

**EXPLORING LEADERSHIP STYLES OF GAUTENG PRIMARY SCHOOLS'
PRINCIPALS DURING CORONA VIRUS-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY**

by

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DECLARATION

I, EB Kunene, Student Number 48048844, declare that **EXPLORING LEADERSHIP STYLES OF GAUTENG PRIMARY SCHOOLS' PRINCIPALS DURING CORONA VIRUS-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY** is my work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged using complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality-checking software.

I further declare that this work, titled **EXPLORING LEADERSHIP STYLES OF GAUTENG PRIMARY SCHOOLS' PRINCIPALS DURING CORONAVIRUS-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY**, is original and has not been previously submitted for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



EB Kunene

Date

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late father, Amos Shadrack Tshabalala, Mshengu.

To my mother, my queen Meki Laleni Sikakane, this would not have been possible without your sacrifices.

To my loving and supportive husband, Mxolisi, and our two sons, Nkosing'phile and Siph'esihle, this project would not have been possible without your understanding and support. You are my pillars, cheerleaders, and everything.

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Ludongwa luka Mavuso

Nina bakwa sidwaba esiLuthuli

Esingabangcwaba seza nomlandakazi

Nina abakawawawa

Enawela ubambo ngokuhlehletela, ememba nabuyela

Nina bengongoni yaseMangwaneni

Abaduma bakhathala bethi, umhlangamvula udilikile, kanti bafihle indoda emsamo

Nina bakamahlokota, ngokuhlokota timbhila emgedzeni taphuma busaphalala

Abavala isibaya ngamakhanda amadoda, abanye bavala ngamahlahla

Kwaye kwa tama tama ucuku nomabevana

Nina bakaMahlasela, ngoku hlasela live ngatishwati abanye baphatha umkhonto netagila

Bathi Mswati uyathakatha, ungaxosha kanjani amabutho ngatishwati?

Basho bethenga amanga ngoSithole esinkone

Wabhonga Mswati wabhonga okwengonyama, lapho ukhona kwatamatama phansi na phezulu.

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 crisis presented challenges for all systems worldwide, yet it also shed light on the significant potential for a groundbreaking leadership style to tackle them. In the Ekurhuleni North District of Gauteng, four primary school principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools demonstrated leadership by going above and beyond to ensure their learners continued to receive a high-quality education. In schools lacking the top resources and ICT amenities, these principals implemented approaches such as WhatsApp and Learner Activity Packs (LAPs) to ensure their learners were not further disadvantaged by the Covid-19 pandemic. By doing so, they ensured that “No child was left behind” and that every learner in their respective schools had access to quality education, with adaptable and compassionate leadership. The study's findings reveal the effectiveness of these leadership styles in addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic and their potential for long-term educational equality.

Some critics argue that disadvantaged schools face challenges with class sizes and finances. The ground-breaking approaches taken by these school principals in the Ekurhuleni North District present a different perspective. Their flexible leadership styles not only confront the disruptions caused by the pandemic but also set the foundation for long-term educational equality. By embracing technology, building community partnerships, and continually advocating for their school's needs, these principals demonstrated that the real constraint is not a lack of resources but a limited imagination. They highlighted that with leadership and community focus, positive educational changes can happen even in challenging situations.

Keywords: exploring, leadership, principals, pandemic, leadership styles, Socio-Economic Status, case study, Coronavirus, and Quintile.

ABSTRAK

Die uitbreek van die Covid-19-krisis het uitdagings vir alle stelsels wêreldwyd gebied, maar dit het ook lig gewerp op die beduidende potensiaal vir baanbrekende leierskapstyl wat nodig is om hierdie uitdagings aan te pak. In die Ekurhuleni Noord-distrik van Gauteng het vier laerskoolhoofde in 'n Kwintiel 1-3-skole leierskapsvaardighede getoon deur bo en behalwe vir hul leerders te gaan om te verseker dat hul leerders voortgaan om 'n hoë-gehalte onderwys te ontvang. Hierdie skoolhoofde werk in skole wat nie die beste hulpbronne en IKT gehad het nie, en het benaderings geïmplementeer soos die gebruik van WhatsApp en Leerderaktiwiteitspakette (LAP's) om te verseker dat hul leerders nie verder deur Covid-19-pandemie benadeel word nie. Deur dit te doen, het hulle verseker dat elke “Geen kind agtergelaat word nie” en elke leerder in hul onderskeie skole toegang tot gehalte-onderrig ontvang met leierskap wat aanpasbaar en deernisvol is.

