The role of the School Management Team in improving the matric results in a National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) School

By

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ABSTRACT

This single case study looked at the experiences of the School Management Team (SMT) within one National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) School in the Umlazi District in KwaZulu-Natal. The school in this study attained the NSLA status due to poor performance in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination, hence the study focused specifically at the experiences of SMT members in trying to improve the NSC results. My study makes a significant contribution towards the improvement and development of NSLA Schools in South Africa who are struggling to meet the demands of the Department of Basic Education and trying to achieve the minimum standards in the NSC examinations.

A qualitative research design was employed for this study which was located within the interpretivist paradigm. One NSLA secondary school was chosen with its school management members, comprising of the principal, and four heads of departments, through purposeful sampling. A thorough review of both local and international literature was conducted on the School Management Teams within underperforming schools, and specifically, NSLA Schools in South Africa. Kurt Lewin's (1953) change theory and the leadership for learning theory formed the theoretical frameworks for this study. Based on the data that was analysed, these were the key findings of this study:

The roles and responsibilities of the SMT within the NSLA School differs from other schools based on an overload of management duties and administration related directly to the grade 12 learners and the improvement of the NSC results. The SMT in the NSLA School engage in in-depth analysis and problem solving strategies to improve the NSC results. Most of the management duties of the SMT revolve around the grade 12 learners and their curriculum which has impacted on their instruction time and resulted in stressful working conditions. The SMT also manage serious discipline problems on a daily basis and are subjected to violent

learner behaviour and those learners who have drug related problems. In trying to overcome some of the challenges that this NSLA School is currently facing, the SMT plans regular grade 12 intervention classes and host parent meetings. The SMT provide learners with support in the form of mentorship and nutrition for those learners that are affected by the socio-economic ills of the community which they come from. The SMT deals with a host of negative factors that seem to have contributed to the poor NSC pass rates and also low morale and frustration. The SMT of the school hold the progression policy accountable for the mass of learners who get to grade 12, but fail because they are not ready. The Department of Basic Education, besides monitoring and evaluating the SMT, provide very little support to improve the NSC results of the NSLA School. The SMT have also not received specialised training from the Department of Basic Education to equip them for the challenges they currently face in the NSLA School.

Based on the research findings, the study makes two recommendations. One recommendation is proposed to the SMT of the NSLA School while the other is directed towards the Department of Basic Education, both with the aim of improving learner academic performances in the NSC examinations.

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I, Preshaan Subramoney, declare that

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20 May 2016

Mr Preshaan Subramoney 201506172
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Dear Mr Subramoney

Protocol reference number: HSS/0525/016M
Project title: School Management Team experiences in improving the National Senior Certificate results in a
National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) School: a case study.

Expedited Approval

In response to your application dated 05 May 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted FULL APPROVAL.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent
Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved
through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote
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for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter
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I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my wife Evashnee, my son Pranav, and daughter Kishalia, who has supported me in this academic journey and sacrificed their time so I could achieve my educational dream.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACE: SML	Advanced Certificate in Education: School Management and Leadership
C2005	Curriculum 2005
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
FET	Further Education and Training
HOD	Head of Department
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management System
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NSC	National Senior Certificate
NSLA	National Strategy for Learner Attainment
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading and Literacy Studies
PLC	Professional Learning Community
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality
SFFC	Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
WSD	Whole School Development

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CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This study aimed to examine the experiences of the School Management Team (SMT) in trying to improve the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results within the context of a secondary school that has attained below a 60 % pass rate in the NSC examinations, resulting in the school being classified as a National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) School by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). This first chapter is an orientation to the study in which I have outlined the background of the study, explain the statement of the problem, provided a rationale for the study, explained the significance of the study, and stated the objectives of the study and the research questions. The delimitations of the study are discussed, and the structure of each chapter is outlined.

1.2 Background of the study

Significant international tests that South Africa participates in are the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Progress in International Reading and Literacy Studies (PIRLS), and Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ), all of which South Africa has shown no improvement (Spaull, 2013). Of even greater concern is the poor performance of learners in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination. There have been growing concerns of accountability related to the NSC results. The NSC examination has become a hallmark of the South African education system. Furthermore, the involvement of the various newspapers which publish the NSC results creates awareness amongst the general public and not just people from within the South African education system (Spaull, 2013). The poor performance of learners in the NSC examination has raised great concerns both educationally and publically.

While the national pass rate has raised growing concerns from various stakeholders annually, the schools that receive the most attention and reprimand are the underperforming schools in the country. The National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) framework was designed solely for underperforming secondary schools in South Africa who had attained below 60% pass rate in the final NSC exam. The Department of Education (2007) designed the NSLA framework made up of strategies, interventions, and monitoring and evaluation procedures, which are both short and long-term with the aim of improving leaner achievement in

underperforming secondary schools. At the forefront of learner achievement is the SMT who are accountable for improvement in NSLA Schools. The SMT of NSLA Schools interact with learners in Grade 12 in various aspects related to the improvement of the NSC results. During their interaction they experience wide range of factors related to underperformance in the Grade 12 results within the context of the NSLA School.

1.3 Rationale for the study

As a co-writer of a chapter in a book that is a University of KwaZulu-Natal project related to teachers work in a NSLA school, I noted that the NSLA context has provided a unique research context as there is a paucity of literature on NSLA schools. "It is widely accepted that the South African education system is not performing as well as it should be, thereby constraining the production of skilled people and, ultimately economic growth and national development" (Khoza, 2014 p.4). According to Heystek (2004, p. 308), the SMT is responsible for the professional management of the school which include all activities that support teaching and learning.

I decided to conduct this research with the aim of gaining a perspective from school management regarding NSLA Schools. Being a matric educator for many years in a NSLA context and having to endure the pressures of accountability from DBE has drawn my attention to this research study. Having taught in elite schools which have attained pass rates of 100%, I have been placed in a contrasting situation of having to teach in a NSLA school for the past three years with no change taking place thus far. I have observed that the SMT in NSLA schools not only perform different functions, but also share different and unique experiences in their attempts to improve their NSC results. The NSLA is also a phenomenon that is unique to underperforming schools only, and by engaging in this research, the world of academia will get a new perspective from the SMT because of the context of the schools in this study.

1.4 Statement of the problem

Given the poor academic achievement in the NSC examinations within NSLA Schools, someone has to be held accountable for the state of education in NSLA Schools. The NSLA programme seems to be more of a surveillance tool for school management based on the NSC results. Likewise, O' Neil (2013) argues that assessments and high-stakes testing are sometimes used to judge the individuals performance and as a strategy to hold individuals

accountable, and not intended for improvement. The growing demand for accountability in South African secondary schools has focused the attention towards the SMT of NSLA Schools. In a post – apartheid era of education, the Department of Education (2000) defines the new-school environment as being democratic, inclusive, participatory and developmental. The South African Schools Act, 84 (1996) applies these principals to schools and relates them to schools becoming more self – reliant. It is with this notion that School Management Teams (SMTs) were formed.

According to Heystek (2004), the SMT is responsible for the professional management of the school which included all activities that support teaching and learning. Improvement in student learning may come as a result of stakeholders such as the SMT reflecting on their practices (O' Day, 2002). However, this does not seem to be the case in NSLA Schools. The SMTs of NSLA schools seem to face scathing attacks by the Department of Education after receiving their final matric results. The NSLA Framework (2007) highlights some punitive measures, including the redeployment of the principal for poor performance, and intense monitoring and evaluation of SMTs in NSLA Schools. Both globally and locally school management has to bear the brunt of underperformance. The burden that is carried by the SMT with regards to the accountability of the NSC results impacts on the schools' pass rate which also has a ripple effect on the country's overall pass rate. The role of the SMT in NSLA Schools is however obstructed by various factors within the NSLA context that affects school management, teaching and learning.

1.5 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are to:

- Explore the role of the school management teams in improving the NSC results in a NSLA school.
- Identify the factors within the NSLA School that negatively and those that positively affect the school management teams' initiatives in improving the NSC results.
- Explore how school management teams overcome the challenges they face when improving the NSC results.

1.6 Research questions

The central question of this research is: What are the experiences of the SMTs in improving the NSC results in a NSLA school? The research problem will be answered using the following critical questions:

- What is the role that school management teams play in improving the NSC results in a NSLA school?
- What are the factors that negatively and those that positively affect the school management teams initiatives in improving the NSC results within the NSLA School?
- How do school management teams overcome the challenges they encounter when improving the NSC results?

1.7 Significance of the study

With the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations being one of the most important external examinations for secondary schools, not all schools are able to attain pass rates above the national norm of 60%. For the NSLA Schools in South Africa, this research study can identify the problems associated with these schools and also provide solutions to those negative factors that are hindering academic performance in the NSC examinations. This research study also significantly identifies what schools are doing both locally and internationally to improve learner academic performances in high-stakes testing like the NSC examinations.

This study is also useful for SMT members in NSLA Schools in South Africa to allow them to carry out their roles and responsibilities as effective leaders and managers within this high challenging context school. Lastly, the recommendations of this study is not only significant for the SMTs of NSLA Schools to improve their NSC results, but also as a guide for the Department of Basic Education to identify with the problems being encountered within NSLA Schools and thereafter engage in ways with the SMT of these NSLA Schools to try to bring about improvement in the NSC results.

1.8 Delimitations of the study

The school in this study is located in one of the poorest townships within the Umlazi District of KwaZulu-Natal. This school has been plagued by socio-economic ills like drugs,

gangsterism, domestic violence, unemployment and poverty. Due to the geographical location of the school with easily accessible transport routes from towns all over Durban, the school's population is consistently escalating and attracting learners from major townships in Durban.

1.9 Structure of the study

This section outlines the structure of the study about the experiences of the School Management Team (SMT) in improving the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results within the context of the National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) School. This study comprises of five chapters which are summarised below:

Chapter One

Chapter one provides an overview of the study. This chapter outlines the background of the study, explains the statement of the problem, provides a rationale for the study and explains the significance of the study. This chapter also outlines the objectives of this study and the critical research questions. The delimitations of the study are discussed and lastly an overview structure of the whole study is outlined.

Chapter Two

The second chapter focuses on the literature reviewed in this study based on the experiences of the School Management Team within underperforming schools and specifically NSLA Schools in South Africa. The chapter also included a detailed discussion of the theoretical frameworks which underpin this study.

Chapter Three

The third chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research design and methodology utilised in this study, including a discussion of the research paradigm, sampling methods, data generation methods and data analysis process followed in this study.

Chapter Four

Chapter four presents a discussion of the data that was generated through semi-structured interviews, and documents review. The four main themes which emerged are discussed with sub-themes.

Chapter Five

The last chapter summarises the study and presents a synthesis of the key findings of the research and recommendations based on these key findings.

1.10 Chapter summary

This chapter provided an outline of the background to the study with the rationale for the study as well as an explanation of the problem statement, the significance of the study, the objectives of the study, the research questions and the delimitations. Finally, a structure of each chapter was outlined.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical review of the body of literature and the various authors views that have been studied about School Management Teams (SMTs) in underperforming schools. Any secondary school in South Africa that has attained below 60% in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination is classified as a National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) School. For the purpose of this study any underperforming secondary school in South Africa will be referred to as a National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) School. The advent of democracy brought many changes to the South African education system. Although freedom was celebrated, the apartheid system had left some scars on our education system which may have led to a possible crisis at present.

Apartheid created many inequalities between white and black schools and even their education departments (Daniel, Southall, & Lutchman, 2004; Jansen, 2006). These inequalities seem to have been most evident based on the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results. Spaull (2013) and Modisaotsile (2012) has noted that the NSC examination is characterised by mediocrity, a mass of learners who drop out before even reaching Grade 12, and the NSC pass requirements which are of a low standard due to learners shying away from the difficult subjects like Mathematics and Physical Sciences. Taking into account Spaull's (2013) discussion, why does the matric pass rate still seem to be in a crisis even though matric learners are choosing the less demanding subjects?

With the state of education in South Africa and the annual NSC results triggering a great cause for concern, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) through policy development, is in the process of addressing key issues related to underperformance. The DBE has placed significant emphasis on School Management Teams (SMTs) in underperforming schools both internally and externally. This chapter critically evaluates the role of SMTs with a special focus on those role functions that are important in improving the NSC results. In this chapter I will also discuss some of the challenges that are being faced in NSLA Schools and critically evaluate ways in which SMTs overcome those challenges. This chapter concludes with a critical discussion on Kurt Lewin's (1953) three-stage model of change, and the leadership for learning model, which forms the theoretical frameworks for this study.

2.2 The role of School Management Teams (SMTs)

In South Africa, the school management teams are the critical role players in monitoring and evaluating their respective departments allocated to them. Most schools in South Africa are structured where each school management team member is allocated a group of specialized teachers and subjects to manage. However, this devolved form of managing has had little impact on some school management teams. For example, Mogashoa (2013) has found that school management team members were confused about their roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, Mogashoa (2013) highlighted through interviews with school management teams that SMT members also were not clear about their critical role in implementing the curriculum and more importantly, as managers. Similarly Ntshoe and Selesho (2014) claim that HODs as part of the school management team lacked understanding of the content associated with the range of subjects allocated to them to manage and supervise. This signals a cause for concern with regards to the role played by school management teams in improving the academic performance in specific subject areas. Ntshoe and Selesho (2014) argue that HODs lack of content knowledge in high ranking designated subjects like Mathematics, Physical Science, and Accounting accounts for the poor pass rate in the NSC examinations. The arguments put forward by Nthsoe and Selesho indicate that the role of the SMT focuses on two aspects: one is that the SMT has to improve academic performances and the other suggests that their role entails content knowledge of the subjects they supervise. The SMT of NSLA School seem to stuck in between these two role responsibilities. Hence the problem faced by SMT in NSLA Schools is improving learner academic performances when they lack content knowledge in so many different subjects that they manage.

2.2.1 The role of the SMT in improving learner academic performances

The main role of SMTs is to provide a sound educational environment which will promote quality teaching and learning (Nelly, 2008). In providing quality teaching and learning the SMT has to engage in tasks that will contribute to academic improvement of learners. According to Blum (2006), SMTs have to provide assistance to teachers in specialized subject areas. Blum (2006) comments on the dual role of the SMT. On one hand Blum (2006) describes the role of the SMT as a team player engaging in tasks that involve tasks like creating and implementing policy, and on the other hand, a team leader, who is in charge of teachers and subjects within a department. By Blum (2006) distinguishing between the two

roles that SMTs play, both as leaders and team players, we find that this distinction may clear up some of the confusion surrounding the role of the SMT. In providing quality teaching and learning, it seems that SMTs need to fulfil their responsibilities both as a player within a team of managers, and a leader, who takes control of monitoring academic performance and the improvement of results from the level of the learners and teachers.

The SMT is ultimately accountable for improving learner academic performance. Managing and coordinating tasks and steering individuals to meet the goals and objectives of the organisation rely on the type of leadership displayed by the SMT member (Mullins, 2010). This suggests that SMTs need to literally take the lead when trying to improve the NSC results. However, this may seem problematic to NSLA Schools due to the high levels of poverty, escalating discipline problems, substance abuse, violence, language barriers, and social problems, all of which impact on the SMTs initiatives of improving the NSC results. However, Ylimaki, Jacobson, and Drysdale (2007) provide evidence that principals of high poverty schools in USA, England, and Australia improved academic achievement through their leadership styles (all of which were similar). The improvement of student achievement in challenging educational contexts was due to creativity and ability to implement change (Ylimaki et al. 2007). This entailed principals and school management teams driving the process of academic improvement through change, and best practices, even though they were from high challenging contexts.

Leadership involves influencing others to achieve goals and objectives (Mullins, 2010). The dilemma that possibly faces leadership within school management teams is trying to get people working together as a team. Mullins (2010) argues that leadership has been characterised by the way in which leaders influence, inspire and promote a shared vision rather than power and control. Within the context of NSLA Schools, if SMTs promote this sense of shared vision, and inspire to lead, all individuals will assist in improving the NSC results. This however, does not seem to be happening in some NSLA Schools. A distinct feature of NSLA Schools is that the poor NSC results portray a negative image of the whole school. It is therefore the task of the SMT to turnaround the school through the improvement of the NSC results. Harris (2010) provides evidence that effective leadership of management teams through strong moral purpose and maintaining high expectations impacts positively on academic achievement within schools with challenging contexts. In order to improve the NSC results, SMTs would need to work as a team with the teachers of their respective

departments through their effective leadership. This would mean using effective leadership to create a vision for their matric teachers and learners which is to improve the NSC results for the academic year.

Sethlodi and Lebeloane (2014) sought to explore the link between desired performance and shared values in overcoming academic underperformance. Sethlodi and lebeloane (2014) provide evidence that by SMTs incorporating values into their tasks and activities like improving the NSC results, it will result in a conducive environment where quality teaching and learning prevails. However, the value system to be adopted by the SMT is underpinned by effective leadership and Sethlodi and Lebeloane (2014) accentuate the importance of the role that SMTs play in determining the overall culture of the school. Sethlodi and Lebeloane's (2014) work suggests that SMTs should enshrine in their context the values based on Manning's (2001) three-pronged approach: decision making, gaining trust, and capacity building.

The three-pronged approach is what SMTs should be engaged in when improving the NSC results. For example, the planning and organising of testing and remediation programmes, monitoring and evaluation of teachers and learners in their departments, dealing with discipline problems and substance abuse or implementing a turnaround and school improvement plan, all depend on decisions taken and implemented by the SMT (Everard, Morris & Wilson, 2004). Everard et al. (2004) assert that decision taking can be problematic when dealing with issues like change, accountability, conflict, facts and data that signal a need for alternatives. Some of the frustrations within NSLA Schools seem to be the failure by the SMT to take decisions that will bring radical changes to the school taking them out of their comfort zone. These SMTs however fail to realise that these decisions can improve the quality of their NSC results.

