Contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo secondary schools

By

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DECLARATION

I, Morowane Sam Mokgapego, declare that the thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree Philosophise Doctor in Education Management and Policy Studies at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

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January 2022

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my late parents, Setutla Maria Morowane and Malekane Frans Morowane, for the trust and faith they had in me when they were still alive.

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ABSTRACT

School leadership plays a critical role in school improvement across the world. However, school leaders in rural schools face many contextual challenges that hamper school success. These challenges include socio-economic conditions and the educational backgrounds of parents. Many parents in rural communities face economic difficulties and find engagement with schools problematic, but they still have a strong desire to be involved in their children`s learning. School leaders need to respond to the challenges by engaging parents in their children's education to succeed. They should acknowledge that parents' participation may influence children`s learning outcomes. A child's learning depends on the contributions a parent may bring into the learning process. Parent engagement is therefore critical for a child`s holistic development.

Parent engagement is associated with higher academic achievement, successful high school completion and a better social environment. Parents play a critical role in providing a learning bridge between the school and the home while instilling positive attitudes and values towards learning and life in their children. However, parents cannot achieve the holistic development of their children without school leaders. Parents should work closely with school leaders. In other words, a partnership between school leaders and parents is critical as education is a collective responsibility. Despite studies showing that parent engagement influences learner achievement positively, parent engagement remains elusive. The conceptual framework derived from the context-responsive leadership construct of Bredeson, Klar and Johansson, this study sought to examine how contextually responsive leadership can establish successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo secondary schools.

A qualitative research methodology based on a case study design was followed in collecting data using semi-structured interviews with principals and parents. The

participants were selected from 13 secondary schools in one rural Limpopo district. The study's findings show that contextual factors such as socio-economic status and parents' educational backgrounds hamper collaboration and engagement needed to support children's learning. The study recommends aligning school leadership practices with the socio-economic dynamics of the school's context to ensure successful school-parent engagement. Since parent engagement is affected by multiple contextual factors, the study also recommends contextually responsive leadership strategies that principals can apply to strengthen school-parent engagement geared towards learners' achievement.

Keywords: academic performance, responsive leadership, parent engagement, rural setting, intelligence

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SGB	School Governing Body
IKS	Indigenous Knowledge System
AIKS	African Indigenous Knowledge System
LPDoE	Limpopo Department of Education
LTSM	Learner Teacher Support Materials
BEd	Bachelor of Education
MEd	Master of Education
B Tech	Bachelor of Technology
ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
NDP	National Development Plan
ZPD	Zone Proximal Development

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction and background

The past 26 years of democracy in South Africa have seen multiple education reforms to raise the achievement standard of learners. School leadership has attracted unprecedented interest locally and internationally due to the complexity and constantly changing context these reforms have created. School leadership is recognised as a critical element in improving learner outcomes (Day, U & Sammons, 2016). Reforms have undoubtedly increased the demand for influential school leaders who are sensitive and responsive, not only to the internal components of the school but also to its external components. The need to connect the internal and external environment of the school opened an engagement conversation between the school and the parents for the child's holistic development (Grayson, 2013). That is why countries globally are seeking to adapt their education system to the needs of society (OECD, 2008). As schools seek to stay relevant to what society desires, the core task of the school remains the academic achievement of learners, while the core task of the principal is to ensure that the school environment is conducive to effective school improvement (National Development Plan, 2012).

School improvement, achieved by effective student learning, is not an event but a complex process. It is a complex process because it must happen in a dynamic and continually changing context (Okeke, 2014). School leaders must understand this complexity, failing which parents and their children in rural areas are disadvantaged. Parents in rural areas are vulnerable and often denied the opportunity to participate in their children's education (Du Plessis, 2014). The absence of parents suggests that school leaders in rural areas should create space to engage parents despite their limited educational background and poor socio-economic conditions. When school leaders recognise parents as partners, the working relationship is strengthened for sustainable school improvement. Povey, Campell, Willis, Haines, Western, Bennet, Antrobus and Pedde (2016)

point out that school principals play an essential role in shaping the school climate and facilitating parent engagement. Research further shows that the active participation of parents in their children's education improves learner performance (Baker, Mamat & Ibrahim, 2017).

Parent engagement refers to the active participation of parents and taking ownership of children's education. Manzon, Miller, Hong and Khong (2015) define parent engagement as the beliefs, attitudes and activities of parents to support their children in learning from the time they are born until they reach the stage of independence. This implies that parents should be willing to partner with schools for the child's total development. Parent engagement is about engaging families to become partners with the school and attend to what parents think, dream and worry about. When parents are engaged, their behaviour should demonstrate a vested interest in their children's education and future (Jensen & Minke, 2017). Parent engagement suggests that a good relationship between the school and the parents should be strengthened.

Parental engagement confirms the need for school leaders to create a platform for meaningful engagement between the school and the parents to increase learner achievements. Mafa and Makuba (2013) assert that learner performance tends to improve when parents are interested in their children and the school's affairs. Research carried out in South Africa and other countries indicates that social, political and economic contexts impact student learning (Marishane, 2016; Taliafferro, 2011). Leading schools successfully in this diverse environment requires someone smart enough to deal with various challenges emanating from such backgrounds. The ability of school leaders to overcome challenges posed by context will pave the way for school improvement. Marishane and Mampane (2018) contend that any form of school improvement needs a context-sensitive strategy from school leaders. Context-sensitive leaders are leaders who can read the context well and realign their strategies to achieve learning outcomes.

Contextually responsive leadership refers to leadership that demonstrates practical wisdom in action through effective use of combined knowledge, skills

and dispositions to adapt to the dynamic environmental variables (Bredeson, Klar & Johansson, 2011). Leaders are well-positioned to respond and engage successfully in their respective contexts. Contextually responsive leaders know that contexts differ, and failing to understand them may constrain their behaviour.

As context changes, school leaders need to respond to the change or become redundant. Being redundant is not a choice because the hopes of rural learners and their parents are in the hands of school leaders. The option is to foster school-parent engagement despite rural conditions that, in all likelihood, may discourage such initiatives. If school leaders fail to adapt and engage but succumb to prevailing rural conditions, learners are disadvantaged compared to those from privileged backgrounds. Evidence from literature shows that, given the impact of context on student learning, school-parent engagement becomes critical in ensuring that learners from all backgrounds are equipped with skills, values, attitudes, habits and dispositions needed for a successful life in this changing world (Marishane, 2020). School-parent engagement suggests that school leadership needs to be responsive to the context in which student learning occurs and create viable conditions in which the school and parents work together to ensure the learner's success.

1.2   Problem statement

This study established how contextually responsive school leadership responds to the need for school-parent engagement for effective student learning.

Effective education is that which promotes learner performance and achievements from such performance. Learners' performance is an intended outcome of continuous engagement between schools and parents. School-parent engagement is indispensable for schools to realise effective education that will foster learner performance (Ozmen, 2016). Principals play a leading role in ensuring that schools move forward to improve learning opportunities for learners. Principals must ensure that parents are well informed and knowledgeable about their decisions for the school's productivity. The

productivity of the school is unreachable in an environment where stakeholders are disconnected. Hay and Monnapula-Mapesela (2017) indicate that principals must create a strong school culture. School culture is needed to reconnect the school and the parents for learners' benefit. Matshe (2014) contends that school-parent engagement is a mediating variable in learner achievements. Parents, however, remain disengaged in the education of their children, especially in rural areas. School leaders take advantage of the parent's poor educational background and low socio-economic status.

Previous research in other countries records that school-parent engagement is a good recipe for learner achievement (Sui Cho & Ho, 2009; Ellis, Lock & Lummis, 2015). Manzon, Miller, Hong, and Khong (2015) contend that when parents are engaged in crucial decision making of the school, they are held accountable for the behaviour, attitude, work ethics and attendance of learners, which are critical for student learning. Parent engagement implies that learners' success cannot be the responsibility of the school alone but a collaborative effort between the school and the parents. Be that as it may, the gap between the school and parents continues to deprive learners of their right to quality education. LaRocgue, Kleinman and Darling (2011) point out that parents' participation in their children's education appears challenging to promote and maintain. The disconnection between the school and the parents is attributed to schools becoming more diverse and more complex for school leaders to meet the needs of learners in rural areas (Kirui, Changeiywo, & Sang, 2015).

Research shows that school-parent collaboration may achieve learner success (Gross, Haines, Hill, Francis, Banning, & Turnbull, 2015). Nonetheless, research has identified factors disconnecting schools from parents. These factors include inefficient communication, lack of mutual trust, time constraints, uninviting school environment, cultural and language barriers, socio-economic factors and the principal's ideology about parent engagement (Jafarov, 2015; Watson, Sanders-Lawson, & McNeal, 2017). School leaders in rural schools seem to shave done very little to address these barriers to successful school-parent engagement (Mleczko, 2013). The often disconnection between school and parents can no

longer be accepted because of its devastating consequences on the future of rural learners. Despite the consensus that parent engagement increases school improvement, it continues to be one of the biggest challenge across rural schools (Chairatchatakul, Jamtaburom & Kanarkard, 2012).

1.3   Rationale for the study

Compelling evidence suggests that school-parent engagement positively affects children's educational success (Mandarakas, 2014). The need to engage parents is reinforced by the view that school leaders should create a productive relationship with parents (Mutch & Collins, 2012). Against this background, school-parent engagement has become a critical educational agenda of the 21st century. Its importance is highlighted by intensive research conducted in recent years.

This study is motivated by the literature, which indicates a positive relationship between school-parent engagement and learner achievement (Goodman & Hooks, 2016). Such a relationship is manifested in a positive learning environment, parental support, learner motivation and achievements (Durisic & Bunjevac, 2012). Epstein and Sheldon (2002) assert that school-parent engagement is a mechanism for learner success. All these authors collectively emphasise that when there is a connection between schools and parents, learners' attitudes tend to be positive, enabling them to do well academically and socially (Dagnew, 2017). Parent engagement means schools should collaborate with parents to improve learner performance. Verosova and Mala (2016) have found that academically weak learners have a negative attitude toward learning and believe that school and education will not help them succeed.

According to the National Institute of Education in Singapore, the critical role of parents has provided a policy framework for school-parent engagement, which includes empowerment, partnership and transparency (Manzon et al., 2015). Education as a fundamental human right in South Africa (South Africa, 1996) can be a fertile ground for school-parent engagement. The human rights perspective

provided sufficient reason for the inclusion of parents in their children's education (UNICEF, 2014). The right to quality education is the responsibility of all stakeholders, and therefore, schools and parents should collaborate to ensure it happens. The effectiveness of parents' engagement will depend on their skills, knowledge, and interest in school-related matters. The need to engage parents creates an opportunity for school leaders to educate parents in rural areas for meaningful contribution to their children's education (Hurana & Liman, 2015).

My personal experience as a South African teacher is that parents in rural areas are less engaged in their children's education. Lack of parent engagement is due to school leaders who seem less sensitive to its need. Rural schools are often labelled as dysfunctional, and their learners are considered incapable of achieving above average. Poor learner performance may also be attributed to the school leadership that fails to engage parents and recognise the critical role in working with schools to support their children's academic performance. Mutodi and Ngirande (2014) confirm that the absence of parents in their children's education harms their achievement. Drawing from the existing evidence, school leaders must see student learning as a societal issue that a collaborative effort can achieve. The child's holistic development depends on the school leader's sensitivity to school-parent engagement. The literature and personal experience have motivated the researcher to examine contextually responsive leadership as a catalyst for successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo schools.

1.4   Research purpose

This study examined how contextually responsive leadership can establish successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo secondary schools. This study assumed that poor parental engagement leads to poor learner performance and that contextually responsive leadership was positioned to deal with the challenge.

1.4.1 The objectives of the study

1.4.1.1 To examine how school leaders engage rural parents in student learning.

1.4.1.2 To establish the challenges school leaders face when engaging parents in their children's education.

1.4.1.3 To develop contextually responsive strategies for successful school parent engagement in student learning.

1.5 Significance of the research

This study will add a different perspective to the existing body of knowledge about the role of contextually responsive school leadership as a critical element for successful school-parent engagement for student learning. Contextually responsive leadership may be a reference point for many school leaders to view schools as unique. The uniqueness of the schools suggests engaging parents should consider their circumstances for effective partnership. Contextual intelligence is required for contextual responsiveness for school leaders to lead effectively. The findings from the study may help the Department of Basic Education review its policies so that they are contextually relevant. The conclusions of this study suggest the recognition of contextually responsive school leadership as a catalyst for parent engagement for better student performance in rural schools. The findings were of great value in suggesting leadership programmes to equip and empower school leaders concerning the influence of parents in rural communities. Finally, I hope that the findings from this study will further ignite research on contextual intelligence and responsive school leadership that engages parents. The results emerging from this study will not be used for generalisation purposes but will only be used within the confines of the school leadership in Sekhukhune East. This study will be used as a point of reference for further studies.

1.6 Research questions

1.6.1 Main research question

The main research question for this study was: How can a contextually responsive leadership establish successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo schools?

1.6.2 Secondary research questions

The following were the secondary research questions emanating from the main research question:

1.6.2.1 How do school leaders engage rural parents in student learning?

1.6.2.2 What challenges do school leaders face when engaging parents in their children's education?

1.6.2.3 What contextually responsive strategies can be suggested to ensure successful school-parent engagement in student learning?

1.7 Preliminary literature review

1.7.1 Contextually responsive leadership

Contextually responsive leadership refers to leadership that can negotiate its way through different contexts to achieve goals. Bredeson, Klar, and Johanson (2011) define contextually responsive leadership as leadership that can demonstrate wisdom in action and appropriate application of acquired skills, knowledge and disposition for effective adaptation to dynamic situations. Here, contextually responsive leadership manifests itself by actions and behaviour, not just speech. Marishane (2020) defines contextually responsive leaders as those who use common sense or intuition to deal with contextual challenges to achieve desired goals. School leaders need to apply their experience, knowledge, skills and attitudes to the demands emerging from the dynamic and changing context to achieve such goals.

According to Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2019), school leaders must draw from basic leadership practices: setting direction, building relationships, developing people, redesigning the organisation and improving the instruction programme to respond to context successfully. These practices are briefly explained in the following paragraphs.

Setting direction involves building a shared vision, a universal practice that can be applied in a different context (Gurr, 2015). Using this practice in a rural school with low income and diverse parents, learners may need a high level of engagement with parents. However, by building a shared vision in schools with lower-, middle- and upper-income pupils, parents' engagement challenges may differ due to their socio-economic class and contexts. *Building relationships and developing people*: Building relationships involves building a trusting relationship with parents. Parents in rural settings are voiceless. School leaders should create a positive relationship with them to draw them closer to the school and allow them to speak (Msila, 2012). A good relationship with parents is achieved when school leaders educate parents on responding to their vulnerable conditions of low socio-economic status and poor educational background. Educating parents will ensure a meaningful contribution to their children's education (Gurr, 2017). *Redesigning the organisation*: This involves reconfiguring the organisation by building a culture of collaboration between parents and school leaders (Cruickshank, 2017). Redesigning the organisation means bringing change to the school by re-branding it to respond to the changing demands of both internal and external contexts.

Improve the instructional programme: Improving the instructional programme involves the school leader's understanding of the parent's substantial influence on the academic achievement of learners and the need to engage them in the educational affairs of their children. The appropriate application of these leadership practices is expected to increase learner performance because it involves both the school and the parents (Manaseh, 2016). The tendency to limit leadership practices to the internal business of the school has, however, yielded minimal results in terms of student performance. The influence of school leaders

is vital for successful school-parent engagement. Rural parents' social, economic and educational backgrounds should not be used to prevent successful school-parent engagement (Kainuwa & Yusuf, 2013). In rising above these barriers, school leaders should initiate a conversation with parents as student learning is a delicate matter that needs the hands of both the school and the parents. The conversation will reinvent collaboration which is presently absent in most rural schools. The gap between the school and parent has deepened poor learner performance in rural schools.

1.7.2   School-parent engagement

School-parent engagement means leading with parents and persuading them to form partnerships for children's education and overall development. Nyatuka and Nyakan (2015) explain school-parent engagement as a partnership between schools and parents for the benefit of all stakeholders. There is sufficient evidence suggesting that school-parent engagement positively impacts learners' academic performance (Ceka & Murati, 2016; Quezada, 2016). Huisman (2019) asserts that, by school-parent engagement, parents experience self-efficacy and better understand how the school works. Parent engagements boost the confidence of parents. Equally, the educator's morale is boosted, ultimately benefiting the learners. The parent benefits in their involvement suggest that schools and parents need each other for learners' progress. Contextual hindrances are eliminated when the two parties work together (Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009).

In Australia and other parts of the world, schools are divided according to their cultural, racial and socio-economic status (Baker, Wise, Kelly, & Skiba, 2016). In South Africa, schools are categorised into quintiles that signify their level of inequality. Schools in the low quintiles representing poverty are primarily found in socially and economically deprived areas. The categorisation of schools is attributed to inequalities experienced globally, which deprives parents in impoverished communities of the opportunity to engage meaningfully in their children's education (Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019). Learners are also denied the

opportunity to excel academically because the categories limit their intellectual ability. Grace, Jethro, & Aina (2012) confirm that quality and equality in the schooling system can be achieved by prioritising school-parent engagement. Parent engagement is achieved when school leaders address the imbalances of knowledge and power between teachers and less educated parents (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). School leaders should make it their business to empower disadvantaged parents through education for purposeful engagement (Myende, 2013). This empowerment initiative will ensure that parents do not contract their parenting responsibilities to schools and are not burdened with educating learners alone.

As a critical element of student success, school-parent engagement should be nurtured and entrenched into the schooling system (Ouimette, Feldman, & Tung, 2006). School–parent engagement is possible when school leaders put their wisdom into action and begin to mobilise parents in rural areas and assure them of their important contribution to student success (Menheere & Hooge, 2010). In this study, the researcher assumes that the theory of contextually responsive school leadership will promote school-parent engagement as a critical element of student learning.

1.7.3   Relationship between school leadership, parent engagement and student learning

Leadership plays a crucial role in school improvement. The decrease or increase in school improvement depends on the school leader's sensitivity to change. Leadership is a deciding factor for school improvement worldwide (Moorosi & Bantwini, 2016; Bipath & Moyo, 2016). The continual desire to determine leadership impact on student learning led to this curious question: Which leadership style is suitable for successful learning? This question is raised because many leadership styles are often applied with little success, especially in rural schools. Studies carried out throughout the world confirm that the quality of school leadership makes a significant difference in student learning (Bush, 2007; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom, 2004). As leaders of their

schools, principals can drive improvement by leadership (Abdulrasheed & Belo, 2015). Learner achievement is the yardstick used to measure effective school leadership. South Africa has introduced a new policy on South African standards for principals (Department of Basic Education, 2015), which outlines eight key areas that state the role of the principals. These areas are leading teaching and learning in the school, shaping the direction and development of the school, managing quality teaching and learning and securing accountability, developing and empowering self and others, managing the school as an organisation, working with and for the community, managing staff in the school and managing and advocating extra mural activities. All these areas are essential for student learning; however, areas of particular interest to this study are working with and for the community, empowering self and others, and shaping the direction and development of the school. These areas imply that school leaders must give schools a new shape and form to cope with changing circumstances (Nawab, 2011). School leaders are expected to create school-parent engagement as a mediating variable for student learning (Louis, 2015). Bearing in mind the difficult conditions in which rural parents find themselves, school leaders are required to fulfil the role of empowering themselves and others to ensure that their living conditions do not hamper parents' engagement with schools.

These policy directives aim to ensure that schools are successful, irrespective of the conditions of the school, parents and the children (Department of Basic Education, 2015). By implementing this policy, the school leaders will redesign the school and foster a collaborative culture built on commitment, respect and accountability (Olhson, Swanson, Adams-Manning, & Byrd, 2016). Principals in public schools in different contexts are required to practise wisdom in applying this policy for effective student learning (Bredeson et al., 2011). The professional standard for principals (Department of Education, Australia, 2011) indicates that principals can embrace change and work with others to seek creative and innovative solutions to support quality outcomes. Embracing change means strengthening school-parent engagement as a boost to improved student outcomes. Despite these clearly stated policy directives for school leaders,

student learning in rural schools is continually compromised. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) insist that successful leaders must respond effectively to the unique context in which they work. This study, therefore, seeks to examine how contextually responsive leaders can establish successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo schools.

1.8 Definition of concepts

The following concepts constitute the conceptual framework namely, contextually responsive leadership, parent engagement and rural context.

1.8.1 Contextually responsive leadership

Contextually responsive leadership is leadership that applies common sense to deal with dynamic contextual challenges. Bredeson, Klar and Johansson (2011) defines contextually responsive leadership as wisdom in action which manifests itself by a combination of knowledge, ability, disposition and behavioural change. This implies that contextually responsive leadership does not depend on one leadership dimension to deal with dynamic situations but uses variety of dimensions to respond appropriately to situations.

1.8.2 Parent engagement

Parent engagement means communicating with parents to make them aware of their roles and responsibilities in helping their children to achieve educational outcomes. Gross et al., (2020) define parent engagement as shared responsibility between school leaders and parents to actively support children to achieve learning and developmental results. The definition implies that there should be a successful school-parent engagement for learner performance. School parent engagement recognises the importance of partnership between

schools and parents for effective communication, healthy relationship, respect and shared power (Semke & Sherindon, 2012).

1.8.3 Rural context

The rural context is a context deprived of necessities such as water, sanitation, electricity, education and health. It is a context characterised by among others, poverty, unemployment, dependence and single parenting. Shikalepo (2019) define rural context as context characterised by poor socioeconomic challenges that deprives rural residents of their well-being and their ability to realise their full potential. The detailed explanation or visual representation of the concepts and their interaction are provided in chapter 2.

1.9 Research methodology

This section explains how the research will be conducted. This section presents the research paradigm underpinning the study, research approach, design, sampling, data collection, analysis, trustworthiness issues, ethical considerations, delimitations, and limitations.

1.9.1 Research paradigm

A paradigm is a set of shared beliefs that informs the meaning and interpretation of research (Kinunja & Kayini, 2017). This study is grounded in the constructivist paradigm. Constructivism asserts that people must construct their views based on their experiences and perceptions (Adom, Yeboah, & Ankrah, 2016). The ontological premise of constructivism is that reality is what people view it. In other words, it differs from person to person. Constructivist views contend that people construct meaning from what they know and subjectively derive understanding from it (Olesegun, 2015). The learners, staff and society are aware of their context and have the sense to construct their thinking for the development of the school. Constructivists view engagements as involving discovering knowledge, which is how people make sense of what they know (Amineh & Asiz, 2015). Understanding the phenomenon involves active participation and expressions of

individual perspectives (Laucknes & Krupa, 2012). This study depended on the experiences and the worldview of school leaders.

1.9.2 Research approach

The research approach is a guideline that outlines the steps from broad assumptions to a detailed data collection method, analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2014). There are three research approaches, qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method. This study was conducted with a qualitative research approach. This research approach was chosen because participants could express their views and draw meaning from reality (Creswell, 2012). A qualitative approach is critical in sourcing adequate data from participants by allowing them to express their views. This qualitative approach collected thick and rich description data by asking open-ended questions (Daniel, 2016). Despite the usefulness of the qualitative approach, it has shortfalls. One of the shortfalls is credibility. However, in this study, triangulation was used to improve data credibility. Triangulation refers to applying various strategies to generate a well-thought-out understanding of a phenomenon (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, Disenso, Blythe & Neville, 2014). A qualitative approach enables the researcher to understand the phenomenon by interacting with the participants in a natural setting (Mohamed, 2017). Yes, qualitative research helped the researcher to understand the experiences of responsive school leaders in improving schools' academic performance in rural Limpopo.

1.9.3 Research design

A research design is a roadmap by which research is carried out (Creswell, 2012). This study used a case study research design. Case study research design focuses on issues of today as they happen in our real-life situations (Yin, 2014). The reason for choosing a case study was because it deals with real-life problems that resonate with people (Harrison, Birks, Franklin & Mill, 2017). A case study made it possible to present the context using people's views to understand better the phenomenon being studied. The phenomenon, in this

case, was the responsiveness of leadership for successful school-parent engagement in rural contexts. This design provided sufficient data to explain the research topic and answer the research questions. To ensure that this research is bounded, the research was conducted in the Sekhukhune district. In this study, the researcher aimed to examine what contextually responsive leaders do in a continuously changing world to improve the academic performance of rural schools.

1.9.4 Sampling

A sample is a group of a relatively small number of people selected from a population for investigation purposes (Mohsin, 2016). Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and Mckibbon (2015) assert that sampling is the selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address the research objectives. This study used purposive sampling to select participants. Purposive sampling is used to identify and select individuals or groups that are exceptionally knowledgeable about or experienced in the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, Horwits, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). According to Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016), purposive sampling is the deliberate selection of participants whose qualities will enable the researcher to obtain rich and in-depth data. In a qualitative case study, sampling is essential for data collection, interpretation and presentation of findings (Yazan, 2015). Purposive sampling ensured that the researcher had the right people to provide the required information to achieve the study's objectives.

The research was conducted in 13 secondary schools located in Sekhukhune East. The schools selected performed below 65% and above 80% of the pass rate in the last two years of their National Senior Certificate (Grade12). The participants were principals of the sampled schools. Thirteen parents were sampled from the parent component of the SGB of sampled schools. This sampling of the parent component was motivated by my assumption that parents have a different views of school-parent engagement. Twenty-six (26) people participated in the study, and their selection was based on their knowledge and

experiences as school leaders and parents. The aim of selecting these participants was based on the possibility of obtaining the in-depth and rich data required in the study. School leaders' selection was also based on their power, knowledge and skills to coordinate parents for successful school-parent engagement.

1.9.5 Data collection methods

This study used a semi-structured interview which allowed the interviewer to probe for further clarification of the experiences and views of the participants. A semi-structured interview is an in-depth interview that enables the examination of the perspectives and experiences of school leaders and parents (Whiting, 2007). The strength of a semi-structured interview is that there are pre-determined questions, and the interviewee has the freedom to respond comprehensively to the questions. On the other hand, the interviewer has the freedom to probe despite the listed questions.

The interviews were conducted after hours in selected schools and recorded using a voice recorder. They were held on a one-on-one basis with each of the participants. The time allocated for interviews was thirty minutes or more. Notes were written during the interview to ensure that the responses were thoroughly and accurately captured. The purpose of noting the interview was to explore the reactions and use them in follow-up interviews.

1.9.6 Data analysis

Data analysis is about finding the meaning of the data collected from the participant's viewpoint (Alhamdam, 2016). After conducting the interviews, I listened to the voice recorder to transcribe data. The transcription of data means the transfer of audio or video recording into written form (Julia, 2008). After transcribing data, I used member checking to allow participants an opportunity to check if data had been correctly transcribed. I then analysed data from interviews using thematic analysis.

The thematic analysis involves identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Maquire & Dealhunt, 2017). Vansmoradi (2013) describes thematic analysis as identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. The steps followed in this study were as outlined by Braun and Clark (2006). Firstly, I became familiar with the data. Data familiarisation means reading and re-reading the transcript. Second, I generated codes. Coding means organising data in a meaningful and systematic way. Data coding helped in reducing lots of data into small sections of meaning. Thirdly, I searched for themes that were captured through significance. Fourthly, I reviewed the themes to determine whether they made sense and checked whether the data supported the themes. Fifthly, I defined the themes, identified the essence of each theme, the interaction and relationship between the themes, and then did the reporting. The typed documents and voice recordings were kept in a safe place for future references.

1.9.7   Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research ensures that the study is accurate and authentic (Elo, Kaaraiaineo, Kaste, Polkki, Utriainen, & Kyngas, 2014). The four criteria used for assessing trustworthiness in this study were credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

1.9.7.1   Credibility

Credibility is the confidence expected from the truth generated from the research findings (Anney, 2014). The following components strengthened the credibility of this study:

Spending time with the participants: This component helped me gain insight into the context of the study. It also assisted me in improving the respondents' trust and provided a great understanding of the participants' culture and context.

Peer debriefing: Seeks feedback from peers to provide additional perspective (Gunawan, 2015). Peer debriefing helped in improving the quality of the study.

Triangulation: This involved using multiple and different methods, investigators, sources and theories (Shenton, 2004). Triangulation helped reduce doubts as it also cross-examined the integrity of the participants' responses. The researcher compared the data to obtain credibility.

Member checking: Refers to returning findings to participants to determine whether the transcripts reflect their experiences (Moon, Brewer, Hartley, Adams & Blademan, 2016).

1.9.7.2   Transferability

Transferability refers to how the study results can be transferred to other contexts and with other respondents (Anney, 2014). The emphasis is on in-depth data collection, which gives a better understanding of the enquiry. The purposive selection of the participants implies transferability. Extracts from the interview transcripts were used to strengthen and support the study's findings. The general public may use the full description of the study for their contextual review.

1.9.7.3   Dependability

Dependability refers to sustained findings over time and is applicable in different conditions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher accounts for data collection, recording and analysis to ensure dependability. Dependability was made possible by tracking the raw data and interviews. An independent critical reader and the supervisor analysed the same data separately and compared results to establish consistency in data generation, analysis and findings. Subjecting data to critical reading and the external review means that the research process should be transparent for dependability.

1.9.7.4   Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the level at which other researchers could confirm or corroborate the results of an enquiry (Moon et al., 2016). Confirmability was demonstrated by consistent reporting based on ontological and epistemological grounds, as pointed out in the research. Therefore, the reporting should

represent the views and experiences of the participants rather than those of the researcher. The researcher can ensure confirmability by providing a detailed research process to assist others in probing the research design.

1.10 Ethical considerations

In this study, considerations were given to the following ethical matters:

1.10.1 Permission

The researcher sought permission from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria to obtain ethical clearance before the commencement of the fieldwork. I complied with the rules of the ethics committee. I requested permission in writing from the Limpopo Department of Education and all the sampled schools.

1.10.2 Informed consent

Participants were called and informed about the research and its purpose. The participants were assured that participation was optional and told they could withdraw from the study. The researcher requested the participants sign an informed consent form as proof of understanding and willingness to participate. Consent forms were issued to participants, and letters asking for permission to conduct research were sent to school leaders and governing bodies (SGBs) of the sampled schools.

1.10.3 Confidentiality

Participants were assured confidentiality and that the information gathered would be safely kept in the university for 15 years. Participants were assured that their schools' identities would be protected using pseudonyms instead of real names.

1.10.4 Social values

Participants were assured of protection regardless of social status. Social values mean participants were treated equally and fairly. Participants were assured of freedom from manipulation and not taken advantage of due to their social status.

1.10.5 Safety and security

The participants were assured of non-disclosure of their names and that of their schools. The data would be securely stored on the University's password-protected computer as the university's intellectual property. The participants were also assured that their information would be used only for research and academic purposes.

1.11 Limitations

Research has limitations that may affect the quality of the study. The first limitation was access to schools. Some schools did not wish to participate, and new schools fitting the selection criteria had to be found. This process delayed the study to a certain extent. The second limitation was time constraints, as the participants did not have enough time for the interviews.

Others were not available per the pre-determined schedule, and I had to reschedule at some point which was time-consuming. The third possible limitation was that participants could decide not to participate in the middle of the research, which caused another delay in finding a replacement. The fourth limitation was financial constraints. I did not have enough money to cover the research costs, such as travelling, which delayed the data collection process. The fifth limitation was the Department of Basic Education's policy of allowing researchers to research at schools only during the first and third terms. These limitations caused an inconvenience in data collection.

1.12   Delimitations

The study was conducted in the Sekhukhune East District of the Limpopo province. The study was not for generalisation to schools in other districts. The study covered underperforming and well-performing schools, which obtained less than 65% and above 80% in their matric results. These criteria were used to gather data from both non-performing and performing schools and establish the school improvement strategies used in both schools.

1.13   Outline of thesis chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction and background to the study

The first chapter presents the introduction and a general background of the study. The chapter also describes the research purpose, rationale for the study, research questions, methodology, quality criteria, ethical consideration and an outline of the thesis. It was assumed that the poor performance of learners was caused by poor parental engagement and that successful parent engagement requires contextually responsive leaders.

Chapter 2: Conceptual framework for the study

The key concepts that outline the framework for the study are leadership, learners, context and parents. The four concepts that underpin the conceptual framework were developed from context responsive leadership construct. The concepts were comprehensively discussed.

Chapter 3: Literature review

In this chapter, the literature to support the study was reviewed. The literature review was based on contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement. School contexts, school leadership, parent engagement, and strategies for successful school parent engagement are discussed.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

This chapter presents and discusses the theoretical assumptions, selection of research design, methodology and data analysis. It also explains why choosing a qualitative approach with a single case study design. Ethical considerations and quality criteria are also discussed in detail.

Chapter 5: Findings of the study

The findings of the study generated from interviews are presented and interpreted. The findings are given according to the following themes: principals' role in establishing school-parent engagement, monitoring and support, challenges affecting school-parent engagement, and contextually responsive leadership strategies. Participants' views substantiate the findings quoted verbatim.

Chapter 6: Discussion, conclusion and recommendations

The final chapter summarises the study and concludes by revisiting the study problems set out in Chapter 1. The chapter addresses the strength and weaknesses of the research. Recommendations for practising contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo schools are made.

1.14 Summary of the chapter

This chapter outlines the context and background, the purpose, rationale, significance and literature reviewed in the study. It also discusses contextually responsive leadership, school-parent engagement and the relationship between school leadership, parent engagement and student learning. Finally, the summary of the chapters is presented.

CHAPTER TWO
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter provided the introduction and background to the study on contextually responsive leadership in Limpopo schools. Issues discussed in that chapter include the rationale for the research and its purpose, a brief overview of the research design and methodology, quality aspects such as trustworthiness, ethical principles applied, and the study's significance. The present chapter focuses on the conceptual framework underpinning this study. This presentation is followed by a discussion on the relevance of the selected framework to the study.

2.2. Key concepts constituting the conceptual framework for the study

This research focused on contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo. Effective interaction of learners, parents, context and leadership is required to achieve learner success. The researcher assumed that the disintegration of these components would lead to a decline in learners' academic performance in rural schools. However, integrating these components would lead to learner success. The literature supported a conceptual framework based on this assumption (Durisic & Bunijevac 2017; Webster-Stratton & Bywater, 2015; Yuianti, Denessen, Droop & Veerman 2020), a conceptual framework was developed.

The four fundamental concepts used in the framework are leadership, learners, context and parents. The four concepts that underpin the conceptual framework were developed from the context-responsive leadership construct developed in a study conducted by researchers from Ohio State University (Abba, Yahaya, & Suleiman, 2018). The construct was generated by Bredeson et al. (2011) and is referred to as *wisdom in action.* It manifests itself in a complex mix of knowledge, skills and dispositions, used appropriately by influential leaders as they engage

in continuous conversation with dynamic situational variables. Context responsive leadership is expressed by actions, the way the leader behaves. Leadership, learners, context and parents were collectively explored in line with their realities to examine how leaders can establish successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo schools. Context-responsive leadership is goal-focused. The interaction of learners, parents and context is explored to achieve learner's success as a goal (Figure 1). The four components that describe the conceptual framework are discussed individually to motivate its application in this study.
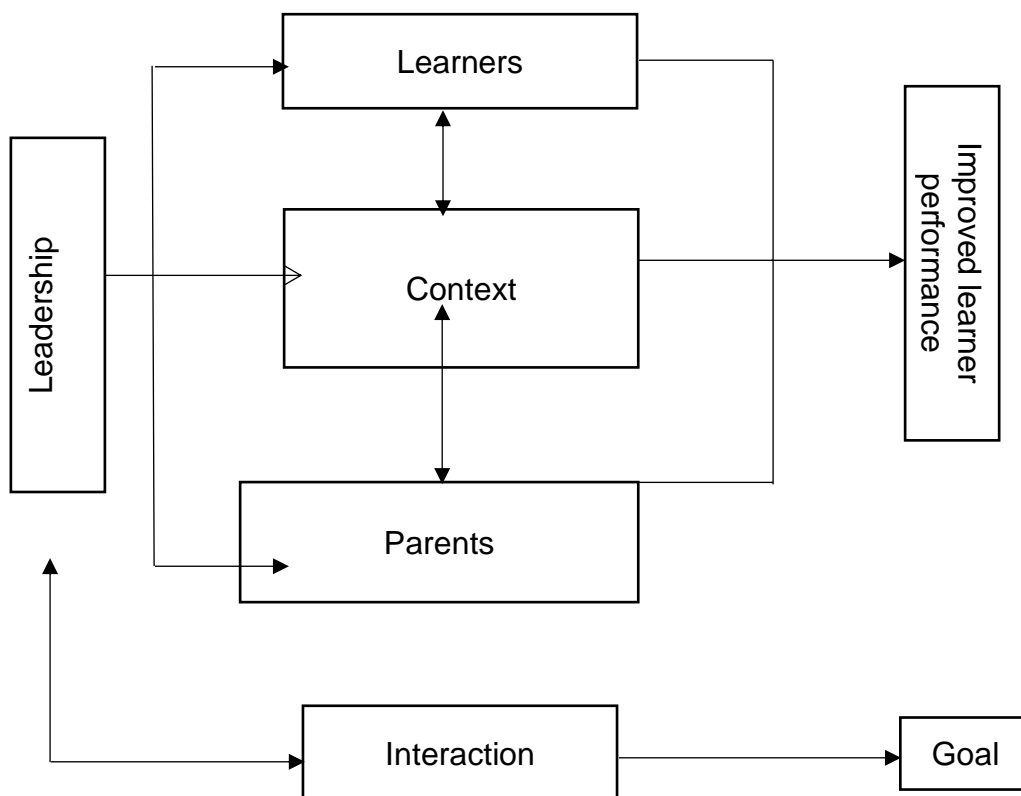
Figure 1: Goal-directed interactive relationship between leadership, parents, context and learners.

2.2.1.   Leadership

Leadership is a process by which the goals of an organisation are set, and strategies are sought to achieve the set goals. Sharma and Jain (2013) define leadership as a process by which individual influences the group to achieve a

common goal. The common goal, in this case, is to achieve learner success. However, a leader has to use skills, knowledge and wisdom to influence the stakeholders to work together to accomplish this. Adebiyi, Adebiyi, Doramok, and Seyi-Oderinde (2019) agree that an effective leader needs a blend of skills, knowledge and disposition deployed appropriately to achieve the desired goal.

Contextually responsive leadership refers to leadership that can respond appropriately to changing contexts. A contextually responsive leader should be aware of the situational conditions to react appropriately to changing contexts. Bush (2018) states that a successful leader is always context-dependent and requires awareness of the context in which they work and how best to adjust their actions and practices according to the changing context. Understanding the rural context enables the leader to design suitable and relevant practices to influence the context. If a leader is not familiar with the context, any strategy adopted to improve rural schools will not work. Knowledge of the context is critical as it will assist the leader in employing leadership practices to meet the needs of rural schools. Marishane (2016) rightfully points out that school context informs leadership practices.

In responding to the rural context, the interaction between the elements of leadership, learners, parents, and the context needs to take place using leadership practices as outlined by Terhoven and Fataar (2018). These practices include setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing teaching and learning programmes. These leadership practices are discussed in school-parent engagement in Limpopo schools.

Setting direction entails the leader's initiative to articulate the school's vision to learners and parents to become a collective mandate that should be carried out to achieve the common goal. OECD (2019) view school leaders as crucial to strengthening collaboration among stakeholders by building trusting and mutual relationships for effective teaching and learning. However, this should be done to recognise the contextual factors rural stakeholders face fully. Mampane and Marishane (2018) argue that, for leaders to influence stakeholders to buy into the

school vision, they should ensure that stakeholders are actively engaged in a collaborative design of the school's future and encourage everyone to commit to the plans. When the vision clearly explains the roles of parents and learners, learners and parents will direct their effort to high-performance expectations.

Developing people: This leadership practice concentrates on people such as learners and parents as vision carriers. It encompasses the leader's attitude to themselves and others, stimulating others mentally, motivating, empowering and providing support under the prevailing situational conditions. A rural context is characterised by people with low self-esteem, illiteracy and lack of commitment (Munje & Mncube, 2018). These factors have worked against parental engagement and learners' success. Mohangi, Krog and Nel (2016) contend that rural areas are characterised by factors that negatively affect the delivery of quality education. This suggests that quality education is possible even in rural areas, provided parents are engaged and empowered to participate meaningfully in their children's education. Empowering parents is a way of recognising the role and the inputs parents may bring to the education system. The empowering initiative will raise parents' confidence and self-efficacy and set learners to academic success. When parents know what to do, when and how to do it, engagement becomes a success, and student learning improves.

Redesigning the organisation: Redesigning the organisation means renewing the organisational culture. An organisation's culture is context-dependent and is the backbone of a successful organisation. Therefore, leaders need to reinvent the culture to achieve the desired goal. The uniqueness of the rural context suggests that redesigning the organisation is necessary to achieve the set goal. Offorma (2016) contends that culture should be shaped by shared values, needs, goals and vision and reflect the ownership of the people who designed it. Societal, cultural values and practices affect what leaders do. Leaders are likely to internalise cultural values and traditions and reflect them in their behaviour. The failure of leaders to lead in a way that reflects societal norms may limit the effectiveness of the leader's behaviour. Redesigning the organisation also implies setting up structures for a sustainable collaborative culture, which will

influence society's ideals, norms, and values. Offorma (2016) sees education as a weapon that can impact society's way of life. Leaders need to ensure that education reflects what people do, feel and believe.

Managing instructional programmes: Teaching and learning is the practice that defines what the school stands for. The school wants to create an environment suitable for effective teaching and learning. When leaders and parents work together, learners do better and stay in school longer (Guenther, Disbray & Osborne, 2015). As much as school leaders are critical role players in education, parents are equally important in ensuring quality education. Parents should be involved to achieve effective teaching and learning. The role of parents adds more value to the education of their children. This added value will happen as parents are continually empowered for meaningful contributions to teaching and learning. Quezada (2016) contends that leaders, who view parents as assets and invest and work with them, will see changes in their school's performance. However, teaching and learning should resonate with rural conditions. Westera (2011) asserts that teaching and learning should be connected with existing conditions to make sense to the learners. This implies that any teaching and learning not aligned to the context will achieve very little. If a context informs teaching and learning, it will enhance high performance as pupils learn from the experience they acquire from their situation. Learners gain new knowledge from the culture embedded in their norms, values and traditions. The element of familiarity with context ensures the learner's self-efficacy. This implies that teaching and learning occur when learners are familiar with the situation from which learning emerges, overriding constraints brought by contextual factors.

2.2.2. Learners

Learners depend on teachers, school leaders, and parents to give them knowledge and can achieve anything if the context of teaching and learning is conducive. Context becomes conducive when it responds to the needs and aspirations of the learners. The aspirations of learners include discovering themselves and achieving success. Learners achieve success when learning

occurs in totality (Power, 2011). Learning in totality involves cognitive, social and physical development, which should be considered to achieve academic performance. Leaders need to understand the context in which learning occurs to understand learners' cognitive, social, and physical development. Du Plessis (2017) supports this view by contending that principals should understand the context in which they work to meet the developmental needs of the learners. Understanding learners' views of their context will assist in creating a learning environment that is responsive to their unique needs (Mestry, 2017).

Leaders should intentionally act as agents of change by supporting and accelerating education, social, cultural and behavioural change in an organisation to meet the needs of learners in rural schools (Sibani, 2018). This implies that leaders must drive the agenda of transforming the organisation to improve performance. Bhengu and Myende (2016) contend that the leader's ability to adjust to a new culture is critical for learner success. This suggests that leaders should advocate the total development of rural learners to transform their lives, despite the contextual challenges. Leaders should ensure that an environment is created for parents to participate in their children's education. There is a strong collaboration between the school and the parents for the learner's success.

Leaders must promote a sense of collective responsibility for student learning and development and establish structures and processes for shared decision-making (OECD, 2019). Sutton and Shouse (2016) contend that building collaborative school culture, creating structures that encourage participation in decision-making and building productive relationships with parents are successful practices. Schools that focus on adverse and challenging circumstances continue to function and thrive.

Leaders are at the centre of school improvement for learners' success. Leadership is critical for school improvement (Cruickshank, 2017). The effectiveness of leaders in rural schools is measured by their ability to build strong relationships with students by praising them and publicly rewarding them for their

accomplishments (Preston, 2017). Motivated learners are productive learners and do well academically and socially (Adamma, Ekwutosim & Unamba, 2018). Appreciating a learner's good work not only works for those who do well, but it's a gesture that sends a good message to those not doing well to work harder and possibly receive the rewards. The conditions under which children in rural areas learn to call for continuous motivation to release their potential and confirm they can rise above their situations and achieve more. The ability to rise above hopeless conditions will depend on the leader's ability to motivate and serve as a role model to learners. Mampane (2016) says that the leader's ability to motivate and inspire learners helps them to improve their performance. Leaders should work to inspire confidence in learners and make them believe in themselves, and work their way to the top despite contextual realities.