Sommige kritici voer aan dat benadeelde skole uitdagings in die gesig staar wat die aantal leerders in 'n klas en finansies betref. Die baanbrekerbenaderings wat deur hierdie skoolhoofde in Ekurhuleni-Noord-distrik geneem is, bied 'n ander perspektief. Hul buigsame leierskapstyle het nie die ontwrigtings wat deur die pandemie veroorsaak is, gekonfronteer nie, maar het ook die grondslag gelê vir langtermyn-onderwysgelykheid. Deur tegnologie te omhels, gemeenskapsvennootskappe te bou en voortdurend te pleit vir hul skole se behoeftes; hierdie beginsels het getoon dat die werklike beperking nie 'n gebrek aan hulpbronne is nie, maar dié van beperkte verbeelding. Hulle het 'n waarheid beklemtoon dat met leierskap en gemeenskapsfokus positiewe veranderinge in onderwys selfs in moeilike situasies kan plaasvind.

Sleutelwoorde: Verken, leierskap, skoolhoofde, pandemie, leierskapstyle, sosio-ekonomiese status, gevallestudie, koronavirus en kwintiel

ABSTRACT

Ukuqubuka kwenhlekelele ye-Covid-19 kulethe izinselelo kuzo zonke izinhlelo emhlabeni jikelele, nokho futhi kukhanyisela amandla abalulekile esitayela sobuholi esidingekayo ukuze kubhekwane nalezi zinselelo. Esifundeni sase-Ekurhuleni eNyakatho yeGauteng othishanhloko abane bezikole zamabanga aphansi ezikoleni eziku-Quintile 1-3 bakhombise amakhono obuholi ngokwenza okungaphezu kwalokho kubafundi babo ukuze baqinisekise ukuthi abafundi babo bayaqhubeka nokuthola imfundo esezingeni eliphezulu. Njengoba besebenza ezikoleni ezingenazo izinsiza eziphezulu kanye ne-ICT, laba thishanhloko basebenzise izindlela ezifana nokusebenzisa i-WhatsApp kanye nama-LAPs ukuze baqinisekise abafundi babo lapho bengancishwe amathuba khona ngenxa yobhubhane lwe-Covid-19. Ngokwenza kanjalo, baqinisekisa ukuthi akukho ngane eyasala ngemuva futhi wonke umfundi ezikoleni zabo ngokwehlukana kwabo uthola ukufinyelela emfundweni esezingeni eliphezulu enobuholi obuvumelana nezimo nozwelo.

Abanye abagxeki bathi izikole ezintulayo zibhekana nezinselelo ngokwenani labafundi ekilasini nangokwezimali. Izindlela eziphusile ezithathwe yilaba thishanhloko, esifundeni sase-Ekurhuleni eNyakatho ziveza umbono ohlukile. Izitayela zabo zobuholi eziguquguqukayo azizange zibhekane nokuphazamiseka okubangelwa yilolu bhubhane kodwa futhi zabeka isisekelo sokulingana kwemfundo yesikhathi eside. Ngokwamukela ubuchwepheshe, ukwakha ubudlelwano bomphakathi kanye nokuqhubeka nokumela izidingo zezikole zabo; laba thishanhloko bakhombise ukuthi into eyingqinamba ayikona ukushoda kwezinsiza kodwa wukucabanga okulinganiselwe. Bagqamisa iqiniso lokuthi ngokugxila kobuholi kanye nomphakathi, izinguquko ezinhle kwezemfundo zingenzeka ngisho nasezimeni ezinzima.

Amagama angukhiye: Ukuhlola, ubuholi, othishanhloko, ubhubhane, izitayela zobuholi, isimo senhlalo-mnotho, ucwaningo, igciwane le-corona kanye ne-Quintile.

ACRONYMS

SARS-CoV-2	Severe acute respiratory syndrome Corona- Virus
Covid-19	Corona- Virus -19
DBE	Department of Basic Education
WHO	The World Health Organisation
PHEIC	Public Health Emergency of International Concern
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
SMT	School Management Team
SGB	School Governing Body
PD	Professional Development
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PLC	Professional Learning Community
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
H1N1	Influenza Pandemic Swine flu
MERS-CoV	Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus
IDSO	Institutional Development and Support Official
LAPs	Learner Activity Packs
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
GIGA	Global and Innovation Gateway for All
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
SA	South Africa
SES	Socio-economic status
URNCST	Undergraduate Research in Natural and Clinical Science and Technology
US	United States
CEDU	College of Education at the University of South Africa
UNISA	University of South Africa
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This research, conducted in four primary schools in the Ekurhuleni North District in Gauteng, explored the leadership style used during the Covid-19 pandemic in Quintiles 1-3 schools. Hayes, Flowers, and Williams (2021:1) state that in times of normality, school principals face both significant obstacles and opportunities. However, these difficulties were exacerbated during times of crisis. These authors further state that the principals are not trained in crisis management, and it is in such situations that they are thrust into the deep end and expected to “swim in uncharted waters”.