2.2.2 The role of the SMT in supporting teaching and learning

According to Sethlodi and Lebeloane (2014), SMTs have to build strong relationships within their environment through trust with those around them. Since SMTs interact on a daily basis with teachers, there needs to be a sense of trust between both stakeholders. NSLA Schools seem to already be under a lot of pressure from the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the SMT needs to allow them a certain amount of space to carry out their duties. In doing so,

teachers may become more committed towards their subject specialisations, which in turn may improve the NSC results of the school. In addition, Mullins (2010) states that school management should not use control measures to gain results but rather provide support and empowerment towards teachers. Significantly, teachers within NSLA Schools need as much support from SMTs as they are subject to accountability processes by the DBE with regards to the NSC progress and improvement plans. Gaining trust however, should not only occur between the SMT, teachers, and learners. Other important stakeholders who should be taken account into are the parents, School Governing Body, and community. Harris (2010) accentuates the importance of a meaningful collaboration between school management, parents and the community. Harris (2010) further argues that when these partnerships are developed in challenging contexts, there may be an improvement in learner academic performance. When the SMTs begin to build strong partnerships of trust between all stakeholders, they should then include them in certain decision-making processes in the school. Within the context of an NSLA School, this would certainly make a difference as the parents of the matric learners know what challenges they are facing and what policies should be implemented to turn the school around.

The last approach mentioned by Sethlodi and Lebeloane (2014) is capacity building. In trying to improve the NSC results, SMTs play an important role in the development and empowerment of the teachers within their departments. The poor NSC results in subjects like Mathematics, Physical Sciences, and Life Sciences signal a need for improvement and development of skills and content knowledge which will impact on the overall NSC pass rate of the school. SMTs play an important role in providing support and development to teachers where subjects perform poorly. In particular, SMTs focus on the instructional capacity will result in an improvement in the NSC results of NSLA Schools. However, many learners in NSLA Schools attain below 40% in English Home Language.

2.2.3 Managing the curriculum

Curriculum management involves managing what is taught, how it will be taught and assessed, and the resources needed for teaching. SMTs are then tasked with managing of all of these processes to ensure quality learning and teaching. By SMTs displaying effective leadership roles they will be able to produce curriculum delivery that may lead to improved learner performances in the NSC examinations. The Department of Basic Education has

provided training to SMTs in Curriculum 2005 (C2005), the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), National Curriculum Statement (NCS), and at present the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Mogashoa, 2013). Mogashoa's (2013) study has noted that although SMTs felt empowered by the curriculum training workshops, they still had doubts about their role as managers of the curriculum. Mogashoa (2013) further notes that confusion about the implementation and management of the curriculum was partly due to SMTs interpreting the curriculum differently in schools. The SMTs in South African schools engage in various activities related to the curriculum like managing and planning of the curriculum, classroom practical and curriculum development (Department of Education, 2008). SMTs as curriculum managers engage in planning of day to day activities based on the prescribed curriculum. They also play an important role in the monitoring and supervision of the curriculum through the teachers and learners on an ongoing basis. By monitoring and evaluating the curriculum, SMTs are able to develop and improve, and implement strategies which will impact positively on student achievement. With regards to curriculum planning, SMTs need to provide support to teachers that will enable them to deliver a more effective curriculum that will impact positively on learner academic performance. Within NSLA Schools, or any school in the country, these are the vital roles that SMTs play to ensure quality teaching and learning is taking place. Ntshoe and Selesho (2014) stated that the principal as the main SMT member is at the helm of accountability for learner performance and academic achievement. It is for this reason that principals have to assume the role of instructional leaders and provide continuous professional development in ensuring the improvement of academic achievement (Ntshoe & Selesho, 2014).

2.2.4 Policy formulation and implementation

Van Wyk and Marumoloa (2012) noted that policies are important as it assists SMTs in their day to day activities at school. School policies also assist SMTs in tasks that involve decision making or problem solving (Van Wyk & Marumoloa, 2012). Gamage (2006) stated that policy making is one of the role functions of the senior management team in the school and plays an important role in the implementation of developmental planning strategies in the school. The SMTs of NSLA Schools plan, develop, and implement policies that will lead to the improvement of the NSC results. Besides the official policies that are received from the DBE, SMTs also decide internally on the drafting of policies that will lead to school improvement, and more importantly, the improvement of the NSC results. The policies

developed and implemented by SMTs serve as a framework for an action plan that is used in areas like the assessment of the instructional programme (Gamage, 2006, p. 148). Policy formulation and implementation can be especially significant for NSLA Schools as these SMTs draft policies for an appraisal system which is used for Whole-School Development (WSD) and the professional development of educators. The appraisal system within South African schools is known as the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS). While some educators may argue that the IQMS process is merely a process for gaining a 1% salary increment, this appraisal system assists SMTs of NSLA Schools in monitoring and evaluating the teaching and learning. This appraisal system is especially beneficial for the improvement of the NSC results.

2.2.5 Planning

Planning offers SMTs a framework from which to understand problems, find solutions, and make changes within the school (Leask & Terrell, 2014). SMTs engage in curriculum planning but also tasks and activities that will lead to improved academic learner performances. Although there seems to be limited literature on the role of SMTs in NSLA Schools, they do engage in planning activities that are found in most schools. For example, the SMT, at the beginning of each year must present a school improvement plan to the Department of Basic Education. Before designing and submitting the school's improvement plan, the SMTs discuss which are the main areas of concern for the school and focus the improvement plan towards achieving that main goal. The SMTs of NSLA Schools prioritise the improvement of the NSC results within their improvement plan for the academic year. If SMTs of NSLA Schools design and implement improvement plans, why do these schools still seem to remain at the bottom with a poor NSC pass rate? Leask and Terrell (2014) argue that school management needs to firstly analyse the problems that is impacting on student achievement and thereafter provide support so that positive change can occur.

2.2.6 Capacity building

Capacity building is the development of individuals combined abilities needed to bring about change (Fullan, 2005). It is quite clear that NSLA Schools need 'change.' Of particular interest is the need for change to improve learner academic performances. Change that will bring about successful school improvement can be achieved through capacity building. The change through capacity building can be both internal and external. Internally, the SMT is accountable for capacity building of teachers to ensure improvement in examination results.

According to Stoll (2009), capacity building that effects change involves critical reflection of practices, skills, professional responsibilities, and motivations. Taking into account the challenges faced within an NSLA School, Stoll (2009) asserts that an understanding of the context and commitment is needed to foster capacity building that enhances school improvement.

According to Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) successful schools are led by good principals and leadership. Ntshoe and Selesho (2014) stated that the Education Amendments Act (2007) identifies the principal as the main SMT member who is at the helm of accountability for learner performance and academic achievement. It is for this reason that principals have to assume the role of instructional leaders and provide continuous professional development in ensuring the improvement of academic achievement (Ntshoe & Selesho, 2014). Leithwood et al. (2010) has noted that the principal has to lead turnaround initiatives by leading teachers, parents and engaging in capacity building of the staff. The principal as the head of the institution has to initiate improvement processes; however, within the changing and challenging contexts we are currently faced with, especially NSLA Schools, the principal can no longer undertake improvement processes alone. The use of the whole composition of the school management team may lead to better results in learner performances. Kinsler (2008) argues that literature has shown that a collaborative partnership between management, results in an increase in learner academic performances, especially in challenging contexts like NSLA Schools.

2.2.7 Developing a school improvement plan

One of the key functions of the school management team is to develop a school action plan (Nelly, 2008). In South African schools this is commonly known as a School Improvement Plan (SIP). The South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) clearly states that the "*principal* of a *public school* identified by the *Head of Department* in terms of section 58B must annually, at the beginning of the year, prepare a plan setting out how academic performance at the *school* will be improved." Every year principals' hand in their school improvement plans to the DBE. While it seems that some principals with excellent NSC pass rates view this as an event, the principals of NSLA Schools should use this as an important process in the quest for improvement of the NSC pass rate. The Department of Basic Education either approves of rejects the school improvement plan submitted by the principal. Upon rejection the school

improvement plan is returned with recommendations to the principal. Arguably, there seems to be some inconsistency with the Department of Basic Education in terms of the scrutiny and approval process of the school improvement plan. With NSLA Schools still finding difficulty in improving their NSC results, the Department of Education seems to ignore the previous year school improvement plan. There seems to be no attention given to the previous year's improvement plan, but a new one is compulsory on June 30th every year. Whatever the feeling is towards the level of significance of the design and implementation process of the school improvement plan, this remains one of the most effective and best practice considered for school improvement (Dunaway, Kim, & Szad, 2012), especially for NSLA Schools to improve their NSC results.

Reynolds, Harris, Clarke, Harris and James (2006) argue that schools in poorer, disadvantaged areas tend to perform below the required attainment levels in national standardised testing programmes. Reynolds et al. (2006) provides evidence that research done in England based schools regarded as 'schools facing challenging circumstances (SFFC)' recorded significant improvement based on school development programmes. Similar research in Netherlands (Houtveen, Van de Grift, Kuijpers, Boot, Groot, & Kooijman, 2007) based on schools that achieved low academic performances noted that a well-developed school improvement programme did make a positive difference in learner academic performances. There is a noticeable difference however in the school improvement design, between the schools that show improvement in academic performances through evidence based research and what is being done in South Africa (Reynolds, et al. 2006; Houtveen, et al. 2007). Firstly, achievement levels in England and Netherlands in underperforming schools use a 'school development programme' in contrast to South Africa, who uses a 'school improvement plan.' A school development programme may involve initiatives based on a 'plan' whereas the school improvement plan may contain the ideas and decisions taken to improve learner performances. The school improvement plan should therefore support the school development programme.

Van Der Voort and Wood's (2014) action research in underperforming South African schools have shown that some schools do not even have a school improvement plan, even though this is a compulsory requirement for school management. As mentioned earlier, some school management views the design of a school improvement plan as an event, and this leads to SMTs developing a degree of apathy towards the improvement of the school, especially in

terms of learner academic performances. The school improvement plan can be used effectively in areas of teaching and learning, curriculum, teacher resource materials and strategies for dealing with learners of various learning abilities (Houtveen, et al. 2007). In contrast to this effective improvement plan, Van der Voort and Wood's (2014) argue that some SMTs in underperforming South African schools show lack of understanding of how to develop a school improvement plan in relation to the needs of the school and the skills to be developed to ensure whole-school development. Taking into account the literature on school improvement plans, it is quite evident that it remains an effective turnaround strategy in underperforming schools in South Africa. The challenge, however, remains upon the SMTs to construct the improvement plan which will ensure amongst other things, improvement in learner academic performances. Van der Voort and Wood (2014) assert that this can only be achieved through collaboration and critical reflection.

2.2.8 Effective leadership

Those individuals who make up the leadership of the school play a vital role in ensuring the success of the school (Horng & Loeb, 2010). According to Ngcobo (2012), South African schools are experiencing difficulty in dealing with change as a result of the demands placed upon by the government in order to transform education in the country. Ngcobo (2012) further asserts that leadership is the key to dealing with change difficult situations that schools are faced with. This is easier said than done, however, taking into account the disparities in education caused by apartheid. In a post-apartheid period, we find that there are the schools which were always well resourced and financially secure and whose NSC results are above average. On the opposite end, there are schools which are under-resourced, poor finances and are underperforming in the NSC examinations. Similarly, a recent study by Chikoko, Naicker, and Mthiyane (2015) describes the South African schooling system as a continuum made up of the best schools, dysfunctional schools, and schools in multiple deprived areas that match up to the best schools in the country based on their excellent NSC results. The research by Chikoko et al. (2015) concluded that leadership from within the school was the key determinant factor in achieving excellent NSC results in deprived areas.

There is a plethora of international literature studies on the effects of leadership on student achievement. For example, several researchers (Yilimaki et al, 2007; Jacobson, 2011; Sammons, Gu, Day, & Ko, 2011) show that principals as well as the rest of school

management had either a direct or indirect impact on student achievement through their leadership practices. Some of the leadership practices associated with improved student achievement include redesigning the organisation, setting goals or a shared vision, improving the learning environment and providing support and professional development for teachers (Jacobson, 2011; Sammons et al, 2011). Leadership within some South African schools especially NSLA Schools seem to be struggling to reach heights of improvement. The study by Ngcobo (2012) is noteworthy as it examines the Advanced Certificate: Education (School Management and Leadership) (ACE: SML). The ACE: SML was designed to prepare school principals and other school managers to cope with the changes and challenges of educational transformation in South African education. Ngcobo (2012) argues that the ACE: SML programme does not equip school managers to deal with the challenges that face schools as the ACE: SML programme does not address the specific leadership challenges and process of change that school managers are faced with in their real contexts. Ngcobo (2012) states that the ACE: SML programme lacks the key feature of the programme which is 'leadership' but rather focuses more on education laws, policies, and management suggesting that leadership is underpinned by authority. In addition, Bhengu, Naicker, and Mthiyane (2014) noted that although school principals show understanding of the ACE: SLM programme, they cannot apply their leadership skills acquired due to the challenging contexts that they work in. With compelling evidence that the ACE: SLM has its flaws (Ngcobo, 2012), the answer to effective leadership practices may lie in empirical research both nationally and internationally. Effective leadership remains, and I will argue, the key feature in turning around underperforming schools.

There exists a buffet of leadership models available to school managers, but of particular significance to SMTs of NSLA Schools may be the instructional leadership model. With NSLA Schools main problem seeming to be teaching and learning, and which is also focused on by the Department of Basic Education in attempts to improve the NSC results, instructional leadership may be the answer for dealing with poor learner performances. Instructional leadership focuses on the managing of teaching and learning as the core to improving learning outcomes (Bush & Glover, 2014). Bhengu and Mthembu (2014) looked at the effective leadership practices between two schools in the same community within the Umlazi District. This study is noteworthy as Bhengu and Mthembu (2014) provide evidence that the school that performed better was a result of its principal using instructional leadership practices and created a collaborative school environment and a positive school culture.

Although there seems to be very limited literature on instructional leadership within South African schools, significant studies of South African schools within deprived and challenging contexts suggest that instructional leadership practices may overcome the challenges that SMTs are facing (Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014; Mkhize & Bhengu, 2015). Bush and Glover (2014, p. 567) further argue that "while there are different approaches to leadership and management, a focus on leadership for learning, or 'instructional leadership', is an essential element for successful schooling."

We are very well aware that there is 'no one size fits all' to the application of leadership practices. We can, however, draw on inspiration from significant research done in challenging contexts in South African schools, especially where we find that the school is underperforming. One such significant study is that of Chikoko, Naicker, and Mthiyane (2015), which concluded that servant leadership, and an asset-based approach to community development did make a difference in schools from multiple deprived contexts. Servant leadership as described by Chikoko et al. (2015) within the context of schools in deprived contexts, entails working and committing to the development of people within the school and expressing value towards the people in the community that are vital to improving the school, especially the NSC results. Lastly, Chikoko et al. (2015) proposed that the asset-based approach as opposed to the needs-based approach is the key to transforming schools in deprived contexts. According to Chikoko et al. (2015), the asset-based approach allows schools in deprived contexts to find solutions from within the organisation instead of looking for answers from external sources like the Department of Basic Education. Although I have discussed only a few leadership models, these models seem to be possible solutions to SMTs of NSLA Schools given the contexts of these schools.

2.2.9 Building strong professional learning communities

A professional learning community is a group of professionals who work together to bring about change that has a direct impact on students' learning (Harris & Jones, 2010). Effective school leaders play an integral part in creating professional learning communities (PLCs). Cranston (2009) asserts that the principal, as the leader of the institution, has an integral role to play in developing PLCs. Furthermore (Hord, 2004, p. 8) maintains that transforming a school into a professional learning community cannot be done without the leader's assistance and motivation to develop the staff as a learning community. The role of leadership and

management in developing and promoting shared vision, beliefs, and values of the organisation is the cornerstone of developing a PLC (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, Senge, 1990). The principal has to ignite the idea of a professional learning community and play an active role in the professional development of the staff to ensure a PLC is successful. Hord and Sommers (2008) argue that PLCs seem to be a very promising innovation in education, however they also caution us that without a change of old routines and the active participation of the principal, a PLC may not impact on the school. Likewise, Senge (1990) advocates that change starts with the principal and suggests that the principal must become a "lead teacher and lead learner" and steer the process of developing and managing a PLC. Harris and Jones (2010) assert that in order for improvement to take place, there needs to be collaboration. This collaboration is formed between school management teams and teachers. To encourage and promote ideas like shared leadership, or a collaborative learning environment, principals may require a review of their leadership style.

2.2.10 Socio-economic factors that impact on NSLA Schools

Historically, the Coleman (1966) report was a significant document in that it claimed that learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds could not learn and achieve academically no matter what the school did. The key findings of Coleman report revealed that student family background was the main reason for student success and children from poor families and homes could not learn regardless of what the school did. Louw, Bayat, and Eigelaar-Meets (2011) looked at the factors that lead to underperformance in South African schools. As this study dealt with NSLA Schools, the significant contribution of this research can be that underperforming schools and geographically location in poor communities are closely related (Louw et al. 2011). Louw et al. (2011) further argue that these underperforming schools are located within a 'dysfunctional community' characterised by criminal activities, gangsterism, violence, substance abuse and teenage pregnancies. The SMT NSLA Schools engage with these socio-economic factors on a daily basis trying to enforce teaching and learning within these troubled communities.

