

**Distributed leadership for teacher empowerment in Tshwane
Secondary Schools**

by

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in

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation that I hereby submit for the Degree Master of Education in Educational Leadership at the University of Pretoria is my own work and has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.



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November 2022

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the participants, both principals and teachers, who made this study possible. It could not have been possible to complete the study without your participation. Your contribution is gratefully appreciated with the hope that this study would transmit your voice to the relevant authorities. Education is a team sport. As such, we need to ensure that we each do our part to surpass the expectations of those we serve.

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ABSTRACT

Teachers are the most significant influencers in learners learning and play a key role in the nation-building process by influencing the mind-set of learners. This study aimed to examine how distributive leadership can contribute to teacher empowerment in secondary schools. The study was motivated by the ever-changing school context which comes with a burden of high expectations and accountability for school leaders. Four principals and twelve teachers from four secondary schools in the Tshwane West District, Gauteng province were purposively selected to participate in this study. A qualitative research approach and case study design were used to examine how distributive leadership can contribute to teacher empowerment. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect in-depth data from participants on how distributive leadership can empower teachers in secondary schools. Participants acknowledged the importance of distributive leadership as a tool to empower teachers and promote collaboration and collective accountability. The findings of this study revealed that teachers believe that distributive leadership can influence the teaching and learning environment, while inclusive decision-making will ensure collective accountability for learners' performance. Teachers are of the view that they need authority and space to innovate new ways to approach the curriculum as opposed to the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) they are issued with and expected to follow. Although principals concur with teachers' views, some principals believe that there should be a balance between distributive and authoritarian leadership in schools to ensure proper command and control.

Key words: Distributive leadership, Teacher empowerment, Collective accountability, Learner achievement, School performance.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DLT	Distributed Leadership Theory
FAL	First Additional Language
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
HL	Home Language
HOD	Head of Department
NNSSF	National Norms and Standards for School Funding
SASA	South African Schools Act
SASP	South African Standard for Principalship
SMT	School Management Team

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Distributed leadership (Hermann, 2016)	16
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LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Biographical information of participants from different schools.....	50
Table 4.2: Themes and sub-themes linked to the research questions and sub- questions.....	52

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
CERTIFICATE OF LANGUAGE EDITING.....	vi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
1. CHAPTER 1.....	1
1.1 Introduction and background.....	1
1.2 Problem statement.....	5
1.3 Rationale for the study	6
1.4 Statement of purpose.....	7
1.5 Research question and sub-questions	8
1.6 Theoretical framework	8
1.7 Research methodology and design.....	9
1.8 Trustworthiness of the study	10
1.9 Ethical considerations	10
1.10 Clarification of key concepts	11
1.11 Significance of the study	12
1.12 Outline of chapters.....	12
1.13 Summary of the chapter.....	13
2. CHAPTER 2.....	15
2.1 Introduction	15
2.2 Distributed leadership in schools.....	15
2.2.1 The relevance of distributed leadership in schools	17
2.2.2 Relationship between distributed leadership and teacher empowerment.....	20
2.2.3 The role of the principals in teacher empowerment	22
2.2.4 Using distributed leadership to empower teachers	24
2.2.4.1 Assigning leadership roles to teachers.....	24
2.2.4.2 Develop teacher capacity for classroom management.....	25
2.2.4.3 Teacher empowerment for <i>in loco parentis</i>	26
2.3 Impact of distributed leadership on learner achievement	27
2.3.1 Creating spaces for teacher-parent engagements	29
2.3.2 Teacher empowerment and learner performance in South Africa	30

2.4	Challenges experienced in implementing distributed leadership	31
2.5	Strategies and interventions used to empower teachers	32
2.5.1	Encouraging teachers to optimise their potential	32
2.5.2	Creating a conducive work environment and reinforcing performance	33
2.5.3	Support provided to teachers.....	34
2.6	Distributed leadership in the South African context	34
2.7	Theoretical framework	35
2.8	Summary of the chapter.....	37
3.	CHAPTER 3.....	38
3.1	Introduction	38
3.2	Research paradigm.....	38
3.3	Research approach.....	39
3.3.1	Qualitative research approach.....	39
3.3.2	Case study design	40
3.4	Research design	40
3.4.1	Research site	40
3.4.2	Sampling method and recruitment strategy	41
3.4.3	Data collection.....	42
3.4.3.1	Semi-structured interviews.....	42
3.5	Data analysis	43
3.6	Trustworthiness of the study	45
3.6.1	Credibility	46
3.6.2	Transferability.....	46
3.6.3	Dependability	46
3.6.4	Confirmability	46
3.7	Ethical considerations	47
3.8	Limitations and delimitations of the study	47
3.9	Summary of the chapter.....	48
4.	CHAPTER 4.....	50
4.1	Introduction	50
4.2	Participants' biographical information.....	50
4.3	Themes and sub-themes	51
4.4	Presentation of the research findings	53
4.4.1	Theme 1: Principals' views on distributed leadership for teacher empowerment	53
4.4.1.1	Sub-theme 1: Shared responsibility among leaders and subordinates	54
4.4.1.2	Sub-theme 2: A preferred approach to leadership.....	56
4.4.1.3	Sub-theme 3: Creating opportunities for teachers to participate in leadership	58

4.4.1.4	Sub-theme 4: Consultative management and inclusive decision-making	60
4.4.1.5	Sub-theme 5: Promoting inclusive accountability	61
4.4.1.6	Sub-theme 6: Effective communication for leadership ethics and the empowerment of subordinates	63
4.4.1.7	Summary of Theme 1	65
4.4.2	Theme 2: Contribution of distributed leadership to learner achievement.....	66
4.4.2.1	Sub-theme 1: Sharing of expertise through team teaching.....	66
4.4.2.2	Sub-theme 2: Space for teacher collaboration and sharing of ideas.....	68
4.4.2.3	Summary of Theme 2	70
4.4.3	Theme 3: Challenges experienced by principals in empowering teachers through distributed leadership	70
4.4.3.1	Sub-theme 1: Teachers' willingness to cooperate in leadership	71
4.4.3.2	Sub-theme 2: Time constraints and teachers' assumption of leadership roles	74
4.4.3.3	Sub-theme 3: Communication between school principals and teachers	76
4.4.3.4	Summary of Theme 3	78
4.4.4	Theme 4: Strategies used by principals to enhance teacher empowerment through distributed leadership	78
4.4.4.1	Summary of Theme 4	81
4.5	Summary of the chapter.....	81
5.	CHAPTER 5.....	83
5.1	Introduction.....	83
5.2	Summary of the findings	83
5.2.1	Principals' views on distributed leadership for teacher empowerment	83
5.2.2	Contribution of distributed leadership to learner performance.....	84
5.2.3	Challenges experienced by principals in empowering teachers through distributed leadership.....	85
5.2.4	Strategies used by principals to enhance teacher empowerment through distributed leadership	87
5.3	Delimitation of the study.....	87
5.4	Limitations of the study	87
5.5	Recommendations	88
5.5.1	Recommendations relating to principals' perspectives on distributed leadership for teacher empowerment.....	88
5.5.2	Recommendations on how distributed leadership for teacher empowerment can contribute to learner achievement.....	89
5.5.3	Recommendations on the strategies to be implemented by principals to enhance teacher empowerment through distributed leadership	89
5.5.4	Recommendations for further research	90
5.6	Conclusions	90

References	91
ANNEXURES	111
ANNEXURE A: PERMISSION LETTER FROM GDE	111
ANNEXURE B: REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH: PRINCIPALS	113
ANNEXURE C: REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH: TEACHERS.....	115
ANNEXURE D: PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM.....	117
ANNEXURE E: TEACHER CONSENT FORM.....	118
ANNEXURE F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: SCHOOL PRINCIPALS	119
ANNEXURE G: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: TEACHERS	120

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction and background

Teachers are significant role players in learners' learning, and they play a fundamental role in nation-building by influencing the mindsets of learners. Kimwaley et al. (2014) have argued that the role played by teachers should not be overlooked, especially given their contributions to assisting schools to achieve their purpose. Several research studies and policy frameworks, both within South Africa and internationally, have emphasised the significance of the role played by teachers in contributing to the efforts to ensure better education for all (Buckler, 2015; Mogliacci et al., 2016). Furthermore, teachers are agents of social cohesion, especially as they contribute to the national efforts to address racial, cultural and linguistic inequalities, to mention a few, which could undermine equal education for all (Mogliacci et al., 2016).

Al-Yaseen and Al-Musaileem (2015) contend that the quality of teaching and the impact of teachers in the education system, regardless of the resources available, is based on teachers' qualities, which are linked to their professional preparedness, willingness and determination. However, the hierarchical power and workplace dimensions for teachers have rarely been a focus of reforms in the education systems (Mogliacci et al., 2016). The issue of power, autonomy and authority is at the heart of the teachers' empowerment. Bogler and Nir (2012) argue that teacher empowerment is the most likely solution to the challenges related to school effectiveness, such as a lack of collaboration and collective accountability, and poor performance. Al-Yaseen and Al-Musaileem (2015) support the view that the lack of teacher empowerment may potentially lead to anxiety and incompetence in the workplace, especially unsatisfactory functioning, low levels of innovation and an absence of the desire to work.

Rangel et al. (2020) define teacher empowerment as a mixture of professional growth, self-efficacy, decision-making, autonomy, status and impact. These dimensions are important as the ever-changing school environments and

expectations require motivated, prepared and empowered teachers to confront the constantly evolving challenges (Mosoge & Mataboge, 2021). Globally, education systems face immense pressure from the rapidly changing contexts, which creates new demands on schools to produce learners with the necessary skills to participate in the competitive world. Gemechu (2014) suggests that these demands can only be met with the participation of teachers in leadership, especially in decision-making processes. This proposition is a crucial reminder that teachers are the cornerstone of school functionality, given their key role in the teaching and learning processes. As such, the participation of teachers in leadership may motivate and empower them to dedicate their mental and emotional involvement in all school activities to ensure that educational goals are accomplished (Cheng & Szeto, 2016).

The leadership approach that allows teachers to participate in school leadership is called teacher leadership (Grant, 2017a; Harris, 2014). While there is no agreement on the definition of teacher leadership, the key argument is teachers can persuade others to contribute to the improvement of the school (Cheng & Szeto, 2016; Grant, 2017b; Harris, 2014; Neumerski, 2013). Cheng and Szeto (2016) contend that the role played by teachers within the school environment makes them leaders. Therefore, if they are marginalised in terms of decision-making processes, their influence and contributions may be weakened and lost (Cheng & Szeto, 2016). Grant (2017b) contends that where teachers are genuinely involved and demonstrate enthusiasm and the necessary skills for leadership beyond the boundaries of the classrooms, they can take risks and, eventually, assume joint responsibility for change initiatives.

Rached and Elias (2019) suggest that given the fact that schooling has become increasingly complex in structure and purpose, there is a need for appropriate forms of leadership to maximise teacher potential and improve learner performance. This is in line with the literature that points out that school principals are no longer expected to manage and lead schools on their own, rather, they should distribute leadership as a strategy to empower teachers and improve the effectiveness of schools and their overall academic

performance (Botha & Triegaardt, 2015; Hatcher, 2015; Marishane & Botha, 2013). In concurrence, Lu and Smith (2021) contend that teachers may develop and improve their competence when school principals involve them in decision-making processes. The leadership approach that distributes and shares leadership with followers, who may be teachers in the context of this study, is referred to as distributed leadership. Diamond and Spillane (2016) define distributed leadership as an approach to leadership that is not the domain of an individual but decision-making or organisational influence governed by the interplay of individuals as opposed to individual direction. Distributed leadership, within a schooling context, therefore, maximises teachers' capabilities, boosts interconnections among staff and improves commitment to the school by assisting in the management of the challenges of reform (Al-Taneiji & Ibrahim, 2017; Fairman & MacKenzie, 2012). In this regard, Lu and Smith (2021) call on principals to collaborate frequently and honestly with teachers to achieve common goals.

While principals have the role to provide strategic direction in schools, including the development of standardised curricula (Dowd, 2018), teachers have the responsibility to provide a conducive learning environment for learners and, most importantly, introduce the curriculum in the classroom (Alsubaie, 2016). Marishane (2011) argues that anything associated with teaching and learning is the responsibility of teachers and their Departmental Heads (DHs), which supports the proposition that school principals should empower and provide opportunities for growth for teachers. The involvement of teachers in the conceptualisation and development of school improvement plans and participation in related decision-making processes is, therefore, critical for meeting school objectives and the overall needs of society.

One of the key challenges confronting the education system is the inadequate decentralisation of authority in schools (Sibanda, 2017). Mosoge and Mataboge (2021) have pointed out that the South African education system still has principals who come from the apartheid past, where authoritarian ways of managing schools were dominant. For example, school principals during this period were expected to manage authoritatively and control everything to

be regarded as strong principals. However, within the democratic dispensation, school principals are expected to manage and lead schools democratically in accordance with the Policy on the South African Standard for Principalship (SASP) (Department of Basic Education, 2015). The SASP stipulates that a good principal must not act in isolation, but lead the school democratically (Department of Basic Education, 2015). This is in line with the spirit of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA Act 84 of 1996), which requires schools to transform into democratic organisations (Republic of South Africa, 1996a).

Grant (2014) points out that the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) and the subsequent laws and policies which seek to democratise schools, present an ideal background for a new theory of school leadership, which elevates inclusivity and distributed decision-making practices. Williams (2011) argued that the primary purpose of inclusivity should be to provide opportunities to empower teachers with, among other things, knowledge and expertise required to reflect on and transform their practices and contribute to the transcendence of the dichotomy between education policy and practice at the school level. Despite the space that has been created for distributed leadership in South African schools, Sibanda (2017) argues that principals are reluctant to empower teachers through the distribution of leadership. Biko (2013) concurs with Sibanda's (2017) view that the policies that sought to replace top-down leadership styles with democratic ones have not been sufficiently embraced by some schools.

According to Naicker and Mestry (2013), principals who use autocratic leadership styles with dictatorial decision-making present strong barricades to teacher empowerment. This, therefore, means that teachers are often not empowered to lead and that they, consequently, lack the confidence to demonstrate take initiative and use and improve the skills that they possess. In this regard, this study focuses on how distributed leadership can contribute to teacher empowerment in a secondary school context in Tshwane West District, Gauteng province, South Africa.

1.2 Problem statement

Although South Africa's educational landscape is evolving, some principals and teachers have continued to perpetuate an 'us and them' mentality, as some school management teams (SMTs) are still placed as the only rightful leadership titleholders and key actors to central decision-making processes (Grant, 2017a). If teachers are not involved in decision-making processes, they are likely to disown the decisions made. Enduring the ideological, economic and organisational considerations could serve, in part, to explain why teachers believe they are less empowered or do not have adequate autonomy to exercise their professional duties. As explained by Binder and Binder (2016), a major determinant of autonomy and capability is the extent to which teachers are enabled to drive their professional development and the advancement of their careers.

The matter of teacher empowerment is important because teaching is, among others, a moral activity (Mosoge & Mataboge, 2021). Mosoge and Mataboge (2021) believe that if teachers, as moral agents, must be accountable for their actions, they must be allowed the autonomy to act according to their professional judgements. Therefore, a shift from hierarchical relationships to distributed leadership practices becomes imperative. Although most research studies have focused on distributed leadership, more work is required in understanding how distributed leadership practices in the school environment can empower teachers to actively and effectively discharge their responsibilities. Teacher empowerment involves more than pedagogical or curriculum leadership and includes a situation where teachers have a voice in decision-making processes and are allowed to demonstrate the necessary expertise beyond the confines of the classroom (Grant, 2017a). Grant (2017b) contends that this would enable teachers to see the bigger picture and predict an alternative future for the school and take calculated risks for the shared responsibilities for a change. Where teachers are at the forefront of co-constructing educational change and reform, the net outcomes are both positive and empowering (Donaldson, 2015). Equally, where teachers are just

recipients of top-down change, with a constrained voice in decision-making processes, then the outcomes are likely to be far less promising.

Distributed leadership is a key approach in education as it allows teachers in both formal and non-formal leadership positions more independence through their participation in decision-making processes. O'Shea (2021) contends that the distributed leadership approach can be associated with creativity in teaching practices, as a result of the empowerment of teachers to make decisions regardless of their status. The strengths of distributed leadership, such as collaboration, collective capacity building and collective decision-making, can be associated with improved teacher empowerment and innovations. This study explored distributed leadership as a way in which teachers may be empowered and gain confidence to discharge their professional responsibilities. This study explored the experiences of a sample of school principals who seemed to be promoting or exercising distributed leadership, as well as the views of teachers in the schools led by these principals. The intention was to understand how the exercise of distributed leadership had empowered or could empower the teachers.

1.3 Rationale for the study

As a deputy principal, I have observed that the evolving basic education and the consequent ever-changing school curriculum come with a burden of high expectations and accountability for school leaders. About a decade ago, Naicker and Mestry (2013) pointed out that the functions and challenges of school leadership had become multifaceted and extended beyond the capabilities of leaders. Despite this, leadership in the education system is generally influenced by the bureaucratic administrative model that is hierarchical; thus, placing teachers at the bottom rung of the hierarchy, with a limited role in the decision-making processes of schools (Makoelle & Makhalemele, 2020). Irrespective of the policy provisions on inclusive participation, coupled with the expectations that teachers should manage their classes and produce quality results, the lack of the decentralisation of power in schools remains a key obstacle to achieving school objectives (Sibanda,

2017). However, this issue has received inadequate attention and has, therefore, continued to impact teacher performance and learner achievements.