Leaders who consistently communicate the importance of education to learners and the value education adds to their lives build in them the character and behaviour for a sustainable life. The values of respect for others, fairness and equality, caring for the well-being of others, integrity and honesty should be cultivated in learners for their total development (Abdallah & Forani, 2017). Marishane (2020) agrees that success is embedded in learning good values, concern for their well-being and ensuring that academic achievement is realised in a well-adapted context.

Leaders play a crucial role in the success story of rural learners. Rural learners are known to be under-performers compared to their counterparts in urban areas. The disparity between urban and rural performance diminishes the opportunity to achieve learning outcomes. However, leaders in rural schools may bridge the gap between rural and urban learners by using their expertise to make learners believe in themselves again and serve as a point of reference to transform their mindsets (Mampane, 2016).

This means that leaders may serve as role models by being credible in their conduct so learners can draw inspiration from them. As role models, leaders should invest their time, knowledge, wisdom and resources in these learners to

become the assets their communities want for their development. Learners' success will not only be measured by individual brilliance but by a collective that will put back into their community for others to thrive.

Learners do not thrive because their confidence is very low but because they need support from both parents and school leaders. The confidence level is low because there is no inspiration to propel learners to put in the extra effort. Shikalepo (2020) states that rural learners risk poor academic achievement. When learners are demotivated because of the conditions in which they live and study, the desire to learn is affected. The absence of the willingness to learn manifests itself in dropouts, culminating in the failure of schools to meet the learners'. Learners who pass Grade 12 migrate to urban areas for a better life. Jamil and Mohyaddin (2015) contend that people migrate for a better living and secure a better education. The migration results in a brain drain, which leaves rural communities without role models. A significant number of people migrate from rural to urban areas. This migration happens for a good reason but leaves rural areas poorer in human and material resources. The migration does not only affect learners; good principals and teachers also migrate for a better life.

Learner performance continues to decline as many rural schools often fail to attract better teachers and principals. The poor performance of rural areas is generational because in many cases every year, school performance drops. This trend may change if parents and principals pay more attention to learners' needs. Schools and parents should join hands to educate rural children. Educating a rural child is achievable if teaching and learning become the business of both the principal and the parents. However, the learners' confidence must be boosted to enhance better performance. When the confidence level of learners is low, their performance at school declines. Mupa and Chunooneka (2015) believe that the socioeconomic background of learners impacts their performance at school. Learners' minds should be reconditioned to become receptive to education. Parents should start showing interest in the education of their children. Parents' education level in rural areas should not be used to deter participation. Despite the poor conditions in rural schools, parents should show support for their

children. Parents may show support by creating an environment at home that is conducive to teaching and learning. On the other hand, principals should demonstrate a willingness and commitment to providing quality teaching and learning. The desire to improve learners' performance in rural areas should be measured by the commitment to involve parents in their children's education. If principals and parents work together, learning outcomes will improve.

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed rural learners`, made them more vulnerable and compromised their education. Teaching and learning were disrupted in rural schools. The World Bank refers to the disruption of education as 'learning poverty' (Belay, 2020). Distance learning as a means to mitigate the effect of Covid-19 did not happen in rural schools due to a lack of resources. Dube (2020) stated that learners in rural areas could not attend online classes due to a lack of infrastructure, electricity, data, electronic devices and qualified teachers to assist them. Online learning favoured urban learners over rural learners. The impact was enormous because the annual teaching plans could not be completed. The backlog of the content coverage will be felt for many years to come. Home education could have been an option in trying to overcome the effect of Covid-19; however, the poor educational background of parents made it difficult for such an avenue to be exploited. The socioeconomic disparity between rural and urban has worsened due to the pandemic. Parents and principals should provide leadership to protect the future of rural learners.

2.2.3.   Context

Context refers to an actual situation where human activities take place. Research by Hollowell (2019) defines context as a concept that creates the social system that guides individuals and group behaviour for effective interactive dynamics occurring in the organisation. Context influences leadership practices and affects organisational performance. However, leadership with expertise may influence the context to achieve the set goals. If leaders fail to identify contextual challenges, they may stand in the way of the organisation achieving its goal. The focus of this study is on the rural context.

The rural context is under-developed with little physical, economic and human resources to develop its full potential. Du Plessis (2014) defines rural context as poor and disadvantaged with a lack of basic infrastructures such as sanitation, water, roads, transport and electricity. Apart from necessities, the rural context is also characterised by poverty, unemployment, low-income levels and poor economic structure. The rural context offers less hope to its residents and a bleak future in jobs, education and financial freedom. Boix and Champallion (2015) contend that a rural context has a less diversified economy and fewer socioeconomic opportunities for people.

Most rural schools are deprived of better resources to provide quality education. Urban schools are better in terms of human and physical resources than their counterparts in rural areas. Learners' underperformance in rural areas is not surprising as schools are under-resourced (Shikalepo, 2019). The lack of resources and support from parents and leaders who are not sensitive to context is blamed for learners' poor performance. Okilwa (2015) regards these schools as marginalised and under-resourced in terms of physical and human capital. Weir and colleagues (2015) assert that schools in rural areas face unique characteristics and remain vulnerable and disadvantaged compared to their counterparts in urban areas. The impoverished conditions under which children in rural areas learn limit their performance. Demi, Jensen and Snyder (2010) indicate that learners in rural areas have a long-standing trend of poor performance and lower educational aspirations. The poor conditions in rural areas negatively impact the education received by rural learners. The poor level of education is attributed to socioeconomic status, culture and traditions and indigenous knowledge system, among others.

2.2.3.1. *Socioeconomic status*

Socioeconomic status is an unequal distribution of social and economic services to the people. The socioeconomic disparity manifests itself in poverty, lack of basic income, poor education, unemployment and poor health. These conditions are common in rural areas and affect the delivery of effective teaching and

learning, which ultimately hinders students' academic performance. The impact of low socioeconomic status shows itself in different ways.

Poverty: Learners with low socioeconomic status experience slow academic progress because their concern is not education but livelihood (Bayat, Louw & Rena, 2014). This implies that livelihood is more important than education. Mihai and Titan (2013) point out that those rural schools continuously experience poor learner performance due to persistent poverty. This is because parents are preoccupied with job-seeking and putting bread on their tables and providing educational support to their children is not a priority. As a result, the idea of educating a rural child becomes a secondary mission.

Poor education: Parents in rural communities are generally uneducated and not aware of the importance and value of their children's education (Alam, 2015). Education is confined to school with very little or nothing from parents to support it because of the rate of illiteracy.

Poor health: The coronavirus pandemic has exposed the magnitude of socioeconomic conditions of people in rural areas and its impact on education. Coronavirus affects not only education but also the health of the people. The threat to people's health, especially educators, learners and parents, is a threat to quality education. Due to the severity of the virus, lockdown measures were imposed on residents and education was severely affected in rural schools. Rural education was blocked entirely (Espino-Diaz, 2020). Learners in urban schools continued with their education using online platforms because these schools are better resourced. Parents in urban areas have better socioeconomic status allowing them to buy gadgets and data for their children. Education in rural schools came to a standstill as learners could not afford devices, let alone data, to connect to the internet (Adarkwah, 2021). Homeschooling was deemed an alternative strategy to educate rural learners but could not work either as parents are illiterate and poor and cannot assist their children. The pandemic further widened the gap between rural and urban education, which will take years to close (Belay, 2020).

Lack of basic income: There is poor resource allocation, lack of funding and lack of infrastructure in rural schools. Beckman (2015) believes that the poor performance of schools in rural areas is due to ineffective and inefficient allocation of resources. Lack of physical and human resources derail effective teaching and learning, negatively impacting learner performance.

Unemployment: The hardship brought by unemployment exacerbates low socioeconomic status and affects learners' academic performance, thinking, and behaviour. Marishane (2020) asserts that low socioeconomic status affects children's academic performance, behaviour in schools, and, ultimately, their success. Therefore, context is the backdrop against which leadership happens. Understanding socioeconomic status is critical for school leaders to respond appropriately to achieve learners' success.

2.2.3.2. Culture and traditions

Traditional practices such as initiation schools have become the culture of rural communities. Sedibe (2019) describes initiation schools as secret rites which serve as a teenager's transition from childhood to adulthood. Rural communities regard initiation schools as a necessary means of transmitting their society's values, norms, and skills. Boys and girls are expected to attend these schools to honour their traditions. Those who fail to attend the schools are regarded as outcasts, mocked and disrespected in their communities (Rehema, Verhan, Emmanuel & Douglas, 2014). Initiation schools enjoy maximum support from parents in rural communities and have gained momentum recently. Due to their prominence in rural areas, teaching and learning have to be suspended for the period of the initiation (Phiri, Musonda & Daka, 2020). Therefore, learners miss teaching and learning for an extended time while at initiation schools. Learners who graduate from initiation schools no longer regard mainstream education as necessary; they develop a negative attitude, ill-discipline and some drop out of school, leaving them and their families with a bleak future. Leaders cannot ignore the culture and traditions of rural communities because of their negative impact on learners' success.

Context has never been an outside issue; it is at the heart of successful leadership. Leaders should better understand the environment and how it affects their organisations in their pursuits to achieve their objectives. Achieving organisational goals will depend on how responsive leaders are to the contextual factors. Ghazzani, Shoughari and Osta`s (2017) situational theory states that leaders should be innovative to overcome challenges for learner success. This suggests that it is better to deal with situations for effective student learning than to ignore them. According to Preston (2017), a leader's ability to read and understand context is critical for learner achievement. Leaders who can diagnose context can find the remedy to deal with variants in a situation. Lingam et al. (2014) contend that, despite the challenges rural learners face, leaders remain the hope and resort to confronting the contextual factors that hamper their success in rural schools. These challenges are surmountable; all leaders need is the ability to diagnose the contextual factors and develop strategies to deal with them.

2.2.3.3.   *Indigenous knowledge system*

An indigenous knowledge system (IKS) is a naturally gained knowledge that gives local people the ability, experience and understanding of how to use their environment for their livelihood. Mounganidze (2016) define IKS as a body of knowledge and skills developed outside the formal education system that enables communities to survive in their specific environment. Mawere (2015) views IKS as a set of ideas, beliefs and practices of a particular people that have been used to interact with their environment and other people over a long period. An IKS emphasises naturally developed knowledge that relies entirely on local people's potential to exploit their natural gifts to improve their lives. In this study, IKS is highlighted because its use is regarded as old-fashioned and cannot add value to the modern education system. According to Ngasike (2019), IKS is barbaric and does not add value to student learning in contemporary schooling. The exclusion of home language in teaching and learning has disadvantaged

learners and parents as they cannot assist their children with schoolwork in subjects where a foreign language is used.

The failure of curriculum developers to integrate IKS into the modern education system has manifested in rote learning, poor intellectual transformation, the passive transmission of indigenous values, and education that does not resonate with children's experience and prior knowledge (Ngasike, 2019). These manifestations are perpetual and subject rural learners to the western adopted ideology of education, which offers very little for their success. Despite the evidence of dropouts and inferior education in rural schools, IKS is not acknowledged in our education system.

However, an IKS is a valuable asset but less considered by leaders to contribute to learners' success. Mawere (2015) highlights the positives that may be gained by incorporating IKS in learner success. These include enhancing innovative thinking and constructivism in the learners, empowering learners to shake off the chains of imperial domination, motivating and bolstering their intellectual fortunes and inspiring and stimulating their minds. These positives suggest that learners will benefit should they be allowed to learn from personal experiences and be independent thinkers who chart their destiny on what they learn both at home and school. This also means that what they already know, do and say should be acknowledged and appreciated. Hlalele (2019) contends that it is a mistake to discard IKS because the rural context in which learning occurs implies that many people rely on indigenous practices for survival. A school leader's response to IKS is critical in fostering parent engagement and learner success.

An IKS can be used to stimulate confidence in both parents and learners. Mawere (2015) asserts that the potential role of IKS is motivating, raising interest and promoting the potential thinking and a sense of self-consciousness in learners. IKS reflects the experience, intuition and culture from which to build teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are effective when prior knowledge has been established. This means that the inclusion of learners' prior knowledge into education curricula promotes and enhances innovative thinking and

constructivism (Mawere, 2015). Prior knowledge is accumulated over time and connects with new knowledge to improve learning. It is through informal knowledge that formal knowledge can be achieved efficiently. Effective leadership starts from the known to the unknown. School leaders should propose that IKS be incorporated into the curriculum. Western domination of knowledge and the marginalisation of the African knowledge system continue to be an academic challenge (Hlalele, 2019). Outcomes-Based Education was adopted from western countries, and IKS was marginalised and neglected. When the curriculum is based on indigenous knowledge, learners can associate the new content with what they already know. The notion that any African knowledge is not real has become a setback because rural communities that rely on IKS are marginalised, creating a vacuum for effective teaching and learning. As a result, parents disassociate themselves as their voices are silenced by the dominance of the western education system. Scholars have criticised the dominance of western epistemologies in African education and advocated the integration of indigenous knowledge (Seehawer, 2018).

Parents in rural settings are unable to participate in their children's education because of an inferiority complex created because what they know is not recognised in the modern education system. A foreign education system has become a way of life that marginalises local communities. Due to the dominance of western curricula, parents cannot make a meaningful contribution to their children's education. The lack of parental involvement leads to further erosion of indigenous knowledge, alienating learners from societal values. Incorporating indigenous knowledge into teaching and learning will entrench values of respect and integrity, dealing effectively with the ills in the community. However, societies that abandoned IKS due to the pressure of western culture lose their identity and fail to meet the needs of the dynamic society.

2.3.   Parental engagement

Parental engagement means that parents become role players and decision-makers and assume full responsibility and accountability for their children's

education. Povey Campbell, Willis, Haynes, Western, Bennett, Antrobus, and Pedde (2016) define parent engagement as initiatives parents take to promote the child's academic development, ability to learn and educational outcome. Bakers and colleagues (2016) describe it as inviting parents to partner with the school and listening to their wishes about their children. It suffices to say parents should be seen as valuable assets who, when engaged, learner performance improves. There is compelling evidence that parent engagement positively impacts a learner's success (Jensen & Minke, 2017; Mlecrko, 2013). Learners perform at their best when parents are engaged in their education (Wong, 2015). This suggests that a lack of parent engagement might have been delayed rural schools' change from poor to better performance. The absence of parents in their children's education has deprived rural learners of the opportunity to succeed in life. Despite the evidence pointing to the importance of engaging parents, exclusion of parents in rural schools persisted, placing children at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts in urban schools. It has become the norm for learners in rural schools to underperform, and those in urban schools do better. Lack of engagement between schools and parents in rural areas is attributed to parents' poor living conditions and educational background, lack of self-esteem, and the transfer of responsibility to leaders and teachers. Parent engagement can be used to bridge the gap between schools and parents and improve learner performance in rural areas. According to Jensen and Minke (2017), parent engagement is embedded in parental role construction, self-efficacy, communication and collaboration.

2.3.1. Parental role construction

Parents in rural areas have a passive role in their children's education. This is due to a lack of self-belief, dependency syndrome and not being willing to engage in what matters most in the life of their children, which is education. These parents regard education as a form of transition from childhood to adulthood, dramatically damaging the rural education system and requiring leaders who can be responsive to context. Parental role construction refers to the parent's belief

and understanding of their responsibilities in their children's education. This means principals should offer parents an opportunity to shape their children's education (Stefanski, Valli & Jacobson, 2016). Leaders should not regard themselves as the only bearers of knowledge. They should create a platform for parents to participate meaningfully in their children's education. The active participation of parents in education is possible when shared responsibility is encouraged. Shared responsibility will build and sustain a partnership between rural schools and parents to achieve learners' high expectations.

2.3.2. Parental self-efficacy

Parents in rural areas are reluctant to engage in the educational life of their children because they are not sure whether what they do or say will make a difference in the education of their children. Self-efficacy refers to parents believing in their powers and being confident that their contribution to the educational life of their children will yield positive results. Holloway, Campbell, Nagase, Kim, Suzuki, Wang, Lwatate, and Baak (2016) define parental self-efficacy as parents believing that their actions and abilities will positively influence them. Leaders in schools should assure parents of their self-efficacy by engaging them. If parental self-efficacy is high, it will enhance their children's academic life Parents will ensure that their children attend classes, wear school uniforms, do homework, study, and participate in extra-curricular activities. However, the absence of parental self-efficacy will dampen learners' self-efficacy and negatively impact their academic outcomes. Parents' self-efficacy is low in rural schools because of their level of education (Kainuwa, Mohammad & Yusuf, 2013). The poor educational background of parents makes it difficult for them to provide educational support to their children (Baker, Wise, Gwendolyn & Skiba, 2016). These parents need the belief that their inputs are welcome and sufficient to propel their children to more significant achievements. Leaders should transform schools into free zones where parents can participate freely without thinking about who they are and what qualifications they possess.

2.3.3. Communication

Engaging with parents is a two-way street and cannot be left in the hands of leaders or parents alone. A reciprocal approach necessitates fruitful communication between the school and the parents. Communication from the leader's point of view is that parents should be welcomed on the school premises, and the parents should show a sincere desire and willingness to work with the parents (Mlecrko, 2013). The inclusion of parents in the school's decision-making processes and structures will communicate a clear affirmation of their efforts and confirm a sense of ownership in their children's education. Communication from parents to the school means that the needs and aspirations of their children are made known. The communication channel between the school and the parents will open a platform for sustainable and significant engagement. Communication between the school and the parents will ensure that the school's programmes are known to parents, and the programmes at home are made known to the school. Research has shown that education cannot be restricted to the conditions in the classroom but has to continue into the home environment (Nyatuka & Nyakan, 2015). However, lack of communication has hindered participation in rural schools.

2.3.4. Collaboration

There is an African proverb stting that it takes a village to raise a child. This means that shared responsibility is required to promote and support learners' academic success. Erdener and Knoeppel (2018) rightfully indicated that it could not be the school's responsibility alone to promote learner's success but has to be a collaborative effort between the school and the parents. Kington and Mleczko (2013) assert that learner achievement may improve when shared responsibility is established and maintained. Collaboration between school and parents is critical in building and maintaining a productive working relationship to facilitate children's learning (Ihmeideh et al., 2020).

2.4. Contextual responsiveness

Contextual responsiveness refers to when a leader applies wisdom to deal with changing contextual realities. Bredeson et al. (2011) define contextual responsiveness as using wisdom to respond appropriately to the evolving contexts. Contexts are dynamic and influence the process aimed at achieving the desired goal. Achieving the desired goal of the school is informed by how responsive the leader is to the changing context. Marishane (2016) points out that school improvement is the core responsibility of the school leader. However, the leader cannot fulfil the core responsibility of the school without being immersed in the context in which it operates. The leader works in different contexts, namely urban and rural contexts. Leaders must understand the context in which they work to respond positively to the contextual realities. In this case, parents should be engaged to respond appropriately to context.

2.5. The relevance of this conceptual framework to the study

The relevance of this conceptual framework to the study is rooted in the concepts constituting the framework (leadership, learners, context and parents), which are used frequently to achieve its aim and respond to the research question. The assumption on which this framework is based is that successful learner achievement requires contextually responsive leadership. This leadership engages parents by establishing positive relationships and close collaboration with due consideration given to the dynamics of the context where parents, children and schools are situated. This suggests that parent engagement and learner success in schools depends on the ability of school leaders to respond appropriately to context. If leaders collaborate with parents in meeting challenges arising from their context, they will collectively find ways of addressing the challenges that will enhance learners' achievement. Leaders must apply their wisdom to ensure smooth engagement between schools and parents. When leaders are connected to parents and parents connected to the school, a conducive teaching and learning environment is established, creating opportunities for good academic performance.

In this study, the challenges of socioeconomic status and low education levels experienced by parents in rural areas undermine their ability to make a meaningful contribution to the educational development of their children. These contextual challenges are reasons for parents' non-participation in their children's education. Due to non-participation, parents develop academic pessimism. Academic pessimism is when parents lose their belief, confidence, hope and persistence about the value they may add to educational activities (Stankovska, Braha, & Grncharovska, 2020). This pessimistic behaviour has produced parents who rely on school for their children's academic success. Total reliance on teachers has undoubtedly worked against learners' academic progress across rural areas.

Leaders should adopt parental engagement in the school's culture to respond to the contextual factors and change parents' mindsets. Msila (2012) believes that effective parental engagement can be achieved by enhancing school culture and climate. This will ensure that parent engagement is not an option but a responsibility that every parent should fulfil. Apart from the lack of resources in rural areas, there is an absence of participation of stakeholders such as the parents (Msila, 2012). Munje and Mncube (2018) contend that schools seemingly do not initiate or implement appropriate strategies that are genuinely inclusive, welcoming or encouraging and prevent parents from volunteering.

Leaders should transform their schools into free zones where parents can voluntarily express their opinions without fear. Some leaders do not believe in inclusive leadership and may side-line parents attempting to be involved. Leaders aware of parents' socioeconomic challenges and educational background in rural areas will respond to such challenges by empowering themselves and others so that participation is based on understanding each other. Hsiao and colleagues (2018) point out that empowerment is a process to enable parents to apply their knowledge, expertise and confidence to make their voices heard. Leaders who can respond to the conditions will encourage rural parents to value their worth, despite the socio-economic conditions likely to weaken them. These leaders cannot take advantage of these parents'

weaknesses. Still, they must uphold the qualities of mutual respect and trust, shared decision-making, shared vision, open communication, respect for parents' role, and promote the interest of the group rather than that of individuals. This will affirm the parental presence and grant them their place in the governance and leadership of the school.

2.6.   Summary

The chapter described the conceptual framework that served as a blueprint for the entire enquiry. The conceptual framework for this study was embedded in contextually responsive leadership, parent engagement and a rural setting. These concepts were used to guide, build, and support the inquiry and provide the structure to define the entire thesis's ontological, epistemological, methodological, and analytical approaches. The conceptual framework ensured that the study was composed and aligned with the phenomenon of interest.

The conceptual framework has advanced a context responsive leadership construct as a catalyst for school-parent engagement in a rural setting. It has indicated that the narrative of variations emerging from the rural setting makes it difficult for leaders to respond effectively. In light of this, a leader's skills, knowledge and attitude are challenged and required to adapt to the changing rural setting. These varying challenges experienced by rural schools shape the educational context and provoke leaders' perspectives in the rural environment. The changing context suggests a reconfiguration of the school context to meet the high academic expectations of learners. The high academic expectations of the learners are the primary objectives of the school and should, therefore, be achieved at all costs. The reconfigurations of the nature of the school should include diagnosing the socioeconomic conditions and the educational background of parents in rural areas. These socioeconomic factors have predominantly served as a hindrance to learners' success.

However, not all leaders or any leadership style can shape the rural context for academic achievements. Leaders who can transform underperforming to

performing rural schools are those who can recognise and respond effectively to the contextual realities. Contextual realities cannot be ignored and should be dealt with to create a favourable climate for learner achievement. A positive learning environment is one from which to expect maximum participation from parents, teachers and learners. Leaders should intentionally respond to the rural contextual challenges to build a collaborative culture to achieve learners' success.

In responding to the contextual realities in rural settings, leaders are expected to view rural context from a wider lens. By this, I mean that leaders should think beyond the walls of the schools and see how influential the external environment is to the school's operation. In responding to external influences, school leaders should open doors for parental engagement by recognising the potential impact on successful learners. Leaders should adopt parent engagement as the school's culture to sustain this engagement.

In responding to the context, the conceptual framework further shows that leaders should be willing to build a trusting relationship with parents. The relationship and trust between the school and the parent will ensure that the social, economic and political issues that impede school success are handled collectively. Embracing collective leadership acknowledges that the school alone has failed to promote learners' success without parents' input.

In responding to the context, leaders have shown how to put wisdom into action by knowing when, where, and how to push back and shape their contextual environment. Pushing back means dealing with contextual factors effectively to create a positive environment for teaching and learning. In responding to the dynamic environment, leaders should be proactive and have the right skills, knowledge, and attitude to shape the context to respond to rural communities' needs.

The conceptual framework has also shown the need for leaders to educate themselves about what rural communities want. As school leaders empower themselves, they should also inform parents of the role they need to play in their

children's education. Improved learner performance is achieved when leaders and parents have a common understanding. Student learning is achieved when stakeholders collaboratively play their part. Leaders should lead, parents provide support to their children and children should be committed and responsive to teaching and learning for learner performance.

CHAPTER THREE
LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1   Introduction

In Chapter 2, I outlined the conceptual framework underpinning the study. The concepts related to the topic were used to create the framework. The framework provides the grounding base for the literature review and, more significantly, the methods and analysis. This chapter focuses on a literature review on contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo. This literature review aimed to explore literature to establish the status quo about the influence of principals in establishing school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo schools and identify the gap that will set precedence for new knowledge. In establishing what is already known, the researcher reviewed local and international literature to follow the trends on how principals lead in rural contexts to build school-parent engagement successfully.

The study is grounded in Bredeson et al. (2011) context-responsive leadership construct. School context and leadership, parent engagement, and responsive contextual leadership were explored in line with their realities in examining the construct in line with the topic of study.

3.2 School context

Schools are institutions of teaching and learning that seek to improve learner performance, regardless of conditions. Damons and Sherington (2020) define schools as complex spaces susceptible to the prevailing social, political and cultural environment. This definition implies that schools do not exist in a vacuum but are surrounded by internal and external environments that influence their operation. Internal and external factors affect the output the school produces. Internal factors include teachers, learners, support staff and learner support materials.

External factors originate outside the school and over which it has no control. These include politics, economics and the community. However, schools do have control over internal environments. In the United States of America, Klar and colleagues, Moyi, Ylimaki, Hardie, Andeolie, Dou, Hamington, Roper, and Buskey (2019) regard school context as institutional, community, sociocultural, political and economic. A school should not be seen as a space for pursuing academic outcomes but as an institution to impact all spheres of human life. In South Africa, the school context is characterised by a lack of commitment, incompetent teachers, poor work ethics, lack of community and parental support, poor control by education authorities, inadequate support for teachers, and low levels of accountability (Mouton et al., 2013).

The new South Africa inherited schools isolated from the entire community. Fraise and Brooks (2015) believe that schools are disconnected from society. What the school does is often contrary to what society stands for. The school principal's response to the disconnection between the school and society is the focal point of the research process. Damons and Sherington (2020) argue that

schools should be reimagined as spaces for teaching and learning and as an evolving site for the possibility of bettering the community it serves. Schools have to reposition themselves as a beacon of hope for the community due to their extended mandate. Fraise and Brooks (2015) argue that leaders should not limit success to the classroom but see it as broadly conceived to enhance the quality of life, including economic, social and political prosperity. In other words, school leaders should be more aware and responsive to the socio-economic challenges faced by their communities that threaten the school's functionality.

School context represents a significant investment for every advanced society (Muller, 2015). As an investment, it can either amplify or undermine the investment made in the community. Recent violence and bullying experienced in South African schools bear testimony to the poor social interaction (Juan, Hannan, Govender & Reddy, 2018). Despite the explicit challenges in South African schools, they are still confined to improving matric results at the expense of broader contextual realities confronting the rural society.

Contingency theorists argue that a leader's effectiveness is optimised when they correctly make their practices contingent on their work situations (Suharyanto & Lestari, 2020). The effectiveness of leadership depends on individual attributes. However, they may not be enough to guarantee learners' success without aligning such practices to the situation. The traditional view has identified principals as primary drivers of educational reform without thinking that the role of other stakeholders, such as parents, is compromised. This conventional view has failed to acknowledge the broader base within which the school exists and continues to disadvantage the underprivileged in rural areas.

Schools in multi-deprived contexts struggle to reach a high level of academic performance. South African schools face a crisis of inefficiency and inequality (Pillay, 2021). These schools are dysfunctional as they often struggle with absenteeism, ill-health, malnutrition, child abuse, general neglect, lack of hope for the future caused by poverty and general apathy to education. Nyatuka and Nyakan (2015) believe that excellent schools can only function when parents

within the community in which it is located function. A comprehensive and collaborative interaction between the school and the parents is critical for schools to work better. The betterment of schools cannot be the sole responsibility of the school but collaboration between the school and the parents. Despite the challenges facing many impoverished schools in rural areas, parents are still less engaged in their children's education. However, schools in marginalised communities are still expected to compete equally with their more privileged counterparts. Many schools in rural communities do not have access to resources necessary to support and effect quality education, yet this disparity in schools is not given attention. Beckman and Gallo (2015) suggest that local communities should organise and empower themselves to promote education for their children. School leaders should shift their focus from purely academic to being responsive to the socio-economic challenges that prevent parents from contributing to improving academic performance. Leaders should be flexible and adaptable to the changing context. The school setting comprises insitutional, community, socio-cultural and political contexts, discussed in the following paragraphs.

3.2.1 Institutional factors

Institutions are the structures and activities that provide stability to society. They consist of family, education, economic, religious, social, and political systems. These structures are essential because a school needs stability to fulfil its teaching and learning mission. Organisations such as schools are shaped by these institutions as they are built within the fabric of society. It is in these institutions that norms, values and beliefs are learned that serve as a foundation to build the academic structure of the school. Organisations should interact with these institutions to overcome many contextual challenges and achieve organisational goals.

3.2.1.1 Family structure

Family is a structure where children are born, grow, nurtured and sent to schools. Each family has its own vision, values and beliefs. Children are brought up according to the values and belief system the family has adopted. Yasaroglu (2017) contends that values are acquired by training and basic identifier of personality traits. Values are important because they shape the personality of a child. Education is received through one's personality, and parents should take responsibility for shaping the personalities of their children, so they are ready to receive an education. How a child is brought up determines the smooth integration into the schooling system. Although family nurturing is informal, it serves as a foundation where values are taught for effective schooling. The teaching of values starts from the family and continues to educational institutions. Educational institutions need children with values to fulfil their mission.

The critical role of family is to prepare children for formal education by inculcating acceptable values such as respect, honesty, integrity and truthfulness in them. Family values are the basis for education (Valeeva, Korolteva & Sakhapova, 2016). Children who come from stable families are likely to respond well to the demands of the schooling environment. Stable families are families characterised by respect, integrity, honesty and ambition. These are families that have order and know what they want for their children. The orderliness is not based on the socioeconomic conditions and the educational background of families but the value system entrenched in the household. These families may be poor but can nurture their children in a way that is acceptable to society. In contrast, there are well-off families whose children are a shame to society. The values children carry from home to school are the assets the schools need. Children without values are vulnerable to the ills society experiences. Turnsek, Skraban, Razposnik and Pavel (2016) downgrade disadvantaged families to risk profiles for failing to provide adequate upbringing for children. Parents should protect their children by instilling good values that will sustain them, even in their absence. Ceka and Murati (2016) assert that families are the direct holders of educational work. This

means families are the architects of the children's future. The education children receive at school complements what families have begun.

Families that abandon their responsibility of entrenching values in their children expose them to societal exploitation and judgement. Families play an important role in children's academic performance that schools and communities want (Li & Qiu, 2018). Children of good character are born from family guidance. The absence of parents means that children will grow without direction and identity. Scabini and Manzi (2011) contend that family identity leads to developing a child's identity. Children without identity become the victims of every doctrine they encounter. In recent times, schools experienced a high level of bullying, drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancies and general ill-discipline. Marilen (2015) regards children with deviant tendencies as an unjustified relinquishment of parental protection resulting in the final loss of control and authority over the child. Lack of discipline is a behaviour that has found its way in children whose foundational values are weak. Children nowadays disrespect their teachers, the school code of conduct, their parents and absent themselves from school.

There is little connection between schools and families. Schools exist in isolation with little or no support from families (Chakaninka, Sichula, Sumbwa & Nduna, 2012). Families are expected to lay a good foundation. When the foundation is strong, schools can provide quality educational services to the children. When the foundation is weak, it defeats the purpose of providing quality education. Building on a solid foundation transcends contextual factors that families might be encountering. Schools cannot provide quality educational services to children without support from parents. Established families can invest and reap the value that education adds to their lives. Li and Qiu (2018) contend that family educational investment decisions make a difference in children's educational achievements. The connection between schools and families is critical as it creates the synergy that strengthens the relationship between the two institutions. Yasaroglu (2017) contends that, if there is no consistency between the values that children learned or witnessed in the school and the family, conflicts occur and cause personality disorders. Schools are born from families;

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therefore, the transition from family to school is important for learner success. The transitional period between family and school should be handled with care as it can break or build the child. Harper (2015) contends that transitions are essential because children who experience continuity with earlier educational experience show increased motivation, improved relationships with peers and adults and higher achievement. This period is often neglected by both parents and principals as the concern is about numbers without checking the child's readiness for school.

When a child is not prepared for school, it becomes a burden (Cikar &Aslan, 2019). The difficulty of the work manifests itself in disciplinary problems which do not only affect the identified victim but also other learners. Teaching and learning are disrupted, and the future of many learners is compromised. When parents are called to school for a child's behavioural problems, it is sometimes too little too late. Parents have neglected responsibilities, and it manifests at an early stage at school.

No school can exist without families, and no families can develop well without the school. A good teaching and learning environment are created in the minds of the children without school. When children's minds are inculcated with good values, children find it easy to abide by the school code of conduct which serves as a reference for effective teaching and learning. The good conduct of children is a basis for teaching and learning. Schools that produce excellent academic performance are proud, not only of themselves but for the families. A working relationship between families and schools is important and should be encouraged. Children deserve fair and dignified treatment, necessary for them to complete a quality school education (Motsa & Morojele, 2016).

3.2.1.2 *Economic factors*

The economic stability of parents depends on the financial capacity of the community. Stable communities can create opportunities for their population. A poor community creates a situation where its people lose any good prospects for

the future and the future of their children. Socioeconomic challenges are one of the barriers preventing parents from participating actively in the education of their children. Parents cannot feed their children due to high unemployment rates, trapping them in a cycle of poverty. Poverty is a dominant feature in rural communities attributed to a lack of economic activities. Business communities are consumed by profit margins targeted at the expense of social responsibilities. Masum, Aziz and Ahmad (2020) contend that businesses should go beyond making profits to being socially responsible. Teaching and learning occur in dilapidated buildings due to a lack of social responsibility by businesses. There is a lack of infrastructure such as libraries, computer laboratories, physical sciences laboratories and internet connections to support effective teaching and learning. The value of education in rural areas has diminished. Business communities have undervalued education by not funding it. Gobeng (2018) points out that the socioeconomic conditions of a community depend on a substantial allocation of funds. There are platinum and chrome mines in the Sekhukhune region, but learners in the area struggle to get funds for tertiary education. The disconnection between schools and economic institutions has affected the educational development of rural communities. The future prospects of rural learners are uncertain, not only for them but also for their families. Learners may excel in secondary education, but lack of funding will deprive them of the opportunity to receive further education.

Apart from the lack of funding to support local schools, parents in these communities are unemployed. Unemployment is increased due to poor productive capacity. Jobless parents have little to offer socially and economically in the life of their children. Varkulevich and Pashuk (2019) point out that effective and constructive interaction of the state and businesses is an essential condition for a country's socioeconomic conditions. This means that change in the economic life of rural communities requires collaboration between the school, businesses and the government. Twinomuhwez and Herman (2020) argue that, if the public and private sectors pool their strength and expertise in their respective efficiencies and capacities, delivery of quality education is

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guaranteed. Currently, the collaboration is non-existent, which has affected the economic status of rural parents. When the socioeconomic status of parents drops, they lose control of their children and the investment decisions they are expected to make in their education. When there is nothing that parents invest in the education of their children, nothing is expected. In other words, the socioeconomic circumstances of parents in rural communities affect their ability to engage effectively in the education of their children.

Lack of economic opportunities for rural parents perpetuates dependence syndrome (Kuralbeyeva (2018). This refers to parents who depend on government social grants for survival. Social grants are a source of income for most parents in rural areas. As a way of life, it has become generational and an acceptable standard of life that continues from one generation to the other. Economic institutions such as mines, banks and manufacturers should prioritise education for rural communities to break the generational connections. When the quality of education provided in rural communities improves, the quality of life of these communities will change. Companies will also benefit due to the pool of skills that will be available. Education provides knowledge and skills that make people more productive (OECD, 2012). Developing the social and economic lives of rural communities needs strong leadership. Grant (2017) asserts that education is a leading determinant of economic growth, employment and earnings. This implies that neglecting education endangers the prosperity of future generations with widespread repercussions of poverty, social exclusion and sustainability of social security.

3.2.1.3   *Religious factors*

Schools are part of the broader society and cannot function in isolation from the church. A church has functions different from a school; however, they are interlinked. A church can serve as a reformatory agency in enhancing a socially transformative agenda in our society. The society we live in today is morally corrupt because the church has neglected its role of entrenching moral behavioural standards in our society. Baloyi (2016) contends that the church

cannot afford to turn a blind eye while the education system of the country collapses. The failure of the church to play its part has led to the deterioration of moral values, which manifest in stealing, murder, corruption, women and child abuse, teenage pregnancies and prostitution. These challenges do not only take away people's right to a good life but affect learners' academic performance. People resort to desperate measures to address their challenges. Wong and Yue (2020) assert that humans may be trustworthy during prosperous times, but when adversity knocks, they turn out to be selfish and deceitful.

Moral degeneration has plunged the society into fear and taken away their peace, order, good governance and decent livelihood. Wong and Yue (2020) contend that morality is the basic condition for education to promote happiness in life. The question is, what role the church play in our schools to restore morality? Partnerships between the school and the church should be formed. A church should be given a chance to provide moral education in schools. The student Christian movements may be used as an option to draw learners to a particular moral standard. There is a relationship between morality and academic performance. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the moral compass of the learners to prepare them for better education. Education without moral values is useless. If the characters of learners do not improve, their academic achievement is overshadowed by bad manners. Society can only become better if the church is allowed to transform teaching and learning. Moral values taught at home should be formalised at school. However, morality has degenerated and culminated in maladministration, corruption and crime. Van Wyk (2017) says that challenges society face is like cancer that continues to eat the moral fibre of the communities. The level of corruption fuelled by immoral behaviour has a detrimental effect on poor communities. Due to corruption, the government fails to deliver quality educational services to the poor and improve their quality of life. Due to a lack of moral leadership, rural communities are more affected than their counterparts in urban areas. Moral leadership is an embodiment and use of ethical competence in inspiring and guiding people to mutually beneficial goals (Wokabi, 2019). Rural learners are deprived of the quality of education because

the government cannot provide school leaders with high moral standards. These leaders pursue their own interests rather than those of the community. School resources are used for personal gain rather than to improve the performance of the learners. Government failure to provide adequate infrastructure is aggravated by leadership that cannot respond to the community's needs.

Establishing commissions and prosecuting people in an attempt to deal with corruption may not serve as a permanent solution to the acts of immorality. Immorality is an inherent characteristic that can only be addressed by moral education. Wokabi (2019) defines moral education as a process that facilitates ethical reasoning and the development of intellectual and moral virtues. The intervention of the church is essential to restore morality. Morality is taught at home from an early age but can disappear in the process of life. Eve and Barna (2015) say that the aim of moral education is to mould religious and moral character. Education without character is prone to deceit and infidelity. Biblical teaching at school assembly points should be encouraged. Student Christian movements schools used to have should be encouraged by allocating time for them as extramural activities. The moral decay that our communities have to grapple with suggests it should be mandatory for learners to attend moral regeneration programmes.

Character building is a lifelong engagement. Schools and churches should form partnerships to drive the moral agenda together (McIntosh & Curry, 2020). The partnership will ensure that the foundation on which the teaching and learning occur is solid. Graduates without characters are a danger to society. Moral culture is needed to foster sensitive and committed leaders and citizens who will recognise fighting corruption in all its form as their rightful honourable duty.

3.2.1.4   Community factors

A community is a group of people who live and work together to achieve a common goal. Community leaders should serve the interest of their community rather than their own (Evans, 2012). The community is expected to participate

in school activities to serve the interests of the children. However, as the community is expected to participate in school matters, school leaders should also participate in community activities. A reciprocal approach should be adopted to build and strengthen the relationship between the school and the community. A child is developed in totality by school-community collaboration. Semke and Sheridan (2012) contend that school-community partnerships go beyond community participation as they emphasise the use of community resources to offer programmes and services to support families and the academic success of their children.

There are resources in communities such as community libraries, halls and computer laboratories that can be made available to support the education of a rural child. There are also retired professionals whose expertise may be used to enhance teaching and learning. These material and human resources are exploitable when the school finds itself within the community.

When the community is involved in education, the challenges of absenteeism, truancy, drug abuse and teenage pregnancies become a societal problem (Kurt & Ozdemir (2015)

. These challenges are not only the concerns of the community but affect the performance of learners at school. When the community members recognise their role as essential partners in education, most of the challenges are addressed. The success of learners will no longer be the business of individual households but the concern of the entire community. Leaners will have no place to hide as education becomes every community member's concern. When learners are seen at shopping malls during school hours, community members will alert the relevant authorities to attend to the matter. When education is transformed from being the business of the school to the business of the community, the quality of education improves. Godfrey (2016) asserts that community participation has the potential to improve the quality of education. Quality education is what the community need to overcome the challenges of poverty and unemployment that have become a chronic problem in rural

communities. The standard of living of rural communities may improve by the provision of quality education.

A well-educated community can reinvent itself for sustainable development. Damons and Sherrington (2020) argue that the process of reimagining schools is not only a space for pursuing academic outcomes for learners but is an evolving site of the possibility of the betterment of the community it serves. Schools should produce learners who are useful academically and in the community. This refers to learners who will serve their own interests and the interests of others. An education that promotes a collaborative approach to development is an education that is contextualised to ignite the sense of responsibility and accountability in learners. Contextualisation will ensure that the community develops from within. This means the community should rely on its own material and human resources to transform it. Damons and Sherrington (2020) contend that quality education can lift a society from poverty and oppression. The function of a school in society is to nurture future generations into responsible global citizens. The development of a community depends on its ability to revaluate its context and reprioritise education as an important means to transition the community from poverty to prosperity.

However, schools in rural communities are susceptible to poor socioeconomic conditions and cultural factors that influence the level of community commitment in education (Du Plessies,2014). The high socioeconomic inequality, poor educational background and unemployment have burdened and demoralised rural communities. Due to these contextual factors, rural communities have little capacity or interest to be involved in the education of their children. This indifference has divided society and deprived learners of academic success. The community can also not reinvent itself because it fails to invest in its own context. Palmieri and Palma (2017) argue that, although economical, educational and some human capital may be lacking, there appears to be an abundance of social capital inherent in existing relationships in these communities that needs to be tapped. This suggests that a strong sense of place, providing opportunities for parent engagement, strengthening church ties and building strong school

business relationships should be cultivated to strengthen good partnerships. The school and the community cannot continue to exist in isolation, and common ground should be found. Schools in rural areas have tried to improve learner performance alone but failed. Sharma (2008) asserts that, without the involvement of the community in school management, quality improvement is not possible. There has been a string of poor performance in rural schools because of community absence. Communities have blamed school leaders for their children's poor performance. School leaders, on the other hand, blame communities for not showing an interest in the education of their children. This is a blame game that doesn't do either party any good. The school and the community should work together to change the *status quo* and contribute meaningfully to the education of rural learners. Gross (2015) describe school-community partnerships as sound and meaningful relationships with community members, organisations and businesses committed to working cooperatively with a shared responsibility to advance the development of learner's intellectual, social and emotional well-being. The education of a rural child may be improved by a joint effort.

The collaboration between the school and the community should be based on social interactions, mutual trust and relationships that promote learner performance (Kousholt & Hojholt, 2019). Education is a shared responsibility between the school and the community (Wahyuningsih & Sumarsono, 2017). A particular kind of leadership is required to bring parties together for shared responsibility. Leadership that is contextually responsive, not self-centred but community centred. Leadership cannot allow the urban school improvement model to be imposed on rural schools. School leaders should adapt their leadership practices to suit their contextual environments (Klar, Moyi, Ylimaki, Hardie, Andreoli, Dou, Harrington, Roper, & Frederick, 2020). Rural schools are unique and require unique interventions to deal with their challenges to improve results. Leaders who are not guided by their intuition cannot find remedies to rural problems; hence rural schools battle to transition from poor to excellent performance. However, contextually responsive leaders seem to be well-

positioned to respond to the desires of rural schools. There is compelling evidence suggesting that community involvement is a critical component for student achievement (Gross et al., 2015). Kusumaningrum, Maisyaroh, Unfatin, Triwiyanto and Gunawan (2017) assert that educational programmes managed collaboratively by the principal, teachers and community can improve learning outcomes. Bauch (2015) identified six types of school-community connections, social capital, sense of place, parent involvement, church ties, school business agency relationship and community as curricula resources. These school community ties are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Social capital: Refers to the moral standard by which children are raised. Bauch (2015) defines social capital as raising children among people who uphold certain morals. Yunus, Hasniati, Nurlinah and Sakaria (2017) define social capital as a cohesive form of norms, beliefs and networks resulting in beneficial cooperation to achieve a common goal. The way children are brought up affects their success in learning. Learning and a moral compass are inseparable. Effective education is impossible in a school setting where moral fibre is absent. Rural communities must have a sense of cohesion to assist in shaping the characteristics of their children. Good character is a precondition for learner success. However, due to the poor socioeconomic conditions in rural areas, morality is not a concern as any means of survival is acceptable. Lack of morality limits chances of academic success. Schools that experience a lack of morality experience learning problems which include truancy, absenteeism, disrespect and dishonesty. Learning without morality is complex. However, a school-community partnership may assist in connecting communities consisting of social and economic class by social capital. Social capital comprises elements essential for successful community-based participation (Sunkar, Meilani, Rahayuningsih & Muntasib, 2016).

