Cohen and Crabtree (2006:1) maintain that the interpretive paradigm relies quite heavily on the fact that the values of the researcher should be intact in all aspects of the research process and that truth emerges from the dialogue that ensues.

I elected to work in the interpretive paradigm (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006: 275-276) which provides the ideal conceptual scope to deal with thorough investigation and "verstehen" of participants' real-life worlds, as encountered daily. This basically means that my study set out to better comprehend and relate to the daily encounters that influenced the way my participants felt about or dealt with the management of teacher absenteeism in their respective schools. This paradigm fully accommodated my interest in "...the concern for the individual..." (Clasquin-Johnson, 2011: 78).

The interpretive paradigm was therefore the obvious choice to guide me through my studies. I worked within a particular framework of a specific research methodology to understand the information obtained from my participants and to derive meaning from the exchange of ideas. The principles of interpretivism state that knowledge is relative and that the most effective manner to scrutinise behaviour is to obtain it from the way others are feeling and thinking (Livesey, 2006:3). The interviews that I conducted with the managers in the different schools enabled me to fully understand their experiences (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006:3).

### **3.5.2 The role of the researcher**

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007), the researcher is viewed as the “research instrument” when gathering information and there is always the possibility of researcher subjectivity. This basically means that the researcher is the primary research instrument for collecting and analysing data during qualitative research. My role in my study was to fully understand how teacher absenteeism is managed in independent primary schools in Midrand, Gauteng. This could prove to be quite a difficult task as a number of these private schools were within close proximity of one another and competition is always rife. One of the major reasons why private schools do not readily reveal their management strategies is because they want to grow, as well as, retain their students.

Another complication that could be expected was the fact that I work for one of the competitor schools so I needed to reassure the participating schools that I would use the information for research purposes only and will never reveal the names of the schools or my study participants at any time during my research. Due to my already established reputation in that particular school community and the fact that I was a principled individual, the schools that I chose for my study, agreed to be a part of it.

### **3.6 Sample selection**

According to De Vos (1998: 191), sampling is a subset of measurements selected from a group of people who interest the researcher. Creswell (2007) explains that purposeful sampling is utilised in qualitative research to assist the researcher as it

identifies the participants and sites by focussing on people and places that can best help the researcher to fully understand the chosen study. Adding to this, Cohen *et al.* (2005) maintain that the selectivity that characterises this type of sampling method permits the researcher to focus on a specific group, knowing full well that it is not representative of the wider population; it is only representative of itself. Patton (1990) says that the significance of purposeful sampling lies in drawing valuable information from cases that can provide what the researcher is looking for.

### **3.6.1 Purposive sampling**

A non-probability sampling technique known as purposive sampling was used in the study. This type of sampling allows the researcher to handpick the participants based on the needs and reasons for study. It also enables the researcher to choose the participants who will add value to the study based on their knowledge and background.

Purposive sampling involves a range of strategic choices about, with whom, where, and how a researcher will conduct his/her research. Purposive sampling is directly linked to the researcher's objectives. There is no single or best sampling strategy. According to Patton (1990), purposive sampling allows a researcher to select subject participants based on certain individual characteristics.

I interviewed managers (one Head of Department, two Deputy Principals, and two Principals) with a range of experience and expertise in primary, independent schools in the same area (Midrand). The participants were selected on the basis of having been uninterruptedly employed as teachers for a period of five years or longer and having occupied a management position at their respective schools for a period of three years or longer. They also had to be involved in the management system utilised by their schools when teachers are absent.

The schools were selected on the basis that they had been in existence and fully functional for 10 complete years. I also selected schools that were in close proximity of my area of residence and work so that the time taken to arrive at the chosen schools and being away from work was minimal

### 3.6.2 Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling came into operation when the researcher experienced a ‘hidden population’ as some of the initial participants became inaccessible to the researcher. However, the participants who became inaccessible were able to recommend suitable replacements that would still be able to add value to my study. For example, in the one school, (School B), the Principal was not able to meet with me but was able to recommend his Deputy who knew how the school was run and managed on a daily basis, especially in respect of teacher absenteeism. At School B, Deputy Principal also managed teacher absenteeism when the Principal was unable to, for various reasons.

### 3.7 Participants

**Table 3.1: Background information of participants**

Here is a list of the school managers’ positions, gender, highest qualification obtained, years of teaching experience, and years of experience at management level:

SCHOOL	POSITION	HIGHEST QUALIFICATION OBTAINED	YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE	YEARS OF MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE	GENDER
A	1 Head of Department	B Ed	12	5	Female
B	1 Deputy Principal	B Ed (Honours)	20	9	Male
C	1 Deputy Principal	B Ed (Honours)	18	8	Female
D	1 Principal	M Ed	25	15	Male
E	1 Principal	B Ed (Honours)	19	10	Female



### 3.8 Data collection techniques

Qualitative research requires the researcher to ask broad, general questions to the participants which will enable them to share their opinions free from the researcher's point of view (Creswell, 2007). I gathered different types of information which allowed me to answer my research questions and fully understand my chosen topic. The data collection techniques that I utilised for my study are discussed next.

Data collection is the process of collecting data on the issue under investigation. Data collection strategy refers to the manner in which I as the researcher collects the information or data. McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 39) state that research may be classified through scrutinising the strategy used in a study in order to gather information. The data collection strategy used, namely the interviews, document analyses and observations, allowed me to fully engage in the research process. These interviews, document analyses and observations cultivated a pleasant relationship between the participants and me. The in-depth probing of any issues was used during the answering of the interview questions so that I could get a complete understanding of how teacher absenteeism was managed in independent, primary schools.

According to Kajornboon (2005: 1), the data collection strategy is an important aspect of conducting a research study. I will address where and how the information was collected at a later stage in Chapter 4. Creswell (2007) outlines the following facets of the data collection in a qualitative research study:

- identification of participants and the chosen site for the research
- being able to work with the participants and acquiring the data
- deciding what data needs to be gathered
- drawing up of data collection forms and
- being ethically correct whilst conducting research

For me to be able to gather useful and vital data from the participants, interviews and observations were conducted and documents were analysed. A detailed explanation of where and how the information was collected will be provided at a later stage.

### 3.8.1 Interviews

De Vos *et al.* (1998) consider interviews to be the primary source of data collection. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) explain that the manner in which individuals perceive and make meaning of the world is vital in an interview. Cohen *et al.* (2000: 267) consider the interview process to be not just about gathering information but also as an unavoidable part of human life. Meanwhile, Melville and Goddard (1996: 44) explain that interviews involve one-on-one verbal interaction between the researcher and the participant and it is imperative for all interviews to have a plan.

Via the interviews, the school managers shared their own views and experiences in response to the questions that were asked by the researcher. A research journal was kept in order to record everything I had observed during the process of gathering information. I also made a note of feelings, experiences and impressions from the participants. When the interviews ended, and I needed to reflect on the participants responses, my research journal played a pivotal role in confirming what my findings were as well as common themes that emerged.

According to Kajornboon (2005), interviews are a systematic way of talking and listening to participants and they can be considered a preferred manner to collect information via individual conversations. An interview is utilised as a research instrument to obtain the necessary answers. I decided to make use of the process of interviews for the following reasons:

- The ability to gather personal data
- The ability to probe and question in-depth
- Anticipating a positive response that will add value to the research (Kajornboon, 2005).

Opie (2004: 231) maintains that interviews allow the researcher to delve deeply into the experiences and perceptions of the respondents about how teacher absenteeism is managed at their different schools. The interviews also permitted me to comprehend and explore the following:

- The experiences of the school managers regarding teacher absenteeism
- The perceptions of the school managers regarding teacher absenteeism

- The reasons for absenteeism
- The challenges experienced when teachers were absent
- The effectiveness or not of the manner in which teacher absenteeism was managed.

### **3.8.2 Document analysis**

Bell (2014) maintains that documents may be considered as the written impressions left by human on beings on physical objects. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:42) a document is a record of past events that is written or printed. Documents refer to diaries, policies, letters, reports and minutes of meetings.

Creswell (2002: 209) states that documents provide useful information to help the researcher comprehend the central theme being investigated whilst presenting a good source of text and words in qualitative studies. For my research, the following documents were studied:

#### **3.8.2.1 Daily attendance register**

This is an official document used by the school to monitor attendance. Teachers sign in every morning and out every afternoon. Thus this document contains information and keeps a record of the times that teachers arrive at work and the times they leave work. The school manager co-signs against the teachers' signing in and out times to verify that all information contained therein is accurate. At the end of every month, this information is captured electronically, either by the school administrative staff or the HR manager.