Since these NSLA Schools are located within a dysfunctional community, school improvement initiatives appears to be a difficult task for SMTs to implement as the community may not share in the vision of the school. Similarly, Bayat, Louw, and Rena

(2014) also highlight unemployment and poverty as socio-economic factors that affect underperformance. The resultant factor of unemployment and poverty leads learners in these NSLA schools to turn to crime and cases where learners begin to sell drugs to make money for their household. Bayat et al (2014) study is also noteworthy as it examined the household structure of the learners. Besides the problems encountered by a nuclear family, Bayat et al (2014) noted that a lack of basic services led to unhygienic conditions, which resulted in learners falling ill, recording high absentee rates, which affected their school work as they missed a lot of work, thereby contributing to the decline in NSC results. The above mentioned factors creates a challenging work environment for the SMT of NSLA Schools leaving them accountable to the Department of Basic Education for the factors mentioned in this section.

2.2.11 Inequality in education

Chikoko et al. (2015) comments on the existence of two types of schools in South Africa, the first class schools which are well resourced and produce excellent NSC results, and dysfunctional schools who are struggling, evident by their poor NSC results. The legacy of apartheid cannot be ignored for some of the inequalities that are evident in some schools in South Africa. The contrast in schooling as mentioned by Chikoko et al. (2015) is partly due to these top schools being situated in affluent former white areas (Letseka, 2013). Letseka (2013) further asserts that parents who send their children to these Former Model-C schools are wealthy and play an active role in the teaching and learning of the school. These first class schools have substantial finances, which is used effectively for teaching materials and the employment of highly qualified teachers. This makes these first class schools a significant contributor to the overall national NSC pass rate.

The SMT of Former Model-C schools do not contend with most of the factors as mentioned in the previous section (2.2.10). Since the so called wealthy schools do not encompass a challenging environment, the role of the SMT seems to be far more relaxed. On the opposite end, there are the township schools and rural schools which lack finances to sustain their schools. Letseka (2013) has noted that these schools lack basic facilities like electricity, running water, proper classrooms, qualified teachers, functioning school governing bodies and attain NSC pass rates of below 30%. These factors all impact on SMTs initiative to improving the NSC results. Without the necessary finances SMTs cannot purchase teaching

and learning support materials, use technology effectively, and create a conducive learning environment for learners. The SMT cannot manage their respective departments, and provide the necessary resources without the finances and basic needs like water and electricity. Also the subjects that are offered by the NSLA Schools like Tourism, Hospitality and Computer Application Technology, which is 50% assessment based to help poor performing learners relies heavily on funding. The inequality of funding due to the quintile ranking system seems to have impacted on the SMT in NSLA Schools as they are finding it hard to provide for their learners and teachers in order to improve learner results.

2.2.12 Policy implementation

Ngcobo (2012) state that many schools are struggling with policy changes, many of which have been introduced by the DBE in a bid to transform education since the dawn of democracy. At present, there seems to be frustration among SMTs in NSLA Schools due to some statutory policies placed upon them by the DBE. One such policy that has caused much controversy in South African education is the promotion and progression policy for Grade 10 to Grade 12. The promotion and progression conditions is that a learner can only fail once in the Further Education and Training (FET) thus preventing the learner from spending more than four years in the (FET) phase. Local literature on NSLA Schools in South Africa has found that the progression policy impacted negatively on learner academic achievement and the main contributor towards the poor NSC pass rates in some schools. This progression policy allows learners to move to the next grade if they have failed, resulting in a group of Grade 12 candidates who would possibly contribute to the high NSC failure rate. One of the reasons for a high failure rate of progressed learners to Grade 12, is that having not fulfilled the minimum requirements from Grade 10 and 11, they are thrown into the deep end of having to deal with demanding syllabi and external examination papers. The progression policy seems to be a significant factor towards the poor NSC pass rate.

International literature has provided evidence of the difficulty experienced by school management due to state policies imposed in schools like the No Child Left Behind Act in America, which raises questions about the equality of the education system (McCoach, Goldstein, Behuniak, & Reis, 2010; Daly, Der-Martirosian, Ong-Dean, Park, & Wishard-Guerra, 2011). While these nationwide policies are implemented in various countries, school management seems to be at the epicentre of the implementation phase process. The state then

holds the school management accountable for the success or failure of these policies. In South Africa, the progression policy has led to a high amount of learners who have reached Grade 12 without passing according to minimum promotion requirements, burdening SMTs with responsibility and accountability for the poor NSC pass rates contributed by these learners.

2.3 Positive effects of the NSLA

There seems to be very limited literature on the positive effects that NSLA Schools or under performing schools have on SMTs, but a few authors have managed to provide noteworthy studies. For example, Luginbuhl, Webbink, and De Wolf's (2009) study has shown that inspections by state departments of education had impacted positively on school performance, thus increasing test scores by 2 to 3%. Although the rate of an increase is fairly low, when considering the state of our NSLA Schools, every percentage increase signifies hope for the life of a Grade 12 learner. Due to intense monitoring and evaluation measures placed on by the DBE, SMTs strive for improvement in the NSC examinations to avoid being questioned by Department officials for poor results. Shah, Akhtar, Zafar, and Riaz (2012) assert that supervision impacts on job satisfaction. Although NSLA Schools present a challenging context for SMTs, there may seem to be a strong sense of self-efficacy towards improving the NSC results in the school. While the NSLA offers strict external monitoring, it also, impacts positively on the work of SMTs, triggering them to give off their best practices in order to bring about whole-school change and improvement. Due to the NSLA programme, the work of these SMTs seems to be driven by values, ethical motives and intrinsic motivations, which Sahlberg (2010) regards as the essence of the teaching profession. The accountability system imposed by the state is positive in the sense that it leads to some improvement in learner academic performances as opposed to the absence of it with no improvement (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005).

2.4 Theoretical frameworks

The two theoretical lenses that will be applied to this study are Kurt Lewin's (1953) three-stage model of change and the leadership for learning model. The Leadership for Learning Theory which focuses on student learning through vision for learning, improving the instructional, curricular and assessment programme and encouraging communities of learning

was able to better understand the educational processes that the SMT are involved in to improve learner achievement in the Grade 12. This theory is also used to supplement the Kurt Lewin's change theory which was used to help me gain an understanding of how the SMT experiences change or rather could affect change using this theory. Since the NSLA Programme relies on change in order to improve the NSC results, the two theories used in this study will provide a framework of how change occurs based on the main principle of the leadership for learning theory which is to improve learner achievement. Below is a detailed discussion of the two theories used in this study.

2.4.1 Kurt Lewin's (1953) change theory

Kurt Lewin (1953) designed a three-stage model of change, which formed a significant part of change theory. Lewin's (1953) model of change is characterised by three important phases in the change process: un-freezing, change and refreeze. The first stage, which is un-freezing, is based on the assumption that past observational learning and cultural influences shape the human behaviour (Wirth, 2004). Schein (2002) referred to the human behaviour as being based on a "quasistationary equilibria" underpinned by a force field of driving and restraining forces. Schein (2002) further asserts that in order for change to take place, changes would have to be made to this force field. In other words, Lewin suggested that breaking the state of equilibrium, which is the current way things are done, is needed for change. Wirth (2004) states that making changes to the force field would require the addition of new change forces or removing those factors that influence behaviour of the individuals. The unfreezing stage is further broken up into three sub processes that influence change (Schein, 2002; Wirth, 2004). The first step is disconfirmation. Disconfirmation is where individuals are dissatisfied with their present conditions, which are data driven. Schein (2002) stated that this process is a prerequisite for change. Disconfirmation triggers the second sub-process "survival anxiety" or "survival guilt," which is recognising and accepting the disconfirming data in order to change. Schein (2002) and Wirth, (2004) however, warns that survival anxiety or guilt must not be greater than the third sub-process, "learning anxiety." This sub-process is associated with the difficulty of unlearning what has previously been learned and resistance to change. Kritsonis (2005) suggested that motivation, preparedness for change, and active participation in problem-solving situations will assist the unfreezing phase.

Lewin (1953) classified the second stage of his theory as 'change.' According to Schein (2002), a cognitive re-definition and unfreezing occur which leads to the desire to change. Wirth (2004) describes this stage as making changes to wherever the desired changes are needed and making a transition into the new way of doing things. Wirth (2004) stated that a degree of dissatisfaction with the current status quo and the urge to make changes happens in this stage. This stage requires a vision of the new way of doing things so that individuals can identify the current situation and the desired state of change. Role model imitation and problem solving on an individual level through trial-and-error learning are characteristics of the change activities in this process (Wirth, 2004). Trial-and-error learning also known as 'scanning,' involves a search through various methods like communicating with people, reading, exposure to new material, all of which may provide solutions to problems experienced (Schein, 2002). This process involves individuals searching for meanings and solutions through problem solving methods and assessing, which is the best possible solution. This new way of learning new ways of doing things in stage two is described by Schein (2002) as "cognitive restructuring." The learning of new information in the change process results in the following impacts identified by Schein (2002): semantic redefinition- different meanings of words to previous assumption; cognitive broadening- a broader interpretation of previous assumptions; and new standards of judgement or evaluation- no fixed judgements.

The final stage in Lewin's theory is 'refreezing.' This stage involves applying the new changes and ways of doing things into the daily routine of the school (Wirth, 2004). Schein (2002) however, significantly notes that the new behaviour must match up with individual personality and behaviour or the refreezing process will run the risk of 'unlearning' what has been learnt from the change stage. Schein (2002) suggests that the best way possible to reap success from this stage is to encourage scanning which allows the individuals opportunity to find the best possible solutions against the particular behaviour and personality.

Lewins (1953) model of change is important in this study as a theoretical lens as it shows that change is a process. Within the NSLA Schools, change is seen to be a key determinant factor in trying to achieve at least some positive turnaround with regards to the NSC results. If NSLA Schools are to change and show significant improvement in their NSC results, Lewin's model of change can provide a solid foundation in dealing with the challenges faced by these schools.

2.4.2 Leadership for learning

Murphy, Elliott, Goldring and Porter (2007) describe leadership as an ingredient which is integral for the success of student achievement. Mullins (2010, p. 373) defines leadership as the emphasis of on "interpersonal behaviour in a broader context. It is often associated with the willing and enthusiastic behaviour of followers." Within the context of this study, the concept of leadership for learning will be used as a theoretical framework to better understand the leadership practices of school management teams in NSLA Schools. With competing models like 'instructional leadership' and 'transformational leadership,' researchers have turned their attention to 'leadership for learning' (Murphy, et al. 2007; Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Leadership for learning focuses on student learning and other school outcomes through leadership approaches used in various ways and not only by the principal as in instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2011). The context of this study will be framed using the following dimensions of behaviour as outlined by Hallinger (2011): vision for learning, instructional programme, curricular programme, assessment programme, communities of learning. This theory was used since the main dimensions identified by Hallinger (2011) forms part of the NSLA Framework (2007). The NSLA Framework (2007) is the guiding policy document for SMT of NSLA Schools. This theory therefore provides an understanding of the experiences of the SMT within the NSLA School based also on their interaction with the NSLA policy. This theory is also used as guide to determine to what extent the SMT can improve the NSC results.

2.4.2.1 Vision for learning

It is incumbent on the leadership to steer the vision and mission of the school which is done with the various stakeholders (Murphy et al. 2007). The principal not only creates the vision, but has to also promote and market the vision on a continuous basis to all stakeholders in the school (Hord & Sommers, 2008). According to Murphy et al. (2007), the vision that is created by educational leaders should envisage a high standard of student learning, a belief that all learners can succeed educationally, and set timeframes for achieving outcomes. Murphy et al. (2007) noted that personal modelling and communication are key concepts in the creation of a vision for the school. Personal modelling involves the actions carried out by school leaders who demonstrate their willingness, dedication and those activities used to achieve organisational goals. School leaders enlist stakeholders like teachers, learners, School

Governing Body (SGB) through the process of communication. Christensen 1992 (cited in Murph et al. 2007) refers to 'operationalising' and 'shepherding' of the vision whereby school leaders are regarded "keepers and promoters" of the vision. As keepers and promoters, school leaders must ensure positivity and inspiration through challenging periods, which may be experienced by the school.

2.4.2.2 Instructional programme

The instructional programme deals with the key function of the school which is the teaching and learning programme. Leaders display sound knowledge of the instructional programme and all aspects related to teaching and learning (Murphy et al. 2007). Leaders are involved in instructional programme activities like monitoring, classroom visits and planning (Murphy, et al. 2007). An important task which leaders engage in, and is an issue which has been debatable in South African schools, is allocating teachers to different subjects and duties according to subject specialisations without any discrimination, including staff politics (Murphy, et al., 2007). Leaders must provide support to colleagues with regards to teaching and learning (Murphy, et al., 2007). Providing support may include allocation of resources, which are important for teaching and learning and ensuring the improvement of teachers in their instructional programmes. Leaders pursue a smooth-running instructional programme where time is utilised to its fullest and not lost to factors such as school events, learner absenteeism and teacher late-coming. Improvement, high levels of performance and quality teaching and learning are recognised through rewards (Murphy, et al., 2007).

2.4.2.3 Curricular programme

School leaders display sufficient knowledge of the curriculum. Leaders ensure that learner's potential is achieved through an effective curricular programme. These leaders closely monitor the curricular programme. In engaging with the school curricular, there is a degree of coordination with regards to curriculum assessment, resources and instruction. This degree of coordination then impacts on the school's subjects and grades and teachers from the various departments and grades under the leadership and management of the Heads of Departments (Murphy, et al., 2007).

2.4.2.4 Assessment programme

Huba and Freed (2000) define assessment as the gathering of data or information from a variety of sources to determine how much students know and how they apply the knowledge they have gained with the goal of using scores from assessments to improve student learning. Within the leadership for learning model, leaders focus on assessment programmes within specific instructional programmes. According to Murphy et al. (2007), school leaders who are effective employ a range of activities related to the assessment programmes in various subjects. Some of the activities highlighted by Murphy et al. (2007) include monitoring and evaluation, data-collection, managing the assessment programme, assessing student performances, and checking of assessment records. Another important activity that school leadership engages in is using the assessment data to assess the instructional programme and organizational operations (Murphy, et al., 2007). Murphy et al. (2007) also assert that school leadership should use the data obtained from assessment effectively to improve learners and the school by reporting back to teachers about the assessment data as well as parents through events like parent's meeting.

2.4.2.5 Communities of learning

School leadership has to promote the idea of a community of learning that fosters professional development. Leaders continuously provide support for teachers through workshops and providing resources for gaining new knowledge with the aim of improving the instructional programme (Murphy, et al., 2007). According to Murphy et al. (2007), a key feature of the PLC is that it allows for professional development through theories of learning and modelling best practices and ensures staff development through learning. School leaders create an environment where teachers and school management can engage critically and reflect on their practices in a professional manner. Furthermore, by engaging in this type of professional dialogue, a collaborative learning environment is created with the aim of improving learning student learning (Murphy et al. 2007).

The leadership for learning model is used as a theoretical framework in this study to support the idea that through this leadership model's activities and practices, improvement is inevitable within NSLA Schools. Each of the dimensions discussed provides positive justification for school leaders within NSLA Schools to enforce improvement initiatives.

Since there is little literature that addresses the use of leadership for learning within NSLA Schools, this research study will help fill those gaps in literature.

2.5 Chapter summary

The body of literature related to the role of SMTs was reviewed in this chapter. The body of international and local literature that exists suggests that SMTs are at the core of improving learner academic performances (Harris, 2010; Sethlodi & Lebeloane, 2014). Some of the role functions of SMTs include engaging in tasks like policy formulation and implementation, curriculum planning and management, planning, all of which contribute to improved learner academic performances. Taking into account the contextual factors that impact negatively on NSLA schools (Louw et al, 2011; Bayat et al, 2014), SMT school improvement practices like capacity building, developing school improvement plans, displaying effective leadership practices and behaviour, and building a collaborative working environment with shared visions and beliefs through professional learning communities may provide ways to overcome challenges faced by NSLA Schools. After having reviewed Lewin's (1953) three-stage model of change, and the leadership for learning model, there seems to be a paucity of literature and research using these two models as theoretical frameworks in underperforming schools in South Africa. This study is intended to fill in these gaps in literature by addressing the experiences of SMTs in NSLA School's and the challenges encountered using these theoretical frameworks.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a detailed and comprehensive discussion of the literature review on this topic. This chapter focuses on the research and methodological process that were involved in this study. A description of the paradigm within which this study is located is discussed following the research design. The sample population recruitment phase and type of sampling used in this study are explained. The justification for the use of single case study methodology is discussed, and the semi-structured interviews and documents review as research instruments used in this study are justified for its use. The process for data analysis used in this study is explained in relation to the research instruments used in the study. To ensure all data is consistent, credible and accurate, issues of trustworthiness are explained within the context of this study. A discussion of the steps to ensure ethical issues were considered in this study is outlined. Lastly, some of the limitations that impacted on this study are discussed.

3.2 Research paradigm

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define a paradigm as beliefs or worldviews that shapes an investigation or research study. This study is located within the interpretivist paradigm in order to gain an understanding of the participant's experiences of improving the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results within a National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) School. The interpretivist paradigm views reality as being socially constructed by people's beliefs, thoughts and actions and who experience a particular phenomenon of interest (Krauss, 20005). Wahyuni (2012, p. 71) states that in order to "understand the social world from the experiences and subjective meanings that people attach to it, interpretivist researchers favour interacting and to have a dialogue with the studied participants." The interpretivist paradigm places emphasis on understanding. This paradigm fits in with this study as it enabled me to gain an understanding of the experiences of the school management teams through their perspectives, which lies within the unique context of the NSLA phenomenon. Krauss (2005) alludes to us that there is no single reality. By utilising this paradigm, I was also be able to gain multiple realities of school management teams within

NSLA Schools, which is important as it takes into account experiences from different levels of management.

