Teacher leadership for supporting learners in an Islamic school context

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS: EDUCATION MANAGEMENT, LAW AND POLICY

in the

Faculty of Education

at the

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

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AUGUST 2022

DECLARATION

I, Muhammed Javeed Ebrahim, declare that the dissertation, entitled ***Teacher leadership for supporting learners in an Islamic school context***, which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Educationis in Education Management Law and Policy 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. All citations are duly referenced.

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APPROVAL TO COMMENCE STUDY	11 March 2021
DATE OF CLEARANCE	**CERTIFICATE** 30 November 2021

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Teacher leadership for supporting learners in an Islamic school context

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank God (Allah) Almighty for giving me the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual strength to see this dissertation to completion. The endless hours of prayer assisted me. I remain grateful to my Creator.

My family had to endure long hours of my absence as I journeyed to completing this dissertation. I would like to thank my parents, my sister, and my aunt for their unwavering support during the arduous academic journey.

My heartfelt thanks goes to my supervisor, Professor R. N. Marishane. His expertise and advice on each section of my work helped to improve the quality of this dissertation. His kindness, patience, motivation, and support through different stages of my research encouraged me to continue with vigour. I have come to the end because of his sound advice which ultimately developed my research skills.

Lastly, much gratitude to my language editor, Brian Naidoo, for refining the draft document.

ABSTRACT

Teacher leadership is an essential research focus area in wealthy nations with well-established democracies. In South Africa, teacher leadership research is still emerging. The focus has been on shifting the role of the principal to more distributed forms of leadership which recognises the informal roles that teacher-leaders play including addressing contextual and cultural issues. Teacher leadership for supporting learners[1] with regard to their learning in an Islamic context does not feature in South African literature. Therefore, this study aimed to explore how teacher-leaders lead to support children's learning in an Islamic school environment. The conceptual framework underpinning this study was informed by an Islamic worldview and education priorities in a secular democracy. The study was conducted in the Pretoria West region with three private schools that catered for predominantly Muslim children. Eight teacher-leaders from these schools participated in the study. The data was generated through semi-structured interviews.

The findings revealed that teacher-leaders supported children's learning through different context-related dimensions. As God's trustees and active agents of knowledge generation and skills development, the teacher-leaders utilised their Islamic theological frame of reference to guide their work. They enacted the principles of distributed, spiritual, and servant leadership to execute their responsibilities. Additionally, they positioned themselves as communicators, motivators, monitors, confidence-builders, mentors and knowledge disseminators to have impact on the school community. Moreover, they were enabled to lead effectively and efficiently via collaboration and relationship-building processes based on trust and intrinsic motivation. Although they were constrained in their work through bureaucratic processes that affected innovation, heavy workloads that reduced time for individual attention, and incorrect techniques of interventions, teacher-leaders were resilient. The study concludes with a call to Muslim scholars and educationists to give more attention to teacher-leadership in the Islamic school context. This meeting of minds and learning exchanges can positively influence teacher-leaders' shared understandings, programmes, and professional development.

Keywords: teacher leadership, children's learning, Islamic context, religion, secular democracy

[1] In this study learners and children are used interchangeably.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CHAT	Cultural Historical Activity Theory
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
HoD	Head of Department
IPC	Islamic Propagation Centre
MKO	More Knowledgeable Other
PLC	Professional Learning Community
SMTs	School Management Teams
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

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CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The extreme and unexpected changes experienced in the 21st century are felt in different spheres of our lives. Societies must prepare citizens to respond to the rapid transformations in democracies. Education's concern is to develop high-quality outcomes that equip children with the knowledge, skills, and values essential for success in the real-world. To forge ahead to attain quality outcomes, it is important to explore the type of leadership that is effective to elicit meaningful change (Harris & Muijs, 2007; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

The approaches to leadership for quality education are contested globally. Within school leadership, the notion that leadership can only be associated with a specific position, like that of the principal, has been rejected (Gronn, 2003; Harris & Mujis, 2004). This myopic view of leadership creates the perception that authority, power, and control can only reside with the head of an institution. Hence, the traditional thinking of leadership at the school level has migrated to recognise other forms of leadership (Grant, 2019). Such efforts have resulted in a broader understanding of leadership where principals, teachers and other stakeholders collaborate to support the attainment of quality learner-outcomes.

Considering the complexity of leading in educational environments, the contextual side of teacher leadership is a necessary area to focus on. This type of leadership goes beyond classrooms and extends to the school and the broader community (Schiavo, Miller, Busey & King, 2010; Hamzah, Noor & Yusof, 2016). An evolution in practices is needed to enhance the educational outcomes in current times. For reform to be established contextually, teacher-leaders should have the ability and characteristics to lead by assisting others to make-sense of how reform efforts connect to what different parties in society can contribute in terms of building a better society - one that is underpinned by sound educational principles. This is a challenge, and to diagnose the challenge, it is imperative to focus on the transition processes from one role to another. Accordingly, there are assumptions embedded

in new roles related to teacher leadership which have to be dissected to identify and make-sense of their influence (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

In South Africa, the quest for teacher leadership research must be understood from the perspective of democratising the education system which needs more participatory leadership styles. To this end, the decentralisation of decision-making processes in teaching and learning, planning, development of goals, and financing and management of resources, become part of the school community's responsibility (Department of Education, 1996, 2008). But while a new policy in South Africa has promoted this process, participatory practices at the school leadership level are still emerging. For Grant (2019), the set of circumstances related to conditions shaping teacher leadership continues to direct South African research in both the theory and in practice; and that the education policies in teacher leadership are enabling, but it is the practice that is problematic. Hence, Grant (2019) calls for urgent enactment of enabling and visionary policies so that new futures can be imagined for education through astute teacher leadership.

Participatory practices are marginalised as they are located within an empowerment paradigm that stifles democratic participation, especially in decision-making processes. For participatory practices to proliferate, school-leaders must create enabling conditions which are supportive and trusting. Once teachers feel a sense of job-satisfaction and belonging, they are more likely to develop a sense of loyalty to go the extra mile to devote their time to support learners to higher levels of academic excellence. A critical perusal and analysis of teacher leadership in literature confirms that job-satisfaction is influenced by positive factors that promotes the holistic wellbeing and motivation of teacher-leaders (Grant, 2019). However, there are obstacles that inhibit teacher-leaders to advance to higher levels of performance; for example, it was evident that the school principal's power and control (which promote hierarchies for its survival) has a negative effect on the development of teacher leadership (Sebastian, Allensworth & Haung, 2016).

In elaborating on barriers that constrain teacher-leaders' enthusiasm and progress, John (2015) criticises how barriers limit an individual to exercise sound and innovative teacher leadership. I, as the researcher, suggest that the school as an organisation needs to be proactive in attempting to establish collaborative efforts to

enhance teacher leadership to a higher level where it can flourish to uplift the quality of education offered at the school. This does not depend on an individual within a system that makes only certain opportunities possible; hence, a whole-school collaborative approach should be agitated for to democratise the teaching-learning environment to produce quality decisions that empower all role-players.

An issue that has not received attention in teacher leadership research in South Africa is the situation prevailing at private schools promoting faith-based education. One grouping that has opted for faith-based private schooling is the Muslim community. According to Vahed (2000), in his study on Muslim identity in the first decade of democracy in South Africa, Muslims were looking to strengthen their core Islamic beliefs. This concern stemmed from the dissatisfaction with the dominance of a secular stance with religion being largely a private affair of families and communities. Islam is a way of life, and every aspect of an individual seeks alignment with Islamic beliefs, principles and values. Bearing this in mind, Islamic private schools as socialisation sites must be reconfigured to ensure generational continuities aligned to Islam.

This study fills the existing gap in the literature on teacher leadership by describing on how eight teacher-leaders supported children's learning in three Islamic schools. The teacher-leaders' understanding and influence are explored together with factors that enable and constrain their work. Since this is one of the pioneering studies for teacher leadership in the Islamic school context in South Africa, it paves the way for discourse, best practice, and meaningful productive interventions. Both robust thinking and responsive action are imperative to ground teacher leadership as a formation to foster quality education by supporting children's learning in an Islamic school context.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

This study was driven by two significant motivations – the personal, and the research imperatives where context plays a significant role. The notion of personal positionality has been unpacked in the literature as an individual's worldview, including how this has been brought into a study, and the contextual elements that influence the study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The researcher is a practising Muslim, and Islam is an organised worldview that has key principles that guide the

practices in the faith. As a male novice researcher grounded in the Islamic faith, the knowledge generation in the study was coloured by the researcher's belief that authoritative knowledge comes from divine sources. In daily life, knowledge is acquired through the interactions with the 'more knowledgeable other' (MKO). These dimensions of knowledge generation influenced the choices made in this study. The Islamic schooling context with special reference to teacher leadership and children's learning, was chosen as there is a dearth of research in this area. In this study, the researcher utilised semi-structured interviews to elicit data from the selected participants as it facilitated knowledge-generation that adhered to principles of respect, dignity, cordiality, equality, co-researching, ethics, and awareness of the positionality of the researcher and the agency of the participants.

The desire to produce evidence-for-action through research, led to this study on teacher leadership. There are 1.8 billion Muslims across the globe with Islam being one of the fastest growing religions in the world (Pew Foundation, 2017). There are Muslim majority countries and Muslim minorities in secular societies. The migration of Muslims into Western societies due to conflict, poverty and related circumstances led to a greater urgency to examine the changing nature of society – broadly, and in the education context. Accordingly, it is imperative to know more about teacher leadership in an Islamic school context. Thus this study has the potential to foster a better understanding of teacher leadership in terms of faith-based education and Islam.

The negative perception of schools for only Muslim children is also a key reason to conduct this research in a school context. Merry (2018) speaks of religious schools as places where there is indoctrination, and views schools that are segregated by religious faiths as being harmful when compared to those that are in broader society in other types of schools where mixing of faiths is encouraged to develop a holistic sense of the knowing 'the other'. While Merry (2018) acknowledges that there is sufficient justification for parents to send their children to faith-based schools, he believes that the indoctrinatory process runs counter to beliefs and practices in a secular society. This kind of perspective raises questions on the choices parents make and the perceptions of these choices by those outside the Islamic faith. Zuhdi (2018), writing from an Indonesian perspective, argues that Muslim schools are

viewed as moderate in their relationship with society and education. This has helped to promote nationalism where children understand and practise their religion. Zuhdi (2018) adds that there is the practice of Islam by the conservatives, but that Islamic education in the mainstream promotes moderate Islam - it faces challenges when Islamic education is directed towards more conservative religious doctrines. This study does not distinguish between moderate and conservative Islam as the researcher focused on teacher-leaders, their understandings, and practice. It is through this focus that Islam as a social practice emerged.

Leadership in an Islamic school context is about how divine knowledge and practices intersect with global knowledge and practices in secular democracies. When teacher-leaders assume positions in Muslim schools, they bring their beliefs with them, hence the spiritual dimension continues to influence practice (Brooks & Normore, 2018). The spheres of influence are many; for example, Islam has 73 sects related to the traditions of the faith and the different schools of thought. The researcher is a Sunni Muslim who strives to abide by the divine revelations of God in the Qur'an and follows the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad – the messenger of God. In practising the faith as a professional, the researcher experienced aspects of leadership which are not sufficiently captured in South African studies; for example, being duty-bound to the divine calling, and adherence to priorities in worldly academic education; hence, this study enlightens us on teacher-leaders and the connection of their leadership styles in both the divine and academic sense.

Another issue that motivated the researcher to focus on teacher leadership was the pressing need to Islamise the curriculum to support children's learning. The pressing need is concluded from the fact that children in Islam need strong foundations in the faith and the world that they live their daily lives in. The Islamisation of the curriculum is favoured as it allows children to grow up grounded in the faith and in the competence to be citizens in a democracy like South Africa. Hoosain (2020) examined the seminal work in Islamisation when he studied the work of the pioneer, Ali Ashraf, with reference to ideas and the contributions made to the process of Islamising education. In his exploration, Hoosain (2020) notes that Islamisation is a process of changing the Islamic education system to work according to the principles that are guided by the divine sources of the Qur'aan (the divine communication from

God) and the Sunnah (the practice of the Prophet Muhammad). The integration of Islamic education with academic education in a national context is difficult. Given the positionality that teacher-leaders have in relation to the field of practice, their roles are critical for investigation. This is particularly the case,

considering that teacher leadership is not merely about promoting educational reform for the functioning of a secular society. More importantly, it is also connected with the concern to perform a religious duty as a Muslim teacher. This study created the opportunity to move beyond Western notions of leadership as it allowed the researcher to examine a more culturally relevant concept of teacher leadership in the context of Islam.

In the South African context, Oswald and Engelbrecht (2013) and Grant (2019) all highlight the need to be context-aware when dissecting the role of leadership. This makes sense as there are several approaches in which teacher-leaders perform their work to engender reform. Since the secular response to education is not ideal for all communities, those who are followers of Islam provide some contesting perspectives which interested the researcher. Additionally, this study expands into the third wave of leadership (see the section of a brief literature review in this chapter). The third wave interrogates contextual and cultural issues regarding teacher leadership. This study seeks further clarity on such aspects, specific to a faith-based school environment. Since supporting children's learning in an Islamic context has not been sufficiently examined as an empirical study, this study attempted to fill the gap in literature.

A significant historical and contextual event that has a bearing on this study is the September 11 attacks in the USA, and their negative influence on how people perceive Muslims worldwide. According to Sachin, Pargament and Mahoney (2011), the tragic event of September 11, 2001, unleashed a variety of hate crimes, Islamophobia, hate speech, and discrimination against Muslims in the USA, and globally. Together with acts of terrorism, this situation continues to sow seeds of anti-Muslim sentiments. The actions of radical Muslims have affected the wellbeing of other Muslims. These are recorded as being fearful of becoming targets for criminal activities, uncertainties about the future, anxiety about safety, high discrimination, feeling isolated from the wider community, and fear of oppressive dynamics (Abu-Ras & Abu-Bader, 2008). Amidst the volatile situations that Muslims experience globally, they have shown resilience. One of the resilience mechanisms is the education of Muslim children to strengthen the Islamic worldview that promotes peace, unity and harmony amidst difference.

Where Muslims are in the minority, and where there is great diversity among them, there are also concerns about their integration into Western societies. Diallo (2018), writing from an Australian perspective, asserts that it is the secular liberal policies and related practices that make life difficult for Australian Muslims. Islamic schools are attacked because of the generalisations that stem from prejudicial media portrayals of Muslims. Anti-Muslim sentiments result in hate-crimes against the Muslim communities. This situation, however, has made Australian Muslims resilient in their efforts to grow an Islamic worldview that is built from key divine sources.

This study focused on teacher leadership in supporting children's learning. The brief history of Islam in South Africa (see section that follows) provides some insights on how leadership by Muslims and their concerted actions led to the growth of Islam. This made visible the agency within the Muslim community to assert itself in daily living. From the agency perspective, the generational transmission of Islam attained a high level of success because of an increasing resolve to promote the religion. Leadership in an Islamic school is important for Muslims to grow their faith by paying attention to children's learning. This line of thinking is best understood from the perspective of Islam being a way of life and not just religious acts of worship on specific days of the week.

Many Muslims strive to be God-conscious by paying attention to the principles for enriching the soul, the body, and the mind. This is a departure from secular education which excludes education of the soul. For religions from an organised worldview, such an omission is detrimental to the education of the new generation. In this broad context, a study on teacher leadership was essential. It draws attention to how teacher leadership is interpreted and enacted in schools with a strong Islamic culture.

1.3 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

A brief historical context which informed this study was essential to include in this research. It provides the foundation by presenting reasons for Muslims in South Africa being assertive in establishing their education system to be grounded in Islam. The following sub-sections describe how Muslims as a minority group tried to make their religion and cultural lives matter in the South African context.

1.3.1 Colonisation and Islam

An examination of the early history of Islam in South Africa features in the work of Mahida (1998) who locates the arrival of the first Muslims as practitioners of the faith in the Cape (South Africa). This grouping suited the colonising intentions set by the Dutch East India Company. The first Muslims in South Africa came from Indonesia in 1658. They were used to fulfil the Dutch settlers' labour needs, among others. When it came to the practice of Islam, the faith was regarded as a private matter and efforts were directed to stifle it to reduce the competition with alternative religions like Christianity. However, the arrival of more Muslim 'labourers' in 1667 saw an increase in the Muslim population.

The growth of Muslims amidst political, economic and social justice issues led to some critical developments for Islam. Mahida (1998) states that influential leaders using their memory made written copies of the Qur'aan (the holy book in Islam) available to Muslim communities in the Cape. Imam Abdullah ibn Kadi Abdus Salaam (also known as Tuan Guru) was influential in the Qur'aan project and the building of mosques. Other leaders became involved in religious affairs, Islamic education, and missionary work in a very constrained environment. Over time, this population became known as the 'Cape Malays'.

The growth of Islam beyond the Cape was started through the labour crisis experienced by the British. In 1860 'indentured' labourers arrived in Natal to work in the sugar industry (Terreblanche, 2002). Muslims and Hindus were part of this grouping that came from India. Badsha Peer was an influential leader who practised 'Sufism' (a mystical dimension of Islam). The Indian Muslims expanded their labour beyond the indentured labour opportunities and became hawkers and traders. The merchant class Muslims arrived from 1869 onwards (Vahed, 2002, 2003). Wealthy individuals and scholars set up Islamic education, events, and councils to keep Islam generationally strong. In the 1900s, there were community efforts to promote Islamic education to be taught by the elderly in private homes, and in mosques. Later, there emerged a number of state-aided schools with limited subsidies (Vahed, 2000).

1.3.2 Apartheid and Community Efforts to Grow Islam

During the apartheid era, the significant efforts to grow Islam in a Muslim minority context came from community leaders. Wealthy business-people, for example, from the Moolla and Motala families, provided leadership for promoting education in Muslim communities. These individuals initiated trusts to generate income to build schools for Muslim children (Mahida, 1993). Efforts such as these were problematic, not only because of brutal discriminatory policies and laws, but also intense prejudice from the white communities, especially concerning the location of 'non-white' schools. For example, if building a school was proposed, and it was in close proximity to the borders of white areas, there was objection which related partly to practices unfamiliar to the white community; for example, the *Adhan* (the call to prayer) which was viewed by Europeans as a public disturbance. Despite the challenges, three state-aided schools were built in Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal): Orient Islamic, South Coast Madrasa, and Anjuman Islamic. These schools offered a combined religious and secular education for some Muslim children. The majority, however, were taught by elders, community members offering Madrasa classes in their homes, and later mosques that had religious education teaching facilities.

1.3.3 Post-apartheid and the Growth of Schools for Muslim Children

In 1994, the turn to democracy raised questions about the place of religion in South African society. This issue was important to consider, considering the dominating influence of Christianity in South African society and its impact on the education system. The *South African Constitution* (1996) guarantees religious freedoms in a secular democracy. Diversity is also respected and hence inter-faith structures exist for dialogue and democratic practices.

However, there are several issues that are noted as concerns for religious freedoms. These concerns can be understood in terms of the choices that informed the final selection concerning aspects of religion in law. Rasool (2004) outlines four choices that were available at the time of the designing of the *RSA Constitution* (1996). The first choice was atheism which was unsuitable as it may have created a hostile environment that would have been counter-productive to the ideals that a democratic state was aiming at. The second choice was to create a theocratic state, but considering the diversity that exists in South African society, this choice would have

given power to some, while marginalising others; hence, it was unsuitable for an inclusive society. The third choice was to opt for a secular society and make religion a private affair of the family, but for this to succeed there must be public tolerance. This choice was expanded to include the right to resources from the state; for example, land for religious institutions and media space on public television - this is the choice that was implemented. The fourth choice did not gain traction, but according to Rasool (2004), this choice would have been more appropriate for thinking critically about the new role of religions in building South Africa as a democratic society. New roles and responsibilities could have emerged, but this was not given a chance. In other words, religious activism could have been further developed if this choice was given more prominence.

Further, Moosa (1991) makes a pertinent point to consider in terms of research involving religious discourse when he noted that in the build-up to the development of the *Constitution* (RSA, 1996), religion and law were positioned as opposing entities as the interconnections between them were difficult to establish. Tension in the *Constitution* emanated from the dualism of religion as belief, and religion as practice. When religion is respected as belief, then individuals can express their pious intentions freely. Religious freedom must allow for freedom of expression. Regarding religion as practice, the issue was that practice tends to lean towards secular values that clash with religions such as Islam (Moosa, 1991).

On the issue of religious liberties, Mokhoathi and Rembe (2017) contend that this is a blurry point in the *Constitution* as there is no proper direction and clarification on this topic. Religious liberties are merely referred to in terms of freedom of religious thought, opinions, beliefs and conscience, but the laws that alert individuals to infringements are omitted. Moreover, the boundaries are not clear should there be a violation of people's rights. In contemporary times, this alert is important considering the abuses perpetrated against some religious organisations and their members.

The *Constitution's* discourse on strengths and areas of contention, has to be understood in the context of the populations it serves. In post-apartheid South Africa, and in 2010 specifically, the Pew Centre (2011) estimated a population of 737,000, which was 1.5 % of the total population. A concerning aspect was that the indicator of religion was not included in the SA census statistics. This implies that this area of

significance was marginalised in the data collection process. Currently, it is estimated that approximately three million Muslims are living in South Africa who are mainly of Indian and Malay descent. There are also African Muslims, amongst them is the Zanzibari population which constitutes a small percentage of the broader Muslim community of Durban.

Also, African Muslims are found in large former townships. Fakude (2001), in his study regarding Muslims in South Africa (specifically in the townships), noted that places like Soweto have a Muslim presence. He explains that the Muslim population of the suburb of Dlamini built a mosque in the early eighties. In its various stages of completion, this place of worship became a hub to grow Islam amongst black South Africans. Outsiders, as well as insiders, started the propagation work in the township. The outsiders were from Malawi and Mozambique. Inter-marriages led to the growth of the religion. There were also concerted efforts by local Muslim communities to spread Islam to the broader population of South Africa. The Islamic Propagation Centre (IPC) is an example of an organisation that directed its efforts to invite individuals to Islam.

Vahed (2000) outlines the changes Muslims experienced in the democratic South Africa by describing how Muslims felt the need to strengthen their responses to Islam as a way of life in a new democracy. These developments can be understood by considering how the African National Congress (ANC) interpreted the state's role in a secular democracy. Thus, Muslims needed to be strong to allow for Islam to flourish.

To ground Islam firmly in democratic South Africa, Vahed (2000) asserts that education had to be reclaimed because public schools were sidelining religious education; hence, parents and community leaders were concerned about the quality of the education for the new generation of Muslims. The practice of children attending public schools, and then Madrasa in the afternoon, was viewed as being inadequate and tedious. This choice was strong amongst working-class Muslim families who were interested in more integrated models of education for their children. This concern led to the mushrooming of Muslim private schools, some of which functioned as state-aided schools in the past. The curriculum in these schools embraces the state curriculum and Islamic education in parallel and somewhat

integrated ways. To date, efforts continue to Islamise the curriculum for basic education.

Considering the above, education must be understood in the context of schools for Muslim children as an expanding phenomenon across the globe. Shah (2012) states that the Muslim diaspora was affected by several political, religious and economic changes which led to the need to focus on the identity that the faith had on offer. Shah (2012) mentions that where Muslims existed as a minority, there emanated a move towards reviving and making visible the Islamic identity. Schools for Muslim children hence mushroomed not only for identity-building in Muslim minority contexts, but also to challenge narrow beliefs related to faith and race, as well as disabling power relations.

Tinker and Swart (2012) highlight the push for in-group unity among Muslims in Britain which exposed narrow conceptualisations of Muslim identity based on essentialism. In this study by Tinker and Swart (2012), stakeholder interviews were conducted to establish how and why there was a convergence toward collective Muslim identities; and the findings revealed that setting up schools for Muslim children was done to protect Muslim children from having their identities eroded. These identities as a collective unearthed multiple identities converging to advance interests in particular conditions that made it necessary to be recognised as a group. It is also interesting to note that the mushrooming of schools for Muslim children is not just about identities, it is also about a vast amount of advocacy done worldwide to present alternative images of radical Islam. Since schools were places for the socialisation of a new generation, the public secular school was the only structure for basic education, which prompted faith-based education to become solely a private undertaking. The home is not always conducive to affording opportunities to develop faith-based education.

Criticisms have also been levelled at the mono-religious independent schools in the new South Africa - Muslim private schools are no exception. Davids (2014) explored Muslim schools in post-apartheid South Africa, and posed a question to allow for critical-thinking about whether the Muslim school configuration has continuity with an apartheid past. Like Vahed (2000), he shows the dissatisfaction of the Muslim community with public schools and their operations for secular outcomes. There is

policy support for independent schools in the *South African Schools Act of 1996*, hence Muslim communities have exercised their rights to be guided by the policy to align education for their children to their religion, and to co-exist with other education configurations in a secular democracy. Davids (2014) asserts that despite the harmonising efforts to co-exist, there are concerns that Muslim schools in South Africa are working along racial lines as they cater mostly for Coloured and Indian Muslims. Schools for Muslim children present a paradox. On the one hand, mono-religious schools show the potential to expand democratic processes; on the other hand, they sometimes present women in stereotypical ways. This paradox leads Davids (2014) to conclude that the empowerment agenda is threatened. However, what must be remembered is that different worldviews are being used to judge what is acceptable, and what is not. These views show contrasting perspectives.

1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study's exploration originates from three sources of contention.

Firstly, the researcher's experience of working in an Islamic school context has raised concerns for leadership in general, and teacher leadership primarily. In the main, there is a lack of evidence to assist in the development of teacher leadership when both the divine calling and the educational outcomes for citizenship development are prioritised.

Secondly, research in the South African context is skewed towards mainstream schools and not faith-based schools, especially schools catering for Muslim children who are in the minority. The specific contexts as noted by Oswald and Engelbrecht (2013), and the religious practices (Yasin & Jani, 2013), are important aspects to research to gain an informed perspective on teacher leadership.

Thirdly, the growing Muslim population of 1.8 billion globally (Pew Foundation, 2017) makes it imperative to focus on the knowledge-generation aspect to support learners by focusing on children's learning in an Islamic context. Teacher leadership is crucial in advancing research agendas to contribute to better learning outcomes and understanding of how societies ready their children for specific purposes.

In summary, the problem relating to the lack of evidence for schools in the Islamic context concerning teacher leadership, has skewed the teacher leadership focus. This, together with the international concerns on Muslim children's learning (with special reference to teacher leadership) was the main issue which motivated this research journey.

1.5 RESEARCH AIM, OBJECTIVES, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.5.1 Research Aim

This study aimed to examine how teacher-leaders lead to support learners/children's learning in an Islamic school context.

1.5.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

1.5.2.1 Explore how teacher-leaders *understand* their leadership roles in order to support children's learning in an Islamic school context;

1.5.2.2 Establish how teacher-leaders exert their *influence* to support children's learning in an Islamic school context;

1.5.2.3 Examine *enabling and constraining factors* that teacher-leaders experience when supporting children's learning in an Islamic school context; and

1.5.2.4 Suggest *intervention* strategies to enhance teacher leadership to support children's learning in an Islamic school context.

1.5.3 Main Research Question

How do teacher-leaders lead to support learners/children's learning in an Islamic school context?

1.5.4 Secondary Research Questions

The following secondary research questions emanate from the main research question:

1.5.4.1 How do teacher-leaders *understand* their leadership roles to support children in an Islamic school context?

1.5.4.2 How do teacher-leaders exert *influence* to support children's learning in an Islamic school context?

1.5.4.3 What are the *enabling and constraining factors* that teacher-leaders encounter when supporting children's learning in an Islamic school context?

1.5.4.4 What intervention strategies can be implemented to improve teacher leadership to support children's learning in an Islamic school context?

1.6. AN OVERVIEW OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

This section is an outline of teacher leadership research and should be read in conjunction with Chapter 2. Understanding teacher-leaders and how they lead, has been a critical area in research in developed countries with well-established democracies which include the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), Australia, and Canada. Aligned to the topic of this study, York-Barr and Duke's (2004) review reveal a host of themes related to teachers as leaders. Although the qualitative studies which were reviewed were limited in nature, they covered diverse topics such as the different facets of the practice of teacher leadership, the characteristics of teacher-leaders, and the conditions that enable and constrain teacher leadership. However, at the time they were writing, York-Barr and Duke (2004) advised that more incisive research should be conducted to enhance the understanding of the capacity related to a specific organisation, conceptualisations of professionalism, relationship-building to improve instruction, and children's learning loops. From surveying the literature, it was apparent that the themes above, motivated a host of research endeavours on teacher leadership (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

As previously indicated, in South Africa, teacher leadership literature is still emerging (Grant, 2019). Considering the necessity to advance sound knowledge-generation, the section that follows presents the concept of teacher leadership, how teachers lead, their support for children's learning, and factors that constrain and enable leadership. (This is just a brief discussion that is more comprehensive in the next chapter).