#### **3.8.2.2 Leave forms**

A leave form is filled in by the teacher who plans to take leave for whatever reasons or when the teacher has been absent from school. Reddy *et al.* (2010: 39), state that this form must be kept either in the clerk's office or the principal's office. In private schools, these forms are overseen by the admin staff, and signed off by the principal, before the information is captured electronically either by the administrative staff or the

HR manager. Leave forms are also filled in when teachers are away from school for a few hours so when the days add up to a full day, the teacher is made aware of this.

### **3.8.2.3 Substitution forms**

These forms are filled in when teachers are absent and basically indicate to which teachers the different classes need to go when their teachers are absent. This information is shared with the absent teacher upon his/her return so as to emphasise the feeling of overburdening the fellow teachers who did come to school.

### **3.8.2.4 Policies pertaining to leave**

These policies outline the conditions for taking leave (short-term and long-term). Even though they are drawn up for the different independent schools, they are derived from the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the South African Schools' Act. Some of these policies also highlight the penalties for taking more leave than is due.

### **3.8.3 Observations**

Observation is a crucial research and data collection tool (Slack & Rowley, 2001: 24). If observations are carried out properly, and are carefully reflected upon, useful data can be derived from this process (Slack & Rowley, 2001: 24). According to Slack and Rowley (2001: 24), "Observation can be participant or non-participant, covert or overt: it can be used to collect quantitative or qualitative data, and can be structured or unstructured". They also explain that observations can be utilised to gather important information that might otherwise have been unavailable to the researcher. It is important to know what is being observed, the reason for the observation, what type of observation method will be employed, how that particular observation will be conducted, and when the observation (the timing of the observation) will take place.

I observed the school managers, their different styles of management and the impact (if any) this had on teacher absenteeism. For my study, I made use of a non-participant observation method where the researcher "stands on one side" and looks at the participants working in their natural environments (Slack & Rowley: 2001: 24).

I observed the five participants in a direct manner to establish what sort of management style they each displayed and the impact it had on the teachers who reported to them. Although the participants in my study were aware of being observed, I reassured them that they need not change their style of management as the results of my observation were only going to be used for my study and that all details pertaining to them would remain anonymous. I observed my participants during regular school hours on a weekly basis for a month. I observed them when they held their regular staff meetings and in their interaction with staff in general and in matters pertaining to leave requests or absenteeism.

### **3.9 Data analysis**

Data analysis describes the processes that will be used to analyse data. De Vos (1998:100), as well as, Maykut and Morehouse (1994:127), explain data analysis as a process which the researcher uses to fully comprehend the phenomenon being studied and to thereafter describe what was learnt with minimal interpretation. The procedure to be utilised entailed conducting data analysis after each interview session occurred and data was also analysed after the documents were scrutinised and the observations took place. The data was examined to identify concepts and themes that would best describe the participants' worlds (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Creswell (2007), argues that in order to structure and analyse the data collected, each participant's response, the relevant documentation, as well as, the notes made during observations must be analysed. Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 134-136), suggest the following steps to help the researcher to analyse data: (i) categorisation of data into clusters for valued interpretation; (ii) detailed organisation of each case; (iii) interpretation of each case; (iv) identification of patterns, and (v) generalisation of findings via individual case synthesis.

It was proposed that the above data analysis procedure would best suit the selected research approach. Data analysis commenced during the interview process and while documents were being analysed, as well as, the notes from the observations to avoid the risk of making assumptions, drawing conclusions at a later stage or relying on the information that was gathered from the literature review. Data obtained from the interviews, document scrutiny and observations was coded through a process of

separating the participants' responses into what was common and what was unique, and highlighting any themes that may have arisen. Recorded interviews and notes made from scrutinising the documents and the observations provided me with an opportunity to analyse the pauses between the different questions and responses, the exact words used, and the order and context in which they were used. After the coding was done, the data was re-grouped to take into account the comparisons in the participants' responses, the different themes that emerged, and the understanding of the various concepts (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

### **3.10 Credibility and Trustworthiness**

#### **3.10.1 Credibility**

According to Babbie (2001: 143), validity is the extent to which an empirical measure sufficiently reflects the real meaning of concepts under consideration. Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) explains validity as broadly relating to the extent to which the measures achieve their aims, in other words, the extent to which an instrument measures what it aims to measure, what it claims to measure or test, and what it intends to test. Drew, Burroughs and Nokovich (1987) claim that although no test measure has universal validity, it has validity in relation to the following factors: (i) the specific population for which it is designed; (ii) the specific purpose for which it is designed; and (iii) the specific conditions under which it is administered.

The research methodology used for this study attempted to establish the credibility of the results through the data analysis procedure employed to scrutinise the information gathered, and reflected on the various approaches utilised in the management of teacher absenteeism. Two types of credibility came to the fore, namely, internal credibility and external credibility. Slavin (1992) differentiates between internal and external validity in the following ways: Internal validity refers to the extent to which a study rules out any explanations for the study's findings other than the one claimed by the researcher. External validity on the other hand focuses on whether the results apply to people who did not play a role in the actual study. The main aim of external credibility is the generalisability of the findings from the sample population to the population that the sample is meant to represent. To achieve this, the researcher must

select a population sample that is reflective of the real-life and practical situations, and that represents not just a unique once-off case but rather the way things are and the manner in which people function on a daily basis.

### **3.10.2 Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to an indicator's dependability. A reliable measure will generate the same result whenever the same thing is measured. A reliable measure is considered to be a trustworthy measure. Burroughs (1987) supports this view by stating that reliability refers to the ability of a measuring instrument to produce the same results in succession when no changes have been made to the thing being measured. Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) see reliability as a matter of consistency of measure; the strong chances of the same results being obtained if the procedure is repeated. The trustworthiness of research can be obtained if another individual, apart from the original researcher, carries out the exact study and obtains the same results. This means that the information derived from the interview does not change based on the personal traits of the interviewer, the instrument or the measurement device that was utilised. The trustworthiness of this study shall be maintained by the researcher's use of the qualitative research approach, supported by the research design, and data collection by means of a single standardised interview questionnaire for all sample participants.

### **3.11 Ethical considerations**

Cohen *et al.* (2005:49) explain that ethical issues can become problematic when social scientists make use of different methods to gather relevant information for their studies. This implies that every step in the research process could be subject to ethical challenges (Clasquin-Johnson, 2011: 93). Since I needed to ensure that my study would proceed without ethical problems, I applied for and received ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria before I could commence with data collection. I had to include the following components in my application:

### **3.11.1 Informed consent**

Informed consent forms the basis of all ethical procedures (Cohen *et al.*, 2005:50). Hence, before I could commence with my data collection, I sent a letter to the principals of the five selected schools to request their permission to use their schools and staff in my study. Seeing that these chosen five schools fall under the ISASA (Independent School's Association of Southern Africa), it was not necessary to obtain permission from the Department of Education. While ISASA is the controlling and managing body for independent schools, it is up to the Heads of the different schools to either accept or decline my request. I acquired the necessary consent from the principals of the five schools by reassuring them that the information I gathered would be used exclusively for my study, and that participation was purely voluntary and the schools could withdraw from my study at any given time (Clasquin-Johnson, 2011). While informed consent applies predominantly to the participants, the institutions also reserve the right to withdraw from the study.

### **3.11.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Berg (1998) warns that research should not be a gathering of inaccurate information, nor should it be conducted under stressful or manipulative circumstances. I reassured the participants from the five different schools that all information gathered would remain confidential and only my supervisor and I would have access to it. I also explained to them that the names of neither the schools nor the participants themselves would be mentioned in my study. I also promised that (if requested), I would make my study available to them after all my information had been gathered and collated, so they could see that I was true to my word. As a researcher, I would be failing dismally, if I could not abide by this code of ethics.

### **3.11.3 Deception and privacy**

Berg (1998) reminds the researcher to be extremely mindful when referring to participants and their respective backgrounds. I guaranteed the participants of the five different independent schools that I would not change their points of view to suit my purposes nor reveal their identities.



This was a particularly challenging task as I am the principal of one of their competitor schools. Furthermore, I promised not to disrupt the teaching and learning process in these five schools and undertook to work within the time frames that these schools afforded me. My entire study, as well as, my integrity as a principal and as an individual would be at risk if I deceived my participants in any way.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a detailed discussion of the methodology I employed to fully explore and understand my chosen research topic. I used a qualitative approach to investigate and comprehend how independent primary schools manage teacher absenteeism. Interviews, document analysis and observations helped me to gather all the relevant information that I needed for my study. This information will now be scrutinised and analysed and the resulting themes will be discussed in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, as well as, the data analysis strategies used to better understand how teacher absenteeism is managed in independent primary schools. The culture and climate that existed within the five independent schools studied played a vital role in curbing teacher absenteeism. The measure of control that was exerted by the HOD, DPs and the Principals also influenced teacher absenteeism rates.

