School Management Teams' support for learners transitioning from primary to secondary schools

By

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DECLARATION

I, **Mkhabela DP** (Student No. 27560831), declare that the study on **School Management Teams' support for learners transitioning from primary to secondary schools** is my individual work and it was never submitted before or either to the University of Pretoria or at any university.

All the sources used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of comprehensive references.

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RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

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- Data storage requirements.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of and the role played by the School Management Team (SMT) in supporting learners who are transitioning from primary to secondary schools. School transitioning forms a bridge between two schools regarding their academic collaborative efforts. Learners' performance can be affected by the 'blame game' between the two schooling levels. SMTs from both levels have to support each other by improving learner performance. One of the major challenges experienced in schools stems from the grouping of phase for grades 7 to 9. This phase obligates learners to belong to two different schools. SMTs play a significant role in supporting and mentoring learners who are transitioning from primary to secondary schools. The Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) policy document clarifies that SMTs are responsible for the effective functioning of their departments as well as the general administrative functions of the school. In line with the above-mentioned policy, the SMT participated in this study to extrapolate information on their experiences regarding the role they play during learner transition from primary to secondary schools.

School Principals, Deputy Principals and Heads of Departments took part in a qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews were used to delve into the SMTs experiences and the planning involved in learner transition. This study used a multiple case study design with the interpretivist paradigm enabling diverse interpretation of the transition from primary to secondary schools. The purposive selection of the participants and the participating schools were diligently approximated to enable possible feeder zones between the releasing and the receiving schools. Four schools comprising two primary schools and two secondary schools were selected to participate in the research.

Schlossberg's transition theory guided the study. As noted within this framework, transition involves the following four important factors: support, situation, self and strategies. One of the major findings is that there are no actual programmes planned at schools for learner transition. Therefore, by implication there is no support given by the receiving schools.

Key words: Transition, School Management Team, learner support, primary school, secondary school

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DBE………………… Department of Basic Education

HoD………………… Head of Department

NCLBA……………... No Child Left Behind Act

NEPA……………… National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996

NPPPR…………… National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of National Curriculum Statement (Grade R – 12)

PAM……………… Personnel Administration Measures

SASA……………… South African Schools Act 84 of 1996

SBST……………… School Based Support Team

SES………………... Socio-Economic Status

SMT………………... School Management Team

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To whom it may concern:

This is to confirm that the following M Ed mini-dissertation: **School Management Teams' support for learners transitioning from primary to secondary schools** by DP Mkhabela has been edited for language use.

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CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1.   INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Primary to secondary school transition is defined by Kikechi and Musera (2011) as the flow of learners from one level of education to another. It is the learners' most challenging time and their capability to manage the changes with which they are confronted. It involves learners having to negotiate and adapt to new educational settings and to changes in social interactions with teachers and peers (Mackenzie, McMaugh & O'Sullivan, 2012). This transition is characterised by some degree of stress and apprehension and, in most instances, learners raise concerns about the organisational settings, namely time-tabling of subjects, induction programmes and attitude of old learners at the new school (Rice, Frederickson & Seymour, 2011).

Primary to secondary school transition, as complex as it may be, has the prospect to impact on learners' development and studies. Transition also influences learners' personalities, family backgrounds, and the process of adolescent development, self-confidence, bullying, the way they interact with their peers and teachers and the preparation for transfer (Hopwood, Hay & Dyment, 2016). In some cases, learners have to transition from a poorly-resourced school to a better-resourced school and this can be problematic. De Wit, Karioja and Rye (2010) suggest that learner transition should be explored with caution.

School to school transition has an impact on learner performance. It has an impact on learners' feelings concerning schooling and their holistic development through post

primary education (Cox & Kennedy, 2008). In certain instances, school transition is the cause of absenteeism or total drop out. There is a likelihood for learners to lose interest in their schoolwork and, in many cases, to encounter educational problems when there is no suitable emotional and social support provided for them at this time in their education, a stage when they are in great need of support from their peers and teachers (De Wit, *et al.*, 2010). It is during this susceptible period of transition that parents and the school provide support to learners. Gottfredson and Hussong (2011) reiterate that interventions delivered by both parents and the school during the transition period could have long-lasting, positive effects on learner performance.

This study reminds us of the African proverb that it takes a village to raise a child properly, meaning that many people should be involved in supporting and developing children. Ubuntu expressions such as 'I am because you are' takes centre stage in this study. Africans are the propagators of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,* representing a continent where orphans do not exist as long as adults are around. Western countries, such as Germany, follow the practice whereby parents invest considerable energy in placing their children in suitable environments where the transition is likely to be considered and the necessary support administered (Griebel & Berwanger 2006); for Africans it has long been a way of life. It merely shows how essential support during the transition period can be. Joyce-Gibbons, Galloway, Mollel, Mgoma, Pima and Deogratias (2018) states that learners in Tanzanian secondary schools had serious difficulties in coping and the dropout and truancy rate sharply rose during the first two years of their secondary schooling. According to Darmody (2008), learners find it difficult to cope with schooling while transitioning from primary to secondary schools and they feel especially vulnerable during this period. Consequently, they fall

behind in their schoolwork, and are exposed to the prospect of discontinuing with their schooling. While several researchers have conducted studies on primary to secondary school transition (Mackenzie *et al.,* 2012), these studies have not dedicated significant attention to how School Management Teams (hereafter, SMTs) academically support or fail to support learners who are experiencing primary to secondary school transition. SMTs are always better placed to give accurate views about these learners. The SMTs' pivotal support and views during transition is unequalled due to the inability of school situation to meet the developmental needs of young transitioning learners. Such circumstances may cause negative educational and psychological outcomes in a learner's life (Mackenzie *et al*., 2012). This study therefore aims at presenting, through a qualitative study, perceptions of SMTs of this transition, the support they give to these learners and to offer relevant recommendations to policymakers.

The South African schooling system is divided into four stages, which are the Foundation, Intermediate, Senior and Further Education and Training phases. Foundation phase consists of grade R – 3, Intermediate phase is grade 4 – 6, Senior phase grade 7 – 9 and Further Education and Training phase grade 10 -12. On the other hand, primary school grades consist of R to 7 and secondary school grades consist of learners in the 7th grade (at primary schools) to the 8th grade (at secondary schools).

The study will focus on SMTs' support to learners during the transition from primary to 8 to 12. The critical fact here is, grade 7 and grade 8 are grouped in the same phase but separated by space. Transition in this study will therefore refer to the movement

secondary school. Learners who are transitioning from primary to secondary typically range from 11 to 13 years. Transition symbolises achievement, success and victory in the life of a learner but, it comes along with various personal and social factors affecting learners' adjustment to secondary schooling. Transition can therefore be defined as the movement from the known into a new environment which is unpredictable and might be full of threats, opportunities and possibilities depending on the support the child receives when transitioning.

1.2.   PROBLEM STATEMENT

Ideally, learners who transition from primary school to secondary school need an intensive support programme to assist them through these trying times in their academic lives. Section 10a(5.2) of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 stipulates that the principal ensure that no initiation practices take place in the school or at any school events outside the school grounds. The principal, as leader and a member of the SMT, has a primary obligation to protect learners from *crimen injuria*, harassment, assault, degradation maltreatment, intimidation or humiliation from learners and teachers and must ensure that learners are not subjected to such practices (SASA, 1996) to ensure a smooth learner transition and reasonably comfortable stay at school.

 Adolescence itself is a difficult stage in young people's lives. Children undergo major developmental changes including cognitive, physical, emotional and physiological changes. The experiences these young people go through as they enter the secondary school phase for the first time make transition an important educational issue (Ganeson, 2009). At this stage, they are expected to cope with dual developmental

changes, namely, those changes that are personal and those that emanate from a learning environment. These changes, therefore, warrant significant attention. Schools in Mogalakwena district, Limpopo, appear not to pay significant attention to these developments.

The South African education system has divided its learner classes into phases comprising of three grades each: the foundation phase, grades R - 3; the intermediate phase, grades 4-6; the senior phase, grades 7-9 and the further education and training phase, grades 10-12 (National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grade R - 12, 2012). Grades 7 and 8 which are the focus of this study are both in the same phase, but the problem is that they are placed at different schooling levels, primary and secondary. The fact that a learning phase is shared by two different schools forms a significant part of this study. Such an arrangement is bound to create challenges, not only in the physical developmental adjustment of the learner, but also socially and academically. DBE (2015) further states that a learner may not be retained more than once in each phase to ensure that the learner stays for the maximum of four years in a phase. A decision of this nature results in schools being obliged to progress some learners to the next grades even if they are not ready. Approximately 48% of learners who pass grade 7 each year reach grade 12 (Van Wyk, 2015).

Reasons cited by Hopwood *et al* (2016) for this high dropout rate, among others, is academic incompetence among learners. This is the second largest contributing factor to this cause and my assumption is that this kind of performance may emanate mainly from poor transition programmes (if any) from primary to secondary school.

1.3.   RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

My observation as a primary school leader has revealed that during the first few weeks after the commencement of the new schooling year in grade 8, most learners lack focus in their adjustment to their studies. There is almost no communication between the two levels of schooling. On the other hand, Neal and Yelland (2014) emphasise that a successful primary to secondary school transition can only be achieved with a combination of strong collaboration between the releasing primary school and the receiving secondary school.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) provides various kinds of academic school support, but there is room for improvement in learner performance. Mahoney (2012) identifies the relationship between primary and secondary school SMTs as a fundamental source of support. During my years in leadership, I found how SMTs are ignorant of their role as a learner support structure, more particularly in secondary schools. This study envisions that the knowledge sharing, and collaborative efforts at both school levels will enhance successful learner transition. This study will explore challenges created by minimal involvement of SMTs in support for learner transition of secondary school teachers, subject differentiation, and physical developmental needs from primary to secondary schools. The expectation is that SMTs should alleviate fear experienced by learners during transition by informing them about the different roles and many other challenges they may encounter. Such deliberation will increase self-confidence about knowing who to approach for support (Horne, 2015). I maintain that there should always be one particular person available, such as the senior teacher of the grade or pastoral leader who is responsible for the general well-being of the learners, to whom learners can bring their initial concerns.

There is also a general perception among the teachers and community members that secondary education is somehow of a higher status than primary education (Hodgkin, Fleming, Beauchamp & Bryant, 2013). This view may seem to have little relation to transition, but Hodgkin *et al.* (2013) argue that if both levels of the education system are not valued equally, this might have a direct impact on learners during transition.

1.4. STUDY PURPOSE

This study's main purpose is to create awareness about numerous challenges experienced by learners who transition from primary school to secondary school. Academic support is a necessity that will inspire confidence in learners and engender motivation to succeed in their studies. This study will encourage schools to pay attention to the learners' well-being and success. Secondary school SMTs and other stakeholders are positioned to provide guidance and support to learners in the process of transition to secondary schools to commence a new life of study as a generation of senior learners in the schooling system for the first time. Parents look up to teachers to help their children succeed in their schooling. The support expected is a very important issue.