3.3 Research design

This study employs a qualitative research design. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), unlike quantitative research which is underpinned by statistics, qualitative researchers want to gain an understanding through the lived experiences of the participants. According to Pratt (2006, p. 8), "the qualitative researcher seeks to discover the meanings that participants attach to their behaviour, how they interpret situations, and what their perspectives are on particular issues." By using this research approach, I gained an understanding of the ideas, opinions and experiences of the SMT about improving learner academic performances in the NSC examinations within the context of an NSLA School.

3.4 Research methodology

The research methodology employed in this study is a single case study. A case study is an empirical research methodology of inquiry, which focuses on a phenomenon within its context and especially useful when studying a complex phenomenon (Yin, 1994). A case study was suitable for this study as it allowed the researcher to critically examine the SMTs experiences within the context of the NSLA phenomenon. Another important feature that Yin (2011) is that critically examining the context and complex nature of the phenomenon, we are better able to understand the 'case.' This also fits in with the interpretivist paradigm of this research study, which will assist the researcher in understanding the experiences of SMTs through engagement with the NSLA phenomenon.

Baxter and Jack (2008) define a case as an occurring phenomenon which is context bound. Therefore, the case in this research study that was analysed is the experiences of SMTs within the context of the NSLA phenomenon. According to Van Wynsberghe and Khan (2007), context between structures and relationships is achieved by the researcher focusing on time and space. The experiences of SMTs in improving the NSC results, is spatially bound within the context of the NSLA School. The three main types of case studies are: the explanatory case study, descriptive case study, and the exploratory case study. The type of case study that was used in this study is an exploratory case study. An exploratory case study according to Yin (2003) deals with 'what' research questions. Within this research study, two of the

research questions substantiate the need for an exploratory case study design, i.e. the role that school management teams play in improving the NSC results in an NSLA school and the factors that negatively and those that positively affect the School Management Teams initiatives in improving the NSC results within the NSLA School.

3.5 Sampling method

According to Mujere (2016, p.108), "a sample is a group of people, objects or items that are taken from a large population for a measurement." Mujere (2016) further defines sampling as a process of selecting a noteworthy population which has significant characteristics important for the research study. Small sample groups are chosen from a population to allow the researcher to gain insight through data generation, which represents the population being studied (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

Purposive sampling was employed in this study. According to Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003), purposive sampling is used to select participants whose features or characteristics will enrich the phenomenon being studied. Purposive sampling was used to select five SMT members from one NSLA secondary school from the Umlazi District situated within the township of Chatsworth in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. During the recruitment phase of this study, a meeting was set up with the principal of the sample school, and the nature of the study was explained. The principal then granted permission to speak to the other four SMT members to explain the nature of the study. The sample secondary school has been identified as an underperforming school based on the NSC results of the previous year and classified as a NSLA School by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education. The five SMT members purposively selected for this study comprise one principal, and four Heads of Departments (HODs). The SMT members were purposively selected as being identified as "information-rich key informants" because they have experienced the phenomenon being studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 401) for three years. Within the context of this study, the SMT members were identified as information-rich participants based on their management experience for more than 20 years, but more importantly, based on their knowledge and experiences within the context of the NSLA School from the perspective of a management member who is ultimately accountable for the NSC results in secondary schools. The intention behind these purposively selected participants was to hopefully gain

insight from SMT members who are presently experiencing the phenomenon during the time this study was undertaken.

The selection of the school was based on the NSC results from the past three years which recorded pass rates below 60%, placing the school in the underperforming list of schools in KwaZulu-Natal and classified as an NSLA School. The selected school is at present in the NSLA programme, with this being its third consecutive year in the NSLA category of underperforming schools in KwaZulu-Natal. The two documents selected for this study were the school's School Improvement Plan 2015 and the National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) Framework (2007). The school improvement plan was chosen because it contained the core strategies used by the SMT of the school in their attempts to improve the NSC results. The NSLA Framework (2007) was selected as it is the policy that states the role function of SMTs within the context of the NSLA School.

3.6 Data generation methods

The main data generation methods that were used in this study were the semi-structured interview schedule, the documents review schedule and voice recorder for the interview process. The semi-structured interview schedule was used to guide the researcher during the interviews. An interview schedule has a set of pre-determined questions that guides the interviewer during the interview process (Robson, 2002). Moreover, the interview schedule provides the interviewer with consistency as the instrument allows for the recording of answers via a systematic process and contributes to an efficient and well guided interview with participants (Robson, 2002). For this study, a semi-structured interview schedule was prepared with pre-determined questions to help the researcher engage in a smooth and efficient interview process with the participants. Questions contained in the semi-structured interview schedule addressed the three main research questions of this study.

An audio recorder was used as an instrument to audio-record semi-structured interviews with the five SMT members. The use of the audio recorder was especially beneficial as the device could be used at the interview itself and be used to analyse and interpret the actual words spoken by the participants (Markle, West & Rich, 2011). After the interviews were completed, the audio recorder was then be used to transcribe the interviews into text format using Microsoft Word. A document analysis schedule was prepared for the review of the sample school's SIP and the NSLA Framework (2007). The document schedule analysis

addresses the main topics contained in the documents being analysed in relation to the key research questions in this study.

3.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interview is a favourable data generation method as it allowed the researcher to explore the perceptions and experiences of the participants with regards to the topic being researched and the use of probing questions helps to clarify and gain more information (Barriball & While, 1994). "Semi-structured interviews tend to be made up of a combination of closed and open questions aimed at collecting both factual and attitudinal data" (McNeill & Chapman, 2005, p. 56). The semi-structured interview was considered a favourable data generation method as it contains a set of predetermined questions, which can be modified according to what the interviewer perceives as being most appropriate (Robson, 2002). The semi-structured interview as a two-way communication process is advantageous to both the participants and the researcher. By using probing questions, the researcher was able to gain more information and insight from responses that may surface during the interview process and the open-ended questions allow the participants freedom to express themselves. Based on the key research questions of this study, the semi-structured interview was a favourable data generation method as the flexibility, predetermined questions, probing, and open-ended nature of the questions allowed the researcher to explore SMT perceptions and experiences regarding their roles, improvement strategies, and those factors that impact on the NSC results within the context of the NSLA School.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with five SMT members from one secondary school. A semi-structured interview schedule was used in the interview process. The interviews were conducted with the following composition of SMT members: one principal and four Heads of Departments (HODs). The same interview questions were asked to all participants in this study. The duration of each interview was approximately 30 minutes. All five participants were interviewed once. A date was set with each participant to conduct the interview. The interviews took place after-school hours and at a time and place that was most convenient for the participants. Two of the participants preferred to be interviewed at their school office, while the other three participants mutually agreed to be interviewed at their place of residence due to them residing in close proximity to the researcher.

3.6.2 Documents reviews

Document's review is a research method used to gain document based evidence and validation regarding a research topic. According to Palaiologou, Needham, and Male (2015), documents can be used to understand characteristics within a particular context. This study uses Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) guide to analysing documents. The two documents were analysed based on the literal meaning of the text and the interpretation over and above the literal text (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995).

Two documents were reviewed in this study. The School Improvement Plan 2015 (SIP), and the National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) Framework (2007) were analysed. Permission was granted by the principal and the SMT members to analyse their SIP for 2015. The 2015 SIP was selected as this is the last improvement plan designed by the school that is presently being implemented. It was hoped that the SIP will provide rich data regarding the NSC improvement strategies undertaken by the SMT. The NSLA Framework (2007) was selected as a public document. Using the NSLA Framework (2007) as a policy document provided insight into what the KZN Department of Basic Education states on paper, and what is really happening in NSLA Schools. By analysing and interpreting the NSLA Framework other than its literal meaning, it was hoped that insight will also be gained through the experiences of SMTs within the context of the NSLA School. The data generated from the documents review also helped to corroborate the findings from the semi-structured interviews.

3.7 Data analysis

The process of qualitative data analysis involves the reduction of large volumes of data into themes or patterns, which is then interpreted by the researcher (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Data analysis is further described by Thorne (2000) as the interpreting and organising data coherently in relation to the research study. The data analysis strategy used in this study was the thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves identifying, analysing the data and reporting themes and patterns that arise from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I began the data analysis phase of this study by first organising and transcribing the data. Each interview audio-recording was played and paused to allow for typed transcription. This process was done for all five participants. The interviews were transcribed using Microsoft

Word. I then read the five transcripts several times while looking for emerging themes and patterns that were related to the research questions of this study. The transcribed interviews were then read several times to gain an understanding of the data collected. While engaging with the transcriptions, I also looked for themes and patterns. Participant's responses that were similar were then coded using different colour highlighter pens. Similar responses that were highlighted the same colour were then bracketed. Bracketed responses of the same colour highlighter were then given a theme. This data analysis process was used for all five transcriptions. I analysed the two documents review using documents review schedule to determine the extent to which the data had triangulated with the semi-structured interviews.

3.8 Issues of trustworthiness

Validity and reliability are terms coined in quantitative research. Validity is concerned with the question of reality and whether something is really what is through the researcher's observation or through the way meanings are meant to be interpreted (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To achieve trustworthiness qualitative researchers use concepts like credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness was thus achieved in this study using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The following way in which trustworthiness was achieved is described below.

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility is the extent to which the key findings of the study are a representation of the participant's actual meaning of their responses (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). To ensure credibility in this study, all participants were revisited and member checking was conducted where participants reviewed their transcripts to confirm the accuracy and consistency with my interpretation. Member checking involves allowing the participants the opportunity to check, edit, and approve the transcripts for verification of whether the data provided is in line with the researcher's interpretation of their experiences and responses (Carlson, 2010). Each participant was given a hard copy of their transcript from their interview. Participants were then given 2-3 days to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions.

3.8.2 Transferability

Transferability concerns the way in which the results of the study can contribute to other situations (Shenton, 2004). To achieve transferability purposive sampling was used and thick, rich descriptions were communicated in this study to allow for continuation or understanding that may arise in other research areas and population (Shenton, 2004; Carlson, 2010). The researcher also ensured understanding was given to the unique context in which the study took place.

3.8.3 Dependability

Dependability relates to the consistency of the findings of the research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation was used to ensure dependability. Triangulation is the use of two or more sources of data to corroborate the findings of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).Triangulation was achieved through documents review of the sample school's School Improvement Plan 2015, and the National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) Framework (2007). Triangulation through documents review as an "overlapping method" was undertaken to ensure dependability to corroborate findings (Shenton, 2004).

3.8.4 Confirmability

According to Shenton (2004), "confirmability is the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity. Shenton (2004) asserts that the research findings must be the views and experiences of the participants and not that of the researcher. To ensure confirmability in this study an audio recorder was used, and I also took notes during the interviews for authenticity of the data.

3.9 Ethical considerations

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010, p. 117), "research ethics are focused on what is morally proper and improper when engaged with participants or when accessing archival data." In keeping with research ethics this study ensured that all participants as well as the sample school was treated in a way which deemed this study ethically and morally proper through respect and consideration for the constitutional rights of all participants. Application to conduct this study was made to the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education. A clearance certificate granting permission to conduct this study was received from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Permission to

conduct this study was received from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education. Permission was granted by the principal of the sample school to conduct the research study within the school. Informed consent was granted by all participants in this study as well as the permission to audio-record their interviews. In keeping with proper research ethics, voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality and anonymity were considered.

3.9.1 Voluntary participation

Voluntary participation involves participants not being forced to participate (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A meeting was set up with each participant to explain the nature of the study. After being informed of the nature of the research study, all participants agreed to voluntarily participate in the study.

3.9.2 Informed consent

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), informed consent involves explaining the participants the nature of the study, withdrawal from the study at any point without penalty and if there are any risk factors in the study. A meeting was set up with each participant informing them of the nature of the study. A participant information sheet was given to each participant highlighting the nature of the study. Participants were then given an informed consent form to read, sign, and hand to the researcher. The informed consent form stated clearly the data generation instruments being used in the study and that all interviews were to be audio-recorded. Interviewees have given the researcher informed consent and permission to audio record the interview process. The same interview questions were asked to all participants in this study. Some of the main ethical issues discussed with participants were their right to withdraw from the study without penalty, and informing them that the data generated from their interviews will be used for research purposes for this study.

3.9.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality involves the researcher making sure that no one has access to the data given by participants and making aware to the participants that only the researcher will access to data and names from the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Anonymity in research ethics means that the researcher cannot identify any participant from the data that has been gathered (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To ensure confidentiality and anonymity,

participants used aliases or disguised names. All participants were interviewed separately to maintain confidentiality. To ensure confidentiality of all data gathered like data and audio recordings were locked away in the research supervisor's cabinet in his office at UKZN (Edgewood Campus) for a minimum period of five years. After five years, all electronic data will be deleted and information from the researcher's computer will be erased. I will give completed hard copies to the research participants and one completed hard copy will be given to the gatekeeper.

3.10 Limitations of the study

This study only contains data generated from the SMT members of one NSLA School. Taking into account that NSLA Schools all experience different contextual factors from schools that have achieved above 60% in the NSC examinations, the solutions of this study cannot be generalised in schools that have attained an average or above-average percentage pass in the NSC examinations. The data generated in this study is only the perspective of the SMT and does not include other stakeholders like the School Governing Body (SGB), teachers and learners. Since NSLA Schools are always pressurised by administration work related to improving the NSC results as well as monitoring and evaluation processes, data collection posed time constraints as some SMT members were busy and had to reschedule interviews.

3.11 Chapter summary

This chapter outlined the research design and methodology used in this study. A qualitative study with the use of the interpretivist paradigm in which this study is located was discussed with its relevance and justification in relation to the research study. The sampling process was discussed with justification for the use of purposive sampling for this study. All sampling instrumentation used as well as data generation methods like the semi-structured interview and document's review was outlined. The process of data analysis using thematic analysis was outlined with the steps taken during the analysis process. Ways to ensure trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability was outlined. Ethical considerations in this study were discussed with confirmation of all clearance certificates and consent from all participants engaging in the study. Lastly, a brief discussion of the limitations of this study is outlined. The following chapter presents a detailed analysis of the data, and the themes and patterns identified by the researcher that have emerged in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR
DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a discussion on the research design and methodology that was used for the generation of data to answer the research questions. This chapter is a thematic presentation and discussion of the data that emerged. The two data generation methods utilised in this study were semi-structured interviews and documents review. The presentation and discussion of the data generated in this chapter are based on the two data generation methods. The presentation and discussion of data integrate the literature that was reviewed in Chapter Two as well as the theoretical frameworks that inform this study.

This chapter is divided into four main themes, and these are as follows: (a) the role of the School Management Team in improving the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results in a National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) School (b) The ways in which the School Management Team (SMT) overcomes the challenges in an NSLA School (c) Challenges faced by the SMT within an NSLA School (d) the positive factors within the NSLA School. Each theme is presented and discussed with sub-themes in this chapter. Before the themes are discussed, the profiles of the participants are presented and the chapter concludes with the chapter summary.

4.2 Profiling of participants and the school

This study was conducted in one secondary school in the Umlazi District of the KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. The school is named Compton Secondary School for anonymity reasons. The data sources included School Management Team members comprising the principal and Heads of Departments and documents. The school is situated in a poverty-stricken residential area. The school is a quintile five ranked school and receives very little in state subsidy. The school has a total learner population of 520 learners and a staff of 18 educators. The school is struggling financially and is not well resourced. The participants in the study are profiled below:

4.2.1 Mr Arthur (School principal)

The first participant is named Mr Arthur for anonymity reasons, and is a male secondary school principal. Mr Arthur was 63 years of age and has been teaching for 43 years. Mr Arthur has been a head of department for 10 years, a deputy principal for 10 years, and a principal for 4 years. This school has been Mr Arthur's first appointment of duty, and he is still working at this school as the principal at present. Mr Arthur works with three HODs and two grade heads. The school comprises of the following departments: languages, maths and science and humanities.

4.2.2 Mr Blake (Head of Department-Languages)

The second participant is named Mr Blake for anonymity reasons. Mr Blake, a male, is a grade head in charge of the Grade 11 learners. Mr Blake was 55 years old and has 32 years of teaching experience. Mr Blake has been a grade head and acting head of department in languages for the past 10 years. Mr Blake handles all learner-related issues in the Grade 11 classes like discipline, misconduct and poor academic performance. Mr Blake also works closely with the time tabling and teacher allocations within the school. Mr Blake currently teaches across two departments teaching History and Afrikaans from Grade 8 to 12.

4.2.3 Mr Colbert (Head of Department-Humanities)

The third participant is named Mr Colbert for anonymity reasons. Mr Colbert was a male HOD in the humanities department. Mr Colbert was 58 years old and has 33 years of teaching experience and had been a HOD for the past 18 years. Mr Colbert has seven teachers in his department. Mr Colbert has also occupied the post of acting deputy principal in the school. Mr Colbert currently teaches Technology and Arts and Culture in Grade 8 and 9.

4.2.4 Mr Danefield (Head of Department-Afrikaans & LO)

The fourth participant is named Mr Danefield for anonymity reasons. Mr Danefield is a male grade head in charge of the grade 8 and 9 classes. Mr Danefiled was 55 years old and has 32 years teaching experience. Mr Danefiled has been a grade head and acting HOD for the past 15 years. Mr Danefield currently works across two departments teaching Afrikaans and Life Orientation from Grade 10 to 12.

4.2.5 Mr Elsen (Head of Department-Science & Mathematics)

The fifth participant is named Mr Elsen for anonymity reasons. Mr Elsen was a male HOD in the Science and Mathematics department. Mr Elsen was 55 years old and has 32 years of teaching experience. Mr Elsen has served as an HOD for 15 years and has also occupied the post of acting deputy principal in the school. Mr Elsen has four teachers in his department. Mr Elsen currently teaches Physical Science in Grade 10 and 11.