#### 4.2 Analytical strategy

The information that was needed for this research was collected by means of interviews, document analyses and observations. All the transcripts of the interviews were typed and coded. To better understand the collected data in the research field, themes and sub-themes were created and examined in great detail (Creswell, 2002: 265). The questions that were drawn up for this particular research together with the interviews that were conducted during the data collection process, brought the following themes to the fore:

- An understanding of what teacher absenteeism was all about;
- The impact of teacher absenteeism on teaching and learning;
- Policies, directives and instruments that regulate teacher absenteeism;
- Teachers' reasons for their absence from schools;
- The causes of teacher absenteeism
- Proposed strategies to better manage teacher absenteeism.

I carefully scrutinised documents that were utilised at the five independent schools in order to fully understand the acts and policies that were operational in the different schools; how leave policies were implemented at these schools and what measures/steps had been implemented to control teacher absenteeism in independent primary schools.

Observation was used to establish the leadership style of each HOD, DP and principal as this also had an effect on the way teacher absenteeism was managed at the five schools. The different managers at the schools that I chose for my study were observed on a weekly basis for a month. They were observed in schools during staff meetings and during their interactions with staff pertaining to general issues, as well as, issues concerning leave taking and absenteeism. I was on the lookout for three types of leadership styles namely, transformational, transactional or laissez-faire. Transformational leadership not only entails providing support so that teachers can develop from an intellectual point of view but also requires the leader to motivate his/her teachers to work enthusiastically towards transformation (Celik, 1998). Transformational leaders promote a positive organisational climate, fulfil their goals with great ease, ensure that their teachers are satisfied with their jobs by encouraging them to give their best and they give special attention to each teacher (Deluga & Souza, 1991; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Rowold & Scholtz, 2009).

Transactional leaders identify what teachers need to accomplish at their schools, then set about creating the necessary structure whilst stressing the importance of planned and scheduled work; followers are either punished or rewarded based on whether they successfully met the planned goals or failed to do so (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). According to Bass (1990), a laissez-faire leadership style is basically an attitude where there is a lack of leadership and there is no engagement between the leader and the teachers. The leader steers away from his/her responsibility, procrastinates on decisions that need to be made, fails to engage with the staff and shows no interests in them whatsoever (Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Northouse, 2007). The leadership style of the principal of the school will therefore play a role in the manner in which teachers behave in terms of working hard and attending school regularly.

#### **4.2.1 Findings on the processes used to track teacher attendance in**

##### **independent primary schools**

The five schools from which the relevant information was collected were given the following pseudonyms: School A, School B, School C, School D and School E. In each of these schools, documents that related to teacher absenteeism were

scrutinised to determine the impact of teacher absenteeism on teaching and learning. I perused all documents relating to leave, and depending on who was responsible (either the HOD, Deputy Principal or principal) for managing teacher absenteeism in that particular school, and I called that person Manager A if he/she came from School A, Principal B if he/she came from School B and so on. The following table will provide a summary of my selected schools in terms of how long the school has been in operation, the number of teachers and the number of pupils.

**Table 4.1: Types of schools**

SCHOOL	NUMBER OF PUPILS	NUMBER OF TEACHERS	YEARS OF OPERATION
A	186	14	10
B	200	18	13
C	354	24	17
D	413	27	33
E	520	30	15

**Table 4.2: Participants and documents**

SCHOOL	PRINCIPALS	DEPUTY PRINCIPALS	HODS	DOCUMENTS
A			1	School leave policies, attendance registers, school leave forms (special, family responsibility, study, other), substitution rosters, SMT monitoring tool, record of teacher absenteeism in the last 6 months in each school, notifications to teachers when leave has been excessive and the resulting consequences.
B		1		
C		1		
D	1			
E	1			

**Table 4.3: The codes used for my participants are provided below:**

NUMBER	PARTICIPANTS	CODING
1	Current Principal - CP	P
2	Deputy Principal	DP
3	Head of Department	HOD

### 4.3. The selected schools

All schools are independent primary schools in the Midrand area of Gauteng. They are all co-ed schools and vary in physical size as well as learner and teacher population. These schools are in close proximity of one another and are located within a 15km radius. They are fully private; they rely solely on parents for paying school fees, and therefore receive no subsidies from the government. One of these schools is controlled and managed via the church while two others are owned by private companies. The remaining two schools are non-profit organisations and whatever income is generated is reinvested into the schools to improve their facilities and infrastructure. Out of the five schools selected for the research, only one school was completely diverse both in terms of its staff and pupils. The other four schools have a majority of white staff members and white children with a smaller representation of the different races among the learners. The school fees were found to range between R 20 000 per year to R 70 000 per year. The class sizes ranged from 18 to 25 pupils per class.

The medium of instruction at all five schools is English while first additional languages like Afrikaans and isiZulu are also on offer. The schools use manual registers for teachers to sign in when they arrive at school and when they leave school. The HODs, Deputy Principals or principals sign off daily against the teachers' register to verify that all information contained therein is accurate. Leave forms are issued immediately to the teachers upon their return to school irrespective of whether they were away for an entire day or a few hours. The information regarding each teacher's attendance or absence is captured electronically either by the school's secretary or the Human Resources Manager (if there is one at that particular school). Teachers are cautioned,

in writing, when they have used all their available leave they had for the specific period or when they are getting close to it.

Teacher absenteeism rates at these five schools are well-managed and do not really present a challenge as there are effective controlling procedures in place and dire consequences for teachers if they abuse their leave-taking privileges. On some days more than two teachers are absent but these schools have put measures in place to accommodate and manage the situation so that teaching and learning is not compromised. Teachers often prefer to work in independent schools (if given a choice) as there are smaller classes, more teaching and learning aids available, as well as room for progression and growth. Hence, the need to prove themselves in terms of their performance and commitment is strong and ongoing. Immense pressure is also being exerted by the parent body and the Board, hence absent teachers are dealt with in a serious manner.

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

Based on teacher-level data from a study conducted in North Carolina, Clotfelter *et al.* (2007) found that teacher absence is associated with lower student achievement in primary school. A study in Zambia found that a 5% increase in teacher absence rate reduces learning by 4% to 8% over the year (Das *et al.*, 2007).

Chaudhury *et al.* (2005) found that an increase in teacher absenteeism led to a decrease in student test scores and in student attendance. This finding was supported by a study conducted in rural Rajasthan, India by Duflo *et al.*, (2012). Whenever teachers were absent for 10 days and longer (Miller *et al.*, 2008) the deterioration in their students' performance was on par with having a novice teacher and one with only two or three years' teaching experience (Clotfelter *et al.*, 2007).

Teacher absenteeism can have an adverse effect on the entire school system; there is a decline in student achievement and attendance, and the school's image is being tarnished due to bigger economic liabilities (Harris van Keuren, 2009). Even the Office for Civil Rights of the United States Department of Education added teacher absences as a new issue on its biennial Civil Rights Data Collection survey in 2009 (Miller *et al.*, 2008). In the United States, for every ten days that a teacher is away from school,

there is a decrease in secondary standardised Math scores which is the same as having a new teacher replacing one with years of experience (Lee, Goodman, Dandapani & Kekahio, 2015). Information derived from global studies also indicates that low teacher attendance results in low student attendance (Black, Seder & Kekahio, 2014).

Added to the decline in student achievement and student attendance, the school's resources are also affected when teachers are absent and more administrative time is spent on finding substitute teachers and managing attendance (Obeng~Denteh, Yeboah &, Monkah, 2011). Between 10 and 24% of a primary school's repeated expenditures worldwide can be attributed to teacher absenteeism, including an estimated \$16 million in Ecuador and up to \$2 billion in India (World Bank, 2011, as cited in Lee *et al.*, 2015). Miller *et al.* (2012) stated that the United States had to set aside \$4 billion to deal with the effect of teachers being absent.

In the five private schools that I studied as part of my research, I discovered that although they do experience teacher absenteeism, it is less frequent and well-managed. This can be attributed to the type of schools, the managing styles of the people in charge and the consequences of abusing one's leave privileges. In School A, the HOD said, *"We have created such a competitive environment amongst the teachers by rewarding them for working hard so the teachers work tirelessly to give of their best which includes not getting absent as they are aware that this features high on our list of priorities"* (SA, HOD).