1.6.1 The Changing Concept of Teacher Leadership

The studies by Wenner and Campbell (2017) and Grant (2019) focus on the contested nature of the concept of teacher leadership. Teacher leadership falls under many themes in research; hence, it is not easy to unpack what the concept means. The study of waves of research assisted to dissect the meaning and the changes of the concept over time. Hence, the 'wave exploration' of the concept was necessary for this study. It provided the location of teacher-leaders and facilitated finding similarities, tensions, and differences in teacher leadership in the Islamic schooling context.

Silva, Gimbert and Nolan (2000) identified three waves of studies that contribute to understanding the concept of teacher leadership. The *first wave* in the early 1990s (Wasley, 1991) describes teachers' formal roles and duties aligned to administration as the key emphasis was to ensure that the schooling system was working optimally. The focus fell on how efficiently teachers performed as heads of departments and managers to meet the desired schooling outcomes. The *second wave* focused on teachers' performance as leaders concerning teaching, curriculum, professional development, and supporting the mentoring and coaching of novice teachers. The *third wave* has a greater focus on reform and empowerment, especially on how to improve teaching and learning performance. Related to this, is the concern of how the school culture can evolve to allow collaboration and lifelong learning where teachers position themselves as agents of change who enact progressive characteristics to reform the existing school culture. Literature confirms that this means working inside classrooms and outside the broader school context where various stakeholders are involved (Ash & Persall, 2000). This study is located within the third wave of understanding teacher leadership since teacher-leaders are viewed as agents performing their duties to enhance children's learning in an Islamic school context.

Where reforms seek to unite the school and community, then teacher leadership must expand its focus to advance the enhancement of community and societal outcomes (Crowther, Kaagen, Ferguson & Hann, 2002; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Another way of looking at the concept of *teacher leadership,* originates from the moral dimension aspect (Fullan,1993). From this moral perspective of teacher

leadership, lifelong teaching aspects, knowledge of the instructional context, and working collaboratively for reform are connected to strong moral links for children's education. Davidson and Hughes (2020) emphasise the moral and ethical dimensions of leadership which reflect on how actions (e.g. values, ethics, respect, fairness, and equality) that promote quality learning from a character-building perspective, is possible.

In South Africa, early studies in teacher leadership were small-scale in nature, and located in a qualitative research paradigm (Gumede, 2011; Ntuzela, 2008; Rajagopaul, 2007). These studies exposed a lack of familiarity with the teacher leadership concept amongst school leaders; however, this situation is changing. Mikelle and Makhalemele (2020) show that teacher leadership should be examined from an agency perspective. Mikelle and Makhalemele (2020) refer to the work of Giddens (1984, 2013) to caution that one is not free to do as one pleases but that there are structures that place restrictions on what is possible. Hence, we should look at agents influencing the structure, and the structure creating certain possibilities for action.

In this study, teacher leadership was viewed as a social practice with multiple avenues for action inside and outside classrooms. The study showed that hybrid teacher leadership came into being through the responsibility for growing the faith in a secular democracy.

1.6.2 How Teachers Lead

Akert and Martin (2012) explain that understanding how teachers lead can be explored through investigating their roles. According to Cooper, Stranulis, Brondyk, Hamilton, Macaluso and Meier (2016), the roles are complex and linked to the type of schools studied, and the type of research done. When examining the relevant literature, teacher leadership is linked to fostering educational change. To stimulate this change, Harris and Jones (2019) suggest that it is important to look at three aspects: firstly, teacher leadership is not a position of influence; secondly, it transcends the classroom to participate in practices that bring about changes, implying going the extra mile to raise learning to a higher level; thirdly, it is about encouraging quality learning in the classroom and outside through enabling the practice of others to make a difference in learning. As agents, teacher-leaders act as

initiators of change in the school and related systems. To effect change, teacher-leaders must work industriously, intentionally and collaboratively in learning environments (Lieberman, Campbell, & Yashkina, 2017; Harris, Jones & Huffman, 2017).

In addition to departmental heads (DH) and managers with formal roles, there is the concept of the *master teacher*, a tier of leadership introduced to improve the quality of education in schools. In South Africa, for example, the concept of master teacher was introduced, but suffered many challenges. These teachers were selected because of their years of instructional experience; hence, they had to offer support to novice teachers and entrench new curriculum changes. Such teachers lead when inducting new colleagues into professional practice in their probation years and beyond. Accordingly, they received financial rewards for a horizontal level of promotion which was welcomed, but their significance as leaders has not received much attention of late.

Several models show how teachers lead. In South Africa, the work of Grant (2006, 2008, 2012) has been influential in developing a model of teacher leadership extracted from relevant research studies which indicate that teacher leadership can be understood in four zones over a five-year period (Grant, 2006, 2008, 2012). These zones include the classroom, working with others outside the classroom, in curricular and extracurricular activities, outside the classroom in whole school development, and beyond the school into the community.

However, none of the South African studies focused on how teachers lead children's learning in an Islamic school context. Neither has their roles, responsibilities and models in which they operate been the centre of research. Hence, this study attempted to fill the gap in this field of research.

1.6.3 Teacher Leadership and Supporting Children's Learning

This study clarified the multiple ways in which teacher-leaders lead to support children's learning. As such, it is important to note the different dimensions of support needed to ensure that learning occurs significantly. School leaders, including teacher-leaders, must be mindful of these dimensions. Leithwood, Sun and Schumacker (2020) studied school leadership and the four pathways model, which

has implications for children's learning: firstly, leadership practices must focus on the *rational path* which is when attention to instructional practices is important; secondly, the *emotional path* which highlights teacher-efficacy, trust, and building relationships; thirdly, the school is an organisation, hence the *organisational path* is important to consider; and lastly the path that examines the *educational and cultural* context is vital. Liethwood, Sun and Schumacker (2020) applied this four-path model to measure how the school's leadership influences children's learning. The findings indicate a complex relationship between the four paths and their elements. For this study, the four-path model was beneficial in gauging the quality of schooling from an Islamic perspective.

Additionally, supporting children's learning in an Islamic context generates different meanings regarding the 4-pathway-model. Teacher-leaders must position themselves as trustees of God (see Chapter 2 for elaboration). They must use the divine and acquired resources to shape children's learning. According to Yain and Jani (2013), emphasis should be on three *'Ts'* - *tarbiyah* (nurturance), the *ta'dhib* (moral education) and the *talim* (instruction which focuses on both imparting and receiving knowledge). Teacher-leaders are responsible for ensuring that they lead with a conviction to elicit positive outcomes in the afterlife, and in this worldly life. This study reveals that teacher-leaders understood their leadership in line with the calling of the faith.

1.6.4 Factors Enabling and Constraining Teacher Leadership

York-Barr and Duke (2004) explain factors enabling and constraining teacher leadership in their study. Three factors are highlighted in this overview to provide insights into the critical ones.

Firstly, the *school culture and context* is a factor that influences how teacher leadership is developed where the school is amenable to facilitating lifelong learning, inquiry into practice, and reflections such that teachers are encouraged to share their expertise and ideas. Moreover, the focus on collaboration helps teams develop, engage in shared understandings, and participate in decision-making. Where this is not forthcoming, it implies that there is no shared understanding to help teachers with their leadership, there are fewer opportunities for teacher leadership, and teachers are considered mere followers of the curriculum and not agents of change.

Secondly, the roles and relationships influence the growth of teacher leadership (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). There is a need to recognise and value teachers as leaders with expertise for such relationships to develop. Sound quality relationships are bound to occur if there is trust, and when the teacher-leader's work is perceived as valuable to teachers and the broader community. Teachers need to be an integral part of the process of choosing their leaders, in addition to understanding role changes to help them enhance their practice.

Thirdly, the structures set up to support the roles of the teacher-leaders have to be comprehensive and solid. They need to build their leadership in collaboration with stakeholders who would appreciate their performance. Additionally, they need the freedom and space to lead as agents of change such that they have access to resources and sufficient time to boost teacher leadership to higher levels. However, teacher leadership is exceedingly difficult if principals are unwilling to devolve their power and change their authoritarian leadership style to one that is more democratic.

In the South African democratic context, the restrictive characterisation of power residing at the top echelons of institutions, is quite important to consider. Grant (2019) asserts that the central nature of power and control in the schooling system is one of the most critical factors limiting teacher leadership development. The limitation can be attributed to the fact that power and authority lie in the hands of principals and school management teams (SMTs). The authoritarian approach by the principal (Lawrence, 2010) and the SMTs (Jasson, 2010) has been noted in South African studies where the top-down approach of power-dynamics is strong; but this is bound to have a negative impact on teachers. The quest for quality education in South Africa is obstructed by centralised powers of control that feature strongly – this has created a great distrust in teachers.

This study showed the enabling factors and the constraining factors in the development of teacher-leaders. The positive factors are meaningful in the Islamic context for promoting quality education.

1.7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is informed by a conceptual framework that considers the context of the study. In the Islamic worldview, the teacher-leader and hybrid leaders form part of

the framework which is detailed in Chapter 2. The focus on teacher-leaders' support for children's learning was explored from two worldviews. Since a worldview consists of a person's fundamental beliefs, it is informed by a system that engenders ideas of what to know, how to be, what to do, and how to feel (Abdullah & Nadvi, 2011). Children's learning is critical for citizenship development, and schools are used as institutions for advancing their learning such that children are afforded equitable and quality education to become active and responsible adult members of society. From an economic perspective, this means that they are regarded as human capital that will provide labour for society to progress. Hence, the citizenship worldview with a human capital focus was inadequate to support children's learning in an Islamic context. Then followed studies which also looked at the Islamic worldview as an organised philosophy around faith. Al Attas (1980) notes that the Islamic worldview focuses on two spheres – the worldly life and the afterlife - which influence all actions prevalent in education and beyond. In this study, the concept of a worldview is explained as the integration of forces that shape Islam as a way of life. Holism, instead of the separation of the worldly and afterlife, is the goal. This study values the holistic concept of an Islamic worldview which includes the goal of citizenship and human capital development.

Accordingly, this study which embraces the concept of the teacher as an agent who is regarded as the *Kalifah* – an agent or trustee of God (Tambak, Amril & Sukenti, 2021) emphasises that great care should be exercised when they nurture children's consciousness of God in their lives. They must use the divine sources to best develop learning opportunities that are in keeping with the holistic worldview. Regarding leadership, this study emphasised the influences of spiritual, servant, and distributed leadership (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013; Greenleaf 1977; Grant, 2019). The spiritual dimension to lead comes from the Islamic faith which is a powerful force that guides teacher-leaders to provide quality teaching-learning opportunities. The teacher-leaders in this study were immersed in servant leadership as they followed the teachings of Islam in their work. Distributed leadership means collaboration beyond the role of the principal and middle managers - this was evident in the work of the teacher-leaders.

These three influential teacher leadership approaches created a hybrid leadership style (Margolis, 2012; Jacques, Weber, Bosso & Olson, 2016) in and outside the classroom which was grounded in the holistic Islamic worldview. However, this direction was not without tensions as schools for Muslim children are not homogenous. Teacher-leaders inevitably face many challenges such as the unrealistic demands and the intricate work-streams of the teacher-leaders.

1.8 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The conceptual framework described above, pointed to the importance of meaning-making; hence, the interpretivist paradigm was suitable due to its sensitivity to viewing people as agents who are intentional in their actions (Yin, 2014). Social reality comes to life when people interact with each other, and with their environments (Maree, 2016). A qualitative approach complemented the interpretivist paradigm since the human and meaning-making elements are strong in qualitative research. Creswell (2014) states that the added value of the qualitative approach is that it happens in the natural setting of the participants, instead of a laboratory setting. In this study, the non-numerical data was needed to understand the way in which teacher-leaders were interpreting their work of supporting children's learning which allowed for insights into the experiences and relationships of participants involved in this research project (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbon, 2015).

The case study design complemented the qualitative approach. Yazan's (2015) analysis of case study designs showed that Merriam's (1998) approach was most suitable for this study as it draws attention to boundaries. In this study, teacher leadership in the three schools formed multiple cases which were confined to the Islamic context to support children's learning. The multiple cases within the bounded context, were beneficial for this exploratory study.

The study was conducted in the Pretoria West region which has a large population of Muslims. It consisted of suburbs like Laudium, Claudius, Erasmia and Itireleng which cater for the needs of Muslims as there are mosques, *halaal* eating outlets, Islamic clothing stores, and spice shops in the Moroccan, Indian, Pakistani, Somali, Nigerian, and Malawian sections of communities. There are public schools in these areas including several schools for Muslim children as there appeared to be a growing need for Islamic education.

The participants in the study were chosen via purposive sampling. According to Sharma (2017), this type of sampling allows the researcher to use relevant criteria to choose information-rich participants for the study. Three Muslim schools in Pretoria West participated in the study. They were selected because they were progressive and had some form of teacher leadership in place. A total of eight participants were selected for this study. They were chosen for their main and supportive roles in the academic and religious studies arena. Convenience sampling (Etikan, Musa & Al Kassim, 2016) was also suitable for this study as research sites were chosen according to accessibility to the researcher and the participants.

Data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews which allow researchers to view the world through the participants' eyes (Maree, 2016). Adhabi and Anozie (2017) distinguish three interview types: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. For this study, the structured interview would have been too rigid. The unstructured interview would have been *ad hoc* in nature but this would have been difficult to implement considering that the researcher is still a novice. Hence, the semi-structured interview technique was chosen as being appropriate. The interviews were conducted using broad themes guided by the study's aim and research questions. This approach helped to effect probing, elaboration, and clarifications, where relevant.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach was adapted for this study's analysis of data. There are six phases of the thematic analysis approach which allowed for familiarisation with the data to produce themes for the final report. In this study, the data was transcribed verbatim from audio-recordings, after which it was read and re-read for sense-making. This engagement led to using the research questions as pre-identified themes. The units of meaning for these pre-identified themes were clustered to find patterns. It was then organised into themes to facilitate the analysis of all collected information from the participants. The following themes emerged (also presented in Chapter 4):

- Teacher-leaders' understanding of their leadership in supporting children's learning in an Islamic school context;
- Teacher-leaders' exerting influence to support children's learning
- Enabling factors for teacher leadership;

- Constraining factors for teacher leadership; and
- Interventions to improve teacher leadership for supporting children's learning.

The trustworthiness of this study was designed using the advice of Lorelli, Nowell, Norris, White and Nancy (2017) who recommend that qualitative researchers must explain the data analysis procedures, and give a description of the research process. This aspect is covered in the methodology chapter (3). Member checks were conducted for validity and authentication of data. This was done after transcription of all data; it was then shared with the participants for verification. Arising from this process, minor adjustments were made to the transcripts as one participant asked for a sentence to be omitted from the transcript. The researcher then proceeded to using the data for interpretation and analysis after the member checks. In the methodology chapter (3), the research process also included the social dynamics experienced in the research process as the researcher was an insider guiding those who would want to undertake teacher leadership research in an Islamic context.

The ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the University of Pretoria. Once this was granted, the three school boards were approached for their consent to access sites and relevant personnel. There was some outstanding information that was needed by the School Governing Body (SGB). The board members, however, were amenable to the study commencing after the information was provided. The principals in all schools gave permission for the study. They were interested in knowing more about teacher leadership. The teachers were also willing to share their thoughts and experiences of leadership as they were excited that a study of this nature was taking place. Voluntary participation went smoothly for this study. All participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity (via pseudonyms) in terms of their identity and provision of information.

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study fills the gap in the literature on teacher leadership to support children's learning in an Islamic context. From a broad perspective, this study departs from the negativity that Muslims receive in the media as it presents a model of private school religious education which adds a tier of leadership to support children's learning for

harmonious living in a democratic society. In this regard, ‘clashes’ between the Islamic and secular worldviews are expected.

The study also contributes to our understanding of how the teacher-leaders lead from a theological perspective in formal and informal ways, both inside and outside classrooms. The teacher-leaders displayed acts of agency inspired by the divine Islamic calling, and the worldly citizenship development obligation. For Muslims, these are not separate acts. The ideal integration is sought as many forces have to be engaged.

Further, this study is significant to the South African Basic Education Department (RSA, DBE) in the sense that it allows for critical-thinking on the issues that are specific to faith-based schools. The Association of Muslim Schools will also find this study valuable. Since the traditional thinking about leadership in terms of the role of the principal and middle management has been extended to teacher-leaders in this study, more thought and action should be directed to how Islamic scholars and educationists think about teacher leadership, and how this concept can be mobilised for action in schools with an Islamic ethos.

1.10 LIMITATIONS

This study was a small-scale study conducted in a specific context. In planning and conducting this study, the population of Muslim teacher-leaders was not determined. The focus of the study was not on generalisation, but rather on the exploration to understand the key issues in detail. Hence, the sample comprised only three schools and eight teacher-leaders. It was also necessary to keep the study manageable because of time-constraints and the lack of financial resources.

1.11 CHAPTER LAYOUT

Chapter 1: This chapter provided the orientation, the rationale to the study, followed by a brief historical background. Also an overview of the literature review was presented on the changing concept of teacher leadership. Next, the aims, research questions and objectives related to the exploration of how teacher-leaders support children’s learning in an Islamic school context, were described. Lastly, the conceptual framework and the limitations of the study were outlined.

Chapter 2: There were two parts to this chapter: the conceptual framework and the literature review. Also, the two-fold understanding of the concept of the teacher-leader an agent acting as a trustee of God and an agent promoting citizenship development, was discussed. Building on Chapter 1, the literature review concentrated on different facets of teacher leadership including the key Islamic concepts. Lastly, the interventions were discussed.

Chapter 3: This chapter explained the research design and methodology. Considering the importance of meaning-making in this study, the interpretivist paradigm provided key ideas. The three schools in the study were explored as multiple cases within the bounded setting of the Islamic school context. Data was produced through semi-structured interviews that provided the flexibility the study needed. An adaptation of the thematic content analysis approach was used to make-sense of the data. Lastly, trustworthiness and the ethical considerations were explained.

Chapter 4: This chapter presented the findings and the discussion. The findings revealed the different context-based aspects that shed light on how teacher-leaders were supporting children's learning in an Islamic school context. The study described how teacher leaders accepted multiple roles to fulfil their duties to support children's learning. Collaboration and interventions which related to professional development for both the principal and the teacher-leaders, were featured as being important.

Chapter 5: This concluding chapter discussed the findings, conclusions and outlined the recommendations. The chapter set the study in its context by presenting a summary of Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4. Suggestions for future research were included as there are several themes that still need to be explored to build contextual understandings of teacher leadership in an Islamic school context.

1.12 SUMMARY

The aim of this chapter was to provide an orientation to the study through a brief discussion of several key points. At the outset, it was made clear that teacher leadership research is not straight-forward; it is complex and requires contextual understandings. Both these aspects were noted as important for a study of teacher leadership in a private school and faith-based configuration; namely, the Islamic

school context. Both the personal and the research needs motivated this study. A historical discussion on the growth of the Muslim community in South Africa was presented to show the assertiveness of a minority group. A literature overview unfolded the existing knowledge on the topic. This led to the discussion of the research gaps on teacher leadership in South Africa. The aims, questions and objectives showed the direction of the study. The overview of the methodology explained the approach, the sampling, the selection of participants, the context, data collection techniques, the analysis, and the ethical aspects of this research study.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter (1) focused on the orientation to the study. This chapter (2) presented the conceptual framework and the literature review. It is structured in three connected parts which elaborated on the overview provided in Chapter 1. The *first part* presents the conceptual framework. In unpacking teacher leadership, teachers are valued as agents in supporting children's learning. *Spiritual*, *follower* and *distributed* leadership are featured concepts. The complexities are captured in the concept of hybrid teacher leadership which is informed by Islam and secular educational priorities. The *second part* reviews the literature in line with the research questions and research objectives. The themes of teachers influencing children's learning, the fundamental Islamic concepts involved, and the factors enabling and constraining teacher leadership, are discussed. This part also explores interventions that can help advance teacher leadership development. The *third part* focuses on South African research regarding the three waves of teacher leadership. Approaching previous and current studies in a critical-analytic manner allowed for identifying the gaps in knowledge.

2.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Considering that this study deals with different worldviews, the conceptual framework had to be developed to indicate relevance and context-sensitivity.

2.2.1 Conceptualising Teacher Leadership

Understanding the concept of teacher leadership is best facilitated by separating each concept and then bringing them together. The discussion that follows refers to teachers from an agency perspective, and leadership from a distributed perspective. The agency perspective values teachers as people who can act, while the distributed leadership perspective refers to leadership that is shared and goes beyond the role of the principal and managers, to include teachers. All these interpretations were relevant for this study, but were not adequate. Hence, it is followed by a discussion on the Islamic concept of teacher leadership.

2.2.2 Teachers and Agency

Before dissecting the concept of *teacher leadership*, it is essential to diagnose how *teacher* and *leadership* are viewed conceptually. In the study, the concept of teacher agency meant a deviation from the view of being merely a passive teacher in leadership. The work of Giddens (1984) - specifically the theory of structuration - explains that to perform as an agent means that one must display some power to create change. However, agents cannot act in a *liassez-faire* manner as social structures have rules and resources that influence thinking, acting, feeling, and intentions in a particular context. Competent agents use their knowledge to embark on acts that they think are necessary and beneficial for them and others. Archer and Archer (2000) refer to the concept of culture in terms of providing the ideology and the influential societal views rooted in traditions; thus, teachers as agents do not act in isolation, but as a collective.

Biesta and Robinson (2015) assert that in the achievement of agency, it is imperative to look at the dimensions of time and relationships. The time perspective affords opportunities to examine what is accepted as the minimum standards or the ideals at the time of studies or specific intervention rollouts. The relational aspect allows one to focus on the conditions that foster the interactions that are necessary for enacting agency in meaningful ways. It is also possible to identify the sort of agency a teacher-leader feels empowered to enact. For Biesta and Robinson (2015), determining power dynamics at the practical and evaluation levels, is crucial as they influence how actions and decision-making unfold. Hence, focusing on the practice-evaluation context enables us to identify factors that promote and hinder agency.

This study specifically dealt with the concept of teacher agency in the context of engendering change. Harris, Jones and Huffman (2017) contend that reform in the schooling context must consider both teacher agency and the power of professional influence. Out of this reform mix, emanates the issue of how teachers can play a role in any decision-making process to exert influence. In other words, teachers will then take on roles of initiators, innovators and implementers of change (Dutaut & Rycroft-Smith 2018). The question arises on how teachers will position themselves - if they are going to be in the leadership role, they must not be seen as being subjected to top-down decisions, rather they must be viewed as agents who are co-

constructors of change initiatives. Donaldson (2015) maintains that co-construction elements can be empowering and motivating for teachers. The opposite is true when teachers are devalued and excluded from the change processes because they become entangled in top-down directives that make them passive subordinates. The CAPS curriculum and its leanings towards a highly structured curriculum delivery, restricts teachers to exercise their full agency. This agency is desperately needed to influence the learning outcomes (Datnow & Park, 2018).

To elicit change in an environment, the agents must show reflectivity, judge the contexts in which they perform, design a range of alternatives, and act collaboratively with others to influence and learn from them. Teachers who work as agents can be identified from what they do in their specific contexts of action (Archer & Archer, 2000). In this study, the teacher-leaders were valued as agents guided by normative expectations from the Islamic frame of reference and the South African education system for primary and secondary schools.

2.2.3 Leadership Distributed

Some leadership approaches associated with teacher leadership include spiritual and servant leadership, which are discussed in the next section. One of the most successful forms of leadership is distributed leadership. According to Grant (2017; 2019), distributed leadership is a valuable tool for studying leadership in the context of reform. For Harris (2013), distributed leadership is a brand on its own, distinctive from collaborative or participatory leadership. As democracies become entrenched in the 21st century, distributed leadership is becoming more relevant and crucial (Bush, 2019).

In a study conducted by Spillane (2006), distributed teacher leadership was noted as a way of providing an understanding of the workings of specific groups that come together to assist others to effect changes which can be within and outside classrooms. In a distributed leadership framework to understand teacher leadership, the study of interdependencies is important. This connectedness promotes the vision of the school and to see that it is being driven at a practical level by teacher-leaders guiding staff. This then makes leadership something that is executed by many people who benefit from achieving the goals they aspired to. If one views leadership

as being distributed, it becomes indispensable as a tool to effect actions instead of merely reporting to the principal on top-down predetermined outcomes.

Additionally, distributed leadership involves reflection on organisational management and fulfilling the roles and positions shared amongst staff (Devos, Tuytens & Hulpia, 2014). At the school level, this means that there is a commitment to developing the leadership potential of the staff to effect improvements in children's learning, and thus change schools to function at a higher level. When distributed leadership is socially just, all staff have an equal chance to be involved in leading the school. The basic philosophy underpinning this leadership approach is creating opportunities for people to share their thoughts and ideas in order to help the organisation to function at its best (Devos, Tuytens & Hulpia, 2014). On their own, principals cannot achieve all the school's goals; hence, leaders need to be proactive to assist in achieving the vision of the institution.

Printy and Liu (2021), in their study of distributed leadership in thirty-two countries, found that it varies in the way the leadership functions as policies in education influence its functionality. The findings also reveal that when teachers have opportunities to lead, distributed leadership comes into action. When teachers feel energised and valued in their work context, they develop bottom-up initiatives that show their agency and commitment to improving outcomes and circumventing challenges.

In this study, the teacher-leaders were viewed as part of the team responsible for the administration of the schools. They were part of the hierarchical structure. What was also clear was that the structure in which they fitted into was not always clear-cut since they performed set duties within their own classrooms too. It was important to consider the ways in which there was some collaboration to attain the goal of supporting children’s learning. According to Wenner and Campbell (2017), distributed leadership makes sense when leadership activities are studied in the context in which they occur. Also of importance, is the tracking of the intersecting roles of the leaders and those that follow them.

The main criticism against distributed leadership is the way in which it assumes that all individuals in the collective have equal power. According to Brosky (2011), the

leadership role has micro-politics. While the roles might be dispersed among individuals, there might still be unequal power relations. There are both internal and external conditions on how to exercise the distributed roles. For example, this study was conducted in private schooling settings. Even though the roles are distributed, the recognition of such roles might be examined in market terms especially if teacher-leaders are remunerated for their duties. The viability of administrative support would then be influenced by whether it makes financial sense. These dynamics are important to explore in specific contexts.

In this study distributed leadership is respected as a divine calling to work collaboratively to achieve outcomes. It concurs with the Islamic principle of bringing different expertise, namely, faith-based and secular education dimensions for quality support for children's learning.

2.2.4 Teacher Leadership: A Variety of Meanings

Teacher leadership is a contested term that is not easily understood. The work of York-Barr and Duke (2004) reveals the lack of a universal definition of the concept. The fragmentation of the conceptual meaning can be attributed to the broad scope of what constitutes teacher leadership. In addition, Brosky (2011) draws attention to the omission of the concept from the professional vocabulary of most education systems. Hence, teacher leadership is configured as having many definitions. To delve into the meanings of teacher leadership, one has to study the different kinds of work that teacher leaders engage in (Neumerski, 2012). Additionally, it is beneficial to determine where teacher-leaders are deployed, and the nature of their leadership in order to make-sense of the concept. Teacher-leaders will work through various positions of influence that make sense in context. For example, Cooper, Stranulis and Brondyk (2016) state that there can be differences in standard titles such as department chairs and grade-level leaders. New titles appear from the teachers' agency to interact with the principal and drive school change related to improving opportunities for children's learning. Teacher-leaders can be subject heads, mentors, coaches, specialist lead-teachers, and project managers (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; Neumerski, 2012). A situation-bound understanding of teacher leadership somewhat clarifies the concept of teacher-leaders. Considering the varied interpretations of who teacher leaders are and what they do, their work can run the risk of not being

recognised by key stakeholders such as the school board of governors, the parents, and the district supervisory staff. To exacerbate the confusion of interpreting the role of teacher-leaders, these stakeholders might have little understanding of the concept due to its unfamiliarity. To unpack the concept through its maze of meanings, Wenner and Campbell (2017) present a helpful thematic entry point. They reviewed several studies, specifically the relevant themes related to this study, and made explicit roles of teacher-leaders leading beyond the classroom. The first theme is about teacher-leaders leading more than the children in their care, and taking on leadership beyond the classroom. The second and third themes relate to the practical engagements of teacher-leaders beyond the classroom. This practice relates mainly to supporting teachers in advancing professional learning and helping teachers with their classroom practices. Involvement in policymaking and decision-making processes is also included in this theme. The fourth theme links with the overarching goal of teacher leadership to improve learning outcomes for children. The fifth theme is about working towards educational change and improvement for the entire school.

In this study, the five themes described above were relevant. However, there is a gap in the thematic discussion of teacher leadership from a faith-based perspective which this study focuses on. Since the themes derive from studies with secular outcomes and a focus on citizenship development, it did not explore how other framings of education examined teacher leadership. This study fills the gap in knowledge about teacher leadership when religion from an organised worldview of Islam is considered. In so doing, the study expands the understanding of teacher leadership and teacher-leaders. In this study, teacher leadership is understood as a situation-bound concept where teacher-leaders as agents interact with people, places and environment that allow them to play a role inn effecting change inside and outside classrooms. In the case of schools for Muslim children there are both divine and worldly outcomes that are targeted for action by teacher leaders.