Sense of place: People are social beings who have a desire to belong. The desire to belong means no individual should live in isolation. A sense of place means loving your own place and dedicating all your being to developing it. Bauch (2015) defines a sense of place as being rooted in one's community and a desire to

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cherish and develop it. A sense of place prevents the migration of local skills, knowledge and materials to urban communities. The development of rural communities is hindered due to the brain drain. The brain drain refers to the movement of professionals from one country or community to another. A brain drain may happen for many reasons, such as crime, lack of development in rural areas, greener pastures and so on. However, when community members begin to love, cherish and be proud of what they have, they will invest their time, skills, knowledge, and money to improve their community. By having a sense of place, communities may transform schools into centres of learning and teaching. Community members with a sense of place are patriotic and wish only the best for their community. These are people who will not talk badly about their community but will source funds and people to invest in it. Children, who grow under the guidance of patriotism, will protect their community and work towards its development.

Parental involvement: There is compelling evidence suggesting that parental engagement influences learner performance (Cano, Cape, Cardosa, Miot, Pitogo, Quinio, Merin, 2016). By the culture of sense of place, parents may become more responsible and accountable in the education of their children. When it is acceptable in the community for parents to participate in the education of their children, the feeling within the community will serve as motivation for those not yet involved. When the mood is geared to parental participation, parents will volunteer at schools, support their children at home and attend extra-mural activities at school. When parents show interest in what their children are doing at school, their self–efficacy will also improve. Parents acting as role models for their children are motivation enough to encourage them to perform better. Parental involvement is critical as it raises a sense of commitment in children and enhances self-efficacy.

Church ties: There is a disconnection between the schools and the church (Purdy & Meneely, 2015). The disconnection has caused the degeneration of morals in our communities. Churches are the custodians of morality the society is expected to uphold. Currently, there is a moral vacuum left by the church which

needs to be closed. The need to reconnect schools with churches is essential. When the church and the schools reconnect, the social capital needed to shape children's future is enhanced. Most community members belong to the same church denomination, which is an opportunity for social cohesion. Bauch (2015) contends that community members in rural areas are religiously cohesive communities. This cohesiveness gives them the power to influence decisions in schools. Churches may be part of drafting school policies to address the moral decay in society. Local pastors may be adopted at schools for counselling and coaching, which ordinary teachers may not do due to their workload. The involvement of churches in schools will help upgrade the moral standard schools need for effective teaching and learning.

School-based-agency relationship: A partnership between schools and the business community is critical. A relationship between a school and the business community in which they operate is essential to learning (Badget, 2016). A good relationship between schools and businesses will ensure that schools have funding to run their operations. Schools in rural areas do not have adequate infrastructure and other resources needed for effective teaching and learning. A good relationship between schools and businesses will give schools the leverage to contact businesses for funding. Hand (2015) contends that it is important to create a close link between schools and communities to meet the needs of society. Schools may develop to meet the educational needs of their community by funding. School leaders need to engage business communities.

Community as a curricula resource: Most rural communities are rich in natural resources and human capital. Sharma (2008) points out that rural communities offer a wide range of resources valuable to schools and the families they serve. These resources include people who volunteer their time in the school, organisations that offer enrichment opportunities, businesses that offer career-related information and workplace experiences and agencies that provide social services for learners and families. School community libraries and computer centres should be opened for learners. Wi-Fi centres should be established for learners to research their assignments. The business community may also

donate books to improve language proficiency and promote a reading community. Community involvement in curricular matters will ensure that parents understand the needs of the schools to give relevant support to the children.

3.3   Sociocultural context

The theory used to describe sociocultural context is sociocultural theory described by Nurfaidah (2018). It was used to explain human cognitive development based on social and cultural development. According to Aliyu and Yakubu (2019), this theory indicates that cognitive development is connected to culture and society. It suggests that learners construct new knowledge by social interaction and collaboration with others. Learners also construct knowledge with the help of other learners, the learning context and the environment. This means cognitive development depends on the resources provided by society. The theory further explains the concept of zone proximal development (ZPD), which describes two levels of learning: the actual development level and the level of potential development. Slavkov (2015) defines the ZPD as the distance between the actual developmental level determined by independent problem-solving linked to the level of potential development as determined by problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. The actual development level is the level already reached by the learner, which means they can solve problems independently. The level of potential development is a level where a learner can reach a degree of potential level with the help of a mentor or a more capable person. Shabani (2016) argues that knowledge construction should not be sought from the mind but is the social interaction co-constructed between a more and a less knowledgeable person. This means that learners as less knowledgeable and competent people need assistance to reach the zone of proximal development (ZPD) for learning.

As applied to this study, this theory holds that learning occurs by interaction, collaboration with learners, parents, teachers and school leaders. However, this study focused on the interaction between learners, school leaders and parents. Supporting learners to engage effectively in the learning process should be the

goal of school leaders and parents. Successful school-parent engagement focuses on learner achievement. However, a learner's success does not happen in isolation but is the product of a particular setting. Phan (2012) contends that the thinking process, motivation and development skills do not happen in isolation but are embedded in multi and systematic layers consisting of the social milieu, the immediate family and the individual.

Social context refers to interactions with surrounding people. Parents are the first people from whom children's knowledge is developed. Social interaction between parents and children is critical to prepare for formal interaction at school. It is, therefore, important that parents be engaged in the learning process. The support given to learners by parents will assist them in discovering meaning. Topciu and Myfliu (2015) contend that children receive knowledge from contact and interaction with people and then assimilate it, adding their personal values. According to the ZPD, learners cannot learn and interpret learning on their own to reach their full potential but need assistance from parents, their school leaders and even their peers. This suggests that learners need support from their parents who know them better and have initiated their life journey. Arshavskaya (2020) defines the ZPD as the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined by problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with a more capable person. School leaders are more capable people who can help children attain academic success. The source of mental capacity lies in the social environment where one grows up and collected life experiences. Individual development is not an isolated entity but rather confined to an overarching sociocultural system (Phan, 2012). The ability to learn depends on the social upbringing to which the learner was exposed. This means that the mental capacity to respond to teaching and learning starts in the family and continues in the neighbourhood, at school, the workplace and in the community where they live. Englund, Olofsson & Price (2018) defines sociocultural context as a close interpersonal relationship with immediate family, relatives and neighbours in which obedience and family loyalty take precedence over

independence and self-reliance. This explains the need to promote school-parent engagement as a mechanism to meet the educational needs of the children. Children are incompetent and dependent individuals who still need support and guidance from their elders to realise their potential.

Cultural context affects the values, perceptions, behaviour and way of thinking shared by a certain group of people (Lukesova & Martincova, 2015). Children grow up in a particular culture and share in the features that define it, such as language, traditions and the way of thinking. Culture influences how learners behave, think and relate to other people. The child's ability to succeed depends on the full understanding of the culture and learning. It remains the duty of the parents and school leaders to guide the children in thinking along the values and beliefs that guide decision making.

However, African and Western culture are not the same, although they both influence academic performance. The reason is that culture affects the thoughts, behaviour and feelings of individuals. For instance, in African culture, children are not allowed to ask their elders questions, argue or speak their minds. Due to this belief inculcated in the African culture, learners in a classroom setting may not ask questions or express their point of view because that is what the African culture has taught them. The African culture deprives rural learners of the opportunity to excel in education. Bisong and Ekanem (2020) argues that Africa cannot develop scientifically, not because she lacks the mental capacity, but because of the cultural belief system in which it is embedded. The cultural attitude will affect a learner's performance. In western culture, children are given the freedom to express their views. Kang (2016) argues that personal freedom, individuality and objective thought are highly valued in Western culture. Comparatively speaking, learners from western culture will perform better academically than their counterparts in African culture. The reason is that children from the Western culture can interact freely with adults and learn more by questioning. Individual learners are expected to be self-directed and take significant responsibility for their own learning (Kang, 2016).

Rural areas are also characterised by the culture of poverty. Children growing up in the cycle of poverty feel socially and culturally rejected. Varenne and Scroggins (2015) argue that people live in poverty because their parents passed on various traits and habits that keep them there. The confidence of children subjected to poverty drops because they develop feelings of insecurity and inferiority; it seems to them, they are not worthy of societal love and, therefore, evidently worthless. Children develop an inability to work well with classmates, often resulting in learners becoming unwanted in groups, adding to their feeling of inadequacy and resulting in them giving up the task before it is successfully completed (Mckensie, 2019). The interaction pattern of learners shifts as their inner thoughts, wishes, and ability to understand others is diminished. Culture and education are closely related because culture provides the content to learn, education preserves and transmits the cultural values. Altugan (2015) points out that learning is successful when learners can summon up or construct an identity that enables them to impose their right to be heard. Decent cultural values and traditions are a good ground for effective teaching and learning. Bisong Bisong and Ekanem (2020) assert that almost all aspects of culture have a direct bearing on education. Culture and education are two sides of the same coin, suggesting that one is inconceivable without the other. Aliyu and Yakubu (2019) contend that cultural beliefs and values may influence children's level of understanding in teaching and learning. Parents should teach their children cultural values that will enable them to cope with the demands of education. Children are expected to behave in a particular way when at school. For instance, children are expected to abide by the school code of conduct at all times. The ability of children to abide by school rules depends on the kind of values instilled in them. Children raised in an environment where cultural values are not essential are problematic to schools. Parents should engage their children in values at an early age so that it is inherent in their character.

Seel (2012) define sociocultural context as not confined to where learning takes place or where knowledge is constructed; it is part of what it is learned. In other words, learning cannot be separated from its context. Wang (2011) assert that

human cognitive development cannot be separated from the social, cultural and historical context from which it emerges. This implies that social and cultural factors, strong community attachment to the culture, religion, cultural conflicts, ethnicity, background and language will always affect learner's academic performance. Chikorove (2012) agree that what is learned is always social, and therefore all knowledge carries social and cultural meanings.

The academic success of learners depends on the sociocultural approach to cognitive development. Cornelius-Ukpepi, Ndifon and Sunday (2019) state that cognitive growth occurs in the sociocultural context that influences the form it may take. Many of a child's noteworthy skills evolve from social interaction with parents, teachers and school leaders.

When there is successful engagement between the school leaders and parent, it will translate into a better interaction for the learners achievement. The learners will get the support they need to cope with the demands of schoolwork. Children learning by guided participation are resilient to the teaching and learning challenges. Guided participation is the adult-child interaction in which cognition and modes of thinking are shaped as they participate with or observe adults engaged in socially and culturally relevant activities. Mutekwe (2018) contends that a competent person and a less competent one should work together on a task, so the less competent person becomes independently proficient at what was initially a jointly accomplished task. When school leaders and parents collaborate successfully, learners benefit not only academically but also socially, emotionally and economically.

Successful school-parent engagement works in the best interest of the learner. A learner exposed to a culturally and socially rooted setting responds well to teaching and learning. The gap still exists between the context and the learning process. When school and parents exist in isolation, it leaves a gap that learners exploit in terms of unguarded discretion. This implies that, instead of parents and school leaders guiding learners to their potential development, learners are left on their own to work out their future. The future of rural learners is often distorted

due to a lack of parental support or cooperation between the school and the parents. The sociocultural context suggests the mixture of interacting with others and cultural awareness is essential for learner achievement.

The sociocultural context is based on the relationship between the educational participants, such as principals and parents. Wang et al., (2011) say that context is based on the social constructivist paradigm, which considers that knowledge is constructed socially by interaction and shared individual values. In this study, the sociocultural context serves as a subject by which school leaders and parents engage as social and cultural beings for a common goal. It suggests that, despite cultural differences, unity in diversity is possible. School-parent engagement can be strengthened by social gatherings and cultural events and can continue beyond the school's walls. Parents may be invited to the school's cultural events, and the school may also be asked to events organised by the community. The sharing of events will strengthen the relationship between the school and the parents, which learners need for their success.

Community: A school is part of the community, and the community is part of the school. There is no school without the community, as the community without a school is doomed. A school-community relationship is essential for the sustainable growth of both institutions (Ihmeideh, 2020). Lipke and Manaseri (2019) argue that rural schools function as the centre of the rural community more than in urban communities. Leaders in communities must afford communities a chance to participate in the educational activities of the school. For example, principals should demonstrate the ability to address and advocate community-based issues. Community context is a context from which the school may draw inspiration and hope for the future. The local community's influence cannot be ignored as it can break or build a school. School leaders must acknowledge the input of communities where their schools are situated.

3.3.1   Political context

South Africa is a non-racial democratic society that was ushered in 1994. One of the reasons for the new dispensation was to meet people's expectations by stimulating the political will to change the education system to address and respond to the needs of all citizens. The new education policies and legislations were inherently political, and within the policies, the principles and values as enshrined in the constitution were outlined (Engelbrecht, 2015). The values of integrity, dignity, human rights, freedom and equality served as the basis from which education policies were drafted. The inclusion of the constitutional values was to address the imbalances in education. Politics cannot be separated from education. Yugoslavia maintained its ideological monopoly over education throughout its existence, evident in how it controlled and managed education (Steyn, 2017). This shows the level of political influence on education. However, education needs political will to be reformed to meet the needs of its population.

The transformation of education needs all interested parties to commit and work together. Political will involves governments, civil society, community leaders, non-governmental organisations, and religious leaders in the development process (Abdullah & Abdullah, 2014). South Africa is celebrating 27 of democracy; however, the political will to serve rural people is yet to be seen in rural communities. The Curriculum for Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS) seem to be a step in the right direction. However, the teaching and learning approach used in rural schools is out-dated and needs transformation. However, education reform in South Africa remains elusive as it is still characterised by a high level of inequality. There is education for the privileged and for the underprivileged.

Politics, however, remains the influence of education policies. Mackatiani, Imbovah, Imbova and Gakungai (2016) contend there are politics behind every education system that have created two different education contexts instead of one that serves the people of the country equally. Rural schools are poorly resourced compared to their counterparts in urban areas. The political philosophy

of South Africa has changed the education landscape in a manner that cannot redress the imbalances of the past. Steyn, Sofija, Kusic, and Spasenovic (2017) argue that the political structure has a direct impact on the design and type of education control in the country. The education policy grounded in the values of integrity, dignity, human rights, freedom, and equality is yet to be seen in rural communities. Rural learners are deprived of quality basic education, yet the political climate seems conducive to better education for all. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is explicit about children's rights to basic education (South Africa, 1996). Yet, many children do not have access to education and, for those who do, education is inferior, especially those in rural communities.

The influence of politics on education is based on the mandate given to a particular party by the electorate. Ozdemiri (2018) classified politics into themes: power, ideology and strategy. Politics as an ideology means it is made up of people's ideas that may break or build the country. Power means that state authorities can formulate and implement and change policies to suit the standard of a particular setting. Strategy means that politicians develop and apply the right strategies to improve education. The influence of politicians using power, ideology and strategy affects education. The classifications suggest that education is a political reality (Ozdemari, 2018). This means that politicians have to think differently to cater for all the categories of people.

Currently, in rural South Africa the power, ideologies and strategies seem to yield little result because the disparity between rural and urban and private and public education continues (Madzivhandila, 2014). Rural development had failed to bridge the gap between the urban and rural communities. The context under which education is provided privileges learners in urban areas over those in rural communities. The political context should not be used to deprive rural learners of quality but used to address the imbalances in education. The curriculum was also structured to address the imbalances of the past. Mouton and colleagues (2018) hailed the new curriculum based on constitutional values as a means of meeting the needs of all learners, regardless of their environment, ethnicity, economic status or disability. The truth is that rural learners are underperforming,

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which indicates that the needs of some learners are not met. What compounds the problem is that there is no recourse on the absence of parents in the education of their children. The policies and legislation seem to be silent about parental participation.

The political context is where a legal framework is provided on how best to offer equal education to all the people. Politicians create education policies that influence the education system. Achieving Sustainable Development Goal Four, which addresses inclusive and equal education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all, needs political will. Political will ensures that favourable policies are drafted and implemented. In South Africa, the disparity between rural and urban schools has been discussed with little success because politicians lack political will (Ambo, Dabi & Chan, 2021). Political will is needed to formulate education policies that effectively narrow the gap between rural and urban schools. Rural schools may be resourced with human and physical capital and inspire better performance by political reform. The availability of resources may not guarantee the performance of rural schools but will ensure that the conditions are favourable (Kysburn, Levidoe, and Anthony, 2016).

3.3.2   Socioeconomic context

The majority of learners in schools in rural areas experience low socioeconomic status. There is compelling evidence suggesting a relationship between low socioeconomic status and academic achievement (Cedeno, Martinez-Arias & Bueno, 2016). This evidence suggests that learners from poor socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to perform poorly academically than those with high socioeconomic status. Ahmar and Anwar (2013) recognise that wealthy and well-educated parents can create a favourable learning environment for their children, which gives them greater chances of success. In contrast to this belief, parents of children with poor socioeconomic status cannot create a favourable environment to learn beyond regular schooling. Therefore, learners from poor backgrounds are denied a living provided by good quality education. Due to these underprivileged conditions, parents exonerate themselves from educational

activities (Cassedy, Drotar, Hottinger, Wray, Nernovsky, Newburger, Mahony, Massato, Cohen, Ittenbach & Marino, 2013). These parents do not see themselves as worthy to participate in the education of their children. The parent's indifference to education is one development that challenges principals to be sensitive to these conditions and begin to engage parents in their children's education, regardless of their conditions. Principals have a role in inspiring confidence in these parents to get involved in their children's education.

Ndebele (2015) point out that the majority of parents in South Africa do not participate meaningfully in the education of their children. The poor socioeconomic context has depleted parents' confidence to engage successfully in education. Therefore, principals should work hard to boost parents' confidence for effective engagement. Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) outlined six factors that may be used to improve parental engagement, namely: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community.

Parenting means that parents have to take the responsibility to nurture their children. Driessen (2019) argues that parents need help preparing their children for school and how to raise them. Parents need to understand the importance of providing basic needs such as food, clothes, shelter, safety for their children, and creating an environment at home for learning. It is not apparent that parents can provide proper parenting to their children; therefore, they need support and encouragement to perform their responsibilities. Principals can play an important role in creating a school climate and facilitating parent engagement by leadership style, communication, attitude and expectations (Povey et al., Campell, Willis, Haynes, Western, Bennet, Atrobus & Pedda, 2016). Parents should be taught, guided and advised on carrying out their parenting responsibilities. This is important because it will create stable families that will present value-driven children to schools.

Communication means there should be constant communication between the school and the parents (Ozmen, Zinzirli, Akuzum & Selcuk, 2016). Schools

should inform parents about events and activities happening at school. On the other hand, parents should provide the school with the complete profile of their children, medical history, academic performance, culture and behaviour. This means the school and the parents should be open about what is happening in their respective settings so that better strategies are sought to work together. Different forms of communication should be explored to reach all the parents. The issue of language should also be considered so that the language which all parents understand should be used. Gross (2019) contend that convenient communication methods should be used beyond face-to-face meetings at the school. This implies that principals should not rely only on invitation letters to call parents to schools. At the same time, meetings should not be used as the only platform to engage parents. Different platforms may be used as long as they consider parents' contextual realities.

Volunteering suggests that schools should create an environment suitable for parents to volunteer. Zolkoski, Sayman, Lewis-Chiu (2018) contend that principals should create a supportive environment where parents are viewed as partners rather than outsiders. Principals should create opportunities for parents to volunteer as assistant teachers, fundraisers, cleaners and gardeners. These avenues will ensure that parents get closer to the school and learn more about academic affairs.

Learning at home means that parents should be trained to assist their children with assignments and homework. Gyamfi and Pobbi (2016) argue that parents should supervise children's homework as a way to influence the child's studies after school. This kind of engagement keeps parents informed about curriculum matters and also assists them in tracking the academic progress of their children (Quezada, 2016). It also awakens the parent's sense of monitoring their children's work. This kind of engagement will create a school-oriented family and encourage parents to interact with teachers regularly. A school-oriented family is a phenomenon that creates a working relationship between the parents and the leaders.

Decision-making means parents should be included in the decision-making of the schools. Schools should not make unilateral decisions but should involve parents in every decision. Meier and Lemmer (2015) argue that, when principals welcome parents' views, parents feel more satisfied with the quality of their children's education. Parents should be invited to participate in meetings and be part of the SGBs as the higher decision-making body of the school. Baker et al., (2016) contend that parents should be given a chance to participate in decision-making within the school. Parents as decision-makers and role-players should play an active role in education. Schools must ensure that parents develop a sense of ownership and are encouraged to participate. Principals should not assume that parents will take part in school matters but should make them participate by inviting and welcoming them into the business of the schools (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017). Principals should not project themselves as superior to the parents but instead promote collaboration.

Collaborating with the community means that schools should work together with the community. Parents should serve as mediators to inform the school about developments in the community. The community should be seen supporting the school with resources to promote teaching and learning. The two stakeholders should not be seen competing but complementing each other. One should not develop at the expense of the other. In other words, learners should not suffer because the community does not want to be part of the operation of the school. Schools should not disadvantage learners by not wanting to be involved in community activities. The community should have a good relationship with the school.

3.4   School leadership

Leadership is critical in every organisation, political, religious, or educational. The success or the failure of an organisation depends on leadership. Leadership has an influence that can drive an organisation to excellence or failure. Ibrahim and Daniel (2019) define leadership as a process in which one person guides a group of persons in a particular direction. Driving people means a leader must have an

approach that will motivate others to follow. It takes a leader with character to set a well-defined goal and influence the situation. Sharma and Jain (2013) contend that leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organisation to make it more cohesive and coherent. A leader who subscribes to cohesiveness will ensure that a collaborative environment is created. A collaborative environment encourages a shared vision so that the realisation of the objectives is collectively achieved. In this study, leadership refers to the school principal who can influence learners, teachers, context, and even parents to achieve excellent academic performance.

A school leader is an agent of change who can transform the contextual dynamics to achieve the desired objectives. Bhengu and Myende (2016) define a change agent as a person who acts and brings about expected change and whose achievement can be judged based on their values and objectives. Khalifa ,Gooden, and Davis (2016) argue that principals should adopt an attitude of critical self-awareness. Critical self-awareness means that principals should know who they are and understand the context in which they lead. Understanding self and context will assist principals in creating an envisioning new environment for children marginalised by socioeconomic class. Taliaferro (2012) contends that understanding self and context will help principals incorporate their values, beliefs and dispositions into day-to-day decision-making and behaviour in the school. A lack of change has constrained rural schools and, therefore, principals are central in driving successful schools in rural areas. However, the ambition to drive successful schools has been constrained by many factors, including social and economic vulnerabilities such as poverty, lack of equity, redress and access (Hlalele, 2014). However, principals in rural schools should not be framed by foreign conceptions but should be embedded in local knowledge and practices. Dependence on local knowledge will assist principals in responding to local circumstances that may sometimes contradict government policies. The government policy issue is raised because it does not accommodate particular circumstances but hinders teaching and learning in some instances.

The core business of a school is teaching and learning. Principals have the responsibility to ensure that this core business is achieved. Principals are crucial for ensuring school improvement in Chile, especially in the most vulnerable schools (Ahumada, Aaidames & Clarke, 2015). In Chile, such schools face multiple challenges, including pedagogical, organisational and economic issues. School principals are faced with the massive task of transforming these vulnerable schools into well-oiled machines that can produce good academic performance. Andalusia in Spain is the region with the highest rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion from the primary education stream. The vulnerability exposed in these two countries implies that principals have to use their skills, knowledge, and dispositions to ensure that education is used as an instrument to deal with the marginalisation of rural children. Principals should create an environment that will facilitate access to the labour market and guarantee opportunities, equity and social justice.

Principals are a source of leadership influence. In Tanzania, the law has adopted instructional leadership as a style effective to improve teaching and learning (Manaseh, 2016). Tanzanians believe that instructional leadership can improve learning when leadership is instruction-focused and located close to the classroom. This view by Tanzanian authorities ignores the impact of contextual realities that may hinder teaching and learning. It does not matter how committed principals are; if schools are under-resourced, the teaching and learning process outcomes will remain or become poor. The Kenyans recognise the role of school leadership in learner achievement; however, for such leaders to succeed, their skills and knowledge should be grounded in their situation (Lopez & Rugano, 2018). Being grounded in one's situation means relying on an indigenous knowledge system to develop a deeper understanding of the setting in which children learn.

In South Africa, school leadership in rural schools is rendered ineffective and inefficient due to the compounding and specific derived rural context (Du Plessis, 2017). This appalling condition impedes the principals' attempts to carry out their mandate and places learners at risk of not realising their dreams. Heystek (2016)

asserts that the socioeconomic needs of rural communities and lack of support from parents have proven to be a drawback in providing quality education to all learners. Learners from disadvantaged communities perform poorly compared to their counterparts in urban areas, and school leaders want to respond to these challenges for learners' success. Chikoko, Naicker, and Mthiyane (2015) argue that some schools have consistently performed better, despite operating in areas of multiple deprivations.

According to Chikoko et al., (2015), the disparity in the performance of schools in the same context is due to unresponsive leadership. Research has shown that principals as school leaders can positively influence learner performance and teacher effectiveness (Shikalepo, 2016). However, the positive influence by principals is not automatic as the milieu in which principal`s work is not the same. Principals need to understand the school situation to explore the nature of leadership practices required. Leadership practices that cut across leadership styles are discussed in the following paragraphs.

In recent times schools in rural Limpopo have performed dismally. In a way that the majority of the schools performed below the threshold of 60%. This poor performance is attributed to the disconnection between the school and the parents. The disconnection is due to contextual issues such as socioeconomic factors, impoverished educational backgrounds and lack of resources. Terhoven and Fataar (2018) argue that a principal's influential position should be used decisively to bring meaningful education to the affected schools. Decisive attitudes by principals will compel them to adopt leadership practices as outlined by Terhoven and Fataar (2018):

Setting direction: In this practice, the principal has to set goals for the organisation and be willing to share the school's vision with other stakeholders, particularly parents.

Developing people: In this practice, principals should enhance skills, knowledge, and parents' disposition. Taliaferro (2012) describes empowerment as academic competence, self-efficacy and initiative. If principals embrace empowerment, it

will serve as an intervention mechanism to liberate the parents enslaved by contextual factors. Empowering parents will strengthen the capacity of the school to overcome its challenges. The initiative to empower parents will ensure that education is not confined within the school's walls but continue beyond the borders. Empowered parents can carry educational batons even under the current Covid-19 conditions. Empowered parents will make home-schooling a reality as parents will know how to help their children with schoolwork at home. Teaching and learning have been disrupted in rural schools since the Covid-19 pandemic. The disruption bears testimony to how deprived learners are in rural areas. The time has come, and the time is now that principals should develop parents for educational continuity.

Redesigning the organisation: This practice challenges principals to build new collaboration, restructuring and reculturing. Nkolaros (2015) dispels the notion that principals can produce results independently but instead believes in productive relationships with parents. Parents know their children, and if fostering relations with parents becomes a success, learner performance is guaranteed. Collaboration, motivation and leading are at the centre of redesigning the organisation (Supovitz, D'Auria, and Spillane, 2019). The culture of schooling has to change to improve the performance of rural learners.

Managing teaching and learning: It is in the parents' best interest to see good performance from their children. Principals have to conduct monitoring and evaluations to achieve the set goals. Parents, however, should be engaged to ensure that teaching and learning becomes a collaborative effort.

Research has shown that principals influence the academic achievement of learners (Solomon & Steyn, 2017). The influence, however, is indirect. It is indirect in that principals have to create a conducive environment for effective teaching and learning. In other words, principals must ensure that those in direct contact with learners can do their work. At the same time, principals should create an opportunity for parents to participate in their children's education. Contextual

factors in rural areas remain hindrances to effective leadership and learner success.

3.5   Parent engagement

Parent engagement means inviting and making parents aware of their responsibilities in helping their children attain educational outcomes. Gross et al., (2020) define parent engagement as a shared responsibility to actively support children to achieve learning and developmental results. The definition implies that learners can succeed academically and economically by collaboration between the school and the parents. Cano et al., (2016) assert that parent engagement is a direct effort to increase children's educational outcomes. The need for parent engagement confirms that children's education cannot be left to school alone but should be shared between the school and the parents.

There is compelling evidence internationally and locally suggesting that parent engagement influences learners' achievement (Durisic & Binijevac, 2017; Bailey, 2017; Yamamoto et al., 2016). Evidence from Philippines showed that parental engagement enhances a child's development growth and academic progress (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). In Germany, parent engagement in school activities leads to better educational achievement for children with diverse ethnic backgrounds (Mandarakas, 2014). Studies in different countries have shown that parent engagement is critical to learner success, regardless of ethnicity, geographic location and socioeconomic background. In Ghana, parental engagement is a prerequisite for high academic performance, without which children's performance is compromised (Appiah-Kubi & Amoako, 2020). In South Africa, Munje and Mncube (2018) contend that parental participation in education can have social and emotional benefits, both formally and informally. Matshe (2014) emphasises that parent engagement is crucial in ensuring how well children perform at school.

Despite the undisputed evidence indicating the importance of parent engagement, it remains elusive both locally and internationally (Echevema-

Castro, 2020). The failure of rural schools to engage parents is attributed to several challenges experienced by parents in rural areas. These include lack of education, low socioeconomic status, lack of self-belief and poor communication. In the rural parts of Mexico, children get little support in their studies as parents do not feel capable of providing any help because of their poor educational background (Echevema-Castro, 2020). Lack of education has stopped parents from taking part in the education of their children. Munje and Durisic (2017) contend that many parents did not experience success in schools and such parents lack the knowledge and confidence to help their children.

Low socioeconomic status: Despite efforts by the government to provide high-quality education, disparities in educational outcomes continue to exist in OECD countries. Schools in rural areas continue to underperform compared to their counterparts in urban areas. Research has shown a relationship between socioeconomic status and learners' academic performance (Msila, 2012). Parents with low socioeconomic status are preoccupied with livelihood rather than education. These parents spend much of their time hustling for food rather than helping their children with schoolwork. Due to a lack of support from parents, children fend for themselves. African American parents who are socially and emotionally stressed tend to distance themselves from school (Murray, Finigan-Curr, Jones, Copeland-Linder, Haynie & Cheng, 2014). These parents lack the confidence to interact with teachers and navigate the school. Parents with low socioeconomic status may experience psychological barriers. For example, low-income parents who struggle to provide their families with basic needs may experience adverse mental health, including depression, limiting their capacity to engage in school activities. In the same vein, parents with low educational levels present a barrier to parent engagement. For example, parents with low academic levels may lack the required skills to help their children with assignments (Murray et al., 2014).

Uninviting environment: A school environment hostile to parents drives them away from engaging in school activities. Hornsby and Lafaele (2014) argue that, when parents feel that their contribution at school is not valued, they are likely to

distance themselves. Parents are likely to participate in school activities when they feel empowered by their interactions with the school staff.

However, power relations tend to marginalise parents with low socioeconomic status. Principals with responsive attitudes are well-positioned to empower these parents and assure them of the value they add to the academic growth and development of the school. From a South African point of view, Matshe (2014) suggests that lack of parental engagement can be attributed to apartheid and colonialism. The rationale is that blacks are denied participation in political and educational issues brought by apartheid legislation in South Africa is the primary factor in discouraging black parents from being involved in their children's education. McKeever (2017) contends that inequality in education is attributed to racist policies. Therefore, it is up to the principals to exercise their powers and create a platform for parents to participate in their children's education. Munje and Mnchube (2018) agree that the failure of principals to initiate and implement appropriate inclusive and welcoming strategies is a weakness on their part.

Inefficient communication: Poor and ineffective communication have threatened and deterred parents from participating in school activities. Communication that seeks to undermine parents due to their social and economic status has barred parents from engaging. Crea, Reynolds, and Deregnan (2015) contend that inefficient communication leads to poor perception. Kheswa (2015) agrees that building a culture of good communication is fundamental to transparency and consensus.

Time constraints: Time is a scarce factor that parents value highly. Parents in rural areas are often preoccupied with sustaining their basic needs and thus have limited time and resources for extensive involvement in school matters (Robinson & Volpe, 2015). Murray et al., (2014) assert that parents from the low-income category are likely to have an inflexible work schedule, multiple jobs or positions without paid leave benefits. These parents have to weigh livelihood and education and, on reasonable grounds, they will choose livelihood over education.

Lack of mutual trust: The relationship between the school and the parents is not always reciprocal. Manson et al., (2015) argue that lack of trust in the school may give rise to unofficial communication, which may destroy the trust between the school and the parents. Karakus and Savas (2012) point out that trust strengthens collaboration between the school and the parents. An effective relationship between parents and school requires mutual trust and respect (Povey et al., 2016). Schools need to accept parents as partners in their collaboration (Pitt, Luger, Bullen, Phillips & Geiger, 2013).

Culture and language: Some parents lack confidence in helping their children because the language of instruction is not their first language, and they feel they cannot communicate effectively with school leaders (Singh & Banerjee, 2019). The difference in language and culture presents significant challenges for school leaders trying to engage parents in diverse communities (Crea et al., 2015).

Despite the challenges linked to parental engagement, it remains the critical functional area in a school. Kiral (2019) regards parental engagement as the most important force behind a child's development. The success story of every child depends on successful parent engagement. However, there are specific characteristics parents should display as appropriate elements needed to engage successfully. These include taking responsibility, willingness to partner with the school, commitment to making a positive change, excellence in one's role, contributing your best, being part of the change and adopting an 'I can do' attitude instead of giving excuses. These characteristics are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Taking responsibility: Parents should take responsibility for the education of their children. Prinsloo and Reid (2015) contend that teachers request parents to carry out learning activities at home as part of shared responsibility for the education of their children. The culture of shifting responsibility had to change for rural education. Parents should step up and be counted in the education process. Parents should take their position as primary educators in this day and age. Kambouri, Wilson, Pieridou, Quinn and Liu (2021) assert that parents are their

children's first educators. They share knowledge with their children by engaging in everyday activities, and they continue to support their children learning once they enter an institutional setting. This implies that parents know their children better than teachers and can, therefore, teach them better. When parents have laid a good foundation, education is unshakable and sustainable. Kiral (2019) contends that, the more parents stake a claim on educational and administrative rights and fulfil their responsibilities regarding the school, the better the educational efficiency of the school will be. As parents become more responsible and accountable, the better the learning and teaching outcomes.

Kiral (2019) outlined the responsibilities parents should take for the development of their children. These are, ensuring that the child has proper education, is physically secure, adequately protected against danger, prevented from being harmed, meeting the child's physical and emotional needs, respecting their individuality and giving them the right to participate in decisions.

Ensuring that the child has proper education means that the child has the right to quality education. The parents should ensure that the child's education is of good quality. Parents should also ensure the 'child's education is appropriate to their needs. Parents should also be responsible for ensuring the child attends school regularly, homework is monitored, and all the school's learning activities are supported.

Ensuring the child is physically secure means that parents should provide enough supervision and a safe environment for the child. Children like to explore, and there are risks involved. Parents should ensure that exploration is safe. Children should feel safe in the presence of their parents. Parents should not expose their children to abuse but should protect them from abusers.

Meeting the child's physical needs. Basic needs include food, shelter, clothes, medical care and clean water. Parents should provide their children with healthy food, clean and appropriate clothes, create a hygienic environment and ensure proper shelter and medical care (Ceka & Murati,2016). The ability of parents to provide these basic needs is essential for learners because they can focus on

education without being concerned about what to eat after school. Meeting basic needs is a daunting task in rural communities; hence learners' concentration span is limited because of the basic needs concerns.

Meeting the child's emotional needs. Roy and Giraldo-Garcia (2018) indicates that emotional needs are equally important to physical needs. Children need to be loved, appreciated for what they are doing and trusted for what they can achieve. The emotional trust bond between the child and the parent is essential. When the child's emotional support is adequate, their social behaviour becomes acceptable in society.

Respecting the child's individuality and giving them a chance to participate in decision-making. Children are their own being and, therefore, their independence should be respected. Children should be allowed to develop and become responsible adults by respecting their ideas according to their level of development. A child's fate lies with them, not the parents. The parent's role and responsibility are to give support, information and guidance for the child to make informed decisions about their lives (Sunarty & Dirawan, 2015).

Willingness to partner with the school. It has become clear that the school alone has failed to improve the academic performance of rural learners. Parents alone have also failed to nurture their children to become responsible adults. Working in isolation has been unable to build a better future for earners in rural areas. Therefore, parents should demonstrate their willingness to work with the school. Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) point out that it is important to recognise the strong positive bond between the school and the parents for the children's development and education. Willingness does not need the parent's material possessions but their inner passion for working with the school leaders to effect change in the lives of rural learners. Willingness has the potential to break the barriers rural communities would typically experience. However, lack of willingness may cause parents to withdraw their participation. The withdrawal of participation means that children are left to decide their future on their own. Even if the poor socioeconomic conditions were removed, as long as there is no willingness,

parents may still not participate in their children's education. Willingness transcends any set challenges.

Commitment to make a positive change. Commitment refers to passion and persistence in performing a task. Tlale (2016) defines commitment as a sense of loyalty, faith and devotion. This implies that people with commitment stay focused and will not stop until they have achieved what they planned. People who are committed are determined to break through, despite challenges. Challenges may not stop committed individuals from getting what they want. Challenges faced by parents in rural communities are overwhelming; however, parents with commitment can rise above them to support their children. It may not be easy, but by commitment, the conditions in rural areas may change. Commitment compels parents to step out of their comfort zone and into the unknown. The fear of stepping into the unknown has prevented many parents from engaging. Commitment is a drive to new knowledge and perspective. The accumulation of new knowledge stimulates new energy to meet the needs of the current crop of learners without compromising the needs of future learners. This means preserving commitment not only for now but also into the future. Durisic and Bunijevic (2017) argue that, unlike teachers whose influence on the child is relatively limited, parents maintain a life-long commitment. Parental support is not temporary but permanent and, therefore, irreplaceable. However, less committed parents will expect others to do work for them because of the belief that what they do will not make any difference in the lives of the children. When children realise how less committed their parents are, they will not commit to their studies. Commitment from parents is a motivating factor for children's commitment to their studies. Naite (2020) argues that parents without involvement in their children's education are considered to demotivate and demoralise their children by negligence. Parents' lack of involvement is negligence with detrimental effects on learners' academic performance and future. The future of children is at risk when parents are absent. Children listen to the advice of their parents more than their teachers. For instance, in the case

of career choice, children will take advice from their parents, but when parents are silent, children become confused and ultimately make wrong choices.

Excellence in one's own role. Parenting is a critical role and should be done well to guide children through life. Children who grow in a well-structured, value-driven family create the culture they inherit throughout their lives. Instilling acceptable values in children is a critical role that parents cannot afford to miss. The conditions in rural settings should not distract parents from exercising this role because the failure to do so has devastating consequences. Children drop out of school, become ill-disciplined and lack commitment when parents fail to play the most crucial role of inculcating values in their children's lives. Parental involvement is associated with positive school attachment on the part of the children (Lara & Saracosti, 2019). Parents should play their role at the elementary stage of their children's education and the adolescent stage and beyond to avoid drop-out and other negative effects. An effective, well-defined parental role creates a communication channel supportive of school activities (Lumadi, 2019). Learners who receive support in school activities tend to perform well academically.

Contribute your best and be part of the change. Poor learner performance in rural schools has been part of the educational conversation for many years and continues with no hope of an amicable solution. Leadership in government and education has changed, but the performance in rural schools remains unchanged. The curriculum has also changed with the curriculum for assessment and policy statement (CAPS) currently being used, but the *status quo* remains.

A change had to happen and should happen from within. This means the parents and leaders should orchestrate the change they want to see. These are people well-positioned to effect tangible changes in the education of their children. Parents should commit their time, resources and ideas to contribute to the positive change. The principals should commit their knowledge, experience and time to transform the school environment such that parents can exercise their influence over learning activities. The problem with rural schools is not an

influence from outside, but those close to the situation are not doing enough to make the necessary changes, but hope outside assistance will help bring the change they need. Parents should trust in their inner worth and begin to hold conversations related to education (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). These parents are the same people who could initiate grocery funds in the village. Therefore education forums can also be initiated by the same parents to bring desirable changes in rural schools. The education agenda can be initiated, and everybody invited, the educated and uneducated, to contribute and be part of the change.

Adopting an 'I can do' attitude. The dominant attitude among rural communities is 'I cannot do it because I don't have the capacity'. Parents will use their educational background as the reason for not being involved. Parents believe that those with capacity should be involved in educational matters. It is a wrong mentality adopted in rural communities. Parents do not count themselves as educators but followers waiting to be told what to do and when. This kind of attitude had delayed the development of the community. An 'I can do' attitude should be adopted to unlock the power parents have to influence the education of their children. Tlale (2016) points out that a child does better academically and has a positive school attitude, higher aspirations and other positive behaviour if their parents are aware, knowledgeable, encouraging and involved. This suggests that, if parents believe they can do it, children will learn from them and adopt the same attitude. If learners believe they have all it takes to perform, they will, irrespective of the conditions in which they live.

3.6   Strategies for successful school-parent engagement

It is the responsibility of principals to lead and ensure that learning extends beyond the confines of the school. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) argue that leaders lead as if learners' lives revolve around the school and that these learners are isolated units with no connection to persons outside the school. As advocated by Lv, Zhou, Liu, Guo, Liu, Jiang, Liu and Luo (2018), parent engagement

strategies can be achieved by parent role construction, self-efficacy, perception of invitation to be involved and life context.

3.6.1   Parent role construction

The educational role of parents in rural areas is generally limited. However, the lack of parental involvement should not be seen as a lack of interest in their children's educational success. Makgopa and Mokhele (2013) highlighted that lack of parental involvement does not translate into a lack of interest. All that suggests is that parents in rural areas lack confidence and do not believe that their participation will benefit the school or their children.   Parental role construction means that parents should recognise their roles, responsibilities and accountability in their children's education. Kumar and Jaiswal (2017) argue that the part played by parents in education is the primary determinant of their total function and future success. It is difficult for parents with a lack of confidence to approach a school for their contribution. The principal's responsibility is to create a platform that will allow parents to play their role in the education system. From a South African perspective, Msila (2012) asserts that leaders need to lay the foundation of a school culture that embraces and reflects the role of parents' in children's educational attainment. In Japan, mothers tend to leave the task of educating their children to teachers (Yamahoto et al., 2016). Most parents show this tendency, especially in rural areas, which strengthens the call for principals to clarify the role of parents and communicate the message to them. If principals take the initiative to embrace parents, parents will begin to believe in themselves and ultimately participate in their children's education.

Parents need to know and understand their role in education to execute them effectively. Banerjee and Trivette (2015) outline the role of parents as providing emotional and physical support and enhancing the parents' capacity to fulfil this role. In the USA, many parents believe that supporting their children's cognitive, verbal and educational development is critical in their role and supporting their physical and social competencies (Yamahoto et al., 2016). These views suggest that parents should construct their roles to cater for all aspects of their child's

development. Hourani et al., (2012) point out that, in Latino cultures, a parental role is viewed as providing nurture, instilling morals and promoting good behaviour. These roles are not easy tasks; parents need to be capacitated to play their roles effectively. Banarjee and Trivetto (2015) identified three principles by which parents may play their roles constructively; parents are the constant in the lives of their children, promoting confidence and affirming the competence of the parents and unique characteristics of the family.

Principle1: *Parents are constant in the lives of their children*: this means children look up to their parents to shape up their future. The future of children depends on how effective parents are in executing their roles. Parental roles include instilling good cultural values in their children, instilling discipline, assisting in homework and assignments and guiding their children on how to make informed decisions in life. Therefore, these roles are directed to parents and cannot be shifted to other role players such as school leaders. Parents should create an environment conducive for their children to learn and should apply both formal and informal skills and knowledge to participate constructively in the education of their children.