In School B, the Deputy Principal said, *"Our parents pay a fair amount of money to send their children to our school therefore when a teacher is absent even if it is not on a frequent basis, we address the issue on a one-to-one basis with that particular teacher by ensuring that he/she fully understands the impact his/her absenteeism is having on the school's reputation. This silent but ever present pressure we exert works for us, as the teachers stay away from school only in absolute emergencies"* (SB, DP). The Principal of School D said, *"I talk about the taking of leave at every single staff meeting so that my staff realise what an important aspect this is. Even though I have DPs and HODs, I make the staff report directly to me when they are not able to come to school. They have to call me directly on my personal phone by no later than 6:30*

*am and give me a reason for being unable to attend. This naturally puts pressure on them to attend school regularly” (SD, P).*

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

Although the teachers at the independent schools in my research do not belong or affiliated to any union, they are governed by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the South African Schools’ Act. Leave due to teachers is in line with what teachers who work in state schools are afforded. When teachers are newly appointed in independent schools, the guidelines and policies for taking leave are explained in great detail either by the Principal or the HR Manager. The following were the actual phrases contained in one of the school’s (School D) policies for its teachers regarding the taking of leave, *“Scheduled working hours, rest periods and arranged additional or extra-mural work periods must be adhered to by all school employees. Poor timekeeping practices, unexplained absences or premature departures from school, from the employee’s place of work or from school events, are not conducive to orderly school activity or workplace discipline.” “All school employees are required to be in attendance during normal or extended working hours, and are also expected to be reasonably flexible i.e. willing to perform work not ordinarily expected of them but of which they are capable of performing. This is particularly the case when a colleague is absent, or is unable to perform the work that needs to be done for any reason.”* This issue is also covered thoroughly during staff meetings where the teachers are urged not to take leave unless absolutely necessary and to plan and prioritise so that their holidays can be effectively utilised to sort out what they need to.



#### 4.6 Findings regarding the factors that influence teacher absenteeism in independent, primary schools

**Table 4.4:** The number of days absent for the teachers in Schools A, B, C, D and E for various reasons (listed below).

SCHOOLS	ILL-HEALTH	FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY	STUDY LEAVE
A	10	2	3
B	11	3	4
C	11	3	5
D	13	4	5
E	11	3	6

*(The information was obtained by scrutinising the attendance registers and leave forms of the different schools for a period of 6 months.)*

In Schools A, B, C, D and E, the most common reasons for teachers being absent were ill-health. A smaller number of days were lost due to family responsibility and study leave, but they did not amount to rates that warranted drastic action from the schools' management teams. If teachers were to request leave for longer periods of time to undergo a major operation that could not be postponed to a school holiday, then that school made use of a substitute teacher. The five schools studied also had a set list of substitute teachers.

These substitute teachers must have worked at independent schools before and must have a minimum of five years teaching experience. In this way, teaching and learning at that particular school was not compromised. However, of the five schools studied, this probably happened once in two years or not at all and it only happened to one teacher. The schools also had a policy in place that if you had worked at that particular school for a period of three years and longer and when you fell ill, you were entitled to 30 days' paid sick leave.

Teachers were also granted leave to study and grow professionally and personally, as this would add value to the school's image. Teachers at all five schools were studying to enhance their teaching abilities but they only took time off to write the examinations and were granted a day's study leave before the examination, provided that the degree/qualification they were studying towards was linked to their current positions in the teaching profession, and would further enhance their growth and development. Teachers had to provide proof of registration at the institutions where they were studying, as well as, an official document from that university, detailing their examination dates and times. Once again, depending on the leave time needed, the school's management team derived a plan so that teaching and learning was not compromised at that particular school.

Teachers were absent from school when their children and sometimes even spouses fell ill but this was also well-managed at these independent schools. The teachers who worked at these schools fully understood the importance of being at work every day so minimal days were lost due to teacher absence. The teacher absenteeism rates at the five schools were low and even when they did occur, were well-managed. This information was derived from scrutinising the attendance registers and leave forms of Schools A, B, C, D and E for a period of six months (see Table 4.4).

The highly effective management of teacher absenteeism could be related to the area in which the schools were operating (highly competitive) and the fact that these private schools were in close proximity of one another. Thus, in order to be the best, the preferred school had to have fewer issues and the challenge of teachers coming to school regularly could never be one of these issues, as it would be detrimental to the school's survival, growth and success. Hence, enormous pressure is placed on their teachers to be at school every day.

Even though the principal's leadership styles differed slightly, they were all similar when it pertained to teachers being absent – they had very low tolerance for the same teachers staying away frequently. I gauged their leadership styles from my observations of the way the principals spoke to their staff and the manner in which they dealt with the teachers. Two predominantly specific leadership styles emerged namely, transformational and transactional leadership. The principals at these five

schools also chose to set the example by coming to school regularly and by asking the teachers to contact them directly when they were unable to attend school.

#### **4.7 Reasons for the low rate of teacher absenteeism at independent, primary schools**

##### **4.7.1 Rewarded with incentives**

Teachers at these five schools were rewarded in the following ways for 100% attendance:

- Cash bonuses at the end of the term/year
- Public recognition
- Opportunities for promotion
- Blanket day
- Above-average pay increases

Teachers were paid cash bonuses at the end of the year for coming to school every single day. This motivated them to maintain their excellent attendance records and encouraged the other teachers to follow suit. The school's chosen type of incentive was clearly stipulated in the code of conduct which every teacher had to read, acknowledge and sign upon commencing his/her employment at that particular school.

When teachers were publically praised and recognised for their hard work, they were motivated to carry on working in that manner. Teachers were given recognition at year-end functions, and school's award ceremonies and they were highly appreciative when their commitment and dedication were acknowledged. Excellent teacher attendance obviously improved and added to a school's image.

Teachers who showed their commitment by not only working hard but by coming to school every day were the next in line when opportunities for promotion arose. Most teachers were ambitious and wanted to climb the school's employment opportunity ladder. Thus, they were prepared to work hard to ensure that when the moment arrived, they would not lose out.

In School A, a blanket day was used where a particular teacher was given a school day off from work as a gesture for saying 'thank you for' always working hard and

giving a 100% commitment and dedication. This was done once a month and one of the criteria that was used, was attendance.

Teachers in School D were given salary increases for the following year based on their performance in that particular year. A teacher who came to school every day, worked hard, and produced the desired results, received a higher salary increase than a mediocre teacher. All five schools used this as part of their appraisal system for their staff to help them decide on the increases for the following year. The Principal in School E had the following to say, *“We make use of the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) to appraise our teachers and one of key performance indicators is regular attendance. We use this rating to determine increments for the next year”* (SE, P). Members of staff were also informed of this via the code of conduct.

#### **4.7.2 Penalty for abusing leave**

Teachers who were found abusing the leave system because they felt the pressure of working in independent, primary schools were dealt with in the following ways:

- Deduction in salary
- Pressure from Management, the Board and parents to either meet with the school's expectations or leave the school
- An unhealthy, disgruntled relationship between the absent teacher and the rest of the staff who attended school regularly
- A basic lack of trust and a stigma of suspicion surrounding the absent teacher even when the offending teacher had genuine reason to be absent
- No opportunities for promotion
- A poor reputation so that chances of employment in other independent schools were seriously compromised

If teachers took more time off than was legally due to them then this could result (and actually resulted) in a deduction in their salaries. This hurt the offending teacher the most as teachers are not the best paid people in South Africa and any additional cut in salary affected their monthly budgeting. The HOD from School A said, *“A teacher that stayed away from school for more than the allocated sick days leave in her first*

*year of teaching at our school, was paid less for that particular month. She came to me and pleaded, indicating that she would not be able to manage her financial obligations until the next pay date. Unfortunately, as much as I took pity on her, the rules of the school had to be enforced. After that month, she did not get absent again” (SA, HOD).* The fact that the school had direct and immediate control over their teachers’ salaries also meant that the teachers tended to treat the matter seriously.

Management exerted pressure on the teachers by either emphasising the importance of coming to school at every single meeting or by calling the teacher and having an upfront and honest conversation with him or her. The teacher would basically be informed that the days taken off thus far were a serious cause for concern as it was affecting the teaching and learning processes. Teachers were constantly reminded of the high school fees, how much parents were paying, the sacrifices they were making to send their children to independent schools, and what they and the school expected in return. If a teacher was still uncooperative, then the Board would get involved by providing advice to the school principal. When that happened, the offending teacher could lose his/her job. Parents also pressurised the school management team who then exerted more pressure on the absent teachers. The Deputy Principal from School C said, *“When I informed the offending, absent teacher, that the Board is aware of his situation and the parents are also demanding an explanation as to why the teacher is absent so often, the teacher becomes more aware of his absenteeism and immediately there is a change in his behaviour” (SC, DP).*

In my study I found that Schools A, D and E had a system in place where, when teachers were absent for a day or two, fellow teachers who were not teaching during that time (admin periods) had to stand in for the absent teacher. Most of the teachers’ workloads were quite full and when they had to sacrifice their admin periods to fill in for a teacher who they believed was absent yet again for trivial reasons, they would start to display great animosity towards that teacher upon his/her return. The Principal from School E said, *“My hardworking, committed and diligent teachers have no qualms about showing the absent teacher how they feel about having to fill in for her/him. When the absent teacher returns to school, that teacher is basically isolated and made to feel like he/she did something wrong. This is especially apparent when the sick teachers make the effort to come to school and have to fill in for the absent teacher. Although this is not ideal, I overlook the matter as I also feel that the absent teacher*