2.3 THE ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Tambak, Amril and Sukenti's (2021) latest work in Indonesia helps shed light on the concept of a *teacher* from the Islamic perspective. Since Indonesia has many Muslims, it was proposed that a way of looking at teachers is to integrate both secular and the Quraanic concepts, and that the professional teacher and teacher professionalism in Islam must be based on the concept of the *Kalifah* – an agent and trustee (Tambak, Amril & Sukenti, 2021). From an Islamic worldview, human beings have been created by God (Allah) with goals set by Him, and we must take full responsibility for our God-given roles and responsibilities. Islam requires adherence to rules, norms, principles, values and prohibitions stipulated in the Qur'aan, which is from God Almighty. The service to God for piety development and fulfilling obligations according to God's purpose are critical in the life of a Muslim. Children are entrusted to adults from God, hence there must be proper nurturance according to the teachings of Islam. Tambak, Amril and Sukenti (2021) explain that a Muslim teacher must live up to the ideals of the *Khalifah,* and the tasks that they execute has to be carefully considered within the framework of responsibility for divine deeds. Whatever the teacher does, it must be beneficial for God's creations. Humans and the *Khalifah* are the same. Being a teacher in Islam is indeed very noble. As such, teachers should be knowledgeable and be guided by the divine messages to educate those in their care.

Leadership is an integral part and function of the *Khalifah* (Tambak, Amril & Sukenti, 2021). The key sources for understanding leadership are the Qur'aan (the unaltered word of God) and the Sunnah (the life of the Prophet Muhammad – peace be upon him). Islam stresses unity of knowledge and reality for the belief in one God. Every act that one engages in, is a religious act. Hence, Islam is a way of life. Leadership then means that all attempts to lead must consider pursuits like supporting children's learning, cordial interactions with children and adults, and community-building as spiritual acts. All acts in the name of leadership must consider the active implementation of the Islamic faith within the Islamic code of conduct which governs what is acceptable, and what is not (Halstead, 2007).

2.4 SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

When viewing teacher leadership in a school context aligned to a religion, it is essential to consider the aspect of spiritual leadership which is essential for fulfilling the needs of leaders and followers (Egel & Fry, 2017; Fry, 2003; Fry & Nisiewicz, 2020). In the context of an Islamic worldview, schools for Muslim children have to ensure that education is geared towards aligning the faith with the empowerment of people to deliver quality education. There is a great responsibility placed on teachers as people performing the will of God on earth, and when leadership is added to the mix, there is an even greater responsibility to bring alignment of the faith with the practice. Upholding the Islamic faith is particularly important in Muslim minority countries such as South Africa – a secular democracy where religious freedom is enshrined in the *Constitution*. Those exercising spiritual leadership must ensure that they follow the calling to create a sense of belonging to the faith in a democratic South Africa.

When teacher-leaders in a school for Muslim children position themselves in an Islamic style of spiritual leadership, they should pay attention to their calling in terms of the divine duties (Egel & Fry, 2017). Both the vision and the culture of Muslim schools are intentionally designed to afford opportunities for teachers to supposedly lead with confidence. When God's obligation becomes the driving force for action, as is with Islam, one must be selfless and involve oneself in actions for the greater good of the Muslim and other communities. Serving others and working with others in harmony are respected when executed within the parameters of human development for the common good.

Suhan, Thahir and Mohammad (2017) explained spiritual leadership in the context of schools for Muslim children by sampling 204 teachers from three religious schools which provided insight on the practice of spiritual leadership by the principals, as well as identifying elements of the school culture. From the study, emerged eight characteristics of spiritual leadership: faith (trust), piety, justice, integrity, *shura* (council), discipline and moral strength, service, and humility - all of which contribute to discourse on spiritual leadership, Islamic culture, and the leadership of the principal. For this study, these findings were beneficial to construct building blocks that drive the spiritual leadership of teacher-leaders.

2.5 SERVANT LEADERSHIP

As a component of leadership, servant leadership emphasises the intention to help develop a follower-base, and to bring religiosity into organisational contexts. This view was first posited by Greenleaf (1977) who emphasised that servant leadership is closely aligned to spiritual leadership, and it focuses not only on one domain for development, but also on a range of domains for the development of followers. These domains are spiritual, emotional, ethical and relational. When a teacher-leader is grounded in servant leadership (Van Dierendonck, 2011), it means that the school as an organisation is on a path to learner-advancement with concerns for holistic wellbeing. In such an environment, teacher-leaders feel motivated and energised to take the institution in a new and better direction through various concerted efforts that involve the cooperation of a host of stakeholders.

Kalifah, Khalil, Marsh and Halloran (2019) critiqued the literature on the decolonisation of school leadership in terms of servant leadership, stating that attention must be paid to the 'other' in leadership work as breakthroughs for indigenous ways of leading. Indicators of servant leadership can be seen in how the followers' needs and interests are given attention, and how the concern for others in the institution and the broader community are addressed. In being focused on leading others, those driving servant leadership should have a solid self-concept, and the will to act morally. The leader-follower relationship considers who the followers are, their motivations and their priorities. Servant leaders invest in the growth of followers in a variety of areas such that followers see their leaders as authentic and trustworthy to guide them (followers) to become other-oriented.

From an Islamic perspective, servant leadership is fundamentally grounded in the *Kalifah,* following the normative religious expectations of God on earth. As noted previously, there is no separation between the Islamic faith and the professional practice domain. Hence, servant leadership needs great introspection as it is about having a solid sense of self - not to be self-serving, but to be other-oriented and selfless. In Islam, everyone is connected through the collective community of Muslims where there are leaders and scholars who offer guidance in all aspects of life and living. Those who become teachers need to use their professionalism to do their work with great care.

Khan, Khan and Chaudhry (2015) examined servant leadership in the context of Islam by exploring and analysing the secular model in relation to Islamic teachings which led to the formation of the five dimensions in their model. The *first dimension* is altruism which focuses on the moral practice of caring for others in a selfless way. This interconnection with fellow human beings and being in the service of humanity is important to earn blessings from God and to grow moral practices. The *second dimension* is emotional healing which focuses on developing the affective domain of human development. As a servant of God in a position of trust, it is expected that Muslims will act in ways that exhibit mercy and compassion for their fellow human beings. Rational thought alone is not enough; it has to be connected with emotional bonds for which Muslims are accountable. Education should focus on healing of the heart so that individuals will act in compassionate ways following divine teachings.
The *third dimension* is about wisdom where it is expected that all leaders will act with astuteness as sound role-models in exemplary ways. The actions of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) show the value of acting with wisdom which was demonstrated in excellent ways in which he made decisions. His followers could identify with and emulate his wisdom in many aspects of life. The *fourth dimension* is stewardship which pertains to learning organisations (like schools) to have leadership that intelligently guides the processes for quality actions. These actions must have positive outcomes, not only for those inside the organisation, but also for those outside. The leadership must create harmony for the betterment of society. The *fifth dimension* is the persuasive mapping which advocates that any leader of worth must exercise genuine effort to enable followers to use their faculties of reason to choose the best possible line of action. In doing so, the leaders have to be regarded by followers as being authentic role-models. All of the dimensions were important for this study.

Being infused with spiritual leadership is the goal of transformation which is identified as the fourth wave of teacher leadership research. Specifically, transformational leadership in an Islamic worldview is about group goals that are directed at achieving social justice (Abdulkarim, Citaku, Waldrop, Zillioux, Citaku & Khan, 2019). Pursuing social justice makes one examine the inequalities which create power imbalances to achieve certain outcomes that do not contribute to the greater good of humanity. The moral and the ethical aspects are thus questioned.

Transformational leadership is linked to servant leadership where followers will be persuaded to increase their focus on goals that allow for achieving certain outcomes in selfless ways. Where teacher-leaders display the qualities of being humble, acting with integrity and patience, then they are said to model the character traits on the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him). Once followers observe this, then the teacher-leader is viewed as someone worthy of emulation.

2.6 HOW TEACHER LEADERSHIP IS CONCEPTUALISED IN THIS STUDY

The previous section on the conceptual discussion helped to unpack critical concepts in the study. In this section, they are brought together. In their review, Wenner and Campbell (2017) note that there are many ways of defining the concept of teacher leadership. It is, therefore, reasonable to conjure up a working definition of what it is. The conceptual links and contents of teacher leadership are presented in the discussions that follow.

This study is about teacher leadership being governed by two worldviews. The idea of the worldview stemmed from the need to study religions and non-religious perspectives that affect individuals' lives. According to Abdullah and Nadvi (2011), a worldview can be thought of as foundational beliefs about reality that influences how a person thinks, knows, acts and feels about what is happening in the world. The worldview functions as a system that has evolved over time and shared by a group that identifies itself with the contents and values of the system.

Two worldviews inform this study: human capital, and citizenship development through schools. Both these worldviews are grounded in concerns about education for worldly life in a secular democracy like South Africa. Regarding the human capital aspect for education, Spring (2015) alludes to the economisation of education where the focus is heavily on skills-based education that is considered necessary for the workplace that children will enter in their adult lives. Education for a secular democracy promotes certain values and practices for the best ways to support children's learning; however, these are driven by humanistic principles that are disconnected from any faith. Secular education is informed by experiences and research into 'what works' for supporting children's learning, and in the case of this study, through teacher leadership. Western framings of education have a strong influence in the South African context, although this has given way to some African values and practices. A good example is the use of African languages as the language of teaching and learning.

The second worldview in this study is informed by Islam – an organised worldview that provides a system of values and principles that gives meaning to human development. From a historical perspective, Al Attas and Mohaghegh (1995) explain the Islamic worldview as having two parts – the worldly life, and the afterlife. Both aspects are included in a system of beliefs that shapes practices in every dimension of a Muslim's life. Education must be directed at a willing submission to God's divine guidance.

In this study, teacher leadership drew from both the secular worldview and the Islamic worldview. For Muslims, the separation is not helpful; Ideally, both worldviews must be integrated to form a force for shaping Islam as a way of life. This integration is fraught with difficulties and is still in progress for education in South Africa. For this study, the teacher was respected as an agent who performs within a rule-bound system concerned with outcomes for this life and the afterlife. The teacher from an Islamic perspective is the *Kalifah*, and as such, his agency draws its contents from the teachings of the Qur'aan and the Sunnah. Taking this into account, teachers are required to nurture children with great care to be God-conscious and live their lives according to normative expectations of Islam. The infused worldviews are in tension, and at best, they function in parallel and dualistic ways.

The three approaches to leadership that were relevant to this study were spiritual, servant, and distributed leadership. Other approaches could have been applicable, but these three provided critical ideas for Muslim teachers in a leadership framework that allows for a double responsibility – secular, worldly outcomes, and outcomes for the afterlife. Spiritual leadership brings the Islamic faith, education and empowerment together. Servant leadership emphasises that all Muslims are supposed to be followers of the faith. Muslim teacher-leaders have to be motivated, knowledgeable and skilled to guide children's learning in all domains of development – physical, spiritual, moral, ethical, social and emotional. Distributed leadership means that the task of supporting children's learning is too big for one leader to cope with - for example, the principal. Many leaders with different wisdoms and priorities for supporting children's learning are needed to produce well-rounded citizens to grow the Muslim communities, especially in diverse countries like South Africa where they have a minority status.

Another critical aspect was the positioning and scope of teacher-leaders' work. In this study, teacher-leaders had teaching responsibilities in their classrooms, and they were taking on more responsibilities outside the classroom. With its concern for competing with public schooling, the private schooling system wanted its teachers to offer more than just classroom duties. However, literature indicates that those teacher-leaders who are still in classrooms are more in touch with the intricacies of teaching and learning (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008), and at the same time they can be collaborators on content relevant for instructional practices and performances (Curtis, 2013; Mujis & Harris, 2003, 2006).

All three influential leadership approaches regarding performance inside and outside the classroom, point to the complexities of teacher-leaders' work which is captured somewhat by the concept of hybrid teacher leadership (Margolis, 2012; Jacques, Weber, Bosso & Olson, 2016). Those who enact this type of leadership have official duties to directly support children's learning as well as lead teachers in aspects of teaching-learning or broader educational goals. Considering that schools for Muslim children are not homogenous, the focus on hybridity opens thinking of teachers as leaders in and beyond classroom practices.

Generally, teacher-leaders in this study were viewed as influencers. Akert and Martin (2012) who studied the role of teacher-leaders as influencers highlighted that every child needs to be catered for in a school environment that nurtures their holistic well-being, but such a context demands role adaptations of both teachers and principals. When teacher-leaders are appreciated for helping to achieve the desired changes, then it relieves pressure on principals and middle managers if they are not in hybrid positions. For teacher-leaders to flourish, the principal needs to have an exceptionally good understanding of the schooling context and the demands made for quality education. For teacher-leaders to be effective influencers, they must co-construct the ideals of supporting children’s learning inside and outside the classroom. The identification of needs is best established when cohesive dialogue exists between the key stakeholders. Hence, the principal must create a school culture where collaboration, collegiality, and trust are evident. Moreover, there should be openness to leadership capacity-building to allow for teacher-leaders to develop their competences inhibited to progress in leadership roles. Where this is forthcoming, there is a better chance for change to be sustainable and successful.

2.7 HOW TEACHER-LEADERS' INFLUENCE SUPPORTS LEARNERS

In hybrid teacher leadership, the scope of teachers is within and beyond the boundaries of the classroom to reach the broader school community. The early work of Harris and Mujis (2004) provide different perspectives of teacher-leaders' work regarding their influence to support children's learning. Active engagement means that teachers are mindful of their practice in terms of effectiveness with regard to specific aspects; namely, leadership that allows for participation that helps them to come up with their strategies, mediation which allows for them to actualise their knowledge and contribute towards new agendas, and building relationships with their peers to support children's learning (Ibid: 23-24).

Fairman and Mackenzie (2012) centralised the goal of children's learning and then unpacked the spheres of teacher leadership for action (Figure 2.1).

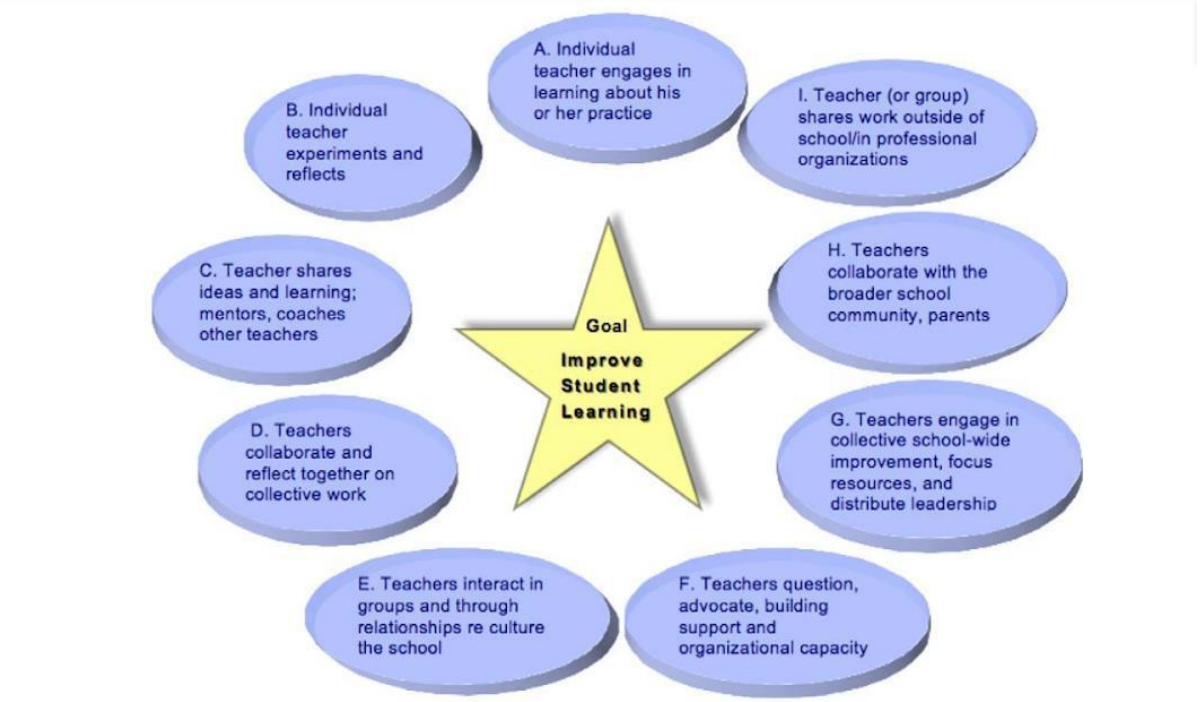

Figure 2.1: Spheres of Teacher Leadership Action for Learning (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2012)

Teacher leadership to support children's learning can also be informed by standards. Where standards have been developed, they were in the context of concerns for having minimal requirements. Cosenza (2015) studied the definition of teacher leadership, looked at the standards for teacher leadership, and then described the process of developing the standards in the US context. A consortium of members who focused on teacher leadership were responsible for the development of the standards. The process began with examining the latest studies, holding interviews with teacher-leaders, and researching the programmes on offer for professional development. Hence, the standards were informed by research findings in 2011. Consenza (2015), writing from a rich country perspective identified seven domains, each of which allows for action regarding the scope of teacher leadership. The domains covered the following action points related to supporting teacher leadership: building a collaborative culture, using research, encouraging professional learning on a continual basis, allowing for opportunities to improve pedagogy as well as learning, finding evidence for improvement, family and community outreach, and advocacy for supporting children's learning. These seven domains were used to invite debate and discussion on the actual competencies that were required to improve teacher leadership for change in the schooling context. This is valuable in formal teacher leadership roles as they provide some guidelines for creating actions concerning the formal role of teacher-leaders. This type of attention is important especially when the concept of teacher-leaders is not well understood by the management and staff in particular schooling contexts.

This study provides insight on a particular context, where the concept of teacher leadership was emerging. No formal standards were developed to guide the process. Each of the sites purported their own notion of what teacher-leaders should know, and be able to do.

2.8 SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S LEARNING IN AN ISLAMIC SCHOOL CONTEXT

In Islam, as already mentioned, a person is considered an agent (*Kalifah*) who has to be very mindful of enacting the will of God on earth (Abdalati, 1999; Laming, 2002). When teacher-leaders are Muslims and teach in schools for Muslim children, they must lead in knowledge and action that promotes the Islamic concept of education. From a historical point of view, scholars in Islam worked hard to explain what education is from an Islamic perspective.

Ashraf's (1985) writing from a historical perspective provided key historical messages on Islamic education that were helpful to consider in this study. At the outset, the education of a Muslim child should centre on holistic development where the soul, the body, and the mind are given attention; therefore, individual efforts and collaboration are viewed as necessary. This means that teacher-leaders need to work with the child, community, and at broader societal levels. These levels of intervention through education are inextricably linked. If children are well-supported in their education, they will become productive and morally upright community members and agents who will soon be the trustees of the divine responsibilities at societal levels. All those intervening in educational encounters are part of a more significant project which aims to unify humanity. If teacher-leaders are committed to change inside and outside classrooms, multiple actions must be considered for supporting children's learning.

2.8.1 ISLAMIC DIMENSIONS OF EDUCATION TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LEARNING

According to Yasin and Jani (2013), three dimensions emanate from child development and supporting learning. They are the *tarbiyah* (growth, development, nurturance, the *ta'dhib* (moral education) and *talim* (imparting and receiving knowledge). These three dimensions have guiding principles for shaping the actions of teachers and teacher-leaders.

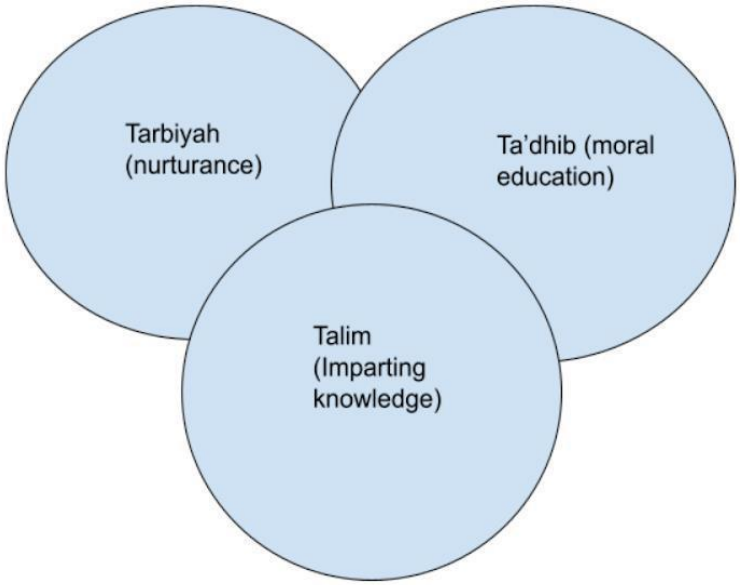

Figure 2.2: Three dimensions of education (with related concepts) in Islam (Adapted: Yasin & Jani, 2013)

The *tarbiyah* is education (Tauhidi, 2000) which is linked to all aspects of human development, inclusive of the spirit, body and mind for nurturance. From an Islamic perspective, nurturance begins from conception where the pregnant mother should be particularly concerned with her overall wellbeing for herself and her unborn child (Olgar, 1999). When children are born, they know God and are in a pure state (Hamdan, 2009). Parents are entrusted to nurture them from there on with careful attention to the teachings of Islam. The first seven years are the formative years to help socialise children into their lifeworld. Hence, teacher-leaders should forge connections with parents to enhance the quality of school tasks, and as partners for child-rearing in Islam.

The *ta'dhib* is about moral education according to divine sources. Muslims need to look at the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to inform their actions. Teacher-leaders should be involved in various types of decision-making processes to advance children's learning. They need to do this with great care without transgressing any of the basic tenets of Islam. The moral codes of action are part of enacting Islam as a way of life. It is believed that children will have good role-models if their teachers uphold moral values.

The *talim* is about knowledge used to impart to others, and about acquiring knowledge. It involves knowledge-building and knowledge-dissemination through different kinds of pedagogies. In Islam, knowledge is viewed as "a journey towards light and awareness" (Qadri, 2007:20). Muslims have to be lifelong learners and should seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave, hence teachers and teaching are greatly valued in Islam. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is viewed as the perfect man and the perfect teacher. Muslims are required to use his example in all walks of life, including leadership in teaching.

Contrary to the belief that Islam promotes only transmission teaching and rote learning, Guddah (2013) describes a variety of pedagogical approaches used by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that are valuable for supporting children's learning – drawings, questioning, problem-solving, and storytelling, among others. Of importance for growing teacher leadership, is the concept of the *halaqa* which is a circle of learning where knowledge is imparted and used to inform action. Kiyumi (2021) views the *halaqa* as an important and convenient way to help professionals to

exchange ideas and experiences in teams as this platform enables idea generation and creative problem-solving. This interaction allows for the culture of learning to flourish as they become familiar with best practices. The *halaqa* is still a new concept that needs to be unpacked by organisations for its value in asset-building, and its potential to influence quality outcomes (Kiyumi, 2021).

An issue that continues to surface as an important aspect for the education of Muslim children is the Islamisation of the curriculum and educational practices. Integrated in this discourse is the dilemma of which epistemological frameworks should be used to guide the education of Muslim children. There are two identifiable camps: on the one hand, there are the historical scholars who are referred to as the neo-revivalists (Ashraf, 1985; Ashraf & Husain, 1979), a grouping strong on applying Islam's tenets as the overarching framework for education. On the other hand, there are those, referred to as the modernists (Davids, 2015) and secularists, who prefer to look at Islam in terms of discipline that offers content in a subject amidst other disciplines. Hence, there is a holistic overarching perspective and a narrow-regulated perspective that exists with other forms of knowledge to support children's learning. These tensions have been the subject of many debates. The choices depend upon the policies in a country. There is no easy solution, but Islam as a spiritual and moral compass, must be significant in the lives of Muslims, and an important weapon against radicalism. In this study, there were teacher-leaders who had the revivalist approach, and saw themselves as a resource to others in the neighbouring schools.

Despite developments in Muslim schools to support children's learning to instil Islamic values in a suitable environment, the challenges continue. Hammad and Shah (2019) note that fulfilling the mission of being religiously on track is difficult in the face of secularism and materialism. In their study with head teachers of Muslim schools in London and Nottingham, they encountered issues such as unrealistic parental expectations, and lack of support from the Muslim community. They also faced difficulties in terms of building Muslim identity in the context of a secular society. Additionally, finding suitably qualified Muslim teachers and financial stability surfaced as challenges. Supporting children's learning is therefore intricately woven with broader conditions that impact on the quality of education that Muslim children will receive.

2.9 FACTORS THAT ENABLE TEACHER LEADERSHIP

A perusal of the literature by Wenner and Campbell (2017) highlight four themes that enable teacher leadership: external training which supports the professional development of leaders, administrative support, the environment, and structural factors that help teacher-leaders be clear about their responsibilities.

Although teacher-leaders might be innovative on their own, professional learning could be valuable for developing communities of practice (Durias, 2010). Teacher-leaders learn about specific content, pedagogical approaches, how to approach leadership as teachers, and where to access cultural support – aspects that were important for this study (Yonezawa, Jones & Singer, 2011).

As the head, the principal plays a significant role in providing administrative support and creating suitable structural conditions (Jacobs, Stephen & Solis, 2016); and he holds the key to enhancing the teacher-leader's development (Goeke, Klein, Onore & Geist, 2011). For quality teacher leadership, the principal needs to trust the teacher, find ways to allow them to build their capacity, and invite them to play a part in the responsibilities to improve children's learning. It is also important that the principal acknowledges the work of his staff as teacher-leaders. Those responsible for school governance and monitoring are advised to support teacher-leaders' efforts into growing the culture of teaching and learning.

For the autonomy of the teacher-leaders (and for them to flourish), the principal needs to be willing to delegate responsibility and be continually encouraging them to exercise their leadership. A lack of interest from the principal can result in teacher-leaders failing to perform optimally (Chamberland, 2009). Principals have to be appreciative, trusting and respectful of the teacher-leader's efforts. Where teacher-leaders are valued, the principal uses them as a reference source (or models) for school matters (Beachum & Dentith, 2004). Teacher-leaders appreciate principals who consult them, listen to their problems, and see their work as a worthwhile contribution (Gordin 2010; Gigante & Firestone, 2008). Space for collaborative endeavours was also considered necessary for teacher-leaders to excel in their work (Chesson, 2010).

Besides the administrative support, the cultural norms in the school environment are fundamental for teacher-leaders to experience success. When teacher-leaders promote creativity and innovativeness, then they need to be supported by the principal. In some cases, principals might feel threatened and limit teacher-leaders to a compliance-mode (Brosky, 2011). These negative responses are possible if teacher-leaders seek to change an issue that requires fundamental shifts on how things are done. Where teacher-leaders and principals are clear about their roles and responsibilities, and how they contribute to the shared vision, many positive developments can take place. Also, teacher-leaders need incentives – they feel motivated to go the extra mile if there are monetary gains (Borchers, 2009) Where there is a conducive climate for support, teacher-leaders can lead informally, and they can position themselves as part of a team that co-constructs or take the lead to make changes through creativity, caring, and forming a critical mass (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2012).

2.10 FACTORS THAT CONSTRAIN TEACHER-LEADERSHIP

York-Barr and Duke (2004) explain barriers to teacher leadership relating to how teacher leadership programmes show the directions that teacher-leaders do not necessarily understand. This requires teachers to dedicate extra time for the development of their area of influence. Challenges arise when teacher-leaders cannot balance their normal workloads, personal life commitments, and the leadership demands (Hands, 2012).

The overwhelming workload of teacher-leaders interferes with the objectives to support children's learning. If the teacher-leaders are deployed in activities both in and outside classrooms including the school and community, time-management would be difficult. There might also be role confusion, and the aspect of resistance in the context of burdensome workloads which may not have been properly factored into the work-allocation of teacher-leaders (Hurt, 2015). Hence, time for collaboration is limited and this causes stress and tensions among teacher-leaders (Margolis, 2012). Teacher-leaders also require administrative support and resources to effectively facilitate their work; and when this is not forthcoming, they become demotivated.

Additionally, when teacher-leaders attend professional learning sessions, they find it very stressful (Darius, 2010) as this requires finding substitute teachers and briefing them on the daily plan. Also, if there are overnight stays, they have to re-arrange schedules to cope with family responsibilities. Hence, both the home and the classroom are affected by the teacher-leader's absence. In Margolis' (2012) study, the lack of time to meet all obligations was a barrier to teacher-leaders. Unless teacher-leaders are given some relief from their heavy workloads, the pressure to fulfil their responsibilities means that there will be trade-offs.