1.5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The formulation of research questions that follow give direction to this study.

1.5.1 The primary research question

How do School Management Teams provide academic support for learners who are in transition from primary to secondary schools?

Secondary research questions:

- How do SMTs understand their roles as academic supporters of learners during primary to secondary school transition?

- What strategies do primary school SMTs use to facilitate learner transition at releasing schools?

- What strategies do secondary school SMTs use to facilitate learner transition as the receiving schools?

- Which mechanisms can be used to ensure primary and secondary SMTs work collaboratively to support learner transition?

1.6. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, the use of a case study method as a preferred technique to explore the role played by SMT members in the academic life of learners during transition from primary to secondary schools was inevitable. A qualitative study used semi-structured interviews with individual participants to gather data. Participants were purposively selected to provide rich data. Research questions were derived from the information in literature, educational policies and real everyday situations. Seven SMT members were purposively sampled to participate in the interviews. Interviews were conducted at four different schools (two primary schools and two secondary schools) at a time convenient to the participants. A voice recorder was used during interviews and notes were taken.

1.7. BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Primary to secondary school transition is an academic and social turning point for the adolescents; this transfer across school scenes carries with it changes that can impact positively or negatively on learners (Langenkamp, 2009; Smith, Akos, Lim & Wiley, 2008). McCauley (2010) concludes that a strong relationship between the receiving secondary school and the releasing primary school and a level of cooperation are necessary for the guarantee of effective transition processes.

Evangelou, Taggart, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons and Siraj-Blatchford (2008) state that secondary schools should provide their new learners with help to acclimatise to the school surroundings, relaxed rules, help with learner adaptation procedures, school visits, induction processes, booklets offering sufficient information, encouragement, assistance and support to learners during lessons and with their homework. Kerr (2013) recommends that teachers also need to be developed to enable them to give learners due support during transition.

1.8. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study's findings will assist teachers and SMT members in schools to support learners in transition accordingly and provide information to policymakers in the Department of Education. It will assist departmental officials from the province, districts and circuit levels to take informed decisions when it comes to issues related to learner transition. It is also envisaged that the outcomes of the study will encourage the Department of Education to distribute information about a policy on transition. In addition, there is optimism that this study will add value to the existing literature.

Finally, it is believed that this study will enable everybody involved in the education, be it teachers or SMT members, to make life easy for learners during transition from primary to secondary school.

1.9. THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

1.9.1 Chapter 1: Overview of the study

The first chapter introduces the study background, the problem statement and its purpose for the support of primary school learners transitioning to secondary schools. In addition, the chapter also discusses the rationale behind the study, purpose of the study and research questions.

1.9.2 Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework

The second chapter presents the review of the existing literature on learner transition from primary to secondary schools. Numerous literature reviews focus on the effect of transition on learners' academic performance. The focus of this study, however, is the role of SMTs during the transition of learners from primary to secondary schools. The chapter draws largely on Schlossberg's theory.

1.9.3 Chapter 3: Research methodology

The third chapter outlines the procedure that followed in carrying out the research. It also discusses research design and paradigm, data gathering techniques, trustworthiness of the study and ethical considerations. This qualitative study uses semi-structured interviews as its data collection tool. The purposive selection of a

sample of SMT members aimed at providing rich data at two stages of schooling, that is, primary and secondary public schools.

1.9.4 Chapter 4: Research analysis and findings

In chapter four data, which comprises the findings on how SMTs view and understand, experience and support the challenges experienced by the learners during transition from primary to secondary schools is presented and analysed. The compilation of themes emanate from categories of data which were derived from the interviews. The results of the study are presented in accordance with case study design.

1.9.5 Chapter 5: Findings, recommendations and conclusions

The summary, the findings and the conclusions with reference to the research questions, literature review and the findings of the study are presented in this chapter. A discussion of the limitations and recommendations for further research was offered in this chapter. The findings indicate that SMT members need to be capacitated on how to support learners during transition. There are gaps and lack of knowledge on how selected schools should approach transition and it is recommended that the DBE develop mechanisms which can be used in all the public schools.

1.10. CHAPTER SUMMARY

The first chapter provides the study overview on how learners should be supported during the transition from primary to secondary schools. The sample chosen comprises four schools in proximity as is the norm in the Mogalakwena area. SMTs comprise senior teachers who are expected to plan and implement measures that encourage team efforts to enable learners to perform to their optimum. Transition

forms one of their responsibilities. In this chapter, a brief background and introduction to the problems encountered by the schools concerning transition and the importance of parent and community support to enable learners to transition from one level to the next are discussed. In sum, in this chapter I have discussed the role of SMT members during the transition of learners from primary to secondary school and the impact that transition has on the learners' academic performance.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter has dealt mainly with the introduction to the study. This chapter provides a comprehensive review of literature on SMTs' academic support on the transition of learners from primary to secondary schools; it also focuses on the issues and concerns of the SMT members and the academic support they are supposed to provide for these learners. An immense body of literature exists on research conducted on transition. International scholars, such as Frank (2010), argue how the move of learners from primary to secondary school is an educational milestone that affects learners' lives. In that light, teachers as well as SMTs, in particular, need to prepare and plan thoroughly for this transition process.

This research covers themes that explain how transition is viewed and various ways in which it is understood, planned for and implemented. It is relevant to determine the challenges experienced during the transition phase, particularly from the perspective of its implementation in other countries. The theoretical framework extracted from Schlossberg's transition theory is discussed at the end of this chapter. This theory encompasses the four crucial elements involved in transition, namely, support, situation, self and strategies. These concepts are further addressed as the 4's.

2.2 THE DYNAMICS OF TRANSITION

Transition is a process that requires careful, planning; the SMT is the most suitable component within the school to perform this function. Jones, Paretti, Hein and Knott

(2010) has designed seven steps that should be followed in order to provide a solid platform for making effective transition a reality, which are:

a. The mission statement adopted should value cooperation and collaboration among colleagues from primary and secondary schools.

b. There should be a commitment by teachers to arrange grade 7 learners' visits to secondary school.

c. Teachers from the two phases should arrange for learners from the respective phases to visit one another for observation and discussion of teaching and learning.

d. Details of content coverage should be shared among teachers.

e. Teachers should make decisions about assessment and agreement about transfer of useful data.

f. There should be baseline expectations of learners at the end of the primary stage.

g. Both school sets should have ideas for transitional learning activities running through the primary school's final period into the beginning stages of life in secondary school.

The above-mentioned factors inform groundwork by teachers, with the aim of playing a role in the transitioning of learners. Any barriers on learner transition should be attended to immediately. Planning should be well orchestrated by the teachers, parents/caregivers/guardians and SMTs. Evans *et al.* (2010) suggest that schools should instead have more activities regarding the management of learners' transition than what is currently the case. The process of transition must be managed in a manner that benefits all the learners by creating continuity of learning and therefore

have a positive effect on them. As a result, learner transition calls for the importance of effective planning and appropriate management by SMTs to ensure that learner transfer from primary to secondary schools proceeds without hassles (Evans, George, White, Sharp, Morris & Marshall 2010). This measure will enable curriculum continuity and progression in learners' education.

Communication between parents and teachers is important because access to parental support is primarily valuable during transition from primary to secondary school (Symonds & Galton, 2014). Chen and Gregory (2009) support the idea that parental involvement correlates with learner outcomes. Research found that, learners obtain higher average scores if their parents support them and have higher expectation about education. As a follow-up of the previous argument, Crosnoe (2010) suggests that parents should encourage their children to work hard academically, so that teachers will give the learners more care.

Effective collaboration among secondary and their feeder primary schools is very crucial during the period of transition. A strengthened cooperation between these schools is a necessary feature for effective transition, which is directed towards accomplishing academic performance and universal well-being of the child (Griebel & Berwanger, 2006). Worthwhile contacts should be created between teachers in different schooling levels to ensure that the learner transfer becomes a natural development.

This cooperation should be planned in such a manner that support can be expected by the child to better guarantee his/her chances and opportunities (Griebel & Berwanger, 2006).

Scholars have found out that communication is lacking between or across schools (Etscheidt, 2006). Burns and colleagues (2010) have noted the limited activities on transition at school level. Many schools are not enjoying close interactions between themselves and a large proportion of teachers argue that contact and cooperation do not exist between the two levels, even though in certain cases some exceptions are notable (Burns *et al.*, 2010). This communication breakdown between a secondary school and its feeder school during learner transition has created adjustment difficulties amongst 13 year olds in the United Kingdom (UK) at the beginning of secondary schooling (West *et al.,* 2010). Learners whose ability and self-esteem are lower had more negative experiences during school transition, which culminated in poorer levels in academic scores and of depression because their secondary school teachers have to start from scratch in order to get to the root cause of the problem (West, Sweeting & Young 2010). This kind of a situation has the capacity to produce feelings of irrelevance and anonymity, which is supported by findings that indicate a learner's self-concept plunges over during this period (Darmody, 2008). When the above behaviours overwhelm the learners, performance suffers. Learners will then not be able to perform to their optimum.

In the UK, Burns (2010) observed the variety of important information about the learner which is transferred from primary to secondary schools as follows: consultations

between heads and learners from primary schools a year preceding the transfer, the use of transfer sheets completed by teachers from primary school which include remarks on assertiveness, conduct, attendance, social conditions, special needs and any special capacities or skills, models of work belonging to learners, documented reports and records of learner achievement, together with evaluation exam marks.

In both instances, research indicated a wide inconsistency pertaining to the availability of such material to teachers at secondary schools. Schools differ in their approaches, because teachers from some schools had access to this information whereas in others the information was only made available to departmental heads, assistant teachers where possible, or teachers assigned to work only with special needs learners. In addition to this, there was a great difference in the way that information was applied to place learners to ensure continuity in curriculum delivery and to meet requirements of special needs learners. Generally, the information received from primary schools was abandoned which created a gap in the flow of curriculum for learners. Certain schools did not bother to use information from primary schools; they conducted assessment tasks of their own upon the arrival of learner at secondary school. It was found that most teachers rejected assessment of learners by other teachers. Kazazi, Al-Rashdi and Al-Azri (2015) also found that most principals from secondary schools never use the transfer documents from primary schools, arguing that secondary school teachers are better placed to diagnose and remedy the learners' problems because they have specialised in those subjects.

Secondary school teachers regarded this information from primary schools as unclear and deceptive. Rous, Myers and Stricklin (2007) confirmed that if there are policies that ensure consistent collaboration between schools, there is positive progress. McCauley (2010) considered the strong relations between the receiving secondary schools and transferring primary schools as indispensable in ensuring an effective transition process. Balfanz (2009) and Kinney (2011) agree by indicating that the quality of transition is enriched by teamwork and the sharing of information between the primary and secondary schools. Information sharing and collaboration between a secondary school and its feeder school enhances quality transition and also increases connectedness to the school, which in turn translates to positive transition (Carter, McGee, Taylor, & Williams, 2007; Waters, Cross, & Runions, 2009)

Proper support structures, collaboration, communication and social development efforts between the two schools during the transition period is essential to learner success. These efforts are important in assisting learners to develop high self-esteem particularly in social and academic settings (Scott & Santos de Barona, 2011). During transition periods, learners are expected to cope with changes involving to the culture of the school, ethos and culture, social interactions, organisation of classroom, learning contexts, style of teaching, standards of academic work, learner diversity, discontinuity of curriculum, and the new school's methods of discipline (Dunlop, 2007). For this to be a success, learners will need more specific support from their teachers and SMT members.