4.3 The role of the School Management Teams in improving the NSC results in a NSLA School

The role of the SMT within a NSLA School is based on their management duties within the NSLA context. The SMT is to an extent accountable for improving learner academic performances. The following subthemes are presented and discussed related to the SMTs role in improving the NSC results within the NSLA context: (a) The management duties of the School Management Team (SMT) within the context of the NSLA School (b) The way in which the SMT manages the curriculum within an NSLA School (c) The way in which the SMT manages the curriculum within an NSLA School (d) Managing discipline (e) Planning of educational programmes to improve the NSC results (f) Instructional leadership role of the principal.

4.3.1 Management duties

The data generated revealed that some of the key functions of the SMT in an NSLA School included supervision of teachers, engaging with various administrative tasks and managing teaching and learning. SMTs acknowledge the importance of executing their management duties for the smooth functioning of the school. Although most SMT members highlighted the importance of management duties like controlling examinations, managing discipline, school safety and supervising teaching and learning, other participants perceive management in an NSLA School as more intricate than the common management duties as compared to other schools. This is what one participant had to say:

> *Our role becomes more in-depth, we have to go on a fact finding mission, we have to*
> *take measures to get out of the programme, so our workload immediately increases*
> **(Mr Blake).**

The management duties within the NSLA School are accompanied by an overload of management tasks and responsibilities. This is what one participant had to say:

We engage in far more exhausting workloads within management (**Mr Arthur).**

SMTs in the NSLA School focus their time and energy mostly on the Grade 12 learners in order to ensure improvement of the NSC results. The SMT regards the management of Grade 12 learners as an integral part of their duties. The fact that the NSLA School contains the majority of Grade 12 underperforming learners, the SMT finds it difficult to manage the mass of underperforming learners. This is what one participant had to say:

In other schools SMTs only have a small number of underperforming learners to manage, in the NSLA School; we have to manage all Grade 12 learners as the whole grade is underperforming (**Mr Arthur).**

The SMT is to an extent accountable for improving learner academic performances. From the discussions above it appears that the management duties of the SMT in this NSLA School focus mainly on the Grade 12 learners in order to bring about improvement. As with the complex situation of managing within the NSLA context, Lumadi (2012) asserts that the role of school management must be carried out properly or the environment in which they work may become affected negatively. Although the SMT engages in common school management duties, they are challenged by the management of the large percentage of underperforming learners. The management duties seem to be revolved around the Grade 12 learners as the performance of the Grade 12 learners in the NSC examinations are a reflection of the way the SMT has managed within the NSLA School.

4.3.2 Curriculum management

The SMT had different views regarding the management of the curriculum. The SMT in this study focuses more on monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum than the actual implementation and management of it. Curriculum management in an NSLA School is not the same as other schools, and the department pays special attention to monitoring curriculum management by SMTs in NSLA Schools but does devote the same monitoring and evaluation measures to other schools. Curriculum management in a NSLA School is a process that is subject to strict monitoring and evaluation by the department of education. This is what one participant had to say:

> *Curriculum management is very different as records are monitored by different levels in the education department whereas other schools are not even monitored externally because their results are good in matric* **(Mr Arthur).**

One participant viewed curriculum management as an important duty for SMT in an NSLA School and felt that curriculum management is the difference between improving the matric results alternatively facing NSLA status again. Mr Elson was of the opinion that the way in which the curriculum was managed, impacted directly on the NSC results. For these SMT members, managing the curriculum involved checking teachers work to verify the syllabus coverage and also to determine if the work being done is adequate to ensure there is an improvement in the NSC examinations. Not all participants felt that curriculum management had any impact on the improvement of the NSC results. This is what one participant had to say:

> *In my opinion all this curriculum management does not seem to be resulting in any improvement in matric results because all we are monitoring is whether the teacher has covered the content according to the CAPS policy and if all the assessments have been completed* **(Mr Elson).**

From the discussion above it appears that curriculum management involves checking syllabus coverage and monitoring teachers work in the respective subject specialisations. The literature review revealed that SMT in South African schools was not clear about their role in managing and implementing the curriculum (Mogashoa (2013). Curriculum management requires more than just checking syllabus coverage and monitoring teachers work in their respective subject specialisations. The evidence from the discussion also indicate that SMT members were not clear about what the managing of the curriculum entails and the extent to which this management function can improve the NSC results. The SMT is seen as important role players in the implementation and monitoring of the curriculum, especially where improvement is needed like in the context of the NSLA School (Lumadi, 2012). This theme also ties up with the leadership for learning theory more especially the dimension of behaviour regarding the curricular programme as identified by Hallinger (2010). The leadership for learning theory states that school leaders should display sufficient knowledge of the curriculum but this is made difficult by the vast number of subjects within each SMT members department that they manage.

4.3.3 Administrative tasks

The SMT in the NSLA School experiences large amounts of administrative work. The administrative workload in an NSLA School does not appear to be the same as other non-NSLA schools. The demands placed upon the SMT from the Department of Basic Education impact on instruction time and thus have a negative effect on teaching and learning. This is what one participant had to say:

> *The administration never seems to stop and it really impacts on teaching and learning as our time is taken up supplying the department with unnecessary statistics on a daily basis* **(Mr Arthur).**

One participant referred to non-NSLA schools as being 'automated.' This participant used the term 'automated' indicating that non-NSLA schools only do their basic management duties, but managing in an NSLA School requires SMT to engage in much more administrative tasks:

> *I would call a normal school an automated school, where you simply do your management duty, that is your administrative duty, but in a school that is NSLA there is much more that we have to put in* **(Mr Colbert).**

In contrast to Mr Colbert, Mr Danefield did not think that there was a vast difference in administration compared to non-NSLA schools. Mr Danefield was of the opinion that there would not be an overload of administrative work depending on how schools function in their daily management tasks. From the discussion above Mr Danefield seems to think that the amount of administration workload are dependent on the management of the school. If management is running the school well and fulfilling their management duties, then the administrative duties will be minimised.

From the discussions above it appears that SMTs in NSLA Schools face an overload of administrative tasks. School management, especially the principal, sometimes sacrifice their role as managers to undertake various administrative tasks (Davidoff & Lazarus, 2002). Not only is the excess administrative task's time consuming, but it also impacts on instruction time. The data generated indicates those administrative workloads that impact on instruction time also impacts on teaching and learning, which is a contributor to the poor NSC results within NSLA Schools. The administrative tasks are important information that is required by

the Department of Basic Education to monitor the progress of the Grade 12 learners. However, the overload of administrative tasks seems to have impacted on instructional time. The time spent on unnecessary administrative tasks can be used profitably in the classroom or used by SMTs to focus more directly on improving the NSC results. The change theory can be used within this context of the NSLA School where the three stages of change are implemented to accommodate the teaching and learning amongst the large amount of administrative tasks. This theory also help in understanding that the SMT has not been able to identify the restraining force (Kurt Lewin, 1953) which is the administrative task in order to affect change to bring about productive teaching and learning.

4.3.4 Managing discipline

One of the major tasks of the SMT in an NSLA School is managing discipline of learners. Discipline remains a serious problem within the NSLA School and is linked to the poor NSC results achieved. When probing about learner-related issues concerning discipline this is what one participant had to say:

> *The main issue is definitely learner discipline. We have cases on a daily basis where learners are caught with drugs, disrespect to educators, even attempted assault on educators as well as other learners* **(Mr Arthur).**

Mr Arthur felt strongly about the impact that poor discipline has on instructional time and the time that SMT can spend productively on improving the NSC results of this NSLA School:

> *The problem is that our SMT are more involved in handling cases that are not even related to teaching and learning and seem to be wasting their time and energy on handling drug related issues and violence amongst the learners* **(Mr Arthur).**

SMT and educators in the school are threatened by the learners because of poor discipline gone out of control. Learner discipline has become a problem that has escalated into learner on teacher violence. Participants expressed concerns over their safety and stated that there have already been cases where SMT members have been assaulted by learners. The work of the SMT in trying to improve the NSC results has been complicated and challenging due to the negative attitude of the learners. The management of learner discipline adds to SMTs list of work overload tasks in the NSLA School. The time spent by the SMT on managing learner discipline could be used on managing teaching and learning for the improvement of the NSC

results. The poor discipline of learners has also created a stressful work environment for the SMT.

The generated data indicates that learner discipline is a serious problem for SMT within the NSLA School. The situation within this school has escalated to a state where learners have even assaulted educators. Literature has revealed that violence, drug abuse within NSLA Schools not only impacts on teaching and learning, but also contributes to underperformance and grade repetition (Louw, Bayat, & Eigelaar-Meets, 2011). From the discussions above, it appears that the poor discipline of learners can be linked to underperformance and a significant factor towards the poor NSC results which has placed this school in the NSLA programme. The change theory within the context of this section has revealed that although the SMT have completed the first stage of un-freezing by identifying the problems within the context of the NSLA School, they have not affected the change process of stage by identifying new ways of dealing with the discipline problem in order to apply a new way of managing discipline on a daily basis (Wirth, 2004).

4.3.5 Planning of educational programmes to improve the NSC results

The SMT in this school regard planning as an integral aspect in ensuring the improvement of the NSC results. The SMT spends a considerable amount of time planning educational programmes as improvement strategies for the NSC results. The SMTs play an active role in planning intervention programmes that will improve the NSC results. Document's analysis of the 2015 school improvement plan indicated that the SMT had planned various educational programmes to bring about improvement of the NSC results:

> *Anticipate getting in motivational speakers. Assembly talks by senior management and daily motivation by form educators in the time provided in the morning. Learners have a sense of belonging with their form educators and they can play pivotal role in the refinement, improvement of the tone, moral ethics and responsibility of learners* **(Compton Secondary School Improvement Plan, 2015).**

Some of the activities that SMT plan are extra Grade 12 classes, vacation classes and departmental meetings to discuss performance and improvement strategies. This is what one participant had to say:

> *SMTs together with their teachers in their departments plan extra tuition classes for matrics in various subjects which take place after school hours and on holidays. A compulsory requirement is that SMTs meet with their departments once a term to discuss how things are going with the matrics and strategies to improve the matric results in those subjects* (**Mr Arthur).**

SMT members actively participate in educational programmes targeted at the learners. SMT members in each department hold meetings with subject educators to discuss the progress of the Grade 12 learners as well strategies to improve the NSC results. Mr Elsen indicated that the planning of intervention programmes aimed at improving the NSC results are regarded as an important task that the SMT engages in within the NSLA School. SMT in the NSLA School also engaged in planning during and after the normal school hours. The SMT is responsible for the planning of the intervention classes aimed at improving the NSC results.

Planning seems to be very time-consuming for the SMT in this NSLA School. The SMTs spend time planning for intervention classes for their Grade 12s in a bid to improve their NSC results. Planning also included having regular meetings with subject educators from the respective departments that are headed by the HODs. Leask and Terrell (2014) found that school management has to identify the problem and then provide support in order to affect change. SMTs together with their educators within their departments use these committee meetings to plan strategies for improvement of the NSC results based on the feedback given by educators on the progress of the Grade 12 learners. The leadership for learning theory ties up with this theme taking into account that leaders' are involved in instructional programme activities like monitoring and planning (Murphy, et al. 2007). The leadership for learning theory also requires that the SMT support the instructional programme of their teachers which is what the SMT is doing in this school through their planning of intervention programmes and strategy planning session with teachers.

4.3.6 Instructional leadership role of the principal

The literature review revealed that instructional leadership involves the impact that the principal as the leader of the institution, has on teaching and learning. The principal, Mr Arthur, felt strongly about quality teaching and learning as one of his core duties as an SMT member. Mr Arthur regards the management of teaching and learning as the core duty of the SMT. Mr Arthur pays special focus to teaching and learning as he believes that this is crucial in ensuring the improvement of the NSC results. Mr Arthur also highlighted some important duties of the SMT suggesting characteristics of an instructional leader:

> *Some of the common duties include controlling examinations, curriculum management and ensuring the school is functioning in good order* **(Mr Arthur)**.

The principal further supports his claim as an instructional leader stating that

> *If the SMT concentrates only on teaching and learning then there will definitely be an increase in the matric results* **(Mr Arthur).**

The principal as the instructional leader focuses on teaching and learning initiatives to enhance student achievement (Glanz, 2006). As an instructional leader, the principal, Mr Arhtur, has put in place many intervention programmes aimed at improving the NSC results. Also significant to note is that the principal has delegated these intervention programmes to the rest of the SMT members as evidence from the interviews with the other SMT members has revealed that planning, preparation and attendance to these special intervention classes for Grade 12 learners seem to be of high priority for the SMT members in this NSLA School. The principal is actively engaged in the instructional programme of the school having realised that this is integral to ensure the improvement of the NSC results which ties up with the leadership for learning theory where the principal as the leader of the school tries to ensure an effective instructional programme with minimal disruptions and maximum use of both school and after school hours.

4.4 The role of the SMT in addressing challenges in an NSLA School

Due to the many challenges facing NSLA Schools in South Africa, the SMT of these schools is always engaging in ways to try and improve their NSC results. The role that the SMT

played in addressing the challenges faced in this school were: (a) Supervision of educators (b) Supporting teaching and learning (c) The SMTs perception of teamwork (d) SMTs interaction with parents. A discussion of each sub-theme follows below.

4.4.1 Supervision of educators

The SMT in this school conducts regular supervision of educators within their departments. The supervision of educators that is undertaken by the SMT is one of the tasks involved in the leadership for learning model, which forms the theoretical framework for this study. Taking into account the poor performance of this school in the NSC examinations, supervision of educators is a compulsory process in this school. This is what one participant had to say:

> *Some of the management duties that SMTs engage with on a daily basis include supervision of teachers in different departments* **(Mr Arthur).**

Although supervision is a management duty for SMT, the SMT in this NSLA School also uses it as a measure for improving the NSC results by monitoring to check if teachers are on par with their work coverage and syllabus. This is what one participant had to say:

> *By checking teachers and learners work the SMT is able to determine the way in which everybody is working and if this is sufficient for improvement of the matric results* **(Mr Danefield).**

From the discussion above it is evident that the SMT in this NSLA School engages in supervision of teachers within their departments. Supervision of educators is a task leaders involved in the instructional programme should engage in and also an integral part of the leadership for learning theory (Murphy, 2007). For these SMT members, supervision is not only about fulfilling a management duty, but also part of their improvement strategy to improve their NSC results. It is through supervision of teachers whom the SMTs are able to determine if learners are being taught according to the prescribed syllabus and also if teachers are working towards improving the NSC results.

4.4.2 Supporting teaching and learning

The SMT in this school NSLA School has provided some support for both teachers and learners in order to improve the NSC results. The leadership for learning model as the theoretical framework for this study accentuates the importance of the leader in supporting

teaching and learning activities (Murphy, 2007). The SMT support teaching and learning by planning and attending special intervention classes for the Grade 12 learners. The intervention classes that are planned and attended by the SMT included subjects that record poor NSC pass rates. This is what one participant had to say

> *We provide extra classes for matrics especially in the gateway subjects like Maths, Maths Literacy, English, Life Sciences and Business Studies. These subjects were identified according to the matric pass rate in the previous year* (**Mr Arthur**).

In a bid to try and improve the NSC results, the SMT in this school try to provide support for learners in other aspects of their lives like nutrition, and mentorship, taking into account the socio-economic problems experienced by learners in this community. The SMT supports teaching and learning within this school by preparing resource materials like examination exemplars and past year examination papers for the subject teachers.

One participant looked at support from a different angle. Mr Blake felt that support should be provided by the SMT identifying the underperforming learners within each department and thereafter work with educators in order to help the learner to attain better achievement levels:

> *I firmly believe that each member of management should look into his department and identify the weak learners and the weak areas and support their members in trying to correct those children and bring them up to par* (**Mr Blake).**

For Mr Blake, providing support entails assisting academically weak learners through the help of educators within the HODs department. The SMT also engages in improvement activities like special educational talks, motivational speakers, and guest educators in a bid to improve the NSC results.

From the discussions above it appears that the SMT in this school provided some degree of support for both teachers and learners. The entire management of the school is dependent on the school management and the way they provide support and work with educators to achieve the goals of the education programme (Charles, Kimutai, & Zachariah, 2012). Support comes through extra classes and special vacation programmes to improve the NSC results. Another form of support is through motivation of learners through special talks and lessons by people from out of the school and also by the SMTs as well. The SMT provides support material like past year examination papers in a bid to try and improve the NSC results. Support is provided through the identification of the performance of weak subjects in the NSC examinations, and

this allows the SMT to provide support where it is most needed and will take the school out of the NSLA programme.

4.4.3 Teamwork

Working as a team and supporting each other is important for improvement within a school. Participants were of the opinion that the SMT have to be working as a team to think collectively and have agreement on decisions made. Participants also acknowledged that the SMT needs to work as a team with goal of improving the school. The SMT in this school acknowledge that teamwork is important for the improvement of the NSC results. However, responses form the interviews indicate that SMTs in this school are not working as a team. This is what one participant had to say:

> *It's not only the grade head of the matrics that should bear the brunt I think it's the entire SMT that should work together to support and work as a team* **(Mr Blake).**

This is what another participant had to say about teamwork:

> *You have to have collective thinking. You have to have agreement. You have to work in the same line. There must be agreement, everybody must be thinking in the same line, everybody on the same pace in order for one purpose and one goal, and that is to turn the school around* **(Mr Colbert).**

Teamwork is acknowledged by these participants but is lacking within this NSLA School. The SMT believes that teamwork will make the difference, but somehow they are not making the attempt to try working as a team. A 'School Management Team' in its true sense means a group of managers working together within the school managing teaching and learning. Working as a team not only results in improvement but also promotes learning and development of group members within the team (Senge, 1990). Engagement with tasks and activities should be done through working teams or groups (Mullins, 2010). The SMT in this school is working as individuals within their respective departments and does not come together and work as a team to ensure improvement of the NSC results. The leadership for learning theory states that communities of learning through a collaborative learning environment improves student learning. Every manager is accountable for his/her department and works in isolation. The manager needs to take into account the positive impact that teams or groups may have on performance of the organisation (Mullins, 2010). Although the SMT

in this school work in isolation in their departments, they do know the value of working in a team and the benefits it has for the improvement of the NSC results.