Another issue that can be constraining for teacher-leaders is how they form relationships for their work. For efficiency and success, teacher-leaders have to be well-supported by their principals, which, when not forthcoming, leads to them struggling with work-backlogs (Klinker, Watson, Furgerson, Halsey & Janisch, 2010). These difficulties include acquiring resources, time-off, and the flexibility to perform optimally. There can also be horizontal tensions in teacher-leaders' work; for example, a peer might resent being chosen as a teacher-leader or resist it as they do not want to overburden themselves (Margolis & Doring, 2012). According to Brosky (2011), there can be conflict when peers do not collaborate or become confrontational. Also, some peers might feel that teacher-leaders are gaining personally from their participation (in collaboration) and therefore withhold it. Peer resistance can be a powerful barrier, especially if groups exert pressure on others to stifle the development of teacher-leadership.

The school climate might be a factor that obstructs change, especially where leadership might be weak or authoritarian. A lack of shared vision might make teachers pull in different directions. Teachers might be used to taking instructions and working in a compliance mode only with principals. Additionally, the communication structures might be dysfunctional, making the teacher-leader's work difficult (Chesson 2010; Margolis & Doring, 2012). Poor communication can be attributed to, but not limited to, the personal characteristics of teachers or the principal's lack of support. Teacher-leaders can also feel inferior (being a junior) to engage with those who are higher up in the school hierarchy (Brosky, 2011). This lack of confidence might compromise their effectiveness when dealing with their peers and the principal.

Another barrier relates to autonomous practices and how this creates isolation. Collaboration is needed for teacher leadership to flourish (Wenner & Campbell 2017). When teacher leaders' status is not recognised, their peers might not be inclined to support them. In some instances, there might be blurred boundaries in enacting responsibilities, hence the role of the teacher-leader would be seen as lacking in relevance.

Moreover, the lack of communication (or communication channels) can be debilitating when teacher-leaders have to articulate what they are doing and the effects of what they are doing. Their enthusiasm is deflated when they feel that all their efforts are not being recognised. When schools are too bureaucratic, this makes it difficult for leaders to make headway. Not all teacher-leaders will have the skills to communicate and negotiate the types of innovations they intend to effect. Margolis and Huggins (2012) also draw attention to how the changes in the leadership, especially if this is frequent, result in disrupted projects, which might negatively impact the responsibilities of teacher-leaders. Besides the sustainability of initiatives promoted by teacher-leaders, the incoming principal might be positioned in a leadership approach that devalues the distribution of leadership. Hence, top-down instructional practices lead to a compliance mode of work which destroys innovative and creative spirits of teacher-leaders and staff in general.

Poekert, Alexandrou and Shannon (2016) provide insight into how feedback on teacher-leaders' work progress is problematic, and can be a source of tension. What teacher-leaders enact as part of their work commitments, elicits change in their learning, among other benefits. This is where the tensions arise, but not all tension-situations are negative as some can make teacher-leaders reflect on their perceptions of themselves and the value of their work.

Further, policy implementation issues exacerbate teacher-leadership hurdles. According to Poeker, Alexandrou and Shannon (2016), when teachers engage with policy demands, they are well-placed to show their shortcomings. There is a high possibility of a disconnect between what the policies want, and what the teacher-leaders see as valuable in the context they are working in to effect changes to support children's learning. Collaboration for change can be daunting for some, especially if the school culture does not promote it, where a shared solid vision is

absent, and the reward system might be individual-focused. Hence, competition rather than collaboration is promoted.

2.11 INTERVENTIONS TO ENHANCE LEADERSHIP

It is important to consider the aspects that are targeted to develop teacher leadership to support children's learning. To intervene in teacher leadership, there has to be harmonised systems in place. Sebastian, Huang and Allensworth (2017) contend that studies have not adequately focused on connected systems of both principal and teacher leadership, and how these systems relate to child outcomes. There was an exploration of direct and indirect pathways from leadership to promote the crucial aspect of how children achieve learning outcomes. The findings show that there is a dichotomy where the leadership of the principal is linked to the learning outcomes of children's learning - one pathway was linked to teacher leadership, whilst the other was not (Sebastian, Huang & Allensworth, 2017). The conclusion is that the learning climate is the only factor related to the organisation that links both the principal and the teacher leadership. Understanding who is influential where, is important for developing responsive interventions.

Another intervention strategy that was implemented involved Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) which have been identified as critical platforms to develop teacher-leaders' knowledge, skills, and dispositions. In the PLCs, the focus is on what needs to be done to develop the teacher-leaders and help their learning. Work by Van Es and Sherin (2010) shows how mathematics video-clubs allowed teachers to become involved in communities of practice and practically demonstrate the new learning. There must be movement towards more enabling ways of acting that shifts from traditional practice. The main emphasis is on improving the teaching culture in which teacher-leaders can be involved. Organisations outside the schooling environment can also help the PLCs. For example, Akkerman and Bruining (2016) examined the partnership between a professional development school and university researchers in the Netherlands, and it was revealed that some teachers positioned themselves as leaders connecting the two groups. Whilst these teachers became immersed in their roles, they found it challenging to involve other teachers. Difficulties in involving peers could be attributed to the lack of familiarity with the new collaborating partners for new activities.

The PLC is a relatively new (enabling) formation in some contexts. Hence, Hairon, Goh and Chua (2015) contend that it is vital for group members to collaborate to ensure that PLCs are effective. They used an ethnographic case study to show how valuable teacher leadership can be to support conversations in a PLC. Teacher-leaders can become enabling agents to help teachers better their instructional practices for quality learning outcomes. The value of PLCs for teacher-leaders was also noted in Harrison, Jones and Huffman's work (2017) where professional development served as a significant way to motivate knowledge-purveyors, including teacher-leaders, to develop their teacher-leadership skills. Findings from three projects in England advocate for the use of PLCs to develop teacher leadership for change and improvement (Harrison, Jones & Huffman, 2017). Moreover, Wilson (2016) studied the perceptions and lived-experiences of secondary teachers in PLCs, and results indicate that it cultivated astute leadership.

Interventions programmes and strategies consider how the tiers of leadership affect supporting children's learning. Sebastian, Huang and Allensworth (2017) studied integrated systems where the principal and teacher-leaders' work is linked to organisational processes and student outcomes. They found pathways where the principal's leadership relates to student learning such that the link and disconnect to teacher leadership were highlighted. The environment for learning as an organisational factor, connected the leadership of the principal and teacher-leader to children's achievements in learning.

De Klerk and Smith (2021) suggested interventions needed for aspiring teacher-leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic which changed the way in which we perceive roles in teaching, leading and learning due to the uncertainty and stress that it precipitated. The applied leadership theory and the method of an integrated review were utilised so that aspiring teacher-leaders were motivated in transformative listening and learning as they seek opportunities to better their competences since teacher empowerment flourishes in school environments where teacher-leaders are encouraged to work together to apply their skills and knowledge to engender change (De Klerk & Smith, 2021). The focus should be on emotional intelligence, autonomy, and inclusivity, such that these elements are integrated in professional development opportunities directed at transforming schools as learning organisations.

2.12 WAVES OF RESEARCH ON TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA

South African studies conducted on teacher leadership presents three waves of research that continue to integrate and expand the emerging body of knowledge in this field. The first wave is about shifting the focus from the formal positional role of the principal. The second wave concerns the informal role and teacher visibility, leadership and conditions shaping them. The third wave, which builds on the other two, is more aligned to the meaningful contexts shaping teacher leadership. The understanding of the literature supplemented the discussion in the next section concerning the gap in knowledge that this study attempted to address.

2.12.1 Destabilising the Formal Positional Role of the Principal

South African literature on teacher leadership shows it is responsive to the historical context, and thus calls for reform in education. The post-1994 democratic dispensation engaged with the newness of the concept of teacher leadership. In the second decade of democracy, there was greater engagement to moderate autocratic leadership for the purpose of migrating to more affirming leadership practices. The distributed task of school reform involving teachers elicited changes (Grant, 2010; Moodley, 2010) which had to consider practices in a democracy as autocratic leadership was only synonymous with headship (Grant, 2019). The power and the control of the principals meant that shared leadership did not get the attention it deserved. Hence, reform efforts through distributed leadership were necessary.

Naicker and Mestry’s (2013) study on teachers' reflections on distributed leadership in Soweto public primary schools showed how school principals enacted leadership practices. Their findings revealed that hierarchies and domination were rampant. The top-down approach with its one-directional communication goals left teachers frustrated. The commanding and controlling powers made teachers feel devalued and stunted their growth for possibilities in more distributed forms of leadership. In this context, the building of community networks also suffered. Autocratic styles of leadership restrict the goals of supporting children's optimal learning as a broader pool of people's expertise is not considered for innovation and reform. Singh (2007) aptly points out that leadership is not just a role (positional leadership), but a relationship between individuals in an organisation.

Effecting reform in leadership and creating greater visibility for teacher leadership is complex and diverse. There are broader forces that have an impact on what happens inside schools. Bertram and Hugo (2008) and Spaull (2013, 2015) draw attention to a two-tier system showing the effects of apartheid on education and serving communities inequitably. In the first tier, the school functions well because of its historical and geographical positioning, access to resources, and reputation for quality teachers. The second tier is located in under-served and under-resourced geographical spaces still reeling from the legacy of apartheid; this highlighted that supporting children's learning is constrained by structural processes, and the effects of poverty, disease and unemployment.

There has, however, been a growing body of literature on teacher leadership in South Africa that seeks more equitable practices and varying degrees of support for enhancing learner-outcomes through promoting quality learning (Grant, 2008, 2019; Oswald & Engelbrecht, 2013). The changing nature of positional teacher leadership to more distributed forms of leadership can be linked to the work of Grant (2008) who advocates that teachers do have the capacity to act as teacher-leaders as described in her model showing the importance of viewing teacher leadership as a dynamic process where teacher-leaders can actively participate in formal and informal roles that expand their work in classrooms and beyond classrooms. This advances the position that teachers do not have to be in a formal management position to lead.

2.12.2 Making the Informal Role, Distributed Leadership, and Professional Maturity, Explicit

The work of Gumede (2011) is an example of how informal roles of teacher-leaders became a subject of research, paving the way for democratising school leadership. Gumede's (2011) study focused on the prevalence of teacher-leaders amongst teachers at post-level one in two South African schools, and the findings showed that school cultures influenced teacher leadership opportunities. While one school constrained teachers through top-down power dynamics, the other allowed much latitude for collaboration and participation. Findings such as these have broadened the focus on teacher leadership without formal positions.

The study by De Villiers and Pretorius (2011) heightened the focus on teachers' perceptions and preparedness to lead as teachers in the Western Cape. The findings showed that teachers were optimistic about teacher leadership and that they favoured the democratic practice of distributed teacher leadership, but indicated that teacher-leaders must be continually supported by professional development programmes to foster the buy-in process by all role-players. Entry-level perceptions affected readiness for teacher leadership roles implying the need for greater attention to leadership practices to be enhanced by an environment encouraging collaboration, professional development, personal development, and a focus on better learning outcomes for children.

For teacher-leaders to perform their roles effectively and interact with the dynamics of supporting children's learning, their professional maturity is a requisite. In this regard, Msila (2021), who revisits teacher leadership in the South African context by studying four Gauteng and Eastern Cape schools, points out that school improvement is an integral part of the work of a school leader; and as such, teacher-leaders are expected to shoulder many responsibilities, including actively engaging in alternative practices to effect improvement. To be effective in this space, teacher-leaders would have to be professionally mature and act as team-players to support change initiatives according to contextual conditions that shape teachers' decisions to assume leadership roles. These conditions may create setbacks for teachers who want to serve as teacher-leaders. Hence, a call is made to visionary leaders to adopt a critical stance regarding teacher leadership and its benefits for school improvement, which will ultimately enhance the quality of children's learning outcomes.

2.12.3 Moving Beyond Classrooms to Broader Spaces for Teacher Leadership

Literature confirms that understanding the school context is critical to understanding teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Harris, 2004; Grant, 2019). For Spillane (2004) and Grant (2019), contextual influences play an important part; hence, in this study, it was essential to focus on the influences of historical, institutional, and broader community cultural contexts.

Firstly, the historical context has been the entry point for many studies in teacher leadership; for example, Sibanda (2017), in his study on the understanding of

distributed leadership in South African schools, notes both the challenges and the opportunities. He asserts that educational reform is not a straightforward process in South African schools. The historical conditions continue to influence what happens in present-day teacher leadership contexts. Similarly, the work of Makoelle and Makhalemele (2020) on teacher leadership in South Africa, confirms that the historical context and political dispensation are critical influencers in teacher leadership research in South Africa, especially when one considers the gap between advantaged and previously disadvantaged schools. In terms of the aforesaid, the way in which teachers conceptualised teacher leadership, differed in both cases. Since the effects of past struggles with inequities were cascading into current times, the controlling and dominant positional forms of the leadership of the apartheid era have not disappeared. However, the acts of teacher leadership showed that some schools are effecting meaningful transitions to promote teacher leadership to improve performance, especially support for children's learning. Professional development efforts in these cases can be instituted and benchmarked for best practice.

Second, and importantly, is the principle of inclusivity since South Africa is a complex and diverse society that was strongly influenced by past divisions along racial lines. The teacher-leaders' work should be embedded in achieving inclusivity. Oswald and Engelbrecht (2013) recognise the need for schools to be inclusive places that cater for all children. Although their study is on school leadership, it is highly relevant to consider as they apply the framework of the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to show its link to a democratic distributed approach where focus is on the activity system (rules, influence of the community, and divisions of labour) which involves inclusion in terms of the disadvantaged.

Thirdly, since context shapes teacher leadership significantly, it is essential to make-sense of its components for cultural responsiveness. In this regard, Van der Vyver, Fuller and Khumalo (2021) studied teacher leadership in the South African context, particularly the attributes and cultural responsiveness, and found that individuals' characteristics were inculcated and immersed in the cultural context; thus, it becomes imperative to identify other aspects of teacher leadership in terms of cultural immersion.

This study opens that gateway to teacher leadership possibilities by highlighting elements of the fourth wave in the South African context. Northhouse (2010) categorises the fourth wave into the transformational leadership domain. Drawing on the work of Burns (cited in Northouse, 2010), it was emphasised that teacher-leaders and those who follow them, work relationally to uplift each other towards improved circumstances, such that when teacher-leaders function within a transformative paradigm, they concentrate not only on quality performance, but also on morality which according to the dictates of the Islamic faith, is foundational.

2.13 Research in Teacher Leadership in the South African Context

South African teacher leadership research can be seen as a unique context providing local insights. There are multiple contexts in which teacher leadership plays out, and there are gaps in the literature of some of these contexts. In this regard, Grant (2019:51) notes that South Africa presents an "emerging democracy perspective" for international research on teacher leadership; but adds that despite her review creating a gloomy picture, there is hope since South African teacher leadership research is small-scale and in its infancy. A call is made for more studies in teacher leadership, using a different theoretical lens from social theory.

One of the glaring gaps in South African research on teacher leadership is focusing on what happens in faith-based schools in the South African context, specifically to support children's learning. Private schools that offer faith-based education are a contextual feature of the South African education landscape. Teacher leadership in an Islamic context has not received sufficient research coverage, conceptually and empirically.

From a religion perspective, international studies provide some insights into leadership research concerning faith-based schools in the UK. Scott and McNeish (2012) observe that research tends to be sparse, with most studies limited to the Roman Catholic and Anglican schools, but Muslim and Jewish schools did not come under the radar. Of late, Muslim authors have taken the initiative to research Muslim schools in the UK; for example, Hammad and Shah (2018) investigated leadership in faith-based schools by focusing on head teachers' experiences. Their findings reveal how the context of providing children with a learning environment that had strong Islamic values clashes with British secularism, highlighting challenges such as

parental expectations, nature of support from the Muslim community, development of Muslim identity, teacher recruitment, and lack of financial support.

This study fills the gap in literature, specifically on teacher leadership to support children's learning in an Islamic context in democratic South Africa. As already noted in the conceptual framework of this study, the Islamic worldview provides particular resources that take teacher leadership outside the quest for better academic learner-performance. Teacher leaders in Islam have a responsibility as the *Kalifah* to execute their responsibilities diligently so that the divine duties are fulfilled in the context of worldly life. Looking at teacher leadership from this perspective, gives a new meaning to it seeing that the focus is on the concept, the influences, the enablers, the barriers and the move to strategic interventions. It is hoped that this pioneering study will invite more research on teacher leadership in schools for Muslim children in South Africa.

2.14 SUMMARY

This chapter aimed to enlighten aspects that focused on the conceptual framework and the review of current literature on the study under investigation. The conceptual framework was drawn from the resources of two worldviews – secular and Islamic. The integration of both, led to valuing teacher leadership as a hybrid concept. The research questions also guided the formulating of themes to explore the literature. The themes of teachers influencing children's learning, the critical Islamic concepts involved, and the factors enabling and constraining teacher leadership were discussed. This part concludes with the exploration of interventions to promote teacher leadership development. The gaps which this study exposed in literature were identified through exploring the three waves of research in the South African context. Thus far, there has been a dearth of research on teacher leadership in the Islamic context for supporting children's learning, hence this study attempted to fill the gap in literature. In light of the above, the next chapter (3) presents the research design and the methodology.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter (2) discussed the conceptual framework of the study and the literature review. It explained the key concepts relevant to the study, and the gap in the literature that this study addresses. The main aim of this chapter is to present the research design and the methodology, with justification for the choices made. The chapter begins with a discussion of the interpretive paradigm. A qualitative approach was applied in the study to connect with the subjective meaning-making of teacher-leaders. The case study qualitative research design was appropriate to develop an in-depth understanding of teacher leadership through multiple cases that were bound in an Islamic educational context. Purposive and convenience sampling were used for the selection of eight participants from three schools in the Pretoria West region. Semi-structured interviews provided rich insights into teacher leadership in selected school contexts. The data was analysed using the thematic analysis approach. Lastly, the quality assurance, ethical issues, and researcher dynamics are discussed.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The concepts that informed this study (see conceptual framework in Chapter 2) were located in the interpretive paradigm. A historical discussion of the concept from the education perspective is helpful to justify the location of this study. The concept of a paradigm is historically attributed to the work of Thomas Kuhn (1962) who advises that a researcher should use it as a framework to examine a problem. Historically, Kuhn (1962) adds that a paradigm is made up of a group of concepts, variables and problems and may be associated with a common set of beliefs which are about what research is, and how it should be undertaken. These aspects are linked to certain suitable research methods.

Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) confirm that in education research, the term *paradigm* refers to the researcher's worldview which is a way of looking at the world informed by beliefs that are shared by a particular group. In support, Lather (1986) agrees that a research paradigm will show what the researcher believes about his/her lifeworld which determines what the researcher sees, how the world is interpreted and acted upon. Similarly, Guba and Lincoln (1994) refer to the worldview as a powerful enabler that allows researchers to direct their research.

In considering the above, I, as the researcher in this study, was afforded the opportunity to share a personal dimension that allows the research community to understand the researcher in this study. I am a 29-year-old male who is a practising Muslim, born into a Muslim family with strong socialisation into the Islamic worldview. This faith-based system instilled the strong belief in one God, the worldly life and the afterlife. These dimensions with other pillars and cardinals of the faith, grew as I completed preschool and early school years in a Muslim school. The transition to a public school in the intermediate phase, meant that the formative teaching was already in place. I attended after-school classes in the local mosque which entrenched practices related to Islam. Once this was completed in the senior secondary years, I felt grounded in Islam. Many challenges tested my faith especially when completing undergraduate and postgraduate studies. As a teacher in a school that catered for Muslim children, the daily practices of Islam are reinforced which affirmed my worldview - and this study is part of that affirmation. The Islamic worldview and my researcher-positionality of being a Muslim insider in this study was valuable to make choices conceptually, methodologically and in the selection of the topic.

Accordingly, the paradigm of social construction was chosen as being appropriate (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This means that it is the researcher with participants who makes meaning of the collected data which is read from particular standpoints as guided by the researcher's positionality, disciplines, literature and the theories. Paradigms are comprised of several identifiable components, but a review of paradigms shows that there are three main components that make up any paradigm: ontology, epistemology and methodology (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Ontology is

concerned with social reality and what constitutes this reality. Where ontology is a focus, the researcher thinks about the research position with regard to the realities on the ground. The concept of *being-in-world* in a specific context is important in this regard. Epistemology deals with the knowledge aspect: how knowledge is constructed, how people get to know something, and how this knowledge is related to others. What it means to know something as well as the relationship between the knower and the known, is key to make-sense of the epistemological assumptions. Different paradigms have different ontological and epistemological assumptions which influence the research approach. The methodological aspects assist one to understand how data is collected, analysed and interpreted. This highlights the fact that there are particular ways in which a researcher believes that something can be known.

This study was grounded in an anti-positivist paradigm intended to unpack teacher leadership. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) contend that positivism enables researchers to study observable realities found in the natural world. This perspective helps them to generalise findings as there are strict controls for dealing with bias. One of the concerns with positivism is that the methods that are used to examine the natural world are not easily transferable to the social world (Maree, 2016). The social world is complex and diverse, and hence needs another paradigm to look at this more closely. This study was concerned with how people constructed and interpreted meaning in their educational context in relation to teacher leadership. The focus on laws, prediction and generalisations could have led to a narrow exploration of the participants' meanings and actions related to the subject. Hence, the positivist paradigm was unsuitable for this study.

The interpretative paradigm addresses the gap in the positivist paradigm. It values how people make-meaning and construct reality (Hammersley, 2013; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). The ontology in this paradigm is relative which means that reality comes into being through considering both the social and experiential dimensions in research. The researchers' subjective meaning-making is linked to their knowledge-construction in the research. For example, the researcher in this study is a Muslim male (myself), and as such he is an insider to the religion of Islam. This positionality does have a bearing of how knowledge is constructed for this

study. A person of a different religion researching the topic as an outsider might have a different subjective-driven perspective.

It is important for researchers working from the interpretive paradigm to be sensitive to the different ways in which people in different cultural contexts experience the world. The reason the researcher chose the interpretive paradigm was that it values people as being intentional in their actions (see discussion on agency in Chapter 2). It is through their interactions that we get a sense of how they understand the world around them (Maree, 2016). Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) shed light on the subjective perspective by examining several aspects such as paying attention to meaning-making as a human aspect linked to context-related factors, cultures and circumstances. Attention to the factors that create diversity helps to understand social realities as being complex. Thus, the nuances and richness in insights come from focusing on several variables.

The focus of complexity and diversity calls for a study on teacher leadership to be flexible rather than rigid. It was both the context and activities of teacher leadership that facilitated an understanding that this study sought to explore. I, as the researcher, recognised the fact that teacher-leaders in this study were people who were actively learning about their leadership when they engaged with me. As social actors, the participants shared their experiences. This made the study sensitive to a variety of interpretations and perspectives on teacher leadership. The reality of the Islamic context was complex; therefore, interpretations were necessary to unpack this.

3.3 THE QUALITATIVE APPROACH

A natural flow from the interpretive paradigm is the qualitative approach. This study used the qualitative approach because it was concerned expressly with the human element. The natural setting of the participants set the stage for the researcher to garner data from the actual lived-experiences (Creswell, 2014). According to Punch (2013), when a qualitative data collection process is used, then the focus is on non-numerical data that helps the researcher to gather the meaning-making perspectives. These perspectives enlightened the researcher on the social life of participants in particular contexts. The value of a qualitative approach lies in the way

it taps into the social processes and the range of influences from the context. When this comes to the fore, then it is possible to get a snapshot of experiences and relationships that people are involved in (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbon, 2015). As opposed to numbers, words become the focus of a qualitative study (Walia, 2015). Since the main aim of this study was to explore what transpired in teacher leadership to support children's learning in the Islamic context, this meant sourcing data from the people who were directly involved in teacher leadership. Hence, this study was concerned with meaning that had a bearing on the actions of teacher-leaders in context.

Another major reason for choosing the qualitative research approach was its value placed on methods and methodology. According to Jackson, Drummond, and Camara (2007), the value of qualitative research is exhibited in the way in which methods and methodologies are perceived. The method is about the *how to* whilst the methodology is about collection of data in particular ways. Both these aspects are related to the research design. The leaning towards a qualitative approach arose from the examination of several aspects; namely, access and recruitment of participants, their responses to the research questions, and clarity on whether their responses would have helped to understand teacher leadership to support children's learning in an Islamic school context. This study did not need statistical assessment of teacher-leaders' work, neither was the aim to test the impact of teacher leadership interventions on children's learning. The research design was also not directed towards generalisations. Hence, in summary, the choice of the approach was influenced by three critical dimensions: the study's aim, the subjective role of the researcher, and commitment to knowledge-generation.

3.4 CASE STUDY DESIGN

This study was based on a case study design. According to Yazan (2015) the case study methodology is contested, hence he cites the works of Yin, Stake and Merriam to illustrate the similarities and differences. This study is closest to Merriam's (1998) view of case study research as she acknowledges that it can be human (teacher-leaders) or a document (a policy) and something which has boundaries. Teacher leadership then, is a phenomenon that occurs in the bounded context of schools

offering Islamic education. This is the case which is made up of multiple sites that provide the contents for the big case.

Another defining factor of the case study design used in this study is the social construction of reality. Ridder (2017) contends that this type of case study deviates from research designs that come from a positivist construction of reality. Drawing on the work of construction philosophical orientations, Ridder (2017) maintains that reality only comes into being when people engage mentally and make contributions through language. The real-world is then a world that has come into being through a history of how people embarked on changes socially and over time.

When the above is applied to teacher leadership then it is the teacher-leaders' meaning-making, shaped by particular conditions and social practices over time that begins to surface in the research. Hence, a case study premised on the social construction of reality, does not look at facts that are perceived to be objective. The aim is not to look for patterns to generalise findings, but rather on particular people's meaning-making, and the spatial and time orientations in which their lives are embedded.

In this study, the interest in a case study was driven by the curiosity to know and to advance the knowledge-generation on teacher leadership to support children's learning in an Islamic school context. The three schools are the multiple sites that form the collective. They helped contribute to answering the research questions. The researcher also learnt the contextual elements of teacher leadership by looking at the multi-sited case study which required prioritising what could be integrated for a holistic understanding of the case in all its complexity.

Additionally, and related to the case study design, is the exploratory nature of this study which arose from the motivation to understand and ascertain the meaning of the experiences of participants from both the academic and the religious sector of the sites under study. The attributes of qualitative research, as posited by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), involve recording participants' views, examining their descriptions of their lived-experiences, and capturing these experiences. These aspects are normally procedural in case study research. The main aim of this type of research was to gain a bottom-up understanding of teacher leadership. The case

study design facilitated interactions between the researcher and participants, hence a degree of co-construction of meaning emerged (Creswell, 2013). Since subjectivity is viewed as an asset in qualitative research, the case study design also presented opportunities for reflexivity. All of the above made the case study design appropriate for this study.

3.5 CONTEXT

The study was conducted in the Pretoria West region. Presently, this region has a large Muslim population, mostly from the south-west suburbs of Laudium, Claudius, Erasmia and Itireleng. While Laudium was historically an Indian suburb, Erasmia evolved from being largely a white area during apartheid times to mostly a Muslim Indian one. Itireleng is an informal settlement on the outskirts of Laudium. These areas strongly cater for the needs of the Muslim population. There are mosques, and outlets that cater for the needs of Muslim communities. The communities range from working and middle-class to wealthy business families. While there are public schools in the area, several schools have mushroomed to offer Islamic education to children. These offer pre-primary, primary and secondary education.

3.6 SAMPLING AND SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The choice of schools and participants to include in the study led to much rationalising. Sampling is described as a procedure that a researcher uses to select participants based on the objectives of the study (Sharma, 2017). There is a variety of sampling techniques. Considering that this study adopted a qualitative case study design, nonprobability sampling was chosen. Taherdoost (2016) states that non-probability sampling is applicable to case studies because it prefers a small sample to make-sense of social reality. There is no aim to generalise findings so representative sample was less important. A robust study, nonetheless, requires a clear rationale for selecting a particular set of participants. There are four types of non-probability sampling techniques (Taherdoost, 2016; Maree, 2016): quota sampling is done so that the participants have the relevant characteristics of the total population; snowball sampling identifies a few key individuals who identify others; convenience sampling is used when researchers choose participants who are easily

accessible; and purposive sampling is when the researcher makes a judgement to include certain participants who can provide the relevant data needed for a study.

In this study, both purposive and convenience sampling were used. Purposive sampling enables the researcher to use his or her judgement to select the participants, the sites and the events for data generation processes (Maree, 2016). As noted previously, it also referred to as judgement sampling. Sharma (2017) provides the advantages and disadvantages of using purposive sampling. When purposive sampling is used, it allows researchers to choose a suitable number of participants according to certain prescribed criteria. The participants who are chosen are normally the ones who provide information-rich incisive data because of their knowledge and experience. In other words, participants chosen are normally well-versed with the phenomenon under investigation. It also allows one to derive meaning from the sample that is studied even though this might be small. The disadvantage could be that the researcher could be biased in the sample creation, but this can be addressed by paying full attention to assumptions and providing clear justification for choices.