In light of increased pressure on principals by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) for schools to improve academic performance, I developed an interest to examine how distributed leadership can be used to empower teachers as a way of promoting accountability and ensuring dedication to achieve the expectations of the basic education sector, including increased learner performance. As a deputy principal, I have from time to time been confronted with challenges where teachers would not cooperate or implement some of the school programmes, often citing the fact that they had been excluded in the development of such programmes. It is against this backdrop that I am interested in examining how distributed leadership could contribute to improved teaching and learning environment. Thus, this study provides an account of how distributed leadership can be used to empower teachers.

1.4 Statement of purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine how the principal's distributed leadership can contribute to teacher empowerment in secondary schools around Tshwane West District, Gauteng province, South Africa. Therefore, this study sought to:

- Examine school principals' perspectives on distributed leadership and teacher empowerment;
- Explore how distributed leadership for teacher empowerment can contribute to learner achievement;
- Understand the challenges experienced by principals in their efforts to empower teachers through distributed leadership; and
- Determine strategies employed by principals to enhance teacher empowerment through distributed leadership.

1.5 Research question and sub-questions

1.5.1 Main research question

How can the principal's distributed leadership contribute to teacher empowerment in the secondary schools in the Tshwane West District?

1.5.2 Secondary research questions

- What are the perspectives of school principals on distributed leadership and teacher empowerment?
- How can distributed leadership for teacher empowerment contribute to learner achievement?
- What are the challenges experienced by principals in their efforts to empower teachers through distributed leadership?
- What strategies are employed by principals to enhance teacher empowerment through distributed leadership?

1.6 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework used in this study is called Distributed Leadership Theory (DLT) founded by Cecil Austin Gibb in 1954. This theory provided a lens for understanding how distributed leadership can contribute to teacher empowerment in the secondary schools in Tshwane West District. DLT outlines the importance and benefits of inclusive decision-making processes, especially the involvement of lower-level employees (Spillane, 2006). For Hairon and Goh (2014), DLT advocates for a more structured perspective whereby leadership responsibilities are separated from formal organisational roles, and individuals at all levels are afforded a chance to influence the functioning and direction of the organisation, for example, a school in the context of this study.

According to Diamond and Spillane (2016), Cecil Austin Gibb was the first writer to directly refer to distributed leadership in 1954, when he suggested that leadership is best conceived as a group quality or a set of responsibilities that should be executed by the group. Shava and Tlou (2018) concur that leadership must not be understood as the monopoly of one person but as a

shared or collective role. In tracking the origins of the DLT, several important concepts are often cited. For instance, Diamond and Spillane (2016) identified the notions of distributed cognition and activity theory as key concepts underpinning their conceptualisation of distributed leadership. Distributed cognition contends that human experiences and cognition are integrally bound up with the physical, cultural and social context in which it occurs (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). On the other hand, activity theory refers to how human activities are both enabled and constrained by material, social, cultural and individual factors (Diamond & Spillane, 2016).

Generally, the task of promoting instructional capacity in schools has been the responsibility of principals. However, Kalra (2020) points out that, recently, there has been an awareness that this responsibility may be too complex and overwhelming for one individual, owing to a multitude of other matters to which a school principal must attend. In this regard, DLT posits that principals must be encouraged to embrace an inclusive idea of instructional leadership, wherein leadership responsibilities are distributed and appreciated as a collective activity by all stakeholders (O’Shea, 2021). Miao et al. (2014) state that DLT encourages principals to bestow trust upon their subordinates to create and follow their schedules and objectives to complete tasks. Therefore, this suggests that this theory has a decentralisation and distribution of power as its primary dimension for the empowerment of the followers to contribute to the achievement of organisational goals (Miao et al., 2014). This suggests that, within a schooling context, the decentralisation of leadership to include teachers in the exercise of leadership has the potential to empower teachers to reach their potential and contribute to the enhancement of learner performance. That is, the decentralisation of power could have a significant impact on how teachers execute their professional duties within a schooling context. The DLT will be explained and discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

1.7 Research methodology and design

The detailed research methodology utilised to conduct this study is outlined in Chapter 3 and explains the research paradigm, design and approach, as well

as sampling, data collection and data analysis methods that were used in this study. The interpretivist paradigm was used as a philosophical position that guided my engagement with the participants and the study. A qualitative approach as well as a case study design was selected to examine how the principals' distributed leadership approach contributed to teacher empowerment in selected secondary schools in Tshwane West District.

A purposive sampling design was used to select principals and teachers who participated in this study. With more than 10 years of experience working in the Tshwane West District, I have established a good rapport with school principals within the district. In this regard, principals were approached and requested to provide a list of teachers with five or more years of teaching experience in their schools as the target group to participate in this study. Semi-structured interviews were used as a method of generating the data, which was later transcribed verbatim and analysed using the thematic approach.

1.8 Trustworthiness of the study

The issues that improve the value of the study include the trustworthiness and awareness and management of the limitations of the study. Connelly (2016) refers to trustworthiness as the level of confidence in the collected data, its interpretation, as well as the methods used to safeguard the quality and credibility of the study. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), the value of data in qualitative research is measured through its credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. These are the criteria that were used in this study, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.9 Ethical considerations

The protection of the participants by applying appropriate ethical principles is essential in any study (Arifin, 2018). King and Horrock (2010) emphasise the importance of safeguarding the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. In this study, I acknowledge that the majority of research studies in education involve human beings. As such, I located the observance of

ethical principles as a central consideration in the conduct of this study. In this regard, I obtained ethical clearance from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) and the Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria (UP). This means that I only proceeded with the study once permission and approval had been granted. The directives and guidelines of the UP on ethical issues were strictly adhered to, which included ensuring that participation in the study was voluntary and that pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants.

1.10 Clarification of key concepts

1.10.1 Distributed leadership

Diamond and Spillane (2016) define distributed leadership as the cultivation of an organisation, a school in the case of this study, that links various organisational elements to produce relationships, wherein individuals contribute and are accountable to the organisation. Naicker and Mestry (2013) assert that distributed leadership is a shared, collaborative, democratic and participative leadership practice, whose aim is to build capacity for change and improvement. On the other hand, according to Harris (2014), distributed leadership seeks to mobilise leadership capability at all levels to provide opportunities for teacher empowerment. In the context of this study, distributed leadership is discussed as a group or collective activity that works through and in relationships, rather than individual action. As such, distributed leadership is relational, inclusive and collaborative.

1.10.2 Teacher empowerment

Flaherty (2018) defines teacher empowerment as the promotion of the teacher's right to participate in the processes to determine school policies and objectives, and the right to provide input on the content of the curriculum. Sol (2021) argues that affording teachers decision-making opportunities and promoting increased responsibilities are key elements in the conceptualisation of the teacher empowerment process.

1.11 Significance of the study

The purpose of the study is to examine how the principal's distributed leadership can contribute to teacher empowerment in the secondary schools in Tshwane West District. It is envisaged that this study will contribute to the existing scholarship on the different ways of empowering teachers and the impact thereof on learner achievement. The study also explored the challenges encountered by principals, as school leaders, in implementing distributed leadership and the strategies they applied to enhance teacher empowerment in their schools. It is, therefore, hoped that the study will trigger thinking and debate on the strategies to assist principals to cope with identified challenges as a way of enhancing teacher empowerment in schools within similar contexts.

1.12 Outline of chapters

The dissertation comprises five chapters to maintain a focus of the study and a chronological framework to respond to the key research questions. The summary of each of the chapters is provided below:

Chapter 1: Introduction to the study: This chapter provides the overview of the study, which includes the introduction and background, statement of the problem under investigation, rationale for the study, purpose and research questions, summary of the theoretical framework and research methodology and design, the trustworthiness of the study, ethical considerations and the clarification of the key concepts used in the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework: Different studies or literature related to distributed leadership for teacher empowerment reviewed for the study in presented and discussed in this chapter. Given that the literature review is more of an analytical summary of the previous studies on the research topic, both local and international literature is covered to acknowledge what already exists, highlight gaps and outline how this study helps to address some of the identified gaps. Furthermore, this chapter

presents, explains and discusses Distributed Leadership Theory (DLT), which was used to guide analyses, interpretations and understandings in this study.

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology: In this chapter, I present the research design and methodology that were used to address the key research questions. Furthermore, the research paradigm and approach, the research design, sampling, data collection and analysis methods, the trustworthiness of the study, ethical considerations and limitations and delimitations of the study are discussed.

Chapter 4: Research findings and data analysis: In this chapter, I provide the profiles of the participants and present, discuss and interpret the data generated to respond to the key research questions of the study. The discussion in the chapter is guided by the themes and sub-themes generated to respond to the main research and sub-research questions of the study.

Chapter 5: Summary of findings, conclusion and recommendations: Chapter 5 provides a summary of the key research findings and the extent to which they support or refute the arguments made in the reviewed literature and theoretical framework. Finally, this chapter concludes by presenting the concluding comments, outlining the limitations of the study, and providing recommendations for further research.

1.13 Summary of the chapter

This chapter provided an overview of the study by introducing the key elements of the study and introducing some of the previous studies on distributed leadership. Among other fundamental aspects covered in this chapter are the research problem, rationale, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, and research methodology.

In the next chapter, I review the literature relating to distributed leadership for teacher empowerment, covering both South African and international

literature. Moreover, it is in this chapter that I discuss the theoretical framework that was used to analyse, interpret and understand the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I introduced the study by presenting an outline and background to the study including the problem statement, rationale as well as research question and sub-questions. In this chapter, I review and discuss both the local and international literature on distributed leadership and teacher empowerment, including the theoretical framework that framed the analysis, interpretation and understanding of data generated. This chapter intends to review and discuss available literature to explore the research topic of distributed leadership for teacher empowerment in secondary schools. The challenges encountered when implementing distributed leadership by principals in the schools as well as strategies and interventions used to counter these challenges are discussed in this chapter.

2.2 Distributed leadership in schools

Distributed leadership, as defined by Sirisookslip et al. (2015), is the practice of opening decision-making channels and persuading followers to participate and contribute to the organisational direction. In other words, it is the practice of opening and sharing leadership space with the followers. Harris (2014) asserts that this model of leadership involves interdependent interactions among stakeholders within the school community and mobilising and releasing leadership potential at all levels to generate opportunities for and build the capacity to participate in decision-making processes. This suggests that distributed leadership can be understood as an inclusive approach to leadership and a practice of democratising leadership (Özcan, 2017). Bellibas and Liu et al. (2018) contend that the ever-changing school context resulting from curricular, technological, financial and other reforms requires increased distribution of leadership and collaboration at different levels to maximise success. Distributed leadership features interconnectedness and interdependence as mechanisms for defining leadership formats and relationships between leaders and their followers (Saunders, 2020).

Botha and Triegaardt (2015) contend that the presence of distributed leadership and the kind of support provided by, for example, the principal as a school leader, plays an important role in mobilising the commitment of their followers, who may be teachers. Hatcher (2015) states that inclusive decision-making and the sharing of leadership functions contribute to teacher development and commitment. In his study, Botha (2014) found that distributed leadership has the potential to promote collaboration in schools and enable teachers to choose leadership roles relevant to their teaching and learning responsibilities. From this perspective, it is not only the leadership of the school principal that counts, but it is a responsibility shared with all staff, both teaching and non-teaching (Grant, 2017b). Sol (2021) shares similar sentiments in that distributed leadership allows everyone in the school, irrespective of their position, to assume leadership roles in respect of the nature of their responsibilities. This suggests that the objective of distributed leadership approach, within, for example, a schooling context, is to mobilise and empower everyone to assume leadership roles to advance the values and goals of the school.

Figure 2.1 below shows how distributed leadership may be executed in a schooling environment, as conceptualised by Hermann (2016). From this perspective, it can be deduced that, within the framework of distributed leadership, the principal’s role will be to enhance collaboration, relationships, teamwork and leadership opportunities for their staff.

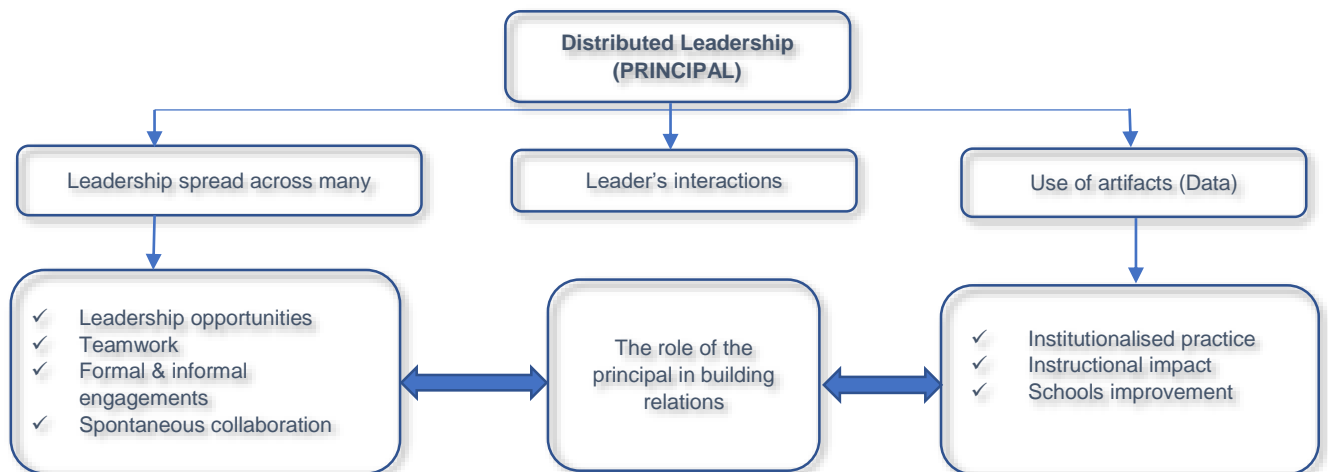


Figure 2.1: Distributed leadership (Hermann, 2016)

Saunders (2020) explains that the artefacts, as reflected in Figure 2.1 above, may include the mission vision and goals of the school. Figure 2.1 above shows how the principal and his/her subordinates work together to solve problems to achieve the vision, mission and goals of the school (Hermann, 2016). According to Pierro (2020), when distributed leadership is applied within a school context, it may require the principal to decide which leadership tasks they must distribute and who must execute them. This is an important consideration to ensure that teachers, for instance, are empowered and not overwhelmed by such sharing of leadership.

Hermann (2016) contends that distributed leadership not only pays attention to the leaders' characteristics but also to the performance of leadership tasks by all involved and how these are distributed. Moreover, Hermann (2016) contends that leadership from a distributed perspective is understood as a situated and social process that involves leaders, subordinates and their situation or context. In this regard, Pierro (2020) has elevated distributed leadership as the answer to the challenges of improving learning and teaching in schools during a time of unparalleled accountability. Smith et al. (2017) conclude that distributed leadership is important for managing school functions more effectively. Consequently, support for high-quality teaching and learning, tracking and monitoring of learners' progress and provision of relevant professional learning support are the key responsibilities of distributed leadership (Smith et al., 2017).

2.2.1 The relevance of distributed leadership in schools

Contemporary literature opposes the assumption that individuals should lead others to ensure change and argue that leadership should be situated on democratic principles, including, among others, shared responsibility, consultative management, team work, accountability and inclusive decision-making (Sol, 2021; Smith et al., 2017; Thien, 2019). Shava and Tlou (2018) concur that distributed leadership presents a more democratic set-up, in which a school principal shares powers and authority, and allows teachers to take a

leading role and act independently. The adoption of distributed leadership does not suggest that teachers can take unilateral decisions. Instead, a principal may choose a few teachers to lead decision-making groups (Berry, 2019). Smith et al. (2017) assert that distributed leadership stimulates the full participation of staff in fundamental decision-making and execution processes while holding them accountable for their decisions and actions. Distributed leadership requires that the principal functions as both a leader and manager of processes and outcomes. In this regard, distributed leadership connects teachers with the values and objectives of the school and frees the principal of the administration duties (Shava & Tlou, 2018).

Hallinger and Walker (2017) contend that the notion of distributed leadership involves teachers taking collective responsibility to work for the welfare of their school. For instance, during staff meetings, teachers may discuss and resolve issues to ensure that teaching and learning objectives are met. In this regard, the role of the school principal is mainly to assist teachers to understand, discharge and fulfil their responsibilities, which could improve the effectiveness of the programmes of the school (Liu et al., 2018). However, despite the potential usefulness of adopting distributed leadership, schools have not seriously embraced distributed leadership (Hallinger & Walker, 2017).

In Sibanda's (2017) view, distributed leadership occurs when leaders share the power to lead with their followers, who are the teaching and non-teaching staff in this study, which, as Hatcher (2005) characterises it, may be understood as the social distribution of power and influence. Liu et al. (2018) contend that several studies reveal a good connection between distributed leadership and school morale, organisational change, teacher leadership, teacher self-efficacy and the vibrancy of professional learning communities. Shava and Tlou (2018) support this view in that they argue that it is unlikely that teaching and learning can be performed without the distribution of leadership responsibilities across the different levels of the school.

Research suggests that there are positive outcomes in schools where distributed leadership is practised (see, for instance, Szeto & Cheng, 2017).

Harris (2013) points out that one of the important benefits of leading through distributed leadership model is the reduction of workload as tasks and responsibilities are shared amongst members as opposed to being managed by an individual. Therefore, distributed leadership advocates for col-leadership and mutually dependent relationships within the school community. For instance, a study conducted by Sibanda (2017) revealed that effective practice of distributed leadership potentially enhances teaching and learning and teacher empowerment. This suggests that the use of distributed leadership strengthens teachers' resolve to develop themselves professionally. Kimwaley et al. (2014) are of the view that sharing leadership and power with teachers can advance their leadership and administrative proficiency, leading to a better learning and teaching climate. In this regard, teacher empowerment in respect of leadership could strengthen teachers' instructional practice, reducing the principal's workload in respect of some leadership responsibilities.