*has to feel guilty. When this happens, the behaviour of the absent teacher changes for the better” (SE, P).*

Even when the teacher who stayed away from school more than he/she should, actually had a genuine reason for staying away, both the management team and teachers became highly suspicious and doubted that teacher’s intentions. The Deputy Principal from School B said, *“I had one particular teacher who had the tendency to stay away for trivial reasons so when that teacher informed me that her grandmother had passed away and she needed a day off work to attend the funeral, I asked for a copy of the death certificate” (SB, P).*

Teachers who were absent more often were not considered for promotion posts even if they were excellent teachers. They also tarnished their reputations so much so that when they applied for jobs at other schools, they were unsuccessful due to their poor attendance records. The Deputy Principal at School C said, *“I would rather settle for a mediocre teacher who was 100% committed, especially about attending school regularly rather than an excellent teacher who was 50% committed” (SC, DP).*

#### **4.8 Findings regarding the strategies used by independent, primary schools to manage teacher absenteeism**

##### **4.8.1 Measures to control teacher absenteeism**

Absenteeism was controlled by keeping of records (both manual and electronic) of the leave forms the teachers were required to fill in when they were absent from school. In independent schools, the teachers would fill in the leave forms which would then be handed to the principal to sign off/approve the leave/decide if it was paid or unpaid leave and then the leave would be captured on the school’s information system. This means that both electronic and manual records were kept. These independent schools had a proper system in place where a teacher who was absent was given the a form to complete by the school secretary upon his/her return to school, and if that teacher for whatever reason did not fill in the form, or provide the necessary documentation (e.g. a doctor’s note), then that leave would be unpaid and the teacher would face immense pressure from the principal of his/her school.

Teachers fill in any one of the following four forms when they are absent:

- Family responsibility leave
- Special leave
- Sick leave
- Study leave

Teachers also had to notify the principal directly when they were staying away from work. This requirement was clearly listed in the teacher's code of conduct.

#### **4.8.2 Management approaches to control teacher absenteeism**

According to Hood (1998: 73-79), the hierarchist approach, is defined by strict relations of authority in terms of which organisations operate in accordance with pre-determined hierarchical structures and a clear division of responsibilities. The thinking behind this approach is that organisations that operate within such a rigid structure would guarantee, (against the backdrop of clearly defined parameters of responsibility and accountability), that everyone will perform to his/her best, without there being any recklessness towards, or dereliction of, duties.

Of the five independent schools, Schools D and E used the hierarchist approach. Predetermined hierarchical structures were in place and there was a clear division of responsibilities from the principal of the school to the person responsible for cleaning the school. Hence if you did not perform, you were held accountable and if you were absent, you could not carry out your allocated responsibilities which then had an impact on the effective functioning of the school. In Schools D and E, absenteeism rates were quite low and not at all problematic. In these schools the principals had this to say: *"When a teacher is absent and returns to school, I give him/her the cold shoulder treatment so much so that they think twice about getting absent."* *"I make the teachers feel real guilty about the other teachers having to fill in for them by emphasising that some teachers who were unwell came to school and then had to still substitute for those who were absent"* (SD, P). *"If I myself have not been absent for the past three years even though I have been sick, then why can't my staff do the same?"* (SE, P).

The egalitarian approach is characterised by co-operation and participation (Hood, 1998), and is based on inclusiveness that promotes the desirability and possibility of self-organisation and self-steering. Egalitarians control their organisations through mutuality and “*maximum face-to-face accountability*” (Hood, 1998), and they apply a bottom-up participatory management.

School B used the egalitarian approach and involved everyone in the smooth running of the school. Every staff member had an important role to play and their contributions were highly valued. Due to teachers at this school feeling a part of the institution they worked for, they rarely stayed away because of the collaborative and equally valued efforts of all. The teacher absenteeism rates in School B were quite low and not at all problematic. The manager who was responsible for supervising and managing teacher absenteeism had this to say: “*I make every teacher feel important and let them know that every single one of them contributes equally to the success of our school.*” “*I constantly reward and praise my teachers for working hard and attending school every day.*” “*We make decisions together so every teacher has the same sense of accountability and responsibility.*” (SB, DP)

The individualist approach, according to Hood (1998), assumes that humans are “*rational egoists*” (Hood: 1998). This approach envisages a quest for personal interests, but the manner in which this quest is achieved may be directed by the institutional context, such as providing or revoking perks for a defined type of behaviour. The first act would be to make people who work together compete for better positions, more money or the highest rewards, by providing the best individual service. Here the manager of School A had the following to say: “*I promote the teachers who work the hardest first and part of that includes attending school regularly.*” “*I give cash incentives to the teachers for 100% attendance.*” “*I reward my diligent teachers with spa vouchers, shopping vouchers or a day off over the weekend when it is compulsory for all teachers to attend.*” (SA, HOD).

School A used the individualist approach where the teachers who worked hard were rewarded with incentives like cash bonuses, promotions, and public recognition. Those teachers who did not carry their weight were denied certain privileges for instance having time off when another was rewarded, having money deducted from their salaries, being denied promotional opportunities, given the lowest increase or



even no increase in salary for the following year. Since none of the teachers wanted to miss out, teacher absenteeism rates were low and not at all problematic.

In the fatalist approach, there are no proper checks on the actions of public officials (Hood, 1998: 145-167). This approach envisages disorganisation and a very low standard of productivity. No effort is made to create a stimulating incentive structure for officials, which ultimately leads to corrupt and unaccountable practices. Whilst this approach has been criticised for being negative, Hood, (1998), stresses that it is common.

In School C, there was a particular teacher who thought that his behaviour would go unnoticed (as had been the case at his previous school), and thus came to school highly inebriated and was absent frequently. School C's management wasted no time in removing this teacher from their school. This sent out a strong warning to the other staff members to fall in line because the school adopted a firm stance against poor performance and negligence. Apart from this isolated incident, teacher absenteeism rates at School C were low and not at all problematic.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

It is evident from the findings of my research that teacher absenteeism is well-managed in the five independent primary schools I selected for this study. This can be attributed to a number of reasons such as better working opportunities, better chances for promotion, better salaries and an overall improved image for the teacher who teaches in an established, independent school.

Good teacher attendance can probably be attributed to the positive and negative consequences that a teacher may encounter based on his/her attendance record, and the fact that the Board and the principals can react immediately to deal with defaulting teachers and do not have to wait for the Department of Education to respond. There is immediate accountability, and since many teachers prefer to teach in independent schools, committed teachers can easily be accessed to replace their not-so-committed counterparts.

The way the school managers run their schools and their management styles are also crucial to the manner in which every school functions. The principal and the school

management team have to set the example if they expect their teachers to attend school regularly. The fact that an absent teacher has to report directly to the principal also makes a big difference. Furthermore, parents play a pivotal role based on the high school fees they pay and the expectations they have of that particular school.

Similar sort of tactics need to be applied in schools with high teacher absenteeism rates to establish which methods are the most effective in reducing teacher absenteeism.

This research supported the hypothesis that independent schools generally do not reveal their teacher absenteeism statistics, publically, as teacher absenteeism does not pose a real challenge. Even when the odd situation arises where teachers are abusing their leave privileges, the matter is dealt with immediately. In terms of Hood's Cultural-Theory Framework, it was quite evident that the management styles of the HODs, DPs and Principals from the five schools selected for this study affected the manner in which the teachers carried out their responsibilities. I also observed that the managers who were responsible for managing teacher absenteeism had a sort of bullying attitude towards the teachers, so much so, that the teachers would come to school even when they were really ill for fear of being victimised or isolated when they returned to school.

The fact that independent school teachers are not affiliated to any unions that will protect their rights often leave them feeling vulnerable and exposed. The Principal from School E had this to say, *“Even though I notice that my teachers come to school sick, I tend to overlook this and as long as they get through the school day, I am satisfied. They may go home immediately after the school teaching day has ended”* (SE, P).

I strongly feel that while maximum teacher attendance is of paramount importance at any school, there should be a balance between putting pressure on the teachers to attend school every day and knowing when a teacher has a genuine reason for being absent.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary of my findings

This final chapter provides a synthesis of the findings, followed by recommendations on how to manage teacher absenteeism for effective teaching and learning. This study intended to answer the main research question framed as follows: “How do South African independent primary schools manage teacher absenteeism?”