On March 26, 2020, the South African President, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, announced on national television that South Africa would enter a nationwide lockdown for 21 days, starting at midnight that day, to curb the spread of COVID-19. This announcement caused an uproar in all sectors of the South African economy; the education sector was not spared. Due to a lack of functional infrastructure and ICT in the education sector, this poses a challenge in primary schools in previously disadvantaged areas, classified as Quintiles 1, 2, and 3, to ensure effective teaching and learning, as stated by Hayes, Flowers and Williams (2021:2).

School principals were forced to adopt and implement new leadership styles to navigate the 'crisis' without causing undue alarm among teachers, students, and families. Pollock (2020:38) stresses the need for a 'two-pronged strategy' to manage school systems during a pandemic or crisis. This strategy involves expanding their roles to include (a) ensuring safe schooling and creating an environment for future learning, and (b) providing digital instructional leadership simultaneously. However, the lack of infrastructure in some schools hindered the effective use of electronic devices, making it difficult for principals to guide their teachers, students, and the community during the pandemic.

The chapter outlines the study's introduction and orientation. It provides background information on the study, the rationale for the study, outlines the problem statement, discusses the aim of the study, research objectives, and questions framing the study, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and the significance of the study in the context of the unprecedented challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The ethical issues guiding the study are also discussed in this chapter. Keywords that were utilised in this study are explained. The delimitations of the research and the organisation of this research are conveyed. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main points, emphasising the significant contribution of this research to the field of education.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The school community and the entire country were in a state of terror after the president declared a 21-day hard lockdown, but no one was expecting this, and most people had no knowledge about the virus. Schools were scheduled to close on March 23, 2020, but due to the president's announcement, they had to close on March 18, 2020, earlier than planned. This unanticipated and poorly communicated school shutdown put enormous pressure on the School Management Team (SMT), which includes key school leaders such as the principal, deputy principal, and department heads, as well as teachers and students, to conclude the term as if there had been no disruptions. The principals were expected to lead their teams without explicit instructions from those in authority, facing unprecedented challenges.

Despite the unprecedented challenges, there are principals who demonstrated remarkable resilience and leadership, inspiring their teams and the school community. Their instructional and transformational leadership capabilities were put to the test, and this was not the only test they would face during this time and would continue to face as they manoeuvred their way into this “new normal” to ensure that they met the vision and mission of their schools, while guiding the new generation of this country.

Reyes-Guerra, Maslin-Ostrowski, Barakat and Stefanovic (2021:1) explain that the Covid-19 pandemic brought to the forefront and catalysed long-run confronted racial and economic inequities, in addition to financial failure and deep political partitions,

which all influence students and schools and have led to a complex crisis requiring a unique conceptualisation of school leadership during times of crisis. The authors further allude to the fact that most principals had to abandon their leadership style and adopt crisis and transformative leadership styles to keep “their ships afloat during the unprecedented waters.”

Harris (2020:321) states that the brunt of COVID-19 disrupted schooling globally. Not only were South African schools disrupted by this virus, but the whole world was disrupted as well. The author further states that, before COVID-19, the style of leadership most characteristic of schools could be described as “traditional, following the contours of role and position”. This could be described as the principal was expected to oversee the Deputies and the Departmental Heads to see if effective teaching and learning were taking place in the school; the teachers were assisting in developing the learners holistically by making sure that the physical, academic, and cultural needs of the learners were catered for in the school programme and classrooms. McLeod and Dulsky (2021:1) support this notion by stating that schools were one of the most essential societal organisations affected by the pandemic (COVID-19). They further assert that most school leaders (principals) have little to no training in crisis leadership, nor have they dealt with a crisis of this scale and magnitude for this long. With COVID-19, all that changed. Principals were thrust into a world they never imagined. They had to row the boat/s given to them in uncharted waters, where they did not know how deep the waters were.

The sentiments above are corroborated by Coletrain (2020:1), who laments that the pandemic (COVID-19) affected leaders worldwide by simultaneously having to assess unplanned situations and plan for change. She further states that no templates, guidelines, or precedents exist for leading through a pandemic. The principals had to lead. They had to ensure that numerous lessons learned thus far were applied to transform teaching, learning, and leadership. Sampat and Oommen (2020:2) agree with the views expressed above, stating that the principal's role changed drastically without adequate training, support, and guidance. They further assert that due to the unprecedented nature of the virus, there are no set directions for principals to follow. They affirm that the principals are seen as actors in this play that, while on stage leading their staff and ensuring that the schools are performing as they should, the script gets adjusted and, without warning, guidance, and support, they (principals)

have to adapt themselves to their new role as teachers, learners, and parents look to them for answers. Sampat and Oommen (2020:2) attest that some principals had limited or no support and training for their role as school managers. Now, having to deal with a pandemic, the security net of having protocols and traditions to follow was eroded, and they had to learn new “protocols” and create new traditions that would allow them to merge the old with the new while being “on stage” for the whole world to see and critique.