Transition is a process that requires building relationship between teachers and the

learners with the aim of supporting these learners. The role played by teachers is very important in the education of the learners and their experience in transition. They are available to provide social and academic support for learner needs in order to experience a successful transition (Hopwood *et al.,* 2016). Some positive transition experiences can partly be attributed to factors external to the learner. When such external experience creates problems, then situational variables such as having a supportive home environment (Rice, Frederickson, & Seymour, 2010), a strong peer network, an older sibling and most importantly accessible teachers in secondary school are identified as facilitating successful transitions (Harris, 2010). According to Hodgkin (2013), learners who are experiencing transition acclimatise quickly when they feel that different structures in the school are interested in their well-being. If teachers provide teaching appropriate to the learners' needs and abilities, such learners will not slip back during the primary to secondary school transition period (Estyn, 2008).

Learners should get support from their teachers during their primary to secondary school transition so that they do not become frustrated when they experience problems, drop in academic performance or even resort to dropping out of school (Fabian, 2007). It is the responsibility of teachers together with the SMTs to give learners support to enable them to focus on their studies during transition. This support should aim at improving the quality of learning. Bru, Stornes, Munthe and Thuen (2010) state that if the learners are well supported, they tend to be positively motivated towards their schoolwork and enjoy a positive experience of social and emotional wellbeing.

2.3 THE BENEFITS OF SUPPORTING LEARNER TRANSITION IN SCHOOLS

There are confirmed reports that moving, changing grades and schools, and leaving friends can cause anxiety for a learner. In order to ensure that learners benefit from this academic switch-over and its accompanying socio-emotional challenges, school support by senior staff members is essential (Hopwood et al, 2016). This support may result in stabilisation of class attendance, positive self-concept and later good performance. Although studies confirm that the above transition is a perfect opportunity for learners to grow and adapt to their new environment, other institutions do not pay attention to this important development at all. Although the transition process might take long, teachers will most likely be willing to support learners. Eventually, learners who are in transition may have to find a way of fitting in with new peer pressure and other challenges they may come across. One of the most important messages to the schools is that staff members need to play their role in the transition of learners.

Greater teamwork between teachers from both the primary and the secondary school is necessary. As explained earlier, some learners may find movement from one learning environment to the other exciting, while to others it may be daunting, (O'Neil, 2013). Yet other learners find their transition experiences to be ambivalent. We must not lose sight of the fact that these learners come from a place of being senior and well-respected to the one in which they are junior and unknown. This experience may cause learners anxious moments. Whatever happens, schools need to create their own strategies for ensuring that transition of these learners is smooth and uninterrupted.

2.4 THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSITION IN SCHOOLS

A large body of research on learner transition suggests that most learners regress in their school academic performance during the transition period (West & Schwerdt, 2012). Some scholars are of the opinion that transition disrupts learning. For example, in their Scotland based study, Hopwood *et al.* (2016) explored the influence transition (which these researchers refer to as transfer) had on learners' educational development. They established that some learner groups like those who initially had problems with schooling, were less motivated or were from families with poor financial backgrounds. Therefore, such learners are vulnerable and likely to underperform during transition to secondary schools. This finding could most likely be the case in some of schools in South Africa.

The intersection between the lives of youth outside the school and their academic performance is repeatedly observed in the progress they make academically. Although not solely of importance, academic achievement is the most pervasive measure of learner success across the transition. Learners who have the greatest difficulty in the transition are those who are not academically prepared and a decrease in grade point average further complicates the transition (Mackenzie *et al.*, 2012).

Issues of curriculum and pedagogy are attributed as significant causes for learner difficulty during transition. For many learners, transition becomes difficult as there is a shift from a child-centered approach and activity-based or experiential classroom, to a more individualised and didactic approach, informed by a different pedagogical ideology (Prosser, 2008). Challenges have also been reported in terms of secondary

school teachers favouring a "fresh start, approach that ignores information passed on by feeder schools, a discontinuity of curriculum content and failure to build on the knowledge the learners have already established in their primary years" (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). Teachers from primary schools are found to offer inadequate or incorrect data about the development of their learners to secondary school teachers (Harris, 2008). The seriousness of such a behaviour is experienced in the lack of background about the learner at secondary school level. If such information were made available, then learner transition would be a success.

International literature on the effects of transition concur that learners often decline in academic attainment because of transition (Galton, 2010). The author proposes that the stabilities and instabilities in academic attainment, their origin, and results should be attended to. For example, Hodgkin (2013) suggests that the disjointedness in the development between primary and secondary school could be associated with the change in the culture between schools, the learner achievement that is not recognised in primary school and the different kind of activities from feeder primary schools where assessment of learners was done. The above factors influence the way learners adjust to their new environments.

2.5 THE CAUSES OF ACADEMIC DECLINE DURING TRANSITION

There is a large and growing body of literature compiled by researchers like Mackenzie *et al.* (2012), Hodgkin *et al.* (2013), Puschner (2010) and Hanewald (2013) which has investigated the causes of academic decline during transition. The main purpose of such studies is to determine the decline in learner performance immediately after

transition. Although several ideas and assumptions are suggested, the reasons for the sources of the decline in performance remains elusive (Hanewald, 2013). West *et al.* (2010) have investigated the drop in learner performance and conclusively stated that it is "inconsistent". However, the literature review on transition indicates that several common factors contributing to the decline in learner achievement are: teacher qualification and content knowledge, communication between primary and secondary schools, socio-economic status, support from family, social adjustment, and the self-efficacy of learners. Although it is outside the scope of this study to explore all these factors in detail, the most two prevalent aspects are teacher qualification and content knowledge and these will briefly be discussed.

2.5.1 The contribution of teacher qualification and content knowledge to learner academic transition

Previous studies have reported that the teachers' qualifications play a significant part in the way learners perform academically (Spaull, 2011). The understanding is that the quality of the teacher, whether measured by experience, content, teacher training and credentials or overall academic skills are strongly associated with how learners achieve in their academic work (Stronge, Ward, Tucker & Hindman, 2007; Fakeye, 2012). Therefore, teachers in the case of this study include SMT members, who include Head of Department, Deputy Principal or Principal. They are regarded as highly experienced in teaching to enhance learner transition to the best of their ability. Once transition is completed, newly transitioned learners will settle in and start performing to the best of their ability.

Stronge, Ward, Tucker, and Hindman, (2007) study on the connection between teacher excellence and achievement of learners in Virginia, United States (US) reported that basic teacher qualifications as stipulated in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) are an important starting point to consider in the critical role played by teachers in learners' education. Stronge *et al*. (2007) indicated that effective teachers were those with higher qualifications. The above argument implies that teachers' qualifications lead to teacher quality and competence, which eventually improve learner performance. In such an environment, I assume, support during transition will be efficient.

In support of the above ideas, the study conducted by Dobbie (2011) on teacher characteristics and learner achievement indicated a considerable variance in the productivity of teachers. For example, Dobbie (2011) found that teachers' academic achievement, leadership, experience and perseverance are associated with learners' gains in their studies. These findings suggest that teacher success can be predicted by their qualifications. Such a finding resonates well with a climate of self-efficacy for willingness to support and develop the learners. This finding creates a breeding ground for transition activities to thrive. Although we acknowledge that the qualifications of teachers have a great influence on learners' achievements, nevertheless there are teachers with fewer qualifications who do well and support learners during times of need.

2.6   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 2.1 shows the theoretical framework developed to guide this study of SMTs' support for learners transitioning from primary to secondary school. This framework on transition involves the following four important factors: support, situation, self and strategies. These concepts originate from Schlossberg's transition theory. Schlossberg addresses these very crucial elements as the 4's.

SUPPORT

➢   Academic

SELF

➢   Special emotional challenges

➢   Vulnerable and poor

➢   Self-efficacy

TRANSITION

SITUATION

➢   Primary and Secondary school systems

STRATEGIES

➢   Motivational talks

➢   Extra curricula activities

➢   Psychological support
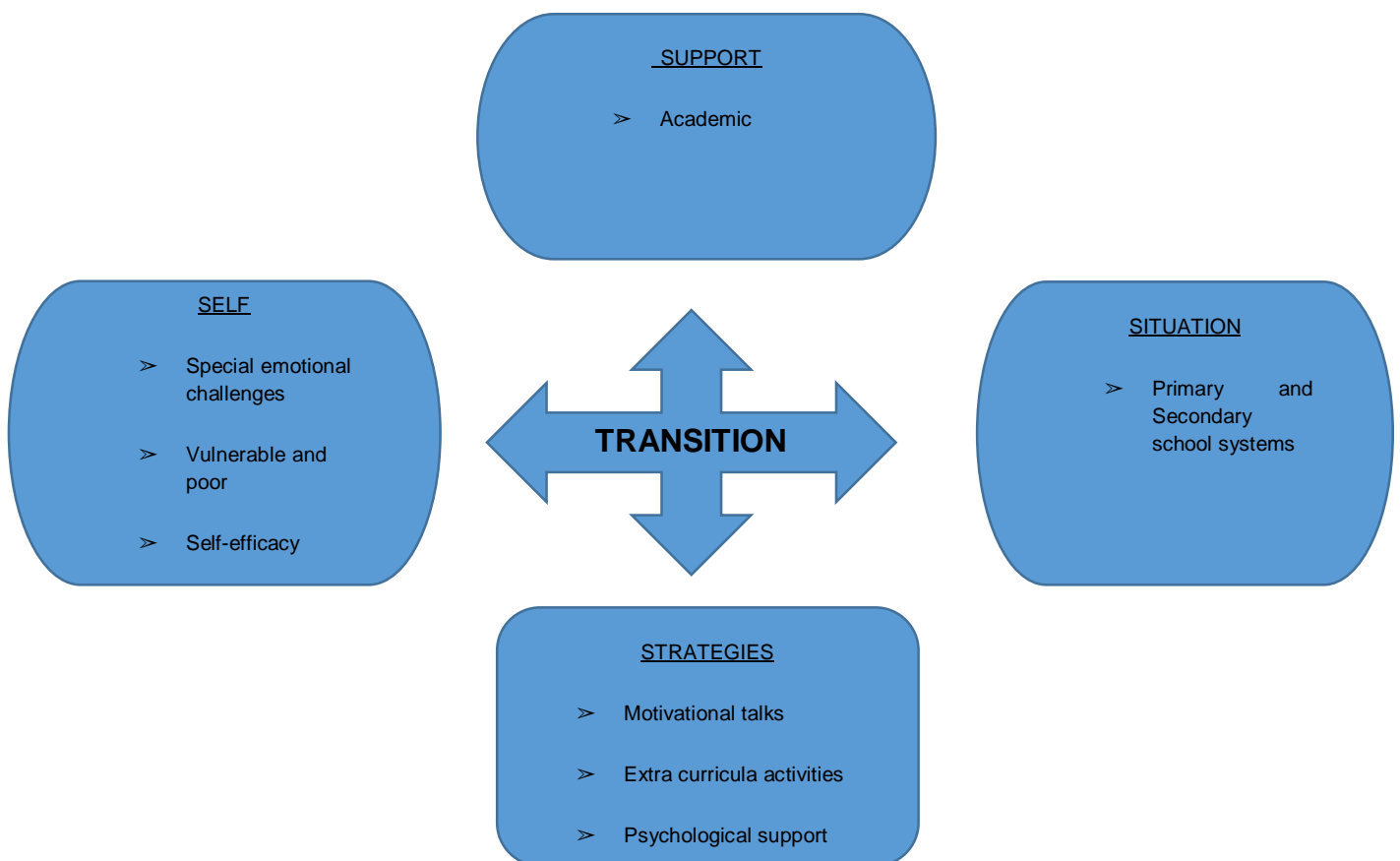
***Figure 1:The theoretical framework for learner transition from primary to secondary schools**.*