Saunders (2020) contends that distributed leadership has the potential to improve collegial norms among teachers, contributing to efficacy and providing teachers with the necessary authority. This aligns with Bayler et al. (2017) view that the participation of teachers in leadership and decision-making processes instills a culture of collective responsibility, which is a requirement for improving school performance. In this regard, Harris (2014) argues that effective distribution of leadership and power potentially leads to relationships of trust and effective communication between the teachers and the principal. For Harris (2014), distributed leadership elevates collective influence as a major contributing factor to school improvement and success.

Botha and Triegaardt (2015) contend that distributed leadership builds capacity and encourages collaboration among both leaders and followers. In this regard, Pierro (2020) asserts that distributed leadership enhances teacher morale, and teacher enthusiasm and positively sways attitudes towards working professionally. As pointed out by Harris (2013), distributed leadership supports self-determination and interdependence, individual expertise and leadership development. Therefore, within a schooling context, distributed leadership potentially enhances job satisfaction and commitment, which may

result in a positive educational atmosphere and improved learning outcomes (Harris, 2013). From Hermann's (2016) perspective, distributed leadership is not a top-down or a bottom-up approach; it is the equitable sharing of leadership and power among individuals at different levels of an organisation. Therefore, the extension of leadership opportunities to teachers is crucial as it takes into cognisance the diversity of talents in the school community and how their involvement and participation may contribute to teaching and learning (Hermann, 2016).

2.2.2 Relationship between distributed leadership and teacher empowerment

According to O'Byrne (2018), empowerment is a process by which individuals gain power, control over their lives and access to resources to do so and can make decisions to influence current and future directions and outcomes. In the context of teacher empowerment, Bayler et al. (2017) point out that teacher empowerment includes allowing teachers to participate in the processes of determining the goals and policies of their schools. Ahrari et al. (2021) assert that teacher empowerment comprises as its constituents, professional growth, decision-making, professional autonomy, incentive and status.

Distributed leadership opens opportunities for teachers to drive and sustain their development efforts and manage changes, and it generates opportunities for them to work together and support each other Sol (2021). Not only does distributed leadership allow teachers the opportunity to voice their opinions, but it also contributes to driving positive change in their schools. For this reason, Williams (2021) argues that distributed leadership, teacher empowerment and building a compassionate school environment can assist schools to respond to the challenges experienced in advancing educational efficiency. Kimwarey et al. (2014) concur that empowered teachers have the expertise and knowledge to take action or improve and develop their proficiency and identify and work with their strengths and weaknesses.

Teachers play a significant part in the development of society by influencing the mindsets of, for instance, learners in the case of this study. However, Polatcan and Cansoy (2019) contend that while the role of teachers is recognised internationally, inadequate empowerment and support, exclusion from key processes, and anxiety in the workplace have resulted in low job satisfaction and performance among teachers. The belief in teacher empowerment goes together with the ability to exercise influence, which involves determining school goals, interaction with peers and situations and the freedom they have to define their relationships. Elacqua et al. (2021) contend that central to teacher empowerment is how leadership is distributed and the extent to which such distribution allows teachers adequate autonomy, voice and confidence through teamwork, active participation in decision-making processes and motivation, autonomy and support. Marshall (2019) asserts that teacher empowerment is directly linked to teachers assuming leadership roles and actively participating in school activities, especially in respect of their increased decision-making power and accountability. According to Hairon and Goh (2015), when teachers participate in decision-making processes, their ability to problem-solve is enhanced and the school profits from it, which results in increased commitment to the school as an organisation. This suggests that the delegation of leadership tasks to teachers remains a crucial factor in the empowerment of teachers.

The above discussion suggests that teacher empowerment can result in real changes in the teacher's professional knowledge, autonomy and contribution to decision-making processes. In this regard, Balyer et al. (2017) have called on schools to have clear protocols regarding the participation of teachers in leading schools, which must not be a privilege for a few teachers. For this reason, Harris and Jones (2018) argue that principals remain key actors in distributed leadership and their role in teacher empowerment is important. Szeto and Cheng (2018) concur that leadership by the principal is an important element of teacher empowerment.

2.2.3 The role of the principals in teacher empowerment

School principals, for instance, control the working environment of teachers. Swart et al. (2019) agree that in addition to carrying out budgetary checks to ensure the school's financial health, principals also serve as links between teachers, parents and other relevant stakeholders of their schools. The attitude of school principals and their contribution to teacher development and empowerment can influence the opportunities available for teachers. Swart et al. (2019) assert that the support that teachers receive from school principals is important for their professional development and the extent to which they impact learners' lives through their teaching. Karacabey (2020) supports the view that the role of the principals and the extent of their openness to sharing leadership and power and opening opportunities for teachers to try new ways of doing their work.

The emergence of distributed leadership has changed the understanding of leadership from, for instance, a school principal as the only person qualifying to lead and take a decision to distribute leadership and power to enable teachers to participate in decision-making and influencing organisational processes (Jambo & Hongde, 2019). However, even though distributed leadership can contribute to flatter hierarchies and teacher empowerment, principals remain essential due to their positional authority (Naicker & Mestry, 2013). The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 refer to the principal as the head teacher and the overall leader of a school (Republic of South Africa, 1996). In this regard, the Policy on the South African Standard for Principalship of 2015 (Department of Basic Education, 2015) stipulates specific tasks for principals to empower teachers. These include encouraging and supporting the continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers; providing incentives for teachers to recognise and encourage good performance; ensuring good working conditions; coordinating actions towards the achievement of the school goals; raising the morale of teachers and ensuring effective communication (Department of Basic Education, 2015). In light of this, the findings of a study conducted by Chalikias et al. (2020) suggest that the role and contribution of the principal are some of the most crucial and

determinant factors of teacher empowerment. This suggests that the principal's leadership is a critical factor for teacher empowerment and development as a prerequisite for the establishment and success of a learning community (Chalikias et al., 2020). Hermann (2016) asserts that although distributed leadership comprises a network of leadership collaborators, it still requires at least one person to be in control, the principal in the school context, to steer the school forward.

The assumption of more leadership responsibilities by teachers in a distributed leadership environment has raised questions about the role of the principals. In Jambo and Hongde's (2019) view, distributed leadership does not intend to replace the formal leadership structures in schools but brings attention to the intersections between lateral and vertical leadership, which may generate organisational benefits. A study conducted by Botha (2014) surmises that in functional or effective schools, there is evidence that teachers are being empowered, work more cooperatively and collaborate to make things work. The study proposes, inter alia, that school principals distribute leadership and power amongst and across teams (Botha, 2014).

This proposal is in line with the necessity to democratise the leadership and management of schools in post-apartheid South Africa (Saunders, 2020). In this regard, the responsibility to enable teacher development and empowerment obliges school principals to be willing to share their power and leadership. In this regard, the SASP states principals should uphold the philosophy of Ubuntu and humanness and work with all stakeholders, with a responsibility to build a professional learning community in the school (Department of Basic Education, 2015).

Smith et al. (2017) asset that principals have a critical role in developing leadership capacity among their staff and creating a desirable environment where expertise is spread to allow every teacher to work independently and collectively. Hermann (2016) concurs that principals are the initiators of distributed leadership and key players in the development of seasoned teachers. Therefore, the role of principals in extending leadership opportunities

to teachers is important in that it takes into consideration the diversity and importance of teacher participation in leadership, as well as how this enhances teaching and learning.

Literature suggests that effective principals are more understanding towards, value the views of and support their teachers (see, for instance, Börü, 2020). Hallinger (2018) asserts that principals should work towards increasing an inspirational atmosphere in schools, which empowers teachers, recognise good practice, fulfils promises made and provide real-time feedback on performance. Hallinger (2018) contends that this will potentially increase the motivation and commitment of teachers. There is a positive relationship between the teachers who feel that their views are valued and taken into consideration and learner achievement (see, for instance, Börü, 2020; Canales & Maldonado, 2018).

2.2.4 Using distributed leadership to empower teachers

In frequently changing and emerging societies, the ability of teachers to adjust to the changing context is crucial. According to Ainley and Carstens (2018), there is a growing realisation of the value of harnessing the leadership potential of teachers, as a way of empowering them to do their job effectively. This section discusses the use of distributed leadership as a mechanism for empowering teachers.

2.2.4.1 Assigning leadership roles to teachers

The perception of singular leadership as applied by the school principal has been challenged worldwide (see, for instance, Grant, 2019). This means that a more distributed leadership typology, which may involve teachers, is now generally acknowledged by practitioners and researchers (Grant, 2019). Conceptualised as teacher leadership, this type of leadership requires a flatter organisational structure in which teachers take on leadership responsibilities, both in and beyond the classroom, working collaboratively with colleagues and having a voice in the development of the school vision and goals (Canales & Maldonado, 2018). Greany (2018) asserts that teachers require a degree of

capacity to change, which includes skills and conditions that strengthen their strategies for professional learning and teaching. Börü (2020) supports Greany's (2018) view and asserts that the performance of teachers is dependent on their capacities, working conditions and motivations.

Besides factors such as teacher proficiency, interrelationships and school culture, assigning leadership roles to teachers is important, as it potentially fosters commitment and accountability (see, for instance, Amels et al., 2020). Given the fact that distributed leadership influences teacher empowerment positively, it has the potential to increase ownership of decisions and events by teachers, as and wellbeing among the school community. Brown et al. (2019) point out that the participation of teachers in leadership can increase their self-efficacy, motivation and commitment to the strategic direction of the school. Brown et al. (2019) contend that the distribution of leadership and allowing teachers to assume leadership responsibilities enhance teamwork and collegiality among teachers. Given the potential of distributed leadership to bring about positive change and empower teachers, school principals must embrace it as a mechanism for improving educational practice (Von Dohlen & Karvonen, 2018). Hadfield and Ainscow (2018) concur that the distribution of leadership roles is a key factor for teacher empowerment and also contributes to teacher collaboration and professional and collaborative learning. Armel et al. (2020) contend that teachers seem to be more empowered and dedicated to collegial support, teamwork and sharing of experiences and knowledge in schools where principals practise distributed leadership.

2.2.4.2 Develop teacher capacity for classroom management

Classroom management has been an issue of interest for researchers, school principals, teachers, learners and parents for decades (see, for instance, Egeberg et al., 2016). Classroom management involves actions taken by, for instance, a teacher, to create and maintain a desirable teaching and learning environment (Özcan, 2017). as the teacher's role in classroom management can include the establishment of codes of behaviour, arrangement of the physical environment and implementation of strategies to ensure that the

attention of learners is on the lesson (Özcan, 2017). Diaz et al. (2018) contend that the effective implementation of distributed leadership is a key component of classroom management. However, classroom management remains a source of concern and challenge for many teachers, especially novice teachers. In this regard, a study conducted by Nazari et al. (2021) recommends consistent support and engagement among principals and teachers to enhance effective classroom management. For Nazari et al. (2021), this can be achieved by allowing a degree of autonomy for teachers to make their professional judgments and respond to classroom situations and events in the way they deem fit.

Nazari et al. (2021) assert that the empowerment of teachers to manage classroom proceedings has been a neglected issue. Diaz et al. (2018) argue that effective classroom management forms the foundations of effective teaching and learning, which cannot be achieved in poorly managed classrooms. In support of this view, Özcan (2017) argues that to ensure effective classroom management, principals must allow teachers freedom and autonomy to exercise their professional judgment and innovate to manage educational processes. Nazari et al. (2021) conclude that, as a component of the classroom climate, classroom management may affect learners' behaviour, engagement and the quality of learning. Moreover, Nazari et al. (2021) contend that allowing teachers the freedom to innovate and take decisions can contribute to teacher professional development and empowerment.

2.2.4.3 Teacher empowerment for *in loco parentis*

Globally, discipline in schools is considered a key determinant of the performance of education in schools (see, for instance, Simba et al., 2016). Within the South African context, the common law principle of *in loco parentis* permits teachers, as guardians of learners in schools, to look after the welfare of learners (Segalo & Rambuda, 2018). The *in loco parentis* role of teachers means that teachers must assume the role of parent for their learners. However, what may be unclear is whether teachers have been prepared and

empowered to assume the role of parents towards learners. In this regard, Jeynes (2018) argues that the training of teachers in leadership and management skills is an integral part of assuming, *inter alia*, the role of *in loco parentis* as well as that of a teacher.

Empowering teachers with the necessary managerial and leadership skills is one of the critical aspects of dealing with indiscipline, and distributed leadership presents an opportunity for empowerment in this regard (Wai-Yan Wan et al., 2017). Teachers must possess the skills and knowledge to address the problems that may emerge while they are doing their work in classrooms. This is critical given the fact that learners, in South Africa, have a constitutional right to basic education and that they must be protected from inhumane treatment and other forms of violations (Republic of South Africa, 199b).

Hamal (2019) asserts that teachers are often criticised for their inability to successfully maintain discipline among learners and that this has the potential to undermine teacher morale and tarnish their reputation. Furthermore, findings of the study conducted by Khanare et al. (2019) revealed that in some schools in South Africa, teachers are often left largely to their own devices to identify and deal with learner indiscipline. This suggests that, in many instances, teachers do not have support systems to assist them to fulfil this professional obligation. Ensuring that teachers are supported in this regard is of utmost importance as the more teachers are supported and empowered with necessary tools, the more they can deal with issues such as learner discipline.

2.3 Impact of distributed leadership on learner achievement

Schools are multifaceted organisations, which must meet the needs of various competing stakeholders. Principals, in particular, and schools, in general, are often evaluated based on learner performance. According to Atsuwe and Achebulu (2018), well-performing teams are characterised by internal consistency and unity, emphasis on high standards, effective communication with both internal and external stakeholders as well as a commitment to distributed leadership. Botha (2014) contends that distributed leadership has

a significant effect on learners' performance, especially when principals and teachers work as a collective. For schools to work and meet the demands of their mandate, the school's vision must be shared among all staff (Lethole, 2017). The findings of the study conducted by Lee (2021) revealed that working collaboratively and sharing ideas, especially between principals and teachers, can contribute to the improvement of professional practice and learning outcomes. Equally important, Grant (2019) contends that distributed leadership requires multiple levels of involvement in decision-making, with a focus on improving teaching and learning and leadership practices to enhance learner performance.

Hallinger (2018) contends that distributed leadership requires collaboration between the principal and teachers to improve teaching and learning. This, however, means that distributed leadership, what Hatch (2015) calls leadership from below, can only happen if sanctioned by, for instance, the principal, within a schooling context. That is, the exercise of distributed leadership by teachers, for instance, is exercised on behalf of the principal (Hatcher, 2015). Equally, Lethole (2017) argues for the adoption of distributed because it does not only benefit the management of the schools but that may contribute to the improvement of learner achievement. Therefore, distributed leadership has the potential to expand access to leadership to, for instance, teachers, which can potentially lead to improved strategic focus for schools. Lethole (2017) concurs that distributed leadership offers a support mechanism for organisational progress and transformation. In this regard, distributed leadership potentially enhances interdependence and collaboration among school management teams, teachers and non-teaching staff for the benefit of the schools. In Williams' (2021) view, when teachers' voices are heard in the decision-making process, they will be empowered and motivated to improve their performance.

Hallinger (2018) encourages collaboration and trust among principals, teachers and community members to work together towards improving learners' academic performance. He further argues that bringing all role players together, encouraging collaborative work, and providing support will

motivate teachers to play an active part in ensuring that the school maximises its performance. Hatcher (2015) contends that learners' academic performance is likely to improve if leadership is distributed across the school and teachers are empowered to participate in ensuring that the strategic direction of the school is diligently pursued.

2.3.1 Creating spaces for teacher-parent engagements

Internationally, the involvement of parents in schools is considered a critical variable for improving learners' academic and socio-emotional development (Lara & Saracostti, 2019). Delgado (2019) explains that the parents' participation in the education of their children means that teachers and parents work together in the education of learners and to attain educational goals. Chiuri et al. (2020) contend that teacher-parent collaborations to support children's education are important because it connects the home and school. These collaborations also allow teachers and parents to familiarise themselves with the children's surroundings and developments in their education (Chiuri et al., 2020). This means that teachers should take a leadership role and be allowed space by the principal to meaningfully engage with parents on learners' performance and other related issues. Lara and Saracostti (2019) have reported that, among other things, teachers have reported benefits when parents get involved in the education of their children, including improvements in their performance and motivation to pursue their academic goals.

Jeynes (2018) identified effective teacher-parent communication, teaching strategies and practices as powerful persuaders of parents to commit to their children's education, both at home and school. However, teachers cannot work alone on building their relationships with parents; they require the support of their school leaders, namely, school principals, who, according to Marshall and Shah (2016), can shape the norms, expectations and cultures of their schools. School principals who create an atmosphere where distributed leadership can flourish, regularly share and communicate their vision and allow teachers to take on leadership roles, are likely to experience increased parental participation in their schools (Yulianti et al., 2019). Heinrichs (2018) contends

that, as a way of supporting teachers in getting parents involved in the education of their children, principals can initiate teacher professional development programmes to examine their beliefs and assumptions about learners and families and to overcome cultural stereotypes and other barriers to parental involvement.

As parents participate in partnerships and collaborations with their children's teachers, they grow and mature in understanding their roles in the education of children (Kirkwood, 2016). Berry (2019) affirms that once parents understand that they can contribute to their child's learning, they are likely to be more motivated to be involved. Therefore, teachers are a critical component of the school that can inspire parent participation. Kirkwood (2016) contends that when children witness their parents' participation in school activities, they begin to understand that their education is important, which motivates them to work harder and achieve academically. Therefore, the participation of teachers in leadership roles can contribute to the overall improvement of the functionality of their schools.