Principle 2: *Promoting confidence and affirming competency*. The confidence level of parents in rural communities is low. Parents do not know what to do in a setting occupied by educated principals. Principals cannot affirm parents as critical role players in the education of their children. Park and Holloway (2018) argue that how school staff thinks about parental involvement serves as a motivation that shapes parents' sense of their role. However, it seems that the gap between the school and the parents continues to widen. The gap strains the relationship between the school and the parents. Principals should capacitate parents to increase knowledge, skills and competence to close the gap. Therefore, principals should initiate programmes to educate parents about their roles and how to execute them. When parents become competent and confident, they will play their roles effectively to meet their children's educational needs. Park and Holloway (2018) argue that schools that succeed in communicating with parents and welcome their involvement can stimulate the construction of

parents' beliefs about their roles leading to actual involvement behaviour at home and school. Schools need to support parents in any way possible to boost their confidence and affirm their invaluable presence in their children's lives.

Principle 3: *Unique characteristics of families*. Every family has characteristics that distinguish it from the other families. This means that the context of every family is different. The uniqueness of the families suggests that each family should be treated differently.

However, the situations in rural communities are similar to a point where it is difficult to separate one family from the other. The socioeconomic status and the poor educational background are the common denominators that put families in the same category. The common challenges suggest that principals should continue sending messages and invitations to parents to trigger the desire in them to want to participate in the education of their children. Schools should communicate with parents persistently as a reminder of how to become involved in schools. Communication is critical as it improves the parents' perception of their role in education. When principals and teachers do not initiate programmes that seek to acknowledge the crucial role parent can play in schools, they believe they have little to offer and ultimately withdraw their commitment.

Parents should not doubt that school principals welcome their involvement. When parents feel welcomed, their role construction is stimulated, leading to actual involvement. Parents need assurance of their significance, and when the assurance is granted, they confidently provide support to their children. In other words, principals need to prepare parents mentally to accept their responsibilities in helping children reach their goals. Learner success should serve as a motivating factor for parental role construction and actual involvement. Spark and Holloway (2018) point out that parental role construction involves parents' thinking patterns about their responsibilities and behaviour and aims to achieve a goal to increase a child's success in learning. When parents become aware of their responsibilities, goals and behaviour in their children's educational journey, they develop valence to school.

Valence is the emotional positivity and negativity of an experience. Parents' perception of how they experience schools in their times influences their thoughts about their child's schooling, which may affect how they get involved in their children's academic success. Positive parent perception of their schooling experience motivates parental role construction. By positive perception, parents develop a positive belief and trust in their capacity to make meaningful contributions to their children's education. However, parents with a negative perception of their schooling experience become demotivated and withdraw from being involved (Ibrahim & Jamil, 2012). When parents distance themselves from school-related matters, children walk the educational journey alone. As the journey becomes too demanding when walked alone, most children drop out of school, and those who stay do not finish well.

3.6.2   Parent's self-efficacy

Parents in rural areas lack self-belief and confidence because of the contextual deficiencies they experience each day. Due to this lack of self-belief, these parents do not believe that participation in education will make any difference. This attitude has disadvantaged rural learners compared to their counterparts in urban areas. Lv, Zhou, Liu, and Guo (2018) define self-efficacy as a belief in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. Parents in rural areas can engage effectively in their children's education; all they need is motivation to tap into their inner ability. Jaiswal (2017) from India argues that creating input opportunities for parents would go a long way in boosting their confidence. From the South African perspective, Okeke (2014) suggests that cultural capital and other hindrances between the school and the parents must be bridged to enhance parent confidence. Principals should develop inclusive strategies to cater for all parents regardless of their cultural beliefs to bridge the gap between the school and parents. Khalifa et al., (2016) argue that an inclusive school environment is critical to prevent exclusionary and marginalising behaviour. Some parents are reluctant to participate in educational matters because they don't fit well into the

school's culture, and leaders are not making any effort to accommodate them. Cultural differences deter parents from taking part in school matters. However, culture may not be the only reason. The low socioeconomic status and educational background have shown to be the potential destroyers of parents' possible participation in their children's education. When the confidence is eroded, even if parents feel the need to engage, they will not do so. Research by Ugwegbylem (2018) contends that, even if parents value and understand the importance of engagement, they may not do so if they feel incapable of enriching their children.

Parents with low self-efficacy tend to participate less in the education of their children than those with high self-efficacy. Parental self-efficacy is critical for a learner's success. Therefore, parental self-efficacy should be promoted, especially for socially and economically weak parents. The social and economic status of parents may affect their ability and confidence to engage effectively. In other words, the parents' environment where parents live may influence their commitment negatively or positively and be a motivation to support their children.

Hoover-Dempsey (2011) identified four tenets that can improve parental involvement and develop self-efficacy, personal experience of success in the given domain, vicarious experience of success related to participation, verbal encouragement and persuasion from significant others and personal emotional arousal.

Personal experience of success in a given domain: The personal experience of success means that, when the parents begin to see positive outcomes from their involvement, they are motivated to get involved. The feedback they get from the inputs made accumulate into a personal experience that gives them hope and strength to carry on supporting their children. Once they gain experience in believing that learners are succeeding because of their involvement, parents would like to involve themselves even more in their children's learning. All the parents need is feedback in terms of the learner's performance. Parents will start to believe that their labour is not in vain.

Sims, RNC-NIC and Sharbek (2019) assert that personal experience is a performance measure where the participants expect outcomes before action. When the outcome is achieved, the participant is assured of the positive effort to achieve the desired goals. This suggests that parents can only participate fully in the educational life of their children when what they do yields positive results. Positive results generate positive energy instead of negative results that will always demoralise those involved. Personal experience measures the level of accomplishments against academic goals.

Parent's vicarious experience of success: Parents learn from the successes of others in the same socioeconomic environment. Hendrick (2015) contends that observing others perform successfully can provide individuals with confidence in their ability to perform similar tasks. When the child of one parent succeeds in a rural community, other parents may start to believe that they too may be involved in their children's success. The success of one parent's involvement may serve as a motivating factor for the participation of others. The parent who initiated the involvement is elevated to a role model for others to follow. If others join, it will be a victory for learners in rural communities. However, due to the uncivilised nature of rural areas, other parents may try to sabotage the success of parental involvement by being unpleasant about it. Sims et al., (2019) point out that learning occurs where the perception of social reality is based on observational experiences and outcomes associated with those experiences. The social reality in rural areas is limited positive experiences from which people can learn. Successful people often migrate to urban communities, meaning the rural communities will remain without vicarious experience. The absence of vicarious experience affects not only the self-efficacy of the parents but also that of the children. When the children's self-efficacy is low, it will affect their academic performance. Vicarious experience is essential in enhancing parents' belief in their ability to achieve the set goals.

Verbal encouragement and persuasion from significant others: Verbal encouragement and persuasion from significant others refer to positive words communicated to others by those who know the importance of supporting their

children and have seen better results. Wong (2015) defines verbal encouragement and persuasion as how individuals express support for one another. Some parents just need moral support from guidance, advice and motivation to decide to support their children in academic matters. Hendricks (2015) asserts that realistic self-affirmation derived from affirmation from others can boost efficacy perception and also ignite the power to influence the outcome of their children's learning process. When a parent from the same community stands up to persuade others, other parents believe it is possible to support their children, despite the contextual challenges. Parents will see the persuader as their own who should be supported. The decision means more parents will start to support their children. However, if the verbal encouragement comes from outside their community, parents may see such guidance as incompatible with their conditions and, therefore, not real and manageable. Verbal encouragement suggests that school leaders should proactively motivate and encourage parents to take part in the educational life of their children. School leaders are preferred to lead the initiative because they understand the parent's conditions, and parents have accepted them as one of their own. A leader's advice may have a positive influence on successful parent engagement due to their knowledge and experience of the community.

However, compliments are not always substantiated. There are times when verbal encouragement and persuasion are unfounded or raise unreasonable expectations. Self-reflection is necessary before compliments are accepted. In other words, verbal persuasion should be tested against facts. The situation in rural communities needs those who provide verbal persuasion to be realistic rather than raise false hopes. It is a delicate situation that should be handled with care. Considering the vulnerability of the residents, anything that seems good may easily capture their imagination.

Personal emotional arousal: Parental engagement depends on their emotional attachment to learners' envisaged success. Parents should have interests, hopes, aspirations and high expectations about their children. Parents should tap into their emotional intelligence to balance being involved and not being involved

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in their children's studies. Emotional intelligence refers to the capacity to see, influence and assess emotions. Encouragement by others may arouse the personal emotions of parents. Personal emotions suggest that parental involvement is not limited to the material provision and physical connection but has emotional connectivity in dealing with children's behaviour. Stievenart and Perez (2020) argue that parents' self-efficacy will foster the use of effective parental behaviour, which in turn will have a positive influence on child behaviour. Parents who think buying their children stationery, paying school fees, transport to school and school uniforms have given their children enough support have a lot to learn. As much as children need this kind of support, parents need to go further to connect with their children emotionally. When parents become interested in their children's success, they will no longer feel sorry for themselves but will transition from being passive to active participants in the education of their children.

Optimal observance of the tenets will ensure that parents' self-efficacy is improved. The rural environment is depressing, hopeless and discouraging. Depressed parents have little to offer their children. Parents with high anxiety levels about the next meal have low expectations about the learner's success. Low expectation levels translate to high emotional detachment. The solution is not from the outside but lies in the parents themselves. If the parents start to see beyond their depressing conditions and begin to reflect on who they are and what they can achieve, they will invest their time and resources into their children's education. It is all in the minds and hearts of the parents to make it work for their children.

The causal link between parental self-efficacy and learner achievement suggests that parental self-efficacy cannot be ignored but should be promoted to serve the learners' interests. Once self-efficacy is raised, it produces attributes that propel parents to a high level of engagement. Sims et al., (2019) describe the following characteristics of self-efficacy, confidence, competence and perception. These attributes are discussed in the following paragraphs.

3.6.2.1 Confidence

Confidence occurs when an individual's trust in the ability to perform a task is high. Luke, Mann and Turn (2016) define confidence as trust in oneself to perform a given task successfully. Parents need high confidence levels to support and nurture their children into successful human beings. The poor socioeconomic conditions experienced in rural communities have eroded the confidence level of the parents. Parents no longer believe they can assist their children to succeed. Self-efficacy has to be raised for parents to play this supportive role effectively. When self-efficacy is high, the confidence level increases. Yosef, Hasmalena and Sucipto (2021) contend that parental self-efficacy provides confidence to keep children's learning within their limits. An increase in confidence means that children receive better assistance from their parents to achieve their goals. However, when the parent's self-efficacy is low, the level of confidence drops and parents fail to provide the necessary support to their children. Taran, Kalantari, Dahghin and Shahsavani (2015) point out that a child with low self-efficacy has grown up in stressed and low self-efficacy families. Parental low self-efficacy affects their children socially, emotionally, physically and academically. Aldhafri , Alrajhi, Alkharusi, Al-Harthy, Al-Barashdi and Alhadabi (2020) argue that confidence alone does not guarantee the successful execution of a task but shows beliefs about one's ability to perform. Belief in ability is the starting point and essential to successful parental engagement. Parents should believe in themselves and what they can do, regardless of discouraging situations. The undesirable living conditions for parents in rural areas have the potential to erode their confidence. Despite these conditions, parents need to rely on their inherent ability rather than focus on external forces that are generally discouraging. Focusing on the positives is the best decision parents can take to support

children's education. Parents must support their children, which is one responsibility that cannot be shifted to someone else.

3.6.2.2 Competence

Alimzhanova, Makulova, Bekturgavona, Umirzakova, Mukulova and Karymbayeva (2015) contend that competence is the ability to do something well and effectively. Competence is measured in terms of good performance. Nagarajan and Prabhu (2015) define competence as an individual's ability to perform in a given situation that incorporates their unique skills, values and knowledge. The competence of parents is compromised due to the poor educational background. The competency of parents is affected because the academic affairs of the school are above them. Parents may not be able to assist their children with homework and assignments because of their level of education. However, with confidence derived from high levels of self-efficacy, parents may be receptive to empowerment that will improve their skills and knowledge to provide academic support to their children. Stievenart and Perez (2020) argue that, the more parents feel competent in parenting, the more they engage in positive and supportive parental behaviour. Competence is one element parents need to make a difference in the child's learning activities. However, parents do not only need to provide academic support; emotional support is also critical. This is one area in which parents can excel without being academically proficient.

Competence is transferable; when children witness competence in their parents, they will marvel and wish to be like their parents. Moneva and Moncada (2020) contend that children who experience the competence of their parents have a chance to excel academically. Children's desire to be like their parents will inspire them to aspire for more at school and ultimately achieve better results.

3.6.2.3 Perception

 Perception refers to how parents think about their past and present to create new comprehension of events. If parents view their past and present experiences

as failures, they are likely to get stuck in the past rather than break new ground and open new perspectives in their lives. Hendricks (2015) contends that the way parents choose to relive experiences affects their efficacy. If parents choose to leave their past behind, which means changing their mind-set, they will start to think innovatively for the child's benefit. Parents' perspectives about learning will change to their children's advantage. Yosef et al., (2021) argue that parents with positive views will face complex tasks as tasks that can be mastered and not a threat that must be avoided. Parental self-efficacy is the product of perception. If parents' perception about education is positive, they will find ways to engage in their children's education even if there are distractions. However, if the perception is negative, parents will sit at home and hope that school leaders and teachers will educate their children. Therefore, it is essential to enhance the parents' self-efficacy to gain confidence in contributing to the children's success.

Parental self-efficacy benefits parents and children. Parents benefit by gaining confidence, competence and perception and children by a well-established support system throughout their educational journey. The journey becomes smooth when parents provide the support children need to cope with schoolwork.

3.6.3   Perception of invitation to be involved

Research has shown that the participation of parents is significantly low in Nigeria (Yulianti, Denessen, Droop & Veerman, 2020). The blame has been put on parents without looking at principals' role in drawing parents closer to the school. School leaders in Japan are often unwilling to extend a genuine invitation to parents (Yamahoto et al., 2016). Principals' attitudes may be due to a lack of trust for parents to offer any tangible contribution to the development of the school. Goodall (2018) points out that the principal should not treat learners as isolated units but should pay attention to the context and the connected parents. Principals need to invite parents to participate in school development rather than assume they know what to do. Mleczko (2013) highlights the need for principals to communicate with parents in ways that welcome them in the life of the school. Lack of communication has resulted in a blame game between the leaders and

the parents. Leaders think that parents are not interested in the educational affairs of the school, while parents feel that it is by invitation that they will get involved. This push and pull attitude has widened the gap between the school and the parents and disadvantaged learners. Principals should be seen as working towards closing the gap between the school and parents by being open to partnering with parents. Bayler, Karatas, and Alci (2013) say that principals should be available to a shared responsibility to communicate humility and willingness to work with parents, regardless of their contextual difficulties.

Principals must transform schools into centres of hope, freedom and responsiveness to context. The willingness to reinvent schools to become relevant to contextual realities is crucial for rural communities. Alinsunurin (2020) argues that a welcoming climate enables parents to work well in schools. Msila (2012) further argues that adopting an Ubuntu philosophy as an African indigenous knowledge system (AIKS) will promote solidarity, collaboration, and respect among the people in the organisation. The argument here suggests that parents need to be respected, trusted and accepted for who they are rather than judged based on their social and economic status. The social and economic situation has been used to subject parents to different treatment by school principals in recent times. In assisting rural parents to become active participants in education, the principle of Ubuntu should be accepted as an inclusive mechanism. Robinson and Volpe (2015) assert that, to create a welcoming environment successfully, school principals should refrain from perceiving a rural setting as a deficit but rather as a fountain of hope by believing in the indigenous knowledge system. Principals should see beyond the state of rural areas and proactively and innovatively see parents from rural areas as assets and resources needed to improve the academic performance of rural learners. If leaders succeed in seeing beyond parents' shortfalls, they will begin to invest in these parents to preserve local knowledge.

3.6.4   Parent's life context

Parent life context refers to the environment that determines the living conditions that may allow or deny parents the opportunity to get involved in their children's education. Murray et al., (2014) define personal life context as parental skills and knowledge and the perceived time and energy parents can expend to become involved. The personal life context of parents is privileged or underprivileged. The life context of parents in rural areas is different from those in urban areas. The life context of urban communities is characterised by literacy, decent jobs and income, functional family structures, better infrastructure and an affluent lifestyle. Parents and schools in urban areas connect better than those in rural communities. Schools in urban communities tend to perform better than schools in rural communities due to the better connection in urban areas. The life context of rural communities is characterised by poor parental educational background, single parenting, child-headed families, unemployment, lack of infrastructure and lack of psychosocial support. These parents' life contexts have become barriers to parental engagement. Murray et al., (2014) argue that parents with lower socioeconomic status experience more significant barriers to parental involvement than more advantaged parents. The barriers are further discussed:

3.6.4.1   Parent's poor educational background

Parents with poor educational backgrounds lack the confidence to engage with educated people. Crea et al., (2015) contend that parents often believe in a professional education model where teachers are solely responsible for education. These parents are not sure whether they possess the right skills and knowledge to engage in various aspects of education. Manzon et al., (2015) assert that some parents may lack the knowledge or confidence about getting involved appropriately. For instance, parents without secondary education may find it difficult to help their children with homework and assignments. It would also be difficult to engage with teachers concerning the academic matters of their children. These parents feel inferior to teachers they know are better educated than them. Even though these parents may have ideas, they may keep them to

themselves due to an inferiority complex. When parents adopt reserved attitudes, everybody loses, from the parents themselves to their children. This is one area that needs to be overcome to improve the standard of rural education. Currently, a poor educational background remains one of the major issues hampering effective parental engagement.

3.6.4.2 Single parenting

Single parenting is a significant concern in rural communities. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) contend that solo parenting and those with young or large families may find it difficult to get involved because of their caretaker responsibilities. Families are run by either the mother or the father. In many instances, grandparents take care of their grandsons and granddaughters. Single parenting is caused by divorce, separation and death. Single parents have to carry all the responsibilities at home alone. The responsibilities are vast and make it difficult for them to support their education. This family situation deprives learners of their right to quality education. Single parenting affects children not only academically but also emotionally and psychologically. In case the same parents are not working in one family, it means that children are left alone at home to take care of their siblings. This affects children because they have to carry their parent's responsibilities which are heavy for them. When children are affected in any form, they tend to perform poorly.

3.6.4.3 Child-headed families

These are families run by older children who had to assume leadership responsibilities due to the absence of their fathers and mothers. The absence of parents may be due to death, separation or work. There are many child-headed families in rural communities. Simofurosa and Wiseman (2016) contend that one of the biggest challenges schools face today is the increasing number of learners coming from child-headed families. One may regard these families as unstable and not conducive to learning. An older member of the family has to act as a leader with little influence over the siblings. Parental engagement is non-existent

in these families as the leaders themselves are learners. Children from these families tend to perform poorly due to the little time they have to concentrate on their studies. Educators are frustrated due to the lack of capacity and resources to support these learners daily (Marongwe sonn & Mashologu, 2016). Principals are also frustrated about whom to consult when engagement has to happen between them and the parents. This family circumstance hampers parental engagement.

3.6.4.4   Unemployment and employment

Unemployment is measured in terms of inadequate income in the household. When parents are unemployed, they cannot afford necessities such as food, clothes, shelter and electricity. If these parents struggle to meet their basic needs, it is difficult for them to afford a car or pay for public transport to attend school meetings. Single parents and families where the mother and the father both work may not have money to hire a nanny to take care of their children while attending a meeting. Some parents work day and night shifts, leaving little time available to engage with the school. Schnell, Fibbi, Crul and Montero-Sieburth (2015) argue that rotating shift work in many blue-collar jobs held by parents means they lack time to support their children effectively in school-related matters. These jobs keep parents busy to the extent that there is absolutely no time to engage in their children's education. Some parents' work involves travelling, meaning they are kept away from home for some days. Those who manage to travel back home find themselves tired with little time spared for schoolwork.   Many parents do manual work due to poor educational backgrounds, leaving them too tired to think about school matters. The employed and the unemployed face hindrances that keep them away from their children's education.

3.6.4.5   Psychosocial support

The conditions in rural communities are depressing. Appiah-Kubi and Amoako (2020) argue that busy schedules and stressful life situations experienced by

some parents burden their ability to participate actively in their children's education. Poverty and joblessness affect parents not only physically but also psychologically and emotionally. When parents are affected physically, emotionally and psychologically, children get little support from them. These parents will find no reason to get involved as involvement in education becomes a secondary matter. Simufurosa and Wisermann (2016) contend that children living in child-headed families are burdened physically, emotionally, socially and psychologically. Parents and children are affected by poor living conditions. The poor conditions affect their rationality which leads to poor decision-making. Parents with impaired rationality are not engage-able because education is not their priority. Their priority is to satisfy their basic needs. The academic performance of learners in these disintegrated families will decline until they give up schooling.

3.6.4.6   Lack of infrastructure

There is a lack of road, communication and transport networks in rural communities. Basic infrastructure such as water and electricity are also not provided. There are often communication breakdowns due to poor signal. The transport network is inefficient; parents who need to travel to school for meetings may not have transport or cannot afford it. Communication and transport expenditure may prevent parents from travelling to and from meetings. The problem is compounded by a lack of electricity and water that means parents have to spend much of their time queuing for water and travelling to the mountains to fetch firewood for cooking. The failure to attend meetings means that parents cannot get in touch with the teachers and school leaders to collaborate for learners' success.

Rural settings have more disadvantages than advantages. Parental engagement seems impossible in rural schools. However, the parental life context should not deter efforts to engage parents because it is beneficial. Parents in rural areas are under-resourced, disempowered, disengaged, and isolated because of their contextual factors. Research has shown that educating children in rural areas

remains a daunting task without engaging parents (Appiah-Kubi & Owusu Amoako, 2020). Currently, learners in rural schools are underperforming, attributed to a lack of parental engagement. Parental engagement is critical if the results of rural learners are to improve. Therefore, principals should take initiatives to empower these parents to boost their confidence and make them assets that can improve learners' performance. Mleczko (2012) argues that leaders need to build the capacity of parental engagement by concentrating on developing relevant skills, knowledge and power. In rural areas, the empowerment of parents is necessary and can be done by courses and workshops provided by the school. Schools should be seen running capacity-building programmes to train parents on parenting, communication, assisting in homework, motivation, and assuring them of their power to effect change in education. Epstein and Sheldon (2019) point out that a parent is compromised in advocating for children without knowledge regarding how schools operate and how to assess progress. Therefore, principals should take proactive measures to empower parents as key participants in children's education.

3.7   Contextually responsive leadership

The world has become a village in recent times. Countries are different in political, educational, cultural, economic and social conditions, yet they are connected. The connection is so intense that one country's problem affects other countries' operations. Educational connection is not an exception. Brackmann Pashiardis, and Arlestig (2020) point out those issues affecting schools are increasingly global; however, solutions to the problem are contextual. In other words, addressing parental engagement as a problem in rural schools cannot be found by importing foreign leadership practices but by responding to the local context. In Indonesia, contextual responsiveness has been adopted as a learning philosophy that pays attention to learners' and parents' needs, interests, and experiences (Satriani et al., 2012). In other words, teaching and learning in Indonesia are bound by the circumstances on the ground, which helps the system resonate well with the needs of the people involved. Malaysia regards

successful leaders as those who respond most appropriately to a specific context (Noman, Hashim & Abdullah, 2016). Contexts are linked to a particular geographic location. Therefore, strategies applied in one school may not necessarily work in another because their circumstances are not the same. Each situation is unique, and for this reason, for principals to be successful, they should treat every case as unique. Arguing from a South African perspective, Maringe et al., (2015) point out that moving away from a broad-based application that tends to serve the minority while those underprivileged majorities are ignored will serve rural learners better. In South Africa, a blanket curriculum approach is applied to all learners, regardless of their circumstances. The learners' performance is on the same scale without considering the socioeconomic gap between rural and urban schools.

Contextually responsive leadership refers to leadership that can negotiate its way through different contexts to achieve goals. Bredeson et al. (2011) define contextually responsive leadership as leadership that can demonstrate wisdom in action and appropriate application of acquired skills, knowledge and disposition for effective adaptation to dynamic situations. What is expressed here is that contextually responsive leadership manifests itself by actions and behaviour, not just speaking. Marishane (2020) defines contextually responsive leaders as leaders who use common sense or intuition to deal with contextual challenges to achieve desired goals. School leaders need to appropriately apply their experience, knowledge, skills, and attitude to achieve such goals in response to the demands emerging from the dynamic and changing context.

Bredeson et al. (2011) believe that leaders must draw responses from contextual realities such as school district size, organisational culture, community characteristics, geographic location, financial situation and political climate to respond to context successfully.

School district size: The size of school districts is not the same; some are large, while others are medium and small. Schools also differ in size as informed by district size; the bigger the district, the bigger the schools. The approach used

by principals to improve the academic performance of these schools will depend on the size of the school. In small schools, principals will directly interact with parents, and quick decision making will take place, which ultimately fast-tracks the development of the school. However, principals may have to work through others in large districts and share responsibility for effectiveness. This strategy is time-consuming, but it dispels principals' notion that they can improve learners' performance alone.

Organisational culture: Organisational culture is the backbone of organisational success. It is the brand that may attract support from stakeholders. Every organisation has its own culture, and principals should adjust to each culture for success. The culture of a good relationship, respect and trust between the principal and parents is critical in this study. If this culture is reciprocal between the principal and the parents, openness, good communication, and cohesiveness will be enhanced (Cruickshank, 2017). Principals need to be sensitive to this culture and adapt their leadership practices to suit the rural environment. In other words, principals should guard against imposing themselves on the culture instead of adapting their style to lead within the culture.

Community characteristics and geographic location: Across the world, countries are characterised as either developed or developing. This characterisation implies that one section is for poor communities and the other for the rich. At the same time, there are communities classified as rural and others as urban. This classification is evidence of disparity existing in our communities. A rural community dictates the way principals should respond to their needs. The reason is that these communities are deprived of human and physical resources. The poor educational background and low socioeconomic status experienced by rural communities' influences leadership. In responding to the needs of these rural areas, principals should establish personal relationships and partnerships with parents to strengthen the collaboration needed to further the educational agenda of rural learners.

Financial situation: Poverty is one of the contextual factors derailing parents from taking part in their children's education. Principals must recognise this shortcoming to respond to it appropriately. The appropriate response will entail proper management of finances allocated to schools by the government. As part of their management, school principals are responsible for safeguarding and using school finances for the intended purpose. Such control can be achieved by proper budgeting, transparency and communication. Instead of being dependent on government funding, principals should be willing to raise funds from local companies to boost the school's financial resources. The school needs financial resources to function effectively.

Political climate: Political climate is the climate within which the school operates and influences it in terms of policies and legislation. Therefore, principals should work with constituencies, build trusting personal relationships and inspire confidence from parents to participate in policy and legislative decision-making. In other words, principals should engage parents so that the voices and plight of parents may be heard and attended to in policymaking.

3.8   Summary

This chapter reviewed international, African, and national literature on the study. The researcher explored literature extensively to establish what is already known, the theoretical base of the research and identified the contradictions and gaps. The literature focused on the unbundling of the critical issues in the four concepts constituting the study's title: school context, school leadership, parent engagement and contextually responsive leadership. The core leadership practices a responsive leader needs have been discussed, and the strategies for successful school-parent engagement outlined. As outlined by the conceptual framework in the previous chapter, leadership, learners, parents, and context have been synthesised to build a strong base for improving learner achievement. Literature has revealed the positive impact of parental engagement on learner achievement. Learners in deprived schools struggle with a range of academic and personal issues, including poor academic performance. Their struggle has

happened and is still perpetuated in a context that has questioned rural learners' intelligence; hence these learners do not find comfort in teaching and learning. However, the literature has revealed that learners' academic performance is low due to a lack of parental engagement in rural schools. The literature review has shown that parents' socioeconomic and poor educational background is the reason for disengagement in children's education. Context as an underlying force is often ignored when dealing with constraints to learner achievement. The view established is that leaders' characteristics and behaviour are essential instruments to improve schools. However, as advocated by many researchers, this notion has disregarded the inevitable situational realities in a leadership discourse.

Studies have shown that principals were unprepared to lead in rural settings and could not even relate their leadership practices to rural conditions. The situation in rural schools is hopeless, given the central role principals have to play to promote inclusiveness. Inclusiveness in this study suggests that principals should include parents in children's education. Inclusiveness has not happened as principals maintain the *status quo* of not aligning their instructional practices with community norms, values and beliefs. Principals continue to focus on transformational, instructional and transactional leadership to address the contextual needs of learners and parents. It has become apparent that the continued use of these leadership styles has done very little to address the needs of rural schools.

Contexts are dynamic, and therefore a successful leader in one context does not suggest that they will be successful in a different context. This study, thus, extends the scope of the existing studies by acknowledging that effective leadership should be context responsive rather than being informed by the leader's character and behaviour. Leaders who employ contextual responsive leadership strategies recognise that context varies and can enable and constrain their behaviour. This view does not suggest that the character and the behaviour of the leader are not necessary. It means that context responsive leadership brings context at the centre stage of leadership practices to become a critical

factor that should be responded to for successful school-parent engagement for learner's success.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH APPROACH, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1   Introduction

The previous chapter focused on a literature review of school leadership and the rural context, emerging from the framework of ideas presented in Chapter 2. This chapter concentrates on the research design and methodological approach followed in this study. Issues covered in this chapter include the philosophical approach, research paradigm, research approach, data collection and analysis, quality assurance and ethical matters. The chapter ends with a synopsis of the various issues discussed.

4.2   Philosophical assumptions

Philosophical assumptions refer to my ideology, beliefs and experiences that inform the study. When a philosophy underpins research, ideas, beliefs and convictions are geared to generating knowledge. Jackson (2013) asserts that researchers have to clarify their philosophical background to be aware and understand the deeper meaning and commitment to what they say or how they conduct their research. I have a philosophical assumption that says contextually responsive leadership can achieve successful school-parent engagement essential for successful learner achievement, particularly in Limpopo secondary schools. Zukauskas Vveinhardt and Andiukaitiene (2018) believe that a philosophical assumption shapes how the researcher understands the research questions, the methods to use and the interpretations of findings. This is true because a thoughtful philosophical assumption will suggest the choice of the research methodology, research approach, research design, data collection strategies and data analysis. In this study, ontological and epistemological views were the two main principles that comprised my philosophy.

4.2.1 Ontology

Ontology is what people perceive it to be and regard as truth. This is based on people's personal experiences, beliefs and value systems within the rural context. Busse, Humm, Lubbert, Moelter, Reibold, Rewald, Schluter, Seiter, Tegtmeier and Zech (2015) define ontology as a structure system structure in the world of objects and how such objects are related to one another. Aliyu and colleagues (2015) contend that ontology is the structure from which the world is made. Ontology is the social structure with its being and existence from which reality is interpreted. The construction of reality depends on people's beliefs and experiences about the nature of reality. As Al-Saadi (2014) points out, reality is what people perceive it to be. This implies that reality is humanly constructed and originates from human perceptions. Human perceptions influence reality in an environment of social interaction. Al-Saadi (2014) regards ontology as the study of being. It plays a role in shaping the relationship among social actors, cultural norms and social structures in the social context.

In this study, the researcher and the reality are inseparable, and the interaction between the researcher and the participants led to multiple realities. Multiple realities mean that participants would provide different views as activated by the researcher when interacting with the context within the phenomenon of interest. It can be concluded that the researcher must be part of the research process to find the truth because reality depends on the researcher's ideology and constant interaction with the participants. Reality was constructed from the experiences, opinions and convictions of the participants. Engaging participants with different points of view produced multiple realities experienced when the researcher granted freedom to express them.

Ontology shapes the researcher's belief system about reality (Celik & Kotsa, 2019). The search for reality inspired me to understand how and why such reality was constructed. For this reason, I understood how contextually responsive leadership could ensure successful school-parent engagement for learners' success. Amakiri and Juliet (2018) describe ontological assumption as the

nature of reality and its existence. Reality could only be constructed from what the participants thought was true. This suggests that reality was derived from people's perceptions; hence multiple realities were experienced when freedom to express them was allowed by the researcher. Multiple realities mean there was no single truth or reality as they were the subject of participants' views. There was no truth without the active engagements of the participants. For this reason, I engaged principals and parents to understand how contextually responsive leadership can ensure successful school-parent engagement for learners' success.

This research examined how contextually responsive leadership can establish successful school-parent engagement for learner achievement in rural Limpopo. As applied in this study, I believed that reality was the subject of human interaction. Learner achievement may improve by constructive engagement between the school leaders and the parents. Learner achievement was therefore based on the desire, willingness and ability of the school leaders and parents to engage. Therefore, ontology was what I believed existed in a particular setting and was confirmed by social interaction (Solomon, Amakin, Emka & Juliet, 2018). Ontology helped in philosophical positioning that confirmed reality was what people in the society believed it to be and how they interpreted it. Ontology, in this case, was not born from the researcher's philosophy but derived from the participants' points of view.

4.2.2   Epistemology

Epistemology studies the discovery of knowledge and the process by which it is gained, validated and communicated (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Ulum (2016) asserts that epistemology focuses on the acquisition of knowledge and its application for meaningful change in people's lives. How can knowledge be created, acquired, communicated and interpreted? The epistemological assumption of this study was that knowledge is personal, subjective and created by social interaction. Knowledge is people-based, which means people

themselves have to construct knowledge. Peoples' interaction was, therefore, the source from which knowledge was created.

As applied in this study, knowledge construction was based on participants' views. The perceptions of the participants played an important role in the research process and contributed to the development of knowledge. The intentional actions of the participants ensured that knowledge was constructed (Garrow & Hasenfeld, 2015). Knowledge construction was based on how the participants experienced a phenomenon and how they made sense of it (Alum, 2016). Making sense of the nature of knowledge confirms the notion that knowledge was socially constructed in this study. Olesegun (2015) confirms that knowledge is created, acquired and interpreted through social interaction.

4.3   Research paradigm

This study was underpinned by the constructivism research paradigm. The constructivist research paradigm explains independent thinking from which new reality and its interpretation were developed. Mogashoa (2014) defines constructivism as a process where individuals construct new thoughts and understanding based on what they already know and believe. Adom, Yeboah and Ankrah (2016) contend that people are in a position to understand the world around them by their life experiences. The purpose of a constructivist paradigm is to allow participants to create their own facts and truth based on their experiences and perspectives associated with the phenomenon of interest. Therefore, the need to listen to participants' views was critical in this study. Constructivism allows the researcher to prove that in-depth information is found by engagement (Antlova, Chudy & Buchtova, 2015). Therefore, participants were bearers of knowledge. Olesegun (2015) contends that participants are critical components in this research as creators of knowledge.

According to Dagar and Yadav (2016), no knowledge exists independent of the knower. This suggests that principals and parents must be approached from the perspectives of knowers who can make sense of what they know and their

experiences (Amineh & ASL, 2015). Principals and parents were selected as participants to offer the required data needed for this study to examine how contextually responsive leadership can ensure successful school-parent engagement. Therefore, it was my responsibility to create an environment conducive to interpreting the pre-existing knowledge about school-parent engagement. Mogashoa (2014) believes that data collection in a constructivist setting is characterised by active engagement, inquiry, problem-solving and collaboration with others. In-depth data was generated by the construction of knowledge and meaning.

Grover's (2015) submission was that the worldview of constructivism was grounded on several characteristics. First, the belief that participants want understanding of the world and that every individual is entitled to their own notion or reality. This suggests that contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement was approached from the perspectives of the participants rather than the researcher. Relying on the participants' perspectives ensured that in-depth data was gathered from different views rather than one and, therefore, reduced bias. Second, the beliefs that participants develop subjective meanings of their experiences were true regarding constructivism. Subjectivity implies that the phenomenon researched was explored from different dimensions and facets. Thirdly, the variety of perceptions sourced from the participants enhanced the understanding the researcher requires to examine the school-parent engagement phenomenon. Constructivism broadened the base from which the findings and the recommendations were generated.

Fourthly, constructivism gave the participants freedom to respond by open-ended data collection. Open-endedness means that participants are free to construct their meaning of reality. Lastly, the magnitude of the data collection depended on the researcher's personality. By this, I mean that the researcher had to be capable of observing, unbiased, able to interpret and apply the experience in assessing the meaning of gestures and words critical in creating knowledge. However, constructivism has several shortcomings. First, research findings cannot be generalised because constructivism is effectively applied when a small

sample is used (Cohen, Marion & Morison, 2011). Second, its ontological view tends to be subjective rather than objective (Mack, 2010). This means contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement could only be understood and interpreted from the participants' perspectives and not by objective means. Despite the limitations, constructivism remains the research paradigm required for in-depth data and credible findings in this study.

4.4   Research approach

The approach to empirical research adopted for this study was qualitative. A qualitative research approach explains how people use their minds to explain how they understand the phenomenon as it unfolds before them (Copley, 2019). A qualitative approach allowed me to interact with the participants from their place of work and residence to examine how school principals can establish successful school-parent engagement in rural schools. Participants in this study were the source of data needed to understand the impact of the phenomenon on learner achievement. Opportunities for the participants to express their views were made possible by constructive engagement in their natural setting. Qualitative research helped me know people better and rely on them for rich and in-depth data (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007). This was why a small number of participants were used for in-depth and detailed data.

The qualitative research approach was applied by intense and prolonged contact with life situations to achieve credibility. The contact between the participants and me was achieved by interactive and humanistic semi-structured interviews. Daniel (2016) asserts that the nature of the data collection methods is not static but flexible as it allows both the researcher and the participants to engage extensively for rich and in-depth data collection.

Yin (2011) identified three main advantages of using qualitative research. First, qualitative research uses semi-structured interviews that offer the participants an opportunity to express their views freely. In this case, the participants were engaged on the impact of successful school-parent engagement on learner

achievement. Second, qualitative research is inductive because it relies on the participants' views for rich data. Capturing the participants' views is one of the major aims of qualitative research. Qualitative research is an approach that represents people's hopes rather than what the researcher thinks should be achieved and, therefore, studies the fundamentals of life and how impactful they are to people's living conditions. Participants in this regard expressed their views openly without being threatened by the researcher's pre-established questionnaires. Thirdly, qualitative research acknowledges the living conditions of the people and the impact they have on their lives. These contextual conditions influence the participants' perceptions about the phenomenon under review. Fourthly, qualitative research is people-driven as it relies on the people's past, present, and anticipated developments. Qualitative research is embedded on the desire, ability and willingness of participants to express their views to see meaningful change in their lives and those of others.

However, there are several disadvantages to conducting qualitative research. First, it is not replicable. It is impossible to conduct the same study and get the same results (Daniel, 2016). Second, qualitative research views the social world as dynamic and, therefore, limits its findings to a selected group of people. Thirdly, qualitative research is expensive and demanding in that the researcher has to travel and spend a long time in the field interviewing participants. However, this research does not intend to generalise but to contribute positively to the phenomenon within a particular contextual setting.

4.5 Research design

This study was interactive and constructivist and warranted using a case study design to enable sufficient contextualised data to be collected from participants. Yin (2018) describes a case study as a one-on-one investigation to find the deeper meaning of the phenomenon in context. Baxter and Jack (2008) define a case study as a flexible data collection method for in-depth and rich data. As case study research design was used in this study, in-depth or rich data were

gathered on contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo secondary schools.

A case study provided me with in-depth insight into participants' life experiences about parental engagement for learner achievements in rural Limpopo secondary schools. During the data collection process, I depended on participants' views, perceptions, experiences and ideas to ensure the essence of the phenomenon was explored sufficiently (Hamilton, 2011). This means I assumed the role of a facilitator while the participants were actively engaged for a variety of information required to understand the phenomenon researched (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A case study research design is participant-driven. Data collection cannot be obtained without a word from those in direct contact with the phenomenon and the context under study.

A case study design is based on several reasons. Firstly, case study is adopted to ensure that the school-parent engagement is unpacked from different point of views rather than from one perspective (Coimbra & Martins, 2013). Second, ensure that the phenomenon of interest is explained correctly and the truth revealed for present and future use (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Thirdly, it is intensive, enabling me to obtain rich data (Heale & Twycross, 2018). The richness of the data anticipated does not suggest an unlimited data collection process but the depth of the data available. Case study research design takes place within certain boundaries Including time, place, activities and context (Rebolj, 2013). This was why the topic of interest was well defined in terms of what to research under which context. The set boundaries would ensure that the study remained reasonable in scope. It is a design that seeks to build a relationship between the phenomenon and the context. For instance, it would not be possible to understand or have a true picture of contextually responsive leadership without relating the phenomenon and the context within which it took place. Yin (2018) contends that the causal link between contexts and the phenomenon is established by case study design.

Despite its potential to draw in-depth data from participants, it has weaknesses that include a lack of generalisation of findings. It is criticised for its lack of rigorousness and does not follow systematic procedures (Yin, 2018). However, it allows participants views to determine the starting and endpoint of the research. However, these weaknesses are manageable by the power to adopt a reflexivity process (Cohen et al., 2007). Reflexivity self-reflection on the actual role the researcher should play in the research process (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, & Caricavito, 2020).

4.6   Sampling procedure

In this study, purposive sampling was chosen as a suitable strategy to sample secondary schools in the Sekhukhune East District of Limpopo Province. These schools are located in rural areas of the province and are classified as Quintile 1 schools with limited resources. The matric performance in the past two years was also used as a selection criterion for the sampled schools. The schools that performed below 60% and above 80% were selected. This criterion would enable me to see the need to engage parents in their children's education in both sets of schools. Etikan, Musa & Alkassim (2016) define purposive sampling as the intentional selection of participants based on their qualities. I deliberately selected secondary schools in rural areas which performed below and above matric pass requirements.

4.6.1   Sampling participants

If possible, all rural schools were to form part of this study. As that was not possible, I purposefully selected 13 school principals who had been in their positions for five years or more. These principals included those who performed under 60% and above 80% in their matric results for two consecutive years. This choice was informed because principals with five years of experience have acquired sufficient experience, knowledge and skills to provide adequate information about school-parent engagement.

Thirteen parents who serve in the School Governing Body (SGB) of the selected secondary schools were also purposively selected for the interviews. These were parents whose children were being taught in the same school. These parents understand the needs of their schools and community and are better placed to generate the required data. The total number of participants was 26. The interviews were conducted after hours at schools for principals and at a place and time convenient for parents. The interviews ran between 30-60 minutes for each applicant.

4.6.2   Recruitment process

Invitation letters were sent to school principals to participate in the study. The invitation letters were also extended to parents via the school principals as they work closely with the SGBs. The letters were sent in advance for response and follow-up. The parents and the principals indicated their willingness and availability to participate. Realising that I did not have control over conditions that could cause some of the participants to withdraw, contingency plans were put in place to cover emergencies that might arise. Covid-19 protocols were considered since some participants may have been at risk of contracting the virus. Two other schools were selected for contingency measures to mitigate any eventuality.

4.7   Data collection process

Data collection serves as a basis for a research study. Taherdoost (2016) defines data collection as a purposefully driven standard procedure for gathering data using various sources, including interviews, focus groups, observations and document analysis. However, this study used interviews for data collection. An interview is a two-way communication that allows exchanging information and ideas between the interviewer and the interviewee (Etikan & Bala, 2017). An interview is a platform by which in-depth data is sourced by direct interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee in a natural setting. The purpose of using interviews was to ensure that participants were granted freedom to provide the required response to the research questions (Gentles et al., 2015). A rich

description of contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement was achieved using interviews.

An interview as a data collection strategy was preferred for several reasons. First, it establishes a rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee. Second, the distance between the interviewer and the interviewee was reduced. The cultural and social barriers were removed, which created a mutual flow of ideas between the interviewer and the interviewee. Furthermore, an interview was selected for its potential to provide the researcher with the necessary knowledge to find the truth about school-parent engagement by social interaction. One-on-one interviews were used since they brought the interviewer and interviewee close together. There are three types of interviews: unstructured, semi-structured and structured. Semi-structured interviews were used in this study.

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview, a purposively driven conversation relying on the participants' viewpoints and life experiences. Al Balushi (2016) defines a semi-structured interview as an inter-subjective enterprise that relies on participants' common sense, perceptions, explanations, and understanding of some life experiences. Semi-structured interviews were used in this study because they provide an adaptable means by which research of this magnitude was accommodated (Pathak & Intrata, 2012). In this study, data was collected from school principals and parents. Since the case study evidence was gathered by interviews, I decided to use semi-structured interviews for both principals and parents. The reason for the use of semi-structured interviews was to ascertain participants' perspectives concerning their experience of the research phenomenon (McIntosh et al., 2015). Dejonckheere and Vaughn (2019) assert that using semi-structured interviews is to gather information from participants who have a clear understanding of the context and can provide the data needed to examine contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo secondary schools.