For learners, transition from primary to secondary schools is tantamount to engagement with several teachers compared to a few in primary schools and in most cases, exposure to diverse methods of teaching (Kazazi *et al.*, 2015). To assist these learners, there should be a combination of strengths from both primary and secondary approaches of teaching and learning to enhance learners' learning across the

primary/secondary school transition (Harris, 2010). Thus, learners deserve intensive support from parents, peers and both the primary and secondary school teachers.

2.6.1 Support

Academic

Academic support is one aspect that is important at this crucial time when learners are transitioning from primary to secondary school because some learners experience a decline in achievement during this time, which affects dropping out of school (Balfanz, 2009). According to Bottoms and Young (2008), successful transition programmes are characterised by shared commitment to the academic preparation of learners. These authors recognise that for learners to be successful there should be an effective instructional programme and learners should be provided with additional time and support if necessary. To ensure a smooth transition provision should be made for teachers from both primary and secondary schools to discuss the curricular issues by using data about learners to guide curricular revisions.

2.6.2 Situation

Primary and secondary school systems

The SMT members have a huge obligation to create an environment that is conducive for learning and teaching in schools during the transition period. In order to ease the tension in learners, Tarekegne (2015) states that school related factors especially school systems like personnel and procedures can become obstacles that have a negative impact on learners during transition. It was further realised by the author that

some learners develop a negative attitude towards a new school because they always find themselves on the wrong side of the school rules. This happens because the rules and regulations guiding the new school are still strange to them. Tarekegne (2015) concludes by stating that secondary schools should use direct processes to make exceptions when applying policies and procedures of the school to avoid such difficulties and assist new learner registration and learner contributions. Pell (2009) recognises that the ethos and culture of a primary and a secondary school are likely to be different and this can have a negative impact on learners during transition particularly those who are vulnerable. Therefore, primary and secondary schools should relax their rules and regulations to accommodate learners who are in transition in order to help them adjust smoothly to secondary school life.

2.6.3 Strategies

Motivational talks

Whatever strategy is developed in improving primary to secondary school transition, it should always be learner-centred. An important strategy to uplift discouraged and devastated young minds during the difficult time of transition is to motivate them. Kosovich, Flake and Hulleman (2017) confirm that there is clear evidence of motivational decline across levels of schooling; therefore, understanding the critical role of motivating learners during transition is important (Wang & Degol, 2013). In the study, Interdisciplinary Education and Psychology by Chouinard *et al.* (2017) motivation is regarded as an important factor in the schooling process of the learners and it makes a huge contribution to academic achievement during transition. Den Brok (2012), Pianta, Hamre and Allen (2012) and Wentzel (2015) also concur that learners'

relationship with their teachers influence their motivation, which in turn helps them to achieve better in their school work.

Extra curricula activities

The second strategy that might boost the learner academic performance during transition is participation in extra-curricular activities. Learners who participated in two or three extra-curricular activities throughout the school year showed greater improvement in their academic performance than those who participated in no activities at all (Reeves, 2008). Olson (2008) also argues that extra-curricular activities have a positive impact on learners' schooling life. He found that learners registered in fine arts activities had a significantly high attendance rate compared to those learners who never participated at all. Involvement in extra-curricular activities is consistently related to good attendance at school; good attendance is frequently linked to higher scores in academic performance (Olson, 2008).

Psychological support

When learners are transitioning from primary to secondary school they are confronted with adjustment problems due to social and academic differences and increased feelings of loneliness (Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, & Kumar, 2014). These challenges if they are not attended to, may worsen in severity, leading to transition shock (McLachlan & Justice, 2009). These, therefore, call for the provision of psychological support for learners by the SMT. The service of professionals should be outsourced by the SMT to assist the learners accordingly. In support of the above sentiments, Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015) found that if a child is able to socialise with other learners on the campus, the stress level reduces significantly.

Collaboration of programmes

Collaboration of primary and secondary programmes has a huge impact on learner academic performance during the transition period. Progress is assured when there is collaborative planning between the primary and the secondary school (Rous, Myers & Stricklin, 2007). Rous and colleagues also believe that both learners and teachers require time to participate in transition programmes in order to help foster academic progress. In addition, Hanewald (2013) suggests a consistent approach to the curriculum by primary and secondary schools to avoid disparities, which create a didactical gap leading to learner underperformance.

Communication

Through communication, information and common understanding are transmitted from the sender to the receiver (Keyton, 2011). Good communication amongst teachers, schools, parents and learners can help all the stakeholders to have a common understanding of issues related to transition. This will ensure a good transition from primary to secondary schools. Interaction among the primary schools and the secondary schools about learners in transition requires SMTs and involved teachers to converse and allocate time to talk around topics associated to teaching and learning (Miller, 2006). This can be done by holding meetings and making sure that learner profiles are transferred from primary to secondary schools. As elders, teachers have the responsibility to cultivate good communication between themselves and the learners, inside as well as outside the classroom, in order to inspire enthusiasm among learners to learn during transition (Geghamyan, 2015). The first educators of the children are the parents; they need to constantly communicate with the school especially during the transition period in order to obtain information concerning

academic targets to be in a good position to assist their children with their studies more efficiently (Loudováa, Havigerováb & Havigerc, 2014).

2.6.4 Self

Special emotional challenges

Transitions are a challenge for each person; therefore, it can be more difficult for learners with emotional and behavioural challenges. McMillan (2013) states that what makes learners highly emotional is a feeling of unfamiliarity, not knowing what to expect and not knowing what is going on in the relationship with their new teachers. Emotions influence school success. The first step in addressing this challenge is to have intact families because learners from such families enjoy high-quality interaction, which prepares them to better endure traumatic occasions like transition to secondary school (Duchesne, Ratelle, Poitras & Drouin, 2009).

Transition is accompanied by disruption of routine and the need to interact with strange people. This in itself is unsettling and stressful to the young children. Moreover, the workload, academic standards and loneliness also take their toll (Morosanu, Handley & O'Donovan, 2010).

Vulnerable and poor

The shift from the status of senior learners in primary schools to junior learners in secondary schools in a much larger school (Ellerbrok & Kiefer, 2013) creates a feeling of vulnerability among learners (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). Secondly, Hughes et al. (2013) describe low socio-economic status (SES) as a predictor of poor transition to secondary school. Particularly, low SES learners might not experience enough

support from parents and resources from home to enable a positive transition causing early failure at school (Serbin, *et al.*, 2013). SES has an indirect effect on learner achievement because homes and families have provided many learners with decent training to succeed. Those who were not well prepared perform poorly and schools are unsuccessful in adjusting this disadvantage (Mbiti, 2007).

Educational transfers are accompanied by enthusiasm for new beginnings and the chance of learning new things. According to Christopoulou (2016), learners have mixed feelings in transition: they expect to make new friends and benefit from new teachers but also have anxieties of how the society will accept them and panic that they will lose old friends. Consequently, it is important to provide learners with opportunities to articulate a 'story of self' and develop the language to express and think about oneself. This results in the need for a relationship, which is supportive among peers and among learners and teachers

Self-efficacy

In operational terms, self-efficacy is defined as a person's trust that one can execute a specified job successfully. According to Goulão (2010), self-efficacy is related to the belief that everyone has to evaluate their abilities to perform a given task successfully. This concept will then have an impact on how one is going to approach things and the effort that is going to be required for the task to be completed. A learner who is transitioning from primary to secondary with high self-efficacy becomes motivated and pays serious attention to the schoolwork (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Consequently, such learners experience less problems during transition. On the contrary, learners with low self-efficacy become procrastinators. Kaufman, Agars

and Lopez-Wagner (2008) conducted a study on procrastinators and found that they do not perform well in their academic work because they are not confident enough to apply useful approaches while starting and completing tasks. Ultimately, these procrastinators do not cope with the dynamics of transition and as a result, fail or dropout.

2.7   CONCLUSION

The literature review revealed that learners who are transitioning from primary to secondary schools are faced with serious challenges, which affect their academic performance. Literature also revealed that some learners do not struggle a lot but others experience problems to such an extent that they drop out of school because of the frustration, which comes along with transition. It has also been found that some countries have plans in place where senior staff members have to ensure that programs are implemented to help learners transit smoothly from grade 7 to grade 8, or any other movement related to the above.

The chapter that follows addresses the research methodology and procedures to be followed when collecting data.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

An exposition of what transition is and how it affects the learners' schooling experience was done in the previous chapter. Many researchers have argued that primary to secondary school transition requires considerable support. Recent studies have revealed how vulnerable and poor learners face the most challenges during the process of transition between schools.

This chapter explains the processes involved in the selection of participants for the interviews, which took place at the selected schools. A qualitative study was undertaken guided by an interpretative approach. There is a paradigm shift in knowing that the element of care is important in serving our own learners. By digging deep into participants' responses, participants' physical expressions also added to the rich data gathered in this study. Such expressions may not be vocalised as it is the norm in the African culture. Participants in this study related their experiences regarding decisions they took in an effort to understand primary to secondary school learner transition. I was interested in understanding the perceptions that SMTs hold about learners who are transitioning from primary to secondary schools by having conversations with the participants selected for this study.

3.2 RESEARCH SITE

Participants in this study include SMT members at primary and secondary schools. Normal school progression in the South African education system allows learners to progress in phases. There are four phases in the system: Foundation Phase (grades

1-3), Intermediate Phase (grades 4-6), Senior Phase (grades 7-9), Further Education, and Training Phase (grades 10-12).