2.3.2 Teacher empowerment and learner performance in South Africa

In South Africa, there is a growing concern that the academic performance of learners at the end of secondary education examinations is of low quality. The findings of a study conducted by Wilkinson (2015) revealed that approximately 80% of South African teachers are less empowered to provide learners with the critical skills that they require to function as productive members of society. This can be ascribed to poor leadership as well as the capacity of teachers to deliver quality education (Wilkinson, 2015). Dirks (2013) identified numerous factors that impact negatively learner performance in South Africa, including teachers with inadequate experience and knowledge to capacitate learners with critical skills; teachers with inadequate leadership skills; and teachers who cannot cope with the constant changes in the education landscape. Lara and Sarascotti (2019) assert that incompetent teachers, poor teacher performance and inadequately empowered teachers are key factors that account for poor

learner achievement and classroom discipline, which are often worsened by a combination of a myriad of other challenges.

2.4 Challenges experienced in implementing distributed leadership

Contemporary literature points to challenges associated with the implementation of distributed leadership in schools (see, for instance, Mesfin, 2018; Tahir et al., 2016). In Liljenberg's (2015) view, the use of distributed leadership in schools is a difficult task for school principals. Harris (2018) agrees that this leadership model can have catastrophic and harmful consequences if it is not executed correctly. Tahir et al. (2016) contend that the challenges of distributed leadership often emanate from hierarchical organisational configurations, teacher skills, power sharing between principals and teachers, and readiness to assume leadership roles, as well as principals' and teachers' understandings of distributed leadership. As a bureaucratic organisation, the culture of hierarchy in schools has created a barrier to the successful practising of distributed leadership (Tahir et al., 2016). For instance, in a study by Harris and De Fleminis (2016), findings revealed that principals used distributed leadership to exploit teachers by overloading them with work through the abdication of their responsibilities.

However, it is not school principals only who are a source of challenges in the practice of distributed leadership. For instance, Hirsh (2017) found that the extension of opportunities for teachers to assume leadership roles and responsibilities was sometimes not welcomed by teachers, especially where the benefits for them were unclear. In this regard, the findings of the study by Saunders (2020) revealed that teachers did not have a good understanding of the notion of distributed leadership despite being practised by most principals. For instance, in a study by Holloway (2021), it was reported that the majority of teachers in Bangladesh felt unprepared to lead their peers as most of them were more qualified to be their team members as opposed to team leaders. In addition, Holloway (2021) argued that the challenges of practising distributed leadership were often based on the following: lack of motivation based on previous experiences; some teachers felt that distributed leadership often

translated into more administrative tasks, which they feel did not belong to them; and teachers reported to have not received any training on leadership and, therefore, lacked the self-confidence to lead their colleagues. Smith et al. (2017) supported this argument in that some teachers believed that a significant proportion of their time was dedicated to their teaching tasks, therefore, less time remained for leadership responsibilities.

Liljenberg (2015) has reported other challenges, such as difficulties in finding teachers who can perform delegated duties. Apart from this, some teachers supported distributed leadership as a mechanism for challenging and countering the prevailing school agendas (Liljenberg, 2015). To minimise this risk, some principals, Liljenberg (2015) reported, decided to focus operations on a small group of experienced teachers. However, this often led to divisions among teachers and between principals and subordinates (Tahir et al., 2016). In this regard, a study by Bayler et al. (2017) concluded that the challenges encountered in implementing distributed leadership were mainly based on four key issues, namely, resources, respect, trust and time provided for teachers. This means that although distributed leadership is an attractive notion, it may be complicated by a range of situations and issues.

2.5 Strategies and interventions used to empower teachers

Yunus et al. (2021) argue that the worth of education is in the empowerment of teachers. Through empowerment, teachers can expand their knowledge and excel in their responsibilities in respect of teaching and learning. This connotes that efforts to enhance the quality of education should focus on the conditions under which teachers work, particularly those associated with their competence (Yunus et al., 2021). In this regard, teacher empowerment strategies and interventions that have been implemented by school principals are discussed in the section below.

2.5.1 Encouraging teachers to optimise their potential

Liu et al. (2018) assert that self-potential is a teacher's highest source of strength to accomplish a set of goals. The notion of self-potential relates to

four competencies or proficiencies that teachers must possess, namely: professional proficiency, pedagogical proficiency, personality proficiency and social proficiency (Bellibas & Liu, 2018). For this reason, principals must encourage teachers to participate in professional development activities to help them to grow and optimise their self-potential (Liu, 2018). For example, Yunus et al. (2021) report that in Indonesia, school principals involve teachers and share information with them using a range of networks, both within and outside the school. These networks include discussion platforms between teachers, training, workshops, seminars and outreach platforms to build teacher proficiency are also utilised as a way of sharing information (Yunus et al., 2021).

2.5.2 Creating a conducive work environment and reinforcing performance

A conducive organisational climate, which is a school environment in the context of this study, is critical for optimum performance (Bush & Glover, 2016). In this regard, Bush and Glover (2016) point out that principals often strive to create a conducive school environment to ensure that all teaching and non-teaching staff can perform to the best of their abilities as a way of releasing and enabling their potential to grow and actualise their proficiency. Rangel et al. (2020) report that some principals create an environment where teachers can take risks, experiment with new ideas and practices, as well as innovate. In further strengthening teacher performance, some people have used recognition and reward mechanisms, such as certificates, monetary incentives and promotions, to motivate teachers (Day & Sammons, 2016). By implementing these reward mechanisms, principals can control the behaviour of individuals and positively sway their attitudes and social habits to improve organisational performance (Ereş & Akyürek, 2016). In this regard, the findings of a study conducted by Rangel et al. (2020) revealed that reward systems often assist schools to improve good classroom management practices by teachers, thus contributing to the development of positive school cultures, which encourage organisational growth.

2.5.3 Support provided to teachers

With the rising pressure on principals and schools to improve learners' performance as a result of accountability policies, the provision of support to teachers by principals has received considerable attention (Karacabey, 2020). School principals must create and support a climate where teachers can enhance their knowledge and practices to ensure that all learners can learn and succeed (Swart et al., 2019). This suggests that supporting teacher learning and development is an important role for school principals. Literature suggests that principals provide support to teachers in three ways, namely, emotional support which includes caring, affection, and assisting teachers to overcome challenges; providing informational support, such as providing them with feedback about their performance, mentoring and guiding them; and financial support, such as providing them with the tools and material and supporting them financially (Yunus et al., 2021). In Ahrari et al.'s (2021) view, principals can provide support to teachers by enhancing their professional development, providing them with the necessary materials, as well as helping them to solve problems. In a study by Rangel et al. (2020), principals argued that teaching involved progression, not perfection; as a result, as teachers expand their pedagogical expertise, they must be assured that their principal will always be there to provide them with professional, emotional and psychological support.

2.6 Distributed leadership in the South African context

In the context of South Africa, the right to representation, as enshrined in the Constitution and the South African Schools Act, is consistent with the notion of distributed leadership. South African schools during the 21st century are characterised by a range of cultural and socio-economic challenges, as such, solo-leader or autocratic models of leadership are often ineffective and outdated (Jita & Mokhele, 2013). In this regard, Sibanda (2017) contends that distributed leadership is relevant to today's school leadership challenges. Despite this, Grant (2017) posit that due to its common-sense definition, the notion of distributed leadership is often utilised loosely and thus lacks conceptual clarity. However, Lumby (2013) contends that distributed

leadership is a powerful theoretical instrument for exploring the exercise of school leadership in democratic South Africa.

According to Szeto and Cheng (2017), in schools where distributed leadership is effectively implemented, teachers are often empowered and motivated to take decisions relating to their work and organisational goals and priorities. Sibanda (2017) asserts that although distributed leadership models have been promoted by the Department of Basic Education, there has been a gap between policy and the practice of distributed leadership in schools. Williams (2011) states that distributed leadership must be considered as a way of addressing leadership challenges in South African schools. If distributed leadership can be effectively implemented in schools, the likelihood is that morale may increase and learner achievement be improved. Szeto and Cheng (2017) argue that distributed leadership should be embraced to address leadership deficits and a situation where teachers divert responsibilities.

2.7 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework selected to guide this study is Distributed Leadership Theory (DLT). Spillane (2006) points out that the notion of DLT was first established by Cecil Austin Gibb in 1954, who argued that leadership must not be located within a single individual but must be shared. DLT is concerned with the practices of leadership and how leadership sways organisational improvement (Spillane, 2006). Harris and Spillane (2008) point out that distributed leadership recognises the work of everyone who contributes to leadership practice, whether in formal or informal leadership structures. In Spillane's (2005) view, distributed leadership involves the practice of leadership rather than leaders and their functions, structures and routines.

Hairon and Goh (2015) assert that DLT has recently become a popular subject of research as an alternative to traditional notions of leadership, which are concerned with the characteristics and behaviours of individual leaders. Thus, distributed leadership inspires a shift in attention from the roles and traits of

leaders to the shared activities and functioning of leadership (Hairon & Goh, 2015). Harris and Spillane (2008) argue that comparing leadership with the acts of those occupying leadership positions is insufficient for the following three reasons: firstly, leadership involves various leaders with or without formal leadership positions; secondly, leadership is not something done to followers, as they are one of the key components of leadership practice; finally, it is not the individual actions but the collaboration among individuals that is essential in leadership practice.

In concurrence, Marshall (2019) contends that distributed leadership is not something practised by an individual to others, but is a group action that works through and within relations rather than individual actions. Spillane (2006) posits that leadership is best regarded as a group quality and a set of functions, which must be executed collectively. This means that there must be a review of labour and power distribution within organisations, such as schools. However, this does not imply simply producing more leaders but enabling actions and pluralistic interactions. According to Klocko and Wells (2015), the DLT clarifies teacher leadership, with principals creating opportunities for teachers to become a part of the leadership team, and can work with groups of individuals to influence instructional processes. However, Mosoge and Mataboge (2021) argue that distributed leadership does not refute the important role played by individuals in formal leadership positions, but suggest that this is only the tip of the iceberg.

The DLT states that how the principals, for instance, distribute leadership and communicate with teachers in schools will influence the performance of schools (Spillane, 2006). This view has been echoed in the study conducted by Bhatti et al. (2019), which states that DLT calls on principals to build capacities and a sense of ownership by encouraging their staff to participate in the decision-making process to ensure empowerment, self-efficacy and enabling their staff to feel valuable. Thus, distributed leadership can be characterised and regarded as dynamic, inclusive, interpersonal and contextually situated. Ravitch (2013) contends that distributed leadership is not

a zero-sum equation in which empowering teachers diminishes the power of the principal, but where individuals mutually strengthen each other.

DLT provided a theoretical foundation for this study to determine the strategies utilised by the principals, who were participants in this study, and who implemented and used distributed leadership as a way to empower teachers. Using DLT as a lens, I could understand the principals' experiences of delegating tasks to teachers from the perspective of distributed leadership. Spillane (2006) maintains that leadership tasks may be co-enacted or carried out by colleagues separately. This understanding framed my thinking in terms of leadership tasks assigned to teachers in the research schools. Also, the use of DLT assisted me to consider the participants' school contexts and other variables in the understanding of the practice of distributed leadership in the selected schools.

2.8 Summary of the chapter

Teachers are the most important constituent of schools. As a result, their skills, knowledge, expertise and competence have become a source of significant interest in the education sector, both in South Africa and internationally. While international literature supports distributed leadership as a possible mode or mechanism for teacher empowerment, there is still less African literature available on distributed leadership for teacher empowerment. The DLT posits that teacher empowerment through participative and collaborative behaviour can positively influence teachers' commitment to organisational goals and priorities. However, depending on a range of contextual issues and how it is practised, distributed leadership can have complex consequences.

The next chapter presents a discussion and analysis of the research design and methodology adopted for this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the literature reviewed regarding distributed leadership was presented. Furthermore, the chapter discussed the nexus between distributed leadership and teacher empowerment, nationally and internationally. This chapter defines the methodological and design parameters for this study. In doing this, the chapter presents the research paradigm, approach, design, data collection methods, sampling design, and data analysis procedure. Furthermore, the ethical considerations and trustworthiness issues regarding the study are discussed.

3.2 Research paradigm

Research paradigms have particular ontological and epistemological standings and associated research methodologies, which guide the actions of a researcher (Lincoln et al., 2011). For this study, ontological and epistemological orientation influenced how I examined and understood the participants' views on distributed leadership for teacher empowerment. In this regard, I believed that the knowledge regarding how distributed leadership can empower teachers can only be sourced or generated from the participants' perspectives.

This study adopted the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm assisted me to understand and analyse the notion of distributed leadership from the participants' perspectives. The interpretivist paradigm contends that reality is socially constructed, which is why it is sometimes referred to as the constructivist paradigm (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In this regard, the participants shared their views and experiences on distributed leadership and teacher empowerment within the context of their schools. Cognisant that the interpretivist paradigm posits that people have diverse views and understandings of phenomena (Creswell, 2016), the study allowed participants to express their views freely through social interaction. This approach is in line

with Saunders et al.'s (2019) description of the importance of the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises that the researcher, as a social actor, should appreciate the different views of the participants. Creswell (2016) explains that the purpose of the interpretivist research paradigm is to unearth participants' understandings and diverse opinions through carefully planned social interactions.

The interpretivist paradigm asserts that truth and knowledge are subjective, and historically and culturally located based on lived experience and deep understanding (Ryan, 2018). Therefore, the adoption of the interpretivist paradigm assisted me in not deviating from the participants' views, values and beliefs. This informed how data was collected, analysed, interpreted and understood. Creswell and Creswell (2018) assert that the interpretivist paradigm uses inductive research analysis because it is based on a narrative description, deep understanding and explanations rather than estimates. In this regard, I utilised the participants' perspectives on distributed leadership for teacher empowerment to generate themes to explain the phenomenon. The interpretivist paradigm, thus, enabled me to interact with the participants to uncover a rich diversity of opinion but, also, to remain fairly impartial in my interactions with the participants, as advised by Tracy (2019).

3.3 Research approach

3.3.1 Qualitative research approach

I selected a qualitative research design for this study, as the intention was to interpret and understand the experiences of principals and teachers within a specific schooling context. A qualitative research approach, as defined by Drisko (2016), refers to an open-ended approach that could be revised and changed during the study, and aims to explore human experiences, behaviour and motivation. Rahman (2017) contends that the qualitative research approach is useful in generating detailed descriptions of the participants' perspectives, experiences, feelings, views and meanings. The qualitative approach was appropriate for this study as the intention was to explore the perspectives of principals and teachers, who were the participants for this

study, on the nexus between distributed leadership and teacher empowerment within the context of their schooling contexts.

3.3.2 Case study design

The case study approach was adopted for this study, as the intention was to allow for an exhaustive, multi-faced examination of the complex issues regarding distributed leadership and teacher empowerment within a specific schooling context. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) assert that a case study research design allows a researcher to closely examine the data generated within a specific context (Rule & John, 2011), such as distributed leadership for teacher empowerment in the case of this study. A case study research design was used to select a small or specific geographical area and principals and teachers as participants for this study. Starman (2013) defines the case study research design as an empirical review that examines a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, when the confines between phenomenon and context are not vividly evident and in which numerous sources of evidence are used.

3.4 Research design

3.4.1 Research site

Tracy (2019) defines a research site as a geographical area or place where a research study takes place. This study was undertaken in four public schools in Tshwane West District, Gauteng Province, South Africa. In South Africa, schools are categorised according to the socioeconomic ranking, called quintile ranking, in line with the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSF) (Department of Basic Education, 2021). The categories or quintiles are based on the literacy rates and unemployment rates of the community in which the school is situated. For example, Quintile 1 represents the category of the most socioeconomically disadvantaged schools, while Quintile 5 affluent schools (Van Dyk & White, 2019). In South Africa, Quintiles 1-3 schools are classified as no-fee paying schools and receive more state funding than those in Quintiles 4 and 5, which are thus fee-paying. Among the

four schools selected for this study, three (3) schools were Quintiles 1-3 while one belonged to Quintiles 4-5.

3.4.2 Sampling method and recruitment strategy

Purposive sampling was used to select the four (4) schools and the participants. The four (4) schools were selected based on the fact that they were known by officials working with school management teams to be using distributed leadership. A sample of 16 participants was selected from four (4) public secondary schools in Tshwane West District to generate in-depth data on distributed leadership for teacher empowerment. Given time constraints regarding the completion of the study, the flexibility of purposive sampling allowed me to save time and money while gathering data. As explained by Palinkas et al. (2015), by using this sampling design I could meet multiple needs while maintaining the foundation of a singular focal point. The purposive sampling design is a non-random sampling design, which allows a researcher to select participants for a sample from a specific target population who are believed to be capable of providing data that can be used to respond to the key research questions of a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this regard, Creswell (2013) asserts that purposive sampling is appropriate for the selection of individuals who have knowledge and experience of a research phenomenon under investigation, distributed leadership for teacher empowerment in the case of this study. In this regard, purposive sampling assisted me to identify and select participants following specific characteristics which made them the essential carriers of data required to respond to the key research questions of this study (Cohen et al., 2018).

I used the inclusion criterion of five (5) or more years of experience in education to select the teachers and school principals for this study. This was informed by the assumption that teachers and principals who have been with the Department for this period would be able to provide data to respond to the key research questions, as pointed out by Cohen et al. (2018). The purposive selection suggests that the participants were selected because they could

provide data regarding the phenomenon under study, namely, distributed leadership for teacher empowerment, based on their experiences.

In respect of recruitment, principals of the selected schools were requested to share a list of their teaching staff from which I selected potential participants. The selected teachers were then approached and requested to participate in the study, whose nature and focus were explained to them. To protect the participants' identities and information, I adhered to the requirements of the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013, which requires that personal information must be handled in specific ways (Republic of South Africa, 2013).

3.4.3 Data collection

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to generate the data to respond to the key research questions. Creswell and Creswell (2018) assert that qualitative interviews provide access to the participants' perspectives and experiences. The section below discusses how data was generated using semi-structured interviews.