Three Muslim schools in Pretoria West were chosen for the study. The schools were chosen as they were considered to be progressive as learning organisations. They were also convenient to access given that this study had a tight time-frame and limited financial resources. The one site was the researcher's place of employment, and the other two were a few kilometres away. Hence, the participants as knowledge-holders, were in close proximity. Teacher leadership is an important arm of a learning organisation, and these schools embraced some form of this characteristic. The schools have been in operation for over fifteen years. All schools cater for Muslim boys and girls. The schools' curriculum included academic and Islamic education subjects with slots for the midday prayer session. Both male and female members of staff shared the same staff rooms in School 1, but not in Schools 2 and 3. The gender separation took place expressly during the midday prayer session, which cuts across the school day. All staff and children adhered to the Islamic dress codes. The females were modestly dressed while males wore their *kurthas* (male dress) with hats and shirts or pants with hats. There were female staff members who wore cloaks and veils.

There were eight Muslim participants in the study - six from the academic section and two from the religious section. Choosing the participants in this way afforded the researcher an understanding of the similarities and differences about how teacher-leaders understood leading processes, and the conditions that shaped their practices. The criterion for selection was that they should have been either given the position of teacher-leaders or have been empowered/motivated to perform as teacher-leaders. They should have at least four years of experience as teachers, and at least two years in a leadership role.

Another type of sampling pertinent to this study was convenience sampling. Etikan, Musa and Al Kassim (2016) compare purposive and convenience sampling but state that either may be suitable depending on the nature of the study and the type of research being conducted. They refer to convenience sampling as haphazard or accidental sampling, but researchers use this type of sampling as it creates easy access to a site, ensures that a site is within travelling distance, that travelling to a site as well as data collection can be done in a short space of time, and that participants are willing to be involved in research activities. The rationale for using this technique (in addition to purposive sampling) was due to location, logistics, financial implications, and administrative considerations (table 3.1). The full explanation of the table below is in Chapter 4 section 4.3.

Table 3.1: Summary of the school sites and participants

School	Participants	Teacher leaders' focus	Age and Gender	Highest Qualification	Total years of experience in teacher leadership
1 Grade R to 12	P1	Religious with supportive academic focus	49 Male	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Islam	10—15
	P2	Academic with supportive religious focus	45 Female	Doctor of Philosophy candidate, Master's in Education (MEd) in Child Psychology Honours in Sociology Honours in Clinical Psychology	9

	P3	Religious with supportive academic focus	52 female	National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) Certificate in Islamic Studies	14
	P4	Academic with supportive religious focus	37 female	Occupational Therapy Assistance Qualification NPDE Advanced Certificate in Education (A.C.T) Certification in Montessori	4
2 Grade RR to 12	P5	Academic with supportive religious focus	47 male	Diploma in Education Bachelor of Arts (B.A) in Education (majors in Islamic Studies) Honours in Islamic Studies	17
	P6	Academic with supportive religious focus	29 female	Bachelor of Education (BEd) Foundation Phase	4
	P7	Academic with supportive religious focus	Past retirement age - female	Diploma in Education Degree in English Teaching	15
3 Grade RR to 12	P8	Academic with supportive religious focus	45 female	Social Science Degree (Psychology and Law) Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) (Current)	4 to 5

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection in qualitative research must be aligned to the aim of producing data that captures meanings. In this process, one of the challenges was the understanding of the techniques for eliciting information pertinent to the study. The quest to enable meaning-making meant that certain techniques such as highly structured surveys were not suitable. The qualitative approach required a more fluid process where the researcher could engage with the participants. The flexible agenda was important to ensure that participants entered a common world related to teacher leadership - specifically supporting learners in an Islamic school context. These concerns pointed to using interviewing as a technique. According to Maree (2016), a qualitative interview endeavours to interpret the world through the participant's eyes. This means a conversation involving both the interviewer and interviewee should be planned to gain more insight into how participants view the phenomenon under study. There are three types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017).

The structured interview was considered too rigid for this study. The questions are prepared in advance, but not necessarily followed in the planned sequence. The key idea in structured interviews is to be sensitive to what the participants are saying and how probing and follow-up questions could be asked to engage participants.

Unstructured interviews were also problematic. Although it would have allowed for flexibility, the concern was the way in which open-ended questions could serve as a distraction from the main focus of the study as the researcher was a novice, and this would have been challenging.

Semi-structured interviews were considered as a suitable choice for this study. Adams (2015) outlines the advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured interviews. One of the aspects that made semi-structured interviews suitable for this study was the notion that as a novice researcher it was possible to be flexible. The flexibility was viewed as important to connect with participant's views, comments and opinions from their life world. Where this is evident, researchers have opportunities to probe and ask follow-up questions for clarity and elaboration. The latitude that the

semi-structured interviews afforded for expanding understandings was a great advantage. This dimension was particularly important in the study as the researcher was an insider on two fronts; namely, as a Muslim and as a teacher in an Islamic schooling context. The researcher's positionality meant constantly checking on assumptions and staying true to the participant's perspectives (see section on research dynamics later in this chapter).

Despite the advantages, Adams (2015) notes that there are disadvantages linked to semi-structured interviews, thus he urges researchers to first investigate the disadvantages before the advantages. This caution is important for novice researchers. For Adams (2015), researchers conducting semi-structured interviews should realise that it consumes a considerable amount of time, is labour-intensive, and that the interviewer has to be at a quite sophisticated level in research competence. Researchers should also have a comprehensive knowledge of the issues that are being addressed in a study. Dealing with large volumes of data is also daunting. Despite the challenges, the researcher saw the value of using semi-structured interviews. The confidence to go down this road was enabled through reading the benefits, and through discussions with the supervisor. Both the relational dynamics and dealing with a large data set, challenged the researcher in this study. However, the benefits outweighed these challenges.

According to Maree (2016), semi-structured interviews can be developed through loose themes related to a study. In this study, the themes and questions were set but served as guidelines. This preparation enabled the researcher to pay careful attention to the responses from the participants, to ask follow-up questions, and to interpret their meanings. The approach allowed for flexibility in the interview process. It also enabled the researcher to dissect issues of concern in the study. The following themes were used to gain a full picture of how teacher-leaders were supporting children's learning in an Islamic context: the understanding of leadership to support children's learning, strategies used to influence others to support children's learning, constraining and enabling factors, and suggestions for intervention. Within each of these themes, attention was paid to the teacher-leader's agency within the hybrid leadership context. The teacher-leader participants were

valued as knowledgeable people who could offer new perspectives on key issues related to their leadership to support children's learning.

The questions and probes on understandings clarified which understandings were dominant. The assumptions associated with such understandings were examined. There were some questions and probes that examined influences and factors. Additional questions from the participants were encouraged. This was addressed immediately and sometimes upon reflection. The interviews lasted for approximately twenty minutes on average. Time was also spent on building rapport with some of the participants. The researcher spent about an hour with each of the participants.

Since the researcher was a teacher at one of the schools, the awareness of power-dynamics was necessary for a quality and valid study. The researcher clearly stated his position as a researcher conducting interviews as opposed to normal duties as a grade teacher. In order to conduct a trustworthy, authentic, and unbiased study, I assumptions were interrogated via reflections (see section on trustworthiness and research dynamics). The study allowed for collegial participation and the sharing of ideas flowed quite freely. This could be attributed to the novelty of the study. There was also interest to gain understanding of what this study could offer to improve educational outcomes.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, thematic analysis advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006), was adapted. The steps outlined below were reinterpreted to make-sense of the findings of the study. Braun and Clarke (2006:87) propose six steps as follows:

Phase 1 – There is the entry phase that requires getting familiar with the data. To do this the transcripts need to be read and re-read. This entry phase is exploratory.

Phase 2 – Generating initial codes is undertaken by looking at units of meaning and assigning them initial codes across the data gathered.

Phase 3 – Searching for themes means taking the codes and clustering them into themes and then populating these themes with the relevant data.

Phase 4 – Reviewing themes is done to check the match between the themes and the coded extracts (level 1). This is followed by looking at the themes in relation to the data set in its entirety (level 2). This allows for the development of a thematic map of the analysis process.

Phase 5 – Defining and naming the themes: As immersion in the data happens, there is refinement in the analysis and the naming of each theme as the big picture emerges.

Phase 6 – Producing the report occurs by concluding the analysis. The scholarly report is produced by selecting the most illustrative examples and excerpts from the data to answer the research questions.

In this study, the above phases were adapted mainly through the use of the pre-identified themes informed by the aim and research questions of the study. The data from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed. It was read and re-read to help understand the meanings, and to record reflective thoughts. The main source of identifying the codes were the research questions which pointed to the units of meaning that were important to consider. The next step was looking for the themes. The research questions were turned into themes and then the codes were clustered under these pre-identified themes and sub-themes. Once this was in place, then it was necessary that the themes be checked in relation to excerpts of data. The data was revisited to ensure the best illustration of the analytical points that were made. In the big pre-identified themes, the sub-themes were arranged to foster a logical flow with most illustrative and complementary examples.

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS

As the social world becomes complex, the demand for qualitative research grows. This makes it increasingly important to ensure that a qualitative study is conducted in a rigorous manner. According to Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017), a qualitative researcher would have to produce a trustworthy study, and show that the data analysis was credible. There has to be a full description of the research process. In other words, the researcher has to detail all the critical aspects and processes of the study.

Qualitative research is sometimes viewed with suspicion. According to Noble and Smith (2015), the main concerns relate to the quality of the research with regard to its scientific merits, descriptions which lack sound justifications in the methodology, and the superficial tabling of the analytical procedures. These shortcomings lead to distrust in the findings. Another issue relates to the competence of a novice researcher to show scientific rigour that is required. The measures adopted in quantitative studies is not applicable to qualitative studies which has its own terminology for quality assurance of research. Lorelli et al. (2017) uses the work of Guba and Lincoln to unpack the concept of trustworthiness for qualitative research. They produced the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These criteria serve as an attempt to ensure validity and reliability that are normally attended to in quantitative research. When the qualitative trustworthiness criteria are satisfied, then a researcher can produce a study that will be acceptable to the scientific community. The following explains each criterion that is related to trustworthiness. The section concludes with the researcher's response to trustworthiness.

Credibility is about ensuring a functional fit between what participants present and how the researcher re-presents this (Daniel, 2018). There are a number of ways to ensure a credible study (Maree, 2016). These are listed as using triangulation, extended engagement, and observations that aim at comprehensiveness. Peer debriefing is also recommended to have some outsider to provide their view on the research process and the data. Member checks are also valuable where participants go through their own transcripts to check for accuracy, to ask questions, and to confirm the authenticity of the data.

Transferability is about the generalisability of the study. In a qualitative study, the researcher has to show the workings of the study so that each case is clearly explained such that there is a possibility of case-to-case transfer (Tobin & Begley, 2004). This means giving full details that are important for anyone who wants to replicate the study. This study provides ample details to allow the reader to understand the workings in the research process.

Dependability is linked to the need to be transparent about the research process. There is due emphasis on how logical the study is, the details it provides, and whether this is within the parameters set for the research (Tobin & Begley, 2004). In

other words, when someone peruses the study, there should be sufficient evidence to make-sense of the research processes. The study not only describes the choices made but also justifies this to allow greater understanding of the complexities that characterises research of this nature.

Confirmability is about ensuring that what is presented as the findings, and how it is interpreted, authenticates the data collected. There are clear justifications for how one arrives at conclusions (Tobin & Begley, 2004) – one is that the evidence must be clear. Guba and Lincoln (1989) note that confirmability is established when the other three criteria are in place. It is important to explain the choices made for theory, methodology, analysis which must be consistent throughout the research processes. Hence, the decision-making component is important. The decision making points in this study are reflected in the engagement with the research process including the researchers own insertion into the study space as an insider.

For a quality study, all the transcripts were presented to the participants to check for its accuracy. This member check requirement resulted in minor changes with two participants requesting a change in the wording of statements. There was also discussion of the study with a peer who had completed postgraduate studies. This connection alerted the researcher to assumptions. Additionally, the conversations with some participants alerted the researcher to the gaps in some content. For example, a conversation about the history of Muslims in South Africa led to the discussion on the Zanzibari Muslims in Durban. This content was added in the introductory chapter after the conversations.

This chapter provides much detail on the research process, including aspects on researcher dynamics in the Islamic context. This exposition is valuable for those who want to replicate a study of this nature.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Qualitative research deals with human subjects, thus their protection is key throughout research activities. Several guidelines have emerged to help researchers to adopt an ethical approach to their studies. Arifin (2018), drawing on in-house guidelines for a study in Malaysia, contends that there are several aspects to consider when engaging vulnerable groups.

Although this study did not include vulnerable groups, it had many traditional protocols to follow in the cultural context which is similar to the Malaysian Muslim context.The ethical clearance for this study was granted by the University of Pretoria. Once this was obtained, permission was sought from the principals of the schools and the governing bodies. They required some additional information regarding logistics, and then consent was granted.

Arifin (2018) outlines the importance of obtaining informed consent. All consent should be voluntary and those giving consent should be of sound body and mind. All participants must be given all the relevant information for them to be able to make an informed choice of whether they would participate or not. The voluntary participation aspect is important to ensure that there is no coercion. The power to decide was in the hands of the participants. In this study, the researcher was junior to some of the participants. In the schools in the study, the religious staff were deeply respected. When obtaining voluntary signed consent, an appointment was set up with the participants. This was done at their convenience. Once an initial contact was made, the researcher physically visited participants to explain the finer details of the study. Once they were comfortable, the consent forms were disseminated for perusal and signing. Since all participants possessed English proficiency, the researcher communicated in English.

Anonymity and confidentiality were requirements for the protection of human subjects. The real identities of the participants and sites in this study were protected via anonymity. The schools are referred to as Schools 1, 2 and 3. Numbers were used to identify the academic and religious staff (Participant 1,2,3 etc. - see Table 3.1 for more details). During the interviews venues were negotiated and privacy of information was secured. There was also openness to telephonic interviews to ensure that participants were knowledgeable about the research activities.

In this study, there were many ethical sensitivities that related to working with Muslim men and women. These sensitivities alert researchers to the fact that they cannot just obtain ethical clearance and think that they have addressed the ethical issues for a study. From the researcher's experience in this study, it was clear that the context in which the research takes place dictates certain ethical practices. For example, when the researcher introduced himself to the women participants, he did not shake

hands with them – this would have happened irrespective of the Covid-19 protocols. In Islam, males cannot have this type of physical contact with women outside the immediate family. The greetings were also done in the vernacular and served as an entry point to facilitate conversations before the research activities were undertaken. This approach varied with the men and women in the study. One school in the study was very traditional and conservative. This set of circumstances meant being more mindful of the protocols for interactions along gender lines.

3.11 RESEARCH DYNAMICS IN AN ISLAMIC EDUCATION CONTEXT

In Muslim-focused research, contextualisation is an important feature that warrants attention. A key reference to this aspect is the 9/11 event. The literature shows that since 9/11 there has been an increased focus on the Muslim world and hence more research. The methodological issues, however, have not been well understood. According to Castelli (2002), research when studying Islam and Muslim schools, have led to viewing them from an orientalism stance. Edward Said (1978) explained orientalism in terms of domination and having authority over the subjugated subjects. This then evades the importance of looking at a phenomenon as it unfolds in its natural setting because of the bias. These ideas, together with the requirements for a trustworthy study, led the researcher to look deeper into the methodological issues. His role as a male Muslim researcher is deeply implicated in such issues.

In this study, it was imperative to adopt the stance of active reflexivity. This term has been coined by Soedirgo and Glas (2020) who explain that it is not a habit or procedure, rather it is an embodied position in reflexivity that allows the researcher to dig deeper on the self from the onset of the design of a study to completion. Specifically, Soedirgo and Glas (2020) identify three aspects for examination. Firstly, positionality refers to how this is read by others in the interactional contexts, and the assumptions about conclusions. But positionality is not fixed as it evolves depending on the context in which the researcher finds himself. Also of importance is the state of humility which allows the researcher to become familiar with suitable approaches to adopt with the participants he/she is engaging with. Researchers have to be mindful of how they are being perceived and received. These reflections are important for researchers to become familiar with who they are, and how they influence the research process.

In this study, the researcher adopted a humble stance which was not difficult as years of socialisation in the Islamic belief system assisted in embedding humility as a significant part of the researcher's character. This is in accordance with the guidance of Qur'aan and the Sunnah. This being the case, it was natural to display humility, and to be mindful of who the participants were, and how to interact appropriately with them. In the study there were factors that needed attention with regards to specific interactions. A good example is the interactions in a space where some women wore the veil.

Throughout the research process, the researcher became more familiar with the idea that his knowledge-generation was always in progress which allowed him to reinvent himself as and when needed. A challenge experienced was thinking about religion as a common denominator between the researcher and the participants. As the research relationships unfolded it became clear to the researcher that he was dealing with interpretations as tabled by religious teachers in Islamic education and teachers who delivered Islamic education in an integrated way with the academic subjects they taught. Continual reflection proved to be valuable and created more opportunities to appreciate situations bound in meaning-making from participants' positionalities.

Through the tools of active reflexivity, the researcher was able to engage with multiple identities. According to hooks (2014), the researcher-role produces multiple identities which are flexible, and they are performed in context. One's positionality is not just about characteristics related to categories of difference (gender, race, social class or age), but entails experiences of both a personal and professional nature, together with ideological stances (Berger, 2015).

An important lesson learnt as a novice researcher was the view that my positionality is fixed. There were challenges as movements were made from being in control of the research agenda, and the realisation that participants were in control of the content required to answer the research questions. In the early interviews, it was difficult to stop participants and take control as there was awareness of being respectful to the participants. After gaining some experience, the interchanges in the semi-structured interview began to flow easier.

From the above, it may be confirmed that the qualities that a researcher will display will be incumbent on engagement with both participants and the contextual location of a study (Fujii, 2017). In this study, the researcher played the roles of a knowledge-generator, a listener, a connector of experiences, and a reference point for teacher-leadership guidance. The one arena of comfort was that the researcher was an insider in terms of being a Sunni Muslim. This enabled the sharing of religious identity with the participants.

The researcher worked with both academic and religious staff who were mostly senior in age. Age is a dynamic that researchers in cultural contexts have to be mindful of. In this study 'researching up' was an issue – meaning researching people that are in high positions and with greater authority. To take the driving seat as an individual conducting research, meant not only adopting an attitude of humility (discussed above), but also assertiveness. The latter was important for impression management. It was imperative that the participants respect the fact that the study was important and that the research activities needed to be taken seriously. This was particularly the case because of the potential this study to produce knowledge that could change teacher leadership perceptions and styles for supporting children's learning in an Islamic school context.

The entanglements with the researcher's insider position had to be engaged with. As a Muslim male who is a teacher by profession, there were insights into the workings of the faith, the school and the community. Access to the schools was not difficult but there were certain aspects that needed attention. As a male novice researcher, there were gender dynamics that had to be contended with. This study had six females. There was etiquette that had to be followed which related to ensuring that they were comfortable with speaking to the researcher, especially those wearing the veil. The Covid-19 protocols also meant social-distancing and the lack of direct contact.

The timing of the study was also important to consider. As an insider to the faith, it was essential to work with the Islamic calendar and prayer times. All schools in the study observed the midday prayer but the Friday prayer commenced a bit earlier. This was a very important gathering of staff and community members. The period of Ramadaan (fasting) was a time where much effort was directed towards reinforcing

God- consciousness, charity drives, and conducting additional prayers. These times were avoided for any research activities.

At different points this study created “reflexivities of discomfort” (Power, 2003:177). These pockets of discomfort, however, were valuable in different ways. It opened up the researcher’s thinking on the importance of reflexivity and its boundaries. The reflexive posture allowed for engagement with the research practice in an Islamic school context. At the same time, it allowed for discomforts to emerge. These discomforts related mostly to being a novice researcher, and to some extent dealing with gender positionalities. Pillow (2003) notes that these discomforts do not mean shying away from realties, rather it should be seen as an opportunity for self-development and the improvement of research practice. Both dimensions were valuable to deepening the research journey in this study.

Generally, being reflexive in this study afforded opportunities to critically analyse researcher status. The insider status had been explained earlier on. The ‘outsider’ status also unfolded as the study progressed. The researcher’s gender, age, experience and position in relation to the participants provided insights into the outsider status. The nature of this study meant that complex and multiple identities had to be adopted. This was mostly shaped by the researcher’s religion and the position held to execute normal duties as a teacher. Regarding identity construction, the introspection on personal positionality and how it influenced interactions with the participants in the study was valuable. Working with women allowed the researcher to think deeply about their lived-experiences as teacher-leaders. As a novice researcher some of the personal chats outside the research arena was helpful in creating a collegial atmosphere and for thinking about the positionality of participants.

3.12 SUMMARY

The focus of this chapter was to make explicit the research design and the methodology. The main aspects were not only described, but more importantly engaged with and justified. Considering that this study had concepts that valued meaning-making, it made sense to align it to the interpretive paradigm. Approaching the study with a paradigmatic focus made it possible to focus on people, context,

interactions and meaning-making. The justification for a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design was provided, given that the study was an exploratory one which sought a close-focused understanding, rather than generalisability. The quest for a trustworthy study led to choosing semi-structured interviews which included member checks. The thematic data analysis phases were adapted to work with pre-identified themes, and to select the most illustrative examples to produce the authentic evidence for this study. The ethical aspects of informed consent, anonymity, privacy, risk-avoidance, and voluntary participation were addressed. Since this study investigated a topic that is still emerging in literature, it was necessary to be conscious of the research dynamics that are critical when engaging in an Islamic school context. The next chapter (4) presented the research findings and discussions.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter (5) presented the research design and the methodology. The focus of this study is to explore how teacher-leaders lead to support learners/children's learning in an Islamic school context. This chapter presents the aim, research questions, profile of participants and data analysis. This is followed by the findings discussed in five themes. The themes are as follows: teacher-leaders' understanding of their leadership to support children's learning in an Islamic school context, teacher-leaders exerting influence to support children's learning, enabling factors, constraining factors, and interventions to improve teacher leadership to support children's learning.

4.2 AIM, MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION, AND SUB-QUESTIONS

The aim of this study was to explore how teacher leaders lead to support children's learning in an Islamic school context.

4.2.1 Main Research Question

4.2.1.1 How do teacher-leaders lead to support children's learning in an Islamic school context?

4.2.2 Sub-questions

4.2.2.1 How do teacher leaders *understand* their leadership to support children's learning in an Islamic school context?

4.2.2.2 How do teacher leaders *influence* others to support children's learning in an Islamic school context?

4.2.2.3 What are the *enabling and constraining factors* to support children's learning in teacher leadership in an Islamic school context?

4.2.2.4 What *interventions* can be implemented to improve teacher leadership to support children's learning in an Islamic school context?

4.3 PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 presented the profile of the schools and the participants. A summary is provided in this section for ease of reference. Three schools from the Pretoria West region in Gauteng province were involved in the study. School 1 catered for children from Grades R to 12. School 2 enrolled children from Grades RR to 12. School 3 catered for children from Grades RR to 12. There were eight participants in total. Two participants were males and six participants were females. The participants are referred to in anonymous terms, for example, Participant 1. The participants excelled in two major focus areas for teacher leadership: Participants 1 and 2 had a religious focus with a supportive academic focus, while participants 3 to 8 had an academic focus with an integrated religious focus. The participants' ages ranged from twenty-nine years to past retirement age. The qualifications of the participants ranged from a diploma to a doctorate. Experience in teaching ranged from four to thirty-eight years.

4.4 DATA ANALYSIS AND THEMES

Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis was adapted for this study. At the outset, the data from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed after elicitation. A descriptive text was created which was read and re-read to understand the meanings and to record reflections. Re-reading the research questions guided the reading process. This helped to identify units of meaning and codes. The units of meaning were then clustered into the pre-identified themes and sub-themes, guided by the research questions. Working in this way provided insights into the selection and arrangement of the data. The excerpts were chosen to authenticate the analytical points made. In the themes, the data was arranged to allow for a logical flow of the findings. There are five themes presented in the findings section. They are as follows:

Theme 1: Teacher-leaders' understanding of their leadership to support children's learning in an Islamic school context

Theme 2: Teacher leaders exerting influence to support children's learning

Theme 3: Enabling factors for teacher leadership

Theme 4: Constraining factors for teacher leadership

Theme 5: Interventions to improve teacher leadership for supporting children's learning

4.5 FINDINGS

4.5.1 Theme 1: Teacher leaders' understanding of their leadership to support children's learning in an Islamic school context

(i) Data presentation

In this study, it was clear that teacher leadership was understood as a position of influence from a divine frame of reference, rather than just an assigned role by a principal or a teacher taking the initiative in the schooling context. This is in keeping with the foundational teaching that Islam is a way of life. All actions have to consider the belief systems, the principles and the values. All participants spoke about some sort of reform that teacher-leaders engender as change agents. These changes were both inside and outside classrooms. There were references to changes for children and adults. The findings discussed below show the dimensions that served as the building blocks for Muslim teacher-leaders' understanding of their leadership.

Participants 1 and 2 explained their understanding of the concept of teacher leadership via separating dimensions. For Participant 2, the teacher must understand the personal dimension associated with leadership characteristics and confidence. They must also understand the school dimension where the teacher has the opportunity to act as a leader to develop children's agency potential, amongst other things. Both the personal and the professional aspects were considered to be important. Participant 1 separated the concept by aligning with strong framings from divine sources. He noted how the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) was sent as a teacher of the Qur'aan, and as a reformer. The concept of a teacher was then viewed as one who is not only passing on information but is also involved in the process of reformation and correcting behaviour, imparting good ways, good

morals, etiquettes and character-building of learners. He felt that a teacher who is a leader, has to go beyond just working with children. He spoke about relationships with fellow colleagues and interacting with them in the school environment and beyond. Participant 6 also concurred with the view of teacher leadership having a reach beyond 'a teacher in the classroom'.

To be influential in a broad context as a teacher-leader, Participant 1 felt that the teacher-leaders must be of good character and act in the service of humanity at large. This points to the concept of moral education (*ta'dhib*) and service leadership. Participant 8 also alluded to the importance of teacher-leaders being self-aware and knowledgeable about their duties as leaders. This concern can be related to the demands for moral practice in Islam. The excerpt below sheds light on the calling to be a good Muslim with sound values. The acts that emanate from such a person has a greater chance of being perceived as authentic.

> *P8: Well, I think you yourself must be aware of the kinds of requirements you must know…as a Muslim…what is required of you as a human being. You've got to instil in people basic values like compassion, sincerity and I think you know when you are sincere about what you do, it has the desired effect and people can sense when you are sincere about wanting to contribute to promoting their progress. You know they can feel your sincerity and you've got to do it with wisdom, love and compassion. It doesn't work otherwise.*

The work of the teacher leaders is not just about being accountable for worldly affairs but being accountable to God taking into account the responsibilities and divine trust. In the excerpt below, Participant 1 links the actions of the teacher leader to the divine and also alludes to servant leadership in the context of humanity.

> *P1: He should lead by example and interestingly the Prophet Muhammad may (peace be upon him) said in another of his traditions that a leader of a nation is their servant. This is interesting. So if a person is a teacher and is a leader he is not only fulfilling the role of the Prophet in terms of his teaching but he should also be serving right …. his learner's in the institution, his fellow teachers and like I said serving humanity at large…*

The idea of servant leadership also featured in Participant 3's understanding of teacher leadership. She saw herself as 'the servant of children'. This reference can

be understood in the context of the Islamic belief system. When children are born they already know God. The primary educators need to exercise the divine trust they are given with great care. Participant 3 understood her duty. In describing her role, she felt that she would be influential in the development of children's personalities. She also noted that their personalities should be better than hers.

> *P3: Teacher leadership is all about becoming the servant of the children. Like you have to motivate them and help them and you have to help them in such a way that you nurture them or help them in such a way that they become the person that you want them to…become better than you are as a person.*

Participant 4 elaborated on the response of the nurturance dimension (*tarbiyah*) of teacher leadership by noting the importance of teacher-leaders as providing 'guidance' which is more affirming of how leadership should be for 'bringing out (the) best potential'. The concept of guidance is pitted against direction. This suggests a more compassionate response to enacting leadership. The excerpt below makes this thinking explicit.

> *P4: For me leadership is about guidance rather than direction. I believe that people should be encouraged to bring out their best potential because everybody has a leader inside them. So, it's not for me to give them directions… it is for me to guide them into the right path.*

The task of guidance through the performance of teacher-leaders from an Islamic perspective, also emanated from Participant 4. The following excerpt shows the importance of modelling leadership as presented in the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

> *P4: So the Islamic concept is I think if you look back at what Islam teaches you and what our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) tells us about leadership. You must lead as a true example and people follow what they see because I can talk all I want to but my words may not be what I actually practice. If you guide people through your performance through your actions, wisdom and through patience then I think that is following the Islamic concept of leadership.*

The divine trust of teacher leadership in terms of role-modelling to influence the lives of children and adults was also articulated by Participants 5 and 6. For Participant

5, a teacher has to be ‘the role model’ because people are looking for role-models and teachers want to see somebody that is practising the Islamic concept of leadership. There is pressure to practically demonstrate that leadership was strong due to Islam being a way of life. Participant 7 spoke about how her task is to nurture God consciousness in everything she teaches to influence Muslim children's lives. To do this, Participant 5 noted how one has to a person that lives Islam so that the broader community will witness Islam in practice. Teacher- leaders are under great pressure to do the right thing. Participant 6 noted the double challenge for teacher-leaders in a school for Muslim children.