In agreement with the above, Myende and Heystek (2020:2) also observe the immense anxiety and demands this pandemic placed on school leaders. They attest that leaders were constantly struggling to ensure quality teaching and learning occurred while also managing the demands of providing quality learning during the pandemic. They further affirm that the SMT and stakeholders involved (SGB) had to play a “creative and constructive role in managing the anxiety and related social and economic impacts that this pandemic and the closure and challenges related to the opening of schools have come with” (ibid).

Spaull (2020:23) and Jansen (2020:2) both agree that “the inequalities between rich and poor schools were exacerbated during Covid-19”. They further state that South African education was already appalling before the pandemic, with many schools lacking resources. COVID-19 worsened the inequalities and made people more aware of the challenges. They also affirm that the infrastructure challenges exacerbated inequalities, as half of primary schools in South Africa lack Internet, water, and electricity. These authors further state that the low learning outcomes and unequal distribution of resources highlight the elusive promises made year after year by our government officials. This can contribute to dropouts if not addressed effectively.

Fiske and Ladd (2004:45) explain that the roots of inequality in South African education are profoundly entrenched in apartheid-era policies, which required separate and unequal schooling systems for different racial groups. They further state that even though post-apartheid restructurings intended to improve access to and quality of education, substantial gaps in learning outcomes, infrastructure, and teacher quality persist in the new democratic era. In contrast, Spaull (2013:7) affirms that South Africa’s education system has long been marked by the harsh discrimination rooted in the apartheid legacy. He further states that although the democratic period

initiated efforts to address these inequalities, systemic differences persist, primarily along racial and socio-economic lines. Moreover, he states that the Covid-19 pandemic did not serve as a strong counterbalance to differences in the education system but rather as a magnifying glass, exposing and intensifying pre-existing educational inequities.

Although the Department of Basic Education (2021: 6) attempted to intervene by providing printed learning materials and broadcasting educational content via radio and television, these initiatives achieved only limited success. A significant number of households were without electricity, reliable radio signals, or access to printed resources due to logistical challenges. In addition, Jansen (2020: 2) maintains that teacher training for online education was inconsistent; educators in underprivileged schools often did not have the necessary skills or tools for effective digital instruction.

Spaull (2020:1) advocates for face-to-face learning, affirming that technology cannot — and will not — replace the relationships that teachers foster with their learners in the classroom. Still, the pandemic pitted two fundamental rights enshrined in our constitution against each other: the right to education and the right to safety. Bryne (2020:1) supports this by arguing that the training offered to teachers by the DBE should utilise remote and blended learning. Overcrowding in schools and inadequate infrastructure and sanitation put the lives of teachers and learners at risk. The learners and teachers in private schools continued teaching and learning with few disturbances. However, those in the public schools, especially the previously disadvantaged schools, were affected.

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic fundamentally changed school principals' work and role across the globe. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how leadership in a school environment shifted to embrace the “new normal” brought by COVID-19. In addition, the changes and demands that were placed on principals to lead their staff and the learners in their schools with minimal or no guidance and training by those entrusted to lead and guide them.

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

"South Africa (SA) is failing too many of its young people when it comes to education," claims Amnesty International (2020: 6). They go on to say that although SA has made significant strides since the end of apartheid in expanding access to schools, this has not always resulted in top-notch instruction for all students. The extreme disparities between the "haves and have-nots" in SA's economic and societal situation have grown, as evidenced by the onset of COVID-19. While the Covid-19 pandemic was at its worst, some schools could continue teaching and learning, while others were forced to stop. This demonstrated that despite the end of the apartheid system, inequality still exists. "Realistically, for the poorest 80% of learners in South Africa, virtually no curricular learning is taking place during the lockdown," writes Spaul (2020: 1). This may be a factor in issues such as limited access to technology at school and home, a lack of educational resources at home, infrastructure issues, unequal resource distribution, and more. The country's two distinct educational systems have been made worse by this.

Although international research on school leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic is expanding, few studies focus specifically on principals' experiences in South African primary schools. This gap was especially notable in disadvantaged contexts, such as Quintiles 1–3 schools. Existing literature tends to highlight general strategies for managing schools but falls short in offering a detailed analysis of how pedagogical leadership was utilised to address the unique challenges posed by the pandemic.

Furthermore, many studies do not seem to have succeeded in investigating how school principals assisted teachers in adapting to new instructional requirements or ensured continuity in teaching and learning during extended school closures (Davids 2020: 2; Harris & Jones 2020: 244; Pollock 2020: 38; Spaul 2020: 1). There was also a lack of qualitative, context-specific research that reflects the perspectives and lived experiences of principals operating in under-resourced settings amid a crisis.