3.4.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews in this study was to generate data on the perspectives and experiences of the participants regarding distributed leadership for teacher empowerment. The use of semi-structured questions enabled me to ask probing questions for greater clarity and explanation, where necessary. The semi-structured interview schedule used in this study included questions which explored the participants' thoughts, beliefs and feelings (Creswell, 2013) about distributed leadership for teacher empowerment. As advised by DeJonckheere and Vaughn's (2019) view, the semi-structured interviews involved an engaging dialogue between myself and the participants, using a flexible interview schedule with probes, follow-up questions and comments on key issues to remember. This allowed me to gather rich data on the participants' feelings, thoughts and beliefs about the phenomenon under investigation, distributed for teacher empowerment, in the case of this study. In addition, the use of semi-structured interviews enabled

me to dig deeper into the personal and, at times, sensitive matters regarding distributed leadership for empowerment.

As argued by Briggs et al. (2012), semi-structured interviews allowed me to obtain rich data as I could not observe the participants directly in their contexts. As argued by Creswell (2016), the utilisation of one-on-one semi-structured interviews provided a high probability of the participants becoming more comfortable with openly sharing their experiences and perspectives on distributed leadership for teacher empowerment. In this regard, I allowed participants an opportunity to share at length while I listened intently, as advised by Creswell (2016). In addition, this allowed the participants to provide detailed responses to the research questions regarding the nexus between distributed leadership and teacher empowerment.

To further ensure that the participants were comfortable and felt safe, I expressed empathy which persuaded the participants to be honest in their responses to the questions. This was in line with what Botha (2019) recommends that creating an atmosphere of empathy allows participants to express themselves freely and honestly. In building rapport with the participants, I held preliminary introductory meetings with the participants, to introduce myself and respond to any questions they may have had about the study. For instance, it was during these meetings that I clarified the purpose of the study to the participants, including how the interviews would be conducted, including the schedule for such interviews. In addition, I also explained the ethical aspects of the research, including how the participants' rights would be protected and upheld. The interview protocol comprising the questions is attached as Annexures F and G.

3.5 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves breaking down collected data into smaller components and restructuring and regrouping it according to themes (Archer, 2018). For this study, thematic analysis was used, which, for this study, was applied to interview data (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is considered

appropriate when a researcher is trying to establish the participants' experiences, perspectives and knowledge from a set of qualitative data, such as an interview (Caulfield, 2019). For this study, I transcribed audio recordings verbatim and coded the data, which assisted me to generate themes and sub-themes. This means that I closely examined the data to identify themes, patterns and ideas that emerged repeatedly.

In conducting thematic analysis, I adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process, as described in the section below.

Familiarisation with the data is the first phase and is similar to other methods of analysing data qualitatively. In this phase, I read and re-read the textual data generated through the interviews and listened and re-listened to audio recordings, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). During this process, I made notes of important issues, and asked questions regarding, for instance, how the participants made sense of their experiences and what suppositions and worldviews they made in explaining their experiences. As explained by Caulfield (2019), the importance of this phase was in familiarising myself with the contents of the dataset and taking note of the key points relevant to the key research questions of the study.

In the second phase, initial codes were initiated. Caulfield (2019) defines data coding as highlighting sections of the text, such as sentences or phrases, and coming up with shorthand labels or codes to describe their content. Hereafter, I organised the data into clusters identified by codes, which enabled me to obtain an overview of the key points and similar meanings that recurred in the data.

In ensuring that practical results were produced, the third phase focused on the generation of themes. This was a critical phase which, as Maguire and Delahunt (2017) argue, was at the heart of the qualitative analysis of the data. During this phase, I crafted the themes which linked the research questions to distributed leadership for teacher empowerment. In this regard, research

questions thus played a critical role in ensuring the relevance of the data to the focus of the study.

In the fourth phase, I reviewed themes generated in phase 3 and assessed them for their usefulness and accurate representation of the data by returning to the datasets and comparing them. In this regard, I split and combined the themes, and discarded or created new ones, where necessary, to ensure they were relevant and responded to the key research questions of the study, as advised by Nowell et al. (2017).

During the fifth phase, I named and defined the themes and sub-themes, as guided by Maguire and Delahunt (2017). As pointed out by Caulfield (2019), I summated the crux of each theme in a few sentences with clear scope, focus and purpose to ensure that the names of themes are succinct, easily understandable and an indication of the content, as guided by Terry et al. (2017).

The last phase of analysis was the production of the research report. In writing up the report, I was careful to ensure that the findings addressed each theme and explained how the analysis responded to the research questions (Caulfield, 2019). The write-up of the report included extracts and quotations from the dataset, the intention of which was to contextualise arguments and elevate the voices of the participants.

3.6 Trustworthiness of the study

In ensuring the fidelity of the study, I paid particular attention to the trustworthiness and awareness of the limitations of the study. I guarded against bias or influence during the study and employed peer reviews from other researchers in the same field to ensure that this happened (Smith & Noble, 2014). Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that the value of data in qualitative research is measured through the credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability of the research findings and the study. The section below discusses how trustworthiness was ensured in this study.

3.6.1 Credibility

Participants are among the key people who can determine the credibility of the findings of a research study (Guba & Lincoln, 2013). I recorded and kept the audio recordings, including notes taken during the interviews for later reference. I triangulated data from different participants to enhance the credibility of the findings. Triangulation is a process that Creswell (2013) describes as examining the evidence from various sources and the use of thick and rich descriptions to prevent possible biases.

3.6.2 Transferability

I facilitated transferability judgement by potential users through the thick description. In this regard, I provided a thick account of the participants, their views, the research process, the context in which the study was conducted, and sample and interviewing procedures to enable readers to have a clear sense of the conduct of the study for transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 2013).

3.6.3 Dependability

Dependability could be regarded as the audit phase of the research processes and allows readers of the research report to evaluate the extent to which research practices were followed. As a way of addressing the issues of dependability, the processes of conducting this study were reported in detail, thus allowing future researchers to reproduce the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

3.6.4 Confirmability

Confirmability establishes the degree to which the findings of a study may be confirmed by other researchers and to which data and the interpretation of the findings are influenced by the researcher's assumptions (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). In this regard, I endeavoured to ensure that the outcomes of the study were shaped by the participants' responses as opposed to my motives or biases. To enhance this, I ensured that my assumptions, views and opinions

did not influence the interpretation of the responses of the participants to suit a preconceived narrative.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Most research studies in the field of education involve humans. As emphasised by Arifin (2018), the respect, protection and upholding of the rights of the participants are essential in a research study. As such, I only proceeded with data collection after having received ethical clearance and permission to conduct the research from the University of Pretoria and the Gauteng Department of Education respectively.

Before the participants consented to participate in the study, I explained to the participants the nature and focus of the study, and what their participation would entail if they agreed to participate. Although I had obtained clearance from the University of Pretoria and the Gauteng Department of Education, this was not understood to have been consent on behalf of the participants. Therefore, the participants were requested to participate in the study, after which they were requested to sign consent forms to confirm their willingness to participate, where they were willing to do so.

Participants were informed that I would endeavour, as far as possible, to ensure the confidentiality of their responses and that their participation in the study and the data collected would be used solely for meeting the requirements of my studies. To ensure the anonymity of the participants, I used pseudonyms, deleted or obscured all the information that could be traced back to them and the stored data was password-protected and kept under lock and key (Heath et al., 2009). I also ensured that my supervisor was the only additional person who had access to the data, the names of participants and the schools in which they taught.

3.8 Limitations and delimitations of the study

Simon and Goes (2013) point out that the limitations of a study are issues that can influence the research outcomes, for which a researcher has no control.

The sample for the study was small and involved principals and teachers within a specific geographical setting. A major limitation of this study was that the findings of the study could not be generalised to schools in other contexts. In addition to the small sample size was the issue of the time available to conduct the study. For instance, the Gauteng Department of Education emphasised that the interviews should be conducted within four months after permission to conduct research had been granted. This meant that I could not go back to the participants to clarify issues after this period. A further limitation was that I had to conduct interviews telephonically to observe the precautionary measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 as stipulated in the permission letter from the Gauteng Department of Education. While I had an option of Skype or blackboard, some participants did not have smartphones or access to a laptop. This meant that I had to make arrangements for them to have access to an appropriate device, which was a time-consuming activity. Furthermore, some participants stated that they did not have money to purchase data for this study. In this regard, I had to provide them with data to ensure that I could communicate with them.

In respect of the delimitation of the study, are borders set by the researcher (Simon & Goes, 2013), the study was conducted in four (4) secondary schools in Tshwane West District, Gauteng, South Africa. Any other school that was in any other district and was not reported as using distributed leadership was excluded from the study. The study only involved principals and teachers of the selected secondary schools.

3.9 Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, I discussed the methodological and design considerations of the study. The discussion included a detailed description of the qualitative research approach, case study design description of the research site, sampling design, methods of data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness and limitations and delimitations of the study.

The following chapter presents, analyses, interprets and discusses the data and findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3, I presented and discussed methodological and design considerations made in respect of this study. In this chapter, I present, analyse, interpret and discuss the data generated to respond to the key research questions of this study. It is against this background that I formulated the following four (4) themes to respond to the key research questions:

- Principals' views on distributed leadership for teacher empowerment;
- Contribution of distributed leadership to learner achievement;
- Challenges experienced in empowering teachers through distributed leadership; and
- Strategies used by principals to enhance teacher empowerment through distributed leadership.

Data for the above themes were analysed and discussed based on the key research questions and juxtaposed with related literature, as presented and discussed in Chapter 2. Furthermore, direct quotations from the participants' responses were used to support the findings and elevate their voices in the conversation.

4.2 Participants' biographical information

The following table presents the biographical information of the participants.

Table 4.1: Biographical information of participants from different schools

SCHOOL	PARTICIPANTS	GENDER	SUBJECT TAUGHT	GRADE	TEACHING EXPERIENCE (YEARS)
1	Principal (P1)	Female	Accounting	10-12	10
	Teacher (T1)	Female	Mathematics Mathematical Literacy	8-12	17

			Natural Sciences Life Sciences		
	Teacher (T2)	Male	History English HL	10-12	25
	Teacher (T3)	Female	Life Sciences	10-12	26
2	Principal (P2)	Female	Mathematics	10-12	13
	Teacher (T4)	Female	Sepedi HL Mathematical Literacy	8-12	05
	Teacher (T5)	Female	English HL Life Orientation	8-12	05
	Teacher (T6)	Male	Mathematical Literacy	10-12	06
3	Principal(P3)	Female	Life Sciences	10-12	06
	Teacher (T7)	Male	Afrikaans FAL	10-12	30
	Teacher (T8)	Male	English HL Afrikaans FAL	10-12	35
	Teacher (T9)	Female	Afrikaans FAL	10-12	25
4	Principal (P4)	Male	Mathematics	8-12	12
	Teacher (T10)	Female	Setswana HL	8-12	35
	Teacher (T11)	Female	Creative Arts	8-9	31
	Teacher (T12)	Male	Physical Sciences	10-12	30

Table 4.1 above presents data on the profiles of the participants for this study. The table shows that the participants comprised both teachers and principals, who were both male (6) and female (10) and teaching at a secondary school. The teacher with the least teaching experience had five (5), and the one with the highest had 35 years. The participants had 301 years of accumulated teaching experience, with an average of approximately 19 years. The participants were taught a range of subjects, both languages and content or non-language subjects.

4.3 Themes and sub-themes

The table below presents the themes and sub-themes as they link to the key research question and sub-questions.

Table 4.2: Themes and sub-themes linked to the research questions and sub-questions

RESEARCH QUESTION	THEMES AND SUB-THEMES
<p>Sub-question 1: <i>What are the perspectives of school principals on distributed leadership and teacher empowerment?</i></p>	<p>Theme 1: Principals' views on distributed leadership for teacher empowerment Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared responsibility among leaders and subordinates • A preferred approach to leadership • Creation of opportunities for teachers to participate in leadership • Consultative management and inclusive decision-making • Promote inclusive accountability • Effective communication strengthens leadership ethics and empowers subordinates
<p>Sub-question 2: <i>How can distributed leadership for teacher empowerment contribute to learner achievement?</i></p>	<p>Theme 2: Contribution of distributed leadership to learner achievement Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange of abilities through team teaching • Space for teacher collaboration and sharing of ideas
<p>Sub-question 3: <i>What are the challenges experienced by principals in their efforts to empower teachers through distributed leadership?</i></p>	<p>Theme 3: Challenges experienced by principals in empowering teachers through distributed leadership Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' unwillingness to cooperate in leadership • Time constrain discourage teachers from assuming leadership roles • Poor communication between principals and teachers
<p>Sub-question 4: <i>What strategies can principals use to enhance teacher empowerment through distributed leadership?</i></p>	<p>Theme 4: Strategies used by the principal to enhance teacher empowerment through distributed leadership Sub-themes:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage participation 	active
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4.4 Presentation of the research findings

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and restrictions thereof, I used telephonic interviews to generate data to investigate the phenomenon of distributed leadership for teacher empowerment. The intention was to examine the contribution of distributed leadership by principals to teacher empowerment in secondary schools; how the exercise of distributed leadership contributed to learner achievement; identify the challenges experienced by principals in empowering teachers through distributed leadership, and propose strategies to enhance teacher empowerment through distributed leadership. In responding to the key research questions, the above constituted the themes and sub-themes that were used to present the data generated. These themes and sub-themes are presented and discussed in the section below.

4.4.1 Theme 1: Principals' views on distributed leadership for teacher empowerment

In understanding the impact of distributed leadership in schools and how it empowers teachers, the views of principals, as school leaders, remain critical. This is especially critical given the fact that school leadership is entrusted to the positional leaders, for instance, as that of a school principal, has been challenged (see, for instance, Sarmurzin et al., 2022; Tshabalala, 2020; Mhlanga, 2019; Mestry, 2017). A distributed perspective of leadership suggests a change in the leadership role of the principal, which requires a whole new perspective and set of capacities and capabilities (Grant, 2017b). This suggests that school principals, therefore, have a key responsibility to do leadership differently, especially in respect of teacher empowerment. Thus, participants were requested to share their views on distributed leadership and teacher empowerment. In this regard, I could identify key issues associated with distributed leadership and teacher empowerment from the participants' responses. These issues constituted the sub-themes for this theme, which are as follows:

- Shared responsibility among leaders and subordinates;
- A preferred approach of leadership;
- Creating opportunities for teachers to participate in leadership;
- Consultative management and inclusive decision-making;
- Promoting inclusive accountability; and
- Effective communication for leadership ethics and the empowerment of subordinates.

These sub-themes are argued below.

4.4.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Shared responsibility among leaders and subordinates

Principals are of the view that teaching and learning at the school level should be based on shared responsibility. While this is important for the empowerment of individual teachers, it can also benefit the school. Principals shared the following views regarding shared responsibility as a way to empower teachers in the school environment:

Distributed leadership puts emphasis on collective approach including teachers, instead of an individual approach. I cannot do everything on my own and by sharing responsibilities, I also empower teachers to reach their full potential. (P1)

As a principal, you don't have to own everything but work with other colleagues and make sure that everyone knows his/her position and what is expected of them. It is good to distribute those leadership qualities and responsibilities among staff members including School Management Team (SMT) and teachers. (P2)

School is not a one-man-show, which means that teachers must also be held accountable especially for teaching and learning in the school. (P3)

We need to ensure that every teacher understands that we work as a team. We do not run any institution or do a one-man show. There is no way that we can succeed if we work in silos. (P4)

Principals recognise the importance of sharing responsibilities with their subordinates as a way to create a school environment where teachers can thrive. It appears that school principals agree that they are not superheroes and they alone would not achieve intended school objectives but rather need the support and expertise of their teachers as well. Bryan-Chambers and Fisher (2021) agree that principals need to drive towards sustainable solutions that engage the whole school community, including teachers, learners and community members. The participants' views are also supported by the study piloted by Fisher et al. (2016) which found that principals generally recognise that teachers have diverse and extensive areas of expertise and passion, as a result; they support teacher empowerment through a culture of collective efficiency and sharing leadership responsibilities. The study conducted by Aczel et al. (2017) revealed that the distributed leadership model at Bribie Island State School (BISS), Queensland, is at the centre of a school culture which not only builds teacher leadership capability but also demonstrates that principals cannot run schools alone in the contemporary school context. Fisher et al. (2016) rank sharing of responsibilities as the number one factor influencing learner achievement.

The participants believe that principals and teachers must work together to direct the activities needed to deliver quality education to learners. The responses above imply that distributed leadership is mainly about giving teachers ownership by empowering them to assume leadership roles and drive forward the strategies that contribute towards the whole school priorities. Therefore, sharing responsibilities with teachers means developing collaborative relationships in which the principal communicates with his/her teachers to identify the potential interrelationship among disciplines to avoid unnecessary gaps, overlaps, misunderstandings and contradictions. Bryan-Chambers and Fisher (2021) agree that in consideration of the dual crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic radical injustice, the need to deliver

high-quality instruction to learners, be it in-person, remote, or hybrid, requires the principals to share responsibilities, engage effectively with all stakeholders and source feedback from all involved. The findings above are also in agreement with the study conducted by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) that a culture of collective responsibility needs principals who bring together teachers with their different skills to achieve the school's goals and create a culture of constant learning and shared decision-making. Ben (2018) agrees that sharing responsibilities allows the school to genuinely become an effective educational institution when a leader and subordinates within it collectively pull in the same direction, directed by the same values and vision towards a common set of objectives.