Semi-structured interviews not only ensure that participants' voices are heard but also allow the thematic analysis of qualitative data (Ryan et al., 2009). In-depth

and sought-after data was collected from the participants using semi-structured interviews. Rich and in-depth data collection was made possible by adopting a fairly open framework of questioning (Mcintosh et al., 2015). This means that the school principals and parents were given a chance to respond to questions freely, and their responses were probed for further details. Useful information was gathered from an intentional conversation with the participants. As Datko (2015) points out, one of the reasons for using semi-structured interviews is to get participants' subjective responses to a known environment for their lived world. Detailed questions are formulated before a structured interview.

A semi-structured interview contains open-ended questions and relies on participants' views. In other words, it focused on the topic in a broad and general way. The open framework of conducting the interview allowed the interviewer to explore school-parent engagement as a critical element of learner achievement. Such an interview enabled me to examine the phenomenon rather than pre-empt its outcomes (O'Keeffe, Buytaert, Mijic, Brozovic & Sinha, 2016). 'Participants' viewpoints were better explained in a free and clearly defined interview than in a standard one. Balushi (2017) likens semi-structured interviews to a daily goal-driven conversation. It is an interview conducted in an open environment with clearly defined objectives.

Balushi (2017) advises establishing a good rapport with participants to conduct meaningful semi-structured interviews. Rapport would ensure some degree of comfort between the participants and me, help to gain participants' confidence and develop equal power relations between the interviewer and the interviewee. Within this view, in-depth and rich data was collected as both parties engaged without reservations.

4.8   Data analysis

The technique chosen for data analysis in this study was qualitative thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for creating themes within a data set and ensuring that these themes are geared to efficient analysis and interpretation of

the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Neuendorf (2019) contends that thematic analysis is a way of ensuring that unrelated data become related and sifted until it makes sense. The first reason for using thematic data analysis was that it could be used as an instrument to detect and derive needed data in a complex data account (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The second reason was that it provided relevant data to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The third reason was that it is grounded in the constructivist paradigm, which relies on the perspectives expressed by the participants (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Braun and Clarke (2006) explain thematic analysis as a method for choosing the required data needed to build outstanding themes for credible research outcomes. Therefore, the themes were critical to the research questions and represented a particular meaning within the data. The meaning was established because the study was committed to its epistemological view of knowledge constructed by the participants. Therefore, data analysis cannot happen outside the epistemological and ontological views, which are people-oriented (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019).

The process of data analysis is clarified in the following paragraphs. As outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012), six phases in carrying out thematic analysis were considered

Phase 1: Data familiarisation: In this phase, the researcher repeatedly read the data, searching for meanings and patterns. This phase was because it provided me with a good foundation for the analysis. In this phase, recorded data was transcribed for familiarisation (Ibrahim, 2012).

Phase 2: Generating codes: Coding followed familiarisation. This means identifying features or ideas from the data relevant to the phenomenon of interest (Roberts et al., 2019). The general data were organised into meaningful groups and developed into themes or patterns.

Phase 3: Developing themes: This phase involved categorising codes into potential themes and placing the coded data within the relevant themes. The

main sub-themes significant to the phenomenon emerged. Those that did not fit into the phenomenon were reserved for future use.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes: This phase involved checking whether the coded data was rightfully placed within the carefully identified themes. This was achieved by generating a thematic map of the analysis.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes: This means a detailed classification of themes to give the reader an immediate understanding of what they entail (Neuendorf, 2019). This phase ensured clarity, cohesion, precision and quality of the analysis. Theme definitions were short summaries of the core idea and meaning. The process of writing definitions can confirm whether there was enough depth and detail for each theme to stand alone as a critical chapter.

Phase 6: Reporting is the final phase of data analysis. This phase provided an interesting story about the analysed data. It presented a comprehensive yet convincing manner in which the research questions were answered.

4.9   Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research aimed to ensure that the study was accurate and credible. The four criteria used in this study to ensure that trustworthiness was maintained were credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability.

4.9.1   Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research was strengthened by reliance on participants' views rather than the views of the researcher. The researcher's voice was less than that of the participants to enhance credibility. Kalu and Bwalya (2017) explain that the voice of the participants in qualitative research should override the voice of the researcher to establish credibility. If the researcher's views were dominant, it would compromise the study's credibility. This was the reason the credibility of the study had to establish whether or not the research findings were accurate reflections of the participant's points of view (Anney, 2014). Pre-

interviews were used to test the suitability of the questions to be fully answered to achieve credibility (Elo et al., 2014). This view challenged my self-awareness in adhering to all protocols required to improve and protect the credibility of the study.

The protocols observed in ensuring credibility included prolonged engagement with participants, peer debriefing, member-checking and an audit trail (Conelly, 2016). Prolonged engagement with the participants meant I needed to immerse myself in the participant's world and understand their context (Anney, 2014). Such understanding gave me an insight into the context to minimise the distortion of data due to a lack of contextual understanding. Peer debriefing means exposing the work to peers to provide constructive criticism to help improve the credibility of the study (Ghafouri, 2016). Member-checking raises the voice of the participants in the analysis and the interpretation of the results. This would assist in reducing bias when analysing and interpreting the data. This means allowing the participants to criticise my work and suggest changes to improve it. The audit trail enhanced credibility by providing substantive evidence to ensure I accounted for all the research processes.

Ghafouri (2016) argues that credibility can be enhanced further by multiple sources, methods and themes, known as triangulation. Triangulation assists in overcoming the intrinsic bias which usually occurs in a research process. Gunawan (2015) explained that I should remain neutral by affording participants sufficient time to express their views about the phenomenon being studied to reduce bias. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed word for word, so nothing was left out. Elo and Kati (2014) contend that ensuring credibility in the research procedure must be clearly defined so the participants in the research adhere to protocols to avoid compromising the credibility of the research.

4.9.2   Transferability

Transferability of the study implies the transfer of the findings from one context to another (Treshame & Riggs, 2015). Transferability answers the question: Can the study results be transferred to a different location with different participants and still produce the required outcomes? If the findings are transferable, the study met the transferability condition. Conelly (2016) argues that transferability can be achieved by openness and answering the fundamental questions of what, how, when and for whom the research was conducted. Haradhan (2018) asserts that transferability can be satisfied if the findings have some degree of relevance and can produce similar results when conducted in a different location with different participants.

4.9.3   Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the level at which another researcher can confirm the results of the initial research (Anney, 2014). Confirmability was achieved in this study by an audit trail, a reflexive journal and triangulation (Conelly, 2016). I demonstrated visible evidence from the research process that the findings were not from my own thinking but drawn from the participant's views. Treshame and Riggs (2015) contend that steps taken should emerge from the data, not from my own predisposition. The research findings were subjected to peer debriefing and member-checking to prevent intrinsic bias that might compromise the results. I cannot confirm my own conclusions, but the participants, supervisor and peer reviews can be used to corroborate them (Ghafouri, 2016).

4.9.4   Dependability

Dependability refers to the findings being sustained over time for future reference (Conelly, 2016). According to Gunawan (2015), all the steps in data collection, recording and analysis had to be accounted for to ensure dependability. Elo and Kati (2014) believe that dependability is maintained by following all the research processes properly. Connelly (2016) suggested an audit trail be used to record

all the activities in the research process and later used as evidence for dependability.

4.10 Ethical considerations

As enshrined in the constitution, the rights of South Africans must be respected at all times (Constitution of South Africa, 1996). The rights include the right to human dignity, privacy, freedom of expression and religion, belief and opinion. In the context of this research, the protection of participants by using appropriate ethical principles was necessary. In a qualitative study, ethical considerations are critical in the entire research process (Arifin, 2018). The need for ethical considerations was even more necessary in the case of face-to-face interviews, which this study adopted. It was also important when vulnerable individual participants had to be interviewed. Ethical principles were observed to prevent the risk of information concealment, reservations and uneasiness during the interview sessions. Principles underpinning research ethics are discussed in the following paragraphs. These include informed consent, voluntary participation, consent forms, anonymity and confidentiality, risk or harm to participants, measures to minimise risks and possible benefits.

In terms of ethical guidelines, this study had to abide by all the conditions laid down by the ethics committee of the University of Pretoria. According to the ethical guidelines, I had to be honest with and respectful towards all individuals, particularly the parents and principals of schools affected by this research, to minimise any risk and harm to the participants and ensure that their confidentiality and privacy were not violated. The following steps were taken. Participants were fully informed of what would be asked of them, how the data would be used and what the consequences could be. The participants had to provide explicit, active consent to participate in the research, including their right to access the information and withdraw at any point (Fleming & Zegwaar, 2018). This meant they took part of their own free will. According to Tresharne and Riggs (2015), voluntary participation is when participants understand the process they are engaging in and the reason for their participation.

Confidentiality and anonymity were preserved by not revealing their names and identity in sampling, data collection, data analysis and even during the reporting of the study findings. In minimising the risks and harm, privacy and the confidentiality of the interviewing environment was carefully managed by ensuring that the names of the participants, institutions, and images of the participants were concealed (Dooley et al., 2017). I further ensured that transcription was conducted in a private room using earphones to avoid the possibility of recordings being heard by other people. The identity of people was removed during data transcription.

I took the necessary precautions to ensure that participants were protected in this study. Protecting participants was achieved by storing data in password-protected encrypted devices. The information was held in the University of Pretoria's computer, my personal computer, hard disk and memory stick, protected using a password known only to me (Arifin, 2018). Written material was kept in a locked cabinet to ensure adherence to confidentiality. Both written and electronic information will be stored in the University of Pretoria archives for 15 years. The participant's identities were referred to by pseudonyms when presenting the findings.

In this study, the participants' interest was prioritised and served through adherence to ethical guidelines. The assurance to comply with the ethical requirements as laid down by the University of Pretoria's ethics committee was guaranteed in this study. Consent to be in the field and engage the participants was sought from the ethics committee of the University of Pretoria to complete this study. Permission was also sought from the Limpopo Department of Education, principals of the sampled secondary schools and the parents. I sent formal letters to the authorised individuals or office for such permission.

4.11   Summary

The chapter presented an account of how the study was carried out. The chapter provided evidence to the groundwork regarding philosophical perspectives, data

collection methods and processes. The qualitative approach used in this study was enhanced by the case study design, which allowed data collection from multiple sites and enriched the study from different perspectives. Data was analysed from participants' views, and themes were developed to sustain the structure of the study. As this study could not be done without respecting the participants involved, ethical consideration was followed during the study process.

CHAPTER FIVE
RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The research methodology used in this study was presented in Chapter 4. The chapter included the philosophical approach, research paradigm, research approach, sampling procedures, data collection and analysis, quality assurance, and ethical considerations. The researcher collected data from 26 participants, 13 principals and 13 parents. The method used for the data collection was semi-structured interviews. This chapter presents the descriptive analysis of findings from the generated data and the narrative descriptions of the major themes and sub-themes that emerged. The profiles of the sampled schools and the ,,,biographical information of the participants are also presented.

5.2 The profile of sampled schools

In this study, 13 secondary school principals were selected to participate. They included those who performed less than 65% per cent and above 80% in their matric results for two consecutive years. This choice was informed by the fact that principals with five years of experience have acquired sufficient experience, knowledge and skills to provide adequate information on school-parent engagement. Thirteen parents who serve in the SGBs of the selected secondary schools were also purposively chosen. These were parents whose children were taught in the same school. The total number of participants was 26. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Limpopo Department of Education (LPDoE). As required by ethical considerations, participants' and school identities were kept confidential. Pseudonyms were used, and school names and codes were assigned to represent the participants. Detailed profiles of the schools that participated in the study are presented in the next section. The study focused on schools located in rural areas with multi-deprived contexts.

5.2.1 Profile of Elephant secondary school

Elephant Secondary School is situated in a rural area. The school enrolment was 398 with 13 teachers. The school is within reach of the villagers, and therefore learners did not need transport to travel to school. There are, however, bottle stores surrounding the school, which occasionally disturb teaching and learning with loud music. Most of the families in this village are social grant beneficiaries. The poor socioeconomic conditions are compounded because most community members are not educated. The poor educational background of the parents creates a gap between the school and the parents. Elephant secondary school has four blocks of classrooms and an administration block. The school does not have laboratories, but its ablution facilities are usable. The sporting infrastructure has been neglected with long grass, which shows that it has not been used for some time.

5.2.2 Profile of Giraffe secondary school

Giraffe Secondary School is located in the middle of a rural village. The total number of learners was 351, with 13 educators. The school is situated close to platinum mines; however, many parents are unemployed. Many learners come from impoverished families and depend on the grandparent's pensions and other social grants such as child grants for survival. Surplus books are kept in the classroom where learners attend because the school does not have enough storage space. The principal shares the same staffroom with teachers because the school does not have an administration block.

5.2.3 Profile of Lion secondary school

Lion Secondary School is situated in a deeply rural area. The total enrolment at the school was 120 with five teachers. Lion Secondary School is a state-of-the-art school recently completed by the government. It has advanced ablution facilities, a library, laboratories and a well-furnished administration block. The school premises were appealing and looked set for effective teaching and learning. The community, however, is affected by poor socioeconomic conditions

such as unemployment, poverty and a high level of illiteracy. Due to the impoverished conditions, most parents had to migrate to urban areas to search for work. Learners are left alone and burdened with the responsibility of heading families. The absence of parents widens the gap between them and the school.

5.2.4 Profile of Crocodile secondary school

Crocodile Secondary School is situated along a main road leading to town. The total number of learners attending the school was 1400, with 37 teachers. Crocodile Secondary School is one of the big schools in the area. The learners attending the school come from the neighbouring villages. However, many learners are transported to the school 50km away from their homes. The school attracts many learners from remote villages because of its good performance in matric results. The school used old, refurbished classrooms and did not have a library, laboratories or usable ablution facilities. Pit toilets are situated at the school for both teachers and learners. Members of the community are mainly unemployed and are social grant beneficiaries.

5.2.5 Profile of Leopard secondary school

Leopard Secondary School is located in a rural village. The enrolment is 1295 with 32 teachers. The community was characterised by poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. The school has drilled water and flush toilets. The school buildings were dilapidated, with one small room used as a staffroom. The same staffroom, which was small, was also used as a print room.

5.2.6 Profile of Rhino secondary school

Rhino Secondary School is situated in a rural area characterised by a high level of poverty and unemployment. The total number of learners was 275, with nine teachers. The school has a newly built administration block. It has sufficient classrooms to accommodate all learners.

5.2.7   Profile of Pangolins secondary school

Pangolins Secondary School is situated along the main road to town. The total enrolment is 945 with 31 teachers. The school had sufficient new classrooms and an administration block. The school had a recently built tennis court.

5.2.8   Profile of Blue Whale secondary school

Blue Whale Secondary School is situated in the deep rural areas. The total number of learners enrolled was 91, with four teachers. The school had unused classrooms due to the few enrolled learners. A significant number of parents are unemployed and poor. The families depend on social welfare services for a living.

5.2.9   Profile of Rodents secondary school

Rodents Secondary School is situated in a rural village. The total enrolment was 394 with 13 teachers. The school is building an administration block that is nearing completion. The school has recently been transformed into a technical school. The school has sufficient classrooms to accommodate the learners. The community is characterised by poverty, joblessness and a high illiteracy rate.

5.2.10   Profile of Hippopotamus secondary school

Hippopotamus Secondary School is a state-of-the-art school situated in a rural village. The school has flushing ablution facilities, kitchen, science and computer laboratories, a library and well-furnished classrooms. H'wever, the school's community is poor, and most parents are unemployed.

5.2.11   Profile of Buffalo secondary school

Buffalo Secondary School is located in a semi-rural area and has 817 learners with 17 teachers. The school does not have enough permanent classrooms because some learners are taught in mobile classrooms. The principal shares the staffroom with teachers because the school does not have an administration

block. The school does not have a library or laboratories. The community is affected by socioeconomic issues.

5.2.12 Profile of Hyena secondary school

Hyena Secondary School is situated in a township outside Burgersfort. However, most of the learners are from the surrounding villages. The villages are not exempted from poor socioeconomic conditions. Most of the parents make a living by selling on the street. The enrolment is 982 with 27 teachers. The school has permanent classrooms. However, due to increased enrolment, the government has supplied mobile classrooms. The school has a newly built administration block, and a well looked after soccer field. The school has a hall used for meetings and other school events. An old classroom has been turned into a storage space for surplus learner support materials (LTSM).

5.2.13 Profile of Dolphin secondary school

Dolphin Secondary School is situated in a deep remote rural area. The road leading to the school is not tarred. The total number of learners is 351, with 13 teachers. The community living in the area is characterised by unemployment, poverty and a low level of education. Most of the learners are orphans, which increases the number of child-headed families.

5.3 Description of the participants in the study

The researcher collected data from thirteen secondary school principals and thirteen parents. The principals were selected as critical participants expected to drive change and improve performance in rural schools. Parents were chosen to ensure that education does not remain within the walls of the schools but continues in the home environment. Each participant was given a code name to present data to ensure anonymity. Table 5.1 is a summary of the codes used for principals and parents.

Table 5.1: Profile information of principals

Principals	Gender	Years of experience as a principal	Qualifications
	Principal A	9	B Ed Honours
Principal B	Female	6	B Ed Honours
Principal C	Female	5	B Ed Honours
Principal D	Male	6	B Ed Honours
Principal E	Male	5	B Ed Honours
Principal F	Male	8	B Ed Honours
Principal G	Male	10	B Ed Honours
Principal H	Male	5	B Ed Honours
Principal I	Male	11	B Tech Ed
Principal J	Female	6	M Ed
Principal K	Male	5	B Ed Honours
Principal L	Male	10	B Ed Honours
Principal M	Male	8	B Ed Honours

Table 5.2 Profile information for parents

Parents	Gender	Age
Parent A	Male	54
Parent B	Male	68
Parent C	Male	51
Parent D	Female	39
Parent E	Female	35
Parent F	Male	59
Parent G	Female	30
Parent H	Female	53
Parent I	Female	40
Parent J	Female	37
Parent K	Female	41
Parent L	Female	54
Parent M	Female	49

5.3.1   Gender of the participants

There were ten male and three female principals. There were four male and nine female parents. In total, there were 13 male and 13 female participants. However, this study was not based on gender; I embraced the balance when I found that gender parity was unwittingly observed. The gender parity helped in terms of balancing the views generated by participants.

5.3.2   Age of the participants

The parents interviewed were aged between 30 and 70. The principals were between the ages of 40 and 59. The age of the participants was an important factor in understanding the years of experience in the case of principals and parenthood for parents.

5.3.3   Experience of the principals

The researcher found that the principal's years of experience were not the same in engaging parents. The years of experience ranged between 5 and 11 years. The years of experience assisted the researcher in collecting in-depth data about school-parent engagement.

5.3.4   Qualification of the participants

Qualifications were an essential factor as principals could understand the context and respond to its challenges. In this study, 11 principals had a B Ed Honours degree, one had a B Tech degree in education, and one had a Master's degree.

5.4 Research questions, themes and sub-themes

Table 5.3: Research questions, themes and sub-themes

Research questions	Themes	Sub-Themes
1. How can a contextually responsive leadership establish successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo schools?	The role of principals in establishing school-parent engagement	❖ Communication ❖ Empowerment ❖ Conducting regular meetings
2. How do school leaders engage rural parents in student learning?	Monitoring and support	❖ Accountability ❖ Motivation ❖ Volunteering
3. What challenges do school leaders face when engaging parents in the education of their children?	Challenges affecting school-parent engagement	❖ Livelihood as a primary goal ❖ The level of illiteracy ❖ Time constraints ❖ Culture
4. What contextually responsive strategies can ensure successful school-parent engagement in student learning?	Contextually responsive leadership strategies	❖ Change of mind-set by school leaders ❖ Partnership ❖ Engaging other stakeholders ❖ Parent's self-efficacy

5.5 Presentation of the findings

The themes and sub-themes presented below are based on the participants' responses to the interview questions, linked to the research sub-questions that guided this study. Four themes were identified and connected to the research questions. Each theme has its sub-themes and direct quotes to substantiate the findings.

The first theme presented below was generated from the participant's responses to the first research question: How can contextually responsive leadership establish successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo schools?

5.5.1 Theme 1: The role of the principal in establishing school-parent engagement

Principals were a gateway to successful school-parent engagement. Parent engagement was an essential ingredient needed for a learner's success. How principals exercise their roles should always consider the context in which they operate because contexts are not the same. Each context has its dynamics. The uniqueness of the contexts challenged the principal's sensitivity to situations. The ability of the principals to respond to the challenges would effectively lead to the achievement of successful school-parent engagement.

In conducting the interview, the researcher wanted to understand the principals and parents' perspectives about the influence of context on their leadership roles and establish their competence to influence context to achieve the set target. The interviews aimed to enable the researcher to understand the parent's and principals' roles. The participants' views were analysed, which showed that principals and parents need to exercise their roles responsibly to achieve learner success. Data collected was predominant in revealing the conscious decisions the principals and the parents had to take in meeting the high expectations of rural learners. In the following paragraphs, four identified themes were discussed. Participants viewed the role of the principals as underpinned by communication, empowerment and conducting regular meetings.

5.5.1.1   Sub-theme 1: Communication

The participants view communication as a missing link needed to bring the school and the parents together. Baker et al. (2016) asserts that lack of positive, constructive and timeous communication has derailed the relationship between parents and the school. Participants highlighted that lack of communication is the reason for poor attendance at school meetings. Participants showed that invites to parents are sent using learners, and they fail to deliver the message. Principals were also unable to do follow-ups to establish whether the invitation letters had been given to parents. The communication breakdown widened the gap between the school and the parents.

It was expected that communication would improve in today's technological world. However, technology is a luxury in many rural communities. Many parents in rural areas do not own smartphones. As a result, they cannot access social media by which invitations may be sent to parents. Though some parents may have smartphones, the challenge was the data to retrieve and respond to the message. It had become difficult for schools to convey messages to parents quickly and effectively. Principal B shared the following view:

> *If it wasn't because of the follow-up made, most learners do not pass invitation letters to their parents. The challenge we are having is communication. Sometimes we sent learners back home to collect their parents when parents fail to attend meetings. Some learners don't tell their parents. As a school, we are doing enough. The only problem is that parents do not respond to our invitations. They come when they are forced to come, of which that is not our wish. We issue invitations to parents, but they do not come. When I request the traditional authority to invite parents on behalf of the school, it is then that parents come.*

The communication problem appears to be shared among school principals. It had become a universal problem in rural communities. Many rural schools do not

have internet access. Lack of internet access made it difficult for schools to transmit information quickly to communities. The letter of invitations fail to reach all the parents. In some instances, the message is misinterpreted due to the poor educational background of the parents. When the letter was not properly read and understood, parents decided not to attend meetings. Principal A expressed the following concern:

> *In most cases, when I try to call parents meetings, only a few attend. You can try to engage them, call them to school, but how often can you do that? When you call a parent that Kabelo is doing 1, 2, 3, you may be successful, but you cannot count on the 2nd and 3rd times. They will feel they have other pressing issues. That economic part which is satisfying their basic needs remains a stagnant sinkhole for parents to get across. If you address issues of primary means and satisfactory so, the mind is open to other suggestions. As long as you asked me to come to a meeting, I did not have firewood in my household and needed to cook when I came back from the meeting. How will I cook? My most pressing need is to satisfy my primary need.*

Just as principals complained about parents, the parents expressed their concern about principals' attitudes to parents.

Parent E's concern was expressed as follows:

> *Actually, I can say principals are ignorant because, if they are not ignorant, they were supposed to call the parent of the children to come and assist or check children's progress. So, they don't do anything. Parents are not invited. I am talking from experience.*

Parent H's view is shared:

> *I think there must be continuous communication between the principal and the parents. It will actually start from a certain point. That point is a communiqué can be given out to the parent,*

inviting parents for a meeting, so when the parents are there, then the principal will outline the purpose of the meeting. Once he has outlined the purpose of the meeting and explained the importance of their involvement in the education of their children, they will then reach an agreement that there should be a follow-up meeting to ensure that they have started.

In support of parent H, this is what principal F has to say*:*

We just have to bring a variety of modes of communication. We can't just rely on meetings alone. Sometimes we have to write to them some notes, communicate with them telephonically for their convenience.

Parent I agreed:

Principals have to call parents to talk about the behaviour of their children. Principals should give advices to parents on how to assist their children".

Principal E, relating to communication:

Yeah, to me, normally, what I do to bring parents on board is writing invitations and put them at public places where most of the parents meet or around the shops where everybody can see the invitations. Sometime we send invitations through their kids. But now that we have technology, you might even create WhatsApp group and send invitations in the group. Sometimes we are making phone calls to ensure that all the parents have received the invitation.

Principal G, in support of principal E, said:

We have the names and contact numbers of all the parents in our gadgets. We invite parents telephonically through SMS; however, the responses, as I have indicated earlier on, it is not

satisfactory. Parents that respond positively are for the learners who are doing Grade 12.

The views shared by the participants showed that there was a communication challenge between the school and the parents. Principals claim that invitations in the form of letters were sent to parents regularly. Surprisingly, the parents' response remains poor. The poor attendance of meetings suggested that invitation letters might not be reaching the intended recipients. It has been found that invitation letters were the primary source of communication; however, the accusations between the parents and the principals seem to suggest that the mode of communication was not effective. This finding also showed that other means of communication had not been explored. The tendency to rely on one means of communication was a setback as the school, and the parent's disconnection with the school continued.

The participants' views indicated that principals were less considerate of the challenges faced by rural parents. This claim was highlighted by the parents' views, which suggested that parents' primary needs come first. Parents from rural areas regard education as a secondary need. Livelihood was their immediate need, and therefore the urgency to attend to secondary needs was minimal. As much as education was essential, the livelihood of families was equally important, and thus when principals arrange meetings, they must consider the parents' socioeconomic status. If the primary need of the parents is not addressed, it remains an uphill battle for principals to engage them. Principals should find a convenient time to engage without compromising parents' attempts to make a living.

Communication between leaders and parents should occur when things go right or wrong. The conditions rural parents are going through could be made known to school leaders by communication. At the same time, the burden school leaders face can be shared with parents by communication. Leaders and parents can be open, share and be honest through healthy communication. If parents are accepted as partners, communication will serve as the glue that bonds them

together. The partners will express and share feelings, exchange ideas and information on how schools can be led and managed to improve learner performance by communication. Communication breakdown, alluded to by both parents and principals, was not good news as it constrained the relationship between the school and the parents. When the relationship is constrained, teamwork and unity are compromised. Disunity manifests itself in learner drop-out, ill-discipline and poor achievement. In this case, learners are the victims of the failed relationship between the school and the parents.

Principals expressed suspicions that parents are not interested in what they would like to share with them regarding the development of the school. On the other hand, parents felt that school leaders are not sensitive to their conditions and disregard them because of their poor educational background. However, people communicate to satisfy certain needs, including being heard, appreciated and belonging. When parents speak, they expect school leaders to listen to them without conditions. On the other hand, school leaders expect parents to listen, understand and do as advised. Due to lack of communication, parents and leaders may not know better. As they edge further apart, teaching and learning are compromised.

Communication shared between school and parents should create better understanding. It should also be used to accomplish tasks and achieve goals. School leaders have a duty to lead and ensure effective teaching and learning. Parents have a duty to prepare meals, assist their children with homework and assignments and give them moral support. Communication is critical to ensure that the tasks are well understood and carried out effectively.

One major hindrance found in the perspectives expressed by participants was that parents were less confident about themselves. They felt that the conversation between themselves and the principals were not fair because they are not educated. These were sentiments expressed by parents who doubt who they are and their capabilities. Communication was needed to boost the confidence of those who do not trust in themselves. People without self-

confidence find it difficult to engage in any form of conversation. Engagement was not possible without communication. Therefore, it was essential for communication to take place between the school and the parents.

Communication is essential as it transmits thoughts, ideas and feelings easily from one person to the other. Communication should be the centre of positive interaction between the school and the parents. Efficient communication was needed to fulfil the task of educating the learners. As much as communication had to be efficient, it should also happen regularly. Regular interaction between parents and the school may help realise successful school-parent engagement.

5.5.1.2   Sub-theme 2: Empowerment

Empowering parents was critical for effective monitoring and support of learners. The critical role of parents is to be active partners with influence over school decision making and participation in school activities and governance Empowering parents means engaging parents in the mainstream of school activities. Hsiao et al. (2018) define empowerment as a construct needed to find participat`s hidden potential and competencies resulting in proactive attitude of all involved. Principals indicated that many parents in rural communities were illiterate and did not know how to assist their children educationally. Those who were educated also showed little interest in the education of their children. Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) contend that the parent`s frustrations of not knowing what to do, manifest in a lot of " I don't care attitude" from parents. "I don't care attitude" means parents shift their responsibiloities to school leaders. Participants emphasised that the parents' mind-set needs to be renewed to adapt to the new educational trends. Their minds had been captured by the socioeconomic situations that eroded their confidence and rendered them pedestrians in their children's education. Mind-set renewal means making parents aware that their living conditions might change if their children were educated. The need for empowering parents was critical.

Principal C's concern:

Illiteracy is the main challenge because parents do not understand what is happening at school. They don't even care what is happening at school.

Principal E agreed with principal C and said:

Honestly speaking, in this rural area, parents are not fully committed. They are just sending their kids to school. For me, I can say that to fix it, you need to give these parents a new mind-set, a particular mind-set. They know that parents should attend the meeting, but they don't attend.

Apart from changing parents' mind-sets, Principal H mentioned: "Parents as social grant beneficiaries are unable to meet all their needs because the grant is not enough".

Parent B's point of view is:

Parents are unable to support their children due to lack of education.

Parent A suggested that:

When parent meetings are called, those enlightened must encourage and empower parents who are lost to make them aware of the importance of being involved in the education of their children.

Parent H corroborated Parent A's view and stated:

As soon as the school identify a problem in a learner, the parent should be informed immediately. So, it was the question of educating the community. Communities seem reluctant and inactive; this is due to lack of engagement and teachings. There was little education initiated towards communities. If they could

use social media platforms, they can even use radio and start to teach the communities. Parents should be taught about the consequences of not showing support to their children.

Parent D said:

I think we can share educational matters among ourselves as parents. It will help a lot. If one child is educated, the community will benefit. Lack of interest is caused by lack of education.

Parent C shared the concern:

The only problem is that 70% of the parents are not educated and therefore most of us, we don't see the importance of education. Though now many parents are young and have little bit of education, they still don't know what to do to assist their children with education-related matters. What is needed is that, when meetings are called, the enlightened parents should encourage and empower parents who are lost to make them aware of the importance of being involved in the education of their children.

Principal L, in support of the need to empower, said:

You know, with me, I just want the parents to be conversant with what the school is doing. I want them to take part, talk and ask about the progress of the learners and what the problems are. I want them to do that and invite them every quarter. When I am with the parents, I give them tips on how to assist their children at home. Some do improve, and if the rest of the parents can be taken on board, the performance may improve.

In support of empowerment, Principal I did the following:

We normally engage other stakeholders like motivational speakers to encourage the SGB, learners and parents for

maximum participation. We created a website where we sell the school so that whoever was interested might know what was happening at the school.

The views shared by these participants indicated that poor educational background and socioeconomic status of parents isolated rural parents. From the participant's perspective, it showed that principals were aware of these contextual factors and were willing to empower parents. Principals have expressed their determination to organise workshops to train parents to monitor and support their children at home. Some principals had even transformed their schools into centres of learning where part-time learning takes place, and parents were encouraged to register and attend lessons to boost their educational level. In parent meetings, principals pledged to include equipping items on the agenda so that the training takes place at every available opportunity. The principals decided to ensure that empowerment takes place formally and informally. The purpose of prioritising empowerment was to ensure that parents understood their roles and executed them effectively despite their rural conditions. Principals were willing to initiate programmes that would draw as many parents as possible to the school. These programmes included school governance, development and outreach, which were the throngs where parents could come through.

Parents have welcomed the exposure and embraced the initiatives. The non-participation of parents in the school's activities was not viewed as a lack of interest by principals but as a lack of confidence due to parents' low level of education. Building confidence by empowerment would go a long way in ensuring that education goes beyond the school walls. Education beyond the school walls implies re-thinking home education as the knowledge base of the parents should have been improved by empowerment.

Home schooling had not been part of the South African education conversation. Most of us had never heard of home schooling until Covid-19 exposed the vulnerability of rural learners and their parents. Schools in rural areas had to close for an extended time during the hard lockdown. Teaching and learning were

completely suspended to protect lives. This suspension had to occur because face-to-face methods were the only way teaching and learning could take place in rural schools. Online teaching was not an option because of the lack of resources in rural communities. Most schools do not have internet connections, learners and their parents do not have gadgets for online learning and teachers were also not technologically trained for effective online teaching and learning. Home education was also not an alternative for continual teaching and learning during the pandemic because of parents' poor educational background. Rural schools relied completely on physical contact between the learners and the teachers.

Home schooling might have been the best option for rural learners to benefit from during the pandemic. However, illiteracy is high among rural parents, which rules out any possibility of home schooling. Both parents and principals alluded to the poor educational background as the main limitation to teaching and learning during the Covid-19. Parents were ill-prepared to teach their children at home. Learners had to sit at home without receiving any form of education. However, children in urban schools continued with teaching and learning programmes because of their privileged conditions. Learners could receive their education using online platforms, and some parents resorted to home schooling because most parents in urban areas are educated compared to those in rural communities. The disparity between rural and urban schools was exposed and continued to widen.

Parents in rural communities should be empowered to deal with the education gap now and into the future. Empowerment is essential, not only to provide a backup up in times of crisis but also for effective collaboration between the school and the parents. Empowerment could change the entire educational dynamics of rural settings. Empowerment is significant in helping schools achieve their objectives. Learners receive support throughout their learning process as a result of empowerment. Parents receptive to empowerment will break the vulnerability cycle experienced by rural learners and their parents.

Currently, schools had reopened on a rotational system as an interim measure to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. However, the knowledge gap created by the pandemic would be felt for many years to come. The catch-up programmes in the form of Saturday, holiday, morning and afternoon classes and trimming the curriculum seem to provide relief in the short term. However, in the long run, the poor socioeconomic conditions of rural communities were multiplied. Most learners dropped out of school, and those who stayed in school lost interest in teaching and learning. These were the learners whose parents were hoping they would be educated and set free from the cycle of poverty. That dream had now been shattered; as a result, generational poverty continues. The situation could not be business as usual; empowerment programmes should be implemented and intensified to mitigate any eventuality that may disrupt education. Education has to be continuous and cannot be compromised for whatever reason, especially in rural communities.

5.5.1.3   Sub-theme 3: Conducting regular meetings

Participants identified school meetings as the source of school-parent engagement. School meetings emerged across the database as the leading platform most principals in rural schools used to engage parents. However, the meetings convened yielded poor results as most parents do not attend. Research has shown that parents who attend school meetings regularly can help their children finish their homeworks and assignments and also volunteer in school activities (Bauch, 2015).This evidence suggests that active parental participation will influence positive learner performance.

Principal L responded to parents' absence from meetings:

> *Yeah, the relationship with parents, they are positively responding even though some will never take heed of our invitations, they will never come.*

Principal I agreed with Principal L and said:

As far as the school is concerned, we live in the mining area, the type of parents we are having are not 100% involved in their children's education because we call meetings, they don't come.

Parent A voiced this concern:

In the community where the school is situated, most parents are affected by low socioeconomic status. If a school is situated in a poverty-stricken area, the preoccupation of parents in that area is that of providing for basic needs, example, food and shelter.

Parent F accepted their weaknesses and shared this:

The relationship between the school and the parents is so constrained that parents are unable to visit schools to assess the progress of their children.

Parent G said:

I think the school can encourage parents to participate by regularly calling them to school and also to create a WhatsApp group for the parents. I think this is the way to engage parents in the education of their children. However, schools are not doing enough because, if you check most of the schools, especially rural schools, a year may go by without parents being called for a meeting. Parents go to school to collect their children's progress report.

Parent D supported the sentiments of parent G and said:

Since I was here, I did not see a parent coming to school. I don't know why parents don't come to school. The parents of this school don't attend meetings. Right now, we have 158 Grade 12 learners, but now we have only 11 parents who came to attend

*the meeting organised for the parents of Grade 12 learners.
Parents have a problem. Principals give children invitations
letters to give to their parents, parents indeed receive invitations.
I cannot blame the principals.*

Principal B agreed with parents D and G and expressed this view:

*Yeah, you know some of the parents when you call them, and
you struggle to get them. It's only few parents who cooperate
when called for a meeting; they come and share their views with
regard to the growth and the development of the school.*

Principal C wanted parents to commit to meetings and said:

*I called a meeting due to Covid-19 so that a way forward may be
found to deal with the effects of the pandemic on teaching and
learning. When I call a meeting, I make sure that every parent
sign a memorandum of agreement between myself and the
parents. We also drafted a code of conduct for learners in those
meetings.*

The views articulated by these participants suggest that a better relationship
between the school and the parents should be established. A good relationship
would encourage the parents and the school to meet. However, participants
showed that those meetings did not yield positive results. Principals continued to
call meetings, and parents continued to disregard them. The views shared by the
participants suggest that meetings were called without taking into consideration
the time parents had for such meetings, work demands and other problems
experienced by most of the parents. Poor planning contributed to parents' poor
attendance. Invitations letters were issued at short notice, leaving parents with
no choice but to disregard the meetings. Programmes for meetings need to be
issued in time for parents to prepare for them. School meetings cannot be
abandoned due to poor attendance but should be arranged to consider the
contextual factors experienced by parents.

Some schools had good meeting programmes, but parents still did not attend. Participants identified culture as the reason for non-attendance. Culture of non-attendance came from lack of confidence, ignorance and education being a secondary issue. Regular meetings should be scheduled to establish and strengthen the relationship between the school and the parents and help parents reprioritise. Regular meetings should be planned and made known to parents in time for thorough preparation. Participants felt that those who fail to attend meetings should produce a written apology and also report to school after their commitments had been addressed. Accountability would ensure that parents attend meetings and take full responsibility for their children's education. Accountability would help bring the significance of education to the parents. There is a relationship between accountability and learner performance (Han & Hong, 2019). Accountability from all stakeholders was essential because society expects a lot from schools. School leaders and parents, in particular, should account for their actions and decisions. If parents and leaders are not called to account, the *status quo* would remain, and schools could continue to underperform. Lack of accountability compromised the quality of education learners receive. It was a disadvantage to the learners. Leaners need support from both parents and the school. Any rivalry between the school and the parents could count against the learners' progress.

The 'learners' progress should be the priority of both parents and school leaders. Regular meetings should be adopted to reflect on the progress of the learners and how to correct the shortcomings within the learning and teaching process. Parents and leaders have shown that schools are making less progress because meetings convened by the school were not attended. Meetings had been restricted to physical contact, which proved difficult for rural parents to attend. Regular meetings should not be restricted to physical interaction. They should be opened to other avenues such as WhatsApp groups, securing a slot in the community radio station, and telephone conversations. When parents did not have the devices for social media platforms, they could form social clubs to

discuss the development of the school. Those with devices could share with those without within that education community forum.

Regular meetings would keep parents updated and strengthen the working relationship between the school and the parents. Principals should find innovative ways of making meetings interesting and beneficial. Principals complained that parents do not attend meetings, and the complaint might be that parents do not find meetings valuable and do not see the significance of attending them. School leaders should respond to the needs of the parents and involve them rather than telling them what to do. School leaders and their governing bodies should improve the standards for meetings. Parents should be acknowledged as equal partners in those meetings rather than just reading reports and making announcements. If parents are treated as spectators, they will register their dissatisfaction by not honouring meetings. This suggests that the meeting agenda should change to respond to the parents' concerns and suit the current context.

5.5.1.4   *Summary of theme 1*

This theme explored communication, empowerment and school meetings as principals' roles to achieve successful school-parent engagement. These roles, however, should be done in a context-responsive manner. Context-responsive means that principals should apply their wisdom to find better ways of engaging with socially and economically compromised parents. Applying wisdom would enable principals to recognise contextual factors and pay attention to them. If principals failed to adapt to rural conditions, the disconnection between the school and the parents could worsen, and learners' performance will continually decline.

5.5.2   Theme 2: Monitoring and support

In this theme, participants believed that parents have to exercise their roles as primary educators. Principals indicated that they were working hard to improve learner performance in the absence of the parents. Principals could attain a 60%

pass in their matric results without the help of parents. With the help of the parents, the percentage may increase to 100%. Principals believed successful school-parent engagement would significantly boost excellent and sustainable learner performance. However, the collaboration between the school and the parents was missing hence poor learner performance in rural schools. Sekhukhune East District was the worst performing district in the province in last year's matric results. Sekhukhune District is the district where rural schools are located. The poor results in matric provided sufficient evidence to suggest that parental engagement was an urgent matter. If parents` supervise children's work and give them emotional, academic and material support, they will succeed.

5.5.2.1   Sub-theme 1: Accountability

The participants acknowledged that principals alone could not improve learner performance. The improvement in learner performance needs the collective hands of both parents and principals. As much as principals must account for their schools' underperformance, parents should also account for children's poor performance. The need for accountability encouraged Principal H to say the following:

> *Parents should ensure that learners do their homework, they should supervise their work and also encourage them and fully support them in their schoolwork.*

In support of Principal H, Principal G suggested that

> *Parents` need to check their kids' books, go through and ask why some tasks are not marked, why this book is empty, who is teaching you this subject, how many books you received at school, and what did you write today. Those are the most important things because the child will understand that my parents want to understand what I am doing at school.*

Principal J lamented:

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> *Uhm, they are not aware of the extent of their responsibility. They think their responsibility is limited to providing food at home.*

The time had come for parents to see beyond their living conditions and embrace education as a solution to their situations.

Parent I's acknowledgement is expressed as follows:

> *At home, as a parent, I must check the books of the learner. The concern of us as parents is to ask about what they have eaten at school instead of asking what they have learnt. We normally don't ask what they have learnt. As parents, we must be concerned about teaching and learning that has taken place at school.*

Parent E expressed a sense of hopelessness and said:

> *According to my view, I think rural parents, as long as they have all that they need, such parents pay less attention to their children. I think they care much about themselves than their kids. Some don't see education as something important. Some did not go to schools; hence they don't see the importance of education.*

Parent A expressed the following views:

> *You know learning happen consciously and subconsciously. What I mean by this is that parents serve as the primary role models before the child goes to school. Parents are in no position to act out of that role; it becomes even more challenging when parents try to act out of that role. Parents should be more proactive. Sometimes for learning to happen, needs an exposure. An example, The area where we are; most parents are not exposed to education.*

Parent B said:

Uhm, parents must assist the teachers by asking their children what they are doing at school. They must also ask questions and look into the books of the learners to identify areas of support. Where possible, parents should assist where children do not understand or ask those who know to assist.

Parent K is positive and said:

With regard to education, I do check my kid's books because I am concerned about their education. I and my kids are open to each other to a point of doing homework and also research together.

Principal A said:

You see, the first thing that parents should do is to understand the importance of education regardless of their level of education. As long as they can show commitment towards learners' work, that is the key and the first level of accountability. Parents should value education and begin to take responsibility towards its achievement. Remember, if somebody become educated in the family, the conditions of the whole family ultimately improve.

Principal B said:

At school, we conduct monitoring to assess the progress of the learners. Even at home, there must be someone monitoring learners work and provide the necessary support and resources needed.

Participants reiterated that parents should sign learners' books after checking them. Principals and parents should meet to draft a code of conduct to govern the relationship between the school and the parent to hold parents accountable. The code of conduct should be drafted and outline sanctions if a parent fails to attend a school meeting o' sign learners' books. Some participants showed that

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a memorandum of agreement was introduced in some schools and signed by parents as an instrument to compel them to monitor their children's work. Parents had to provide school uniforms, devices for research, calculators and cover the cost for transport if a learner had to travel. Parents were also made to sign pledges at the beginning of each term to monitor and support their children.

The absence of parents has been shown to have detrimental effects on learner performance. The time for parents to shift responsibility to the principal has passed. Parents need to take full responsibility for the education of their children. Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) point out that successful learners have solid academic support from their parents. However, principals should assist parents in drawing a monitoring timetable to be used at home. Principals should expect monthly feedback from parents regarding the performance of the learner. If parents in the same rural environment can monitor and commit to their burial society and "stockvels", they can monitor learners at home (a stockvel is a group formed by parents to boost one another financially and materially). Parents should not use their socioeconomic status as an excuse not to participate in their children's education. Nothing should preoccupy parents' minds other than the education of their children. Parents need to reprioritise their commitment and ensure that education is also a basic need.

Quality teaching and learning would begin in the school when both leaders and parents stop waiting for someone to give instructions and start being proactive and taking responsibility for their actions and decisions. Leaders and parents are at the forefront and should be seen taking a proactive stance to explain their mistakes or poor performance. This means those in charge should be able to reclaim their sense of responsibility and accountability instead of shifting the blame to someone else. When the plan to improve the performance of the school fails, school leaders and the parents should take full responsibility. If they were spared from accountability, the *status quo* would remain, and the condition of rural schools could never change. The blame game delayed the transformation of rural schools because much time was spent on who was responsible for the

poor performance instead of finding permanent solutions to the problem collaboratively.