This study sought to fill these gaps by providing an in-depth, case-based analysis of how primary school principals in Gauteng exercised pedagogical leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic. It shed light on their leadership styles, decision-making

processes, and strategies to support both teachers and learners. In doing so, it enriched both local and international literature on crisis leadership within education, offering practical insights for developing effective leadership practices and policies in similar situations. According to Pollock (2020:38), COVID-19 presented challenges to principals in "creating conditions for students to learn and teachers to teach, while at the same time seeking new ways to support online learning and the operations of public schooling through what they call 'extensive digital instructional leadership'.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT OF THE STUDY

The historical setting for this study is the pandemic's impact on school leadership. According to Urick, Carpenter and Eckert (2021:1), this generation of school administrators (principals) experienced several significant crises. These authors further state that over the past 20 years, principals have been asked to handle tragic situations such as school shootings, the devastation of natural disasters, and general upheaval brought on by societal unrest. However, they are expected to guide the towns and the schools in a way that does not mirror the said unrest.

Without a safety net, principals were on a precarious tightrope. This analogy held some truth because there were no precedents or manuals for managing schools during a pandemic available to principals at their worst. Harris and Jones (2020:244) state that school leaders (principals) who had to lead their schools at the height of the pandemic worked in demanding, chaotic conditions. They further state that these principals faced constant pressure and had fewer options due to the pandemic, instructions from superiors, and the environment in which they found themselves. This inevitably led them to have frequent sleepless nights as they tried to meet the demands of the Department and the community while being viewed as community leaders.

Jones and Harris (2020:244) assert that leaders (school leaders) ought to act swiftly and strategically in times of crisis. They further state that school leaders must be cognisant of the options, consequences, and unintended effects of actions taken. Nelson Mandela, one of South Africa's most significant leaders, once remarked, "Education is a weapon that we can use to change the world." Cohn-Vargas (2020:1) supports Mandela's viewpoints. In 2020, she claimed, "we saw children, particularly

children of colour, dealing with poverty, hunger, and mental health issues, lack of computers and Internet access, and consequent fears of falling behind."

Furthermore, the author states that due to "pandemic-driven remote schooling," teachers had to adapt. Schools were compelled to adopt distance education overnight, and enormous gaps became obvious. The virus exposed the pervasive injustices in "Paperless schools," a programme the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) wanted to pilot, led by the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) Mr Panyaza Lesufi, who was the Minister of Education in Gauteng in 2015.

Each Gauteng child participating in the pilot programme received a tablet for educational purposes. This pilot programme aimed to enhance student learning by giving them access to digital textbooks and practice tests. To "militate towards a truly non-racial and inclusive education system" was the goal of this project. By 2019, the plan was to roll out to all remaining schools, with a special emphasis on township schools. This was the plan, but by March 2020, most of the township schools, if not all, could not offer lessons online, in line with the government's anticipated plans for society and education.

In 2015, the Gauteng Department of Education withdrew 88,000 tablets from seven township schools due to an increase in burglaries. One then wonders if sanitation and infrastructure are equally crucial to maintaining a safe and healthy environment for teaching and learning. Some schools still lack working restrooms or running water, and classes are crowded because there are no classes to teach. According to Spaul (2020:1), providing technology to individual students is not the most economical way to enhance learning outcomes. A redesign of the South African education system is necessary to establish "one country-one education system and not two or three education systems where one has the private sector and two categories of the public sector - the haves and the have-nots." This may have been made clear by the virus, which could also have provided us with a starting point for improving education. How can we ensure that principals are adequately prepared to handle the difficulties posed by such pandemics and avoid jeopardising teaching and learning in the process?

According to Le Grange (2020:2), COVID-19 "revealed the core of South African society and its educational system." This author further states that this pandemic exposed the apparent disparities that are apartheid's legacy and the results of

neoliberal capitalism in the South African economy. The idea above is supported by Davids (2020:2), who claims that the imbalanced educational system was further exposed when South Africa went into lockdown during the pandemic and closed its schools. He claims that wealthy and middle-class public and private schools had relatively easy access to emergency remote learning.

This was made possible by the students' access to technology, connectivity, and parental and educational support. According to Davids (2020:2), most school students' access to online learning is still a pipe dream. As a result, the Covid-19 pandemic exposed the severity of digital dissent in the South African educational system.

According to Kwatubana and Molaodi (2021:110), during COVID-19, a lot was written about teacher well-being in South Africa (Mungroo, 2022), the digital transformation of education, and recommendations were made (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020; Mahaye, 2020). These researchers focused on the leadership philosophies that allow principals to assist teachers during those trying times. This sparked my interest in exploring the leadership styles principals used to manage and lead their schools during the pandemic. Le Grange (2020:5) emphasises that if the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is that communities in South Africa are deeply divided, divided by the type of education offered to learners.