4.4.4 SMTs interaction with parents

Although the lack of parental involvement was identified as a negative factor by the participants, on the flip side, the participants have made attempts to get parents involved in their educational programme for Grade 12s with the aim of improving their NSC results. Three of the participants have highlighted their interactions with parents as an improvement strategy. This is what one participant had to say:

> *SMTs meet with different parents on a daily basis regarding various issues that take place during and even after school hours* (**Mr Arthur).**

Given the number of challenges within this NSLA School, the SMT members make it their duty to engage with parents even going beyond the normal school hours. This is also an indication of their dedication to improving the school. This is what one participant had to say:

> *We have special Grade 12 parents meetings every term, sometimes more than once in term. At these meetings we discuss learner performance and strategies for improvement* (**Mr Elsen).**

Furthermore, formal parent meetings are organised by the SMT whereby they get to interact with parents. The SMT meets with parents once a term. This is an indication that SMTs are making attempts to get parents to school even though there is very little participation by parents when it comes to parent meetings. Sometimes, however, the SMT is not successful in trying to get parents to school. This is what one participant had to say:

> *We tried to phone parents, tried to get into contact with parents but we are not getting any success there* (**Mr Blake).**

The collaboration between the SMT, parents and the community is an important one in ensuring improvement (Harris, 2010). Even though parents show little interest, the SMTs seem to still persist in trying to get parents to report to school to discuss their children's progress. As a management control measure, the SMT keeps records showing that they have made attempts to contact parents. The persistency of this school's SMT members to try to get parents to meetings or discuss their children's progress in Grade 12 is a significant

improvement strategy to improve their NSC results. The SMT recognise the importance of parents in their attempts at improving the NSC pass rate and no matter how disappointing their attendance at parent meetings are, the SMT still persists to forge this important relationship. When partnerships are developed within challenging contexts like Compton Secondary, there may be an improvement in learner academic performance (Harris, 2010).

4.4.5 Motivation

Although the NSLA brings with it a lot of challenges and negative factors, three of the SMTs have identified work motivation as a positive factor. The NSLA programme together with its demanding strategies for improvement and continuous monitoring and evaluation, has indirectly led to the SMTs working above board on a continuous basis. This is what one participant had to say:

> *The only thing that I can think of is that the NSLA programme pushes the SMT and teachers to give off their best* **(Mr Arthur).**

The general trend within South African education regarding monitoring and evaluation is that schools are given notice by the level of department concerned to get ready. Within NSLA schools, there are often no notices given when the department visits to monitor. This is what one participant had to say:

> *The NSLA programme also allows SMTs and teachers to be fully prepared for any external monitoring and valuation that may take place during the year* **(Mr Arthur).**

The intense work load and administration of the NSLA indirectly prepared the SMT of this school for any departmental visit. This SMTs preparation through the NSLA programme is a process of working and not an event for a notified school visit by the department as in most cases. The NSLA programme encourages SMTs to pay special attention to learners and their reasons for poor performance. This is what one participant had to say:

> *The only positive thing that I can think about is the intrinsic motivation that comes from some members. The HODs take it upon themselves to chase after children and investigate further as to why they are performing poorly* **(Mr Blake).**

The NSLA programme with its strategies, promotes positive work motivation and ethics as the SMTs in this school are continuously working educationally to improve the situation. The

accountability systems imposed by the state is positive in the sense that it motivates the SMT which leads to some improvement in learner academic performances as opposed to the absence of it with no improvement (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005). The regular visits by the department keep the SMT and the staff on board with their educational programme at this school.

4.5 Challenges faced by the SMT within an NSLA School

The literature review on underperforming schools globally and NSLA Schools in South Africa revealed a number of factors that impact both negatively and positively on the school. Some of the negative factors identified in this study were: (a) Administrative tasks (b) Substance abuse and peddling by learners (c) Lack of management training for the NSLA (d) Lack of parental involvement School (e) Impact of the progression policy on the NSC results (f) Low morale amongst SMT (g) Poor attitude amongst Grade 12 learners (h) Socio-economic ills of the community (i) The impact of the language barrier on the NSC results (j) Lack of cooperation from teachers (k) Lack of support from the Department of Basic Education (l) Monitoring and evaluation by the Department of Basic Education (m) Autocratic leadership. The negative factors that emerged from the data generated are discussed below. The only positive factor that emerged, which was motivation concludes this theme.

4.5.1.1 Time spent by the SMT on NSC intervention programmes

The SMT spends a large percentage of their time planning and engaging in intervention classes aimed at improving the NSC results. Discussions with the SMT indicated that they are dissatisfied with the time that they spend on planning, preparing and engaging in NSC intervention programmes. Some of the intervention programmes highlighted by the SMTs in the interviews were morning classes, afternoon classes, weekend classes and quarterly vacation classes. This is what one participant had to say:

> *Life is very difficult in a NSLA School. All your privileges like holidays are taken up to have extra lessons to improve the matric results* **(Mr Arthur).**

The amount of time taken up for intervention classes that SMTs monitor had also led to a considerable amount of work exhaustion and frustration. The SMT spends a considerable

time after-school hours and on vacations on providing extra classes for the Grade 12 learners. Participants expressed their dissatisfaction over their time spent every week on managing the intervention classes. The time that SMT spends on planning and attending intervention classes for Grade 12 learners usually took place after normal school hours. This has impacted on the SMT member's personal life and affected their family time as well. This is what one participant had to say:

> *More time spent, like my family time coming here on weekends and so on, and my time is going. We find that sometimes we are making great sacrifices which I think is not needed if the teacher himself down in the classroom really puts the output* (**Mr Colbert).**

Mr Colbert expressed frustration over how his personal and family quality time is spent on NSC intervention programmes. However, the participant also felt that if teachers give off their best practices when teaching these Grade 12 learners, there will not be a need for such intense NSC intervention programmes. Mr Elsen also shares the same frustration as the other two SMT members expressing concern over the time imposed by the intervention programmes during vacation periods. Mr Elsen also argues that the time that SMTs spend in an NSLA School on intervention programmes does not seem to be the case in non-NSLA Schools.

Much of the work of the SMT in this NSLA School involves planning and attending Grade 12 intervention classes. While the SMT seemed to be frustrated about the time consumed from the intervention classes, it is a strategy that is needed for the improvement of the NSC results. The SMTs have expressed frustration over the NSC intervention programmes on their 'free' time, which included before and after-school hours as well as during most of the school vacation periods. Planning allows SMT to identify problems within the school and also ways to overcome the problems and effect change in the school (Leask & Terrell, 2014). By the SMT identifying the problems within this NSLA School and finding solutions, also ties up with Lewin's (1953) theory of change, which forms the theoretical framework for this study. Identifying the problems in the school is characterised by Lewin's (1953) unfreezing stage and finding solutions to the problems is the refreezing stage which is affecting change as described in Lewin's (1953) theory of change.

4.5.1.2 Substance abuse and peddling by learners

One of the serious negative factors that impacted on the NSC results and appears to be a challenge faced by SMTs in this school is the scourge of drugs. The principal indicated that learners were caught on a daily basis with drugs. The abuse and peddling of drugs have affected the SMTs work in that more time is consumed resolving drug issues instead of focusing on improving the NSC results. This is what the principal Mr Arthur had to say:

> *The problem is that our SMT are more involved in handling cases that are not even related to teaching and learning and seem to be wasting their time and energy on handling drug related issues* (**Mr Arthur**).

A great cause for concern that was highlighted by Mr Arthur was the shocking revelation that SMT members in this school were being assaulted by learners in a drugged state of mind. Similarly, Mr Danefield also expressed concerns over the time lost through drug-related issues. Mr Danefiled also felt that the SMT did not receive specialised training to deal with high risk cases like drugged learners or drug peddlers. Mr Elsen also shared the same views as the other participants highlighting the challenge that SMT face as a result of the drug epidemic in this NSLA School. The drug problem in this school has resulted in the SMT becoming frustrated with having to deal with drug-related issues.

Drugs are a major negative factor that has impacted on the SMT of this school. The drug-related issues has consumed the SMTs time on a regular basis. The response from the participants is consistent with Louw, Bayat, and Eigelaar-Meets's (2011) study which found that NSLA Schools in South Africa have a serious problem regarding drug abuse. The SMTs spend more time resolving drug related issues than focusing on teaching and learning. The document review of the School Improvement Plan of the school stipulates the strategies for dealing with issues like drugs and violence, however the SMT still cannot prevent or reduce the problem of drugs. The peddling of drugs is also an indication of the type of learners whom the SMTs deal with. The drugged state of some learners has led the SMTs to become victims of assault and violence within their school.

4.5.1.3 Lack of management training for the NSLA School

The SMT had not received any formal training from the Department of Basic Education as a SMT member to help manage under the unique pressures of this NSLA School. Many of the SMT members attend workshops, but these workshops are not aimed specifically at management within the NSLA School. This is what one participant had to say:

> *The department gives training when it is something specific that they require like for example professional development management or administering examinations. Besides the training that we have done at college or universities there is nothing that the department has done to empower SMTs in NSLA Schools* (**Mr Arthur**).

The principal, Mr Arthur, takes into account the change in educational demands over the years and makes attempts to capacitate the SMT in order to able to cope with the demands of the NSLA. The principal as the main SMT member tries to capacitate his staff, which is an indication that he is committed to improvement within the NSLA School. This is what Mr Arthur had to say:

> *I try very hard to empower my SMT by sending them for whatever workshops or training that is organised by the department* (**Mr Arthur**).

There also exists some departmental processes like promotions, vacancies and rationalisation that impact on the management of the NSLA School. Some SMT members who are newly appointed lack the skills and training to cope within an NSLA School. The NSLA context is not easy for new appointees or rationalised educators to work in. This school is now in the third year of the NSLA programme and it seems that the SMT is becoming accustomed to life and work within the NSLA School. This feeling that may be developing amongst some of the SMT may signal causes for concern as they may lose focus to strive for improvement and getting out of the NSLA programme. The Department of Basic Education provides training that is subject-specific for both the SMT and educators. The participants expressed their need for more specialised workshops and training that is aimed at equipping the SMT of NSLA Schools to deal with the challenges they currently face, which include learner discipline and poor performance in the NSC examinations. This is what one participant had to say:

The department focuses a lot on subject specialisation training workshops which is good, but they should also focus on special SMT workshops where we are able to learn how to cope with problems in order to improve the matric results in NSLA Schools **(Mr Elsen).**

From the discussions above it appears that the SMT had not received any specialised training to cope within the challenging context of the NSLA School. A study by Nwangwa and Omotere (2013) found that the changes in education create challenges for school managers. It appears that although the participants received formal teacher training, it is not sufficient enough for coping with the day to challenges of the NSLA School. Nwangwa and Omotere (2013) assert that retraining of SMTs should be undertaken to improve their role as managers within schools.

4.5.1.4 Lack of parental involvement

This NSLA School shows very little parental involvement with regards to the Grade 12 learner's educational programme. The SMT to an extent hold parents accountable for the poor performance of learners in the NSC examinations due to little or no interest in their children's education as well as the parent meetings organised by the school for Grade 12 learners. This is what one participant had to say:

Parents also do no come to the party. There is no support from the parents and the community. There is very poor attendance at matric parent meetings **(Mr Arthur).**

Parents rarely attend meetings concerning the progress of their children in Grade 12 which also contributes to the poor NSC pass rate being experienced within this NSLA School. Parents are unaware of the children's progress or the demands of the Grade 12 academic year. Grade 12 learners have no parental support which is so desperately needed for a learner when writing the final NSC examination. This is what one participant had to say:

It seems in our institution the child is on their own and what they do is their business. There are very few visitations from parents. Even if a parent's meeting is called to discuss the pupil's progress we don't get cooperation from the parents here **(Mr Blake).**

The SMT in this school has developed an attitude where they are now holding parents accountable for the poor performance of learners in the NSC examinations. The lack of parental involvement had, to a certain extent, created stress and frustration amongst SMT members who are trying their utmost best to get parents to attend school in the hope that they will assist in their attempts at improving the NSC results. Mr Danefield noted that there is only less than 10% attendance to Grade 12 parent meetings. The parents that attend the meetings were usually those of learners who were not struggling academically. Statistically, the poor attendance of parents highlights their lack of interest even though they are informed when officials like the Department Education Specialist and Circuit Manager are going to be present at the parent meeting.

The lack of parental involvement and interest has to a certain degree impacted negatively on learner achievement in the NSC examinations. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) distinguish between teacher and parent goals in their study and identify parent meetings as an integral event that allows for academic improvement of the learner. Parent meetings can provide the platform where teachers discuss learner's progress and ask parents for their support in their children's education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). The SMT does not have the support of the parents in this school and this impacts on their attempts to improve the NSC results as learners are not monitored after-school hours. Attendances at Grade 12 parent meetings are very poor, which makes it difficult for the SMTs to discuss the progress records of the learners. The parents show little interest towards their children in Grade 12 and give little or no support as they prepare for the final NSC examinations.

4.5.1.5 Impact of the progression policy on the NSC results and the SMT

The progression policy implemented by the Department of Basic Education has to an extent, affected the NSC pass rate in this NSLA School. The progression policy is applicable to Grade ten to twelve. The policy states that if a learner fails once in grade ten or eleven, then that learner must automatically pass should they fail Grade ten or eleven again. Three of the SMT members hold this policy accountable for the poor NSC results in this school and the main factor that has led this school into the NSLA. This is what one participant had to say about the progression policy:

> *This has affected our school tremendously as in the last three years we have had*
> *learners who were in matric that did not have the necessary literacy and numeracy*
> *skills to cope with matric. On average we have like about 30-40 learners who are*

progressed every year. These are the very same learners who do not pass the matric exams at the end of the year **(Mr Arthur).**

The progression policy promotes learners who have failed either Grade 10 or Grade 11, which results in learners advancing to the next grade without gaining the necessary educational skills from the previous grade. Furthermore, when the department progresses learners, the SMT has to bear the brunt of ensuring that they perform better. The problem that has emerged in this NSLA School is the large number of grade eleven learners who have been progressed to Grade 12. After progressing the learners who have failed Grade 11, the Department of Education expects the SMT to improve the NSC pass rate of the school. This is what one participant had to say about the progression policy in his school:

It has effected the school greatly because we have had a lot of learners who should have never been progressed and the departments thinking is that they will improve their results the following year and then they place the emphasis on the teacher and you must now assist those learners **(Mr Danefield).**

The progression policy has contributed partly to the poor NSC results in this school due to learners progressing to Grade 12 but without the necessary skills and knowledge required to cope with the demanding Grade 12 syllabus. Participants commented about the high number of learners who progress, and these are the very same learners that eventually fail the NSC examinations taking the school into the NSLA category. The SMTs seem to hold the progression policy to a large extent responsible for the poor performance in the NSC examinations and are totally against this policy. Research by Louw, Bayat, and Eigelaar-Meets (2011) has found that the progression policy had been a problem in NSLA Schools in South Africa. Louw, Bayat, and Eigelaar-Meets (2011) further found that district departments did not provide the support needed for the problems created by the progression policy. The progression policy has impacted negatively on the role of the SMT based on the criteria that gives learners a "free" progression to the next grade. Learners realise that whether they do their work or not, they are still going to pass anyway which makes managing teaching and learning difficult for the SMT.

4.5.1.6 Low morale amongst SMT

The SMT is demotivated by the current situation of the school. The poor NSC results and the NSLA categorisation have left the SMT pessimistic about the improvement of the NSC results. The principal described life as being very difficult in an NSLA School. It also seems as if this SMT has lost the will to try other improvement strategies. The SMT is of the belief that they have done everything in their power to improve the NSC results. The principal of the school felt that there is nothing more the SMT could do to improvement. The lack of motivation and poor morale amongst the SMT is due to the number of years that this school has spent in the NSLA programme:

> *Because of the poor matric results over the last three years teachers and SMT are demotivated. SMTs are finding it difficult to motivate their departments with the poor pass rates* (**Mr Arthur).**

Mr Blake felt that SMT should take ownership of the school but with little improvements taking place in the NSC results individuals are not going beyond their duties. This is what Mr Blake had to say:

> *As much as we say this is our school and we must work together, if they are disillusioned you are not going to get 100% from everyone* (**Mr Blake).**

The poor NSC results with all the challenges and negative factors has made the work of the SMT in the NSLA School difficult and seems to be taking away their passion for education. The poor NSC results have been a determinant factor in the low morale amongst SMTs in this school. High-stakes national testing like the NSC examination has found to affect the morale individuals involved in teaching subjects (Gonzalez, Peters, Orange & Grigsby, 2016). The SMTs show no signs of hope or resiliency towards improving the NSC results. The poor NSC results and being stigmatised as an NSLA School have made the SMT reluctant to work any harder than they already have been. The SMT has also developed a degree of dislike for their work within their school. The fact that the SMT is unhappy about their working conditions means that they will not give off their best in trying to improve the NSC results.