#### 5.2 Overview of the research process

Chapter 1 presented a general orientation to the study by setting out the need for this investigation based on previous research that highlighted the lack of strategies adopted by school management teams to control teacher absenteeism. Chapter 2 provided a thorough perspective from current literature on teacher absenteeism in general. Chapter 3 focussed on the qualitative methodology and explained how data was collected and analysed. Chapter 4 described the results and findings. A synthesis of the study’s findings and recommendations that followed from those findings are discussed next, based on the research questions set out in Chapter 1.

#### 5.3 Synthesis of the study’s findings

Interviews were conducted with the different school managers who were responsible for overseeing and controlling the school environment in which teachers were absent. Documents like school leave policies, leave forms, attendance registers and substitution rosters were also scrutinised to see how they were being implemented at schools and gauge their effectiveness. The school manager’s leadership style was furthermore observed to establish its effect on teacher absenteeism at the schools concerned. The information obtained through the empirical research was analysed and the results of this analysis were presented in Chapter 4. The interpretations are presented here in Chapter 5.

I commence with a summary of who manages teacher absenteeism at the different schools studied, how teacher absenteeism is managed, and the impact of the management strategies employed at those schools. Subsequently the reasons why teacher absenteeism is better managed at independent primary schools are suggested.

#### **5.4. A review of South African independent schools' management of teacher absenteeism**

For the purposes of my study, I focussed on teachers who were physically absent from school for a day and longer. The school managers whom were interviewed all agreed that unless teacher absenteeism was managed well, it could and actually contributed to poor student performance. Teacher absenteeism also had an impact on the other teachers who had to bear the burden of an absent teacher by filling in for that particular teacher. This set the tone for other teachers to stay away unnecessarily and did little for the morale of learners who then also stayed away or developed an apathetic attitude towards their learning. Moreover, the school's image also became tarnished.

It was found that the school principal as the Head of the school played a pivotal role in managing teacher absenteeism by adopting various strategies and approaches. Adopting a no-nonsense approach to teachers who were absent frequently, had a huge impact. Enforcing the serious penalties, which would have been discussed with the teachers, made a difference as well. The school principal set the example by coming to school regularly, and thereby pressurised his/her staff to do the same.

Irrespective of the approach used by the principal - be it hierarchist, egalitarian, individualist or fatalist, the rates of teacher absenteeism at the five independent primary schools were found to be low and not in the least bit problematic. This was attributed to the fact that these were independent schools in a fairly affluent area. The parents themselves exerted enormous pressure on the schools since they paid a considerable amount of money for school fees.

The schools were in close proximity of each other so competition was found to be rife and stiff. The schools employed teachers who were 100% committed and if they proved themselves to be otherwise, none of the school wasted any time in imposing penalties, and if the need arose, even asked the offending teacher to leave. Most

teachers wanted to teach at these private schools for their improved images, better working conditions and facilities, and smaller classes, and thus they knew that if they were to mess up, they would be ruining their own chances of progress and growth. Also, since word quickly spreads around, a truant teacher's prospects of being employed at a private school again would be diminished greatly.

Teacher absenteeism may have adverse effects on an entire school system, from lowering student achievement and attendance to tarnishing the school's reputation to broader economic losses (Van Keuren, 2009). International sources also indicate that low teacher attendance is linked to low student attendance (Black, Seder, & Kekahio, 2014), and implying that there are mutually reinforcing implications of teacher absenteeism for overall student performance (Banerjee *et al.*, 2012; Benveniste, Marshall, & Santibanez, 2007).

Furthermore, teacher absenteeism adds pressure to the schools by draining its resources and increasing the administrative time spent on finding suitable substitutes whilst still managing attendance (Obeng-Denteh *et al.*, 2011). Between 10-24% of continuous primary education expenditures worldwide are due to teacher absenteeism, including an estimated \$16 million in Ecuador and up to \$2 billion in India (World Bank, 2011, as cited in Salami *et al.*, 2013). Miller *et al.*, (2008) state that in the United States an estimated \$4 billion is set aside to cope with teacher absenteeism.

According to Freiberg (1999), the school climate can define the quality of a school. Schools should create a positive teaching and learning environment that meets the needs of all its students. Schools should focus mainly on their teachers by ensuring that they are happy and motivated because this, in turn, rubs off onto the learners. A school is considered to be special if it can create the reasons why teachers and learners love it and really want to be there (Freiberg, 1999). Work morale is also closely interlinked with the school climate that has been created. The physical structure of the school should provide an environment that is conducive to both teaching and learning. The affective impact of culture is in the social fabric that embraces the school and the people who work and learn there (Freiberg, 1990).

Rosenblatt and Shirom (2005) highlighted the presence of an absence culture. An absence culture is rife when there is an expectation from the school that it is okay to

be absent. A study from Jacobson (1990) that was cited by Bowers (2001) revealed that the frequency of absences which are acceptable to the set beliefs and practices of a school will inadvertently be adopted by that school's staff and can set the scene of an "absence culture". A workplace acceptance of high absenteeism may have a greater impact on absences than the individual's contribution to the level of absenteeism. According to Imants and Van Zoelen (1995), the school principal is an important agent in creating and maintaining the norms and values of the school (Bowers, 2001).

The five schools I studied all experienced minimal interruption to their teaching and learning due to the strict measures that were in place and the management approach adopted by the school principals. If teachers were planning to stay away for longer periods then a suitable contingency plan came into operation so that the quality of teaching was maintained. The climate that existed within these schools encouraged every stakeholder to give nothing less than the best and a huge component of this was to attend school regularly and on time. These five schools created a positive culture and climate, so, there was no room for teachers to behave differently. If a teacher deviated from the norms, he/she was immediately reminded of his/her duties, the school's expectations, etc.

## **5.5 Common factors that influence teacher absenteeism in independent primary schools**

Mkhwanazi (1997: 156) states that teachers were absent for various reasons inter alia, ill-health, memorial services, teacher stress, party politics, transportation problems, cultural activities, excessive use of liquor and the upgrading of teacher qualifications. Teachers who were absent from the schools I studied, generally did so for the following reasons: ill-health, urgent private matters and study leave.

### **5.5.1 Ill-health**

Teachers who were absent were usually ill only for a day, or longer if they had to undergo surgery. In one of the schools, a teacher was booked off for a whole term because she was admitted into a psychiatric institution. The school principal was

extremely supportive of this particular teacher and requested that she be paid fully upon her return (even though it was more than the amount of leave due to her). The school saved money by using the deputy principal as a substitute for her. The teacher was extremely grateful and a positive message went out to the rest of the staff which motivated them to work harder and attend school regularly.

Teachers could be requested to produce a doctor's note when they were absent on a Friday, Monday or at the start after a public holiday and long weekend. If the school was in any way suspicious, it did not hesitate to contact the doctor or exert pressure on the teacher to not repeat that type of behaviour. If a pattern of absenteeism was noticed by the school manager, then that particular teacher would be cautioned verbally and in writing. Since the school managers were free to act immediately and did not have to wait for the Department of Education (as in the case in state schools), the truant teachers experienced the immediate consequences of abusing their leave. Miller *et al.* (2008) explain that ill-health is the biggest contributory factor to teachers being absent and from the five schools that I studied, this inference was proven true.

### **5.5.2 Urgent private matters**

This type of leave encompasses family leave and special responsibility leave. Teachers are entitled to two days special leave and three days family responsibility leave per year. Once they have utilised this leave allowance, any additional leave taken, becomes unpaid leave. Teachers do not earn high salaries so even one day's unpaid leave truly makes an impact. The independent schools that I studied strictly enforce these penalties so that teachers do not abuse the leave they are allowed to take.

The teachers normally took leave if a child was ill, a spouse/mum/dad needed to undergo an operation, or if they had something really urgent to sort out that could not wait until the weekend or after school hours. Leave was also taken when teachers were getting married but the weddings were usually planned more or less around the school holidays so that the leave taken had minimal impact on teaching and learning. Once again I found that at these five private schools, the amount of leave taken for urgent private matters was minimal as these schools had very clear and strict

measures in place to counter leave being abused for trivial issues. I also discovered that when teachers requested leave for urgent private matters, they were quite honest about why they needed time off.

### **5.5.3 Study leave**

Teachers were encouraged to develop and grow, so when they pursued further studies that contributed to that process, they were given time off to study. If the teacher's study was directly linked to his/her professional growth, then he/she would be given the day off before the exams to study as well as the actual day of the exam to write. If what was being studied was not related to school, then the teacher was granted leave only on the day of the examination.

If the number of subjects the teachers was writing stretched over a period of a week or longer, then a substitute teacher would be brought in. This could be done, provided that all relevant information was submitted and discussed in advance. I also found that in most of these independent primary schools, the Deputy Principal and Principal either did not teach at all, or had minimal teaching loads so they could (and did) step in for those teachers who were absent for longer periods. This not only reassured the parents but also ensured that the standard of teaching and learning was maintained.