He adds that redistribution and allocation ensure that school personnel, such as learners and teachers, are the primary concern in providing comprehensive care should a pandemic like this, or worse, reappear, and that we remain mindful of the concept of "Ubuntu-current." Le Grange (2020:5) describes this idea as a source of inspiration and motivation to break society's shackles from neoliberal capitalism and its adverse effects on education. Further, he states that society ought to strive to become one and recognise that our being and becoming depend on other people. The education sector needs to acknowledge that education can facilitate the necessary shift.

Prior to enrolling for a doctoral study, the researcher, employed in a Quintile 5 school holding a senior managerial position, engaged in discussions with other stakeholders in Quintiles 1-3 schools regarding the challenges brought by Covid-19 in their schools. This revealed that they were experiencing numerous challenges in ensuring that effective teaching and learning was taking place (Zuze, Mohohlwane & Hoadley,

2021:5). It emerged that due to the learners' lower-income household's status, parents often lacked the time, education, or resources to support them in their learning (Van der Berg, Patel & Bridgman, 2020:14). Not all of their learners had reliable access to the Internet or digital devices, compared to those in private schools (OECD, 2021:18). The discussions thus revealed that there is a challenge in disseminating and ensuring that effective teaching and learning was taking place in the height of Covid-19 pandemic.

A gap in the body of knowledge was identified that needs to be investigated and filled. The current knowledge gap regarding the appropriate leadership style for a pandemic needs to be examined closely, particularly the one that will support disadvantaged schools, leaders, and principals. This establishes the study's problem statement. To facilitate the type of leadership style to be used in times of a crisis/ pandemic, this research aimed to understand the lived experiences of four principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools about how they led their schools and ensured quality teaching and learning was taking place without putting the lives and safety of the learners and teachers at risk.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Hereunder are the study's research questions and sub-questions.

1.5.1 Main question

Hereunder is the study's main research question.

To what extent did the leadership styles of Gauteng Primary School Principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools influence the effectiveness of teaching and learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic?

1.5.2 Sub-questions

The following questions constituted the study's sub-questions:

- 1.5.2.1 What leadership styles did the Gauteng Primary school principals use during the Corona Virus-19 pandemic?
- 1.5.2.2 How did different leadership styles influence the effectiveness of teaching and learning during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic?
- 1.5.2.3 How was information pertaining learning and communication with parents disseminated in the school during the hard lockdown?
- 1.5.2.4 What type of assistance and guidance was given to principals to lead the school and all stakeholders involved during the pandemic?

1.6 AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to explore the leadership styles employed by principals in Gauteng schools from previously disadvantaged primary schools during the Corona Virus-19 pandemic.

1.7. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1.7.1. To identify and describe the leadership styles adopted by primary school principals in Gauteng during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.7.2. To explore the impact of different leadership styles on the effectiveness of teaching and learning during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.7.3. To examine the strategies and methods used by schools to disseminate learning-related information and maintain communication with parents during the hard lockdown.
- 1.7.4. To investigate the support, guidance, and resources provided to principals for leading schools and engaging stakeholders during the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.8. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Kivuja (2018:46), a theoretical framework is a collection of theories by experts in the field one plans to study, and it is used as a "theoretical coat hanger" for one's data analysis and interpretation. The author states that the theoretical framework is a foundation for the researcher to build upon. To understand what has been investigated and discover how they can contribute to that field and broaden the body of knowledge in the study area. According to Adam, Hussein, and Agyem (2018:438), the theoretical framework serves as the basis for a study. They also compare the theoretical framework to a road map or itinerary. Without a theoretical framework, a study lacks "accurate direction to the search of appropriate literature and scholarly discussions of the findings from the research," according to Imenda (2014:187). This supports Ankitoye's position that research and studies should have a purpose and a structure.

The use of leadership to support teaching and learning was examined and evaluated through the theoretical framework for pedagogical leadership. Pedagogical leadership is described by Male and Palaologou (2016:7) as an ethical approach that takes pride in respecting the values of all parties involved in an organisation. It avoids plans that benefit only the individual and instead focuses on the school community as a whole and the community in which the school is located. They say leadership evolves into a practice grounded in actions seen in various learning environments, blending theory and practice.

In this study, pedagogical leadership is used as a lens to examine how, and to what extent, the research subjects —principals in Gauteng —were prepared to handle the scale of the pandemic. What modifications to their leadership styles did the principals of primary schools need to make to ensure that their institutions fulfilled their fundamental obligations, namely teaching and learning, and how was that supported by the communities in which the schools are located? What kind of leadership approach was used to aid classroom teachers in putting curriculum into practice at the

height of the Covid-19 pandemic? Did the principals use situational, transactional, and instructional leadership?

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE/ RELEVANCE

Being in education myself and in senior management, I was not oblivious to the stress and pressure placed on principals to ensure that teaching and learning continued effectively during the hard lockdown. I am fortunate that I worked at a school where parents and learners have access to technology and the Internet.