4.4.1.2 Sub-theme 2: A preferred approach to leadership

Principals believe that distributed leadership should be fully implemented to empower teachers and enhance learner performance. However, there is a need to create balance as absolute distribution of leadership has the potential to result in a hierarchical crisis and a struggle to maintain accountability. The following responses from participants explain why distributed leadership should be a preferred leadership approach and why a need to be cautious when exercising this approach:

I highly put it as a model which must be practised by any leaders or by any school. Should all schools be able to distribute leadership, make follow-up and evaluate the impact of this model, it will definitely empower teachers and improve performance. (P2)

Distributed leadership helps a lot because everyone is held accountable and everyone takes responsibility. By distributing responsibilities to all people, everyone will get an opportunity to be empowered and grow. (P3)

This is a good model but I want to emphasize that it cannot always work because at one point you've got to ensure that one becomes

autocratic on issues of importance. In that instance, one should be very careful about being very distributed or autocratic. In instances where distributed managing is not successful, unfortunately, one has to put the foot down and say particular things need to be done and done in a particular way and time, so that the name and performance of the school is not compromised. (P4)

The above responses depict that principals support the distribution of leadership responsibilities as a way to empower teachers and foster accountability for school performance. In support of the distributed leadership approach, Nawab and Asad (2020) acknowledge that unless the expertise of all teachers is made available, it is unlikely for the school principal to bring improvement, especially at the classroom level. However, it cannot be discounted that the motivation for distribution is also partly from the recognition that principals are overloaded, as such; distribution would help to reduce the workload.

While participants agree on the importance of this leadership model for teacher empowerment, there are descending views on its total application. One of the participants said that teacher behaviour and possible accountability crisis require a level of autocratic practice to maintain control. This view is supported by Elnaga and Imran (2014) who stated that the empowerment of teachers does not suggest that the administrative leadership, principal, in this case, should give up his/her responsibility to lead the school, but rather, it supposes that principal's responsibility is to build and foster a situation characterised by open communication and trust between subordinates. Similarly, Moalusi (2016) assert that a principal's distributed leadership does not imply that teachers are allowed to control different processes within the school, but rather, it affirms the view that teachers must decide what facets of work activities should be given and whom. Based on this, schools should pay enough attention to enhancing their human assets, which are considered the most critical assets in the Department of Basic Education.

4.4.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Creating opportunities for teachers to participate in leadership

The principals indicated that they create opportunities for teachers to assume leadership roles and also encourage them to participate and share their ideas in different school committees. Principals are of the view that consultation and inclusivity could help to empower teachers. The participants explained as follows:

We create opportunities on an actual basis and we incorporate existing opportunities, for example, sitting on the SGB, acting as sports facilitators and serving on different committees in the school.

(P1)

Create jobs or form different committees and ensure that teachers know what is expected of them. With teachers, we've got different committees and in those committees, we make sure that every teacher at school participates thus I must believe that by so doing all teachers will be empowered.

I create a space for teachers to coordinate teams or participate in different ways. For example, we do have committees where teachers are encouraged to take a lead.

There are various ways in which teachers can be empowered and this includes by the principal himself. There are issues that are related to the running of the institution, it is not only the principal's baby to see to it if the school is right, but the principal needs to ensure that every teacher is developed and ensure that the school runs and runs effectively.

The principals' responses show many similarities such as ensuring the active participation of teachers in school activities and/or committees as a means of teacher empowerment. It appears that principals have put teamwork on their

high-priority list as a way to make teachers understand that no task can be completed successfully without the support of others. The participants' responses are supported by the South African Standard for Principals policy of 2015 (Department of Basic Education, 2015) which stipulates that principals should create opportunities for joint leadership, participation in decision-making and teamwork, and promotion of teacher empowerment. Ben (2018) agrees that principals are among the key authorities that dispose of power and for them to accomplish school goals, they have to work with and through teachers. Furthermore, in support of the participants' responses, the study conducted by Bryan-Chambers and Fisher (2021) suggested that principals should establish systems that enable teachers to continuously improve their practice and galvanise the whole school community to enhance learners' achievement.

The responses above show that principals understand their roles in the distributed setup as that of creating structures that would help teachers to do their best in the collegial collaborative environment for improved teaching and learning. The participants' responses suggest that a school environment where teachers share ideas in committees empowers teachers and they learn to work collectively as a team to achieve a common goal. Harris and DeFlaminis (2016) support this view that principals should also work with their teams to set a vision for their schools and further propose that rather than limiting leadership to a specific role or title, principals need to cultivate the skills and knowledge that exist across the school. Elmazi (2018) agrees that distributed leadership does not happen only because an open-minded principal decides to involve teachers in decisions that affect them, but rather happens when principals demonstrate the initiative to liberate teachers from bureaucratic domination as well as an inclination to reconstruct teaching as a profession that reflects the democratic ideals of liberty and self-governance.

4.4.1.4 Sub-theme 4: Consultative management and inclusive decision-making

Much as the business world has recognised that the input of valued employees could benefit organisations, the educational setting seems to be shifting from autocratic principals to more inclusive principals who allow teachers to participate in management functions (Makoelle, 2014). Participants believe that consultative management and inclusive decision-making are important factors of teacher empowerment. Participants are of the view that the direct participation of teachers in decision-making processes could have an affirmative impact on both the teachers and the school. The participants responded as follows:

There is a need for effective teacher engagement and teachers should be allowed to share their ideas to help generate the solution to the problems in the school. As we work together, we have to share information. (P2)

Teachers are supposed to be part of the decision-making in the school. So, with distributed leadership, I think teachers are involved in one way or the other. Furthermore, teachers should be allowed to participate in the determination of school goals and by involving them especially in decision-making and policy development. (P3)

I think workshops and staff meetings where we collectively discuss school objectives do benefit teaching and learning and also uplift morale and efficacy. (P4)

It appears that consultative management and inclusive decision-making are among the key factors that contribute to stronger problem-solving as a team due to its higher employee engagement. In light of the responses above, principals agree that teacher empowerment can be effective when teachers are consulted or involved in determining ways to achieve school objectives. The findings are similar to Flaherty's (2018) who states that the promotion of

increased responsibilities as well as the provision of decision-making opportunities are factors that dominate the conceptualisation of the teacher empowerment process. Participants' responses suggest that principals should enhance their engagement with teachers on issues that affect their work. Delgado (2014) agrees that teacher empowerment should include investing in teachers' right to partake in determining school objectives and policies, as well as the right to exercise professional judgement about the curriculum content and means of instruction. The study conducted by Amels et al. (2020) supports the participants' views by recommending that school systems should be reformed and reorganised to stimulate teachers' roles by giving them more authority and assigning them constructive roles in addition to their normal teaching assignments to make them active members in decision-making community.

One of the participants stated that consultation and inclusivity of teachers in school management and decision-making can affect morale and efficacy at school. In this regard, I agree with Khany and Tazik (2016) that a process by which teachers would take up greater responsibility in their professional work life is entrenched in job enrichment, participatory decision-making, professional autonomy and teacher efficacy. The findings, therefore, reveal that teacher involvement and effective consultation at the school level could lead to effective teacher empowerment and improved professionalism as teachers take up responsibility for and participation in the decision-making process.

4.4.1.5 Sub-theme 5: Promoting inclusive accountability

One of the most prominent issues in education policy today is accountability, which is regarded as a key element in the success of education improvement systems (Paletta et al., 2020). All professionals are required to be accountable in various ways for the quality of the services they render. The principals' responses posit that when teachers are involved in school programs, decision-making and initiatives, it helps to foster a sense of ownership and accountability in the school. Principals believe that by giving teachers

autonomy and/or decision-making powers, they are given a sense of freedom which allows them to take responsibility and accountability for their work. The participants shared the following views:

When we have meetings we want to know what teachers are doing in their different meetings and how far they are in implementing school programs. The same applies with the SMT, if you are responsible for late coming, what are you doing. (P2)

Teachers are given a chance to be involved in the education or must be accountable for the education of their learners and other responsibilities especially teaching and learning in the school. Distributed leadership helps a lot because everyone is going to be held accountable and then everybody will be responsible. (P3)

Equal opportunities, implementation of accountability measures and the use of learner performance to assess teachers could help in improving the education level. This dictates that leadership should be distributed so that every person can be held accountable for the outcome of teaching and learning processes. (P4)

Participants argue that while distributed leadership approach intends to give teachers the autonomy to make significant decisions in their areas of responsibility, there should be accountability. The above responses show that when distributed leadership works well, leadership roles are created and everyone including teachers is held accountable and becomes responsible for their leadership actions. Elmore (2017) agrees that accountability should follow responsibility and both principals and teachers, individually and collectively, should be held accountable for their part in improving learner performance. Holloway (2021) also supports the participants' argument that in distributed leadership setup, one cannot get autonomy unless one accepts accountability.

The participants' responses suggest that in this accountability era, distributed leadership is a key mechanism for teacher empowerment, improvement of

learner achievement and overall school performance. It seems teachers are likely to perform better and learners' achievement could improve if teachers are held accountable. The reality is that there are several aspects that principals or parents may not be aware of, hence teachers are expected to be well aware of the average required mental ability of their learners and work under that parameter. Hirsh (2017) agrees that learner performance increases when teachers assume collective accountability and responsibility, and parents have greater confidence in all teachers when principals create structures and systems that ensure teachers are held accountable for learning processes and learner achievement. Although Torres (2019) supports the views of the participants by pointing out that autonomy and accountability are interlinked, he emphasised that principals need to be aware that they hold sole responsibility for standards across the school, as such; they should accept a degree of collective accountability if they buy into distributed leadership. The study conducted by Uysal and Holloway (2020) supports the participants by reporting that distributed leadership requires that teachers should be allowed to try and fail, create and share problems and strive towards a common goal. In this regard, accountability becomes shared between the principal and teachers as they strive to meet a common goal. Holloway (2021) concludes that distributed leadership should be based on the premise that leadership responsibilities and accountability are shared and should build up as a fluid and emergent property, and not be controlled or held by one individual.

4.4.1.6 Sub-theme 6: Effective communication for leadership ethics and the empowerment of subordinates

Principals argued that distributed leadership involves effective communication across the board and that they, as principals, had a responsibility to ensure that this was realised. Principals believed that effective communication could assist in clarifying and demarcating roles and responsibilities, leading to fewer misunderstandings. The following excerpts from the participants' responses suggest ways how principals could create a conducive environment for effective communication:

We must always assure teachers that the management will always be there to support them. This means that we should appoint a teacher for a particular position and we should ensure that there is continuous communication to identify possible challenges and shortcomings. (P1)

Immediately you work with SMTs, make sure that you communicate openly and ensure that everybody knows their positions and knows what is expected. Communication is key in reality because if you can't communicate with others, they won't know what is expected of them. (P2)

Principals should support an open door policy and allow teachers to discuss school problems about teaching and learning openly with them. Therefore, as a principal, I should motivate teachers to communicate openly about teaching and learning and also to solve problems together, in a way I empower them. (P3)

Distributed leadership says to me that anyone who assumes leadership role can communicate directly with another than to seek approval of the principal. (P4)

The excerpts above suggest that the participants, who were school principals, shared the understanding that effective communication with teachers was important for leadership and teacher empowerment. In support of this view, Torres (2019) states that it is important that principals must listen to and communicate with teachers and encourage them to express their views. Cooks-Campbell (2021) supports the view that demonstrating a 360-degree approach to receiving, ingesting and sharing information with teachers is important in ensuring that communication channels are open and working.

The participants' responses above suggest that effective communication can help build and enhance relationships. In support of this argument, the study conducted by Aczel et al. (2017) argued for an increased invitation for

teachers' voices to be heard regarding problems and proposed solutions. Elmazi (2018) points out that in the event a preferred approach or solution is not selected as a way forward, teachers who are supportive of the non-chosen approach may tend to be vocal in opposition to distributed leadership rather than the proposed solution. In this regard, Elmazi (2018) agrees that effective communication and teachers' involvement in decision-making processes would allow for some control of this type of situation. In this regard, the findings of this study advocate for continuous communication on, among other things, responsibilities, accountability and understanding of the vision of the school, and what it means in terms of the experiences of all those who come into contact with it. Torres (2019) asserts that, in line with the participants' responses, this could generate a sense of ownership and commitment among teachers and allow for creativity, autonomy and experimentation. While the communication process can be time-consuming at times, from the participants' responses, it is, thus, important to empower teachers and support inclusivity leadership (Aczel et al., 2017).

The participants' responses above suggest that principals have a sole responsibility to ensure effective communication for effective distributed leadership and teacher empowerment. Desravines et al. (2016) support the view that distributed leadership and its adaptive challenges require principals to engage in an open dialogue, creating a safe space for productive engagement.

4.4.1.7 Summary of Theme 1

Theme 1 supports the argument that distributed leadership can offer a useful approach to teacher empowerment, especially as principals understand that in using the distributed leadership approach, tasks and responsibilities are shared and decision-making is inclusive. Distributed leadership implies an inclusive leadership approach, not located in an individual. The perspectives shared by the principals, who were participants in this study, on distributed leadership for teacher empowerment suggest the importance of the following key issues: shared responsibility; inclusive model of leadership; consultative

management and inclusive decision-making; accountability; and effective communication. The findings above suggest that the participants must distribute and share leadership and that leadership responsibility should be shared. The findings suggest that if distributed forms of leadership are incorporated into the vertical leadership structure of, for instance, the school, the principal would be required to play the role of a mediator, facilitator, supporter and coach, thereby encouraging a more collegial school atmosphere (Naicker & Mestry, 2013).

The following theme will present and discuss the contributions of distributed leadership to learner achievement.

4.4.2 Theme 2: Contribution of distributed leadership to learner achievement

School principals, teachers and parents have an important role to play in supporting learners to improve their academic performance. Participants identified specific methods that they regarded as best practices for improving teaching and learning and learner achievement. From the participants' responses, I could identify specific methods that teachers cited as effective for improving learner achievement. These can be organised into the following sub-themes for the above theme:

- Sharing of expertise through team teaching; and
- Space for teacher collaboration and sharing of ideas.

These sub-themes are discussed in the following section.

4.4.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Sharing of expertise through team teaching

Moss (2017) contends that team teaching brings teachers together to build bridges across disciplines and motivate learners towards academic success. The excerpts from the participants' responses support the view that team teaching is an important pedagogical practice that can contribute to learner achievement. The excerpts from the participants' responses below suggest

that learners learned better when several teachers work together to present multiple perspectives on the subject matter to assist learners to learn.

We are living in a constitutionalized democracy and democracy dictates that we've got to ensure that we develop together, we grow together, and we do things together. I just want to set an example, learners in mathematics will perform well if there's an exchange of abilities between teachers. When teachers work together, the learners will also benefit. (P4)

I think distributed leadership can improve learner performance because sharing of classes can take off the load from the teacher and then you can focus on what you know best. (T3)

As long as teachers know that they have different skills, for example in language, they can share classes. If Teacher X has expertise in the language content and Teacher Y has expertise in the literature, sharing can improve learning. This means that Teacher X will teach content and Teacher Y will teach literature. (T9)

The different skills and expertise possessed by teachers, as reflected in the above excerpts, points to the importance of team teaching in supporting teaching and learning. This sharing of expertise could make learning easier for learners to understand the subject content. The participants' responses suggest that teachers may have expertise in some areas and weaknesses in others, which could be complemented by collaborating with others. This suggests that while teachers would always seek to ensure that learners are taught effectively, deficits in certain areas could disadvantage learners if they are working alone. In this regard, the participants believed that team teaching had the potential to close this gap and contribute to learner achievement. Gladman (2015) supports the view that learners who are experiencing difficulties in understanding what is taught by one teacher may find it easier to learn the same from a different teacher. For instance, the findings of a study conducted by Moss (2017) revealed that a significant number of teachers

regarded team teaching as an efficient way for reforming education, bringing struggling learners into the general classroom, reducing teacher isolation, improving instructional techniques, training future teachers, and creating learning opportunities for complex problem solving across disciplinary boundaries. As expressed by one of the participants above, teachers should be encouraged to use team teaching to ensure that learners are supported in the areas that they struggle to teach, as this could assist the teachers to improve their teaching in those areas. This view is shared by Sweigart and Landrum (2015) who argue that with proper planning, support and training, team teaching can achieve significant results as teachers seek to enhance learners' performance.

4.4.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Space for teacher collaboration and sharing of ideas

Fodo (2020) asserts that collaboration among teachers is key to successful inclusive education and positively influencing learner performance. In this study, participants pointed out that effective communication and a conducive environment were critical elements for ensuring that learners received a quality education. The following excerpts from the participants' responses reflect ways in which they believed collaboration and sharing of ideas could help improve learner performance:

When a school implements measures that work toward a shared vision and demonstrate a system of belief in learners, it will definitely increase achievement. I would also look at the way in which we communicate, which is important for team work. (T1)

When you look at the model of distributed leadership, it focuses on everyone and whatever expertise each individual brings to the table. It creates an environment where everyone can lead and share ideas to make sure that at the end of the day, the school achieve its goals. (T6)

This kind of leadership can only work when a positive atmosphere or conducive environment, and vision and mission for educational activities are created and all school stakeholders are encouraged to work together towards purposeful common goals. (T7)

If your teachers are involved in sharing ideas, then they will work willingly with no one forcing them. They are going to do they work with passion. (T9)

Given the impact that teachers make on learner achievement, coupled with the high expectations for improved learner performance, the above findings suggest that the participants were aware of and acknowledged the need for sharing ideas and working as a team for the benefit of their learners. According to Mora-Ruano et al. (2019), the sharing of ideas is important for learner performance, which may be the reason why education reforms and policies globally endorse and support more cooperative practices among teachers.

The findings above suggest that the creation of a conducive environment may encourage collegial interactions and working together to achieve common goals to positively contribute to learner achievement. The participants' responses above can be understood as confirmation that they believed that they needed each other to execute their responsibilities more effectively for the benefit of their learners. In support of these views, Davis (2020) argues that when teachers collaborate and share ideas, information and expertise, learning becomes more accessible for learners. Dumay et al. (2013) assert that learners whose teachers participate in collective professional development activities, such as sharing knowledge and skills about instructional methods and strategies, performed much better than learners whose teachers did not. In this regard, Mora-Ruano et al. (2019) contend that teachers who share ideas about teaching and learning often bring everyone to the same level of functioning and performance, leading to access to quality education for their learners.