The three factors mentioned above were the main reasons why teachers were taking time off from work in the five schools that I studied.

## **5.6 A review of how independent primary schools implement processes to track teacher absenteeism**

The principals at the schools I studied used different tools to manage teacher absenteeism all of which proved to be extremely effective. Teacher absenteeism was well-managed and controlled at these schools.

### **5.6.1. Reporting to the school principal when absent**

When a teacher was absent, he/she needed to inform the principal of the school directly. The principal then asked the HOD or DP to arrange for a substitution



timetable. Teachers who had “free” administration periods on that day were asked to fill in for the absent teacher. The absent teacher had to email the work that was meant to be covered by the learners and the substitute teacher had to ensure that this work was done. Alternatively, if the teacher was seriously ill and the work that needed to be covered had to be taught first, then the substitute teacher would make use of a relief/back-up file. This file contained constructive work for the learners to complete and they had to be able to do it on their own. If the principal was suspicious for any reason, he/she would request a doctor’s note. In the five schools that were studied, the HODs, DPs and principals were all given a lighter teaching load as opposed to the other teachers so that when such a situations arose, they would have the time to effectively deal with and manage it. Since teachers had to report their absence to the principal directly, they were not very keen to do so and preferred attending school rather than being absent.

### **5.6.2 Completion of leave forms**

Whenever teachers had been absent, they were required to complete the necessary leave forms upon their return. The school secretaries were generally very efficient at ensuring that this was done. They practically hounded the teachers and even went as far as personally delivering the leave form and waiting for it to be filled in, before they left. If a doctor’s note was requested and it was not produced, the principal refused to sign off on that leave form which meant that the leave would be unpaid. Information regarding the absent teacher was also captured electronically and his/her work history and attendance record would be readily available upon request. In one of the five independent schools I studied, I discovered that even if a teacher was late by 15 minutes or more, he/she would be requested to fill in a leave form. The same applied to those teachers who requested to leave school early. Once the number of hours taken off amounted to an entire day, it would be deemed as a day’s leave, especially when the teacher stayed away often or asked to leave early on a regular basis.

### **5.6.3 Signing the attendance register**

The five private independent schools in my study got their teachers to sign off on an attendance register daily. Actually, the entire staff - academic and non-academic needed to follow the same protocol. Everyone had to indicate the time they arrived and the time they left school. When a teacher was absent, the school secretary immediately recorded that teacher as being absent electronically, and later the absence was recorded manually on the attendance register so there was no opportunity for anyone to be dishonest.

Once a week on a Friday, the manager in charge would sign off against each teacher's roster to ratify that all the information contained therein was accurate. One of the schools I studied also penalised teachers for not signing the attendance registers on time. If by the end of the month, when the attendance register was submitted to the finance department, the teacher had not signed the register for a specific day, he/she would be considered absent even though it was not the case. The teacher would then not get paid for that day. Although this strategy seemed harsh, it proved to be extremely effective. According to the school, it inspired the teachers to be diligent about their responsibilities and duties.

## **5.7 A review of the types of strategies used in independent primary schools to discourage teacher absenteeism**

The five private schools used the following methods to curtail teacher absenteeism:

### **5.7.1 Creating a positive culture and climate**

The school and its managers were solely responsible for fostering a positive culture of teaching and learning. This included rewarding and recognising the teachers who worked hard, setting a positive example, and following through with the stipulated consequences when leave was abused. The school principal played a pivotal role in managing teacher absenteeism.

The school principal set the tone by working hard and inspiring the rest of his/her staff to do so. Teaching and learning were the main priorities pursued, so anyone and

everyone who added value to that vision was respected, admired and valued. This was the trend in all the schools I studied – motivating, and hardworking principals inspired their staff to perform at a superior level. A no-nonsense approach towards absenteeism and underperformance, in general, was implemented by the different managers.

The leadership styles of the principals played a key role in the manner in which the school was run. Through observations, I was able to identify two dominant leadership styles namely, transformational and transactional. In School A, the principal displayed a transformational leadership style, he believed in creating a positive climate, and motivated his teachers to perform at their best while focussing on the individual needs of each teacher. This approach naturally encouraged the teachers to work extremely hard which included attending school on a regular basis.

In Schools B, C, D and E, the principals displayed a transactional leadership style. Here the principals believed in establishing a structure that had to be maintained by the teachers by following through with the plans that had been made for the school and by adhering to the stipulated work schedule. The teachers were either rewarded when they contributed to the successful implementation of the schools' plans, or they were punished when they failed to do so. For the plans to be successfully implemented, it required teachers to come to school every day.

### **5.7.2 The use of incentives**

The five independent primary schools made use of incentives to reward their teachers who worked hard. Teachers were recognised for a multitude of things, one of which, was for attending school every day. They were rewarded in the following ways:

- Public recognition and praise
- Cash incentives
- A day off
- Very strong opportunities for promotion
- A relationship based on complete faith and trust

These factors encouraged teachers to work very hard and to perform at their best, as they did not want to miss out on the rewards.

## **5.8 Recommendations regarding the management of teacher absenteeism**

My study explained the importance of strong management and leadership in schools as it helped to ensure that schools function effectively and that teachers carry out their duties and responsibilities in a diligent manner. Attending school regularly was identified as one of these important strategies. The strategies that were implemented by the various managers (HODs, DPS and principals) were crucial as they set the tone for how the rest of their staff would conduct themselves. A key component of these strategies was the ability to manage teacher absenteeism to such an extent that it would not become a problem.

My study also afforded a glimpse of independent schools and their approaches to challenges that might occur. Independent schools tend to keep their operational procedures a closely guarded secret, as the existence of these schools depend on their student intake. It is a highly competitive industry and in the area where I live and work (Midrand), there are many independent primary schools within close proximity of one another. The schools that generally survive and succeed are the ones that earn and maintain a good reputation in terms of the quality of the teachers they employ, the quality of the education they offer, the extra-mural programme and its successes, and so on. If the message had to get out and (it usually does) that a certain school's teachers are absent on a frequent basis, then that school's life span will be a short one.

Currently, public schools are over-populated and halfway through the first quarter, there are still children who have not yet found places in schools. The large number of students, per class, in a public school, places enormous pressure on their teachers to teach the children, mark their work timeously and maintain discipline. This is a mammoth task that discourages most teachers and makes their jobs that more difficult. One of the appealing factors of teaching at an independent school is the guaranteed lower student-teacher ratio. This does not mean that no pressures are being placed on the teachers in independent schools to perform, but a smaller class allows a teacher to accomplish more. Therefore, teachers are eager to teach in independent schools and they want to retain their positions, so they will generally work extremely hard and if that means attending school religiously, then so be it.

Independent schools have more control over their teachers as they can impose immediate sanctions when a teacher does not fulfil his/her duties. The fact that there are so many teachers, who want to work in independent schools, means that independent schools have a wide range of options to choose from. Teachers who are fortunate enough to work in independent schools are prepared to work hard to retain their positions. Moreover, the fact that teachers in independent schools are not affiliated to unions makes them vulnerable and desperate. They will do all they can to not miss a school day, for fear of repercussions. Teachers who work in independent schools need to conduct research regarding teacher unions and their options.

### **5.9 Recommendations for future studies**

The current study prompts further research in areas pertaining to the management of teacher absenteeism. If control of the number of teachers is dictated by the hierarchical approach in an independent school, then this management style would be even more appropriate in a public school. Learner attainment in public primary schools is much lower due to excessive absence of teachers. Some pertinent domains for further research that hones in on management practices include the following:

Topic 1: How do principals sustain effective management strategies to control teacher absenteeism?

(Sample schools to be revisited after three to five years)

- Perceptions of the various stakeholders as to what variables ensure sustained control of teacher absenteeism
- Revisiting what constitutes effective management of teaching and learning
- The patterns and impact of a lack of control of teacher management on the quality of teaching and learning

Strategising for the enhancement of learning and teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century schools. Do we need teachers to be present in schools or behind their computers giving virtual lessons to the learners?

Topic 2: How can the South African education crisis be mitigated via the efficient management of teacher absenteeism?

- Identification and management of risk factors associated with teacher absenteeism and the quality of teaching and learning
- Establishing environments that support teachers to be present at schools
- Leading and managing curriculum delivery to ensure teacher presence in all schools
- The value of professional learning communities in enhancing attendance and enthusiasm among teachers

Topic 3: How can leadership development programmes lead to the positive management of teacher absenteeism?

- What is the link between management development and human resource management?
- What are the perceptions of principals and the School Management Team on the value of a module on teacher absenteeism in a management development programme?
- What are the challenges encountered during management training programmes?

### **5.10 Limitations of the study**

I chose five independent primary schools in the Midrand area, close to where I live and work as it made my access to these schools much easier. I did not choose schools from different areas such as Centurion, Fourways or Randburg, thus my findings are based only on the schools I selected for my study.