A partnership between the principals and the parents suggests there was no longer a justifiable excuse that one was not in a senior position. Parents and school leaders would operate at the same level because they are partners and should, therefore, take responsibility for poor performance. Many failures in rural communities were caused by a lack of accountability. An organisation run without the principle of accountability was doomed to fail. Such an organisation cannot correct itself because there is no time for reflection on the mistakes that might have contributed to the poor performance. Accountability is a critical element needed for higher organisational performance.

The success of the school depends on everyone being part of the leadership. This means that parents should see themselves as part of the leadership team. Parents should lead at home and also at school. Parents should not see themselves as subordinates to school leaders but as partners. If the master-servant attitude was adopted, parents could withdraw their input and shy away from taking responsibility when something went wrong. Parents did not need the title of principalship to lead but need the commitment to make a positive contribution to the education of their children. Parents should take pride in contributing to the educational life of their children.

Parents should commit their time and resources to change the current school settings. When the settings changed, everyone began to take responsibility for the school's performance. When teaching and learning become the responsibility of everyone, confidence was inspired, and everyone was encouraged to deliver their absolute best. It was out of the absolute best that the self-efficacy of the learners improves. Parents should champion all the moves that lead to good performance. On the other hand, principals should create an environment that would enable parents to express their voices and capabilities freely.

5.5.2.2   Sub-theme 2: Motivation

The participants regarded motivation as a tool that could drive school-parent engagement in rural schools. Due to hopelessness, lack of interest and poor development in rural communities, the future looks bleak for the entire school community. Lack of development in rural areas had led to the deterioration of any hope for a better life. Park and Holloway (2018) argue that motivation is needed to inspire parents, principals and learners to believe in themselves. Young people who passed matric migrate to urban areas permanently due to a lack of development in rural societies, which delays development from within. Development from within means the community uses its resources to develop itself. As a result of poor development, rural schools could not attract competent teachers and principals. The situation in rural communities remained hopeless. The views participants shared pointed to motivation as a factor to change the conditions in rural settings. Motivation was seen as a driving force for successful school-parent engagement.

Principal G view was expressed:

> *You know the biggest thing is motivation.*

In support of principal G on motivation, Principal D expressed this view:

> *Consider the parents' participation in their children's work as a sort of motivation.*

Parent L weighed in on motivation and said:

> *We must motivate our children to protect the image of the school.*

Parents seem to understand that their active participation in their children's education can make a huge difference.

Parent K:

> *When you show interest in education, the interest is transferred to the children, and eventually, they develop an interest in*

education as well. Some parents view government's intervention through social grants as a hindrance to parents' outward thinking.

This was how Parent A expressed it:

> *Social grants stifle outward thinking of parents to such an extent that it provides dependency syndrome, and in turn, there is no push on the parent to think about education as a solution to their challenges. The benefit from social grant becomes a permanent solution to their problems. Due to social grants dependency behaviour, rural communities do not develop and due to lack of development, the children who go to schools and do well don't return to the communities. They move away, so there is continuous bleeding of potential growth in rural areas.*

Participants viewed motivation as a vertical stimulus to parent engagement. Principals should immerse themselves in rural sentiments to find inspirational means to raise the hope of rural parents. Yulianti et al. (2020) asserts that a school leader is an important agent to promote parental involvement. Participants believed that there were autocratic principals in this time and age. Autocratic principals believe their word is final and might not be aware that their leadership style demoralises parents and drives them away from school. As much as parents need the education to support their children, principals also need to be educated to change the way they lead schools.

The participants highlighted a lack of interest from both parents and principals as a liability because it affects the prospects of learners. If the trend of putting less value on the education of learners were allowed to continue, rural schools would collapse. Lack of role models as a motivating factor perpetuated the trend as both parents and learners have no reference point. The time had come for principals to act as role models and shed light on the darkened rural setting. Principals should model what they wish to see parents doing. If parents could learn from the best, motivation as a contagious factor would affect children, and

they will begin to study, learn and perform better. Parents' motivation to learners had a significant impact on achievement.

Motivation inspired children to work harder. Principals should act as role models by reflecting all the benefits associated with being educated. An educated principal should be a source of inspiration, reflecting good morals, humanity and a good character. When such attributes are exposed, parents use them as a reference to stimulate children's confidence. Exposure of this nature would open up parents' perspectives. For instance, parents would say, 'I may be illiterate, but I do not want my child to be like me'. Leverage that goes beyond the classroom was provided by the exposure. The school would now come in to prop up the fire that had been ignited. However, parents should also serve as primary role models before the child goes out to school.

Parents should motivate themselves and be motivated by others to ignite or reignite their sense of commitment. When parents are appreciated for who they are and for the ideas they bring into the school, they become motivated. When they realise their presence is recognised and their input welcomed, they would engage more in the education of their children. When parents become aware of the value they add to the school, they would do more, as it reconnects them with their sense of purpose. In other words, parents start to engage purposefully for the sake of their children. Motivated parents would appreciate their inherent self-worth, which would reinvigorate their passion and commitment to serve in the school for the learners' benefit.

Parents seemed to have lost their identity as role players and decision-makers in their children's education. Motivation is essential to keep parents in their role. They cannot afford to opt out and hope that principals will guide their children into the expected future. The future of children needs the hand of parents to be secured. The culture of relying on the school to educate children has failed and should change. Parents should reclaim their identity and self-conscious awareness as transformative change agents. In other words, parents should act as initiators of change in their children's education. Parents should act as

ambassadors who protect their children from any threat that may take away their right to quality education.

Parents occupied a follower role instead of leadership role for too long and destroyed the future of many children, some of whom had become adults without careers. This pattern had to continue unless parents take up their role and act as agents of change. The initiative for change should come from the parents rather than the school leaders. As clients to the school, parents had the right to demand from the school leaders how education should be to upgrade it to the required standard. Children deserve quality education which parents and leaders are capable of delivering, provided they work together. However, the level of demotivation and demoralisation showed by the participants meant quality education was unattainable. Motivation is needed to change parents and leaders' perspectives about education. All is not lost; they both need to rise beyond just doing their work to building the future of the present and future generations. As active role players, parents have the power to observe, preserve and facilitate an orderly change. Change necessitates a transformation process that will see parents being more involved. Transformation is critical because this is where children's minds are conditioned to adapt and be receptive to teaching and learning.

5.5.2.3   Sub-theme 3: Volunteering

The participants mentioned the impact of volunteering. Desire, willingness, ability and determination were ignited by volunteering. The element of coercion in volunteering was subdued as parents offered to serve their school and the children without expecting any reward. Volunteering means people act out of their free will to serve their communities. Expecting a reward every time parents are called for a meeting dented the noble cause of working together for a common goal. However, volunteering is an expensive commodity in a multi-deprived context because all people strive for is money to survive. Expecting parents to volunteer on an empty stomach is asking too much from them.

Principal C shared the following perspective:

> *The election of School Governing Body (SGB) was going hand in hand with the post of food handlers. Most of the parents came to that meeting not to discuss the progress of the learners but for the post advertised for food handlers because it's for money.*

Volunteering was quite significant for the growth and development of the school.

Principal K had a different view on volunteering:

> *The school is an open system. It receives influence from the external environment, and when they are volunteering themselves in the school, the school will begin to perform better.*

Parent B shared the same view as Principal K and said:

> *Uhm, there is nothing that can stop parents from going to school to ask the teachers.*

The participant's views suggested that principals should initiate projects at the school to engage parents. Zolkoski, Snyman and Lewis-Chiu (2018) contend that schools should create good environment that will encourage parents to volunteer. Volunteerism is a mechanism principals may use to connect with the parents. Projects such as gardening, creative arts, parents adopting the school for cleaning and planting trees should be initiated, and these would create avenues for parents to volunteer. Even if parents are illiterate, there is something that they know. For instance, they can serve as resource persons. In some cases, principals might organise sporting activities, cultural events, exhibitions, entrepreneur's days and allow parents to sell merchandise on that particular day. These events will provide some level of exposure to what was happening at the school to all community members. There will be plenty of food for parents who do not have anything to offer. This kind of initiative would allow other parents to discover themselves and start to serve the school better.

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Volunteering is no longer automatic, and principals should create projects to draw parents to the school. Projects that target specific people, such as the vulnerable in society, are needed. For instance, gardening may be initiated because it would also help rural parents' socioeconomic conditions. The breakdown of initiated projects should take place to engage as many parents as possible. When parents contribute to school activities, such contributions will bond the school to the initiative to a point where the relationship between the school and the parents becomes solid. However, if the principal's job is in the office and stays there, parents will stay in their homes and the principal in his office. The children remain the victims as their future is compromised.

5.5.2.4   Summary of theme 2

The findings show that principals have done very little to create an environment suitable for school-parent engagement. In the same vein, parents failed to exercise their oversight role of accountability as primary educators of their children. It is a situation that leaves learners' education dreams shattered. Parents and the school should find each other for the future of the learners. Leaners expect a lot from schools and their parents, and when the expectations are not fulfilled, they become frustrated and drop out of school. School work is a burden to many learners, and educational and emotional support is critical to enable them to cope with their work.

5.5.3   Theme 3: Challenges affecting parent engagement

The parents in rural communities are affected by multiple contextual challenges. Both parents and principals conceded that the contextual challenges were barriers. Munje and Mncube (2018) contend that any attempt to engage parents is hampered by poverty, single-parenthood, unemployment and lack of supportive family structures. Parents and principals were working parallel to each other because of the obstacles. In the end, learners suffer due to a lack of collaboration between the school and the parents.

5.5.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Livelihood as a primary goal

The parents describe livelihood as their primary commitment while education is relegated to a secondary need. It is an indisputable truth that livelihood in rural areas is a matter of life and death. However, education is equally important.

Parent A shared this view:

> *How many houses have electricity in rural areas, how many have a reliable source of water, you can count, very few. Those represent primary needs of every human being. You cannot blame them for not being part of the secondary need.*

Parent C shared the same sentiment and said:

> *Some parents are unemployed, some are self-employed, and most of the time, they have to search for something to survive. The poor socioeconomic conditions of parents are the reason why learners get less support from parents.*

In support of Parent A and C, Principal J indicated:

> *Maybe it is not only the level of education. It is also the case of resources. Lack of resources such as uhm, poverty is a restrain because sometimes parents struggle to assist their learners even with a simple calculator. And sometimes, I usually make family visits with the Grade 12 learners. When you visit their homes, you find the level of poverty was impacting them negatively.*

Principal L could not help but weigh in on the living conditions of rural parents and said:

> *Some are single parents; being single parents, you will always be out to get something for the family.*

Poverty in rural areas is very high. The majority of families depend on social grants for survival. As poverty relief measures, these social grants have done

very little to recondition parents' minds to education. Education remains a secondary goal for rural parents. Poverty and its devastating effects are aggravated by the high level of child-headed families, single parents, unemployment, and the higher number of dependents in families. Due to this level of vulnerability, most parents were intimidated by the school environment, making effective engagement difficult. Parents in this state of vulnerability tend to lose confidence and shift responsibility to the school to handle their children's education.

Principals seem not to accommodate the vulnerability of rural parents as parents suggested that principals held on to their autocratic leadership style. An autocratic leadership style subscribes to the centralisation of power. Centralisation of power means that other stakeholders are marginalised. When the environment was not welcoming, people were wise and quick to see that they were not welcome. Parents might not have the power to raise such concerns because of their situation, but they would distance themselves from the school. The leadership style principals choose to apply at their school might draw many parents to the school or drive them away. Msila (2016) report that school principals should understand the challenges rural communities face in order to know how to interact with them. Principals, therefore, need to use their intelligence to drive the agenda of engaging parents. However, the ability to engage cannot be guaranteed among all the principals. It takes leaders with the wisdom to acknowledge context as a driving force for parent engagement.

5.5.3.2   Sub-theme 2: Illiteracy level

The principal and parents acknowledged that a poor educational background affected successful school-parent engagement. The level of illiteracy is high in rural communities and has become a norm.

This was how Parent I viewed the effect of illiteracy:

> *Parents lack knowledge on how to help their children at home. They don't know how to start to help their children. They don't*

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have an idea of how to start. If they can have an idea, they will be able to assist.

Parent C and Parent L agreed:

The only problem was that 70% of the parents were not educated, and therefore most of us don't see the importance of school.

Poor educational background of parents is a challenge in rural areas. Aligning with Parents C and L, Principal L said:

Some, because of their background, don't believe that education can change somebody else's life. Illiteracy was the main challenge because they don't understand what was happening at school.

The principal and the parents agreed that illiteracy in rural areas undermines effective teaching and learning. Children whose parents lack education are less-resourced, less confident and tend to perform worse than those with educated parents. Manzon et al. (2015) argue that literacy difficulties could lead to social, economic and community problems such as welfare costs, learner drop-outs and juvenile delinquency. There was little work done at home to build from the school has begun. The home environment had become an opposing environment to the school environment. The home environment opposes the school by allowing truancy, absence from school, dropping out and ill-discipline. Participants indicated that parents seem to have lost control over their children. Illiteracy had stifled the outward thinking of the parents and made them dependent on principals and teachers. There was little effort made by rural parents to engage in the education of their children. The parent's continual absence from school meetings was evidence suggesting parents were not willing to engage. The school principal's reaction to parental resistance was to engage only the parents of learners in Grade 12 because of the pressure to improve matric results. The parents of lower grade learners were left out, which widened the engagement

gap. It was not surprising that rural schools perform poorly because principals at secondary schools focused on Grade 12 learners, not the entire school.

In rural communities, there was a high level of pessimism which caused parents to drop the ball and rely entirely on the school. The level of pessimism closed the parent's line of thinking. Some believe that it was possible to be successful without education. Participants stated that most parents were ignorant.

5.5.3.3   Sub-theme 3: Time constraints

Time was regarded as a scarce commodity that should be used efficiently. Some of the parents were working while others were self-employed. There was a need to balance family commitments and school activities to accommodate parents.

Parent D said:

> *The reason for not attending meetings organised by the school is that some are working. Most of the parents are complaining about time.*

Principal D proposed intervention and said:

> *I also write some letters to their employers to say, please release this parent because the parents were afraid to ask for a leave to attend meetings. Parents would say, If I don't go to work because there was something I had to do at school, my employer was going to dismiss me or not pay me for that day, and I would say as a principal, let me talk to your employer to release you. Parents would reason to say I cannot come to the meeting because my employer did not grant me a leave.*

Principals complained about poor attendance in school meetings, and parents complained about a lack of time for such meetings. Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) contend that parents are often preoccupied with the distraction and demands of life because of the poor socioeconomic challenges they find themselves.   It

reached a stalemate, and the relationship between the school and the parents had been strained for a long time. It seems there was no way out as meetings were regarded as a convenient means to engage rural parents. When meetings did not materialise, principals took unilateral decisions about the future of the learners. The danger with unilateral decision-making is that it favours a few, and the majority are left out. The principals would decide to work with the elected School Governing Body (SGB) to drive the education agenda. The centralisation of power may be a fertile ground for corruption. When corruption was allowed to happen at school, it would destroy the future of many learners and the community at large.

Even though there are fewer employed than unemployed parents in rural areas, attendance at meetings remained poor. With the high level of unemployment, one would assume that parents would have enough time to attend school meetings, but that was not the case. The failure to create time for school meetings indicated the value parents attached to education. Education seems to be the last resort as parents were held up by other commitments such as weddings, funerals and other cultural activities.

It is expected that principals should have a plan to engage parents, regardless of their busy schedules. Principals had to explore other avenues to engage all parents. Meetings cannot be the only channel of engagement. Social media platforms may be used to engage parents successfully. Zoom meetings may be explored to make life easier for those who are always committed. Parental engagement was crucial for better learner performance, and therefore it should happen, despite the challenges.

5.5.3.4   Sub-theme 4: Culture

The parent's absolute reliance on school and continuous failure to attend school meetings is entrenched in rural society. Parents' lack of belief about whether their involvement adds value to their children's academic achievement influences their level of involvement. The absence of parent had a negative impact on their

children's education. Across the board, principals showed that parents do not attend meetings organised by the schools. It has become generational as young parents have observed their parents not attending school meetings and continue the trend. There was a culture of non-attendance. This was what the participants had to say:

Principal D commented:

> *You see this mentality of saying academic matters belong to the teachers that is a problem.*

Principal J believes that culture was manifesting itself in different ways and expressed it this way:

> *Another culture that was looming was a sense of helplessness. Not all successful people in this community had gone to school. Parents believe that their children can become successful without education, and they cite certain examples from the community and say so and so had no matric but successful.*

Parent A revealed the desperate situations of rural communities:

> *You have your political and social structures that are not accountable to anyone, the community lack water. The local government was expected to provide parents with social grants. That creates a dependency syndrome. Therefore, parent would say, child won't suffer; they will get a social grant from the mother, go to the local school, get food there, and that feed dependency syndrome. In turn, there was no push on the parent to find alternative means of surviving.*

The verbatim quotes indicated that parents have beliefs and habits that prevent them from working with the principals. Parents have created their comfort zones which have set limitations for them. Principals do invite parents to meetings, but parents do not attend. When called, parents would only go to school because

their children had flouted school regulations, and suspension was imminent. When parents are called to discuss the school's growth and development, they do not attend.

The culture inherited by parents, suggested that education belongs to the educated and cannot be the only solution to the vulnerable, crippled the minds of rural communities. Crea et al. (2015) confirm that parents often believe in professional model of education according to which teachers solely take responsibility for education. Parents have shifted the responsibility to educate their children to schools. The schools were not coping hence the poor performance. The level of dependence on principals also suggested they were not held accountable as parents have exonerated themselves. The lack of accountability reduced the principal's level of competence. Teachers share such a low level of competency, and finally, learners bear the consequences of incompetency. It was a pattern. Principals should be held accountable by parents, and failure to do so results in academic crisis. The laissez-faire environment is created where nobody accounts for anyone. It was a recipe for disaster.

An organisational culture should be established to prevent an organisation from collapsing. An organisation built on culture is sustainable. Organisational culture comprises attitude, experiences, beliefs and values. The culture shared by parents showed there is no clear mandate as to how the parents and schools can work together, what values are essential for the parents and the school leaders to work together, and how they are reflected in their behaviour. The behaviour as expressed by the participants indicated that there is no chance for school leaders and parents to work together. Principals remain isolated as parents believe that they have no role in education. Therefore, they cannot be held responsible and accountable if something goes wrong in their children's education.

Culture is essential because it states the values and norms shared among the people in an organisation and influences the way they interact with each other to

achieve goals. In countries like USA and Japan, parental engagement has become a school culture (Yamamoto et al., 2016). These countries explain what parents should do to assist children with the homeworks and assignments. Parents are requested to exercise this responsibility formally. Parents are not left on their own but helped to assist and support their children. Goals in an organisation are achievable when people involved have a shared vision and work together to achieve it. The belief system of school leaders and parents is synchronised for a common purpose by culture. Culture is critical because parents and leaders may agree on the goals to pursue and the standard needed to achieve those goals by values, beliefs and ideas. As the core business of the school, teaching and learning involve different minds that should connect to achieve learners' success. The disconnection between the parents and the school is a barrier to success. On this basis, organisational culture is re-established to remove the degree of individualism that is pulling schools down.

Culture should be explicit such that the school has an institutionalised identity. In other words, culture should be blended into the developmental framework of the school. When culture becomes the lifeblood of the school, parents and leaders will pull in the same direction. However, learner achievement is derailed

because parents and leaders are pulling in different directions. The time has come for the stakeholders involved to change their attitudes, beliefs and values that promote self-interest over the interest of others.

When organisational values are intact, the organisation will operate in the specific norms and the guidelines to help direct the behaviour of parents and leaders towards each other. The primary purpose is for parents to find each other for learner success. The current situation cannot be left unattended; guiding principles should be drafted on how each party should play its role and appropriate values and norms required for principals and parents to work together. Working together should be what school leaders strive for to benefit learners.

5.5.4 Theme 4: Contextually responsive leadership strategies

The participants felt that it was still possible to engage parents in the education of their children. Parental input in education would cause learner performance to improve. Parent involvement in education would move it to a higher dimension because parents are the primary educators in their own right, so they should be engaged. The participants indicated that engagement should encourage collaboration. More was achieved by collaboration. Principals should adopt strategies that are responsive to the challenges experienced by rural parents. Meier and Lemmer (2015) explains that if schools want parents to be authentic partners in education, they must consistently and respectfully invite parents to voice their opinions in a co-equal relationship.

5.5.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Change of mind-set by school leaders

The parents complained that school leaders were old and unable to adapt to the new evolving environment. Parents felt that some principals were authoritative and made the school environment unwelcoming. Such leadership style drives parents away. Principals should engage parents on an equal level regardless of their status. Parents also indicated that principals should not dictate to parents but rather engage them from a colleague's point of view. Principals should believe and convince themselves that parents could make an invaluable contribution to their children's education.

Parent H thought about principals:

> As much as parents must be educated about supporting their children's education, I believe some of the principals are still old school. They are using the authoritative style of doing things. They still believe that "my word is final". They also need to be educated; things have changed. We have to meet each other halfway.

In support of Parent H, Parent B said:

You see, principals should approach the parent concerning the learner's performance with dignity, and the parent will accept it. But if you go to a parent roughly and say to the parent, your child does not understand. The parent will be afraid to approach the school.

Principal E proposed a solution:

I can say that to fix it, you need to give these parents a new mind-set. They must know that parents should attend school meetings. Because, if you couldn't be strict on engaging them, you will have serious challenges.

The participants are looking for a change. Change was inevitable. Schools had to meet the expectations of the learners. At the same time, parents need to embrace change and begin to value education. The parents expressed their unhappiness about the autocratic leadership style, which most principals were still using. Parents proposed that this leadership style be replaced by leadership that understood parents' conditions and were ready to lead them through such situations. The principals and parents need to change their thinking so that learners do not suffer while they pursue their selfish interests.

Principals should be concerned about learners' interests rather than theirs. As a sign of being concerned, principals should identify areas in the school that are relatively better than others. These are the potential growth areas that may leverage school development and growth. These areas radiate with life in the midst of challenges faced by the organisation. Despite challenges in rural communities, there are positive areas that leaders can capitalise on to improve the school's performance. Green patches include the availability of parents, learners, teachers' commitment and leaders themselves. This means that change starts with the mind-set, not with material resources. Bhengu and Myende (2016) argue that principals should play their roles differently as they are placed at the forefront of societal transformation. In other words principals should adapt their minds for successful parent engagement. Marishane (2020) argue

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that leaders should adapt their thinking to adapt to the prevailing environment. Physical resources may be inadequate; however, if the mind is ready, change is possible.

However, the mind is fragile and vulnerable; it needs to be handled with care. Leaders must understand the rural context and respond in a way that will boost their confidence, affirm them and promote their self-efficacy. It is taxing for parents to balance livelihood and quality support to their children. For this reason, leaders should be there to provide support so that there is no chance for parents to think of abandoning the critical mission of educating their children. Schools are there to support what parents have already started. However, it is important that schools know their growth potential to effect the necessary change. It does not help to complain constantly about rural schools being under-resourced; schools should begin to discover their inner potential that can effect change in the lives of rural learners.

5.5.4.2 Sub-theme 2: Partnership

Parents' collaborative relationship with the schools has a positive impact on learners' academic achievement. Principals acknowledged that it was challenging to improve learner performance without the help of the parents. Good relationships for working with parents should be established. When the relationship is sound, it removes the master-servant attitude that threatens partnerships. Parents and principals should have and equitable relationship (OECD, 2012). The inferiority complex was replaced by boldness to stand for their children's education by partnerships.

Principal A suggested:

> *As a principal, whenever there were these community meetings,*
> *we also need to involve ourselves in those community meetings*
> *to try and show parents the importance of education.*

Principal H agreed with principal A on working together and said:

If a parent was holding this learner this side, we were teaming up for the learner. I am telling you things would be different.

Parent B thought that principals should initiate the conversation and shared this view:

I think the teacher must approach the parent and have a conversation about the child.

The participants believed that partnership was necessary and should be based on the principle of transparency. The principal should be transparent by making curriculum management, financial and human resource plans and physical resources available to the parents. When the principal adopts an open-door policy, parents would be free to approach the principal and start a conversation about the learner's success. The communication between the school and the parent should be mutual and unconditional. When the environment is positive, the parties enjoy being part of the school. Parents would be free to relate their challenges, and together they will find solutions. When there were school projects such as building new classes, tree planting and food handling, vulnerable parents would be prioritised for employment to address their socioeconomic challenges.

However, partnerships should not be limited to poverty alleviation but should ensure that parents are also wise academically. Parents need empowerment to assist efficiently in teaching and learning. Participants showed that adult basic education and training (ABET) should be initiated to empower parents. In school meetings, empowerment should be the critical item on every agenda. Meetings should not be restricted to discussing learners' progress but should include issues of the economy, health, poverty and unemployment. The principal should be target driven.

Partnership as an inclusive approach to learner support will allay the fears of parents in engaging school leaders. Partnership should not be used to expose each other`s weaknesses, but should foster collaboration for effective learning at home and at school (Wahyuningsih & Sumarsono, 2017). When partnership

occurs, no one is superior to the other, which means parents and school leaders operate as equals. This kind of collaboration will ensure that both parents and principals lead in the transformation of rural education. Education in rural communities needs total reconfiguration of the school to satisfy the needs of the community and align it to the prospects of the community. Configuration means that education or the curriculum should be structured to suit the rural community context. Every community is unique, and its vision should match its uniqueness. The way one community collaborates may not be the same in a different community. As much as a partnership is important, it should be aligned to its contextual dynamics. Parents and school leaders may find the best way to redesign the organisation so that teaching and learning are compatible with the prevailing conditions by partnerships.

Partnerships should be encouraged as participants have shown that working in isolation yielded negative outcomes. Learners have not been doing well in rural schools due to a lack of collaboration. Improved learner achievement may be achieved by collaboration. As long as the disconnection between schools and parents continues, learner success may not be achieved.

A partnership means that skills, knowledge and experiences are pooled together for a common cause. If all expertise is geared to one mission, it may be accomplished. However, the effective integration of the skills, experience and knowledge brought in by partners will depend on the trust and faith between them. This means that there has to be a consultative approach adopted for every decision made. The future of the partnership depends on the ability to respect and regard everyone's input as important. Decision-making will no longer be based on the superiority or seniority of an individual but rather emerge from collaboration. The relationship between the partners is important because, if one partner is passive or leaves, the whole transformation plan of teaching and learning in rural areas collapses.

The principles on which the partnership should be built for sustainability are mutual trust, shared vision, joint decision-making at all levels and sharing of skills.

Mutual trust means that leaders and parents should trust one another. Principals should trust that, besides their socioeconomic conditions and poor educational background, parents could still make an important contribution to the education of their children. Parents should trust that principals are willing to work with them to improve the performance of their children. Currently, there is an element of mistrust between the parties because of the educational gap. Partners without trust cannot work together. It is important that trust be established between the leaders and the parents, which will ensure that the school's vision is shared and carried forward together.

Shared vision keeps the stakeholders focused on the primary purpose of teaching and learning. Shared vision will also ensure efficacy in using human and material resources. When resources are used optimally, learner success is guaranteed. However, a divided organisation will achieve little, which is the situation in rural schools. A collaborative agenda should be promoted by a shared vision to achieve success.

Joint decision-making at all times. Partners are jointly and severally liable for the school's outcomes. If the outcomes are positive, partners will work jointly to sustain them. However, when the outcomes are negative, they will still work together to correct the negatives. The unilateral decision-making, which seems to dominate rural leadership, has derailed progress in rural schools. As parents were generally not attending school meetings, principals and the SGBs take decisions unilateral about budgeting, curriculum implementation and extra classes. Parents are simply informed about the decisions taken, and leaders expect them to abide by the decision.

Parents then depend on the school to deliver education to their children and are unaware of what is happening. This kind of development makes it difficult for parents to engage in their children's education. Parents show up at school only

when progress reports are issued to learners at the end of the year. In some cases, parents will show up at school when called to their children's disciplinary hearings. Apart from that, parents in rural communities are ignorant about curriculum matters. The problem lies squarely on school leaders who are unwilling to engage parents on an equal level. Principals seem threatened when parents begin to play an active part in the education of their children. This situation warrants a change in leadership.

A change in leadership is necessary to accommodate parents. Parents should be part of planning, organising, directing and controlling and, as partners, should be involved from planning to implementation. Concerning leadership, parents should be included in setting direction, building relationships, redesigning the organisation and implementing the instructional programme. This suggests that parents should not be left out when the strategic, tactical and contingency planning of the school takes place. The mistake school leaders have made is to believe they can run schools alone. The parents' mistake was to relinquish their power to school leaders. Parents should realise that pooling what they know will make a huge difference in their children's education. One thing for certain is that no single person can change the conditions of rural schools. The condition of rural schools needs a collaborative effort between the leaders and the parents. Each collaborator has an important role to play, no matter how small or insignificant it may appear. Each partner is unique, and their uniqueness should work for the betterment of the partnership and ultimately for the school. No partner is bigger or more important than the other. Principals should not regard themselves as bigger than the parents, and parents should not view themselves as smaller than the principals. They should both join the partnership as equals and combine their skills and capabilities to work together to shared and meaningful outcomes.

5.5.4.3   Sub-theme 3: Engaging other stakeholders

Participants were believed that education was a societal matter. It had to include social workers, business owners, retired teachers and pastors. The inclusion of

other stakeholders was informed by the challenges of child-headed families, orphans, and poverty. These contextual factors affect learners emotionally and physically. The social workers, nurses and pastors were needed to assist the affected learners. Participants also felt that learners from low-income families need financial support to study further. The business owners in the village may be approached to donate to the learners. Retired educators may be approached for extra lessons to close the content gap, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. These retired educators may also be used in the empowering initiative of the parents. Regarding stakeholder participation, this is what the principals said:

Principal F said:

> *My role is to engage in community issues. I am doing that. I attend community meetings, and I can talk at those meetings that, as parents, it's important to participate in school matters. When principals convene meetings, you must go there.*

Principal E lamented:

> *Some parents were ill-disciplined; you cannot blame the kids. We were trying very hard to engage with social workers to give these learners what the school needs: counselling and motivation.*

Principal E suggested:

> *For those with a lack of funds, some kids do not have school shoes, trousers. We were trying to connect with local businesses to donate for us those shoes and trousers. This was how we were helping the poor kids.*

Parent E praised the involvement of stakeholders and said:

They were keeping girls at school. They usually come to school to give support, usually for girls. Even the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) visits our school, providing uniforms to the needy. Even sanitary pads we do receive, in a way encouraging learners to attend and perform.

Parents F complained:

There is poor delivery of services in rural communities. Parents couldn't build bridges for their children to attend school during rainy seasons. Can I build a bridge to ensure that my child goes to school? I can't. It needs the involvement of other stakeholders to assist in developing the area, provision of basic infrastructure services.

The principals wish to see parents participating actively in the education of their children. However, the culture of not attending school meetings has derailed the process of engaging parents. Parents in rural areas were continuing to disregard school meetings. Principals indicated that the time had come to participate in community meetings and other activities to set a good example. Principals would use any opportunity they get in those meetings to advocate school-parent partnerships.

The participants also showed that many learners were orphans, and some were breadwinners. This kind of development affects children not only physically but emotionally and psychologically. For this reason, principals should look for social workers, nurses, businesspeople, and pastors to assist where teachers are unable to help.

The participants also felt that municipalities need to play their part to develop rural areas by providing infrastructure. When rural areas were developed, parents would refocus their energy on education instead of being concerned about clean water, electricity, sanitation and bridges. Developments in rural

areas would change the perspective the parents have about the education of their children.

5.5.4.4   Sub-theme 4: Parent's self-efficacy

The participants showed that parents could make or break the child. Charity begins at home. Parents have a responsibility to model characters and personalities that children should emulate. If children were raised in a value system of confidence and respect, their self-efficacy would increase. When introduced into the schooling system, the child would behave and do well.

Principal F:

> *If you don't understand how the child behaves in a school environment, the parent is the first person to talk to. They are exercising an important role in ensuring that their children were taught and learn.*

Parent M showed the critical role of parents in their children's education:

> *You know learning happen consciously and subconsciously. I mean that parents serve as the primary role model before the child goes out. And parents were in no position to ignore that responsibility.*

The participants indicated parents' living conditions in rural communities had eroded their confidence and dignity. Parents were living in fear of the unknown because of their living conditions. Parents were seen as ignorant, not serious about education, clueless and irresponsible. Principals need to respond to these humiliating utterances by boosting their confidence. The principal will boost parents' confidence by empowering and communicating directly with them. When the parents' self-confidence is restored, they will contribute meaningfully to learners' success.

5.5.4.5   Summary theme 4:

The principal should be target-driven. In other words, principals should target all challenges and deal with them decisively for successful school-parent engagement. Targeting challenges should not be the sole responsibility of the principal. The principal and the parents should collaborate to overcome the difficulties. Principals should, however, be careful not to marginalise parents because of their vulnerability. Principals need parents regardless of their poor living conditions. Principals should see the parents' plight as an opportunity to develop and improve their mental competence for effective engagement. Principals should empower parents to improve their competence. Improved competence will enable parents to assist their children with homework and assignments. In other words, parents will take responsibility to educate their children at home.

5.6   Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, the data collected from participants were presented, analysed and interpreted. In analysing the data, four themes emerged, the role of principals, monitoring and support, challenges affecting parent engagement and contextually responsive strategies. These themes were further characterised by sub-themes to describe them. It became evident that there was a disconnection between the school and the parent. Principals also confirmed that enormous challenges face rural parents. Strategies were developed to deal with such challenges by the wisdom of the school leaders. Finding appropriate and effective strategies was critical to pursue effective teaching and learning for success. The findings of this chapter are discussed and compared with the literature in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX
DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.1   Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the research findings. The present chapter focuses on discussions of research findings. The purpose of the study was to examine contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo schools. The sub-questions that guided the study were (i) How do school leaders engage rural parents in student learning? (ii) What challenges do school leaders face when engaging parents in the education of their children? (iii) What contextually responsive strategies can be suggested to ensure successful school-parent engagement in student learning?

The previous chapter analysed research findings. Four themes emerged from this study: the role of school principals in establishing school-parent engagement; monitoring and support; challenges affecting school parent engagement; and contextually responsive leadership strategies. These themes were discussed and analysed. In this chapter, the findings of the study are discussed.

6.2   Discussions of research findings

This section discusses research findings concerning the existing knowledge on the topic. The topic is contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo schools.

6.2.1   The role of principals in establishing school-parent engagement

This study found a need for principals to carry out their practices effectively and responsibly to engage parents successfully for learner success. The roles of principals described in this study are communication, empowerment and conducting regular meetings.

6.2.2 Communication

Communication has been found to be the weakest link between the parents and school leaders. The poor communication between the school and the parents has strained their relationship. Poor communication has derailed all the plans to engage parents optimally. Baker et al. (2016) asserts that lack of positive, constructive and timeous communication has affected the relationship between the school and the parents. Poor communication between principals and parents makes it difficult for schools to notice absenteeism, dropouts, truancy and substance abuse. As a result, truancy, bullying, substance abuse and dropout among others had increased in recent times. School are unable to deal with these problems because they are working alone. Effective and consistent communication between the school and the parents is needed to address absenteeism, dropout rate, truancy, bullying, late-coming and drug abuse. Poor communication is a critical barrier to the normal functioning of school-parent engagement. Due to poor communication, parents are found wanting about events and activities taking place at school, and the school is not aware of the conditions of children at home. In this study, poor communication has denied learners constructive academic support from both the school and the parents.

The study further found that school meetings are the only platform by which parents may communicate with school leaders. However, parents are not attending school meetings, so parent engagement is hampered by lack and poor communication between the school and the parents. Lack of engagement due to lack of communication deprives parents the opportunity to participate in the education of their children. Lack of parental engagement had compromised the academic performance of the learners. Communication is important as it brings parents and the school leaders together for successful school-parent engagement. .

Communication is a process by which partners share information by expressing feelings, having conversations, speaking, listening, writing and corresponding. However, parents and leaders are unable to share among others their thoughts,

dreams, feelings about how they would like to improve student learning. Communication is an effective means by which thoughts and dreams can be shared. Leaders and parents should communicate to satisfy the needs inside and outside the school. People want to be heard, to be appreciated and to belong. School leaders need to listen to parents, appreciate them for who they are and accept them, despite their living conditions. At the same time, parents should believe that leaders genuinely appreciate their efforts, accept their conditions and are willing to work with them. School leaders should assure parents that their living conditions and educational background are not a precondition for them to take part in the education of their children. Mutual trust and understanding between schools and parents develop through communication and encourage student learning. Efficient communication will put parents at ease, make them feel good about themselves and serve their children.

Communication as an essential pillar of a working relationship between schools and parents has to happen constantly. A good relationship can be maintained by truthful, honest and respectful communication. Truthful communication is not limited to convening meetings to update parents about the school's budget and learner's progress. Communication goes beyond meetings; it involves transmitting thoughts, ideas and feelings from one mind to another. Communication should occur in quantity and quality, suggesting it should be limitless, intentional and purpose-driven.

Efficient and purposeful communication should be free from barriers. Communication barriers include language and culture differences, negative school experience, lack of technology and poor communication timing. Language and cultural differences may distort communication between the school and the parents. In communities where different languages are spoken, the school may resort to English as a medium of communication. Parents may not understand the message shared by the school due to their poor educational background, which may compromise their relationship with the school. For families for which English is not their first language, the language barrier may contribute to the difficulty of communication between school and parents (Baker et al., 2016).

Similarly, if one group's culture is considered superior, the inferior group may be reluctant to participate. School leaders should initiate a process of understanding the parents' language and culture to deal with this miscommunication.

A good relationship between school and parents is essential for learner success. Communication should improve to maintain the relationship. Communication can improve by recognising cultural and language differences. When messages are communicated in diverse communities, different languages could be used to accommodate all parents. Gross (2019) contend that convenient communication methods could be used beyond face to face meeting at the school. Instead of complaining about technology being expensive, a database of all parents could be created to contact them telephonically. Parents in rural areas have phones but not smartphones, therefore calling them for meetings and other conversations is possible. Telephones may assist in sending messages earlier and quicker. Parents need to be informed in advance about meetings to make the necessary preparations.

Seeing parents as equal will assist in ensuring that communication respects the independence of parents and allows them to express their ideas, feelings and dissatisfaction. Local radio stations could communicate school events and activities to the parents. Different communication channels should be explored by leaders to mitigate the effect of poor communication on successful parent engagement.

6.2.3   Empowerment

Parents in rural communities are challenged by poor educational background and socio-economic status which hinder their engagement to improve learner performance. School leaders should ensure these parents are empowered for effective participation in the education of their children.

Empowerment is a construct needed to find participants' hidden potential and competencies, resulting in a proactive attitude of all involved (Hsiao et al., 2018). This study found that many parents in rural communities have an academic knowledge gap. Principals should make it their business to empower parents to

get constructive and meaningful support from them. Parents with empowered minds will gain confidence and awareness to take part in the education of their children. Parents need to be enlightened for effective contribution in the education of their children.

The current study has shown that poverty, illiteracy and unemployment affect parents' ability to care for and support their children educationally. However, if parents' ability is enhanced, they will support their children emotionally and academically. By empowerment, parents will regain their power and constructively interact in improving learner performance. Empowerment has a ripple effect; as principals empower parents, parents empower their children, and positive teaching and learning are achieved. Empowered parents will ensure that education is not confined to school walls but continues at home.. Parents' participation in education will bring significant improvement in learner performance.

The lack of empowerment has affected parents' ability to engage effectively in the teaching and learning of their children. Parents remain vulnerable despite the democratisation of the education system. Parents' vulnerability does not only affect them but also their children. Children who are not supported educationally face a bleak future. Parental support enhances learning and plays an essential role in academic success. The academic success of children is at risk because the culture that seeks to promote the significance of education in the home setting is absent. Parents cannot act as teachers in their homes because of a lack of knowledge. Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) contend that the frustration of not knowing what to do manifests in an 'I don't care attitude from parents. This attitude suggests it is the end of the road for the future generation due to parental failure to take responsibility for their children's education. The failure of parents to act as primary teachers results in moral degeneration that derails the core business of teaching and learning. The absence of parents leaves a gap for children to exploit. Parental absence happens due to work commitments and livelihoods that cause parents to spend less time with their children to pursue a career. Parents who focus on their careers give children a chance to engage in

immoral behaviour, including disrespect, dishonesty, pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse. This kind of behaviour results in moral decay that disrupts teaching and learning and ultimately affects outcomes. When children's moral standards have dropped, ill-discipline manifests at home and in the school environment. When children's minds are not conditioned to education, they are susceptible to any teaching they come across.

Teaching and supporting children at home is critical because it prepares children for education in a formal setting. However, if children do not have a learning foundation laid at home, it will affect teaching at school. Children with solid values develop resistance to distraction. Resistance works well because people remain committed to their soul. When all is said and done, parents are capable and willing to support their children; all they need is empowerment to execute their role effectively. When parents are empowered, their role transcends enrichment of values to assist their children with homework, assignments and monitoring their progress.

Parents have to understand their rights to access information about teachers, subjects taught at school, codes of conduct, and school policies. These rights are hardly exercised in rural communities as parents do not know their rights. No one takes the responsibility of enlightening parents about their right to become involved in their children's education. Many rural parents still believe they have very little to offer, and their rights are violated by those in authority due to a lack of knowledge. When parents' rights are violated, children's' right to basic education is also affected. The livelihood of these children will be compromised due to a lack of education.

Parents do not feel equipped to engage in their children's education due to socioeconomic conditions and their educational background. The social and economic challenges of rural areas are a barrier to parental participation in education. The need to empower parents is critical due to the benefits of parental engagement. Taliaferro (2012) contend that empowerment may improve the academic competence, self-efficacy and the initiatives of the parents. Several

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avenues may be used to empower parents, including workshops, meetings, support groups for parents, information channels to keep parents informed about the development at the school and classes for empowerment. Schools may also initiate projects such as gardening and cooking, where parents are invited to participate. This kind of project will not only connect parents with the school but will also serve as a solution to the deprived social and economic conditions.

6.2.4   Conducting regular meetings

Researcher found that school meetings are common platforms used in rural schools to interact with parents. The absolute reliance on school meetings to engage parents suggests that they should be held regularly to establish and strengthen the relationship between the school and the parents. School meeting have a significant role in rural school to build a sound relationship between the school and the parents. In these meetings, learner`s code of conduct, instructional programmes and learner performance are discussed, and practical strategies are sought and implemented to improve performance. Although parents in rural areas are less knowledgeable, they still can process information and change their behaviour positively. When involved in regular meetings, they will eventually adapt to the new trends that make them critical education ambassadors. Regular meetings mean involving parents more in the education plan of the school.

Research has shown that parents who attend school meetings regularly can help their children finish their homework and assignments and often volunteer in school activities (Bauch, 2015). This evidence suggests that active parental participation will always influence positive learner performance.

In this study, principals interviewed complained that parents do not attend school meetings. Therefore, there is no engagement because meetings are platforms for communication. Crea, Reynolds and Deregnan (2015) argue that inefficient communication leads to poor perception. The perceptions about meetings may change if the needs of the parents are prioritised. The non-attendance suggests that invitations and meeting times should improve to meet the needs of the

parents. Parents are always willing if meetings are organised in advance, they are informed in time and meetings are facilitated to embrace their suggestions. Meetings will remain the critical engagement strategy in rural schools.

6.3 Monitoring and support

This study found a lack of monitoring and support from parents. As much as principals should exercise their roles for effective teaching and learning, parents should also be primary educators. Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) assert that successful learners have solid academic support from their parents. This view suggests that principals and parents should work together to define their roles and play them effectively. The joint effort between the principals and the parents will guarantee learners some positive outcomes. The elements of accountability, motivation and volunteering were essential for successful monitoring and support.

6.3.1 Accountability

In recent times, principals must account for any performance under 65% in matric performance. Schools that perform above 65% are also required to account for the quarterly performance of their learners. Accountability is now a standard procedure. As much as principals account for learners' poor performance, parents should do the same. The academic success of learners cannot be the sole responsibility of the principals but has to be shared between the school and the parents. Organisations that live by the principle of accountability tend to do better. The reason is that accountability is the strategy by which learner performance may improve. Accountability should be prioritised to achieve efficiency and produce quality teaching and learning. The prioritisation of accountability means that the actions and decisions taken by the parents should be aligned to set objectives. Schools grapple with ill-discipline because parents think they can abdicate disciplining their children to schools. Principals and parents should instil acceptable values in children's lives to maintain discipline. Discipline in schools is possible if stakeholders are involved and account for

every action that seeks to undermine the school's code of conduct. A school marred by ill-discipline tends to perform poorly.