> *P6: You (are) now facing two different challenges. So, you are teaching the children on one hand. At the same time, you got to make sure that you incorporate all your Islamic aspects. So, every teacher leader (has to be mindful of) everything from head to toe –the way you dress, the way you walk, the way you speak. Everything is Islamically inclined and not just your normal basic education of Maths, English and Afrikaans.*

(ii) Support from literature

The concept of teacher leadership as articulated by the participants, reinforces notions of spiritual and servant leadership as noted in the literature. Egel and Fry (2017), in their exploration of spiritual leadership, highlight that any foundation for Islamic leadership has to encompass the spiritual qualities that are core to the Islamic belief system. By unpacking the notion of spirituality, certain qualities relating to the human spirit come to the fore. Kriger and Seng (2005) draw attention to the need on a personal level to feel a sense of interconnectedness, from an Islamic perspective. Spiritual leadership makes demands on attaining divine proximity (Nasr, 2013) from a personal standpoint, and then to extend that in the domains of work where one is involved in. The understanding of teacher leadership by participants in the study shows that the divine frame of reference was highly active. Monjour (2015) emphasises Islam as a way of life, and leadership as a trust from God. Hence, teacher-leaders have a sacred position, and they have to be mindful of their divine duties when they enter professions like teaching. Actions must lead to the betterment of humanity for this world and the afterlife. Thinking and acting in this way is a departure from the professionalism that is required in secular

education. The faith-based drivers make Muslim teachers aware of their double responsibilities.

The participants in this study were aware of the importance of their calling as teacher-leaders. This was evident when they referred to character-building, morals, etiquettes and using the divine role-model of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him). All of this resonates appropriately with servant leadership in the context of the three key aspects in Islamic education – the *tarbiyah* (nurturance), the *talim* (instruction/pedagogy), *ta'dhib* (moral education) (Yasin & Jani, 2013 – see Chapter 2 for more details). In Islam, when any human welfare is endangered, then leadership is a 'psychological contract' between leaders and followers (Monjour, 2015:15). Leaders should explore the best options for the betterment of their fellow human beings. There are consequences for not acting in accordance with this belief system.

The findings also indicate that the servant leadership concept was infused with spiritual leadership. Greenleaf (1977) notes that in servant leadership there is a variety of domains that needs to be enacted for the development and benefit of followers. In religions that promote organised worldviews, the moral-ethical dimensions are given central attention. Teacher-leaders themselves have to be exemplary Muslims to ensure that the children they are nurturing are guided on the right path from their formative years. Van Dierendonck (2011) asserts that for good servant leadership, the school as an organisation must create opportunities for growth and development. Kalifah et al., (2019) refer to the indigenous ways of leaders where difference is not perceived as deficit, rather the needs and interests of followers in the context of their development are prioritised. In Islam, acting in this way is aligned to the duties of a *Kalifah* who fulfils God's expectations of His followers on earth.

(iii) Analysis and interpretation of findings

In locating teachers' understanding of their leadership within an Islamic frame of reference, it is possible to see how a particular worldview shapes what is thought of and acted upon for supporting children's learning. At the core, is the need to ensure that any leadership stance for a Muslim is informed by the belief system and the

practice of the faith as a way of life. As followers of the faith, the teacher-leaders have access to resources that guide them on how to be, what to do, and who to follow. The prescriptions have to be adhered to, and infused in daily life activities. Hence, the power to perform the duties of a teacher-leader comes not just from the demands of curriculum coverage, parent agitation, and societal educational priorities, but also from a trust and calling. There would be accountability to fellow human beings (e.g. the children, principals, members of school governing bodies, and parents) but more importantly to God Almighty which has both present and after-life dimensions.

The participant-teacher-leaders emphasised that the practice of selflessness was part of a divine duty. The emotional dimension was forthcoming from the teacher-leaders who were displaying efforts to forge connections with others. Implicit to what they noted in their understanding of being teacher-leaders, was the awareness that they had to be wise in what they did to support others; for example, children's learning. Knowledge and skills were important tools to help them forge ahead in providing stewardship. The mapping, to lead, in particular ways was driven by their quest to be agents of change within the confines of what the private schooling context offered them.

Another important direction was how the teacher-leaders were advancing the agenda to develop faith identity within schooling and the broader South African society. As a minority group seeking to uphold Islamic beliefs and teachings, the teacher-leaders do provide signs of commitment to the callings of the faith, and state requirements for private education. In the broader backdrop of extremism and radicalism that shapes public thinking about Islam, these teacher-leaders exhibit faith as being central in the lives of Muslims as they enact it to be productive and positive in shaping thinking and practice. These types of alternatives are important to present counter-perspectives of what Islam really is, and how it is used to support children's learning.

4.5.2 Theme 2: Teacher leaders exerting influence to support children's learning

(i) Data presentation

In the study, it was evident that the teacher-leaders were utilising formal and informal strategies to exert influence in support of children's learning. The co-ordination and management function featured less as opposed to what teacher-leaders actually did as agents to create change in the learning spaces. The concerns with instructional goals and the efforts for changing practice in the study meant that teacher-leaders were seeking to exert influence within the classroom and beyond. The discussion that follows shows their influence as they interacted with their peers, the principal, the parents, and the communities for children's learning. There was a mixture of the teacher-leaders directing efforts to professional goals while sometimes performing personal and moral obligations. The findings also show the importance of relationships, collaboration, trust and collegiality in the process of teacher-leaders' attempts to influence children's learning. This required considerable effort from the teacher-leaders and meant that they had to deal with some tense situations (discussed in the sub-sections below).

(a) Influencing peers and children

The processes of supporting children's learning are complex and diverse; hence, it is important for teacher-leaders to be up-to-speed with their knowledge and skills so that they can perform as effective and positive influencers who engender impactful change. In the study, the participants noted that professional learning platforms allowed them to learn, grow and feel confident to influence others. Participant 3 noted how meetings were arranged in groups to exchange ideas and advise peers so that the learning patterns of the child improves in tandem with quality teaching. Participant 1 preferred short informal meetings on a regular basis as he felt that teachers became more responsive to share their challenges with him. He described the one-on-one informal sessions, when held regularly, were more productive for relationship-building, knowledge-acquisition, and to exert influence where necessary.

The excerpt below articulates this:

> *When you have a one-on-one meeting you have ten minutes with one person. You deal with the issue directly, immediately and you can get some result. So, I believe in that and I sit and we talk whether it is during break time, outside or whether it is in an office, we sit and talk all the time. So I know exactly what each and every teacher is doing. In this way, if they are having any difficulty we can deal with it immediately and not wait for one meeting that happens once a month or once a term or whatever the case may be.*

The formal meetings, however, were valuable in terms of strengthening collaboration and enabling brainstorming on key issues at a departmental level. This provided possibilities for horizontal influence of actions in other departments. Participant 7 explained the advantages of the departmental meeting space which allowed for the sharing of ideas. The excerpt below indicates this:

> *In terms of my actual role in my team, we generally have a departmental meeting every week where we sit and we look at things that are posing challenges to us and how we can make it better and things we are improving on, things that work within our department. With that we can now filter it on to other departments. Meetings with those departments are really good.*

One of the issues that continued to create tensions in reform efforts for children's learning at two schools in the study, was the integration of Islamic studies with secular subjects. The two schools in the study were trying out different ideas to Islamise the secular curriculum. Each subject was studied for the possibility of linkage to the teachings of the Qur'aan and the Sunnah. Participant 2 from School 1 used her extensive knowledge of the Arabic language and Islam to influence the content and pedagogy for both the teachers and the children.

> *I do integration because of my background in Islamic studies. I am teaching Arabic, so I do Islamic integration…we have a theme in English and Afrikaans… we teach Arabic as a language. I use the same vocabulary to help the kids to find it in the Qur'aan or maybe the concept or the theme. We try to relate this to Islamic history, or the life of the Prophet Muhammad may peace be upon him. That is the way I do integration. I also work with thinking skills. I help the kids (and) even the teachers to integrate this in their teaching*.

Participant 5 explained how they were able to integrate topics in mathematics; for example, teaching of fractions related to the Islamic practice of inheritance. For the complex reform project of Islamisation and for overall support, there was a mentor system. Participant 5 as a teacher-leader built collegial relationships via mentoring. He described the system to influence quality learning as follows:

> *We have a mentor system with our HOD who is the senior maths teacher. Then we've got an upcoming teacher that's got potential to teach grades 7 and 8 and 9. So how do you bring them to grade 12. So then we mentor them with the HOD to put them a few years in 10, then few years in 11 and then they go to 12. Then they get strong to be a matric maths teacher. Whereas the HOD go down, they go up. So you are basically empowering the other teachers to develop through the system.*

From evidence above, it is clear that the role of a teacher-leader requires substantial and dedicated effort. To be influencers who are authentic, the teacher- leaders should ensure that they update their knowledge and skills, and use them effectively. Participant 8 spoke about seeking 'fool-proof' professional development materials to share with teachers under her supervision in the school workshops. This was proving to be successful. Participant 8 had the following to say: "You know I have actually done that, and it's proved to be quite useful". Participant 6 noted that at a horizontal level, the teachers have to motivate each other and do a lot of hands-on work, and not rely on books. She saw herself as motivating the other teachers.

To influence children's learning, a teacher-leader has to be approachable. Participant 7 possessed a degree with specialisation in psychology. The children found it easy to interact with her. She used her professional knowledge and skills to support children, and to share experiences with teachers for confidence-building. She had the following to say:

> *…. I often experience learners coming to me and saying that (they) have an issue and please can I assist… maybe personal or maybe with work (or) whatever it is that I can do in terms of going the extra mile - pointing them to other sources of references like go onto YouTube or using different apps… study skills on how to get prepared for the papers. I do find myself interacting with both the learner and teachers. if you look at our grade 8 Economic and Management Science (EMS) learner - he says sorry my teacher has been in EMS for years and now suddenly he's*

is doing the Life Sciences…So in terms of being a grade 12 teacher for years you know there were certain things I could impart to him and say to him that this is the way I do things in my department, and this is how I get my learners ready - maybe you could actually try to do the same that will make you a little bit more confident as well.

The sharing of expertise and offering support to peers was also beneficial for special needs interventions. Participant 4 supported this intervention:

My history is in special needs education. (This is) where I help my teachers. If there is a child with a learning difficulty…we assess the situation. I give them tips on how to improve the child's performance. So, whether it would be taking a bit of speech therapy and putting it in there and teaching them the tricks of the occupational therapy for integrating into the classroom - that's what I do.

(b) Support by principals to strengthen teacher leadership

The extent to which teacher-leaders exert influence for creating change to support children's learning will depend on the availability, the beliefs, and actions of the principal. For the teacher-leader to influence others, there has to be support from the principal. For example, Participant 1 expressed concerns about building a relationship with a new principal who was appointed during Covid-19. The negotiation of the risk-adjusted approach to school closures affected the interactions that were necessary for teacher-leaders to collaborate and influence others' thoughts and actions about children's learning. The excerpt below communicates this:

We have a new principal…and it is really difficult for me to say much. He has just joined the school in January. Then we taught for 3 months or 4 months and then went into lockdown. We are teaching online again so there hasn't been too much physical interaction as in one-to-one sitting, talking and discussing matters. Although we have had one or two sessions that seemed fairly useful and fairly beneficial. Hopefully we can grow as a department, as a school and take the school forward.

Where the principal was available and amenable, the teacher-leaders were able to present and deliberate on ideas to advance children's learning. Participant 2 stated the following:

> *I always go to him and suggest a lot of projects. He helps. So we did a lot of projects…like robotics, thinking skills, programmes about Islamic identity…*

Participant 4 spoke about being closely in touch with the principal for discussion purposes. He would support her on how to best help the children. Participant 3 saw the principal as a pillar of support for her work. Participant 8 felt comfortable to discuss educational activities that went beyond the normal scope of work. Contrastingly, Participant 3 saw herself giving the principal support. The excerpts shed light on the varied responses.

> *Participant 3: When I need the help of the principal, I will interact with him or I will have a meeting with him to discuss the matter. We go through different ideas so to see how we can help this child or to see how we can get the support for the child or the parent to support the child.*

> *Participant 8: Anything that I want to do beyond the normal scope of work, I discuss with the principal and I get him to see the benefits of engaging in such activities. I have been really fortunate because the principal has been very supportive for instance our speech contest have been really very successful. Our spelling contest has been very successful because the parents are invited and the principal is on board.*

> *Participant 5: Basically, as you see I sit here. The principal sits there. The door is usually open and we continuously discuss issues and matters arising at all points in time. And then I give him support and I give him my ideas or advice on a certain issue. Ultimately, he will decide what would be best to take it forward.*

(c) Influencing parents

All participants in the study recognised the importance of parents to support children's learning. They had varying ideas about how they should approach parents and use them as resources and partners in learning. For example, Participant 3 referred to parents as the ‘foundation of the child’, and that parents must be respected. The excerpt below articulates the importance of teacher-leaders

connecting with parents for spreading positivity and for strengthening the education triangle (learner-teacher-parent).

> *If you respect the parent and if you show you got love for that child or you show the parent that you know what you want is the best for that child, the parent will then support you and the parent will then help you to become the person that needs to be supportive. It has to be a triangle - you, the child and your HOD or your support at school.*

The above response emphasises going beyond core duties to find common purpose to support children's learning. This was recognised by Participant 6 who highlighted the effort that is required by the teacher-leaders for knowing children well so that they can evoke responsive actions. The excerpt below bears testimony to this.

> *I go the extra step. It's not that I just look at the child's book and mark their book and that's it. I know every child in and out from head to toe. When I see something wrong or something doesn't fit, the child is not managing or whatever it is, I address it. I mean I feel like in the long term it would help the child.*

The findings also showed that the link between teacher-leaders and parents was predominantly from a parent-involvement model. In this model, the parent is viewed as responding to the needs of the school via the demands the teacher leaders were making on them. One of the factors that is important for teacher-leaders is availing effective communication channels to avoid ambiguity and to build better relations between staff and the parent community. The teacher-leaders were well aware of this, and were adopting different strategies to communicate with the parents. Participant 4 described ‘open communication’ with parents. Participants 8 spoke about special events and communication. Participant 1 spoke of the pressure in the learning environment, and different ways on how parents were informed about their children's progress. The excerpts below provide participants’ responses on this aspect:

> *Participant 4: So we've got an open communication with the parents that we are constantly in contact with them. The moment there is a child who is struggling with anything we give support - first on how we can improve either the child's schooling environment or home environment. (We see if) there is an issue with the child physically, mentally, emotionally, socially. We look at all of those things holistically*

and then we guide the parents along the right track only if it's absolutely necessary then only do we encourage them to go for an assessment.

Participant 8: I do invite parents when we have quizzes and speech contests - you know to see the kind of work that we do because parents look at children's books and it becomes meaningless to them. They don't actually know the spade work that we do before the actual event. So it's been difficult for the past two years because we have limited time but parents are also invited to discuss learners' progress at the end of each term so they have an insight into what is being done - intervention programmes, enrichment programmes you know things like that.

Participant 1: Helping the parents - that's the difficult one when we do meet with parents or alternatively if we don't meet parents then we try and keep them informed on a fairly regular basis through whatever medium the school makes available – ClassDojo, the internet or email. We share what's on our programmes and what our syllabus is about… if the parent has any queries or questions they are welcome to visit us at school or they speak to us on the phone. In that way we clarify any matter... we can do more in terms of our interactions with parents but at the moment that is what we do.

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted negatively on the teacher-leaders' work as they tried to exert influence by being motivators and monitors of children's progress. Participant 7 had the following to say:

Participant 7: I think with Covid-19 the marks (in the subjects) are really bad. If you look at my current grade 10 Business Studies I've never seen mark's like that previously… we had so much of online. I mean kids don't focus online. Not everyone is cut out for the online (environment). With regards to parents I think it's important to be able to communicate with them to be able to tell them what is going on constantly with the child. Especially if you know that the child is not progressing. It's important to get the parent's support from home…You know the parent-teacher communication is essential. To get the learner to a place where they are comfortable when there is a breakdown in communication then you are not winning.

There were also instances where the interactions with parents were limited. Parental involvement was viewed as 'interference' in the work of the teacher-leaders who saw themselves as having the expertise to deliver quality learning without much parental involvement. The excerpt below sheds more light on this.

Participant 5: We've got a WhatsApp group for them (parents) for each class. The teachers are on that same WhatsApp group. Basically, the teachers have every person's phone number. We don't encourage too much interaction and in that sense, they haven't really interfered too much. Where it's relevant we promote it. For example, say a grade 11 child is having difficulty in Afrikaans. If it is one of the biggest problems, then they need tuition… we put them in touch with a person…

(d) Extending reach to the community

The teacher-leaders were evidently influential in their communities. This, however, was limited by the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants spoke about their pre-Covid-19 responses to community work. For example, Participant 3 noted how they initiated poetry sessions and art exhibitions to encourage parents and grandparents into the school-community. Participant 4 noted that she had reading nights which were disrupted by pandemic protocols. She described it as follows for the future:

For reading and literacy nights we have a few teachers that will be reading and then we invite our community to come in. We have stories and the kids dress up as their favourite book character to make it interesting for the kids – to instil that love for reading because literacy is the key to so many subjects.

When children are educated in private schools with a particular faith-based focus, then it can be very limiting for them to meet others who are 'different' from themselves. For a more balanced and holistic development, children need exposure to the realities in other communities besides their own. As a teacher-leader, Participant 7 maintain a broad perspective on community work to expand children's learning, and also to help other teachers understand the contexts in which people live. The excerpt below shows how Participant 7 made the extra effort to allow the children to go outside their community to different places where they were likely to see the vulnerabilities of other children. Accordingly, opportunities were also created for contributing to uplifting the lives of the less fortunate. The excerpt below provides more details of activities for learning across cultures.

Personally, I accompany our learners. Some of them were not able to handle it - like we did a visit to the paediatric burns unit at Kalefong Hospital. We donated toys and things like that and some of them were quite sensitive in terms of not being able to see what is happening. But we got back to the school environment and the feedback

that we got was sensitivity to the issue and being grateful to know the things that happen out there. I think especially being Muslims being in our Islamic environment in this school, this is our safety nest. We don't know the things that we are going to be exposed to out there and it's important that our kids become exposed to these kinds of things, so they know what is going on. Even in Ramadan we do this Ramadan Iftaar (the breaking of the fast) programme. Every Friday we feed the locals in Itireleng and in Lotus Gardens. We go into Itireleng - the location. Few children and some teachers accompany us. This is down the road from where we are. Some of them did not even know that this exists.

The Islamisation of the curriculum, as noted previously, has been challenging. In the study, there was evidence that there was expertise developing in this area. There was help offered to all schools for Muslim children in the study area and beyond. The bringing together of the schools could be viewed as a community of practice for teachers in schools for Muslim children. Participant 5 spoke about how the Islamisation process led to capacity-building efforts for professionals, and the community, at no cost.

Participant 5: From our side because we are unique in the Islamisation process that we've designed, we've offered it to the Amalgamation of Muslim Schools. We offered it to the different Islamic schools around here to say that if they need any help then it's available and if your school needs assistance on how to develop it we can help you…in that sense we are helping the Islamic process - viewing the so-called secular system on an Islamic side. This is one of the ways that we work with the Muslim community.

When teacher-leaders see their role beyond the confines of their responsibilities in schools, they do act in their personal capacities and may affiliate with organisations that are involved in community work. For example, Participant 2 was visibly active in community outreach, and used her expertise to help vulnerable women and children. The excerpt below sheds light on efforts of empowerment:

I don't do it (community work) under the school, I do it individually. We have an organisation that we do a lot of workshops with the community. We target women and children. We do a lot of support for them in English and Maths. We also do Robotics and Life Skills. We also target refugee women and immigrant women to improve their skills so that they can find jobs.

4.5.2.2 Support from literature

The findings on teachers exerting influence to support children's learning is aligned to hybrid teacher leadership as posited by Margolis (2012) and Jacques et al. (2016). The teacher-leaders' work is complex, and we admire their attempts to go beyond the classroom to the school and community. What is different from the literature is the divine calling to fulfil, not only a worldly duty and its immediate demands, but also the divine duty. The latter becomes clearer if we engage with the frameworks of Islamic spirituality and servant leadership. The teacher-leaders' work in this study resonates with nine spheres of teacher leadership action outlined by Fairman and Mackenzie (2012).

To exert influence on children's learning, teacher-leaders must interact with different people: their peers, the principals, parents and community members. Each of the engagement opportunities promotes their advancement of their knowledge and skills. They also become *au fait* with their own actions via reflection, and how their influences are being experienced by others. This is noted, for example, on how the teacher-leaders engage with the principal. A flat hierarchy becomes possible because of the teacher-leader's attention to relationship-building. The collaboration and mentorship examples in this study are aligned to Fairman and Mackenzie's (2012) references to the importance of building the school culture.

The teacher-leaders in the study also operated within a distributed approach to leadership. Devos, Tuytens and Hulpia (2014) note that distributed leadership is a valuable way to helping the organisation for optimal functioning. In this study, the teacher-leaders engaged with different role-players including the principal to help support children's learning. The formal and informal opportunities provided by the distributed leadership approach assisted the teacher-leaders to make some headway regarding collegiality and building trust. However, there were also tensions in the roles they played that required strategic intervention.

4.5.2.3 Analysis and interpretation of findings

This study showed that exerting influence to support children's learning depended on the context where teacher-leaders perform their duties. In a private Islamic education context, teacher-leaders were presented with opportunities that allowed them to

perform their work both in formal and informal ways. Their empowerment opportunities and working in horizontal and vertical leadership models stimulated them to flourish in certain aspects, but sometimes also created tensions. To exert influence, the teacher-leaders learnt the importance of being knowledgeable, skilled and approachable.

What is also evident, is the identifiable role of teacher-leaders when compared to any other leadership position. The teacher-leaders in the study were multi-talented as collaborators, problem-solvers, decision-makers, developers, and initiators of change. These roles enacted by the teacher-leaders also confirms that informal teacher leadership can arise outside formal frameworks. Teachers who feel energised to go the extra mile can be motivated to use their knowledge and skills to effect meaningful change. Since they are intrinsically motivated to do so, external rewards and formal structures are not needed to engage and effect the changes to support children's learning. Informal initiatives have the potential to change the culture at the school, the community in which it is embedded, and the teaching profession as a whole. Such developments are crucial for supporting children's learning in an Islamic schooling context. As teachers grow their motivation to lead learning, the need for teacher-leaders' professionalisation increases, and hence more financial resources are required for professional learning. In summary, the informal efforts of teacher-leaders can lead to the formalisation and development of the 'teacher-leader-sector'. Once this happens, the resultant mushrooming of enabling environments will allow for change to occur from within institutions and individuals.

It is also evident that the circumstances in which teacher-leaders find themselves in, allow for opportunities to take the initiative to excel in their own learning. These initiatives arise from both the objectives of supporting learners and improving children's learning, and the conditions that shape them. This study highlights that if teacher-leaders have the intrinsic motivation and zest to support learning, then shifts in practice are possible. The evidence garnered from data collection indicated a willingness of teacher-leaders to learn, take risks, collaborate, and initiate innovation (among others). With this positivity, the sources of tensions and conflict could also be minimised, but this requires teacher-leaders to exercise their interactional skills

astutely and provide opportunities to self-reflect. The reflections are valuable for awareness-raising and redirecting efforts for change. The informal experiences contribute to professional learning which filters into formal programmes for teacher-leaders in Islamic school contexts.

4.5.3 Theme 3: Enabling Factors for Teacher Leadership

4.5.3.1 Data presentation

Collaboration and building collaborative networks are enablers for advancing the influence of teacher-leaders. When teams strongly collaborate, then teacher-leaders can co-construct ideas and devise informed decisions for reforming children's learning. Four participants identified collaboration as an enabler for their work. Participant 1 spoke about how teacher competence makes him feel confident. The excerpt below (P1) elaborates on the value of working together (despite differences) with a competent and dedicated team:

> *What makes it easy is the fact that I am fairly confident that the team of teachers that I have with me are doing their work. They are dedicated. They are committed and they are working. We can speak to one another despite our differences. We can speak, we can argue, we can debate and we can move forward… I know that I have teachers who are committed, dedicated and hard-working - (they) give everything of the best in the classroom. They are always busy developing things. They always come up with ideas. We opened with the discussion…and we take it from there… We try and implement it in the classroom and I think that gives me a sense of confidence and comfort as well.*

Participants 5 and 8 also noted the importance of collaboration but focused more on the qualities of the teacher-leader as a relationship-builder, and earning the trust of teachers through a person's personality. Participant 3 spoke about the need to build up each other, and build trust among the role-players like the board of governors, the principal, the HODs, the school management teams, and the teachers. Participant 5 was emphatic that teacher-leaders invest in building relationships for better results by developing a good rapport, showing respect, and exhibiting gentleness. She was quick to point out that investment in relationships has to be matched with being task-driven in order to successfully attain the outcomes for children's learning, and for school reform. An enabling environment of openness and flexibility was also considered to be important. The excerpt that follows demonstrates this.

> *To be a leader what's important is that you have to have a good rapport with your people. If you have people under you and you show them respect, you show them kindness, you show them gentleness but at the same time you mean business then your work gets done. We are not too formal, rigid and technical about things. We want our work done. It's easy for (teachers) so because they have that understanding - easy going understanding and open door policy. The teachers feel comfortable and they don't feel like you are judging them…*

Participant 3 drew attention to the importance of support from her colleagues and learners' parents. She felt encouraged to do her work meticulously when she was motivated by those whom she valued, and those who valued her. When things didn't go quite well, she knew she could rely on colleagues and parents for support. The following excerpt testifies to this:

> *My colleagues - the ones that are near and dear to me in school, the ones that help me, support me and encourage me. I must say it is my colleagues and some of the parents also - the encouragement from them but mostly my colleagues - encouraged me to such an extent that you feel like you know when one of your days are low, one of them just comes and gives you that push and then you can carry on*.

Participant 4 believed that teacher-leaders are most enthusiastic when they are emotionally driven to achieve the best outcomes for children. This, together with a supportive staff who are willing to learn. was viewed as critical to inspire teacher-leaders in their work. She (P4) had the following to say:

> *Well, my passion for children and then having a very supportive staff I think that's what makes it (my task) easy. My staff are always eager to learn. So if they find that I said OK let's try this method instead of what you were doing for so many years, they are very willing and very accommodating to go ahead and try it. They then give me feedback on how it works in the classroom and if it didn't work. I love children, so I am constantly trying to find new ways to get across to them to bring out their full potential.*

It can be assumed so far that the participants were enabled to do their work because they saw teacher-leadership as a mindset of self-belief – an opportunity to develop themselves and others through the work they did. This mindset was also influenced by the divine calling. Participant 2 believed that as a Muslim it is expected that leaders should be developed not only for the faith, but also for citizenry in South Africa.

First because I believe in it (teacher leadership) and I think as a Muslim we need to do that. It is a must. It's not something that I have a choice. We need to produce leaders in our community, in our Muslim Nations because we need it to improve. Even here in South Africa we need leaders to develop the country and the community.

Participant 7: Okay so it's never an easy job. You know that teaching it's constantly reviewing. It's constantly improving… if you have an obliging team and if the rules and regulations are followed and your team is doing what needs to be done then your job becomes easier. But I never believe that that's it there. There is always room for self-growth, improvement for introspection and things can get better

An enabling environment was important for good-teacher leadership. Participant 6 mentioned how senior managers are important to help her to perform her work effectively and efficiently. Participant 8 noted that resources were needed to go beyond ordinary information contained in textbooks. Participant 5 spoke about how he uses resources.

I look for new material. I plan my work very carefully so as a result I come up with new ideas and thus far I've been very successful in getting the children on board they like to work with me and likewise it stimulates me…

4.5.3.2 Support from literature

Working collaboratively is a great positive for teacher-leaders. York-Barr and Duke (2004) confirm that effective teacher-leaders work collaboratively as this presents opportunities to effect change. This study affirms the positive spin-offs of collaboration as reciprocal learning and can be mutually beneficial. Where collaboration is strong, then possibilities can arise from dialogue, problem-posing, problem-solving, and participation based on knowledge and skills. As teacher-leaders collaborate, they also build a communal identity. Sinha and Hanuschin (2017) in their multiple case study, argue that this identity-building happens at different stages of teacher-leaders' careers where there is participation in activities and professional learning. In this study, the collaborations were beneficial and emerged according to specific demands. The generosity and sharing were evident; a consequence of adopting values that are promoted in spiritual and servant leadership. Teacher-leaders must take care of those they lead - collaboration could be viewed as that act of caring. This study affirms the value of collaboration and

expands the literature to include collaboration as an important tool to better fulfil divine obligations entrenched in faith-based education.