The current study focuses on the transition from the primary to secondary school. There are 147 primary schools and 105 secondary schools in Mogalakwena District, Limpopo Province. Limpopo Province, formerly, Northern Province, is South Africa's northern most province bordered by Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Botswana, Mpumalanga, Gauteng and North-West provinces. Polokwane is its provincial capital.

Two primary schools and two secondary schools were selected from the 33 schools in the Mokopane Circuit, which falls under the Mogalakwena District to participate in this research. The selection of these schools was informed by their situatedness and proximity to my workplace. It was convenient for me to travel to these schools after work to collect data without disrupting teaching and learning activities.

3.3   RESEARCH DESIGN

The direction of the study is determined by a plan drawn by the researcher called the research design. The research design's intention is not to generalise the findings, but to explore the phenomenon with a certain specificity. The phenomenon explored in this research is the transition between the schools, bearing in mind the care we have been exposed to as Africans. This exploration took the form of qualitative participant interviews. Thereafter, data collected in the form of interviews were analysed and

interpreted to give meaning to the experiences. This qualitative study utilised the multiple case study approach explained by McMillan and Schumacher (2010).

According to Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorensen (2006), the case study is rooted in real life and can offer an abundant and comprehensive explanation of a phenomenon. Although the case study can provide restrictions about the number of participants to be interviewed, data provided are reliable as reasonably possible (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this case, study design I interviewed eight participants. This process also allowed me to grasp, understand and define the intricacies of real life practices (Jacobs, Razavieh & Sorensen, 2006). Jacobs and colleagues (2006) understand case studies to be deeply rooted in real life and to provide very detailed information about the phenomenon. Yin (2011) argues that multiple sources can be used to collect data when using case study design, such as document analysis, interviews, observations and focus groups. Due to rich data engendered during face-to-face, semi structured interviews, I decided to use this type of interview as a data collection tool.

3.4   SELECTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) describe purposeful sampling as one in which individuals or the participants are selected by the researcher on the basis that they will yield rich data about a phenomenon or the topic. Members of the SMT on both sides (i.e., primary and secondary schools) were purposively selected by virtue of them working with departing learners (primary) and new learners (secondary). SMT refers to those teachers who on daily basis work closely with the principal in the school management.

The SMT may include the Deputy Principal, Heads of Departments, Senior Teachers, Master Teachers or co-opted members from the staff.

Therefore, in this study I interviewed two (2) principals from primary schools and two (2) from secondary schools. In addition, two (2) SMT members from the same primary schools and two (2) from secondary schools were interviewed. The two groups of participants both have direct experience with learners who are about to leave primary schools and those who have just entered secondary schools. All these schools are rural, and in most cases learners who are transitioning from grade 7 in primary school A to grade 8 in secondary school B stay in the same village. The participants' efforts and determination to prepare grade 7 learners for transition to secondary school is the subject of this study.

3.5 EPISTEMOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY

Maree (2008) and McMillan and Schumacher (2010) describe a paradigm as specific procedures involved in the research process or types of research design. Willis (2007) summarises it as an outline that directs research practices in a field, and that it comprises of a set of concepts, expectations and ideals in addition to actions that establish approaches of observing the truth. This embraces the knowledge of the researcher, the procedure including the epistemology employed in investigating the SMTs' support for learners transitioning from primary to secondary schools (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009). The epistemological view of an interpretive paradigm afforded me an opportunity to take a powerful position and witness what the participants involved

viewed as reality so that I was able to learn and advance an understanding of the participants and their world (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

3.6   DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Semi-structured interviews were used as a tool for collecting data in this study. These interviews require people participating in the research to respond verbally to a set of scheduled questions but also allow for the follow-up questions and explanation of answers (Creswell *et al.,* 2010). Before the interview started, rapport was established between the participants and myself. For example, I introduced myself in a humble way by also explaining my whereabouts. This ignited interest on the side of the participants, as they wanted to know exactly where I stay and work. I used the aspect of proximity to my advantage. At times participants may become suspicious of researchers if they do not know them.

General questions on participants' biographical data, sparked questions that related well with the interview questions. The whole process was meant to ease tension between us. I used the interview to delve into the opinions and experiences of my participants. In an effort to deal with the unanticipated answers, I probed with the intention of deepening responses to questions. In addition, I used reflective summary, to get more understanding of the participants' responses, for example, by asking them how they benefited from the interview encouraged them to verbalise their ideas, thoughts and feelings as rich, desired responses (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2014). One of the advantages of interviews, says Merriam (2009), is to unearth and interpret another person's thoughts. It creates an environment in which interviewees

share their opinions, understandings and assessments so that the picture of phenomenon or the event can be clearly drawn. Another advantage of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews is the quality of each response. I used this aspect to my advantage in order to capture as much information as possible.

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) encourage the use of hand-written notes and the transcription of recordings. In this study, recordings were transcribed as soon as possible while the interview was still fresh in my mind. All eight (8) the participants were interviewed at their workplaces. A departmental policy dictates that interviews should be conducted after normal working hours. The selection of an orderly and quiet venue without interruptions was ideal for this purpose.

Analysis of data is the process whereby transcripts, interviews, field notes and other resources that I accumulated to allow me to come up with the findings are searched and arranged in a systematic way (Leedy *et al.,* 2010). This study used inductive qualitative data analysis to analyse data. The qualitative analysis of data is mainly a process of organising data into groups and finding patterns and connections among the groupings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It involves a relatively logical procedure of coding, classifying, and understanding data to offer clarifications of the only phenomenon of interest, which is subjective in nature (Leedy *et al.*, 2010). In this study, I have analysed data using the steps that follow as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2010):

- Data collection (fieldwork): data was collected through interviews from the participants. Questions were prepared in a manner that would enable me to further probe if the need arises to get more information from the participants.

- Data organising: this is the process of cutting and sorting information. I cut and sorted information from the participants' responses, considering only what was relevant to the study.

- Data transcription into segments: I transcribed data from the audio tape word for word (i.e., verbatim). Furthermore, I read the transcribed data and separated it into important logical parts.

- Data coding: the data segments were marked with descriptive words, codes, or special identifying names (Creswell *et al.*, 2010).

- Data categorisation: this is the process of selecting sections of data and putting them together in their appropriate category.

- Developing patterns: patterns are valuable tools for structuring and capturing knowledge in many applicable areas.

- Data preparation: This involves editing, coding, entry and cleaning of data; presentation refers to the various forms in which data can be presented depending on the type of the data collected.

3.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CREDIBILITY

Trustworthiness in qualitative studies refers to validity and reliability of a study. However, the concept trustworthiness is more obscure in qualitative studies, as it takes

various forms. It is important to explain these concepts to enable me to establish whether this study's findings are credible, transferable, dependable and conformable. Firstly, credibility implies that the study results are believable. In order to strive for the study's credibility all members of the SMT qualify to be participants regardless of the different positions they hold in the SMT. Secondly, the results should be transferable. Transferability means the level at which the qualitative research results can be generalised or conveyed to another similar background or setting. To ensure that the study can be transferable, current and future researchers should be able to compare my study to similar cases across research sites and draw upon similarities and differences in findings (Schwandt, 2007). To achieve this, I categorically defined and explained what transition is and the impact it makes on the learners academically, socially, psychologically and emotionally. The third concept is conformability. Conformability of the study is there to verify that the participants shape the findings more so than they are shaped by a qualitative researcher. Finally, there is dependability, which establishes whether research study's findings are consistent and repeatable. To enhance dependability, I tried to justify the differences I found between the findings and the literature (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

Trustworthiness of a study means, for example, the use of multiple data sources. If different sources produce data, which points to similar conclusions, one will be more confident in the outcomes (Creswell *et al.,* 2010). In this study Principals, Deputy Principal and Heads of Department were interviewed in order to get opinions from different sets of participants about the same phenomenon. Credibility means that the results are more believable after the researcher has used techniques such as member checking and triangulation. Member checking means verification of the researcher's

understanding of what s/he has observed (Creswell *et al.,* 2010), while triangulation refers to the comparison of various sources of evidence so that the correctness of the data or phenomena can be determined (Briggs *et al.,* 2012).

According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2014) trustworthiness means the level at which an instrument measures what it planned to measure. Creswell *et al.* (2010) indicates that instead of using the term validity, researchers should use words like conformability, trustworthiness, transferability and verification in qualitative research. To make the research data valid, a voice recorder was used in recording the interviews for accuracy in data gathering. This process has ensured that the researcher does not miss on any information that might prove very important to the research. An audit trail is attached as an annexure to provide proof of which documents used during the research process.

3.8   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of obtaining ethical, approval and eventually, clearance is to ensure that participants are not harmed during the process of collecting data. It furthermore ensures that the research will be conducted as stipulated and if there is a change in the research protocol, further approval should be sought from the ethics committee before data are collected. This process is essential in that human beings are involved as participants in the research, and therefore their rights have to be respected. Participants are able to withdraw from the research process if they are aggrieved or dissatisfied with what is happening. The Limpopo Department of Education allowed me to enter the four schools under its jurisdiction in the Mogalakwena District, Mapela

circuit. When requesting permission from schools, I attached a copy of the letter from the DBE allowing me to conduct the research.

Before participants were provided with consent forms, I gave a brief explanation of the aims and purpose of the study. Same information was disclosed in the letter of consent to the participants. Oral explanation of the contents of the consent letter allowed sufficient time for questions. The consent letter is a document that contains information that opens an important relationship between a willing participant and an 'anxious' researcher. Participants feel confident if they know if the information they are disclosing is handled confidentially. I describe this document as a 'passport' to the impending qualification. In this study, the participants were requested to sign the consent form. Thereafter, arrangements were made with individual participant for appropriate times and places in the school for interviews to be conducted.

Anonymity is one of the most important aspects during the research process. Wiles, Graham, Heath and Charles (2008) state that anonymity refers to putting information in a way that will conceal or hide the identity of the participant who gave the information. Pseudonyms were used to maintain the anonymity of schools and the participants. The report as presented in Chapter 5 has been presented in a way that did not reveal individual participants while not allowing for information distortion.

3.9 CONCLUSION

In chapter three I deliberated on the research methodology applied to obtain information from the participants. I explained the research design, described the site where the research was conducted and the way in which the participants were selected and sampled for the study. The epistemological view of the interpretive paradigm and the data collection technique used were discussed. To ensure the study is trustworthy I included aspects such as credibility, conformability, dependability and transferability in my discussions. I concluded this chapter by indicating the importance of ethical issues that need to be considered to ensure the safety and anonymity of the participants.

In the next chapter I discussing the presentation and analysis of data collected. The chapter also covers the study results based on the themes that appeared. Information extracted from the deliberation by interviewees is included to support my discussions.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter deliberated on the research methodology, the instrument used in the study and research design. The chapter also clarified the research sample and the protocol for the analysis of data. The data presented in this chapter is about the support provided by the Principals and SMT members to those newly registered learners coming from primary school. Transcription of interviews was done; coding, analysis and interpretation of data were also done. The study comprised of participant SMTs of two primary schools and two secondary schools. The SMTs constitute the HoDs, Deputy Principals and Principals; only two members per school were invited to participate in the interviews.