4.5.1.7 Poor attitude among grade 12 learners

The Grade 12 learners in this school show very little interest towards their demanding academic year. To a certain extent, the learners of this school are accountable for the NSC pass rates. Some of the characteristics that these learners portray are high absentee rates, non-attendance to Grade 12 intervention classes, failure to complete assessment tasks and late-coming. The participants linked the poor attitude of the Grade 12 learners to irregular attendance, late-coming, and not taking work seriously. This is what the principal had to say about the attitude of the learners:

> *It is the product we are dealing with and that means it is the learner who is not coming to the party and showing any interest* **(Mr Arthur).**

This response shows that SMT and educators are playing their part but learners on the other hand are not fulfilling their duties of learning for their demanding NSC year. Mr Danefield also stated that it seemed that learners were coming to school to please their parents which was also another indicator that they are reluctantly going to school and therefore not doing any work at school. Mr Blake highlighted the lack of interest of Grade 12 learners in the intervention programmes arranged to improve the NSC results and is of the opinion that the learners are probably the cause for the poor NSC results.

The SMT also recognise that the Grade 12 learners do not have goals or the motivation that is required for them to succeed in Grade 12 in order for them to pursue good careers. The learners in this school show very little concern and interest towards the NSC academic year. Based on the responses from the discussions above, the learners in this school remain a significant negative factor towards the poor NSC results. Learners are not goal driven and do show any concern for their future or career when the finish Grade 12.

4.5.1.8 Socio-economic ills of the community

Poverty is rife in the community which surrounds this school. The negative socio-economic factors experienced by the community at large seem to have filtered into this school. Some of the main socio-economic factors that affect this school are unemployment, poverty and dysfunctional families. Four of the SMTs expressed in the interviews how some of the socio-economic problems have affected their attempts to improve the NSC results in this school. This is what one participant had to say:

Many of the kid's parents are unemployed or earn very less. The learners then take up small jobs to support their families. This means that they do not spend enough time on their studies and have a high absentee rate from school **(Mr Arthur).**

The parent's financial situation and unemployment also impacted negatively as learners do not have money travel to school. This has also impacted on the NSC results as learners frequently absent themselves from school. As discussed earlier, parents show little interest in their children's educational programme. Partly, this may be because of the high number of dysfunctional families within this community. Some learners do not have parents, or they are the breadwinners of their households. There is a considerable percentage of learner's from this community who come from broken families and some of whom are orphans or taken care of by other people within the community while some of the learners are even living on their own. This is what one participant had to say about learners and their households:

Some of our matric learners work in order to support their families. Sometimes they are absent because they are working to get money. These learners do not learn as a result of their situation and eventually fail. We also have matric learners who head their homes. They do not have parents or guardians and they have to look after themselves and their siblings **(Mr Elsen).**

From the discussion above it appears that socio-economic factors like poverty, unemployment and dysfunctional families have impacted not only on the SMTs task of improving the NSC results, but have also greatly affected the education of the learner. Learners in this school take up jobs to support their families and as a result absent themselves from school and do not receive substantial lessons to prepare them for the NSC examinations. Louw, Bayat, and Eigelaar-Meets (2011) have found that underperforming schools like Compton Secondary in this study were situated within poor communities that were characterised by dysfunctional families. Bayat, Louw and Rena (2014) also found that factors like drug abuse, violence and unemployment are significant factors in underperforming schools in South Africa.

4.5.1.9 The impact of the language barrier on the NSC results

The large percentage of second language learners in this school had to an extent contributed to the poor NSC pass rate resulting in the school being placed in the NSLA category.

According to the minimum requirements of the NSC, a learner must obtain 40% in English Home Language to acquire a pass in the NSC examinations. Two of the SMTs commented on the impact that the language barrier has on the school's final NSC results. This is what one participant had to say:

> *The language barrier is another factor that we struggle with. Many of the learners are second language speakers and besides communicating with them being very difficult, there is also a high rate of these learners that fail English Home Language which results in them failing the whole examination* **(Mr Arthur).**

The participants stated that the poor Grade 12 results were due mainly to second language learners experiencing difficulty in answering the English exam papers. This argument by the participant's was based on the fact that when learners failed English below 40%, this results in failure of the whole NSC examination. The language barrier remains a negative contributing factor of this NSLA School. Learners with language barriers find learning very difficult. With second language learners unable to attain a minimum of 40% in English Home Language, this school still has an uphill battle to get out of the NSLA programme. Louw, Bayat, and Eigelaar-Meets (2011) study in NSLA Schools found that learners who were struggling with English as a medium of instruction contributed to high repetition rates, and poor NSC pass rates.

4.5.1.10 Lack of cooperation from teachers

The SMTs rely on the help of the educators in order to improve the NSC results in any school. Some educators in this school do not give the SMT their full cooperation, making educational improvement of the NSC results very difficult. This is what one participant had to say:

> *We do have some educators who are always trying to buck the system and unfortunately in all walks of life you will never get a 100% cooperation* **(Mr Blake).**

It appears that the SMT is putting in a lot of effort to change the current situation in the school and take the school out of the NSLA programme. The work of the SMT would not be that sacrificial in this school if the educators put in more effort and commitment at the classroom level to improve teaching and learning. This is what one participant had to say:

We find that sometimes we are making great sacrifices which I think is not needed if the teacher himself down in the classroom really puts out the output, give 100% and at the same time he sits on the learner because the purpose of the learner coming to school is to be educated **(Mr Colbert).**

The SMT in this school lack the full cooperation from the educators in order to bring about significant improvements regarding the NSC results. The SMT felt that in order for them to succeed the educators need to be thinking along the same page as them and fulfil their duties in the classroom which is the most important place to make a difference to ensure improvement in the NSC results before matters get to the level of the SMTs.

4.5.1.11 Lack of support from the Department of Basic Education

All the participants stated that the Department of Basic Education failed to give the SMT and the school the support which was so desperately needed to improve the NSC results and take the school out of the NSLA category. The evidence from the interviews suggests that the Department of Basic Education is not fulfilling their functions as stated in the NSLA Framework (2007). As part of document's analysis I have looked into the NSLA Framework (2007). The NSLA Framework (2007) was supposed to pay special attention to the support and training of SMT in NSLA Schools. The NSLA Framework (2007) is meant to provide support to the SMT of underperforming schools but is also a blueprint containing strategies for the improvement of learner academic performances with a special focus on improving the NSC results. The framework gives special attention to the SMT of NSLA Schools in order to improve the NSC results. According to the NSLA Framework (2007):

> *Development of management and leadership skills will be paramount in the development of the school. School principals, deputy principals and heads of department, from the under-performing schools will undergo an intensive management and leadership-training programme organised by the province. Workshops on school management for Senior Management Team (SMT) and the school governing bodies and the training of SMT in the effective supervision of learners' and teacher's work will be done* **(The National Strategy for Learner Attainment Framework, 2007, p. 5).**

The participants expressed concern and frustration over the lack of support from the Department of Basic Education. The participants felt that although the department recognised

that NSLA Schools faced many challenges, they have done very little to improve the situation of the poor NSC results. Further complicating issues for the SMT of this NSLA School is the misleading role that the department is playing. Mr Arthur also had this to say:

> *The department officials sometimes talk as if they are supporting the SMT but when the school implements strict policies the department then wants to take action against the SMT* (**Mr Arthur).**

There has also been a lack of support from the department in terms of resource material in order to bring about improvement in the NSC results. The department reports to this school to investigate what is going wrong but does not provide assistance on how to bring about improvement. The participants stated that the department does not provide support material or guidance, but reports to school to identify the problems experienced within the NSLA School. The SMT in this school has developed a level of frustration due to the department's lack of support and not understanding the happenings within this NSLA School. On the one hand the department wants the NSLA School to improve the results, but on the other hand they provide very little solutions to the problems being faced within this NSLA School. The lack of support from the department also is an indication that they are either unaware or do not want to empathise with the SMT and staff of the NSLA School and the challenging context they work in.

The department conducts regular visits to the school but mainly to monitor and evaluate the work of the SMT and educators. No substantial support is given that may improve the NSC results, but the idea of the visit is to check that work is being done. This is what one participant had to say:

> *Now again you get an advisor who comes to school, but they just come to check on the teacher and they are not really giving us any support material as such so we can improve the results* (**Mr Danefield).**

The SMT in this school expressed their need for a more hands-on approach from the department where help is given in a practical way within this NSLA School. The NSLA Framework (2007) addresses the importance of developing leadership and management skills of SMTs. The Department of Education is supposed to workshop SMTs of underperforming schools to enable them to effectively supervise both teachers and learners work with the aim of improving the NSC results. Although the NSLA Framework (2007) covers some of the

ways in which the Department of Education is trying to address underperformance in NSLA Schools, responses form the participants in the interviews indicate that there is very little being done to capacitate SMT in NSLA Schools. This is what one participant had to say:

> *department has not really stepped in there but the pressure has increased but when I say pressure there is no extra resource material no real extra training and hints on how to improve results etc.* (**Mr Blake).**

Furthermore, one of the main causes for the poor NSC pass rates in this sample school was the high failure rate in English Home Language. The NSLA Framework (2007) pays special attention to the improvement of gateway subjects like Mathematics and Sciences and its impact on the quality of NSC passes, instead of developing strategies for learners to pass English Home Language (which failure to achieve 40% results in a learner failing the whole NSC examination). Although the NSLA Framework (2007) is a document for improvement of learner academic performance, and provides educational support for SMT, it contains some punitive measures, which may be demotivating for principals of NSLA Schools. According to the NSLA Framework:

> *In schools where under performance persists despite the support provided to the principal, consideration will be given to the re-deployment of the principal or disciplinary measures could be considered in accordance with the conditions prescribed in the legislative framework* (**The National Strategy for Learner Attainment Framework, 2007, p. 5).**

Principals are now put under immense stress and pressure to improve their results but sometimes given the negative factors that have been identified in this study, it may not be so easy for principals of NSLA Schools. Although the NSLA Framework (2007) is the guiding document for the SMT of NSLA Schools, they are not receiving the support that is stated within the document. This lack of support from the Department of Basic Education further contributes to the poor NSC results within NSLA Schools.

The Department of Basic Education, according to the participants in the interviews, provide little or no support to bring about improvement in the NSC results. Some of the support that the department does provide is not actually support but monitoring and evaluation of educators and SMT. The department has also provided very little support in terms of resource materials for the Grade 12 learners. The department seems distant from this school regarding

the problems that this school is dealing with. From the discussions above, it appears that the SMT desperately wants the department to step in and provide support that is of a practical nature and also understand what their experiences are with working within the context of this NSLA School.

4.5.1.12 Monitoring and evaluation by Department of Basic Education

The monitoring and evaluation that this SMT is subjected to creates a stressful work environment. Without giving the SMTs notification of departmental visits, puts the school's SMT under pressure. Mr Arthur commented on the extent at which the department monitors the school stating that quality assurance department Umalusi visits the school and conducts detailed checks of lesson plans with dates from the educators weekly planning. This is what one participant had to say:

> *The department monitoring teams visit all the time and sometimes come unannounced to check on management and teachers work* **(Mr Arthur).**

Participants felt that the monitoring and evaluation processes of the NSLA School by the department often resulted in extremely stressful situations. The stress experienced by the SMT was due to the daily visits by the Department of Basic Education. In terms of accountability, the SMT is at the forefront of monitoring and evaluation. This is what one participant had to say:

> *The SMT is the first ones that the department attacks when they do visit the school* **(Mr Elsen).**

Regular checks by the Department of Basic Education are conducted in this school based on the continuous poor performance of the NSC results. The responses from the participants indicate that the Department through their monitoring process creates stress and pressure. Although the SMT feel stressed by the Departments monitoring processes, it is needed if improvement is going to take place in this NSLA School. It appears that the Department of Education is to an extent, fulfilling some of their roles and responsibilities in ensuring improvement to underperforming NSLA Schools. The accountability system imposed by the state is positive in the sense that it leads to some improvement in learner academic performances as opposed to the absence of it with no improvement (Hanushek & Raymond,

2005). The monitoring and supervision are demanding emotionally, and this process may also be responsible for a decrease in job satisfaction and work morale (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

4.5.1.13 Autocratic leadership

From my discussion with the SMT, it appears that some SMT was unhappy due to certain executive decisions taken by the principal denying the SMT and staff any democratic right. Some decisions that are taken by the principal which the staff and SMT do not have a say. This is what one participant had to say:

> *The atmosphere is set by the principal as the head of the institution and in our school we have a situation where staff is very unhappy about the systems that we employ* (**Mr Blake).**

Mr Blake further mentioned, as an example the 'teacher based system' that was in practice, where learners go to the teachers class for lessons which was thrown out and replaced with a 'learner based system' where the teachers now go to the learners. This system has had a negative impact on SMTs and teachers where teaching resources become a problem and the staff is generally unhappy. Mr Blake also had this to say about executive decisions taken by the principal:

> *It definitely impacts on our productivity and if staff is unhappy then obviously you can't say this is 'our' school and working towards democratic principles* (**Mr Blake).**

It is clear through this example that the principal as the main SMT member does not allow for democratic decisions in certain areas thus making the SMT unhappy which creates a negative impact on improvement of the NSC results. Bush (1995) asserts that bureaucracy should not be enacted when managing people within a profession and managers should take into account the educator's specialisations. The principal as the main SMT member should be working together with the other SMT members and not creating an autocratic sense of atmosphere for them. These few traits that have been outlined by the participants are an indication that democracy in decisions taken by the SMT is lacking and has resulted in low work morale amongst SMT members. The staff also loses trust when the principal as the main SMT member of the school displays autocratic characteristics (Short & Greer, 2002).

4.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the data generated was presented and discussed utilising using the semi-structured interviews and document's analysis. The data was presented in four main themes each with sub-themes which were mentioned and discussed. The next chapter provides an analysis, findings and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

STUDY SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter thematically presented and discussed the data that was generated using the semi-structured interviews and document's reviews. This chapter presents the key findings of the research. Recommendations will be made based on these key findings. In presenting the findings, I have used the research questions as headings. I thought that by presenting the findings in this way, it would be easier for me, first to organise them. Secondly, I thought that it would be easier to assess the extent to which the research questions have been addressed.

5.2 Summary of the study

This study has explored the experiences of the School Management Team (SMT) in improving the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results in a National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) School. This was a case study based on the SMT members comprising of a principal, and four Heads of Departments (HODs) within one NSLA secondary school in KwaZulu-Natal. Chapter one has outlined the background of the study, the problem statement, the rationale for the study, the significance of the study, the objectives of the study, the three research questions, the delimitations of the study and the overview of each chapter. The second chapter focused on the literature reviewed in this study as well as a detailed discussion of the theoretical frameworks which underpin this study. The third chapter provided a detailed discussion research design and methodology utilised to answer the research questions in this study. The fourth chapter presented the data which was organised into four main themes and discussed further with sub-themes. The last chapter summarises the study and presents a synthesis of the key findings of the research and recommendations based on these key findings.

5.3 Research questions restated

The research questions guiding the study are the following:

- What is the role that school management teams play in improving the NSC results in an NSLA school?

- How do school management teams overcome the challenges they encounter when improving the NSC results?

- What are the factors that negatively and those that positively affect the school management teams initiatives in improving the NSC results within the NSLA School?

5.3.1 What is the role that school management teams play in improving the NSC results in a NSLA school?

The data has shown that the role of the SMT within the context of the NSLA School differed with many complexities to that of non-NSLA schools. The SMT highlighted the different management duties they fulfil on a daily basis like controlling examinations, managing discipline, school safety and supervising teaching and learning, but expressed with a strong belief that due to the NSLA context, their roles become more in-depth and complex. In trying to improve the status of the school in terms of the NSC pass rate, the SMT has become bombarded with an overload of management tasks related to the Grade 12 learners and the demands placed upon them by the Department of Education to improve the NSC results. Due to this school being in the spot light because of poor performance in the NSC examinations, the SMT has devoted a large amount of their time towards the focusing on the management of improvement strategies for the Grade 12.

One of the roles that the SMT engaged with in ensuring an improvement in the NSC results was curriculum managers. The SMT in this school managed the curriculum through monitoring and evaluation of educators as well as learners. The SMT had different feelings towards the management of the curriculum as one participant felt that monitoring the curriculum can make a difference in improving the NSC pass rate while another felt that the SMT are only checking the syllabus coverage and completion and this management task has not impacted on positive NSC results. More details about these issues can be found in **Section 4.3.2 of Chapter 4.**

The data has shown that the SMT in the NSLA School engaged in far more administrative tasks than other schools. The SMT experiences an overload of administrative tasks all related

to the NSC examinations and the Grade 12 learners. The administrative tasks require SMT to submit important statistics and learner information on a daily basis to the Department of Basic Education. In completing daily administrative tasks regarding the improvements of the NSC pass rate, the SMT compromises their instruction time in their subject specialisation as well as the effective management of their respective departments. More details about these issues can be found in **Section 4.3.3 of Chapter 4.** It was also found that managing discipline is a major task that SMT has to engage in order to ensure improvement of results. The SMT in this school deal with violent, abusive, and serious drug related issues on a daily basis and even been assaulted by learners in order to try and bring about change in this NSLA School. More details about these issues can be found in **Section 4.3.4 of Chapter 4.** One of the main tasks that SMT are involved in is the planning of special intervention programmes aimed at improving the NSC results. These programmes include extra tuition classes and vacation classes. In ensuring that learners have these special classes aimed at improving the NSC results, the principal has fulfilled the role as an instructional leader whose focus in this school has been mainly teaching and learning.

5.3.2 What are the factors that negatively and those that positively affect the school management teams initiatives in improving the NSC results within the NSLA School?