Another enabling factor identified in this study was the building of relationships. Trust plays a major role in helping to forge interpersonal cooperation and working as a team towards shared goals. Demir (2015:624) mentions “organisational trust” - where this is strong, then relationships are stable thus minimising risk-taking. From an Islamic perspective, the teacher-leaders were in a position of trust so was incumbent upon them to drive this trust through actions that augured well for building the Muslim community and the South African citizenry. Relationships built on trust featured prominently in terms of teacher-leader fulfilling all their obligations.

Poor relationships with administrators and/or colleagues was a factor that inhibited teacher leadership. As seen in the data presentation, the support from the principal was invaluable to the success of a teacher-leader. Principals could also be stumbling blocks to teacher-leaders exercising their leadership. When principals are unsupportive, teacher-leaders are often hampered in fulfilling their duties. This disabling practice could mean that there could be no structures or resources in place to assist the teacher-leaders (Klinker, Watson, Furgerson, Halsey & Janisch, 2010). One of the reasons for this situation is that the teacher-leader’s autonomy could be perceived as a threat to the principal’s authority. Hence, teacher leaders are discouraged by principals from performing their extra duties (Friedman, 2011). Consequently, this unsupportive environment could result in teacher-leaders feeling marginalised (Sanders, 2006).

Further, the recognition of the teacher-leaders and their own unique characteristics to fulfil their obligations was an enabler. The findings showed that teacher-leaders have to be self-aware, motivated and able to interrogate their own work. But these qualities needed to be refined, hence professional development has been recognised as an important way to help teacher-leaders to dissect their own work. According to Yonezwas, Jones and Singer (2011), when teacher-leaders participate in professional learning programmes, they build their competence through joining a community of practice or a network. Here, learning exchanges can be helpful to enhance specific competencies. In well-designed programmes the teacher-leaders are exposed to not only content, but also support for advancing their leadership

skills. Such programmes are still generally scarce for teacher-leaders, and for Muslim teacher-leaders specifically. What is also absent is the set of standards, or benchmarking processes for teacher-leaders. The standards could be valuable in setting minimum requirements and then measuring them against teacher-leaders' performances. This would be a critical entry point as teacher leaders grapple with the complexities of their work in a faith-based environment.

4.5.3.3 Analysis and interpretation of findings

This study highlights the fact that teacher leadership is not something that is an individual response, rather it is social practice which means that the context allows for teacher-leaders to develop innovative and creative strategies that impact positively on children's learning. The collaboration and self-awareness, among others, cannot flourish on their own and in a vacuum. Professional development is key but must be framed from an Islamic perspective to be effective for teacher-leaders in their context. The content, the pedagogical skills, and support must function from a perspective that is relevant to the education of Muslim children, for building the community, and for their future roles in society.

The enabling factors for teacher leadership also enlightens us on how the private schooling system was gaining an edge in the schooling market. The top-down leadership that normally characterises public schooling provision with role confusion of master teachers, is somewhat reconfigured in the schools in this study. The devolution of power and the focus on collaboration and relationship-building, can be valuable in the evolution of mindsets and practice. The human capacity below the leadership of the principal was exploited to unearth practical and visionary responses to supporting children's learning. Thus, teacher-leaders' agency has to be valued for the bottom-up change to happen.

4.5.4 Theme 4: Constraining Factors for Teacher Leadership

4.5.4.1 Data presentation

Participants in the study drew attention to several factors that impacted negatively on teacher leadership. All schools in the study were private so they adopted market principles to sustain themselves. Parents had expectations as they were paying high

school fees compared to public schools. The teacher-leaders were aware of the power of parents and their influence on hiring and firing staff. Participant 3 spoke about the need for the broader community to understand where the teachers are coming from especially where the environment is more business-like and less of a nurturing institute. There was frustration expressed among participants who claimed that there is no appreciation for going the extra mile. Participant 2 spoke about how they were performing in a time-constrained environment which made many demands on them. Participant 6 noted the pressure of keeping in touch with the rapidly transforming environment and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Participants also noted that parental expectations posed a challenge since most were from the middle- and upper-class backgrounds. They were seeking upward mobility for their children so that they could maintain a competitive edge. Participant 1 noted that parents expected particular outcomes from teachers and that this was problematic and frustrating for teacher-leaders. Teacher-leaders who were knowledgeable about children's development and learning witnessed the pressure that parents were putting on their children, as well as on teacher-leaders who supported children's learning in formative ways. Participant 4 made these views explicit:

> *…parents I think are the biggest challenge here... Parents don't accept that children develop at different paces and that you can't expect your child to develop the same as somebody else in the class. Sometimes the child could be lagging behind and they over pressurise the child to reach what the A student is getting. Sometimes we've got that A student and the parents are like yes but that is not good enough. You need to do even more and instead of encouraging the children and also praising them for what they have already accomplished, they bring them down. So for me I think that is what makes it difficult to deal with the parents and their expectations.*

There was conflict in expectations related to learning goals. Participant 1 explained how conflict arises between subject-specialists and non-specialists in teacher leadership:

> *Well, sometimes the difficult part is conflict. The term 'conflict' may be a hard word. So we can say a difference or diversity in terms of what is required or what is expected from a teacher or from a subject so that a teacher may teach with this*

intention that he wishes to achieve a certain goal at the end of the year. Where someone else has a different objective, a different outlook, a different outcome that he wishes to achieve, there is conflict. The teacher in most cases is the specialist in his area in his field or in his subject. He should be allowed that freedom to explore and develop. What becomes the problem is when someone is not qualified or not a specialist or not trained to teach the subject and they start to interfere and have their own expectations or their own desired outcome.

Teacher leaders put in considerable effort and energy behind their work. It is their duty to influence the child to produce better outcomes. However, pitching their efforts in authentic ways was proving difficult. Participant 5 noted (below) the struggles in trying to be an influencer:

What makes your work as a teacher leader difficult is that you don't know how to pitch. Sometimes you think you are doing something good and you know you are dealing with so many people. Sometimes they feel that you are being funny, that you are arrogant, that you are mister know-it-all. Then the difficulty is in how you deal with it and how you relate to it. When you find out there is a problem you don't realise that you are perceived in a certain way. That creates a problem…and it's not about you being a bully or whatever the case is but looking at the child coming first.

4.5.4.2 Support from literature

The constraining factors related to the model that the schools in the study were adopting. All schools were private and hence the business model was prevalent. In this model, there is normally a leaning towards creating a new learner who speaks to particular kinds of outcomes (Hogan & Thompson, 2019). Ball and Youdell (2009) identify two types of school privatisation that are pertinent to the findings – endogenous and exogenous. The logic of business, frames endogenous privatisation. The exogenous response is about the private sector selling its education products. The findings in this study are located in a juncture of both approaches. The private schools in the study were offering an alternative education for children, but this created certain barriers for the teacher-leaders. The survival of the schools depended on parent paying fees; hence, they were assertive and made certain demands which led to an intimidating environment which was impacting negatively on the teacher-leaders' performances. Conflict of expectations also led to

teacher-leaders experiencing stress and demotivation. They felt that their efforts to bring reform and support children's learning was undervalued.

This study revealed that stress can arise out of the conditions that shape teacher-leaders' work. The psychological and occupational stress experienced by early childhood teacher-leaders has been highlighted by Fletcher and Wisneski (2020) whose study focused on lived-experiences to gain a more nuanced understanding of stress in professional spaces, and their findings pointed to powerlessness, huge responsibilities, and being devalued. As a way forward, it is suggested that there should be creative interpretations of power, instead of it being viewed as something that disables teacher-leaders. It should be viewed as a resource to be used to effect improvement. Professional programmes should focus on how power as a resource can empower teacher-leaders. In this study, the teacher-leaders as agents showed their capacity to act in different ways. An empowerment approach to their development would enhance building their competence on how to use power in creative and appropriate ways for influencing others to support children's learning.

Additionally, relationships with colleagues could be constraining. This study showed that there are close relationships. Resistance or resentful behaviour from colleagues can make teacher leadership equally difficult. Some of the obstacles that teacher-leaders face when confronted with confrontational colleagues are described by Brosky (2011) who observed how non-support from team members can be difficult for teacher-leaders. The resistance may originate from resentment of individuals who might not have been successful in attaining the teacher-leader's position. They are likely to sabotage efforts of teacher-leaders. In some instances, there might be groups of individuals that form cliques and oppose the work of teacher-leaders. These groupings might be opposed to teacher leaders' progress or they might not want the change that the teacher-leader may have initiated. This might be particularly the case where new aspects to be introduced are 'radically' different and might expose senior staff as being backward. However, what might be enabling is when those who resist are given tasks of importance, where they co-lead or lead specific aspects through teacher leadership – this learning experience leads to better understanding of teacher-leaders' roles.

4.5.4.3 Analysis and interpretation of findings

The barriers experienced by the teacher-leaders emanate from the business model of schooling adopted by all the schools in the study. Parents have certain expectations which are not necessarily informed by sound educational practices. They then demand certain outcomes. This latitude that parents had in the study, impacted negatively on the teacher-leaders' work. It could be assumed that the teacher-leader's role was not adequately communicated to the parents. Despite this, the pressure to perform in particular ways is characteristic of private schools due to high school fees that parents pay; hence, they demand specific types of responses to their children's schooling. Teacher-leaders were also reluctant to implement a parent engagement model which was tightly structured and would have precipitated negativity and so affect teacher-leaders' morale. They would have lost interest in their work which affects efforts to generate change to enhance children's learning.

Additionally, the resistance teacher-leaders experience from teachers could also demotivate them. In the absence of professional development, teacher-leaders might also fail to understand how to influence others. Where modelling might be needed, teacher-leaders need to be reflective practitioners who model processes that make-sense to their target group. Where teachers experience teacher leadership as replication of practices, this leaves them demotivated and reliant rather than being agents of change who develop personal autonomy. Teacher-leaders should focus on improvements to be made rather than providing recipes for practice to support children's learning. This is particularly important where the education of Muslim children is involved. The scripted lessons that come from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and related textbook materials, need to be reinterpreted in the context of educating Muslim children. Teacher-leaders committed to improving children's learning should encourage teacher-inquiry rather than handing down recipes for what they believe is best practice.

4.5.5 Theme 5: Interventions to Improve Teacher Leadership for Supporting Children's Learning

4.5.5.1 Data presentation

The teacher-leaders in the study were able to share some thoughts on the interventions that would be helpful for them to flourish. These are related to working directly with peers, principals, and children.

All participants recognised the value of learning to improve the ways in which they supported the children. There was recognition that we are living in a rapidly changing environment, but for Muslim teacher-leaders this meant that they were dealing with traditional practices that were being challenged. Regarding improving children's learning, they had to ensure that they provided the best opportunities to help teachers in their instructional practices. Participant 3, for example, spoke about being open, selfless and child-focused in order to support children in their learning:

> *Participant 3: We have to be open in learning new things every day. We can't be orthodox, or we can't just say right. I know what I'm doing. You have to become humble; you have to understand that the world is changing and you need to revolve with the world. You need to understand that in the end it's not about you. It's about that child and you need to learn whatever is out there to improve the learning of the child*.

Mentorship and coaching are important ways to build teacher-competence to intervene in children's learning. How this is approached is dependent on the specific needs of the schooling contexts. Encouraging cross-learning, co-construction of new ideas, and sharing of expertise among peers with varying levels of experience forms an important part of teacher-leaders' work. Participant 1 shared ideas on the importance of creating platforms for junior and senior staff to meet. He identified a number of advantages. The excerpt below highlights his notions on mentoring and cross-generational learning:

> *…allow the teachers to grow in number (with) lots of discussions and consultations with existing people on every level. So, like I said it could be a junior teacher who is maybe a first-*

year teacher as well as someone who has been teaching for 30 years. They should be talking to one another because there's always things that could be learnt and shared. A new teacher is exposed to a new way of teaching. As a different generation of youth, he's got his own fresh ideas. The old teachers have got a lot of experience over the years. If they sit together and share ideas, that will go a long way. Having those weekly or whatever once a month meeting where teachers get to share ideas and speak about whatever is on their mind I think is important…

Another aspect of intervention referred to 'teacher-leader and principal cohesion'. Interventions must be framed and implemented not only for professional aspects but also for improving the personal characteristics of teachers and principals on how to manage change. Participant 2 felt that teacher-leaders and teachers benefit when principals believe in them and avoid bureaucracy which minimises the potential of the staff. All attempts to improve teacher leadership must be mindful of the specific needs of teachers and how they can flourish. Participant 1 spoke about improvement efforts being aligned to who teachers are and what their experiences are on the ground. He was opposed to 'outsiders' who had no recent classroom experiences of facilitating workshops to enable new practices. He noted the following:

…teachers are the people on the ground. They have direct contact with the learners, so they are the ones who have access to the learners every day. So, their ideas are very important. Sometimes we have workshops for example, and you bring a person who has not been in the classroom for the last 10 years and now he wants to share ideas on how to develop teachers. He is completely not relevant to the classroom situation. You speak to the teacher who from Monday to Friday for the last few years is in the classroom everyday interacting with learners, he knows what the needs are. He knows what's the best way to deal with learners. Allow the teacher to express himself and tell him what's required to improve and take the school to another level.

Participant 8 concurred with the view that any attempts for improvement of children's learning must help teacher-leaders to work closely with teachers. She substantiated her view as follows:

You've got to work with the teachers themselves they are well aware of the children because they've marked the papers. I have a very general view of the problem so I discuss with them which areas need attention and we discuss ways and means like in the form of remedial work or you can even have a workshop with the children…children become aware of their shortcomings.

The support and delivery of differentiated instruction was important, considering the private school environment and the individualised attention for learners, as demanded from parents. Participant 4 mentioned ongoing workshops to help her improve her knowledge and skills to support quality learning using different methodologies to connect with children's needs.

> *I think that workshopping is important. We need to attend more courses that address these issues of children's learning. If we can have different methodologies being implemented, it would be good. We have to have workshops that teach us the different methods and you see what works in your class because one method doesn't always work for every child.*

Implementing new strategies, however, was challenging for teachers. As a teacher-leader, Participant 7 noted how curriculum coverage and curriculum differentiation created a pressurised learning environment. She noted the time-constraints and called for flexibility to cater for diverse learning needs.

In consideration of the above evidence, Participant 5 spoke of the value of weekly meetings to deal with the challenges that teachers were experiencing in supporting children's learning. She believed that regular face-to-face meetings were necessary to connect with the key challenges that the teacher was struggling with. Having workshops, offering mentorship, and classroom visits were considered important strategies to create opportunities for teachers to enhance children's learning.

> *Participant 5: We got a special day on a Friday where we highlight certain issues relating to Islamisation of the academics depending on what is required from the teacher in the classroom or it just may be petty things on how to have discipline in the class or how to deal with children who have learning difficulties. We may get someone in there or something like that so basically, we support them by having workshops… and at the same time being a mentor. Then over and above that you'll have to do class visits to make sure that the teacher is teaching effectively in the class and that is usually done by the HOD*.

The workshops were beneficial for not only building knowledge to support interventions, but also for supporting peers. Participant 6 noted the ‘delayed’ learning experienced from workshops:

> *We do a lot of workshops and stuff and sometimes you feel like it doesn't help. When we face a challenge we realise that we learnt that in a workshop. You actually find*

you put it to use. I feel those workshops really help us… We are supporting each other - you're learning from each other at the same time.

4.5.5.2 Support from literature

The findings reveal the value of the lifelong perspective on learning. Huda (2019) provides a comprehensive view of how learning is perceived in Islam when he cites the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) and how he encouraged knowledge-seeking from birth to the end of life. The Islamic belief is premised on the idea that every child is born in a state of purity, but it is the environment that has an influence on what he will become. For children and adults, learning through astute role-models is essential. The teacher-leaders in the study were aware of their obligation to become lifelong learners. The teacher-leaders were knowledgeable of the fact that mentoring and coaching are supportive of teacher leaders' work. Gul, Demir and Criswell (2019) who explored teacher leadership through mentoring assert that for the development of teacher-leaders, mentoring should be an ongoing process; hence, mentors of teacher-leaders need to have adequate time and patience for the mentoring process to be successful.

In this study, the teacher-leaders preferred a site-based model of professional development. This resonates with Macias's (2019) idea for a bottom-up structure to advance professionalism. This structure affords teachers and teacher-leaders to use their own context to make decisions, identify the contents, and develop responsive workshops. This is possible because teacher-leaders have an intimate knowledge of what the pressing issues are. It also affords a safe and convenient space for exploration as a small group of teacher-leaders can better describe their concerns with key stakeholders.

4.5.5.3 Analysis and interpretation of findings

The teacher-leaders in this study recognised the importance of gaining professional teacher development. As teacher-leaders in an Islamic context, they were obliged to heed the call for lifelong learning that was divinely sanctioned. Considering that the development of teacher-leaders in an Islamic context is not straight forward, the teacher-leaders suggested a bottom-up model to professional development. This is significant, given that they had intimate knowledge of the drivers that impact on their

development. They were knowledgeable about irksome issues and were best placed to drive the professional development and secure relevant resources based on their specific needs.

To effect the bottom-up professional development approach for teacher-leaders, one should consider how teachers can contribute to their own development. Where this is forthcoming, teacher-leaders can be responsive to the needs of the teachers they are supporting. Where a co-constructed approach is followed, then teacher-leaders can also be viewed as learners and leaders as they engage with those who they want to influence. Approaching teacher leadership in this way, allows for more authentic practices. Supporting children's learning in an Islamic school context requires the meeting of the religious and academic staff. The platforms they occupy for professional development would have to be enabling for the meeting of minds and diversity aspects. Top-down approaches regarding professional development might provide restrictive frameworks that do not necessarily consider the contexts in which teachers operate, the demands on their practice, and the support required.

4.6 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The findings indicate that teacher-leaders are important human resources who deliver quality education for children to succeed, in addition to effecting change. Teachers-leaders in this study were serious about instructional practices as they were invested in the process of educating children for success. Together with the principals, they were attempting to construct strategic ideas and practices for broadening children's learning experiences, and for school change. These concerns also led to teacher-leaders being mindful of expanding children's learning in the broader community context which was outside the normal experiences of the children.

The findings on understanding teacher leadership as supportive of children's learning revealed that teacher-leaders were drawing strongly from the Islamic frame of reference to inform their work. This meant that the concerns that the teacher-leaders had for supporting children's learning was informed not just by the accountability to deliver the CAPS curriculum in a secular democracy for human capital development, but also (and more importantly) to deliver learning experiences in keeping with the

duties of a Muslim teacher-leader and as a trustee of God by acting responsibly. This was done in the classroom, in the school setting, and to a certain extent in the community. Teacher-leaders were thus practising hybrid teacher leadership related to learning spaces (Margolis, 2012; Jacques, Weber, Bosso & Olson, 2016).

The hybridity was also evident in the combination of leadership approaches that were forthcoming in the study. The teacher-leaders applied the principles of distributed leadership for their work. They collaborated in teams, and worked with the principal and middle managers to exert influence and support children's learning. Spiritual leadership (Egel & Fry, 2017) was evident when teacher-leaders attested to moving beyond self-serving interests and connecting with the divine power to inspire their work. The divine sources (Qur'aan and Sunnah) provided the teacher-leaders in Schools 1 and 3 with purpose, values and rules to live by. School 2 used the Qur'aan as the sole source of reference. The teacher-leaders used these resources to shape their thinking and actions. There were concerns about accountability and fulfilling the duties of a Muslim teacher-leader. This is in keeping with the Islamic premise that all actions are inseparable and considered to be religious acts (Mahmood, 2006). Hence, there is great responsibility to promote children's development and learning as they are gifts from God. In their duty as the trustees of God (the *Kalifah*) (Tambak, Amril & Sukenti, 2021) the teacher-leaders in the study were mindful of the importance of their task. They internalised their work as having links with nurturance (*tarbiyah*), moral education (*ta'dhib*) and the process of imparting and receiving knowledge (*talim*) through role-modelling and other relevant pedagogies (Yasin & Jani, 2013).

Also, there was evidence of servant leadership in the study. As a holistic concept, servant leadership enabled teacher-leaders as the followers of the Islamic faith to use multiple dimensions such as the spiritual, emotional, relational and ethical to influence their actions (Nathan, Mulyadi, Sen, Van Dierendonck & Liden, 2019). The divine sources of the Qur'aan and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) strongly influenced what the teacher-leaders saw as their tasks for supporting children's learning. As stewards of the school for Muslim children, they saw their task in leading, not only in terms of the academic, but also in character-building and personality development as informed by divine sources. This tells us

that they recognised the importance of their duty not only for worldly life, but also in terms of accountability for their actions in the distant afterlife. Role-modelling and ensuring that talk and actions were linked for quality education, featured as important elements of teacher-leaders' understandings of their work.

When examining how teacher-leaders exert their influence to support children's learning in an Islamic context, it was clear that they played multiple roles to be influential in the specific context of their work. The findings show that as influencers they recognise the value of relationships, collaboration, trust, and collegiality. Moreover, they were deliberate and intentional in their work as communicators, motivators, confidence-builders and monitors (Schiavo, Miller, Busey & King, 2010; Hamzah, Noor & Yusof 2016).

In addition, it was also clear that the teacher-leaders as situated agents in a particular context, were experiencing challenges that impacted on their work. This is particularly important to consider when teacher-leaders are transitioning to their new roles or expanding their existing ones (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). In the study, teacher leaders noted how Covid-19 restrictions were negatively impacting their work; minimal face-to-face contact, uncertainties with erratic school closures and re-opening, poor competences, and work ethic and skills of children to handle remote learning. A further challenge was the appointment of a new principal in times that restricted open communication. Despite this the teacher-leaders continued to assert themselves by seeking opportunities to become knowledgeable and skilled. These attributes were viewed as important to create networks that were beneficial to the children and for wider school reform.

The one issue that needs to be specifically highlighted is that the work of the teacher-leaders as agents of change, tended to be in one direction. For example, when it came to parents, the favoured model was parental involvement. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) distinguish between parental involvement and the more promising concept of parental engagement, and how involvement is about participating in something which implies that one party should fulfil an obligation as part of a duty. Parents are viewed as add-ons to the school's priorities. Engagement is more than just participating in an activity that the teacher-leaders might think of as important for parents since it allows for greater ownership by the parents for what is

important in their children's education. The parents, in the study, were cast as interfering, and hence the co-construction of children's learning experiences was less visible. Participant 5 articulated parental interference as an issue when too much attention is shown by them towards their children's education. The teacher-leaders saw themselves as the experts, but this made the shared responsibility to support children's learning less important.

The enabling factors for enhancing teacher-leadership surfaced as collaboration, building quality relationships with trust, and being personally driven towards sound work ethics and best practice. The constraining factors showed how the private provision of schooling put pressure on teachers' performance according to particular expectations. The issue of conflict and the pitching of inappropriate interventions were also viewed as constraining. As a way forward, the teacher-leaders were able to suggest aspects for relevant and strategic interventions which all point to the importance of professional development where the bottom-up structure was favoured for more responsive teacher leadership development.

4.7 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

The aim of this chapter was to explore how teacher-leaders lead to support children's learning in an Islamic school context. The evidence showed that the teacher-leaders navigated complex worldview demands to support children's learning. An important aspect to consider is that Islam is a way of life. As the teacher-leaders spoke about their leadership influences, it was clear that they were mediating their work as agents of change under certain conditions. This gave rise to hybrid teacher leadership. The findings of how the teacher-leaders exert influence to support children's learning, revealed how they worked with multiple stakeholders, hence, they attempted to seek expansions within the ambit of their responsibilities. Teacher leaders' work was also affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and having a new principal. The constraining factors included meeting the expectations of stakeholders in a private school 'business' environment, handling conflict, and implementing intervention strategies that teachers were comfortable with, so professional development was key. The accountability factor to the stakeholders in the schooling community was also deemed important. However, the conditions surrounding private school provisioning

challenged them. The next chapter (5) presents the summaries, findings, and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARIES, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter (4) presented the findings and the discussion. This chapter presents an overview of the first three chapters followed by a discussion of the findings of this study. Next, recommendations are outlined based on the findings of the study. This study has raised issues that need further exploration through future research, hence some ideas for future research are suggested. The delimitations of the study provide the parameters that guided the study. Lastly, the chapter ends with a concluding paragraph to round-off the whole study.

5.2 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS 1, 2 AND 3

Chapter 1 set the stage for the study. The opening section of this chapter showed how the transformative aspects in education were relevant to the study. Regarding the rationale for this study, the personal dimension and the need for teacher leadership research from contextual and cultural dimensions were made explicit. It was important to set the study in a historical context. The background to the study explored the historical events that contributed to the growth of the Islam in South Africa. This exploration showed that the minority Muslim community in South Africa was assertive in the quest to be recognised as a significant grouping. In the current context, schools for Muslim children can be seen as Muslim parents making deliberate choices to educate their children in a faith-based environment. In this context, the work of teacher-leaders needed growth and advancement. It was noted in this study that teacher leadership literature was sidelined especially in the faith-based dimension - specifically support for children's learning in an Islamic school context. The aim, the research questions and the objectives were therefore designed to produce knowledge to fill the gap. Lastly, the conceptual framework and an overview of the research design and methodology together with other pertinent issues were presented.

Chapter 2 was divided into the conceptual framework and the literature review sections. The conceptual framework was developed from the understanding that

children's learning in an Islamic context is driven by the secular worldview of citizenship development, and the Islamic worldview of teacher-leaders as trustees of God to nurture God-consciousness. Teacher-leaders, in this study, were positioned as agents. Distributed, spiritual and servant leadership were relevant as they formed part of the hybrid leadership approaches that allowed teacher-leaders to perform inside and outside classrooms. Their work extended to the broader school and community contexts. The hybrid leadership was also relevant as Muslim teacher-leaders were expected to model Islam as a way of life. A holistic way of leading was envisaged. This is not without tensions, as the work of teacher-leaders is complex in schools with a faith-based orientation. The literature review looked at the themes of teachers influencing children's learning involving the fundamental Islamic concepts, and the factors enabling and constraining teacher leadership. The literature on interventions was also engaged with. The discussion on the gaps in research helped to emphasise the relevance of this study.

Chapter 3 presented the research design and methodology. The conceptual framework was informed by the interpretivist paradigm. Since this study valued the rich meaning-making of the teacher-leaders, a qualitative approach was most suitable. The case study design was used to explore multiple cases in the bounded setting of the Islamic school context. Eight participants from three schools in the Pretoria West region participated in the study. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The data was analysed using the thematic content analysis approach with pre-identified themes emanating and developed from the research questions. The dynamics when researching teacher leadership in an Islamic context was engaged with. It is envisaged that this discussion would alert other researchers to the methodological aspects of such a research-type.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

This study explored how teacher-leaders lead to support children's learning in an Islamic school context. In the main, the findings show that the Muslim minority in South Africa were assertive in the way in which they wanted to educate their children. The private schooling option provided a way for parents seeking generational continuity with Islam as the only faith that their children will be educated in. This makes sense considering that the parents do not expect faith to be a matter

of choice for their children. Schooling in a tightly-controlled environment provided an option for parents to exercise their right to choose education institutions that resonated with their belief system.

The teacher-leaders were an important component in the human resource mix of educating Muslim children. Their own positionality came to the fore. They were performing not just as professionals but also as agents given a divine trust for the preparation of the next generation of Muslims in South Africa. The delivery of this duty, however, was complex and required unpacking. The achievement of their agency was complicated by the dimensions of time and relationships as noted by Biesta and Robinson (2015). The study was conducted during the Covid-19 lockdown period within risk-adjusted approaches. This constrained the wide possibilities of the teacher-leaders' work. It also restricted types of relationships that could have been forged. One school in the study also had a new principal. Staff were getting to know the principal in a time where face-to-face contact was restricted. Hence, interactions were online and face-to-face. Enactments of agency by the teacher-leaders functioned within certain possibilities. There was some evidence of co-construction with the principal and others which assisted in exercising agency to support children's learning.

To instil change in an environment, the agents must show reflectivity and be aware of the contexts in which they perform, come up with a range of alternatives, and act collaboratively with others to influence and learn from them. Teachers who work as agents can be recognised from what they enact in their specific contexts (Archer & Archer, 2000). In this study, it was apparent that the teacher-leaders were valued as agents guided by normative expectations from the Islamic frame of reference, and the South African education system for primary and secondary schools.

The findings show different context-based facets of how teacher-leaders were supporting children's learning in an Islamic faith-based school environment. The first facet focused on teacher-leaders' understanding. This study revealed that teacher-leaders firmly utilised the Islamic frame of reference to shape their teacher leadership work. As an organised worldview, Islam provided the teacher-leaders with values, principles and practices from divine and acquired sources. These sources were viewed as authentic by the teacher-leaders who were agents in two related

dimensions. In dimension one, they were active people who used their knowledge and skills to work successfully within the structure of rules, norms and prescriptions in schools to support children's learning. Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration was helpful to understand this type of agency. Teacher-leaders were acting and intervening in the lifeworld of others to make a difference in the learning space. The teacher-leaders in this study were agents from a faith-based understanding. As Muslim teacher-leaders, they were entrusted with the role of a *Kalifah* – an agent or trustee of God - and as such, they were to fulfil the duties of building God-consciousness in children while working to satisfy the educational demands for a worldly life.