Table 1: Biographical data of the participants

Designation	School	Pseudonym	Gender	Experience	
				Teaching	Management
Deputy Principal	Primary 1	Hail	Male	28	15
Principal	Primary 1	Rain	Male	29	24
HoD	Primary 2	Mist	Male	23	7
Principal	Primary 2	Drizzle	Female	27	10
HoD	Secondary 1	Fog	Female	24	5
HoD	Secondary 2	Shower	Female	32	15
Principal	Secondary 2	Dew	Female	29	14

Table 4.1 above illustrates the participants' teaching experience and the period they have spent in managerial positions. These figures reflect the exposure participants

had as members of the SMTs. Being in a managerial position presents an advantage of enabling a person to be capable to plan, organise, lead and control systems and people. This expectation is considered pertinent to this study. Their different experiences enabled them to provide rich data depending on the position the person is occupying; this consequently adds more value and credibility to this study.

4.2   DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Analysis of data refers to the process in which interviews were recorded, field notes were captured, and other resources that are accumulated to arrive at the outcomes are systematically searched and arranged (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). In this study, comparison was made between the newly acquired data and the present groupings from the collected literature. Coding of data from the interview was done by sorting **participants' responses into comparable thoughts, ideas or themes, which were** discovered.

Table 2:Themes and findings

Themes	Findings
Theme 1: Understanding the changing environment	Change of the environment has a great impact on the learner's life
Theme 2: Challenges associated with learner transition	SMTs' knowledge of transition plays a major role in supporting the learners
Theme 3: Associating learner transition with performance	Transition has a great impact on learners academic performance
Theme 4: Strategies for managing learner transition	Strategies used by SMTs in supporting the learners in transition

4.2.1 Discussion of themes and findings

The above-mentioned themes aimed at understanding and interpreting participants' responses. After reviewing the literature in chapter 2, a few ideas emerged. It came to my attention that what emanated from these ideas led to the themes mentioned below: a) Understanding the changing environment; b) Challenges associated with learner transition; c) Associating learner transition with performance; and d) strategies for managing learner transition.

4.2.2 Understanding the changing environment

Participants describe learner transition from primary to secondary schools, 'as a change of environments'. Firstly, there is a change in the learning environment. There are two phases of transition, namely, the academic achievement and social adjustment. The following discussion explains the two phases mentioned above. Academic transition means the learners' movement from the closing year at primary school to embark on their first year of secondary schooling career (Mackenzie, 2012), while social adjustment implies the ability to fit into a new social group and make new friends during transition (Hanna & Topping, 2013). This transition or movement means that the learner needs a helping hand in the form of support as an enabler for their development and progress. According to Harris (2010), transition has an effect on all the learners to a varying degree, therefore they all need to be given support during this trying time in their academic life. These are experiences of a growing child who would, in one way or the other, need adult support and care in order to walk this extremely difficult journey from primary to secondary schools.

4.2.2.1 Academic transition

Transition is perceived internationally to be the cause of a decline in learner achievement. Learners are affected by transition in their ability to perform to their optimum. Currently all SMTs from secondary schools are concerned that the learners are unable to perform basic skills such as reading and writing. This means that they unable to read, write nor numerate at the level of their peers. This inability affects teaching and learning at secondary schools. It also places an additional burden on the secondary school teachers because they have to ensure that these learners improve and succeed. Rice *et al.* (2011) explain that readiness for transition is multi-dimensional and includes aspects of academic performance, behavioural involvement and perception of school. Although behavioural and perception of school, combined with the school climate are also important aspects during the transition period, they will unfortunately not be discussed in this study. Participants explained how the DBE has excessively relaxed the promotion requirements in the senior phase by lowering the pass requirements. This change makes transition more difficult for both the learners and the teachers. One of the HoDs from a secondary school mentioned:

> *Most of them come without knowing how to write their own names. They cannot even read in grade 8. It is frustrating.*

According to the DBE's policy on promotion requirements in grades 7 – 9, learners must satisfy the following requirements to be promoted to the following class: they should offer nine subjects and comply with promotion requirements in eight of those subjects (National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grade R - 12, 2012). Contrary to the statement above, DBE has issued out National Assessment Circular no. 1 of 2017 which

stipulates that where a learner has satisfied all the requirements in respect of promotion from one grade to the next (referring to grade 7, 8 and 9), except where a learner has not attained a level 3 (40%) in Mathematics and therefore has to be retained, such a learner must be condoned in Mathematics. This applies that the Mathematics mark is condoned and the learner can be promoted to the next grade, if all other pass requirements are met. She continued to say:

> *This policy on progression is bad. It is a serious challenge because it does not work for us in secondary schools. We inherit problems of primary schools.*

SMT members who have the final say in the learner progression are obliged to promote undeserving learners to the next class even though they have failed Mathematics. If such learners happen to be in grade 7 and are progressed to grade 8, they are already at risk of failing to adapt to the next difficult phase of learning. This experience poses a challenge that will affect transition negatively. Consequently, learner experiences and policy content are two aspects that do not complement one another. It also means that these learners are not academically suited to be in next grade.

Social adjustment means learners adjust to the new environment by socialising with their peers and knowing their teachers. During this transition experience, participants say that this kind of adjustment involves making new friends and being exposed to new teachers. This is a completely new world for the learner who is promoted from primary to secondary school. Learners need social guidance in this regard because they might find themselves in a negative peer group. This negativity may lead them

astray; and that means dropping out of school. At this stage, learners are easily influenced. Most learners find primary to secondary school transition the main challenge. This milestone can yield a mixture of reactions of satisfaction and anticipatory anxiety, meaning that some learners might experience a feeling of fulfilment and uneasiness, which might unsettle them. A participant attested to the fact that learners need support during transition by saying:

> *Leaners move from primary school where they have been taken care of by their teachers, where they are monitored throughout the whole day to secondary school where they are left on their own most of the time. Some learners then become lost in the process. They need someone to give them direction.*

The principal expressed the concern of how care should be taken in monitoring and guiding these learners when they enter the new environment. Mentoring implies that an adult, in this instance, SMTs, share whatever knowledge they have in reaching out to the learners to assist them to perform to their maximum potential. It calls for intervention on the part of the two schools, the essence of which is to cooperate and work together to guide the learner.

Some of the important findings about learners who are placed in an unfamiliar environment is that it becomes somewhat overwhelming and causes emotional fearfulness as well as a drop in educational attainment (Akos, 2010). The newness of the surroundings makes the learners uncomfortable when they are transferred from a school with a small enrolment to a school with very high enrolment. It becomes even more challenging to vulnerable learners. This transition involves a movement from

small premises to a large one, with complex infrastructure. The possibilities are that these environments create 'proxy shock' or 'temporary shock' to newly registered learners. Sometimes the existence of structures such as laboratories, libraries, computer rooms and staffrooms are strange to them. To this end, a participant from a secondary school said:

Learners in grade 8 spend the first few weeks running around the buildings during the exchange of periods, which results in them getting late for the next class because they are unfamiliar with the school premises.

The above utterances concur with the understanding that the learners in transition expect to get support from the receiving school to adapt to their new environment. To some learners it takes a short spell, but to other learners it means there could be lack of exposure to an environment as different as this one.

4.2.2.3 Challenges associated with learner transition

There is limited knowledge on how SMT members should manage learner transition. None of the selected schools has a policy on learner transition to guide schools on how to orientate the arriving group of learners to their new environment. The school's inability to orientate these learners delays their adjustment to the new school. Consequently, the impression I get is that schools do not prioritise their role in supporting new learners. Learner transition is taken for granted, because schools do not regard it as a legal hazard if not done. Meanwhile, there is a lack of proper planning and management in expectations of receiving new learners from primary schools.

There is a gap existing between the learners departing from primary and those that arrive at secondary schools. This transition can negatively affect learning, as it involves the learners' social, emotional and physiological changes. A well-planned transition programme should be considered for all the learners, not only those who are "at risk" and diverse, but for all the learners together with those who perform well in the primary school environment (Hopwood *et al.,* 2017). It goes without reason that teachers should aim at supporting all these learners and understand their wellbeing much better in order to help them adjust to their new environment.

A secondary school participant reported that there is an element of improvisation with regard to assisting learners in this regard. She said:

> *We really don't have a committee responsible for transition; all we have are supporting committees like, the transfer committee and the School Based Support Team* (hereafter SBST)*. The SBST for example identifies learners who have barriers in the learning process and come forge some means to help them. That's all what we have.*

The absolute reliance only on the SBST during learner transition is not going to be of much help because the SBST emanates from White Paper 6 which deals mainly with inclusive education. Early in the academic year, learners might underperform due to a number of factors that might also require intervention later in the year. In my opinion, it would be better to prevent a situation where intervention strategies are required to improve learner performance. In addition, there are times when a learner's performance can be directly attributed to a mismatch between his/her choice of school and the school's organisational structures. Schools should be well prepared to respond to challenges of this nature. This will require that schools should identify the

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groups of learners who are most at risk and support them. Threats of slow adaptation will result in slow performance, which will pave the way for underperformance. The likelihood exists that such learners might drop out of school.

In support of the explanation above, one of the participants said:

> *We help those who have some challenges as time goes by. There is no policy or a piece of paper pertaining to transition at our school. I think the Department of Basic Education must come up with a policy, which will make schools to have something in common when it comes to learner transition.*

Primary to secondary school transition should not be underestimated. Both the learners and their teachers experience enormous challenges. SMTs who are supposed to give a hand also experience unexpected challenges. Education Review Office (2015) perceives the transition period as a starting phase for adolescence. At the same time, the transition period becomes a challenge for SMTs because academic, social, emotional and physiological changes will also be taking place simultaneously.

Burns (2010) supports the idea that the duty for dealing with transition is often left to specific teachers. Nevertheless, teachers around the world state that some challenges communicate to problems that are omnipresent and are not restricted particularly to the period of transition. For example, the non-availability of resources and inadequate access to current technology is a standing infrastructural problem. The lack of technological equipment in schools becomes a limitation to SMTs when they support

the learners. Teachers might fail to access some information from the internet for enrichment. In addition to this, a participant said:

> *We experience challenges when we support learners. Some of the learners have long-standing problems, which emanate from primary schools, so it becomes a mammoth task to address them. Problems like being unable to read and write are time consuming for teachers at secondary schools. If teachers take time to address such problems, they start to lag behind the pacesetters and work schedules.*

Most learners transitioning from primary to secondary school are at an adolescent stage. During this phase in their lives, Martinez, Graves, Peters-Myszak and Nellis (2011) maintain potential turmoil and difficulty prevails. It involves multiple factors that affect the socio-emotional and behavioural functioning of adolescents and they maintain peers, teachers and parents' support is vital in modelling teenagers' lives

These are the views of the participant:

> *These learners need an intense support in deed. Remember that they are also in an adolescence stage. Therefore, SMT members need to support them so that they remain focused to their schoolwork.*

Notwithstanding the fact that these learners have challenges, support from their parents is not always satisfactory. When parents are called to the school, they fail to arrive, so it frustrates the teachers. A participant said:

> *The biggest challenge that we have in supporting some of these learners is the lack of cooperation from the parents. Those learners whose parents come when they are called to the school experience a great*

adjustment and learning improvement because these parents know that they have to assist them with their schoolwork. The most difficulties arise with child-headed families and learners who stay with their grandparents.