I have acquaintances who work at schools where the hard lockdown exposed the inequalities in our education system and where learners and parents have no access to technology. I am intrigued by how they managed to teach and disseminate information to the parents and learners. I wanted to find out whether adequate support was provided to the principals based on their school type and context. I also wanted to ascertain if the observation by Prof Jansen, who said that only a small percentage of schools were able to make the most of online learning opportunities such as Google Classroom. In addition, Jansen posits that the learners in the township are significantly disadvantaged, are valid and how such implications have changed the leadership of principals and the way teaching and learning is conducted in schools.

1.10 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the literature on the leadership styles of primary school principals during the coronavirus-19 pandemic, both globally and in South Africa, excluding the Gauteng Province, where the study was conducted. Focus will be on discussing leadership styles that were used by primary school principals during Covid-19, the period when primary school principals used leadership styles during Covid-19, the way leadership styles were used by primary school principals during Covid-19, reasons why primary school principals used leadership styles during Covid-19, types of leadership styles, and characteristics of a good leader.

1.10.1. Leadership Styles That Were Used by Primary School Principals During Covid-19

Ramos-Pla, Tintoré and Del Arco (2021: 1) state that the impact of COVID-19 had a global influence at almost every level in society. They assert that in Spain, the government declared a State of Alarm, resulting in a lockdown that persisted for four months. They explain that during those four months, schools, universities, and all centres of learning remained closed, and teaching was conducted online. This resulted in a radical shift in the leadership styles principals used to lead their schools overnight, thereby altering the roles and responsibilities of their duties.

While Bishop, Craven, Galer, Wilson, and Duggins-Clay (2020:10) state that the principals had to find ways to ensure that students continued learning even when in-school teaching and learning were suspended, they did not elaborate on the methods used. They further assert that the principals were primarily responsible for ensuring the well-being of their staff and learners.

According to Nannyonjo, Fernando, Oomen, and Sampat (2020:3), school leadership affects all facets of education, including motivating teachers, shaping the circumstances and environment in which teaching and learning occur, and engaging with the community. Sampat et al. (2021:1) concur with the aforementioned viewpoints, claiming that principals were responsible for ensuring that schools were prepared to handle the uncertainties of the Covid-19 crisis.

According to Pedroso and Siason (2021:26), principals in the Philippines strengthened their responsibilities for instruction and administration during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. To manage the situation, they ensured that teaching and learning continued despite the resource shortages some of their schools experienced during the pandemic. They opined that the principals took personal and context-based actions.

Reyes-Guerra, Maslin-Ostrowski, Barakat and Stefanovic (2021:1) state that principals in the United States used shared leadership qualities to ensure effective teaching and learning in their schools. Such a leadership style requires principals to

be aware of their leadership style to communicate their qualities effectively to those around them. This includes being a personalised and practical communicator, leading with flexibility, creativity, and care, bending the rules and shifting priorities, and displaying resilience under stress.

McLeod and Dulsky (2021:1) state that most school leaders have insufficient or no training in crisis leadership, nor have they experienced a disaster of this magnitude, which has been a longstanding constraint. They further state that during a disaster, school leaders (Principals) are expected to employ effective communication, foster conducive teaching and learning conditions in the face of uncertainty, be flexible and adaptable, and be considerate of employees' emotional well-being and health. This can be achieved by delegating leadership duties to teachers and ensuring they, too, become part of mitigating the circumstances they face.

Green (2021:4) corroborates the above statement that principals had to adapt their priorities and leadership methodologies throughout the pandemic to navigate internal and external stimuli. She further states that their leadership style shifted from an operational leadership approach to a more relational approach. The dominant leadership style adopted by principals was relational leadership, as they recognised the importance of building relationships with those they were meant to lead. This type of leadership paves the way for transformational leadership to ensure effective teaching and learning.

Adangabe and Boateng (2022:20) state that principals gravitated towards a democratic and transformational leadership style to ensure improved academic performance among students and teachers under their care. They further state that the principals attest to allowing their immediate stakeholders (students and teachers) to express themselves and encourage them to go beyond their self-interest and embrace the school's established objectives. This ensured minimal interruptions in teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Kwantubana and Moloadi (2021:106) state that in times of disaster, people look to their leaders and anticipate that they will mitigate the effects of the crisis. They further state that school leadership in times of disaster differs from the leadership required under normal circumstances. They advocate for teacher well-being, noting that being empathetic to the factors influencing it during the COVID-19 crisis determined the

leadership styles required to support teachers. They also emphasise that poor well-being can have grave consequences for the teaching profession if not addressed.

De Klerk and Smith (2021:56) concur with the views above, stating that teacher leaders (principals) working in these circumstances (the Covid-19 pandemic) would need a radical shift in how they execute their teaching and leadership practices. The “circumstance” of the Covid-19 pandemic created a perfect opportunity for schools to empower teachers through teacher leadership and to seize opportunities to step up and lead. This implies that principals must be aware of their own well-being and those of learners and colleagues, and that they must delegate and share leadership duties in the school. In other words, transactional and transformational leadership styles are employed.