4.4.2.3 Summary of Theme 2

Theme 2 presented and discussed the benefits of shared or collaborative teaching to learner performance. The participants' narratives leaned strongly toward acknowledging the connection between distributed leadership, teacher collaboration and learner performance. The findings of this study suggest that, from the participants' perspectives, shared leadership and collaborative teaching can influence learner achievement by creating a conducive collegial environment and enhancing teacher development. In this regard, the participants, who were school principals and teachers, identified ways in which collaborative teaching could be utilised to enhance learner performance. For instance, the participants pointed to the importance of complementing abilities through team teaching and creating spaces for teacher collaboration and sharing of ideas.

The findings from the above sub-themes suggest that learner performance can be achieved through collaborative teaching and leadership that makes possible conducive collegial culture in which teachers are motivated and supported by their school principal. The sub-themes also suggest that distributed leadership has the potential to encourage positive relationships among teachers, improve teacher self-efficacy, encourage teachers to collaborate and improve learner performance. This is in line with the findings of the study conducted by Jambo and Hongde (2019), which reached a similar conclusion that participatory and distributed patterns of leadership practices have the potential to improve academic achievement.

The following theme will present and discuss the challenges experienced by school principals in empowering teachers through distributed leadership.

4.4.3 Theme 3: Challenges experienced by principals in empowering teachers through distributed leadership

For this study, the narratives of the participants suggest that the application of distributed leadership in schools was not easy for principals. From the narratives, I could identify common challenges encountered by school

principals in their attempts to empower teachers through distributed leadership. These challenges emerged to constitute the following sub-themes:

- Teachers' willingness to cooperate in leadership;
- Time constraints and teachers' assumption of leadership roles; and
- Communication between school principals and teachers.

These sub-themes are presented and discussed in the section below.

4.4.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Teachers' willingness to cooperate in leadership

The inadequate understanding of distributed leadership by teachers could impact negatively a school principal's intentions to empower teachers through sharing of leadership opportunities. The excerpts from the participants' responses below suggest that, in this study, it was often difficult for principals to distribute and share leadership responsibilities with their subordinates, as they were unwilling to utilise the opportunities provided. According to the participants' responses below, it would seem that teachers who assumed leadership responsibilities as shared could be marginalised and ostracised as this may cause them to lose connection with their peers:

Distributed leadership has a positive and negative side. There could be a misunderstanding of teacher empowerment through this model as some teachers think that, as a principal, you are lazy therefore you want them to do your work. Some teachers think they are more empowered to control the whole school by taking the roles and responsibilities of the principal. (P3)

The "pull-him-down syndrome", otherwise known as PHD syndrome, has ensued in the education system. Some members of staff feel that whatever that needs to be done to empower others with the ultimate goal of assisting a learner is PHD syndrome. (P4)

Some teachers are reluctant and not open-minded in terms of taking the leadership roles thus making it difficult for the principal to implement leadership strategies. This is why we have teachers who are lacking behind and show no interest. (T5)

Most of us, teachers, tend to create a feeling that we have reached a ceiling and we are used to what we do, therefore no one can tell us what to do. We also do this with a view to bring down the principal or Head of Department. (T7)

Some teachers feel like “my duties are in the classroom and that’s it”. When it’s knockoff time, they go home and do not want to entertain any other issue outside their classrooms. (T11)

The participants’ narratives above suggest that the creation of opportunities for teachers to assume leadership roles and responsibilities may be unlikely to be welcomed by teachers unless there is a clear understanding of the concept and its benefits for teachers and the school. Tahir et al. (2016) have confirmed that teachers often lack adequate understanding of distributed leadership as a concept, despite it being practised by their principals. The literature suggests that, in line with the findings of this study, distributed leadership has as its objective the empowerment of subordinates and improving leadership, this model is still too new and thus people often lack understanding (Tahir et al., 2016; Torrance, 2013).

From the findings above, the participants’ responses suggest that some teachers did not support distributed leadership, as they often viewed it as exploitation. For instance, some participants reported that the sharing or distribution of leadership responsibilities was sometimes perceived as exploiting teachers by making them do work that they are not supposed to do. In this regard, one participant, who was a school principal, reported that when teachers took up leadership roles, some teachers often viewed this as a deliberate move to disadvantage others. As a result, the sharing or distribution of leadership responsibilities often led to divisions among teachers. This could

be viewed as an instance of inadequate support for principals' efforts and intentions to empower through distributed leadership.

Therefore, when considering factors impeding distributed leadership, support from peers should be considered as an important influence on teachers' interest to take up leadership roles. The findings suggest that there is a possible relationship problem when teachers assume leadership roles, which may lead to distance from and even loss of relationships with their peers. Zhang et al. (2014) agree that teachers who take up leadership responsibilities may be viewed by their peers as traitors, which may result in alienation from their peers. Zhang et al. (2014) further explain that the shifting nature of relationships with peers may serve as a disincentive to taking up leadership roles, as some teachers may fear that this may jeopardise their relationships with their peers. In this regard, Wenner and Campbell (2017) conclude that the inadequate understanding of distributed leadership when teachers assume leadership roles would not only negatively affect the intended goal, which is teacher empowerment, but may also affect the smooth running of the school and impact learning negatively.

The findings of this study suggest that while some teachers may refuse to take up leadership roles due to their experience, some may assume leadership roles to undermine the principal. For instance, one of the participants stated that some teachers sometimes think they know everything. As a result, they assume leadership responsibilities to challenge and undermine the principal. This has the potential to result in a situation where teachers could find themselves at odds with the principal. Harris (2013) agrees that some teachers have used distributed leadership to undermine the authority of the principals and negate their influence. In this regard, the findings of this study suggest that distributed leadership can become destructive, especially when it is not properly understood. Sibanda (2017) supports this finding and proposes a need to effect an equilibrium of control as a way to ensure that no individual or group can undermine, derail or disrupt the efforts of the principal to move the school forward and empower teachers.

From the findings above, it could be deduced that some teachers do not consider themselves leaders; hence their reluctance to take leadership responsibilities. The unfortunate part is that teachers who do not have an interest in the leadership of the school are usually left behind during school reforms. The findings of the study conducted by Nazari et al. (2021) revealed that teachers are the greatest influence on learners' academic success yet seldom lead the reform efforts of their schools. This view supports the views of the participants of this study that some teachers do not consider themselves leaders and would prefer to confine their involvement to the classroom.

4.4.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Time constraints and teachers' assumption of leadership roles

For this study, the high expectations and limited time due to teachers' increasing responsibilities as well as insufficient support from the school principal and the Department of Education were the key challenges that made leadership less attractive. The excerpts from the participants' responses presented below suggest that the issue of time was a key factor that must be considered when teachers assume leadership roles. In this regard, the responses suggest that time constraints and pressures that come with taking up leadership roles could impede the practice of distributed leadership in schools:

A challenge we face is the length of the process which is personality orientated. It is only when you implement empowerment opportunities that you can engage the success of each text and not all teachers are equally motivated and their speed is different. Therefore, we need to always be ready for the lowest common denominator in terms of moral and participation. (P1)

A lack of time coupled with performance pressure from the school administrator, a balanced diverse and learning needs, planning, and lot of paperwork are serious challenges. (T1)

Limited human resource capacity has mounted pressure on the limited time available. This is why the DBE should hire more teachers to offload the workload on teachers. (T11)

The participants' responses above suggest that, with the ever-increasing burden of responsibilities, teachers who take up leadership roles often had to endure long hours of work and heightened pressures, which made it difficult for them to carry out their leadership roles. This finding supports what Yu (2017) has pointed out being a teacher leader is often overwhelming because of the increase in workload. Literature on this subject has pointed out that issues such as additional responsibilities, heavy workload and deteriorating quality of family life are often cited as obstacles to the successful practice of distributed leadership (see, for instance, Tahir et al., 2016; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Yu, 2017; Zhang et al., 2014). For example, the findings of a study conducted by Tian (2013) revealed that teachers who worked with principals who often reported frustrations with tight deadlines and who provided inadequate feedback to them, caused teachers to have negative perceptions of distributed leadership as a mechanism for teacher empowerment.

The participants' views also reveal that teachers were less likely to assume leadership roles or support their principals' practices of distributed leadership when they realised that this would lead to substantial increases in their workload. In this regard, the participants believed that assuming leadership responsibilities had negative consequences for them. This implies that there is a need for school principals and the Department of Education to develop mechanisms to ensure that these issues are resolved for the successful practice of distributed leadership. This supports the findings of the study by Lizotte (2013) who argued that some teachers believed that a significant amount of their time must be dedicated to their teaching responsibilities, as opposed to leadership responsibilities. Tian (2013) supports the view that taking on leadership responsibilities is often presented as a barrier to the successful practice of distributed leadership for teacher empowerment.

4.4.3.3 Sub-theme 3: Communication between school principals and teachers

The participants for this study believed that poor communication by school principals regarding their plans regarding the distribution and sharing of leadership often resulted in divisions and misunderstandings among teachers. The participants argued that this could result in unnecessary tensions and resistance due to the perception that some teachers are favoured more than others. The excerpts from the participants' responses below paint a picture of the impact of inadequate communication by principals on the success of distributed leadership:

Principal's lack of openness is a serious issue. There was a situation where the principal decided to include me in the School Management Team (SMT) despite the fact that I was not the HOD, but because of my experience. Some SMT members who did not appreciate how the matter was handled refused to work with me.

(T2)

A lack of effective communication has created a situation where the message is not correctly understood by the subordinates. There are incidents where principal belittled other people and that alone created a hostile environment where now teachers are just doing their job for the sake of their salaries instead of fully being part of the school program.

(T6)

As a leader or principal, you need to be open to teachers and be willing to share the ideas with teachers but not to instruct them.

(T9)

The participants' views above suggest that their principals' communication deficiencies impacted negatively on human relations among teachers and undermined the potential of distributed leadership as a mechanism to ensure teacher empowerment. The participants cited the principals' poor communication as a key challenge to the successful practice of distributed

leadership, which often created confusion, tension and misunderstanding among teachers. These findings support Kheswa's (2015) argument that when communication between the principal and teachers is inadequate, the success of the organisational objectives is severely undermined and teacher empowerment through the sharing of leadership is compromised. Literature has argued that for distributed leadership to contribute positively to teacher empowerment in schools, principals must ensure positive and constructive communication in their engagements with teachers (see, for instance, Bernhardt, 2014; Zepeda, 2013).

The participants' responses above may suggest that although some school principals have adopted distributed leadership, they still operate within authoritarian models of leadership regarding communication with their teachers. When this happens, teachers often feel disrespected as decisions are imposed on them without prior explanation and discussion, which results in resistance and tension. This finding supports Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya's (2014) argument that when adequate channels are not created to communicate leadership messages properly, conflicts and tensions are often inevitable. Therefore, the findings of this study in this regard suggest that the success of distributed leadership will depend on adequate communication and how school principals manage their messaging. The finding for this study also supports what Naicker and Mestry (2013) have found in primary schools around Soweto, where teachers reported that their reluctance to take on leadership responsibilities was often informed by poor communication and the fact that all decision-making powers resided solely with the school management team. Naicker and Mestry (2013) reported that the participants in their study argued that the attitudes of school principals contributed to the ineffectiveness and incompetence in schools (Naicker & Mestry, 2013). This suggests that, for distributed leadership to work for teachers, principals and schools, these barriers must be identified and eliminated.

4.4.3.4 Summary of Theme 3

The findings in theme 3 suggest that the practice of distributed leadership in schools has not been easy to implement for school principals. The participants pointed out several key difficulties, barriers and obstacles that impeded the successful practice of distributed leadership for teacher empowerment in their schools. These barriers included teachers' unwillingness to cooperate; time pressures that discouraged teachers from assuming leadership roles; and inadequate communication by principals.

The findings in the sub-themes above suggest that moving teachers from isolated to collaborative practice and changing their focus from teaching only to leadership for their empowerment would require a significant paradigm shift from both principals and teachers. Without this, the practice of distributed leadership will result in resistance, tensions and conflict, which will negate the very purpose of its adoption. The findings point to the importance of both principals and teachers in distributed leadership as key players in the success or failure of distributed leadership for teacher empowerment. This suggests that while principals have a role to play in ensuring that teachers are empowered, teachers must also play their part in distributed leadership to contribute positively to teacher empowerment.

The following theme will discuss the strategies used by principals to enhance teacher empowerment through distributed leadership.

4.4.4 Theme 4: Strategies used by principals to enhance teacher empowerment through distributed leadership

Teacher empowerment can be accomplished in different ways, for example, through the strengthening of teaching, personal, professional and social competencies and by allowing a space for and encouraging active participation by members of the school community, including teachers. The findings of this study have thus far pointed to the fact that equipping teachers and principals with the skills and knowledge to discharge their duties competently and assisting them to effect the necessary paradigm shifts could contribute

positively to the success of distributed leadership for teacher empowerment. The strategies used by the principals who were participants in this study are presented and discussed in the section below under the theme: Strategies used by principals to enhance teacher empowerment through distributed leadership.

One professional development activity that almost all teachers would have experienced in their careers is participation in meetings and workshops (see, for instance, Dasoo & Van der Merwe Muller, 2020). The participants' responses in this study suggest that they were of the view that the active participation of teachers in school activities, such as departmental meetings, workshops and different committees was the most effective method of empowering teachers. The following excerpts from the participants' responses point to teacher participation as a critical mechanism for teacher empowerment:

Teachers must be encouraged to actively participate in all school activities. They must be shown the importance of their participation in education as a whole but not only in a particular class or for a particular subject. (P3)

We have many committees in the school but we don't have subject committees as much as we have departmental meetings. There is a need for subject committees wherein teachers of a particular subject can participate, make their inputs, discuss content, and help each other. (T4)

Teachers should be encouraged to get actively involved in different committees and workshops, and take leadership roles in those committees. This will assist in moving teachers out of their comfort zones, i.e. from classrooms, to take up the leadership and develop their professional career. (T5)

The participants' responses above suggest that opportunities and space must be made available for teachers to express and actively participate in decisions about their professional development. In addition, the participants' responses suggest that teachers must also be afforded opportunities to take on leadership responsibilities, and not be confined to classrooms and subjects. These suggestions support the announcement made by the Department of Basic Education (2014) about the importance of establishing subject committees as a key mechanism for driving the professional development of teachers. The Department of Basic Education (2014) argued that subject committees can be a useful mechanism for encouraging teacher participation and could enable teachers to determine their professional development trajectories, as well as direct their professional development. Davis (2020) supports the view that teacher empowerment must include investing in teachers and allowing them to participate in determining school goals, teaching and learning programmes and policies. Uysal and Holloway (2020) contend that the time invested in teachers' learning is integrated with teacher participation and development within a collaborative professional culture will ultimately pay off in terms of teacher empowerment and learner achievement.

The participants' responses above suggest that workshops and different committees within schools have the potential to empower teachers. For instance, one of the participants argued that these platforms could assist in moving teachers out of their comfort zones and realise the importance of taking up leadership responsibilities. This suggests that school principals must encourage teachers to participate in professional development platforms within schools, such as subject committees. This finding supports the argument by Yunus et al. (2021) that principals must create professional development opportunities for teachers and encourage them to participate actively in their professional development. As argued by Yunus et al. (2021), this will likely develop the teachers' competencies and professionalism).

The above responses by the participants suggest that the potential of teachers could be improved if they were allowed and encouraged to participate in school activities. Ainley and Carstens (2018) support the view that the participation of

teachers in professional activities has the potential to help them improve their professional, social and personality competencies. The study conducted by Holloway (2021) concluded that teacher participation is an excellent mechanism for assisting teachers to gain confidence and enable them to develop long-lasting professional and personal contact with the areas of responsibility. From the perspective of distributed leadership for teacher empowerment, this suggests that school principals must be empowered and prepared to create these opportunities and spaces for teachers to participate as legitimate players in the life of their schools.

4.4.4.1 Summary of Theme 4

Theme 4 suggests that strategies for the effective practice of distributed leadership to empower teachers must be informed by the active participation of teachers in the key activities of schools. The findings suggest that the success of distributed leadership requires commitment from both principals and teachers. That is, distributed leadership as a mechanism for teacher empowerment can only work if both principals and teachers collaborate to make it work (Jambo & Hongde, 2019). In this regard, school principals must be empowered and prepared to distribute leadership functions to teachers, pool their expertise and identify deficits threatening the success of their efforts. Distributed leadership has huge potential for success should the challenges that threaten its successful implementation, it could empower contribute positively to teacher empowerment (Harris, 2014). Therefore, the active participation of teachers in school programmes, including decision-making processes, has the potential to advance the practice of distributed leadership and contribute to the empowerment of teachers.

4.5 Summary of the chapter

Chapter 4 presented, analysed and interpreted the findings within the context of the key research questions and reviewed the literature for this study. The chapter presented these according to the themes that were generated in line with the key research questions and available data. The chapter argued that distributed leadership has a huge potential to contribute positively to teacher

empowerment if the issues raised by the participants are properly managed and addressed.

The following chapter provides a conclusion for the study, which includes a summary of the key research findings, recommendations in respect of the findings and ideas for further research, as well as the limitations that were encountered during the conduct of the study.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, I presented, analysed and discussed the data generated through the semi-structured interviews with the principals and teachers in secondary schools in Tshwane West District. The focus of the interviews was on how the principals used distributed leadership for teacher empowerment. This chapter provides a summary of the key research findings, draws conclusions from the findings and generates recommendations in respect of what may need to be done and ideas for further research. The delimitations and limitations of the study are also discussed in this chapter.

5.2 Summary of the findings

Four main findings emerged from the study and are briefly discussed in the section below.