In addition, another participant said:

One other challenge is that some of our learners need intense support programs in order to cope academically. What becomes a problem is that our teachers did not study courses which address learners with special needs. Some parents worsen the problem by denying the fact that their children need to be enrolled at special schools

The above-mentioned response is associated with the need for services of external agencies that have to be allocated to the schools for the purpose of supporting. SMTs and class teachers alone find it extremely difficult to address every single challenge the school may encounter. All the schools need the support of social workers, psychologists, law enforcers and many other stakeholders to volunteer to help the teachers to improve learner behaviour, which is the cause of their poor performance.

4.2.2.3 Associating learner transition with school performance

Primary to secondary school transition is a significant crossroad in the learning life of the youth. These learners get transferred from a small classroom which is self-sufficient to a large, more varied school with amplified anticipations of free academic performance and less teachers' support (Hanewald, 2013)

A participant said:

> *Yes. They really need support because primary school give the learners too much. When they go to secondary school there is a little bit of academic independence. This independence enables them to interact with their new classmates and cultivate new friendships in a totally new environment. If they are left alone they might go astray.*

Transition creates a completely new world of change an experience for the affected learners. Important changes are also encountered in the peer group, which may create worry about social acceptance and may often damage self-esteem, lead to falling educational performance and increase nervousness and despondency levels (Frey, Ruchkin, Martin & Schwab-stone, 2009; Marston, 2008).

Another participant puts more emphasis on the above-mentioned idea by saying:

> *These learners are going to face a different world out there. They are going through a journey with different peer groups, different teachers in a different environment. Even their life style is going to change. Therefore, these people need enough academic support.*

Participants accept their role and responsibilities in supporting the learners. Their ideas are also in line with National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996, which states that collaboration between the principal the SMT and the SGB should ensure that the teaching and learning is of quality in the school. The quality of learning outcomes is the responsibility of all the teachers in the school. Such cooperation, if well managed, can produce excellence if learners are transitioned responsibly in schools. Learning support should be a collective effort by the teachers, learners and their parents.

A participant explained that they try to prepare their grade 7 learners academically. She also commented that:

> *I make sure that programmes are in place, learner profiles are compiled to enable me identify those who are vulnerable. Strategies are developed and also followed to help learners who need remedial support.*

Participants agreed that when these learners transition to secondary schools, they gain some independence, which may overwhelm them. Some learners misunderstand this independence to be an opportunity to play truant and bunk classes, whereas others relax and pay less attention to their schoolwork, which ultimately influences their academic performance negatively or positively. A reasonable number of the learners know what their responsibilities are to learn.

4.2.2.4 Strategies for managing learner transition

Quality learning environment is a crucial element that can be assured by the ability of teachers to support learners. The support that teachers give to learners contributes to a constructive motivational attitude towards their schoolwork and to emotional and social wellbeing (Bru, Stornes, Munthe & Thuen, 2010).

A participant said:

> *They really need support, because they have been used to a certain life style and now things have changed. They need an elderly person like SMT members to guide them on how to adapt to this new life. They also*

need educational support by involving specialists to help them boost their performance.

Mahoney (2012) has acknowledged that constructive relations between primary and secondary school teachers is the main source for support. This suggests that there should be a close relationship between the secondary school and the primary feeder school. SMTs are expected to take a lead in this regard. An SMT participant agrees:

If there can be a very good relationship amongst parents, primary and secondary school teachers, I think, most of the challenges can be solved.

The Guardian (2015) mentions other less intensive ways of exposing primary school learners to the experience of the secondary school environment. One strategy has to do with the creation of a collaborative environment between the two levels of schools, which is essential to learner development during transition.

The above idea was supported by a participant who emphasised:

I think we need to work together with grade 7 teachers to make it a point that when these learners come to secondary we know what they have been doing in their final year at primary school.

One of the strategies used to manage transition involves SMT members who should ensure that there are regular meetings held with the purpose of identifying teachers responsible to support learners in transition. This will address the concerns raised by some teachers requesting guidelines from departmental authorities (Burns *et al.,* 2010).

Another participant has the following viewpoint:

My view in addressing this issue is that there should be clear policy directives. The implementation of the policy should from time to time be monitored and supervised. This will help us manage transition efficiently and effectively.

Parental involvement in this case is very crucial in facilitating the work of SMT members. Those learners who are truant are easily guided to improve if parents become involved in supporting them. A participant said:

For those learners who don't have support at home because of being orphans, or those whose parents don't live with them we make sure that in the afternoon they stay behind to do their home works under the supervision of certain teachers.

The above-mentioned comment reiterates the importance of respecting the seven roles of the teacher: the controller, the prompter, the resource, the assessor, the organiser, the participant and the tutor.

4.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented data and analysed it. One of the important ways of organising large chunks of information was by using a thematic approach to data analysis. In addition, the information gathered from the participants was interpreted. Participants need guidelines from department officials to enable them to support learners who are transitioning from primary to secondary schools. Teachers must have a voice in the formulation of the above-mentioned policy. This role is important, as it enables learners to adjust to their new environment easily. This adjustment is a precursor for

good academic performance. The main aim of the interviews was to understand how the SMTs support the learners who find themselves in an unfamiliar environment. They were respected, well cared for and regarded as seniors in the previous schools, and now they are junior. This shift in status feels like a demotion. A discussion of the themes emerged from the study. Themes discussed in this chapter are: (a) understanding the changing environment, (b) challenges associated with learner transition, (c) associating transition with performance and (d) strategies for managing learner transition.

One of the major findings revealed by this study is that the learners need an intense support program during transition because the absence thereof might create serious harm to their schooling. The fifth chapter focuses on the conclusion and recommendations based on the outcomes of the study.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

A summary emerging from the findings of this study occupies a great deal of arguments in this chapter. This summary refers to the research questions, literature review and the findings. The drive to conduct this study emanates from an exploration of the experiences and views of the SMT on how learners are supported during transition from primary to secondary school.

The fifth chapter summarises the contents of the research design and methodology, the findings deriving from empirical data, summary from literature findings, and synthesis of the findings originating from research questions, conclusion and recommendations for further research.

5.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This purpose of this is to create awareness about the importance of managing and supporting learners during transition from primary to secondary school. These are learners moving from the primary (grade 7) to secondary schools (grade 8), and therefore their journey is unknown. In order for the learners to acclimatise easily to secondary school life, develop holistically and prosper academically, they have to be supported. All stakeholders: SMTs, teachers, parents, peers, DBE and the community at large will be empowered and encouraged by this study to play a significant role in supporting those learners who are transitioning from primary to secondary schools.

5.3 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The design followed in this research is a qualitative case study. The limitations encountered during the research were related to the low number of people interviewed (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). However, the findings emanating from this study will not be generalised to similar environments. I had an enviable opportunity to capture and give the description of the complexity of real life practices by interviewing experienced senior school managers (Jackobs, Razavieh & Sorensen, 2006). The face-to-face, semi-structured interviews has afforded me an opportunity to meet the participants in their school environments (Yin, 2011).

In this qualitative study, I managed to accumulate data from participants at their usual environment, in this case, a school as a teaching-learning area, to give logic to meanings they attribute to the phenomena. I took the advantage of using an interpretative approach and made conceited efforts to understand the meanings attached to the way participants act, believe, decide and add value to their social world. Participants in this study have expressed their experiences regarding decisions they have taken with the aim of understanding primary to secondary school learner transition. Some of the participants were unaware that what they were doing is beneficial to the learners in transition. They tend to confuse their activities with ordinary 'orientation', which is a once-off programme.

With the same objective in mind, SMTs were made to understand that transition takes place over a longer period and that it includes orientation. I was humbled by the participants' willingness to participate in this study. I was interested in understanding

the SMTs' perceptions about their plans in supporting the learners who are transitioning from primary to secondary schools.

5.4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS EMANATING FROM EMPIRICAL DATA

This section aims at emphasising the central outcomes of this study stated in the previous chapter and is laid out in the manner that had followed the three research sub-questions that are underpinning the study as follows:

5.4.1 Strategies that primary school SMTs use to facilitate learner transition at the releasing schools

Participants indicated the need for primary schools to put more effort in supporting learners during transition. In trying to address this challenge, some primary schools hand over learners' profiles to secondary schools where their learners have been admitted in order to guide the receiving schools on how to start assisting the new learners. As part of this strategy most participants said that their primary schools organise farewell functions where speakers are invited for motivational reasons, but also to prepare the grade 7 learners for grade 8 classes at secondary schools. These speakers, among others, are requested to include issues such as bullying, peer pressure and many other challenges these newly admitted learners might encounter at secondary schools.

There was also a consensus from the deliberations made by the participants that they create awareness on the magnitude of work that comes with secondary school life. They all indicated that learners are supported simply because during this period they

do not only experience academic transition but also physical, social, environmental and many other changes in their lives. Some participants indicated that they organise meetings among teachers who work at primary level and those from secondary school to share information about the learners so that the receiving schools can know exactly what to expect.

Among the strategies employed is that some schools arrange parents' workshops on how parents should support their children during transition from primary to secondary schools. Parents are advised to manage their children's behaviour and to assist them with their schoolwork. Although some participants shared the same sentiments of lack of parental support, they all concurred that immediately parents start involving themselves in their children's schoolwork, things change for the better. Reservations were made for vulnerable learners; including those in child-headed households.

5.4.2 Strategies that secondary school SMTs use to facilitate learner transition at the receiving schools

The common approach used by secondary school SMT members in assisting newly admitted learners in the grade is orientation. As professionals, they take these learners on a walk around the school premises with the belief that this exercise makes the learners to feel welcomed and adjust easily to unfamiliar surroundings. Furthermore, the profiling of learners has been identified as one of the most important aspects that is used by secondary schools to help learners to acclimatise. Documents such as learner profiles enable teachers to identify learners with their learning challenges.

Some schools take their learners through the code of conduct policies to alleviate the transgression of the school rules. Each learner together with their parents/caregivers/guardians are provided with copies of the code of conduct, for which they also sign. This helps the parents to understand and discuss the code of conduct with their children at home and be aware of the schools' rules and regulations. Professionals, like nurses and social workers, are involved at some of the schools to support in cases where learners have extreme problems that are beyond the jurisdiction of the teaching profession.