My study included five schools in Gauteng, and I did not research the schools in other provinces to see if my findings would be similar - despite the fact that my topic is an issue of concern both internationally and nationally. I furthermore focussed on independent primary schools and therefore cannot be sure if the same principles of management would apply in independent high schools.

I did not select any public, primary schools for my study. Even though the teacher absenteeism rate is believed to be high in public schools, it may not apply to all public schools. There are many successful public primary schools and I have not delved into their strategies for managing teacher absenteeism. Furthermore, in the schools that I

selected, only two of the three leadership styles were displayed, namely transformational and transactional. It would have been interesting to observe what transpired at a school where the principal had a laissez-faire leadership style.

### **5.11 Concluding remarks**

Having looked at the current rates of teacher absenteeism that prevail within public schools as opposed to private schools, I found huge discrepancies. It seems that when teachers are left to their own devices and fear no consequences, they will do as they please. Teachers join the teaching profession because it is a calling and they want to make a positive contribution to the future generation. Teaching is not just a job - it is something we care for passionately and those not involved in the profession will probably never understand our devotion. However, why are there such huge discrepancies between teacher attendance in public schools and independent primary schools? This is obviously an area that needs to be delved into further.

I work at an independent school and previously worked at a number of successful public primary schools but I must admit that the difference in the teacher absenteeism rates in public and independent schools is disappointing. Some independent schools pay their teachers higher salaries but not so much that the quality of teaching and learning should be compromised. Independent schools in particular have kept their successes a closely guarded secret and unless one is privy to that type of information, one is completely left in the dark. Teacher absenteeism is a huge concern for parents who cannot afford independent school fees but want a good education for their children. If teaching is in fact a calling, what works in one school should work for another, granted that location and income or a lack of it, do make a difference.

However, it seems that teachers like the “whip to be cracked” if the inference can be made that the hierarchical management style was the underlying motivation for teachers to be present in their classrooms. The principals, who mentioned that they ignored teachers who had been absent and gave them the cold shoulder treatment on their return from leave, implied that this type of treatment encouraged teachers to be at school daily. Apparently, the fear of facing the stern looks of the principal, worked in those schools.

I would, personally, prefer to see a complete transition in all schools in South Africa. Teachers have a crucial role to play and yet they are not delivering quality due to their frustration with some of their colleagues who are absent regularly. The incentive initiative for 100% attendance by teachers should be a project driven by the Department of Education. Maybe, if teachers were offered a 10% increase in salary for the months during which they were not absent, they would feel encouraged to come to school. Irrespective of where one works, one's passion and commitment needs to be the same. I have had the privilege of interviewing school managers who have not been absent in the past three years and I firmly believe that if one person can sacrifice so much and commit in such a manner, many others can do the same.

Teachers work with young children, and we try to shape and mould them. We have to set the example, especially as teachers, to make a difference, and rightfully we should. We need to attend school regularly, motivate our learners and emulate the ideal example of what all human beings are capable of, so that our learners will strive to do the same.

On a final note, it is envisaged that the outcomes of this study will be included in the content of a management module of the principal preparation programme towards improving teacher management in all South African public schools.



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## Appendices

### APPENDIX 1: LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT



## Faculty of Education

Dear Head of Department/Deputy Principal/Principal

I would sincerely like to express my gratitude for your kind assistance with the research being undertaken at your school. I would like to conduct my research with members of the school management team who are directly involved in managing teacher absenteeism. My research topic is, "**The Management of Teacher Absenteeism in Independent Primary Schools in Midrand, Gauteng Province.**" The research project will involve me conducting semi-structured interviews with the selected participants. All information obtained will be used for this research purposes only, and will be treated with the strictest of confidence.

The interviews will be conducted in a quiet room and will be audio taped via a Dictaphone. These interviews will take place at the convenience of the participants and will in no way affect the school day and them carrying out their duties. I would also like to analyse policy documents or any other records utilised in the management of teacher absenteeism. Here again, the information gathered will be used for this research purposes only, and will be kept in the strictest of confidence.

Before commencing with any data collection exercise, I will first come to the school and explain the research and what the participant's role will be. I will also explain how I intend to conduct my research and how the recordings will be done. My intended interview should last for an hour, at most.

I would yet again like to thank you for assisting me in my research, and hope that the information obtained will be used to assist schools that are struggling to manage high rates of teacher absenteeism.

Yours sincerely

---

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign this letter as a declaration of your consent, i.e. that you participate in this study willingly and that you fully comprehend that you may withdraw from the study at any time. Under no circumstances will the identity of  
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the interview participants or their  
be involved in the research process



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any organisation/parties that may

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Yours sincerely

\_\_\_\_\_





## Faculty of Education

The Head of Department/Deputy Principal/Principal Interview Protocol

### **The Management of Teacher Absenteeism in Independent Primary Schools in Midrand, Gauteng Province**

**Time of interview:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Duration:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Place:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Pseudonym:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher absenteeism is a continuing and growing concern both locally and internationally, and the high rate of teacher absenteeism suggests that there are gaps in the effective strategic management thereof despite there being institutional interventions to manage same.**

#### Questions:

- 1) Who is responsible for managing teacher absenteeism in the school?
- 2) Do the teachers know and comprehend the conditions under which they can take leave during the school's operational hours? How has this been established?
- 3) Are there policies in place that are made available to the teachers to inform them of their rights and responsibilities when absent/taking leave?
- 4) What would rank as being the number one contributing factor of teacher absenteeism in your school?
- 5) How do the teachers go about applying for longer periods of leave?
- 6) When is the procedure that teachers need to follow when they are absent?
- 7) How do you monitor (keep a track of) teacher attendance?
- 8) When a teacher is absent or taking leave what contingency plans are in place?
  - Short term leave (a day or two/couple of hours)
  - Long term leave (week or longer)
- 9) What plan of action is carried out when it has been identified that some teachers have already taken more leave than the [© University of Pretoria](#) year?

- 10) Would you say that you expect her absenteeism in your school?
- 11) What tactics (if any) are employed to maintain low teacher absenteeism rates? /What are some strategies that you would use to improve the attendance rate amongst educators?



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Ask if there are any additional comments that interviewee would like to make regarding the management of teacher absenteeism at his/her school.



**DECLARATION OF EDITING**

I herewith declare that I,

**Isabel M. Claassen** (APSTrans (SATI)),

full-time freelance translator, editor and language consultant

of

1367 Lawson Avenue, Waverley, Pretoria  
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and

accredited member (No. 1000583) of the South African Translators' Institute (SATI)

completed the *language editing*\* of the MEd thesis

entitled

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in Midrand, Gauteng**

which had been submitted to me by

**Gonasagarie Naidoo**

in fulfilment of the degree Magister Educationis

in the

**Department of Education Management and Policy Studies**

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

E-mail: scooternaideo@gmail.com

Date completed: 26-03-2017

***\*Please note that no responsibility can be taken for the veracity of statements or arguments in the document concerned or for changes made subsequent to the completion of language editing. Also remember that content editing is not part of a language editor's task and is in fact unethical.***

**APPENDIX 4: ETHICS CLEARANCE**



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Faculty of Education

**RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

**CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

CLEARANCE NUMBER:

EM 15/07/02

**DEGREE AND PROJECT**

MEd

The management of teacher absenteeism in independent primary schools in Gauteng

**INVESTIGATORS**

Ms G Naidoo

**DEPARTMENT**

Education Management and Policy Studies

**APPROVAL TO COMMENCE STUDY**

1 January 2013

**DATE OF CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

31 March 2017

*Please note:*

For Master's application, Ethics Clearance is valid for 2 years.

For PhD application, Ethics Clearance is valid for 3 years.

CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS COMMITTEE: Prof Liesel Ebersöhn

CC

Ms Bronwynne Swarts

Dr Keshni Bipath

This Ethics Clearance Certificate should be read in conjunction with the Integrated Declaration Form (D08) which specifies details regarding:

- Compliance with approved research protocol,
- No significant changes,
- Informed consent/assent,
- Adverse experience or undue risk,
- Registered title, and
- Data storage requirements.

**Table 1.1: The plan of action for my study, using Christopher Hood’s Cultural-Theory Framework..... (Page 11)**

**Table 2.1: Christopher Hood’s four approaches to dealing with public management problems..... (Page 28)**

**Table 3.1: Background information of participants..... (Page 50)**

**Table 4.1: Types of school..... (Page 62)**

**Table 4.2: Participants and documents..... (Page 62)**

**Table 4.3: The codes used for my participants are provided below..... (Page 63)**

**Table 4.4: The number of days absent for the teachers in Schools A, B, C, D and E for various reasons..... (Page 67)**