In this study, accountability from both parents and principals is deemed necessary. Principals should account for poor teaching and learning and suggest strategies to improve performance. Parents should account for their children's failure to finish homework and assignments, late-coming, absenteeism, truancy, and bullying. Kiral (2019) argue that the more parents stake a claim on the education of their children, the better the educational efficiency of the school will be. If parents and principals can own up to their actions and decisions, learners' performance will likely improve. Lack of accountability is the reason for continuous poor performance in rural schools, and apathy and inefficiency are the order of the day.

There is a relationship between accountability and performance (Han & Hong, 2019). Accountability should be mandatory to achieve quality teaching and learning. When learners do not perform well, principals are called for accountability sessions to account for the poor results. However, accountability should not be restricted to principals but extended to all stakeholders including, teachers, SGBs and the deputy principal. Currently, principals account on behalf of the entire school. A hierarchy of accountability should be established to ensure that everyone is answerable for their own actions and decisions. Parents, in particular, should account for their children dropping out, lack of uniform and failing grades.

The core objective of schools is to achieve quality teaching and learning. There is a relationship between accountability and academic performance. The link between accountability and learner performance suggests it should be mandatory. Mandating accountability will ensure that the materials, human and financial resources of the organisation were used efficiently. Currently, principals carry the responsibilities of schools alone. This approach to accountability is not effective as weaknesses in lower positions are not fully accounted for. The researcher believes that deputy principals, departmental heads, educators and

parents should also account if the school underperforms. Deputy Principals and the departmental heads should give an account of the decisions taken in their departments. Departmental heads should account for subject performance in their respective departments. Teachers should execute the plan provided for by the respective departments in the school. Parents should take responsibility for the education of their children by creating an environment at home for effective learning. If children do not do their schoolwork but indulge in drug and alcohol abuse, parents should take responsibility for such behaviour. All stakeholders should account for their actions and decisions to encourage effectiveness in providing teaching and learning.

Accountability in schools is not currently practised satisfactorily; it should become a policy directive. Policy will ensure that accountability is carried out consistently. Accountability should be adopted as a school policy. When accountability is accepted by all stakeholders, including trade unions, it will become the school culture. Accountability will bring urgency and efficiency in executing the work at hand. However, a lack of accountability results in apathy, meaning the future of children is uncertain. It is therefore important that the interest of the children is prioritised by promoting accountability.

6.3.2 Motivation

This study suggests that the environment in rural areas is hopeless, demoralising and without prospect for improvement. Learners who pass matric migrate to urban areas, leaving rural areas with no hope for change. Motivation is needed to inspire parents, principals and learners to believe in themselves. The inspiration may be derived from internal and external sources (Park & Holloway, 2018). Internal sources mean that parents need to engage within themselves and be prompted to monitor and support their children voluntarily. Since parents give their children the opportunity to attend school, they should support them. When parents check their children's schoolwork, the child's sense of responsibility to schoolwork is activated. Internal motivation is not visible and cannot entirely be relied on to inspire confidence in parents and principals. The poor conditions in

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rural areas override anything intangible like intrinsic motivational factors. However, the internal motivational factors can be triggered by external motivating factors. External motivating factors such as role models, awards and bursaries for improved performance, visible and practical, can inspire confidence in others.

If parent engagement is entrenched as a culture in rural communities, it will be transmitted from one generation to the other. Parents always want what is best for their children and wish that their children can do better than they did. Therefore, parents are motivated to provide the resources needed for their children to succeed even under challenging conditions. Stievenart and Perez (2020) argue that the more parents feel competent in parenting, the more they engage in positive and supportive parental behaviour. However, this desire does not translate into parents being the centre from which learners can derive inspiration. A gap exists between the parents and their children, despite the effort to provide the necessary resources. The existing gap suggests that parents should rise above just providing resources to acting as educators at home and ensuring that teaching and learning occur outside the school environment. At the same time, principals should act as role models so that their work serves as a point of reference. Principals as people who can ensure high expectations are achieved by maintaining a high community profile. Principals should be seen embracing the context within which they work so that the community does not see them as outsiders who come to make money at the expense of the community. There is a culture of believing that the 'child of the soil should occupy school l

eadership' in rural communities. A child of the soil is a person born and bred in that community. If you are an outsider and you reserve your energy, the community will notice and begin to sabotage your efforts to improve the school. Therefore, principals should be part of the community and draw the parents closer to the school by inspiring confidence and trust.

Context-friendly strategies sensitive to the plight of rural parents should be used to draw parents closer to the school. The challenges include illiteracy, poverty

and unemployment, which have demoralised and demotivated parents who were interested in the education of their children. Due to the challenges parents face, they have to choose between livelihood and education. Despite the significance of education, parents choose livelihood at the expense of the education of their children. The parent's search for a better life has negatively affected the education of rural learners. Many parents don't know the subjects their children are doing at school, teachers who teach their children, and the career their children want to pursue due to being preoccupied with meeting basic needs. The absence of parents in education does not mean they are not interested. Parents are simply in a dilemma and unable to balance education and livelihood. All school leaders need is to motivate parents for effective participation in their children's education.

The following reasons have emerged from the study that demotivates parents and cause parents to be absent in their children's education. Negative perception about parent engagement; the engagement initiative does not consider the contextual realities of the parents and their engagement paradigm. These reasons are explained in the following paragraphs.

6.3.3   Principal's negative perception about parent engagement

Principals are the champions of their schools; they must create an environment conducive to successful school-parent engagement. Yulianti et al., (2020) assert that a school leader is an important agent to promote parental involvement. Principals should communicate the right message to the school community about parent engagement. School leaders in Japan are often unwilling to extend a genuine invitation to parents (Yamamoto et al.,2016). When principals show an interest in working with parents by creating a trusting and welcoming environment, parents will develop an interest in working with schools. Principals should demonstrate the desire to work with parents and encourage teachers to develop the same attitude. When there is a mutual attitude between school leaders and parents, the level of engagement will increase. However, if principals and parents cannot find each other, parent engagement is at risk. In many cases,

principals do not reach out to parents beyond semester meetings arranged by the school which has become a bureaucratic process. The meetings are not context bound but determined by protocols and procedures. As a result, parents feel marginalised because of a lack of belief in them. The disconnection between the school and the parents dampens the desire to engage.

In rural schools, principals use meetings to engage parents for compliance. When meetings are called, parents are simply updated and given reports about the development of the school without being given an opportunity to express their views. Principals act as bearers of knowledge, and that discourages collaborative decision-making. Unilateral decision-making had driven parents away from the school. Schools are operating without parents, which has deprived learners of the opportunity to do well academically. The absence of parents in the businesses of the school had also given principals more power, which means running the school alone. Too much power leads to the exploitation of the human and capital resources of the organisation. This means that resources are diverted from the intended purpose of teaching and learning to personal use. Learners of are deprived the right to quality basic education.

6.3.4 Engagement initiatives do not consider the contextual realities of parents.

Parents in rural areas are grappling with contextual factors that prevent them from supporting their children educationally. These parents are faced with water shortages, poor sanitation and infrastructure, community protests and joblessness. The views shared by parents suggested that the unavailability of parents at schools is not deliberate but due to them being socially and economically constrained. These socioeconomic conditions divert the parents' attention from educational matters to going out in search of basic necessities such as water and food. As a result of water shortages, families might spend the whole day waiting to fetch water from a communal borehole. Some might have to travel to the mountains to collect firewood for cooking due to lack of electricity. Due to the hard labour rural parents have to deal with, it is difficult for them to balance life and education. As much as they would like to participate in the

education of their children, they also need to provide food. It is a dilemma that needs to be fixed by all the affected stakeholders.

School leaders do not seem to understand the difficult conditions under which these parents live. Instead, they blame parents for not attending school meetings and not being serious about their children's education. Leaders regard parents as negligent with little to offer in support of their children. Parental input is undervalued, and this affects learning outcomes. Despite strings of poor performance, school leaders believe they can improve learner performance without support from parents. However, the quantity and quality of results continue to decline and will do so until leaders respond to the contextual realities faced by rural parents. Principals should create a welcoming environment that will enable parents to work well with them (Alinsunurin, 2020)

Parents have also been taken for granted due to their poor educational background. The illiteracy level of parents had been used to undermine their contribution to their children's education, depriving them of the opportunity to be part of their children's academic journey. Every parent would like to share in the academic success of their children. This means that, despite being illiterate, parents are interested in their children's education and would like to contribute directly and indirectly to its success. Leaders need to immerse themselves in the dynamics of rural settings to understand their nature and base their engagement on the views shared by the parents. The gap between school and parents should be closed so that engagement is not based on a master-servant relationship but collaboration. The master-servant relationship is the reason parents drift away from the schools. This kind of relationship is demeaning because it defines parents as weak participants while school leaders are masters. This kind of relationship creates an intimidating environment for parents.

The successful engagement of parents should be based on partnerships; leaders and parents should see each other as equal partners. When parents are treated with honour and respect, their confidence level will rise, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to the education of their children. When parents are

recognised and welcomed as partners, their educational perspectives change. Change in perspective will inspire confidence, children will gain support from their parents, and their academic performance will improve. When principals do not use contextual factors as preconditions to engage parents, they will reciprocally respond positively to the developmental agenda of the school.

6.3.5   Parent's engagement paradigm

The parent's engagement paradigm means new perspectives in engagement being developed from school-parent partnerships. The paradigm suggests that education is placed on top of the family commitment agenda. This implies that education is elevated to a primary need on the hierarchy of needs. This view will change the dynamics of rural communities so that they develop from the power of the new perspective. The perspective seeks to shift the mind-set of parents from the short-term solution of their developmental programme to long-term solutions. The long-term solutions to rural communities are striving for quality education for the present and future generations.

The new engagement paradigm has four motivational benefits, academic, emotional, social and economic.

Academic benefits: The academic performance of learners will improve as parents intentionally engage in their education. As parents show interest in what children are doing at school, they will respond by showing commitment to their schoolwork. This means that the significance of education is transferred from parents to learners. Learners could always emulate what their parents are doing. When parents advocate the importance of education and dedicate their time to it, learners too will begin to value it and start to excel.

Emotional benefits: Simufurosa and Wisermann (2016) argue that children living in child-headed families are burdened physically, emotionally, socially and psychologically. Education plays an important role in moulding the emotional intelligence of a person. When children's' emotions are nurtured by education, their life decisions become factual. Children will be able to distinguish between

right and wrong. Children's' decision-making improves as education finds its way into their emotions. However, children with little education become vulnerable to life due to their emotional weaknesses. The vulnerability often manifests in drug and alcohol abuse. The decision to indulge in intoxicating substances traumatises children emotionally and puts their future at risk. Parents should refrain from distancing themselves from the education of their children.

Parents should become aware of the emotional boost their children get from education and begin to support them. Such support will inspire the emotional intelligence of learners and help them make rational decisions in their daily lives. When learners are emotionally strong, they do not need their parents to make life-changing decisions but will mature into independent decision-makers. The self-efficacy of children will improve as they reach emotional maturity. The new thinking in parent engagement would be a catalyst for children's emotional growth.

Social benefits: This means the smooth integration of children into the culture and tradition of the society. Children who miss education are treated as outcasts and marginalised in society, and they feel useless and unwanted. The community expected to support them will mock and isolate them. This kind of treatment affects their confidence and future. These children need support from their parents for social benefits. Educated children accept themselves before society does. The society welcomes them because of the invaluable contribution they bring to the community. These children are admired by their own communities because they plough what they have gained back into it. Community development is guaranteed due to children who are educated.

Economic benefits: This means being able to support oneself and others. Educated children may improve their lives and those of family members. The poor socioeconomic conditions in rural communities may be transformed into middle- and upper-class lifestyles because of education. The lives of people in rural communities may change through education. Parents have no choice but to support their children's education for economic benefits. Parents who are

eager to support their children protect the futures of the present and future generations.

6.3.6   Volunteering

The participants showed that a lack of projects at school discouraged volunteering. Volunteering is no longer automatic. Parents are willing to serve schools but are failed by principals who cannot create opportunities for them to volunteer. On the other hand, principals cannot open doors for volunteers because parents expect payment even if the work is performed voluntarily. Parents always expect a stipend because of the poor conditions under which they live. In this study, volunteering is an opportunity for parents to offer their input and labour into their children's education. Volunteering is a process by which individuals act out of their free will, without pay to help someone and that it becomes a lifestyle. The finding suggests that principals should initiate gardening, cleaning, and cooking projects to create opportunities for parents to get involved in school matters. Zolkoski, Sayman, Lewis-Chiu (2018) asserts that schools should create good environment that will encourage parents to volunteer. The school should make it a culture to include parents by activities initiated deliberately to suit their desires and skills.

 Volunteering should be formalised where the state creates conditions for developing volunteer movements and budgets for them. This study confirms that, as much as volunteering is done initially from free will, impoverished rural conditions necessitate its commercialisation. Due to rural parent`s living conditions, they needed to be compensated for their volunteerism even if it is payment in kind. This gesture could assist in refocusing their attention to their children`s education. As communities are impoverished, volunteering can support those in need with services and products. Volunteering is not a waste of time but a mechanism by which parents find their way into the school to assist their children.

Volunteering refers to offering services to an organisation or person without expecting a reward in return. Volunteerism is not self-seeking or done for self-

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enrichment but happens compassionately to help others. Volunteerism prioritises the needs of others over the needs of the person volunteering. In this study, parents are expected to volunteer at school to meet its developmental needs and benefit the learners.

In recent times, volunteerism is not evident because the world has become more economical than social. Human worth and existence are measured in terms of possessions rather than social cohesion. The findings showed that volunteering was associated with a stipend. Volunteering with the expectation of a reward was a fair demand, considering the poor socioeconomic conditions of rural communities. Volunteering for social cohesion exceeds its economic value. This means that volunteering is a fulfilment of the inner person, which cannot be bought by material possessions. School leaders are responsible for making parents aware of the benefits of volunteerism. The nature of volunteerism suggests that the next person gains more than the one doing it. This is against human nature which seeks material things for itself. When parents view volunteerism as a waste of time and energy that should have been used for something beneficial, they withdraw from it.

Volunteerism is, therefore, not for everyone but a few people with unique personality traits. It connects to certain personality traits such as being open to experience, an extrovert, agreeableness, emotional stability and conscientiousness.

Open to experience defines someone adventurous and open to new ideas and experiences. These are people who are open to new experiences and independent thinkers who appreciate innovations. People with a high degree of openness are prepared to serve as volunteers.

Extroverts are the people who like to socialise and meet new people. They always have space for new people in their lives. When the opportunity to volunteer presents itself, they jump in because of the desire to meet new people and make friends.

Agreeableness refers to people who find pleasure in assisting others. These people are pro-social, meaning they put the interests of others first. Agreeable people have a high propensity to volunteer as it is fulfilling to them.

Emotional stability refers to calm people who do not volunteer because all is well with them. They volunteer even if the situation does not allow them because they can control their emotions. Parents in rural communities may use their socioeconomic conditions and their poor educational background as the reason not to volunteer. Emotional stability suggests that volunteering is possible under all circumstances. Emotionally stable people are resilient and can stand the test of time.

Conscientiousness is characterised by efficiency, self-organisation and logic. These are people who seek order and would like others to enjoy order. This means that, when these people see others suffering, they want to assist in restoring order. When order prevails in others, it brings joy to their lives. Rural communities need these people who would like to see rural learners succeed like their counterparts in urban areas.

These personalities may not be found in all rural parents. Due to the disadvantaged nature of rural communities, those that have these personalities may not be free to express them. As the need for volunteers increases in rural schools, school leaders need to ignite these personalities for volunteerism. Volunteerism will promote parental engagement for the learner's success. The Biblical narrative that says 'Blessed is the hand that gives' may be used as a principle to propel volunteerism in rural parents. Volunteerism motivates people to volunteer and contribute to a noble course.

6.4   Challenges affecting school-parent engagement in rural settings

This study found contextual challenges that hinder effective and successful school-parent engagement. The challenges identified include livelihood, illiteracy, time constraints and culture.

6.4.1   Livelihood

Participants showed that livelihood is the priority of rural families because of the high poverty level. Education has been relegated to a secondary concern by families. Munje and Mncube (2018) indicate that any attempt to engage parents is hampered by poverty, single-parenthood, unemployment and lack of supportive family structures. The participants showed that involving parents in school matters is a challenge when they struggle to satisfy their basic needs and do not have time. All parents are concerned with is their livelihood.

The findings of this study suggest that the poor living conditions of these parents increase their vulnerability. When vulnerability increases, it erodes their confidence to interact with schools. When parents' confidence level is low, parents' active participation is compromised. Even though principals are aware of the parents' vulnerability, they have done very little to boost their confidence. Parents are easily marginalised due to a lack of confidence. Msila (2016) reports that school principals need to understand the challenges rural communities are faced with to find ways to work with them. The inability of parents to deal with the challenges will drive them further away from the school.

This study confirmed that the priority of parents is to obtain maximum satisfaction with their basic needs. Education remains a secondary goal that unfortunately receives little attention. All is not lost. Principals need to make parents aware of the importance of education and create a positive environment for them to engage. Principals should refrain from using intimidating tactics which alienate parents. As observed by some participants, autocratic leadership is unwelcome and limits the space for parents to interact. This finding further pointed out that less engaged parents come from poor economic backgrounds, migrants, minority groups and single parents. Due to low socioeconomic conditions, parents are hardly at home but always away, searching for a better living. Their children are left in the care of grandparents and helpers who have little to offer children, leaving their education compromised.

When one learner in a disadvantaged family is educated, the living conditions of that family were expected to change from poverty to a better life. Due to the inferior education in rural schools, rural learners are locked in their communities with no future. Rural schools are often deprived of better education services depriving rural learners of the opportunity to satisfy the demands of life. These demands include decent employment, sustained family structure, tertiary education and fitting well into the world of technology. However, the level of education provided in rural schools makes it difficult for rural learners to meet these needs. Learners have to bear the consequences of the compromised level of education. These consequences include learners who don't qualify to enter universities and colleges, persistent poverty, unsustainable development and increased dependence on the government. Most learners from rural schools do not pass well enough for university admission and face barriers when applying to enter higher education. Many learners do not qualify for universities and colleges due to poor subject performance. Learners who manage to go to university are often unable to complete their studies due to the inferior education received at primary and secondary levels. These developments keep learners and their parents in the same state of poverty. The pressure of making a living compels learners to seek jobs at a young age to support their siblings and unemployed parents. Even though some might have passed well, tertiary education is not an option, but a job to support their families. The long-term effect of poor or little education is living on a meagre salary that cannot transform the lives of the family.

Persistent poverty is aggravated by the poor level of education provided in rural schools. Poor education means fewer opportunities for decent jobs and income to mitigate the impact of poverty. Poverty is inherently generational and will not be addressed without good education. It affects both the physical and socio-psychological well-being of people. Education should be prioritised by rural communities to mitigate the devastating effect of poverty. Parents should be made aware that life is sustained by education. The findings suggested that parents in rural communities prioritise making a living at the expense of

education. As a temporary measure, it makes sense, but rural learners deserve quality education for a quality life in the long term.

Improving the level of education in rural is urgent for sustainable development. Education is a necessity for human existence. It will ensure that needs of the future generation are met without reducing the ability of the current generation to meet its own needs. Education is important as it enables people to effectively and efficiently function in their own environment. This means preserving the material and human resources of a community for continuous development. Development in rural areas is not sustainable. The findings suggested that those learners who score high marks in matric and manage to go to university do not return to their rural communities. These children migrate permanently to urban areas leaving their rural communities with no hope for sustainable development. Urban communities keep ahead of rural communities because of the rural resources. There is a brain drain as professionals from rural communities serve those in metropolitan areas. Due to a lack of skills and expertise, rural areas become unsustainable. Better service delivery may encourage skilful people to stay in rural areas to sustain development. There has been little change in rural communities since the dawn of democracy.

Increased dependence on government: Millions of South Africans depend on social grants, most of them come from rural communities due to high unemployment in these areas. There is a relationship between the number of educated people and the number of social grant recipients. The poor or less educated will depend on social grants. The less educated have limited job opportunities. Education improves critical thinking that can help people create jobs. The uneducated lack self-sufficient thinking to support themselves. The findings showed that life in rural communities is inherently unstable and defined by the comfort of receiving social grants from the government. The problem originates from the disintegrated system of education, which alienates rural learners. Lack of parental engagement undermines the standard of education in rural schools.

6.4.2 Illiteracy levels

When parents are not engaged in the education of their children, it does not only affect children's academic performance but also lead to bad behaviour. In this study, parents and principals acknowledged that the poor educational background in rural communities affected school-parent engagement and academic performance. The point made here is that learners need their teachers. They also need their parents to cope and perform well in their schoolwork. However, the poor educational background of parents limits their active participation.

This study has shown that illiteracy negates and opposes the progress made at school. The home environment contributes very little to the education agenda, which is frustrating. Educating rural children is regressive, meaning every time progress is made at school, it is reversed by the home environment, which is educationally passive. However, it is a fact that, despite the high level of illiteracy in rural communities, parents still desire their children to succeed. Another study showed literacy difficulties could lead to social, economic and community problems such as high dropouts, juvenile delinquency and welfare costs (Hooge & Menheere, 2010). The findings of this study suggest that illiteracy affects parents' outward thinking and makes them dependent on principals and teachers. Parents become pedestrians in the education of their children. When learners do not perform well, it is business as usual as parents are unaware of its impact on their lives and children.

This study confirms the link between the literacy level of parents and learner success in schools. Parents whose educational background is high can provide resources and emotional and academic support to their children. Parents with a low literacy have little understanding of the educational needs of their children, leaving them little prospect for academic success. Due to poor education, parents are engulfed by a high level of pessimism which causes them to rely entirely on the school to educate their children. However, it remains critical for parents to engage despite their conditions because this will ensure that learner's

performance improves. Parental involvement is vital for children's academic outcomes and the lack thereof reduces children`s prospect of a good life. Despite the close link between academic performance and parent engagement, illiteracy remains a challenge in rural communities and has rendered education unbalanced, ineffective and less transforming.

6.4.3   Time constraints

This study found a challenge of time management. Time is a scarce resource, and if not used efficiently, the target for schools may not be achieved. The interaction between the school and the parents is determined by time. Parents indicated they do not have time to attend school meetings because they are preoccupied with making a living. Murray et al. (2014) contend that parents from low-income category are likely to have an inflexible work schedule and multiple jobs. Parents cannot find space between their family commitments to attend meetings. It is an untenable situation.

The findings of this study suggest that principals should consult with the parents to understand their schedules and plan accordingly. When principals begin to consult parents, they will respond positively to invitations. The consultation will enable principals to schedule meetings that fit into daily schedules. When parents are taken seriously, they will, in turn, value the school's activities. However, if principals plan school activities unilaterally, the non-attendance at meetings will increase. The increase in the number of parents, who don't attend meetings, means the failure of principals to gain their support.

The feeling about the time factor was expressed in two ways: they coincide with other events and or conflict with work schedules. When meetings are scheduled for weekends, parents have other family events needing their attention, making it difficult to attend. If meetings are scheduled during the week, parents raise concerns about work and that their employers cannot grant them leave to attend. Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) assert that parents are often preoccupied with the distractions and demands of life. The needs of everyday life are justified because parents are burdened by low-income and inflexible working hours, making it

difficult for them to attend meetings. The findings further suggest that parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds have many challenges to grapple with, excluding them from school activities. These challenges affect parents physically, emotionally and psychologically. Without support, successful engagement seems impossible.

This study confirms that the personal life context of parents hampers their ability to interact successfully with schools. Due to unfavourable personal life experiences, parents are compelled to have multiple jobs to generate adequate income for their families. Such multiple commitments leave them with little time to engage in the education of their children. Even though parent engagement impacts learner achievement positively, rural parents remain passive participants in their children's education due to lack of enlightenment about the significance of education in their children`s lives. Most parents seem not to care about education because it did not yield expected results for them.

6.4.4   Culture

The finding of this study indicates that there are cultural practices that defy the logic for parents to engage. The failure to attend meetings has become a culture entrenched in rural communities and is passed from one generation to another. Parents have used the poor socioeconomic situation as a reason for non-attendance. However, they can attend other community meetings and events, such as funerals, weddings, cultural activities, political events and parties. However, when invited to school meetings, they tend to use *commitment* as a barrier to their non-attendance. This tendency tells how parents in rural areas undervalue education.

The culture of absolute reliance on principals and teachers to educate their children has made inroads into the lifeblood of rural communities. These communities have lost trust, confidence and belief in themselves. Parents believe that education belongs to the educated, and therefore whatever contribution they wish to make will not make any difference because they are not educated. The total reliance of parents on schools has become the thought life of these parents.

Dependency on principals gives parents the leverage to shift the blame when learners underperform. In rural school the culture of dependency is rooted because parents believe that school leaders could educate their children's while their committed in other daily activities. Trying to encourage them to do their homework and assignments or attend meetings is a waste of time. This finding suggests that a total mind transformation is required to deal with these cultures. There will be opposition and resistance to this change in trying to embark on the transformation process, although it has to occur.

The finding on culture is also reported by Crea et al., (2015). They confirm that parents often believe in the professional model of education according to which teachers are solely responsible for education. Therefore, principals are given the power to monopolise education, enabling them to manipulate the system without anyone holding them accountable. Monopolising education means that principals become a law unto themselves, as decisions that affect the community are taken unilaterally.

In countries such as the USA and Japan, parental engagement has become a school culture (Yamamoto et al., 2016). These countries explain what parents should do to assist children with their homework and assignments. Parents are then requested to exercise these responsibilities formally. Parents are not left on their own but helped because of their poor educational background. This study confirms that parent engagement in rural areas is significantly low due to cultural norms and beliefs.

It is critical that parents realise that being dependent on school leaders and teachers will not assist their growth. Parents need independence to engage optimally to make desirable changes in their children's education. Most parents are not educated, so they need to work interdependently with other stakeholders to support teaching and learning. If teaching and learning are managed collaboratively, the thinking that it should be done by selected individuals will disappear. The elements of dependence, independence and interdependence are discussed in the following paragraphs.

6.4.5   Parent's dependence thinking

The findings showed that parents in rural communities trust and believe that principals can champion the education of their children. As a result, principals act as both *loco parentis* and *loco paedagogus* (Marishane, 2020). This means that principals act on behalf of the parents and are also expected to do the work that should be done by parents when children are not at school. It is a daunting task for principals to carry such responsibilities. Principals are overloaded and overwhelmed. Instead of sharing the responsibilities of educating the child, it has become a one-sided affair where principals have to do parenting and manage curricula at the same time.

The parents' traditional way of thinking exacerbates the weakness of others to control them. Parents still believe that education is the sole responsibility of the school. Parents occupy not the secondary but the tertiary position in education, meaning they have surrendered their educational role to principals. Occupying a tertiary stance is a sign of shying away from the primary responsibility of educating the child, where the core business of educating begins.

The dependence stance adopted by parents is a serious challenge because they will always agree with others even if they actually disagree. This happens because parents have decided to give away their power and keep their opinions to themselves. This does not suggest that parents do not have ideas but means they have allowed principals to think on their behalf. The dependence thinking has absolved them and created self-doubt in their own capacity. The attitude of dependence has done more harm than good because parents have now developed low self-esteem, which diminishes their confidence and reduces them to followers rather than proactive participants in their children's education.

Self-esteem is the foundation on which a person builds the future. When self-esteem is low, people depend on others for their future. In this case, parents gave principals the responsibility for deciding on their children's future. It does not come as a surprise that children get lost along the way due to loss of self-identity. Children fall by the wayside because their connection with principals is

temporary. When the time comes for principals to withdraw, children get lost. Children get lost because there is no continuity for where principals have left off. Parents and children have a permanent connection that should be nurtured as a family identity. A certain belief system that children can associate with should be established to keep them on track. Once established, children will draw inspiration from it and remain on track. The failure of parents to exercise their oversight role has manifested in drug abuse, gender-based violence, alcohol abuse, patriarchal systems and hopelessness.

6.4.6   Parents as independent thinkers

Independent thinkers rely on their own thinking or opinions and have the confidence to express them. These people are not controlled by other people's thinking. They believe they can effect change in their own lives and others by their own thinking. They create their sense of worth and believe in their ability. Independent thinkers take proactive steps to change their conditions rather than waiting for others. Parents in rural areas need to adopt this thinking to change their conditions and that of their children. Conditions in rural areas can change anyone to being a dependent thinker. It is against this background that parents in rural areas should learn to think creatively. Parents should acknowledge that their perspective on life is narrow and work to change it. It should not be allowed to escalate into a disability. Parents can still move out of dependency syndrome into independent syndrome to overcome the challenges experienced by rural schools.

Parents can speak out against what they think is wrong but do it with respect. Parents can use meetings convened by schools to make their voices heard about how they want education to be provided to their children. Meier and Lemmer (2015) explain that, if schools want parents to be authentic partners in education, they must consistently and respectfully invite parents to voice their opinions in a co-equal relationship. Parents' voices may be heard on how policies can be crafted to suit their context. The silence of rural parents has allowed educational authorities to impose a system unaligned with their contextual realities. Children

in rural communities are subjected to a curriculum that does not speak to their belief system. Parents can change this, not only at the micro-level but also at the macro-level, by developing a strong sense of self-confidence, responsibility and accountability.

6.4.7   Parents interdependent thinking

Interdependent is the highest level of thinking where individual brilliance is replaced by collaborative brilliance. Skills, knowledge and wisdom are pooled for a shared vision. This kind of thinking expects parents to do away with the traditional belief of solely relying on principals to educate their children. Interdependence promotes collective responsibility in educating children. Schools and parents share the common vision of desiring to assist children develop their full potential (Meier & Lemmer, 2015). Interdependent thinking is a test of the level of maturity of both parents and principals. A good relationship between the school and parents depends on maturity.

The success of learners depends on the relationship between parents and principals. Parents' collaborative relationship with schools has a positive impact on academic achievement. The working relationship between the school and parents should be established as a good ground for interdependence. Parents and school leaders enjoy reciprocal support and satisfaction in achieving positive changes in learners and the school. The willingness of parents to work with others is accepting that 'I cannot do it alone'. It is human nature to take credit at the expense of others. However, interdependence outgrows individual achievements to collective achievements. To accept collective achievements where no individual is singled out as the best contributor requires a high sense of maturity; thinking more about others than yourself is maturity. This is a situation where ideas, skills and talents are combined to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Interconnections between schools and parents are essential to enhance children's growth, development and learning (Mahuro & Hungi, 2016). Collaboration is the opportunity parents should use to share their capabilities with others. It is an opportunity to learn and complement one another.

Interdependence promotes co-responsibility, co-accountability and a very strong team spirit. Parents and school leaders must share responsibilities instead of thinking that one party can effectively complete the work. Schools need to build partnerships and develop mutual responsibility with parents. When the school underperforms in a collaborative relationship, the parents and school will share accountability and responsibility, establish deviation together, do corrections and move forward. Interdependence is a growth path to restore the culture of teaching and learning for success in a school.

The culture of dependence is man-made and can be changed. Change in the mindset of dependence can elevate parents to independence and ultimately interdependence. As parents and principals begin to work together, learners in rural schools will do as well as their counterparts in urban areas. If the *status quo* is maintained where parties work in isolation, learner performance will continue to decline. Individual brilliance from one school suggests that schools can perform. However, the continued disregard of parent engagement has compromised the future of rural learners. A synergy between school leaders and parents should be established regarding skills, knowledge, resources, wisdom, competence and willingness. A new rhythm should be forged to steer teaching and learning in schools to a higher dimension.

6.5   Contextually responsive leadership strategies

The positive relationship between parent engagement and learner achievement is undisputed. For this reason, mitigating the challenges that prevent successful parent engagement is not a choice. The following strategies are used: changing mind-set by school leaders, partnership, engaging other stakeholders and parents' self-efficacy.

6.5.1   Change of school leader's mind-set

Change is pain; however, it is inevitable. The leadership style should change to context-responsive leadership, which adapts effectively to changing situations to drive the agenda of parent engagement forward. Parents in this study argued

that principals are autocratic, making the school environment unwelcoming. Parents feel unwelcome and undermined because their status is used to judge them. Due to their economic and social status, they feel marginalised, and their inputs are not taken seriously.

Principals should transition from autocratic to contextually responsive leadership. Contextually responsive leadership will listen to their voices and also attend to their needs. When such a leadership style is adopted in a school environment, the parents' ideas will form part of the developmental agenda. Developmental agenda refers to the targets set and achieved for the growth and development of the school. Involving parents will encourage them to participate in the education of their children. Participants have shown some principals still centralise power and believe in master-servant leadership. This kind of leadership not only undermines the parents but reduces them to obliging individuals. The opposite is true that principals should see themselves as servants employed to serve the community rather than acting as masters who should be served at all costs. A careful leadership style is critical because it can break or build an organisation. The eagerness and willingness of parents to participate in schools depend on the attitude of the principals.

Marishane (2020) reported that the traditional role of the principal needs to shift to meet the increasing demand for accountability in education. This view suggested that principals should account for every decision they take to benefit the community they serve. Principals should see themselves as carriers of hope for the parents and the children and should be accountable when the community's expectations are not met. Another study found that contextually responsive leaders promote the school climate inclusive of marginalised within the school context (Khalifa et al., 2016). Inclusive school leaders acknowledge that parents in rural areas can add value to schools despite their living conditions. This study confirms that contextually responsive leadership is not based on hierarchy but is defined by context. School leaders should allow themselves to change as context changes and advocate community-based issues such as

infrastructure development, skills development, preventing gender-based violence and building a self-sufficient community.

Change in a school leader's mind-set is justified by a continuous change in context. School leaders must respond to the context change to remain relevant in domestic and global settings. Leaders have to lead differently to keep up with the trends in school leadership. Therefore, intervention should be adapted to capability and effective response. Leaders should understand the context to achieve intended outcomes. Results in rural schools are appalling because school leaders rely on styles of leadership they have adopted. Inflexible leadership forces leaders to do the same things repeatedly. For instance, all schools in the Sekhukhune East District apply the same strategy of extra classes to improve learner performance. There are morning, afternoon, weekend and holidays lessons. However, the results in the district decline every year. The strategies yield little results, yet school leaders continue to use them. As long as parents are not engaged, the results suggest that any method to improve performance will not yield the desired results.

The gap comes when parents do not attend meetings convened by the school, yet leaders insist that meetings are the right platform to engage parents. There was a general complaint from school leaders that parents do not attend meetings. Principals seem to have run out of ideas to find effective ways of interacting with the parents. Bhengu and Myende (2016) argue that principals should play their role differently from the past, as they are placed at the forefront of societal transformation. This means that principals should apply different strategies in different contexts to achieve the intended results. If one strategy worked in the past, the same one might not apply in the present because the context has changed. In this study, leaders should explore new innovative ways of engaging parents because they should not be left behind, regardless of their situation. The belief by some school leaders that schools can run without parents has long term consequences. If parents do not attend meetings, resolutions reached by those in attendance become binding to those who did not attend. This stance may seem to work in the short term but has negative consequences in the long run. The

consequences include violating children's right to quality education, children deprived of the needed support from parents, and depriving learners of the opportunity to improve their self-efficacy. If the disconnection between the school and the parents continues, it will disadvantage the parents and the children.

The desire to effect notable change in schools is a responsibility school leaders should fulfil by a paradigm shift. The paradigm shift in this study is measured in terms of the context responsiveness of leaders' preparedness to engage. Contextual responsiveness is not a calculated move but a change in human behaviour. Contextual responsiveness means that it is how leaders think at a given time how they act in response to a changing context.

Contexts are not predictable, so a predetermined formula may not be used to deal with them effectively. An effective response to context depends on the capability of the leaders. Leaders who acknowledge the poor socioeconomic conditions of parents in rural communities can deal with them effectively. However, leaders confined to autocratic, democratic and transformative mind-sets struggle to cope under changing circumstances. Parents in rural areas are on their own, and principals have lost the patience, persistence and passion for working with them. The situation has culminated in the survival of the fittest. Principals are overburdening themselves by thinking they can play their role and that of the parents. The perspectives shared by parents proved that the relationship between them and the parents is weak.

The poor relationship between the school and the parents results in learners being promoted to the next class through progression. Progression is a system created by the government to promote learners on factors such as the number of years in the phase, age cohort and the conduct of the learner, not based on academic competence. The system indicates how desperate educational authorities are to compensate for parental absence in the education of their children. The progression system has created a vast knowledge gap that will continue to widen as long as teaching and learning are kept within the school walls and parents are disengaged. The progression system provides temporary

relief, but economic, social and emotional consequences will be felt in the long run. The absence of parents is a challenge that may be addressed by collaboration. Collaboration is possible in an environment of unity and teamwork but not possible where the stakeholders are divided. Collaboration in the current state of affairs where school leaders are above the organisation may not happen. The complexity of the situation in rural schools calls for leaders to renew their minds to deal with the changing context effectively. Two minds are better than one. Behavioural change has to take place to create a workable environment. There are three basic actions that a school principal can take to respond to changed context, adaptation, selection and reshaping. These actions are discussed in the following paragraphs.

6.5.2   Adaptation

Adaptation is the ability to adjust oneself to fit a new environment different from what one is accustomed to (Marishane, 2020). This implies that, when someone moves from one place to another, they should familiarise themselves and quickly settle in that environment. Adjusting oneself requires a shift in mind-set and behaviour. Rethinking and reflection will enable the flexibility and ability to transfer skills from one environment to another. To the school leaders, it means changing the old ways of seeing and doing things and aligning new methods with current and future trends. Finding new ways of doing things is critical for every successful organisation. Principals who can improve school performance can adapt to and cope with the changing policy environment. These principals have to be vigilant to ensure that new ways of influencing the context work to the advantage of the learners. For example, the habit of convening school meetings as a source of parent-school intervention has to change. New and innovative ways of engaging parents have to be found. Parents are not difficult; all they need is for the principals to immerse themselves in the context to understand their behavioural patterns.

In some schools, principals have banned cell phone use by learners. These principals do not want to embrace change. The banning of cell phones is used

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as a precautionary measure to maintain order and discipline. The principal fears that learners may indulge in inappropriate content that may distract them from the core business of teaching and learning. The intentions are good; however, technology plays an important role in quality education in the new educational setting. Principals have to move with the times and adapt to new technological innovations. The thought life of most of the principals needs thorough reflection.

Many rural schools are technologically illiterate because those at the helm are unwilling to adapt to the new change. Teaching and learning remain traditional and ineffective. Learners are not coping with the demands of the curriculum as it requires them to be independent critical thinkers and problem solvers. Principals are standing in the way of advancing technology in their schools. Parents are still invited to school meetings by letter when there are cell phones which every parent uses. Cell phones have become the primary means of communication, and parents own them, despite their poor living conditions. The sooner school leaders change how they think and do things; the better rural schools will become. Principals need to cope with rapid changes and adapt and bring about sustained improvement in schools. Principals have to rise above the *status quo* and bring about new developments in the school. When the schools underperform, it cannot be business as usual; the situation warrants a different approach to cope with the situation.

6.5.3   Reshaping

Reshaping refers to redesigning the old environment. When an old environment is transformed, a new environment emerges. Reshaping involves entrenching a new culture in the school and ensuring that it is aligned with the needs of the school. If the school advocates excellence, such a culture should run through all the components of the school including, vision, mission, instructional programme, school, SGB and learner representative meetings. Excellence should become the brand by which the school identifies itself. A brand evolves and is, therefore, context compliant. Bigger brands can cope with any form of crisis. A school that produces excellent results can sustain such performance through its brands. A

good brand is associated with quality. If a school is such a quality brand, it will attract good learners, teachers and funders.

Reshaping is about moving into unknown territory so that inputs lead to better outcomes. It is about changing the usual way of doing things to get different results. Different results are hard to find in situations where leaders do not influence the context. School leaders have to play an active role in reshaping the context because an unshaped context is not manipulative. When a context is shaped, it is aligned with the parents and learners, creating a new school order that does not serve the interest of an individual but that of the entire community. If parental engagement is accepted as that new order, school leaders have no choice but to adopt it to influence the outcome of the school. Reshaping the environment challenges the protocols, procedures and bureaucracy that has formalised the thinking of school leaders such that innovation is non-existent. Routine thinking will delay the progress of the school and its community.

1.1.1.1 Selecting

Selecting means that the environment presents a variety of choices on how to deal with its dynamics. The available option does not mean that the learner may choose it but should choose options compatible with the context. In dealing with the changing context, school leaders have to develop a sense of responsiveness to balance context and school values. Only school leaders are equipped to handle complex, rapidly changing environments that can implement deep, lasting reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achievement. School leaders need to have control over the environment to satisfy the school's needs. Schools achieve better results when there is a synergy between their objectives and values.

6.5.4 Partnership

Collaboration is an important strategy to generate creativity and innovation to improve the school's educational programme. Our finding suggests that parents and principals want to work together for learners' success. The partnership

between the parents and the principals cannot happen overnight. Both parties should make a continuing effort for effective collaboration. Principals should see parents as equal partners and create a welcoming environment that will assure parents of their place in its core business. Parents should not allow their socioeconomic disadvantages to discourage them from making their voices heard.

If principals belittle parents because of their social and economic status, the partnership between parents and principals is unattainable. OECD (2012) argues that parents and principals should have an equitable relationship. An equitable relationship is one without fear, favour and prejudice. It is the relationship by which principals seek to empower parents as partners rather than demonstrate their academic prowess. This study argues that the relationship between parents and the school should be based on trust instead of status. When the parents and the principals see each other as partners, a high level of creativity and innovation is achieved.

The partnership between the parents and the principals will enhance learner performance. Providing education to the learners will no longer be the sole responsibility of the schools. The school will collaborate with the parents and ensure continuity in teaching and learning. Kousholt and Hojholt (2019) argue that collaboration between the school and the parents should be based on social interaction, mutual trust and relationship that promote learner performance. In collaboration, principals will see the parents' vulnerability as an opportunity to share their plight and be willing to upgrade the standard. This shared responsibility will ensure that children are supported emotionally, physically and academically.

In promoting total support to children, the partnership between the school and parents should be strengthened. Conditions for successful engagement should be laid down to serve as a framework for the partnership. The findings showed that the two parties are working in isolation; therefore, laying down conditions will bring the two parties together. The following conditions for successful partnership

engagement should be considered, creating a trusting atmosphere, affirming each other, bringing the best effort into the partnership, being candid is not a sign of weakness and encouraging sincerity for learning and growth. These conditions are discussed in the following paragraphs.

6.5.4.1   Creating a trusting atmosphere

Trust between the school and a parent is low in rural communities. Parents believe that school leaders are misappropriating funds and not doing enough to serve the interests of the community. School leaders blame parents for not showing support for the education of their children. Findings showed that parents do not attend school meetings and are indifferent to the affairs of the school. Parents accuse principals of not being sensitive to the challenges experienced by rural communities. Despite the blame game, partnerships remain essential to connect the school and the parents. Trust is a link by which collaboration between the school and the parents is enforced. When trust is established, a positive teaching and learning atmosphere is created. Karakus and Savas (2012) assert that a trusting relationship remains a positive predictor of improving academic achievement in schools. However, mistrust will dampen the relationship between the school and the parents, putting learners' future at risk. Risking the learners' future will affect not only the present but also the future generation. Building relationships between the school and parents will work to secure the learners' future.

6.5.4.2   Affirming each other

A successful partnership between school leaders and parents needs the affirmation of each other, which means believing in one's ability to add value to the course of education. The two parties should see each other as equally important to the learners' success. School principals should assure parents that their views are important, and the school needs them for growth and development. The master-servant relationship should be removed so that the element of school leaders being superior to parents is cancelled, which will help revise the notion that education belongs to the educated. This will be replaced

by the notion that education belongs to those who need, support and are interested in it. The insecurity parents had will disappear, which will boost their confidence for active participation in their children's education. The integrative and collaborative approach should be adopted as a means by which to strengthen the relationship. School leaders should also assure parents that their educational background and socioeconomic status will not be used as a requirement for being involved in their children's education. All the parents needed was the willingness to engage in improving their children's academic performance.

6.5.4.3 Bringing the best effort into the partnership

The success of every partnership depends on the commitment, knowledge, skills and determination of the parties involved. When these are combined, the outcome of the school will improve. However, if one partner is committed while the other is not, that attitude will destroy the trust and affect the academic results. Initiatives and strategies should be contextually appropriate to resonate with the unique situation at the school and protect the academic results. The parties should bring their wisdom and willingness to the partnership to make it work. Parents should not look down on themselves but be confident to work with school leaders. The two parties should guard against competition. If competition is allowed in the partnership, it will defeat the purpose of working together as each one would like to take the credit when academic performance improves. The parties should complement each other, which will ensure the weaknesses of the parties are not exposed. Partnerships should not be used to expose each other's weaknesses; they should foster collaboration for effective learning at school and home (Wahyuningsih & Sumarsono, 2017) A partnership is beneficial because it attracts support from other social and economic partners.