Parental involvement is the most common tool that secondary schools utilise to support learners during transition, but schools experience challenges when some parents do not come whenever they are called. Child-headed families also pose a challenge due to the absence of supportive adults. Fortunately, the African principle of Ubuntu enables neighbours and kinship networks to take part in the development of the children. There are families of parents who leave home to look for better work employment opportunities in other areas far away from home. In this instant, the significant other should take over the upbringing of children. The other most significant and efficient strategy some SMT members mentioned is team talking. Though some learners might still be shy, some teachers found this to be an important way of addressing learners' challenges meaningfully.

5.4.3 Mechanisms for collaborative learner support

Studies on teamwork between primary and secondary school identify senior teachers or SMTs as the key role players to a successful learner transition. Both primary and secondary SMTs indicated that there should be constant communication about learners who are in transition. They have to share the ideas about the performance of their learners, both the struggling and the good performing ones.

There are indications that primary school SMTs should forward grade 7 learners' portfolios to secondary schools when they are admitted to enable continuity in learner support. Regular meetings held by the two groups of SMTs and teachers is one of the ways in which ongoing support and identification of challenges can occur. In this atmosphere handover and smooth interaction between the two parties is encouraged. As mentioned earlier in this study it takes a village to raise a child.

5.5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE

One of the discoveries on learner transition as explained by West and Schwedt (2012) is that transition disrupts learning. The above-mentioned finding is consistent with Prosser's (2008) study who concluded that transition turns into a problematic issue due to the change from a child-centered approach, action-based or practically orientated classroom to a more personalised and didactic approach, informed by a different pedagogical ideology. Overall, some learners experience a decline in academic achievement during transition, and therefore this emphasises the importance of support at that time. Considerably more work needs to be done to

determine how much harm absence of support during transition in schools can hinder learners' progress.

It appears that transition is not only a challenge to South African learners, but also in other countries around the world. Countries such as Tanzania experience different form of transition challenges with language at the centre (Gibbons *et al.*, 2017). Many factors affect academic decline during transition, such as teacher qualification and content knowledge, relations between primary and secondary schools, arrangement of curriculum from primary to secondary schools, socio-economic issues, support from family, societal adjustment and learners' self-efficacy contributing to poor learner performance during transition (West *et al.*, 2010).

5.6 SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS EMANATING FROM THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this study, I have responded to the research questions mentioned below. Research questions are based on primary and secondary sources. The primary sources in this study involved data collected through interviews with the participants and secondary sources included literature review. The research questions are:

▪ What do SMTs understand by academic activities that support learner transition from primary to secondary schools?

▪ What strategies do primary SMTs use to facilitate learner transition at releasing schools?

- What strategies do secondary SMTs use to facilitate learner transition at receiving schools?

- Which mechanisms can be used to ensure primary and secondary SMTs work collaboratively to support learner transition?

5.6.1 Recommendations

5.6.1.1 Recommendation no.1: Strategies primary SMTs should use to facilitate learner transition at releasing schools

In light of current developments in primary schools regarding transition, I recommend that the SMT members should receive thorough training with regard to this important activity of learner transition. The whole exercise of learner transition is individualised. This idea is not helping the schools as they are expected to work collaboratively in an effort to develop learners. SMTs have no common approach to deal with issues of learner transition. The difference in approaches to this problem leaves some schools in a dilemma to an extent that they ultimately do nothing to support their learners. Based on this fact, this study contends that training and developmental programs should be developed and implemented to address the well-being of learners at this level. The training of SMTs on the matter will also serve as an obligation to implement policy.

5.6.1.2 Recommendation no.2: Strategies to facilitate transition at receiving schools

The present research study was designed to determine the SMTs' role in the transition of learners from primary to secondary schools. The present finding also supports the presumption that secondary schools have systems in place to assist learners coming from primary schools. For example, policies on transition, committees responsible for transition and any other strategies that can facilitate the SMT's work during learner transition. SMT members should also be supported and encouraged at all times to ensure that the transition process runs smoothly by planning for its implementation in good time. The principal's most important role as the head of the institution is to encourage communication between the feeder schools and the SMT members in order to facilitate partnership between home and school.

5.6.1.3 Recommendation no. 3: Mechanisms for collaborative learner support

Although primary and secondary school SMTs hold meetings frequently about learner progress, one of the important items in the agenda should entail the strategies of managing learner transition from school to school. Secondary school SMTs should opt to moderate and assist with academic knowledge content related to the learners in the lower classes. Schools are often clustered to work collaboratively with academic development in mind. Consistent with the finding of Rise *et al.* (2011), that transition disrupts learning, the above recommendation will stand the SMTs in good stead. Suggestions of an expedition with the grade 7 group to their impending environment will serve the purpose of motivating them and aiding acclimatisation to their new

environment before arrival. The discussion above resulted in the following conclusions:

- School transition requires support from school senior staff members. This strategy requires commitment from the SMT and other role players to enable this unhindered learner movement.

- Schools should work collaboratively to support development of any form in the learning process. Learners should not be unnecessarily distracted from their schooling process. The reason for the unwavering SMT involvement is based on the understanding that they are senior staff members who know how a team should work together. They are also responsible for planning, leadership and execution of school programmes.

- There is equal importance attached to both releasing and receiving learners from one school to the other. This necessitates care and support of learners during their movement, for enablement of adjustment, acclimatisation and coping.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The transition of learners from primary to secondary is a bridge that connects the two learning communities together. It puts the spotlight on schools to create enabling learning environments by creating a culture of care and Ubuntu at another level. The current research has offered an opportunity for Africa's future leaders to progress significantly in their level of study by creating competitive environments for them to

thrive. This study has also helped to lay the foundation of facilitating a better-educated

workforce by ensuring that learners receive quality education.

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Annexures

Annexure A: Request to the District to conduct a research

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

27 March 2018

Ref: 27560831

Enq: Mkhabela DP

Cell: 073 629 6332/082 423 3468

Email: dinganepeter@gmail.com

The District Director

Limpopo Department of Education

Mogalakwena District

Mawhelereng, 0626

Dear Sir

Re: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MOGALAKWENA DISTRICT.

I, Mkhabela D.P, Persal No: 81312725, hereby request for permission to conduct a research in two primary and two secondary schools in Mogalakwena District. I am probing in the following topic: *School Management Teams' academic support for learners transitioning from primary to secondary schools*.

My research will involve semi-structured interviews with four principals (two from primary and two from secondary) who will be sampled purposively and four SMT members each from the same sampled school.

I will like to assure your office that if permission is granted, I will ensure that my research activities do not interfere with my work as the employee of the Department of Education and that teaching and learning in affected schools is not affected. I will also ensure that at completion of the study, a copy of the dissertation is made available to the employing authority.

Hope you will find this request in order.

Yours truly

Mkhabela DP

Annexure B: Permission from the District to conduct a research

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

MOGALAKWENA DISTRICT

Ref   : S11/2/2
Enq   : Dolo S.J
Tel   : 015 483 7582
Date   : 28 March 2018

To   : Mkhabela DP
Persal : 81312725

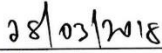From   : Office of the District Director
       Mogalakwena District

SUBJECT: APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS' ACADEMIC SUPPORT FOR LEARNER TRANSITIONING FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL.

1. Your letter dated 27 March 2018 refers.

2. It is with great pleasure to inform you that approval to conduct research as per subject above is hereby granted.

3. The research must be conducted in accordance with the Department's policies and conditions such as but not limited to:

     a. No disruption of Learning and teaching;
     b. No publishing of research outcomes with privilege information before HOD gives approval.

4. We wish you best of luck with your studies. We believe this will add value to education system in our Province especially in Mogalakwena District.

Kind regards,

District Director

28/03/2018
Date

MOGALAKWENA DISTRICT OFFICE
805 Rufus Seakamela Street, Mahwelereng
Tel: 015 483 7500 Fax: 086 425 8313
The heartland of Southern Africa- development is about people

Annexure C: Request to school principals to conduct a research

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

Enquiries: Mkhabela DP

Contact: 073 629 6332/082 423 3468

Email: dinganepeter@gmail.com

Stand No: 89

Mashahleng Village

Mapela, 0610

04 May 2018

Dear Principal

REQUEST TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL

I hereby request to conduct a research in your school on the topic:

School Management Teams' academic support for learners transitioning from primary to secondary schools

The purpose of the research is to explore the role played by SMTs from primary and secondary schools in assisting grade 7 and 8 learners respectively for secondary school education. I request to conduct interviews with the principal and one SMT member.
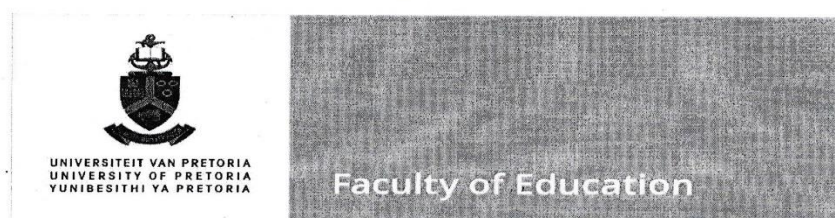
The participants are assured of their anonymity and the name of the school will not be mentioned in the study. A permission to conduct this study in your school has been granted by the District Director in Mogalakwena District. A copy of the permission is attached for your reference.

Thanking you in advance.

Yours truly

Mkhabela DP

1

Annexure D: Consent letters to participants

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

Informed Consent

Research topic: School Management Teams' academic support for learners transitioning from primary to secondary schools

Date: 04 |05|18

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in a research project aimed at investigating the school management teams' academic support for leaners transitioning from primary to secondary schools.

Your participation in this project is voluntary and confidential. You will not be asked to reveal any information that will allow your identity to be established, unless you are willing to be contacted for individual follow-up interviews. Should you declare yourself willing to participate in an individual interview, confidentiality will be guaranteed, and you may decide to withdraw at any stage should you wish not to continue with an interview. Also note that the interviews will be recorded for data capturing purposes and that the results of this study may be published in a journal. In both instances, your identity will always be protected.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sing this letter as a declaration of your consent, i.e. that you participate in this project willingly and that you understand that you may withdraw from the research at any time. Under no circumstances will your individuality be made known to any parties or organisations that may be involved in this research process.

Statement of consent

I .... hereby consent that I participate in this research project out of my own free will and voluntarily and prepared to share my thoughts and experiences in this interview. The researcher explained to me the purpose of the research and I was informed and guaranteed my right of confidentiality. I fully acknowledge that this information will be used solely for Med studies and not for commercial purposes and thereby give consent to the researcher to use this information.

Participant's signature .... Date: ....

Researcher's signature: .... Date: ....

Supervisor's signature: .... Date: ....

Annexure E: Interview questions

- How long have you been a member of the SMT?

- What do you understand by learner transition from primary to secondary schools?

- What are the strategies required for successful learner transition from primary to secondary school?

- What strategies do you employ in assisting learners transitioning from primary to secondary school?

- Why do learners who transition from primary to secondary need support?

- What are your roles and responsibilities during learner transition?

- How do you prepare your learners for transition?

- How is the process of supporting learners during transition managed at your school?

- What challenges do you come across in helping learners during transition?

- What do you think can be done to address the challenges you are faced with?