5.2.1 Principals' views on distributed leadership for teacher empowerment

The study found that principals were aware of and knowledgeable about distributed leadership and its significance in schools, especially how it could be used to empower teachers. Principals, who participated in this study, acknowledged that due to the pressures and demands for improved learner performance, coupled with the ever-changing curriculum, they could not meet the school objectives unilaterally, without the active involvement of and sharing of leadership responsibilities with their teachers. Furthermore, principals recognised and acknowledged the fact that teachers had diverse areas of passion and expertise. Therefore, their view was that sharing leadership responsibilities was important for easing pressure and empowering teachers. Principals argued that unless the expertise of all teachers was made available, it was unlikely for them to improve, especially in the classroom. In this regard,

the participants argued that distributed leadership should be preferred to empower teachers and foster collective accountability for school performance.

The findings of this study suggest that the role of school principals is important in ensuring the successful practice of distributed leadership for teacher empowerment. One of the views expressed by the participants was that principals must create opportunities and establish systems to enable teachers to take on leadership responsibilities. According to the participants, principals had a critical role to play in creating opportunities for sharing leadership, encouraging teamwork and participation in decision-making processes and promoting teacher empowerment. Principals, who participated in this study, were of the view that teacher empowerment can only be effective when teachers are consulted or involved in determining strategies to achieve school objectives.

Participants reported that shared accountability should be enforced in schools to improve collaboration and shared responsibility. The principals who participated in this study argued that giving teachers autonomy and involving them in decision-making would foster a sense of ownership and accountability. Participants stated that distributed leadership was a key mechanism for teacher empowerment, improvement of learner achievement and overall school performance. The participants further argued that communication was crucial for the practice of distributed leadership for teacher empowerment. The participants argued that effective communication was essential for the clarification of roles and responsibilities to prevent misunderstandings, frustrations and tensions. In summary, the findings of this study revealed that school principals were aware of distributed leadership and its importance for teacher empowerment.

5.2.2 Contribution of distributed leadership to learner performance

The findings of the study suggested ways in which distributed leadership could contribute to learner performance. For instance, the participants suggested the sharing of expertise through team teaching as one of the ways of ensuring that

sharing of leadership contributed positively to learner performance. For instance, the participants argued that in a distributed leadership set-up, collaboration and team teaching were important for bridging gaps in skills, knowledge and expertise. Some participants pointed out that teachers have a range of expertise, although they had weaknesses in some areas. In this regard, the participants argued that the complementing of expertise could ensure that learners benefit from their teachers.

The participants also argued that the sharing of ideas and expertise among teachers was important. However, participants pointed out that this could only happen where school principals exercised inclusive decision-making through distributed leadership, which would empower teachers to fulfil key roles in improving organisational performance. Participants also pointed out that, while teacher collaboration contributed positively to learner performance, this also assisted teachers to empower and support each other to grow in their professional responsibilities. Moreover, participants pointed out that they needed each other to execute their responsibilities effectively and to achieve organisational outcomes. That is, for them, the distribution of leadership was key to empowering teachers to contribute positively to the core business of their schools.

5.2.3 Challenges experienced by principals in empowering teachers through distributed leadership

The findings of this study pointed to the fact that practising distributed leadership was not easy and was riddled with complexities that school principals had to navigate to ensure teacher empowerment. In this regard, the participants pointed to numerous challenges that were experienced by principals in the practice of distributed leadership. The participants reported that one of the key challenges was the teachers' unwillingness to take up leadership responsibilities, which impacted negatively on the principals' intentions and attempts to share leadership responsibilities for teacher empowerment.

Some principals, who participated in this study, admitted that it was difficult to successfully empower teachers where teachers did not have an adequate understanding of the benefits of taking up leadership responsibilities. For instance, the participants stated that some teachers were unwilling to take up leadership responsibilities despite the principals being willing to share responsibilities with them. For instance, the participants reported that some teachers viewed distributed leadership as a clever way of exploiting teachers and making them do what principals are supposed to do. On the other hand, the participants went on, the teachers who took up leadership responsibilities were often isolated and ostracised by their peers, which discouraged them from supporting distributed leadership. While some teachers remained reluctant to support distributed leadership due to a lack of support from their colleagues, some assumed leadership responsibilities for devious reasons, including, for instance, undermining the authority of school principals.

Participants also reported limitations of time as a serious challenge, especially owing to unrealistic expectations, increased workloads and inadequate support from school principals and the Department of Education. In addition, participants argued that taking on leadership responsibilities was often demanding in terms of time and compromised the quality of family life, thus making distributed leadership less attractive to teachers. In addition to the pressures of time, the participants reported inadequate communication between principals and teachers as a major challenge for the practice of distributed leadership, as it caused divisions and misunderstandings among teachers. For instance, participants reported that inadequate communication by school principals often resulted in resistance and tensions among teachers. This finding underlines the fact that the success of distributed leadership pivots on adequate communication and how school principals interact with their teachers within a conducive organisational culture.

5.2.4 Strategies used by principals to enhance teacher empowerment through distributed leadership

The findings of this study pointed to one key strategy that principals could use to empower teachers through distributed leadership. Participants reported that, for distributed leadership for teacher empowerment to work, school principals had to encourage the active participation of teachers in school activities, including professional development programmes. In addition, participants argued that, for distributed leadership for teacher empowerment to work, teachers had to be provided with opportunities and space to express their views and expectations, especially concerning professional development issues. The participants believed that this could assist in moving teachers out of their comfort zones and empowering them to take up leadership responsibilities. That is, participants believed that encouraging active participation was key to ensuring that distributed leadership contributed positively to teacher empowerment.

5.3 Delimitation of the study

The delimitations are the boundaries that the researcher set for the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The focus of this study was on secondary schools in the Tshwane West District, Gauteng Province, South Africa. The schools were chosen because they are located in proximity to the researcher.

5.4 Limitations of the study

The limitations of the study were experienced especially during the process of data collection. A major limitation was that secondary schools were under pressure to complete the curriculum for the 2021 academic year, especially cognisant of the time that had been lost due to the outbreak of COVID-19. The time factor became a serious challenge as the Gauteng Department of Education had stated in the letter of permission that interviews should be conducted within four months.

Furthermore, the Gauteng Department of Education stated that I had to strictly adhere to precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the Covid-19

pandemic. As a result, I had to switch from face-to-face to telephonic interviews. I had the option of using Skype or Blackboard to interact with participants, but some of the participants stated that they did not have data to connect. Although the participants had agreed to participate in the study, their availability was a challenge as I had to reschedule the interviews several times before data could be collected.

Moreover, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to schools in other contexts as the sample was small. However, it is important to point out that it was not the intention of this study to generalise findings; the intention was to explore how school principals practised distributed leadership for teacher empowerment.

5.5 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made concerning distributed leadership for teacher empowerment in the secondary schools in Tshwane West District, as reflected in the findings of this study.

5.5.1 Recommendations relating to principals' perspectives on distributed leadership for teacher empowerment

The findings of the study revealed that the importance of sharing leadership responsibilities and decentralisation of power by principals, the creation of opportunities for teachers to participate in leadership responsibilities, the importance of inclusive decision-making, promotion of inclusive accountability and effective communication are critical for teacher empowerment. In this regard, the following is recommended:

- Decision-making processes must be inclusive and communication must be clear to ensure that teachers are aware of what is expected of them and are encouraged to take on leadership responsibilities.
- Principals must create an environment of openness and trust amongst teachers to alleviate tensions and foster collegiality and collaboration.

- Principals must engage teachers by regularly soliciting their feedback and suggestions and supporting them in fulfilling their professional responsibilities.

5.5.2 Recommendations on how distributed leadership for teacher empowerment can contribute to learner achievement

The findings of the study pointed to the fact that distributed leadership for teacher empowerment contributed positively to learner performance, which could be achieved through team teaching and the availability of space for teacher collaboration and sharing of ideas. In this regard, the following recommended are made:

- Peer-to-peer support and team teaching should be encouraged to assist teachers to complement each other's strengths and weaknesses through the school principal providing ongoing support for teachers to execute their professional responsibilities.
- Schools must create conditions where expertise can be shared across the school by allowing teachers space to work individually and collectively to improve learner achievement.

5.5.3 Recommendations on the strategies to be implemented by principals to enhance teacher empowerment through distributed leadership

The findings of the study revealed that encouraging the active participation of teachers in school-wide activities, including professional development programmes and decision-making processes has the potential to enhance teacher efficiency. In this regard, it is recommended that:

- Principals should create conditions for whole school participation in decision-making processes.
- Teacher participation in workshops, meetings, decision-making processes, and other school activities should not be a choice, but a necessity.

5.5.4 Recommendations for further research

It is recommended that research may be conducted in the following areas:

- Findings revealed that school principals experienced complexities in the practice of distributed leadership for teacher empowerment. Therefore, there is a need to explore how school principals who are practising distributed leadership are navigating the complexities to ensure teacher empowerment.
- Findings revealed challenges in teachers working together to ensure the achievement of organisational goals and objectives. Therefore, there is a need to explore ways of empowering teachers to collaborate to ensure the improvement of learning outcomes.
- The issue of teacher practices concerning distributed leadership was not explored in this study. Therefore, there is a need to explore how distributed leadership relate to teacher practices and professional ethics.

5.6 Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine how distributed leadership could contribute to teacher empowerment. The findings of this study suggest that the school principals and teachers, who were participants of this study, understood and appreciated the importance of distributive leadership as a mechanism for empowering teachers. In addition, the participants believed that distributed leadership for teacher empowerment could contribute positively to learner performance. For this to happen, the teachers, who were participants in this study, argued that this required that teachers be allowed authority and space to decide on and come up with innovate new ways to contribute to the organisational performance of their schools. However, although the participants considered distributed leadership as the way to go, they pointed to complexities that must be resolved or managed to ensure that it has benefits for teachers, learners and schools.

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A: PERMISSION LETTER FROM GDE



GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA


8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	03 May 2021
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2021– 30 September 2021 2021/113
Name of Researcher:	Mangole K.V
Address of Researcher:	1523 WHITE THORN STREET AMANDASIG EXT 43 PRETORIA
Telephone Number:	076 298 9865 / 060 508 6106
Email address:	Keabakam70@gmail.com
Research Topic:	Distributive leadership for teacher empowerment in Tshwane secondary schools
Type of qualification	Masters (Educational Leadership)
Number and type of schools:	Secondary Schools
District/s/HO	Tshwane West

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

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

 03/05/2021

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

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

1

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gov.za

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

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

Kind regards



Mr G. M. Mukatuni
Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 03/05/2021

ANNEXURE B: REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH: PRINCIPALS



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA



Letter to participate in research

Dear Principal

I am a Masters student at the University of Pretoria. My research title is distributive leadership for teacher empowerment in Tshwane secondary schools. The aim of this letter is to request your permission to interview you as part of my study. The purpose of this study is to examine how the principal's distributive leadership can contribute to teacher empowerment in secondary schools around Tshwane.

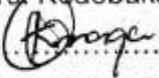
The main aim of interviewing you is to get your perspective and understanding of distributive leadership and how this leadership model can contribute to teacher empowerment and learner achievement. Your participation in this study will allow me to share your views anonymously through my research with other principals.


With your permission granted to interview you, I will collect data through tape-recorded semi structured interviews, to be used for the purpose of the study only. I will interview you through semi-structured one-on-one interview that will take place in the school premises in line with COVID-19 guidelines. In this regard, I request permission to record the interviews. The recordings will be kept strictly confidential, and neither the school nor you will be identifiable in any report. As a participant, you will also have the right to withdraw at any time during the research process. The findings of this study may provide a new perspective and assist other principals on how distributive leadership can be used to empower teachers and improve learner performance.

In addition to above, I also request permission to use your data, with guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, for both primary and secondary data analysis research purposes. The dataset will be the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria, as such; ethical issues i.e. confidentiality and privacy applicable this study will be binding on further studies.

If you agree to this interview and are aware that the interviews will be recorded, kindly complete the participant consent form below. For any enquiry or further information regarding this research project, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor on the contact details below.

Thank you

Name of Student : Mrs. Keaobaka Mangole
Signature of Student : 
Contact student : 076 298 9865
Email : keaobakam70@gmail.com

Name of Supervisor : Dr. N. Mhlanga
Signature of Supervisor : 
Contact Supervisor : 072 259 4865
Email : nontuthuzelo.mhlanga@up.ac.za

ANNEXURE C: REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH: TEACHERS



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA



Letter to participate in research

Dear Teacher

I am a Masters student at the University of Pretoria. My research title is distributive leadership for teacher empowerment in Tshwane secondary schools. The aim of this letter is to request your permission to interview you as part of my study. The purpose of this study is to examine how the principal's distributive leadership can contribute to teacher empowerment in secondary schools around Tshwane.

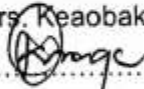
The main aim of interviewing you is to get your opinion and understanding of distributive leadership and how this leadership model can contribute to teacher empowerment and learner achievement. Your participation in this study will allow me to share your views anonymously through my research with principals.


With your permission granted to interview you, I will collect data through tape-recorded semi structured interviews, to be used for the purpose of the study only. I will interview you through semi-structured one-on-one interview that will take place in the school premises in line with COVID-19 guidelines. In this regard, I request permission to record the interviews. The recordings will be kept strictly confidential, and neither the school nor you will be identifiable in any report. As a participant, you will also have the right to withdraw at any time during the research process. The findings of this study may provide a new perspective on how distributive leadership can be used to empower teachers and improve learner performance.

In addition to above, I also request permission to use your data, with guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, for both primary and secondary data analysis research purposes. The dataset will be the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria, as such; ethical issues i.e. confidentiality and privacy applicable this study will be binding on further studies.

If you agree to this interview and are aware that the interviews will be recorded, kindly complete the participant consent form below. For any enquiry or further information regarding this research project, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor on the contact details below.

Thank you

Name of Student : Mrs. Keabaka Mangole
Signature of Student : 
Contact student : 076 298 9865
Email : keabakam70@gmail.com

Name of Supervisor : Dr. N. Mhlanga
Signature of Supervisor : 
Contact Supervisor : 072 259 4865
Email : nontuthuzelo.mhlanga@up.ac.za

ANNEXURE D: PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA



Principal consent form

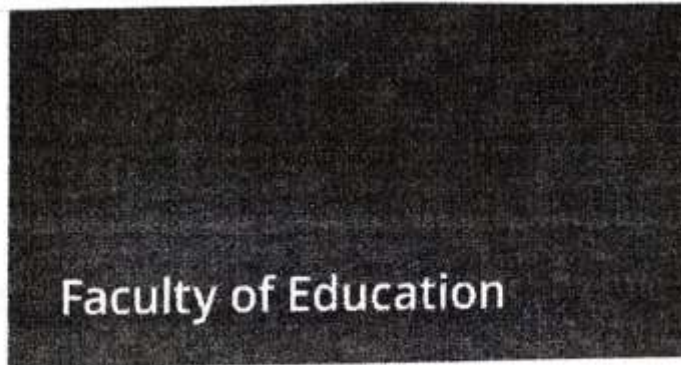
I _____ (name), hereby give consent/~~do not give consent~~ (delete what is not applicable) for the researcher to interview me for the purpose of her research, titled: **Distributive leadership for teacher empowerment in Tshwane secondary schools**. I am fully aware that my identity will be kept confidential and that I can discontinue participation at any time during the interview. I grant permission for the researcher to record the interview and I am fully aware that the recording will only be analysed by researcher and her supervisor and not publicly shared. No tuition time will be lost, no incentives will be given and there will be no implication for academic assessments during the interview process. I also request

Name : _____

Signature : _____

Date : 27/09/21

ANNEXURE E: TEACHER CONSENT FORM



Teacher consent form

I [Signature] (name), hereby give consent/~~do not give consent~~ (delete what is not applicable) for the researcher to interview me for the purpose of her research, titled: **Distributive leadership for teacher empowerment in Tshwane secondary schools**. I am fully aware that my identity will be kept confidential and that I can discontinue participation at any time during the interview. I grant permission for the researcher to record the interview and I am fully aware that the recording will only be analysed by researcher and her supervisor and not publicly shared. No tuition time will be lost, no incentives will be given and there will be no implication for academic assessments during the interview process.

Name

[Signature]

Signature

[Signature]

Date

27/09/21

ANNEXURE F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

1. Tell me about yourself? How long have you been a principal at this school?
2. What do you understand about distributed leadership for teacher empowerment?
3. Please tell me about teacher empowerment in this school?
4. What measures have you put in place to empower teachers in your school i.e. do you practice distributed leadership in your school?
5. How successful have you been in empowering teachers?
6. Do you think distributed leadership is important for teacher effectiveness and learner performance? Please elaborate
7. Do you think distributed leadership should be a preferred model to empower teachers as a way to enhance learner performance?
8. What factors of distributed leadership can contribute to learner achievement?
9. In your opinion, what are the challenges or potential challenges that could be encountered when implementing distributed leadership?
10. What strategies would you recommend to ensure a successful distributed leadership in schools?
11. Is there anything that you would like to add with regard to distributed leadership for teacher empowerment?

ANNEXURE G: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: TEACHERS

1. Tell me about yourself? How long have you been a teacher?
2. What subjects are you teaching in this school?
3. What do you understand by distributed leadership for teacher empowerment?
4. Do you feel empowered enough to effectively carry out your duties?
5. What measures are being used by the school principal to empower teachers in this school?
6. Do you think distributed leadership model can be used as a tool to empower teachers?
7. What is your view on how distributed leadership can improve learner performance? Please explain how?
8. What do you think could be the contribution of distributed leadership in enhancing the standard of teaching and learning?
9. What are the challenges encountered in empowering teachers in this schools?
10. In your view, what are the challenges or potential challenges that could hinder effective distributed leadership in this school?
11. What strategies would you recommend to enhance teacher empowerment in this school?
12. What leadership roles would you propose teachers to undertake as a way to empower them? Kindly explain their importance.
13. Do you have anything that you would like to say with regard to distributed leadership for teacher empowerment?