6.5.4.4 Being candid is not a sign of weakness

A sustainable partnership is measured by honesty and truthfulness. Parents and school leaders should be honest and truthful with each other. Their relationship should be based on openness rather than convenience. A relationship based on

convenience is defined by being economical with the truth and trying to use the other partner for personal gratification. If values of truth and honesty are not part of the partnership foundation, it is bound to collapse. However, parties are allowed to challenge decisions that are not in the best interest of the learners. Some school leaders feel challenged when their decisions are questioned. This kind of attitude cannot be allowed as it has the potential to weaken the partnership. Partnerships should be built on solid ground to avoid conflicts that may destroy their purpose. Threats are likely to occur, but parents should not feel intimidated and continue to raise critical issues to build their children's future.

6.5.4.5   Encouraging sincerity for learning and growth

Partnerships should be built on common ground to achieve teaching and learning. When parents and principals work in isolation, the sources to improve teaching and learning are inefficiently used. The inefficient use of resources means poor academic performance. It is essential to encourage sincerity so that the resources acquired to offer educational services are put to good use. The good use of resources is measured by its output. Expected outcomes are achieved by the optimal use of resources. School leaders should initiate programmes in the school that keep the partnerships intact. When teaching and learning occur in an environment where parties are prepared to sacrifice their time and resources, sincerity prevails. Sincerity also suggests that partners should be free to express their views without fear or favour. School leaders should not use their powers to suppress the parents' opinions. Sincerity should work for leaders and parents.

6.5.5   Engaging other stakeholders

This study suggests that education is a societal issue. Therefore, the commitment of all the stakeholders is critical in dealing with prevailing conditions in rural communities such as poverty, child-headed families, single parenthood and orphans. Rural schools face challenges unique to their environment and go beyond the reach of principals and teachers. These challenges affect learners' ability to cope with teaching and learning demands and consequently affect their

performance. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) contend that some rural schools' challenges are attributed to lack of parental interest, insufficient funding from the state, lack of resources, under-qualified teachers and multi-grade teaching. Some of these challenges are from within the school, and others originate outside the school environment. Although some obstacles arise outside the school environment, they still influence the academic performance of the learners.

This study suggests that stakeholders should be involved to provide essential services to rural communities. These services include water, sanitation, electricity, social workers, therapists, psychologists and funding. The appalling conditions in rural areas only affect learners and parents physically but also emotionally and psychologically. The parents and learners are in distress due to their socioeconomic disadvantages, and they need support from psychologists and therapists to cope with their situations. During rainy seasons, learners cannot go to school because of flooded roads. Local municipalities need to improve roads and build bridges for learners to cross over to their schools. The failure to provide services will cause learners to miss classes, especially those heading families and orphans. Stakeholders must be engaged to provide human and physical services needed to support teaching and learning.

6.5.5.1   Engaging local municipalities

Rural communities are the most neglected areas in the country. These communities lack basic services such as water, sanitation, electricity, houses and infrastructure. Local municipalities should be engaged because service delivery is their competence. Poor service delivery has plunged rural communities into social and economic distress. Parents spend most of their time at water wells; some parents wake up at 3:00 am to be the first in the queue to get water. If they get water, it is not enough to carry them through the week, meaning they have to be at the well every day. It is a lifestyle of travelling to and from water stations. In some communities, parents may spend weeks, if not months, without water. Families without electricity rely on paraffin and firewood for cooking. Most families cannot afford paraffin due to poverty and unemployment and rely on

firewood for cooking. Again, this means travelling to the nearby mountains for firewood. Some parents are too old to travel, school children bunk classes to fetch water and firewood. Poor sanitation exposes community members to health hazards. Some learners fall into pit latrines due to a lack of ablution facilities. Du Plessis (2014) contends that many rural schools are poor and disadvantaged, lacking basic infrastructure for sanitation, water, roads, transport, electricity, information and communication technology. Infrastructure such as roads, bridges, transportation and communication is a problem in rural communities. During rainy seasons, learners do not go to school because roads and rivers are flooded, and they cannot cross over to their schools. Learners travelling long distances cannot do so regularly; buses are unreliable as there are frequent breakdowns. Absenteeism is on the rise due to distance and unreliable transport. It is essential to deliver educational infrastructure to maximise the accessibility and effectiveness of education. Apart from physical infrastructure, rural schools do not have internet access. Textbooks are still the primary source of teaching and learning.

Learners are not exposed to the world due to a lack of data. They cannot explore the world without the assistance of teachers. Teachers are the main drivers of learning, and children become passive recipients of teaching. Teaching and learning is not learner- but teacher-centred. Critical and independent thinking is discouraged as learners cannot study by themselves. During the pandemic, there was a total shut down of schools as physical interaction was impossible. Online learning could not occur due to a lack of data, smartphones and lack of knowledge from teachers on how to use online teaching and learning. Municipalities could intervene by providing quality services to rural communities to change the educational conditions of rural learners. Be that as it may, the socioeconomic conditions of rural communities put learners in rural schools at a disadvantage (Du Plessis, 2014).

As a result of poor service delivery, parents cannot spend time with their children to assist them with their homework and assignments. Children are on their own

as parents are preoccupied with satisfying basic needs. The disconnection between parents and their children has affected their academic performance. School leaders need to work closely with the community to engage local municipalities for better services. Local councillors should be approached and engaged to accelerate service delivery. Protests may be used to force local municipalities to take care of their citizens. Burning tyres, blocking roads and destroying public property is discouraged; however, if it is the last resort the government can listen to, let it be. The future of many learners has been destroyed due to a poor teaching and learning environment. Some learners are discouraged by distance and ultimately drop out of school. High overheads for parents and long commutes for children have led to increased drop-out rates among village pupils. Rural communities deserve better, and it is by better service delivery that parents may find time to engage in the education of their children.

6.5.5.2   Support from social workers and psychologists

The poor socioeconomic conditions in rural communities affect parents and children physically and psychologically. Parents and their children live in distress which can result in domestic violence affecting children mentally; children find relief by indulging in drugs and alcohol. Children may also resort to bullying, dropping out of school, pregnancy, prostitution and child labour. Mental and physical fatigue affects academic performance. On this basis, school leaders should engage social workers and psychologists to offer psychosocial support to their children. Psychosocial support strengthens resilience using local capacities and promotes positive development. Psychosocial support will give mental strength to cope with the demands of schoolwork and resilience to other social and economic challenges. School should seek the services of social workers because some of the challenges are beyond the scope of the school. The contribution of social workers may improve the academic performance and overall well-being of learners in a healthy and safe environment and enhance teachers' understanding of the child's social context. A school leader's decision to adopt social workers in their schools will go a long way in keeping children at

school. The services of life coaches may be sought to give daily mental support to children. Through these interventions, the mental strength of the learners will enable them to receive teaching and learning better.

6.5.5.3   Business community engagement

The business community has a role to play in education. Businesses have a stake and a vested interest in the local school effectiveness. Their role is to provide funding to schools because the government has failed to fund them adequately. Lack of funding derailed the noble purpose of providing quality education to rural learners. Schools in rural communities operate without libraries, computer laboratories, physical sciences laboratories and internet connections. The world has become digital; however, rural education has yet to migrate to digital platforms. Even the 2030 National Development Plan (NDP) will not achieve the digital migration in education. Teaching and learning will still be conventional in 2030.

A partnership between school leaders and the local business community is critical in securing the necessary teaching and learning resources to improve the academic performance of learners. Badget (2016) asserts that partnership between schools and businesses provides benefits, including improving teaching and learning capacity and learner performance. Adequate funding in schools will provide quality resources for quality teaching and learning. School leaders should take steps of faith to engage business leaders for the development of schools.

6.5.6   Parent self-efficacy

Yamamoto and colleagues (2016) assert that parents who do not feel capable of teaching, disciplining or interacting with their children lack self-efficacy. The findings in this study suggest that parents cannot play their roles effectively for learner achievement due to a lack of self-belief. Participants showed that people who know children better are their parents. Parents, however, have shifted their responsibilities to principals and teachers who do not know the children better than they do. Principals attempting to carry out those responsibilities face

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learners who smoke dagga, are truant, lack values and discipline. Parents are unable to deal with these challenges because their self-efficacy is low. Due to a low level of self-efficacy, parents fail to persevere in the face of difficulty and cannot respond resiliently to adversity. Instead of dealing with the disciplinary problems of their children, they burden principals with such issues. These parents with low self-efficacy avoid contact with school because they believe that such involvement will not bring a positive outcome for their children (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Lack of confidence from these parents is attributed to their poor living conditions.

The finding demonstrated the importance of re-cultivating, reviving and restoring the confidence in parents to enhance participation. A parent's self-efficacy will produce resilience and perseverance in times of adversity. Parents should believe that they can make a difference in the educational life of their children. This belief will override their social and economic challenges and ensure that parenthood is fully exercised.

This research has discovered that parents' self-efficacy is low. On this basis, enhancing self-efficacy remains critical because parents need the confidence to support their children. The following strategies can be used to improve the efficiency of parents in education, promoting self-belief and believing that the effort is not in vain

6.5.6.1 Promoting self-belief

Self-belief means believing in one's ability to make a meaningful change. Mouton and colleagues (2018) define it as the belief parents have in their capacity to parent a child. Self-belief is an inherent inner potential that propels a person to do what is right. It has been shown that parents have lost power due to poor socioeconomic conditions and educational backgrounds. Parents seem to believe that they don't have control over the education of their children and regard themselves as failures with little to offer their children. Lack of self-belief has allowed school leaders to decide on the fate of the learners without parental input.

The time has come for parents to exercise their powers and be the voice of reason for their children. Parents should realise that the success of their children lies in their hands, and when they voluntarily choose to serve, they reclaim their power. Parents should start to believe that their voices are heard, and they should not be discouraged to express them. School leaders should assure parents of the influence they have in education by respecting their views and creating a platform for them to be heard. When parents realise that their opinions are taken seriously by the schools, they become motivated and acquire a sense of ownership over the education of their children. The sense of control means responding to the educational needs of children. Engaging in school activities will strengthen communication between the school and parents and work in favour of the learners.

6.5.6.2   Belief that the effort is not in vain.

It is human nature to engage in beneficial activities. It is rare for people to engage without expecting anything in return. The same with parents, they would like to engage in projects where there is payment in return. Parents want payment because their conditions are not the same. It is difficult for school leaders to convince parents to volunteer and equally difficult to persuade them to participate in their children's. Educational outcomes are not tangible for authorities to see. Parents may not realise the significance of their contribution to education. School leaders should demonstrate that they wish to work with parents by words, actions and commitment. When parents' voices, ideas and questions are sought and heard in the context of collaboration, successful learning is attained. Parent engagement should be gazetted as a guiding principle for effective engagement. The school should brand itself as an agent of parent engagement. When parent engagement is linked to a brand, parents will be motivated to serve their children.

When parental self-efficacy improves, so will the children's. Mouton, Loop, Stievenart and Reskom (2018) assert that performance accomplishments are the strongest source of self-efficacy. Parents with high self-efficacy nurture their children more than those with low self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is not only based on

individual personalities; it is also contextually inclined. Self-efficacy means that parents will also have a chance to deal with contextual challenges.

6.6   Contextually responsive strategies

There is compelling evidence from the literature suggesting that parent engagement improves learner performance (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014; Mahuro & Hungi, 2016). However, parents in rural settings are not engaged hence the poor academic performance in rural schools compared to their urban counterparts. The non-participation of parents in rural areas is attributed to poor socioeconomic conditions and educational background. The continuous poor performance in rural schools suggests that a different leadership style is needed to deal with the challenges that hinder parental engagement. Contextually responsive leadership is the kind of leadership that seems capable of responding to the school-parents engagement challenges. Bredeson et al., (2011) define contextual responsiveness as using wisdom to respond appropriately to changing context. The dynamic nature of contexts requires active leaders who can respond effectively to changing contexts. The researcher suggests the following contextual responsive strategies for successful school-parent engagement.

Disposition as leadership practice: Disposition refers to the natural ability of a person to engage effectively in any form of social, economic and cultural activity. As much as leadership practices of setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing the instructional programme are essential, disposition is equally important. Disposition is important in every leadership endeavour because it goes beyond curriculum-related activities to community-related issues. The community issues are gender-based violence and child-headed families, among others. Leaders who can fit well into the community can change their behaviour and attitude to parents to know and understand their conditions for purposeful engagement. Principals should tap into their natural ability to diagnose the nature of rural settings. Diagnosing rural settings needs innovative minds that depend not only on knowledge and skills

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but also on intuition. Intuition is the highest level of thinking that will enable school leaders to cope and adapt to every context. Principals should change their perspectives about rural schools and begin to engage parents.

Engagements: Data has shown that most parents in rural communities are not educated and live in poor socioeconomic conditions, which affects their ability to engage in the education of their children. Nyatuka and Nyatuka (2015) believe that excellent schools can only function when parents within the community in which it is located function. Principals should develop teaching and learning programmes where parents are invited to participate. Participation should be mandatory to ensure that all parents are trained on how to support their children. Principals should raise funds to support the initiative and find former professionals to assist. The funds raised could be used to purchase learner teacher support materials and pay stipends to encourage participation.

Empowerment is critical in changing the perspective of parents about engagement. The knowledge and the skills parents receive from the programme will restore their confidence and improve their competence for engagement so that they know what to do and how to do it. Empowerment returns the power to parents for them to account for and respond to their children's educational needs. Beckman and Gallo (2015) suggest that parents should organise and empower themselves to promote education for their children.

Partnership: suggest that collaboration is an important strategy to generate creativity and innovation to improve the school's educational programme. This means that principals should be willing to work with parents. Principals should see parents as equal partners and create a welcoming environment that will assure parents of their role in their children's education. Principals should create an environment of trust, affirmation, sincerity and boldness to encourage parental participation. Stier and Kats (2015) contend that an atmosphere of trust can enhance cooperation between the school and the parents and improve school efficiency, ultimately enhancing learners' academic performance. If need be, principals should draw a partnership agreement that will hold them accountable

for any form of deviation. The partnership agreement will ensure that both parties honour their commitment to supporting the learners.

Engaging stakeholders: Data has shown that parents in rural schools are faced with situations that hinder their participation. These include unemployment, lack of infrastructure, such as water, sanitation, electricity, roads and communication. The researcher suggests that principals in a rural setting form a stakeholder initiative to assess the community's needs and present them to the local municipality as grievances. When principals act communally, municipalities will have no choice but to respond by delivering the required services.

The purpose of engaging local municipalities and the business community is to address the socioeconomic conditions of the parents for them to engage in education. When the municipality intervenes, and the conditions improve, parents will have time to focus on the education of their children. Principals should initiate these engagements rather than rely on community protests to solve education-related challenges. A principal's proactive approach is accepted as a concern for parental absence. Principals should act as agents of change, so their role extends beyond school walls into the community. Palmier and Palma (2017) point out that engaging other stakeholders is important and should be seen as an opportunity to rethink teaching and learning.

As many schools have adopted a policeman for safety and security, the researcher suggests that principals adopt social workers or life coaches for socio-psychological support to parents. The conditions in rural communities are depressing, affecting parents physically and emotionally. When parents are emotionally drained, little is expected to support their children's education. It is critical that principals respond to this need by engaging social workers to prepare parents for engagements.

6.7   CHAPTER SUMMARY

Discussion of findings about contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement have been presented in this chapter. The study has established that principals have to play their roles effectively in order to engage them successfully. The study has established that through communication, empowerment and regular meetings parents may be successfully engaged. The study has established that monitoring and support should be exercised by both school leaders and the parents. Parents and school leaders should collaborate for effective teaching and learning. Teaching and learning cannot be the responsibility of the school alone hence effective need to take place for learner achievement. The study has however, established that there are challenges that hinder successful school-parent engagement. The challenges includes, high level of illiteracy and socio-economic problems. These challenges are blocking a working relationship between the school and the parents. Due to poor working relationship, engagements between the school and the parents is limited. Lack of engagement means that learners in rural schools are exposed to teaching and learning that cannot meet their lifetime expectations. The study has however, established that contextually responsive strategies may be sought to address parental engagement challenges. The strategies for successful school-parent engagement includes engagements, partnership, empowerment and disposition of leadership practice. The next chapter explores the conclusions, summary and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1   Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the findings of this research in relation to the research questions. This chapter makes conclusions and recommendations on contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo secondary schools. The conclusions are made based on the findings of the study.

7.1.1   The role of principals in establishing school-parent engagement

Researcher had found that school leaders have a bigger role to play in the engagement process of the parents. Parents in rural areas depend on the educated to lead them. To achieve parental engagement, leaders should consider parental engagement in the developmetal agenda of the school. Researcher found that through communication, empowerment and regular meetings parents may be effectively engaged. Researcher had found that constant interaction between school leaders and parents may improve the quality of education provided to rural learners.

7.1.2   Monitoring and support

Schools in rural areas are known to be underperformers. School that happen to perform well in one year, perform badly in subsequent years. The researcher had found that inconsistency in learner achievement is caused by lack of monitoring and support. School leaders and parents have failed to monitor and support teaching and learning both at home and school. The lack of monitoring and support is attributed to lack of accountability, motivation and volunteering.

7.1.3　Challenges affecting school-parent engagement

The researcher had found that parents could not participate in the education of their children because of the challenges they face. The challenges faced by parents includes, poverty, illiteracy, time constraints and culture. The level of poverty leave parents in rural areas with no choice but to use the time and other resources they have to support their families. Education is not a priority but livelihood. The prioritisation of livelihood has hindered parental engagement in education to the detriment of learners.

7.1.4　Contextually responsive leadership strategies

The situation in rural areas that seem hopeless can be achieved through appropriate response to the needs of rural communities. The strategies needed for appropriate response to the challenges of rural areas includes, change of mind –set,partnership, engaging other stakeholders and parental self-efficacy.

7.2　Significance (contribution) of the study

Firstly, the research contributes to the body of knowledge by introducing a new and unique style of leadership which is contextually responsive. It is unique in the sense that it is adaptable in all forms of situations. It is not like contingency theory where one type of a leader is effective under one context, while ineffective under a different set of a situation. Contextually responsive leadership is not situational but appropriately respond to different context by using a mixture of skills, knowledge and dispositions.

Secondly, Contexts are dynamic and influence the process aimed at achieving the desired goals. Achieving the desired goals depends on how responsive the leader is to the changing context. One may argue that why schools in urban areas perform better than those in rural areas. A simple answer is urban context is better than rural context. Contexts are not the same. However, school leaders fail to respond to the unique context of rural

communities because to them one size fits all. This research brings with it the element of responsiveness which suggests that apart from using the skills, knowledge and dispositions, leaders need wisdom, an intuition to be effective in response to dynamic context.

Thirdly, the research empowers leaders, tapping into their inventive and innovative potential to diagnose contextual factors and deal with them successfully. For instance, parents in rural communities experience poor socioeconomic conditions and poor educational background which hinder their participation in the education of their children. These factors should be responded to in order to create an environment for parents to participate effectively in the education of their children.

Fourthly, the research brings enlightenment with regard to engagement rather than involvement. Parent involvement has been happening in rural school with little results from it. Engagement includes any parental behaviour that shows learners that parents have a vested interest in their education and encompasses behaviour at home, school and parent learner conversation. Engagement encompasses more than just school meetings but brings with it feelings of ownership of that activity which is greater than the current parent involvement. The researcher view parent engagement as a new dawn that has the potential to ignite the zeal for parents to participate in the education of their children. It is a concept that will ventilate new commitment, passion and persistent from rural parents.

Fifthly, the research brings with it the new culture which is the culture of collaboration. The school alone cannot achieve better results and reach the high expectation envisaged by all stakeholders. The research suggests a culture of collaboration should be adopted in school for better results. The findings have shown that there is lack of collaboration and cohesion in rural school. The traditional system where principals have an upper hand is still been used. The time has come that principals work in collaboration and partnership with parents.

Sixthly, the contextual factors parents face have dampened and compromised their ability to be part of the educational life of their children. This research brings with it a wealth of inputs that boost the self-efficacy of the parents. Self- efficacy is an important driver of parental participation. This research recognises contextual factors however, parents have the conviction within them that their children deserve better. This research`s aim is to preserve that conviction and ensure that there are actions behind the conviction to achieve learner performance.

Seventhly the researcher makes a contribution to the body of knowledge by suggesting a model that will ensure a successful school-parent engagement. The model is presented below as figure 2

Figure 2: Contextually responsive leadership model for successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo secondary schools
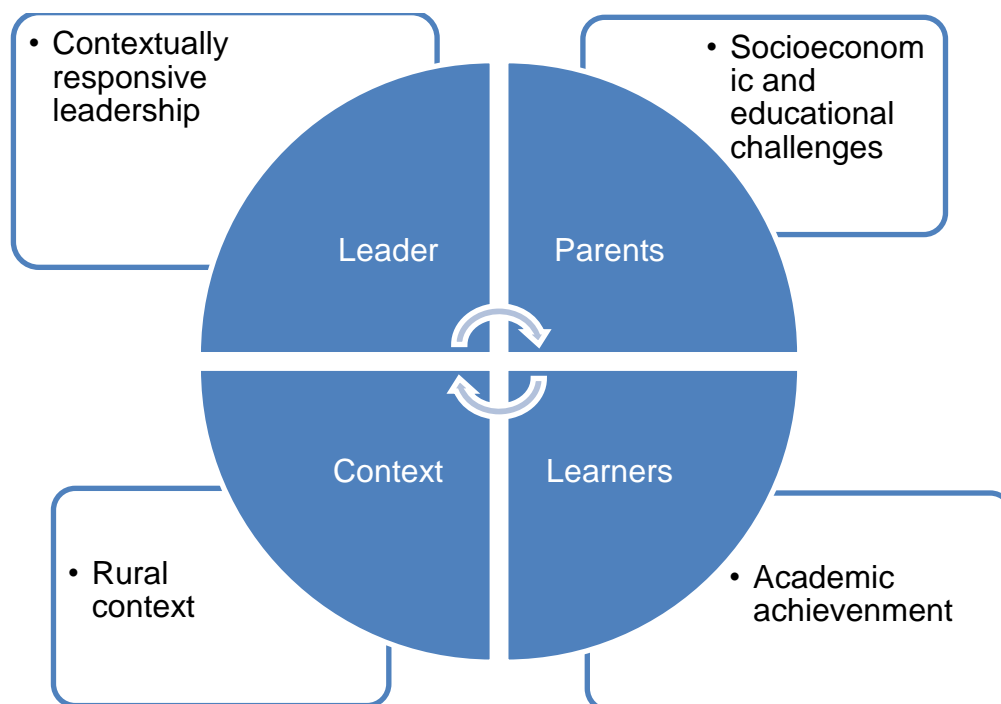
The model suggests that school leaders, parents, learners should work in collaboration to overcome challenges in rural context. The ultimate goal of the

model is to improve learner performance. However, learning and teaching in rural school is not effective due to poor human and material resources. Parents on the other hand are unable to contribute towards the education of their children because of poor socio-economic conditions and educational background which affect their ability to engage effectively. Through a contextually responsive leader, parents can work in partnership with school leaders that are able to respond appropriately to contexts and ensure that effective teaching and learning take place to achieve learner performance.

7.3 Limitations of the study

This study has two significant limitations: sample size and time frame.

7.3.1. Sample size

The researcher intended to interview 13 parents and 13 principals with five years' experience and 13 parents recommended from the SGB parent component. Some parents in the SGB were not available due to work-related commitments. The SGB, however, suggested the co-opted parents for the interviews. Principals with five years of experience were hard to find as new principals were recently appointed. However, before they were appointed, they acted in those posts for several years and accumulated vast experience that assisted me in collecting in-depth data.

7.3.2. Time frame

The time planned for data collection was two months. However, the data collection coincided with the preparatory examinations, and some principals were engaged in extra classes, even over weekends. Most of the dates and venues were rescheduled due to time constraints. Due to several postponements, the planned time for the data had to be increased. With patience, convenient times were set for the interviews.

7.4 Conclusions

One of the most important issues facing education in South African rural schools today is poor learner performance. The purpose of this study was to examine how contextually responsive leadership can establish successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo secondary schools. Based on the findings and discussions, the study makes the following conclusions:

- ❖ School leaders should create a welcoming environment in schools to welcome parents regardless of their social and economic status. This implies that school leaders should respond to the needs of rural parents by being inclusive.

- ❖ School leaders should acknowledge that there are social and economic challenges in rural communities. These challenges do not only affect the livelihood of the parents but also hinder parental engagement. School leaders should therefore accept that it is through school-parent collaboration that the challenges may be overcome

- ❖ Parental engagement is critical to learner performance. Lack of parental engagement remains the weakest link to learner performance. Various avenues like learner camps, weekend and morning classes were explored to improve learner performance especially in rural school but failed. Parent engagement should be mandatory and entrenched as a culture in rural communities. Policies may be developed in rural school were parents are made to participate in the education of their children.

- ❖ Fostering partnership between school leaders and parents is critical however, the focus should be on improving learner performance in rural schools. Learner performance should be the ultimate goal of the engagement process.

- ❖ As a result of the poor educational background of most parents in rural communities, empowerment should become a policy matter in order to enlighten the parents for effective engagement in the education of the children.

7.5 Recommendations

This study presents the following recommendations:

7.5.1. Communication was found to be the weakest link that hinders successful school-parent engagement. The gap between the school and the parents is widening due to communication breakdown. The researcher recommends that school leaders should not only rely on letters to invite parents to schools but should explore other communication strategies such as community radio stations, funerals, social Medias and churches. Places such as chiefs' palaces, where parents frequently gather, may be used to deliver important messages to the parents. The researcher further recommends that the language of communication should suit all the parents. In case the community is multilingual, different languages should be used to accommodate all the parents. A leader should show a sincere desire and willingness to work with the parents by communicating in the language well understood by the parents (Mleccrko,2013). Parents should also be exposed to different modes of communication.

7.5.2. The socio-economic conditions and the poor educational background of the parents suggest that parents lack the capacity to effectively participate in the education of their children. The researcher recommends that school leaders should initiate programmes in schools to capacitate parents. These programmes include literacy training sessions where parents will be taught how to write and read and also to read with understanding. In school meetings, principals should have an item where parents are empowered on how to assist their children at home. The curriculum management of the school should be made known to parents for parents to know how to monitor and give support their children at home. Empowering parents will increase their academic

competence, self-efficacy and initiative (Taliaferro, 2012). Empowerment will boost parent`s confidence and ignite the potential in them to support their children. Empowerment is so critical that it will make home schooling a reality. In the recent Covid-19 pandemic, learners in rural schools had to stop learning because teaching and learning rely on physical interaction between the teacher and the learner in rural schools. Due to the lockdown, it was not possible for learners to receive education. However, it was a wake-up call to fast-track the empowering of parents to mitigate deprivations brought by instances such as Covid-19 pandemic.

7.5.3. It was found that school meetings were the main source by which parents and the school may interact. However, parents do not attend meetings. The researcher recommends that schedule for meetings be developed and made known to parents in advance. The schedule should be drawn collectively to avoid setting dates that do not suit the parents. The meeting should be transparent and democratic such that parents are given the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings. When parents feel that their contributions are not valued, they distance themselves from the activities of the school. Parents should therefore be given the opportunity to add their inputs to the development of the school.

7.5.4. When rural schools underperform, nobody is held accountable for the underperformance, it is business as usual. The principal tend to shift the blame to parents while on the other hand parents blame the principals for the poor performance. Rural schools consistently underperform due to lack of accountability. The researcher recommends accountability should be mandatory. By this I mean that all stakeholders from parents to school leaders should be held accountable for poor performance. As parents stake a claim on educational and administrative rights and fulfil their responsibilities regarding the school, the better the educational efficiency of the

school will be (Kiral, 2019). Accountability is the key that can unlock the inventive and innovative potential of both leaders and parents. All stakeholders should be answerable to their own actions and decisions.

7.5.5. Motivation was seen as the driving force for successful school-parent engagement. However, it emerged from the findings that parents and school leaders are demotivated. Motivation is needed to inspire parents, principals and learners to believe in themselves. The researcher recommends that merit certificates be awarded to parents and children who excel in support, teaching and learning process. Parents who volunteer at school should be granted concession in terms of school fees, school trips and transportation. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation should be employed in rural schools. School leaders may invite motivational speakers on a quarterly basis to motivate all stakeholders for better outcomes. School leaders may also engage business owners around the community to offer bursaries to deserving learners as a form of motivation to other learners. The school may partner with experts such as social workers for emotional support to parents, school leaders and learners. When principals are motivated, they can transmit it to teachers at the same time when parents are motivated, they can transmit it to their children. Motivation has a significant contribution to the academic performance of the learners (Moneva et al., 2020).

7.5.6. Parents are willing to serve their children at school voluntarily but due to the poor living conditions in rural areas, it is difficult for parents to volunteer without getting something in return. Burtein and Court (2015) Volunteering is an act of free will (Burtein & Court, 2015) . However, conditions in rural communities do not allow free will volunteerism. The researcher recommends that school leaders should initiate projects such as gardening where parents will

volunteer while at the same time benefits from the proceeds generated from gardening.

7.5.7 Livelihood is the primary concern in rural communities due to high level of poverty. Education remains the secondary goal for rural parents. The researcher recommends that principals should organise on a regular basis sporting activities, cultural events, exhibitions, and entrepreneurial day and allow parents to sell merchandise on that particular day. These events would not only generate income for the families but will provide some level of exposure to what was happening at the school to all the community members. The school should prepare food for parents who do not have anything to offer. This kind of initiative would allow other parents to discover themselves and start to serve the school better. As a long term plan to balance livelihood and education, schools should start its own businesses e.g. Schools should establish its own businesses to manufacture their own uniform. This kind of initiatives will create employment for many parents and ultimately afford parents the opportunity to take care of education of their children.

7.5.8. The level of illiteracy is high in rural communities. Children whose parents lack education are less resourced, less confident, and tend to perform worse than those with educated parents. The researcher recommends that ABET classes be mandatory in every rural schools. Apart from ABET classes that will normally take place after hours, permanent literacy centres should be established for daily lessons for those who are not engaged during the day. When parents become literate, they will know how to support their children in teaching and learning.

7.5.9. Parents seem not to have time to engage in the education of their children. Some parents are working while others are self-employed and therefore they have little time to engage in school activities.

When parents arrived home after work, they are tired to support and monitor their children`s school work. The researcher recommends that principals should explore various avenues of engaging parents. The avenues includes the use of community radio stations, zoom meetings, conference calls, whatsApp groups may be explored to reach parents who are unable to attend school meetings. Schedule for face to face meetings should be issued in advance for parents to make proper arrangements for such meetings.

7.5.10. The culture entrenched in rural communities is that of total reliance on schools to educate their children. Parent's belief about whether their involvement will add value to their children academic performance influences their level of engagement (Jafarov, 2015). Researcher recommends that school leaders and parents should work as partners. Partnership will ensure that school leaders and parents operate at the same level and therefore no one is superior to the other. Partnership will assist in restoring the confidence of parents and ensure that participation is increased. The culture of collaboration should be cultivated to replace the master-servant culture that has dominated rural school for many years.

7.5.11. Some principals do not believe in change hence they held on to authoritative style of leadership. Principals who believe in non-consultative form of leadership have made the school environment unwelcoming. Due to the unwelcoming school environment, parents are unable to engage effectively in the education of their children. The researcher recommends that a contextually responsive leadership be adopted in rural schools to serve and represent the aspirations of rural parents. The mind-set of many parents should be transformed such that it boost their confidence, affirm them and promote their self-efficacy. Change of mind-set may not happen

overnight, researcher recommends that leadership workshops be organised for school leaders to undergo a transformation process. \

7.5.12. In the current schooling environment, schools and parents are operating in isolation. Researcher recommends that parent`s collaborative relationship with the school should be established. Collaboration between the school and the parents has a positive impact on learner`s academic achievement (Wanat, 2010). Partnership between the school and the parents will allay fears on parents to engage with school leaders because they will be engaging on an equal level.

7.5.13. Education is a societal matter and therefore all stakeholders should be engaged. The researcher recommends that schools should partner with social workers, business owners, retired professionals and pastors and include them in the programmes of the school. The SGB`s should understand their functions well and implement them to serve the interest of the learners. However, SGB`s in rural school don't know what their functions are therefore unable to execute them. SGB`S as key stakeholder should be engaged for effective governance of rural schools. School need among others water, electricity, bridges, money, emotional support and therefore all the stakeholders are relevant for the total development of the learner.

7.5.14. Parents in rural areas lack self-belief and confidence because of the contextual deficiencies they experience each day. Due to lack of self-belief, parents do not think that they can add value to the education of their children. Creating input opportunities for parents would go a long way in boosting their confidence (Jaiswal, 2011). The researcher recommends that inclusive school environment be created to accommodate all parents regardless of their status and

their cultural background. Parents should be included in the key decision making of the school as a way of empowering them.

7.5.15. The researcher makes the following recommendation for further research:

The researcher recommends that the study into contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement which was confined to secondary schools, be investigated in primary schools. Since a qualitative research methodology was used for this study, the researcher recommends that quantitative methodology be used to gather data from schools across the country.

7.5   Chapter summary

One of the most critical issues facing education in South Africa and globally is parent engagement. The purpose of this study was to examine how contextually responsive leadership can establish successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo secondary schools. There is compelling evidence indicating that parent engagement leads to learner success. This research report analysed the views of principals and parents regarding contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement. It was found that poor socioeconomic conditions and educational background, among others, deter parents from actively participating in their children's education. It was also found that principals need to create a culture of parent engagement by empowerment and partnership. The findings imply that the relationship between the school and the parents is critical to enhancing school performance.

Performance may be enhanced by partnerships between the school and the parents. The study showed that working in isolation deprives learners of the opportunity to excel, and if schools and parents work together, it will unlock and awaken the potential of learners. The study found that learner success is achievable by the interrelationship and interdependence of parents and school leaders.

Despite the challenges experienced in rural communities, parent engagement remains the critical component schools need to improve learner performance. School leaders need to lead from the front and initiate programmes that encourage parental participation. The desire, ability and willingness of the leaders to welcome and appreciate parents' contribution is critical. Parents will always be interested in the education of their children, regardless of their context. All leaders need to do is empower parents and affirm their capability to make positive inputs in their children's education. Parents need to feel their worth, and the leader's willingness to work with them will assure them of their importance in education.

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Annexure 1: Ethical Approval

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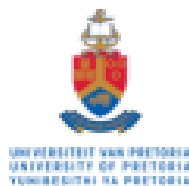
Faculty of Education

Ethics Committee

18 December 2020

Mr SM Morowane

Dear Mr SM Morowane

REFERENCE: EDU168/20

We received proof that you have met the conditions outlined. Your application is thus **approved**, and you may start with your fieldwork. The decision covers the entire research process, until completion of the study report, and not only the days that data will be collected. The approval is valid for two years for a Masters and three for Doctorate.

The approval by the Ethics Committee is subject to the following conditions being met
1. The research will be conducted as stipulated on the application form submitted to the Ethics Committee with the supporting documents.
2. Proof of how you adhered to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) policy for research must be submitted where relevant.
3. In the event that the research protocol changed for whatever reason the Ethics Committee must be notified thereof by submitting an amendment to the application (Section E), together with all the supporting documentation that will be used for data collection namely; questionnaires, interview schedules and observation schedules or any other before data can be collected. Non-compliance implies that the Committee's approval is null and void. The changes may include the following but are not limited to:

Annexure 2: Letter to the Department of Basic Education

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of education

Limpopo Department of
Education
Private Bag x9489
Polokwane
0700

Faculty of Education
Department of Education Management and Policy Studies
Groenkloof Campus
Pretoria
0002
23 November 2020

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO DO RESEARCH IN LIMFOPO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Dear Sir/ Madam

I am currently enrolled as a PhD student at the University of Pretoria and would like to ask for permission to conduct research at your school. The title of my study is *contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo*. Its purpose is to examine how school principals can establish successful school-parent engagement in rural settings with consideration given to the context in which parents and their children find themselves. As part of the study, interviews will be held with secondary school principals and parents. These interviews will take place in schools after working hours to avoid interruption of the normal teaching and learning programme. Each interview will last for approximately one hour and will be audio-recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis of the data collection from the participants.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during the course of the interview without fear or providing any reason for doing so. To avoid any possible harm and ensure privacy, your identity as well as that of your school will be protected by using pseudonyms in the place of real names. This will ensure that any information you give, including your own views on the issue of contextually responsive leadership for parental engagement, will not be linked to your name or that of your school. As part of data collection I will be using an audio recorder for the purpose of capturing the interview for subsequent transcription and data analysis. All the information obtained will be treated confidentially. For this reason, only my supervisor and I will have access to the data recorded during the interview. To further ensure the safety of the data, data will be securely stored at the university's password protected computer, as intellectual property of the University. The findings and recommendations of this study will be made available to your school in the form of a thesis on completion of this study. I would also like to request your permission to use your data, confidentially and anonymously for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria. Further research in this regard may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes.

Should you be willing to participate in this study, kindly sign the attached consent form.

....
Date: 23/11/2020
Mr Morowane SM
(Researcher)
083 965 7166
morowanessm@yahoo.com

....
Date 23/11.2020
Dr Marishane R.N
(Supervisor)
(012) 420 5513
nylon.marishane@up.ac.za

Annexure 3 : Approval letter from Department of Basic Education

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
SEKHUKHUNE EAST DISTRICT

REF: 2/2/4   Enq: MAKOLA MS   Tel: 013 231 0100

To: The Principal

FROM: DISTRICT DIRECTOR
SEKHUKHUNE EAST DISTRICT

SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

1. The above matter has refers.

    Kindly be informed that MR MOROWANE SM, PHD student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria is granted a permission to conduct a research at your school.

2. **Conditions attached to permission are:**

    - Participation is voluntary
    - Information collected will only be used for study purposes and remains confidential
    - No names should be written on questionnaire
    - Participants are free to withdraw anytime during the process

NB: DATA COLLECTION AND ADMINISTRATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE MUST BE DONE ONLY DURING BREAKS AND AFTER TEACHING HOURS

3. The District Director wishes you well as you continue to assist him.

_____   16/3/2021
MAKOLA MS   DATE
DISTRICT DIRECTOR

Subject: Permission to conduct research in Schools within Sekhukhune east District
83 Aloe Street, 2314 Extension4, Aloe Ridge West, BURGERSFORT, 1150, P/Bag X 9641, BURGERSFORT, 1150

Regards

Morowane S.M

Signature

Date: 23-11-2020

Researcher's Contact Details

Name: Morowane Sam Mokgapego

Cell: 083 965 7166

Email: morowanesam@yahoo.com

Signature

Date 23-11-2020.

Supervisor's Details

Name: Dr Nylon Marishane

Tell: 061 532 3871

Email: nylon.marishane@up.ac.za

INFORMED CONSENT FORM TO PARENT

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

I, ... (Full name) understand the information given to me and I am willing to participate in the study with the title *Contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo*. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that my identity will be protected and remain confidential.

....
Participant's signature   Date

Annexure 5 : Letter to the parents

Faculty of Education

Dear Parent

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN AN INTERVIEW FOR A RESEARCH PROJECT

My name is Mokgapego Sam Morowane and I am currently enrolled at the University of Pretoria for a PhD in Education Management, Law and Policy under the supervision of Dr Nylon Marishane. The title of my research study is: *Contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo*. The purpose of this research is to examine how contextually responsive leadership can establish successfuly school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo schools.

As part of my study, I have to collect data by interviewing parents of learners in secondary schools. For this reason, I would like to request your participation in an interview session focusing on your experiences, beliefs, perceptions of the significance of school-parent engagement for learner achievement. The interview will be held at the school and will last for approximately 30-60 minutes. In order not to interfere with school activities, the interview will be held outside school hours. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during the interview without fear or providing any reason for doing so. To avoid any possible harm and ensure privacy, your identity as well as that of your school will be protected by using pseudonyms in the place of real names. This will ensure that any information you give is not linked to your name or that of your school. As part of data collection, an audio recorder will be used during the interview for subsequent data transcription and analysis. All the information obtained during the interview will be treated with absolute confidentiality. For this reason, only my supervisor and I will have access to the data recorded during the interview.

The findings and recommendations of this study will be made available to your school in the form of a thesis upon the completion of this study. I would also like to request your permission to use data derived from the interview confidentially and anonymously for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria.

Should you be willing to participate in this study, kindly sign the attached consent form.

Faculty of Education
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

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INFORMED CONSENT FORM TO PARENT

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

I, ... (Full name) understand the information given to me and I am willing to participate in the study with the title *Contextually responsive leadership for successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo*. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that my identity will be protected and remain confidential.

....

     Participant's signature   **Date**

Annexure 6: Interview schedule for principals

Interview schedule (Principal)

RESEARCH QUESTION	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
1. How can a contextually responsive leadership establish successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo schools?	• What can you say about the relationship between your school and the parents? • What is your experience of the role of parents in the education of their children? • How do you view your role as a principal in ensuring that parents are not left out in their children's education ?
2. How do school leaders engage rural parents in student learning?	• How do you think parent engagement can influence learner achievements in rural schools? • How do you ensure that parents in your school community may be engaged given the educational level and their poor socio-economic background? • What factors should be considered for sustainable school-parent engagement?
3. What challenges do school leaders face when engaging parents in the education of their children?	• What challenges do you face in your attempt to engage parents in the education of their children? • What do you suggest can be done to overcome challenges for successful school-parent engagement?
4. What contextually responsive strategies can be suggested to ensure successful school-	• What strategies do you apply in your school to engage

	parents in their children's learning?
parent engagement in student learning?	• What change will applied strategies bring to children's learning in rural areas?

Annexure 7 : Interview schedule for parents

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (PARENTS)

RESEARCH QUESTION	RESEARCH INTERVIEW
1. How can a contextually responsive leadership establish successful school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo schools?	• How do you rate the school where your children are attending in terms of parental engagement? Why do you rate the school that way? • What contribution do you think parents can bring in improving student learning?
2. How do school leaders engage rural parents in student learning?	• Why do you think parents have not being engaged in rural schools? • Why do parents show less interest towards the education of their children in rural area than those in urban area? • What do you think can influence parents to participate in their children's learning?
3. What challenges do school leaders face when engaging parents in the education of their children	• What challenges do you encounter when attempting to engage in your children's learning? • How can encountered challenges be overcome for successful school-parent engagement? • What should be done for you to work with principals for student learning?

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4. What contextually responsive strategies can be suggested to ensure successful school-parent engagement in student learning?	• What strategies do you suggest to strengthen the relationship between you and the principal? • What support do you expect from the principal in your school for you to participate actively in the education of your children? • What role can you play to make school-parent engagement a success or achievable?

Annexure 8: Sample of data analysis

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	PRINCIPAL'S RESPONSES	PARENT'S RESPONSES	THEMES	SUB THEMES

1 How can a contextually responsive leadership establish school-parent engagement in rural Limpopo schools?	Principal B: We tried in the school policy to include parents to make sure that it allows us to summon the parents to come to school and if the parents does not come, we send the learner home to come with the parent.	Parent A: I want to believe, for any positive or vertical movement there must be stimulus. Parent I: Principals have to call parents to talk about the behaviour of their children. Principals should give advices to parents on how to assist their children.	The role of principals in establishing school-parent engagement	• Communication • Empowerment • Conducting regular interviews
2 How do school leaders engage rural parents in the education of their children?	Principals G: We have the names and contacts of all the parents in the school in our gadgets, we invite theme telephonically through SMS however, the responses as I said earlier on it is satisfactory. Principals J: I have an attendance register, when I call parents, I send out letters and all	Parent E: Parents are not invited, I am talking from experience. Parent H: You need to involve the parent, call the parent and ask them what is it that you are observing on the learner.	Monitoring and support	• Accountability • Motivation • Volunteering

	these letters, there is a caution where the parent must indicate whether he/or she will come. After issuing out letters, I make a follow-up telephonically to inform the that I have a meeting.			
3 What challenges do school leaders when engaging parents in the education of their children	Principal L: Some are single parents, being a single parent, you will always be trying to get something for the family. Parent F: There is culture of not attending meetings. It's just the culture that should be changed.	Parent B: Parent are afraid. Parent C: As parents we are negligent.	Challenges affecting school-parent engagement	• Livelihood as a primary goal • The level of illiteracy • Time constraints • Culture

4 What contextually responsive strategies can ensure successful school-parent engagement in student learning?	Principal L: we need to organise workshops so that parents are taught on what exactly is needed from them. Principal M: As a school we have part time lessons and we encourage parents to come and attend.	Parent C: We need commitment as parents to overcome the challenges. Parent A: Empowerment Accountability Stakeholder participation	Contextually responsive leadership strategies	• Change of mind-set by school leaders • A partnership between schools and parents. • Engaging other stakeholders • Parental self-efficacy