The teacher-leaders were also using different strands of leadership to do their work. They were part of a distributed leadership system that went beyond the principal. They had different avenues of responsibility related to supporting children's learning and beyond. The findings indicated that the teacher-leaders were able to collaborate with others, as well as work on a one-to-one basis. This is in keeping with spiritual leadership (Egel & Fry, 2017). The main thrust of this type of leadership is to go beyond the self and contribute towards the common good of others. These actions are normally guided by a divine framework and sanctioning of participatory modes of working. The teacher-leaders in this study demonstrated that they were able to help others to fulfil the goals of nurturance (*tarbiyah*), moral education (*ta'dhib*) and the process of imparting and receiving knowledge (*talim)* (Yasin & Jani 2013). Servant leadership (Nathan, Mulyadi, Sen, Van Dierendonck & Liden, 2019) also featured in the study as all the teacher-leaders were Muslim and hence followers of the Islamic faith. There was evidence of teacher-leaders intervening for not only academic but also character and personality development as guided by the divine sources. Since teacher leadership is complex work, the teacher-leaders in this study adopted multiple roles to perform their duties. These roles featured them as communicators, motivators, monitors, confidence-builders and knowledge-disseminators.

It was possible to identify the factors that were enabling and constraining teacher leaders' work. Teacher-leaders conducted their work exemplarily when they had possibilities for collaboration, relationships that had elements of trust, and when they were intrinsically motivated to perform optimally. Teacher-leaders felt constrained by

the pressure in the private schooling environment as there was evidence of conflicts and interventions being pitched at unrealistic levels. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic was also restricting teacher-leaders' work as they had to cope with many uncertainties that put pressure on them to perform in new ways. In the private school environment, the teacher-leaders had to address learning losses and contend with parental expectations. In all of this, the teacher-leaders did not take the full opportunity of working with parents in an engagement model as noted by Goodall and Montgomery (2014). In this model, the parents would have been co-constructors in supporting their children's learning, but teacher-leaders worked more from an expert-novice model rather than a shared responsibility model for children's learning.

As agents in their work, the teacher-leaders suggested ways on how they can be helped to better perform their role and responsibilities. The learning exchanges between senior and junior members of staff was viewed as a helpful process in mentoring and coaching. Also, the enabling role of the principal featured as an important aspect for teacher-leaders. Interventions were needed to help principals to move beyond bureaucracy and to encourage innovative practices. Professional development opportunities were required for both the principals and the teacher-leaders. Quality facilitators with authentic experience were needed to help teacher-leaders to flourish. Workshops, meetings and other platforms were necessary to allow teacher-leaders to support a variety of needs related to children's learning.

Generally, the findings of the study revealed how teacher-leaders lead, is largely dependent on the context in which they perform their work. The work of Muslim teacher-leaders using the Islamic framework to advance children's learning and citizenship development in a secular democracy like South Africa, has many starting points for professional development and networking for policy development.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

There are some substantive recommendations emanating from this study which can be useful to build teacher leadership to support children's learning in an Islamic context. The following recommendations should be considered:

5.4.1 Building an Islamic Concept of Teacher Leadership and Responsive Programmes

The concepts used in shaping teacher leadership bring certain realities to life. Most research on teacher leadership originates from what is called the minority world (rich Western countries). Bearing this in mind, Mutohar and Brooks (2018) advocate that educational leadership needs more non-Western approaches when it comes to leading schools, and they cite the use of Islamic values and beliefs as a possible starting point. This study concurs with the view that dominant Western concepts should be tested for their authenticity and relevance. For Islam, this is particularly important as there are different sects in Islam. In this regard, perspectives on leadership do not necessarily converge. In this study, concepts were combined to align to the perspectives applicable to an Islamic worldview. There needs to be a deliberate collaborative effort of scholars in Islam and Muslim educationalists to engage in discourse on the notion of the Islamic concept of leadership with special reference to teacher-leaders. For this to come to fruition, influential organisations like the Association of Muslim Schools in South Africa need to prioritise teacher leadership in its programmes. This would help to build shared understandings to inform the development of responsive programmes for the capacity-building of teacher-leaders in an Islamic school context.

What might be helpful to consider is the action areas for teacher leadership advancement in an Islamic context. The domains mentioned in Cosenza's (2015) exploration of the concept of teacher-leaders in the context of standards might be a useful starting point. In what follows, six action areas are presented. Each of the areas should focus on the particularities of teacher-leaders in an Islamic context.

- *Action Area 1 – Collaborative cultures*

  Collaboration, as noted in the findings of this study, is key to build teacher-leaders' competencies, not just for achieving educational outcomes for building human capital, but rather as a religious duty expected of Muslims to come together to allow for learning to be enhanced. All teacher-leaders need

is to be empowered with the skills of collaboration for the greater good of South African society, and the fulfilling of the divine trust as Muslim teacher-leaders. This is a great responsibility that should be handled with care.

- *Action Area 2 – Professional learning*

  As noted previously, to seek knowledge is divine in Islam. Muslims are expected to be lifelong learners. The opportunities for professional learning must be directed towards understanding the duties of teacher-leaders in the divine sense, and for the thrust towards human capital development. The double responsibilities must be emphasised to allow for contextually relevant standards that teacher-leaders in the Islamic context can identify with. The divine sources as well as acquired sources should be consulted for the best lines of action.

- *Action Area 3 – Pedagogical and learning reform* (elaborated in the next section)

  Teacher leaders need to be knowledgeable and skilled on how to effect educational change through their concerted actions. They should have exposure to a variety of pedagogical approaches for influencing staff to support children's learning. These approaches must be carefully selected to meet the demands of being contextually relevant. All pedagogical techniques for teacher-leaders should be premised on adult learning framings. Transformative learning as posited by Meizrow (in Kitchenham, 2008) allows adult participants to share their prior knowledge and to revise their knowledge based on new teachings. Dialogue, critical-thinking and reflection are three tools that helps to shape new learning. Using adult education pedagogies together with the Islamic concept of the *halaqah* (group gathering for learning in Islam) would develop hybrid models of pedagogical learning, and might be more responsive to the needs of teacher-leaders in an Islamic schooling context.

- *Action Area 4 – Research*

  Experience is a great teacher, but it is not enough. Research provides a systematic response to the key issues that complicates teacher leadership in an Islamic context where Muslims are in the minority. Large scale studies using mixed method designs will be helpful in providing the numbers and the narratives around teacher leadership in the Islamic schooling context in South Africa. Also, focus must be on how the data will be used as it is important that the teacher-leaders, together with other leaders, become data-driven in their work; that is, they should know how to use the data that research produces. This would go some way towards making their work more authentic.

- *Action Area 5 – Family and community outreach*

  Islam favours community-building. Individuals are not only responsible for themselves and their families. They are deeply connected to the community and the wider society of Muslims (Yasin & Jani, 2013). This interconnectedness means that children's learning cannot just be confined to classrooms and schools. This study showed some sensitivity to the need to go beyond the borders of the school to reach communities. These communities are not homogenous. They have many lines of difference based on socio-economic conditions, gender, race, class, cultural practices and how Islam is practised. Teacher-leaders need rich baseline information about the surroundings of the school and the population they serve.

- *Action Area 6 – Advocacy*

  Teacher-leaders can be powerful advocates for reform in supporting children's learning in an Islamic context. This is especially if they perform in classrooms and outside classrooms with some reach into the community. They could mobilise others to effect change in specific areas for the greater good of not just children and their families, but also the wider national and international communities.

In addition to the above, the principal is key in collaboratively developing guidelines with teacher-leaders, and with community members for the benefit of all. Jacobs, Gordon and Solis (2016) call for negotiation to develop consistent

district guidelines. In this study, it was evident that teacher leadership was not formalised, hence there was no shared guidelines for all schools operating in an Islamic context. As noted earlier, the whole focus on teacher-leaders needs to be co-constructed to bring about change to support children's learning. Policymakers should design guidelines to develop the maximum potential of teacher-leaders by considering certain aspects (Jacobs, Gordon & Solis, 2016) such as clear role-functions with room for flexibility and new possibilities, addressing anticipated conflicts and misunderstandings, and setting parameters for workload to prevent teachers from being overloaded so that they could spend more time supporting novice teachers. The principal has to also astutely lead and be committed to having feedback loops on a regular basis as failure to do so can lead to teacher-leaders feeling demoralised and unsupported, especially if the workloads are unrealistic. Where this is the case, there is a high possibility of teacher-leader resistance.

5.4.2 Professional Learning Communities for Teacher-leaders in an Islamic Context and Beyond

Teacher leadership is complex and does not come naturally to many individuals. Bearing this in mind, professional development is important. For teachers in the Islamic schooling context there should be professional growth programmes which should be organised at the national level by the Association for Muslim schools. At this level, teacher-leaders (and future teacher-leaders) should converge to support each other. Principals should also attend the capacity-building programmes to become more familiar with teacher-leaders' work in order to decide how they can support them. All teacher leadership programmes should emphasise contextualisation, intentionality, reflection, collaboration and acting with the moral-ethical framework of the Islamic belief system.

The development of professional learning communities is also helpful to consider in reshaping the education of children in an Islamic context. This grouping has the potential to reform the approaches to leadership for supporting children's learning. The value of developing professional learning communities is dependent in the way in which a group of individuals benefit from collaboration for the betterment of educational outcomes (Hoaglund, Birkenfeld & Box, 2014). This

study showed the value of collaboration; for example, to advance the process of Islamisation. What needs to happen, however, is a more focused effort for teacher-leaders to meet on a regular basis to achieve specific goals. The progress towards these goals needs to be tracked with data. Building professional learning communities for teacher leadership, however, will require different kinds of expertise to come together. The Islamic scholars and the educationalists need to be part of a collaboration that allows for idea generation and shaping practices within the belief system. In professional learning communities, collaboration is very specific and should focus on both learning outcomes for children, and the teacher leadership outcomes. In the study, the teacher-leaders were attending meetings and workshops, but this was not driven by a strong shared vision of teacher- leaders leading. In professional learning communities there is continuity of team efforts in particular directions. Teacher-leaders should be goal-directed, organise space to learn together, and share their experiences with others.

In the development of the professional learning communities, a network of schools need to come together. The value of networked professional learning (Prenger, Poortman & Handelzalt, 2019) lies in its ability to combine a pool of resources and expertise. When this happens, greater engagement can occur, especially when hybrid practices are needed from conflicting worldviews. Verification of authentic practices can happen effectively if professional learning communities are carefully constituted.

5.4.3 Learning Exchanges and Immersions

Teacher-leaders in an Islamic context need broad exposure to leadership to do their work competently. Learning exchanges can be a process for them to develop their competencies. Teacher-leaders need to cross their school boundaries and experience their work in another context. The exchanges between schools and contexts can help teacher-leaders to demonstrate their strengths, confront and eliminate their weaknesses, and work in complementary ways with their exchange partners. The learning exchanges can be guided by particular questions that help to develop teacher leadership practices.

The practice of immersion is valuable for teacher-leaders in an Islamic context. The level of performance expected as a Muslim is the responsibility of the individual, the community, and the humanity level. The immersion of teacher leaders in the community brings added value to support educational outcomes. This study showed some evidence of community outreach work. Connections with communities can help to develop responsive interventions to support children's learning. Muslim children are isolated when they attend private school in a mono-religious context. Teacher leaders can explore outreach work by experimenting with immersion in the community and understanding the possibilities they bring to the education space.

5.4.4 Creating Enabling School-based Teacher Leadership Practices

Teacher-leaders need the school environment to be an enabling space. Jacobs, Gordon and Solis (2016) highlight the importance of principals being proactive in working with teachers to negotiate the guidelines for teacher-leadership at school level. This study showed some promising practices enacted by principals. However, full attention to working on teacher leadership guidelines that were documented and sent to all relevant stakeholders, was largely absent. When principals and teachers have shared understandings of their roles and responsibilities related to teacher leadership, then this minimises resolving conflicts, dealing with duplications, and making sense of job descriptions.

Each school will have its unique take on what is required and how teacher leadership needs to function. As this study has shown, mentors can play an important role since they groom junior staff for teacher leadership roles. Taking into account that teacher leadership is still at an early stage of development to support children's learning in an Islamic context in South Africa, the use of critical friends with teacher leadership expertise from within and outside the school could be advantageous (Jacobs, Gordon & Solis, 2016), as they could assist in troubleshooting and giving feedback on performance. This enabling role is important considering the conflicts that can arise from working with different worldviews.

Principals have to also ensure that teacher-leaders are given reasonable workloads so that they can carry out their duties efficiently to achieve quality outcomes. Timetables need to be adjusted so that teacher-leaders receive the 'free' time to fulfil their leadership duties. The cost-cutting measures at private schools also means that critical consideration should be given to the trade-off between normal workloads and the time needed to support others through teacher leadership. This study indicated that teacher-leaders were working with their peers, the parents, and to a limited extent with the community to support children's learning. However, working in this way is time-intensive, if done conscientiously. Hence, the principal and school management team have to be visible in supporting teacher-leaders to do their work effectively.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Since teacher leadership research in an Islamic context is new, it has raised several issues that need further investigation. The major theme for future research should be teacher leadership in a minority Muslim context. It is important to state the context as there are differences between the minority and majority Muslim country contexts. In minority contexts there is a push for recognition, and for state resources. The assertiveness of the minorities is important to track. The following areas are recommendations for future research for greater knowledge-generation within the theme of teacher leadership in a minority Muslim context:

- The historical context in which teacher-leaders are operating;
- Characteristics of Muslim teacher-leaders in a Muslim minority context like South Africa;
- Spheres of action for teacher leaders and how are these enacted in an Islamic context;
- How teacher leaders negotiate the demands for integrated learning in an Islamic schooling context;
- The gender dynamics for teacher leadership in schools for Muslim children;
- Teacher-leaders engagement with Muslim families and communities to advance their work as influencers;
- Teacher leadership in the Islamic context as an arena for professional development in a secular democracy like South Africa; and

- Teacher-leaders accelerating inter-religious dialogue for supporting children's learning.

5.6 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted in three schools in the Pretoria West region with eight participants in the Gauteng province. It was an exploratory study involving a topic that is still new to schools supporting children's learning in an Islamic context. The small-scale study was valuable to stimulate thinking and action. The schools in this study were attempting to move closer to being learning organisations in the competitive private schooling sector for Muslim children. Despite the small sample, their configurations and progress with special reference to teacher-leaders has produced relevant lessons for others. No attempts are made to generalise the findings of this study; rather what it provides is a close focused understanding of teacher-leaders in an Islamic schooling context to support children's learning. Although small-scale with a specific focus, this study should be seen as an entry point for further research.

5.7 CONCLUSION TO THE STUDY

This study focused on teacher leadership with relevance to supporting children's learning in an Islamic school context. It considered how minority Muslim communities in South Africa used basic education in private schools to preserve their identity, and to steer their children's learning in a way that would help to integrate positively in a secular society. The theological understanding of Islam as a way of life meant that teacher-leaders comprehended their work as agents carrying out the duty of building God-consciousness and using these opportunities to advance learning. The spiritual and follower-leadership approaches helped teacher-leaders in formal and informal ways to understand their responsibilities. The development of teacher leadership in the Islamic school context in South Africa is still in its early stages. Efforts need to be directed towards building shared visions and understandings for action through the collective leadership of Islamic scholars and educationists. This can be promoted through key organisations like the Association of Muslim Schools in South Africa. At school level, the role of the principal, formal teacher-leaders, and informal teacher leadership including those from the community, needs in-depth exploration. Equally

important is the integration of teacher-leaders in larger inter-faith and other communities of practice to expand the teacher leadership research and practice base in the South Africa context. It is envisaged that this study would inculcate a desire by the powers that be to create conducive environments to encourage teacher-leaders to fully exploit their full potential.

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ANNEXURES

Annexure 1: Request for permission of school board

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

Dear Chair of the Board

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY IN YOUR SCHOOL

My name is Muhammed Javeed Ebrahim and I am currently enrolled at the University of Pretoria for Masters in Education Management, Law and Policy under the supervision of Dr Nylon Marishane. The title of my approved study is: *Teacher leadership for supporting children's learning in an Islamic school context*. The study is about establishing how teacher leaders support children's learning in Islamic schools. As part of my study, I have to collect data by interviewing teachers in two schools. For this reason, I would like to request your permission to interview teachers in your school. The interview will focus on teachers' perceived leadership influence over learners and factors that affect them in carrying out their leadership responsibilities. The interview will be held at your school and will last for approximately 30-60 minutes. In order not to interfere with the normal teaching and learning programme, this interview will be held outside formal school hours.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and the participants will be 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 of participants, their identity as well as that of the school will be protected by using pseudonyms in the place of real names. This will ensure that any information given, including personal views on the issue of leading learners, will not be linked to participants' names or that of the school. As part of data collection, I will be using an audio recorder for the purpose of capturing the interview for subsequent data transcription and analysis. All information obtained during the interview will be treated confidentially. 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 thesis on completion of this study.

Your permission is requested for the use of the data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching and writing journal articles. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on you for future research studies. Once the study is completed, a summary of the results will be emailed to you on request. Please feel free to ask me or my supervisor about any concerns or questions that you may have regarding the study.

Should you be willing to participate in this study, kindly sign the attached form.

Regards
Muhammed Javeed Ebrahim (Researcher)

Signature .....

Date: .....
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Name: Ebrahim M.J
Cell: 074 797 2065
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.....

Date: .....
Supervisor`s Details
Name: Dr Nylon Marishane
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Faculty of Education
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

Annexure 2

INFORMED CONSENT FORM TO THE TEACHER

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 *Teacher leadership for supporting children's learning in an Islamic school context*. 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 3: Participants' consent letters

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

Dear Colleague

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN INTERVIEWS FOR A RESEARCH PROJECT

My name is Muhammed Javeed Ebrahim and I am currently enrolled at the University of Pretoria for Masters in Education Management, Law and Policy under the supervision of Dr Nylon Marishane. The title of my approved study is: *Teacher leadership for supporting children's learning in an Islamic school context*. The study is about establishing how teacher leaders support children's learning in Islamic schools. As part of my study, I have to collect data by interviewing teachers in two schools. For this reason, I would like to request your participation in a semi-structured and focus group interview session. I will be focusing on your perceived leadership influence over learners and factors that affect you in carrying out your leadership responsibilities. The interviews will be held at your own school and will last for approximately 30-60 minutes. In order not to interfere with your normal daily duties, this interview will be held outside formal school hours.

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 your privacy as a participant, 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 leading learners, 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 data transcription and analysis. All information obtained during the interview will be treated confidentially. 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 thesis on completion of this study.

Your permission is requested for the use of the data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching and writing of journal articles. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on you for future research studies. Once the study is completed, a summary of the results will be emailed to you on request. Please feel free to ask me or my supervisor about any concerns or questions that you may have regarding the study.

Should you be willing to participate in this study, kindly sign the attached form.

Regards
Muhammed Javeed Ebrahim (Researcher)

Signature .....

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Faculty of Education
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INFORMED CONSENT FORM TO THE TEACHER

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 *Teacher leadership for supporting children's learning in an Islamic school context*. 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 4: Semi-structured interview schedule

Semi-structured interview schedule

Dear Participant

Thank you for agreeing to be part of the study entitled Teacher leadership for supporting children's learning in an Islamic school context. In preparation for the interview, I am sharing the interview schedule. There are 2 sections. The first one helps to get the biographical details. The second one is related directly to the key aspects of the study. Should you have any queries before the interview, kindly contact me at 074 797 2065.

Thanking you in advance.

MJ Ebrahim

Section A

Biographical details

- Name (Participant No.___)
- Age
- Gender
- Qualifications
- Total years of experience in teaching
- Total years of experience in the current school
- Total years in teacher leadership

Section B

1 Understanding teacher leadership

1.1 Tell me what you understand by the term teacher leadership?

1.2 Comment on an Islamic concept of teacher leadership.

1.3 What would you say is the difference between and Islamic concept and others ways of understanding teacher leadership?

1.4 Why do you think that it is important for teacher leaders in an Islamic context to have an integrated understanding of teacher leadership?

1.5 What is the value of having an integrated understanding of teacher leadership in an Islamic context?

1.6 What are the challenges in developing an integrated understanding of teacher leadership in an Islamic context?

2 Influencing others to support children's learning

2.1 How is the school management structured to accommodate teacher leaders?

2.2 Tell me what you as a teacher leader are expected to do in your school.

2.3 Tell me about the different people you work with.

2.4 What roles do you play to support teachers to improve children's learning?

2.5 What do you do to help parents to support children's learning?

2.6 Describe how you work with the principal to support children's learning.

2.7 Tell me about the different ways in which you work for the community to support children's learning.

3 Enabling and constraining factors

3.1 Tell me what makes your work as a teacher leader easy.

3.2 Comment on what makes work as a teacher leader difficult.

3.3 What must be done to address the challenges you experience?

4. Interventions for improving teacher leadership

4.1 Tell me about the different types of interventions that must be undertaken to improve teacher leadership for supporting children's learning?

4.2 What would you need to do these interventions?

4.3 Who can provide what you need?

Are there any questions you would like to ask me on teacher leadership to support children's learning?

Thank you for taking time to go through the questions.

Annexure 5: Excerpt from interview

Interviewer: We are here with xxx, participant number 1 and he holds a PHD in Philosophy in Islam. He has been at this school for about 5 years and he has been in a teacher leadership position for 10- to 15 years.

We are going to start of the interview by tell me what you understand by the term teacher leadership.

Participant 1: Teacher leadership is a combination of the two words as it states in the question 1 as a teacher and then as a leader. So if we look at it as my understanding and in terms of the Islamic concept the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) said that he has been sent as a teacher and not only was he a teacher…he also reformed them. The teacher… is a person who is not only passing on information but is also involved in the process of reformation and correcting behaviour and imparting good ways and good morals and character and etiquette and character building of these learners. Now if we have a leader or a teacher who is a leader he is supposed to be doing this on a greater scale in other words acting on his learners as well as on his fellow colleagues so everything about him should be more than just passing information but he should be affecting a change within everyone who interacts with him or her in the school environment or even beyond the school environment because that is actually the need of the time where we always complaining about the lack of good leadership. So one as the person should himself have good character. He has responsibility as a human being and service to humanity at large as well as the fact that he is accountable to his creator. So those things should come in the forefront of a person who is a teacher and a leader more so. He should lead by example and interestingly the Prophet Muhammad may peace be upon him said another of his traditions that a leader of a nation is their servant. This is interesting so a person as a teacher and who is a leader not only has the fulfilling of the role of the Prophet in terms of his teaching but he should also be serving right - serving his learner's in the institution serving fellow teachers and like I said serving humanity at large. So that is a short simple answer.

Interviewer: We've covered the Islamic concept of teacher leadership what would you say is the difference between an Islamic concept of leadership and other forms of teacher leadership.

Participant 1: Look the leadership… it depends, you get good sound models of leadership which those leaders represent - sound good noble morals and values etc. Many of them would be in conformity with the Islamic model of leadership. Things like honesty, integrity and all of that is universal. Only in Islam, however, the difference lies in where the emphasis is on. Is it purely on passing information or like I said earlier academic or is it more on refining and reforming the society through reforming the behaviour and conduct and morals of the learners so that should be…. interesting that they normally use…they don't simply call someone a teacher they call him Ummu Rabbi - one who nurtures right and this is very important, they call it taribiyah. That is where a teacher is known more as a Mu Rabbi. He nurtures and trains and gradually moulds his students into becoming models themselves and examples for others themselves. That is the difference…

Interviewer: Why do you think it is important for teacher leaders in an Islamic context to have an integrated understanding of teacher leadership?

Participant 1: In the South African context because we are living in a society where we are…perhaps 3% of the population. we need to interact with the 97% out there who are not Muslims. So a teacher eventually is going to interact with himself as well as the learners are going to interact with the broader community in the broader society. So they should have an integrated understanding. In this way they can make a difference and interact and coexist in a meaningful manner

Interviewer: How would it benefit the community at large if a teacher has the proper understanding of integrated teacher leadership?

Participant 1: He can make a difference to people who can identify with him. He is not someone who is isolated - speaking about something that is strange or foreign to the rest of society. If people understand him and he understands people it is more

effective and will enable him to make a bigger impact on his learners first of all and that impact will be felt in the community.

Interviewer: What are some of the challenges in developing an integrated understanding of Teacher Leadership specifically within an Islamic context?

Participant 1: Well one or two things or two problems or challenges or maybe more. Sometimes we have a teacher who is maybe grounded in maybe in his Islamic understanding but he is not necessarily a good leader or have the skills and the knowledge and know-how and the character to be a good leader. On the other hand, you may have a person who may be a fairly good leader but does not have knowledge of the Islamic concept on what is required in terms of his Islamic duty etc. We have certain challenges which we are faced with. We are bound by certain requirements by the departments and stuff like that but overall the challenge is where you find a lot of you know a person excelling in one of the two. It is very difficult to get a person who is balanced and who understands both fairly well to have a real and meaningful impact.

Interviewer: What can we do to address that gap and find that balance between leaders?

Participant 1: I think everyone should be everyone's mind. They should be aligned with a common goal and a common vision of the school is. In other words what is it that the school wants. If the school truly has a certain vision from the top every person who holds any position in the school whether it is a teacher or a leader or a head of department or the principal as well as the board sometimes, even the parents should all be aligned with the same vision and what is meant by this vision of the school. So once everybody is on the same wavelength it makes our task much easier. Instead of where we have a person who maybe a leader in the school but his focus is purely academic. Someone else's focus maybe religious and someone else focus is just simply I'm here to do a job and nothing else and get a salary at the end of the month. Once people's ideas are aligned somewhat they may not all be aligned 100%. Some may buy into the other ideas - 50% or 60%. At least somewhat they have aligned and that would help in achieving the desired results.

Interviewer: As someone who has studied the religion do you feel that there is a sort of conflict between Islam and the leadership that it promotes and the current secular structure within a school. Is there a contradiction there or can they work in unison?

Participant 1:
I don't know if there is a contradiction but it is sometimes because of a misunderstanding I think sometimes people don't understand the way Islamic leadership works and how it's supposed to function and what is meant by Islamic leadership so then they appear and seem to be like challenging or almost antagonistic towards Islamic concept of leadership. Sometimes it is the other way around. You know it seems like that but it may not necessarily be this case just repeat the last part again…

Interviewer: As someone who is in a leadership position in this school what are you expected to do?

Well, some of it is the usual meaning - oversee teachers within the department in terms of work covering of syllabus in terms of the standard of the work being covered. In other words supervising classes and teaching actually learning and teaching taking place, assessments and overall development of the teacher in terms of his or her own subject and then ensuring that a certain level of competency comes out from the learners in that particular subject. Because of the school being an Islamic school and the ethos is Islamic so yes as a person in-charge you are required to make some kind of impact to the learners beyond the teaching. So either through the assembly and through different programs at the school may may encourage learners and develop them in terms of their spirituality or their character or their commitment to Islam and to the human values and serving humanity. All of those kind of things so from time to time we try and have some kind of programs that may encourage that yes in the last two years it has been or year-and-a-half it's been difficult due to the Covid pandemic but yes we have outreach programs normally we have some at one stage we had sleepover in the mosque. At one stage we took learners to a camp. Whatever it is that could somehow benefit them and their development as you say a holistic human being who could add value to the society.

Interviewer: what role do you play to support teachers in order for them to improve children's learning?

Participant one: Like I said earlier I believe in not too many of the formal meetings but I'd rather speak to the teachers in my department on a regular basis and an individual basis. If there's a need for a meeting then we have a meeting but when you speak to a person individually and informally generally they tend to open up more. They tell you and they share their problems with you or whatever their challenges are etc. Then we can get something done. Sometimes in a meeting the meeting gets for a lack of a better word hijacked by one or two people who speak a lot who have a tendency to speak a lot. They have good intentions though and then the time is limited because you may have eight or seven people in a 20-minute meeting. Then each person is given a few minutes to speak before you know it your 20-minute meeting is over. Right so when you have a one-on-one meeting you have 10 minutes with one person - with one individual. You deal with that issue directly, immediately and you can get some results. So I believe in that and I sit and we talk whether it is during break time, outside whether it is in an office, we sit and talk all the time. So I know exactly what each and every teacher is doing and that way if they are having any difficulty we can deal with it immediately and not wait for one meeting that happens once a month or once a term or whatever the case may be.

Interviewer: What role do you play in terms of helping the parents to support children's learning?

Participant 1: Helping the parents… that's the difficult one. When we do meet with parents or alternatively if we don't meet parents then we try and keep them informed on a fairly regular basis through whatever medium the school makes available – the class dojo the internet or email…and we focus on what our syllabus is and what we intend achieving as an Arabic and Islamic studies department. In that way if the parents have any queries or questions are unclear about anything they are welcome to visit us at school or are they speak to us on the phone in that way we clarify any matter. Probably we can do a little more… in terms of our interactions with parents but at the moment that is what we do.