The data has shown a host of negative factors that affect the SMT with regards to the improvement initiatives aimed at the NSC results. The SMT expressed a strong belief that the amount of time they spend on Grade 12 intervention programmes had resulted in work exhaustion and high levels of stress due to them working above their regulated working hours and especially during the vacation periods. The demanding work required within this NSLA School has also imposed on the SMTs family and personal time. More details about these issues can be found in **Section 4.5.1.1 of Chapter 4.**

One of the serious factors that the data has shown the SMT to contend with on a daily basis is the scourge of drugs and peddling within the school. The SMT engaged on a daily basis with learners who are not in their right frame of mind due to substance abuse and this activity compromises the safety of the lives of the SMT. The SMT have also expressed frustration over the time they spend on drug-related issues in the school. The SMT had a strong belief that the time spent handling drug-related issues could be used constructively to improve teaching and learning. More details about these issues can be found in **Section 4.5.1.2 of**

Chapter 4. Besides the formal training that the SMT had undertaken to enter the teaching profession, they have not received any specialised training as SMT members. Of particular importance is the concern raised by the SMT over the lack of training aimed specifically at the SMT of NSLA Schools. The Department of Basic Education has not provided any training for the SMT to help deal with the challenges presented by the NSLA context. The principal of this school, however, does make attempts to empower his SMT through workshops, but these workshops do not address ways in which the SMT can deal with negative factors identified within the NSLA School in this study. More details about these issues can be found in **Section 4.5.1.3 of Chapter 4.**

The data has shown that there is a serious lack of parental involvement amongst the Grade 12 parents. The SMT had expressed the importance of the parent in helping them to try and improve the NSC results as the parents are the only ones who can ensure learners are studying when they leave school. Attendance at parent meetings are dismal with the parents of learners who are passing being the ones who attend and parents of learners who are struggling academically do not seem to be attending. As the study by Louw, Bayat, and Eigelaar-Meets (2011) found that the progression policy had impacted in underperforming schools in South Africa, the data from this study has also revealed the same negative factor. The SMT highlighted the impact the progression policy has had on their NSC results. The policy was found to have progressed learners who had not met minimum standards in Grade 10 and 11 into Grade 12. This has led to a high failure rate in the NSC examinations in this school. The department contradicts in this regard and has provided no support to the NSLA School to address the high number of progressed learners in Grade 12 but keep on demanding above average pass rates from the school. Ultimately, all the negative factors within this NSLA School have resulted in the SMT developing a low sense of morale towards their work. This low morale experienced by the SMT is also fueled by intense monitoring and evaluation processes imposed on them by the Department of Basic Education with no support provided to bring about improvement. The SMT was of the opinion that the poor NSC pass rate was also a result of the lack of commitment and poor attitude of the Grade 12 learners. This was due to learner late-coming, high absenteeism, and an indifferent attitude towards their school work. Another factor that the data has shown is the autocratic leadership style of the principal which has contributed to the low morale of the SMT due to executive decision making.

Educators do not cooperate with the SMT thereby making management and improvement within this school difficult. The learners show poor attitude towards the Grade 12 academic year and do not comply with the SMTs' educational demands making improvement of the NSC results difficult to achieve. The SMT was also of the opinion that the community which surrounded this NSLA School contributed to some extent towards the poor NSC results. Drugs, dysfunctional families, unemployment and poverty have led to learners losing focus on their studies in matric. The fact that the majority of the learners are second language speakers, many of them have problems attaining a 40% pass in English Home Language which has contributed to the high failure rate in the 2015 NSC examination. More details about these issues can be found in **Section 4.5.1.9 of Chapter 4.** The SMT expressed their concern over the lack of support from the Department of Basic Education in trying to resolve some of the problems experienced in the NSLA Schools. The SMT felt that the Department was only looking at the negatives affecting the school but did little to turn the school around. This was mainly contributed to monitoring and evaluation process that the SMT and teachers were subjected to in this NSLA School. The SMT felt that the Department was trying to fault the managing, teaching and learning, but payed little attention to help the SMT and school after recognising all of the serious problems associated within the NSLA School. The only positive factor that the data has revealed was the motivation to work and succeed in the NSLA School ironically due to the demands placed on the school by the Department of Basic Education. The findings suggest that there are a number of negative factors within the NSLA School context, and the SMT cannot eradicate these negative factors without support from the Department of Basic Education.

5.3.3 How do school management teams overcome the challenges they encounter when improving the NSC results?

The data has shown that the SMT engaged themselves in various educational activities aimed at improving the NSC results in their school in a bid to overcome the challenges that they face. The strategies to overcome the challenges that the SMT face is targeted towards the educators they manage, the Grade 12 learners, and the parents of the Grade 12 learners. The supervision of educators within the different departments helps to keep the SMT on track with curriculum delivery and the quality of teaching taking place. More details about these issues can be found in **Section 4.4.1 of Chapter 4.**

The data has also revealed that the SMT played an active role in overcoming the problem of poor academic performance in the Grade 12 by providing support for both teachers and learners. SMT take it upon themselves to plan Grade 12 intervention classes beyond the normal school hours and also make themselves present during these special intervention classes after hours and during the vacation periods showing commitment and dedication towards improving the NSC results. The data has also shown that the SMT provides support not only in teaching and learning but also towards the social upliftment of the learners by introducing feeding schemes, motivational talks and mentorship for learners taking into account the socio-economic problems experienced by these learners. More details about these issues can be found in **Section 4.4.2 of Chapter 4.**

While some of the SMT regard teamwork as integral to the improvement process they have however, indicated that not all members of the SMT seem to be working as a team. All the HODs work in isolation within the departments that they manage. The SMT in this school regard parental involvement as integral partnership that has to be forged in order to improve the NSC results in this school. In trying to bring about improvement the SMT has realised that the parents of the Grade 12 learners play an important role in facilitating the learning process of Grade 12 learners at home and have used parent meetings as a strategy to meet and discuss the learner's progress. Although the data has revealed that attendance at these Grade 12 parent meetings are very poor, the SMT had shown persistency and continued to regularly host Grade 12 parent meetings in the hope that parents will show up to discuss the progress of their child. The SMT also engages with parents on a daily basis though telephone conversations and appointments where they discuss the progress of Grade 12 learners which is a valuable step towards bringing about improvement in the NSC results. Therefore, the finding is that the SMT engaged in activities that are aimed at overcoming the challenges by taking into account the important role players like educators, learners and parents who they actively engage with and provide support.

5.4 Recommendations

This study has made two sets of recommendations. The two sets of recommendations are related towards the SMT of NSLA Schools, and the second set of recommendations is directed towards the Department of Basic Education.

5.4.1 The need for SMTs to work as teams or groups to enhance learner academic performances in the NSC examinations

The findings from this study have revealed that the SMT in NSLA Schools are working in isolation within their respective departments. It is recommended that the SMT of NSLA Schools work as a team when developing and implementing improvement initiatives for the Grade 12 learners. The SMT of NSLA Schools needs to engage in team work on two levels: one as a team of managers, and two as managers of a team of educators. The SMT only plan Grade 12 intervention programmes for educators and subjects that they manage. The SMT need to work as a team when engaging in all improvement initiatives targeted towards the improvement of the NSC results. The NSC pass rate of the school is everyone's priority and both the SMT as well as the educators need to collaborate and work as a team to improve the NSC results. Working as a team will reduce the work overload, especially the administrative tasks, as well as work-related stress and exhaustion.

5.4.2 The Department of Basic Education's role in providing support to the SMT of NSLA Schools

The data has shown that there is a lack of constructive and practical support from the Department of Basic Education towards the SMT of NSLA Schools. It is therefore recommended that the Department of Basic Education provides support in the critical areas of the NSLA School like safety and security, providing a substantial amount of resources like textbooks and most importantly the provision of specialised training for the SMT of NSLA Schools. The findings of the study have shown that the Department of Basic Education acts more on the capacity of monitors and evaluators of SMT and educators. The department should present themselves at the NSLA Schools and start to engage with the learners and the actual teaching and daily routines of the NSLA Schools to determine what area of support is needed. As part of the departments support programme, the SMT of NSLA Schools needs to undergo specific training that will equip them for handling the challenges of the NSLA School as identified in this study.

5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a summary of the entire study which was followed by a presentation of the key findings based on the research questions of this study. This chapter has presented a summary of the key findings of this study and two sets of recommendations for the SMT of NSLA Schools and the Department of Basic Education.

5.6 Conclusion

This study presented an understanding of the role that the SMT of NSLA Schools plays with regards to improving the NSC results. The findings of this study together with the negative factors identified, give rise to future research in the field of NSLA Schools such as addressing school governance within the NSLA Schools and the partnership between the school and the Department of Education in NSLA Schools in improving the NSC results. The findings of this study can also be used as a starting point for the Department of Basic Education to implement measures to assist NSLA Schools similar to the one in this study. While the SMT of NSLA Schools is struggling with issues of discipline and poor attitude towards the NSC examinations, future research may be needed into the leadership and management of the NSLA Schools. This research study links with the field of 'school improvement' where important answers and solutions can be raised through future research within this unique South African school context.

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7. List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Template of consent letter requesting permission from KZN Department of Basic Education

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22 Jesters Avenue

Westcliff

Chatsworth

4092

5 March 2016

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<u>Attention</u>: The Superintendent-General (Dr N.S.P. Sishi)

Department of Basic Education

Province of KwaZulu-Natal

Private Bag X9137

Pietermaritzburg

3201

Dear Sir

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

My name is Preshaan Subramoney, a M Ed student in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). As part of my degree requirements, I am required to conduct research. I therefore kindly seek permission to conduct research in one secondary school under your jurisdiction in Durban within the Umlazi District. The school that I want to conduct this research study in is Glenover Secondary. The title of my study is:

School Management Team experiences in improving the National Senior Certificate results in a National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) School: a case study

This study seeks to gain information about the experiences of SMT members in their attempts at improving the matric results in an underperforming NSLA School. This study also aims to explore the role that school management teams play in improving the NSC results in the NSLA School. Taking into account the many challenges that are evident in NSLA Schools, this study aims to explore ways in which school management teams overcome the challenges they face when improving the NSC results. This study aims to identify those factors that

negatively and those that positively affect the school management teams initiatives in improving the NSC results within the NSLA School.

This research study will be conducted with six SMT members employed at the school: four HODs, one Deputy Principal, and the Principal. This study will use semi-structured interviews. Participants will be interviewed for approximately 45 minutes and the interviews will be audio recorded. All interviews will be done after school hours and at a time and place that best suits the participant and will not affect the normal running of the school. I will also analyse the 2015 School Improvement Plan of the school and the NSLA Framework (2007) to corroborate my findings from the interviews.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants will have access to all transcripts from the interviews and the rights to review, change, or withdraw information or data that has been given. I will make every effort to ensure that the school and participants identities are not divulged. To ensure the protection of the school and participants, I will ask all participants to use aliases or disguised names for the interviews. Participants are at liberty to withdraw from the research at any point without any penalties or negative consequences. SMT members will not be paid for their participation in this study. All audio recordings and transcripts from interviews will be stored and locked away for safe keeping by the research supervisor Dr T.T. Bhengu, in his office cabinet at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus. All information and data generated from this study is intended for research purposes only.

Should you require further clarification, please contact my research supervisor, Dr T.T. Bhengu, on Tel: 031-2603534 and by email bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za. For queries concerning ethics, please contact Ms Phumelele Ximba at 031-2603587 or email her at ximbap@ukzn.ac.za In addition, should you have any queries please feel free to contact me directly using the following contact details: Preshaan Subramoney; cell 072 2045 655; or E-mail: preshaansub@gmail.com

Research tools are attached herewith for your perusal. Your positive response in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Thanking you in advance
Yours sincerely
Mr P. Subramoney

Appendix 2: Template of consent letter requesting permission from school principal

GATEKEEPER PERMISSION

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Preshaan Subramoney. I am a Master of Education (Med) student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal who will be participating in fieldwork for my research project entitled, "Bridge over troubled waters: School Management Team experiences in improving the matric results in a National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) School." My supervisor for this research project is Dr T.T. Bhengu, a senior lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus.

The National Senior Certificate (NSC) Examination results have attracted a lot of attention over the years from both the public as well as the Department of Basic Education. Secondary schools that have attained below 60% in the NSC Examination are classified as NSLA Schools in South Africa. There are only a small amount of schools that are in the NSLA Programme which function differently from other secondary schools. The responsibility and accountability for the improvement of the matric results is placed upon the School Management Teams (SMT) of NSLA Schools.

This study seeks to gain information about the experiences of SMT members in their attempts at improving the matric results in an underperforming NSLA School. This study also aims to explore how SMT members perceive their work within the context of a NSLA School and the factors of the NSLA School that impact on SMT initiatives in improving the matric results.

I am seeking your permission to conduct this research study with six SMT members employed at your school. Participation in this study is voluntary. All SMT members will be interviewed once which will take place after school hours and will not impact or interfere with the normal running of the school. All interviews will be audio-taped. Participants will have access to all transcripts from the interviews and the rights to review, change, or withdraw information or data that has been given. I will make every effort to ensure that the school and participants identities are not divulged. To ensure the protection of the school and participants, I will ask all participants to use aliases or disguised names for the interviews. Participants are at liberty to withdraw from the research at any point without any penalties or negative consequences. SMT members will not be paid for their participation in this study. All audio recordings and transcripts from interviews will be stored and locked away for safe

keeping by the research supervisor Dr T.T. Bhengu, in his office cabinet at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus. All information and data generated from this study is intended for research purposes only.

Should you require further clarification, please contact my research supervisor, Dr T.T. Bhengu, on Tel: 031-2603534 and by email bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za. For queries concerning ethics, please contact Ms Phumelele Ximba at 031-2603587 or email her at ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

Yours Faithfully,

_____   _____   _____

Fieldworker's full name   Fieldworker's Signature   Date

Fieldworker's details:

Name of Student: Mr Preshaan Subramoney

Institution: University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus)

Course: Master of Education (Med)

Cell: 072 2045 655

Email: preshaansub@gmail.com

Appendix 3: Template of letter requesting school management team members to participate

<div align="center">

Participant information sheet

</div>

Dear Participant,

Information regarding participation in a research project:

Title: "School Management Team experiences in improving the National Senior Certificate results in a National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) School: a case study"

I am seeking your participation in a research project which explores the School Management Teams (SMTs) experiences in an underperforming school currently classified as a National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) School in South Africa.

There are only a small amount of schools that are in the NSLA Programme which function differently from other secondary schools. The responsibility and accountability for the improvement of the matric results is placed upon the SMTs of NSLA Schools. This study seeks to gain information about the experiences and the role that SMT members play in improving the matric results in an underperforming NSLA School. This study also aims to explore how SMTs overcome the challenges they encounter in the NSLA School and the factors of the NSLA School that positively and negatively affect the SMTs initiatives in improving the NSC results.

This study requires you to be interviewed once. With your permission, the discussion will be audio-taped. The interview will take place after school hours and will not interfere with the normal running of the school and your work. The interview will take place at the venue and time that suits you.

As a participant, you have rights. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage. You have the right to be protected from harm, and no detail that will enable you to be identified will be used. You will have access to transcripts of the interviews before they are used in this study. You may delete or change excerpts from the interview. All information is intended for research purposes only. All data recordings and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet in the research supervisor's

office. On completion of the study, the findings will be shared with you in the form of a hard copy. There is no payment for participation in this study.

Should you require further clarification, please contact my research supervisor, Dr T.T. Bhengu, on Tel: 031-2603534 and by email bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za. For queries concerning ethics, please contact Ms Phumelele Ximba at 031-2603587 or email her at ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

Yours Sincerely
Preshaan Subramoney
Cell: 072 2045 655 / E-mail: preshaansub@gmail.com

Appendix 4: Template of informed consent letters to participants

DECLARATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

I…………………………………………………………………… (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:	YES	NO
Audio-record my interview		
Video-record my interview / focus group discussion		
Use of my photographs for research purposes		

…………………………………….   …………………….

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

For any queries and further information you may consult my supervisors, Dr T.T Bhengu from 031 260 3534 or bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za. Alternatively you can contact the HSSREC RO contact details (Ms Phumelele Ximba 031 260 3587, Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za).

Researcher's details

Mr Preshaan Subramoney

Institution: UKZN (Edgewood Campus)

Qualification: M Ed. (Educational Leadership, Management, and Policy)

Email: preshaansub@gmail.com

Cell: 072 2045 655

Appendix 5: Semi-structured interview instrument for participants

Questions to be asked in the interview:

1. Briefly describe a National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) School.

2. What is the role of the School Management Team (SMT)?

Probe question: What role does the school management team play in improving the NSC results?

3. How different is the role of the SMT in a NSLA School to SMT's in other schools?

4. What strategies does the SMT employ to ensure improvement in the matric results?

Probe question: Do you think these strategies are enough to ensure improvement in a NSLA School? Please elaborate.

5. What are some of the factors of that negatively affect the school management team when improving the NSC results.

6. What are some of the factors of that positively affect the school management team when improving the NSC results.

7. Is there any way, in your opinion, that you think these factors can be overcome to ensure improvement   in the NSC results? Please elaborate.

8. What support, if any, has the Department of Basic Education given to the SMT of NSLA Schools?
9. What support should be given to school management teams of NSLA Schools?

10. What do you think should be done by the school management teams to improve the matric results in the NSLA School?

Thank you for your time and participation.

Appendix 6: Instrument for documents review

Title of document:
Date of review:
Type of document: Public
Author/Person responsible for document:
Location / Source of document:
What are the main topics or content of this document?
Brief description of this document:
Main target groups/audience as described by the document:
Relationship between this document and the role of school management teams in National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) Schools:
How does this document relate to this research study?
Reflections about this document:

Appendix 7: Turnitin Certificate