According to Grint (2020: 4), leadership is more crucial than management in times of crisis. He explains that leadership focuses on solving complex problems with unfamiliar or complex solutions, encouraging cooperative efforts, and advocating collaboration. Grint (2020: 4) further states that leaders do not lead consistently in hard times as they do in ordinary settings or environments. He believes that a leader places much greater emphasis on people's current emotional state during a crisis, enabling them to communicate their leadership style and vision with greater flexibility and clarity.

1.10.2. The Period When Leadership Styles Were Used By Primary School Principals During Covid-19

D'Auria and De Smet (2020:2) assert that what leaders need during a disaster is not a ready-made strategy but behaviours and mindsets that will stop them from exaggerating yesterday's developments and help them look ahead. Sherman (2021:2) attests to the views above. She states that leading through a disaster can result in either success or a modification met with resistance.

McLeod and Dulskey (2021:1) state that many schools struggled to respond quickly and effectively due to the rapid spread of the Covid-19 pandemic worldwide. They further state that, unlike any other disaster before, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the

shortcomings of our educational systems and the lack of preparedness among administrators for crisis leadership.

According to Du Plessis and Keyter (2020:31), factors that can impact a crisis, such as COVID-19, include leadership style and the methods leaders use to address it. They further state that a suitable leadership style, combining elements from different leadership styles, can be pooled together to manage a crisis such as COVID-19.

Dusabe (2020:1) states that schools in Rwanda were closed since March 2020 when the first COVID-19 case was confirmed. She further states that the Ministry assembled education patrons to take leadership roles in this development. Headteachers (principals), teachers, and parents reconsidered school infrastructure to support social distancing measures. This author classifies it as shared leadership at the school level, extending to school improvement planning.

Pollock (2020:38) states that the Covid-19 pandemic changed the nature of school principals' work. She further states that nowadays, principals are required to be incomparable managers and outstanding leaders, given the exponential pace of change.

According to O'Connell and Clarke (2020:2), schools are not only considered critical places for knowledge acquisition and general education, but also a fundamental aspect of the contemporary world. They further state that the education system was key to upholding safety protocols and providing care for learners and their families during the pandemic. They also believe that, given the limited standardised operational protocols for managing schools during a pandemic, principals were obligated to be innovative and direct their schools' activities with or without assistance from those tasked with guiding them.

Fernandez and Shaw (2020:5) believe that the Covid-19 pandemic was a blessing in disguise for the educational sphere, as it redesigned educational activities. This process accentuated more supple and distributed leadership characteristics grounded in unanimous agreements, encouraging both independent and cooperative resilience for the institution to thrive during the pandemic.

Thus, Sikwatubana and Molaodi (2021:106) state that in an era of disasters, society looks up to its leaders and assumes they will minimise the effects of the disaster at

hand. The Covid-19 pandemic presented challenges for principals and school management personnel in leading their schools during the disaster. Such leadership styles mentioned above applied to them.

1.10.3. The Way Leadership Styles Were Used by Primary School Principals During Covid-19

According to Mazurkiewicz (2021:1), it is necessary to stop rationalising leadership as a set of abilities and traits of a single entity and instead think of it as a collection of circumstances and the act of enabling others to accomplish their goals. The views put forth by Urick, Carpenter, and Eckett (2021:1) are hypothesised. They claim that this group of principals has had to deal with several notable crises, including school shootings, hurricane devastation, and the Covid-19 pandemic. To successfully lead their institutions during this period, this cohort of leaders had to put crisis management, leadership in turbulent times, and self-care into practice.

According to Ramrathan (2020:5), numerous responses by principals and teachers (in school, college, and higher education) were made in response to this growing concern to preserve the academic year because of the closure of educational campuses such as schools, colleges, and universities, and the realisation that time to cover the curriculum was lost. Professor Jansen (2020:1) wrote an article for MyBroadband in which he states that, due to Covid-19 and the challenges faced by South Africa's education system, which is marked by inequality stemming from Apartheid, the school year should be scrapped and all learners should be promoted to the next grade. He stated that 80% of the country's learners lack the necessary resources for online teaching and learning, while 20% of schools continue to offer online learning. The gap between the haves and have-nots widened, disadvantaging those who lack resources.

Prof. Jansen (2020:1) further explains that the curriculum model used in South Africa, known as the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), is jam-packed and does not allow for any loss of time caused by schools closing during the national lockdown. He believed this would put pressure on teachers and learners to cover the syllabus, resulting in concepts not being fully explained and taught. This, in turn, would further disadvantage learners who really needed thorough teaching and explanation.

His solution was to pass/promote all learners in Grades 1-11, allowing them to adjust back to the schooling environment without the teaching and learning being imposed on them, and to ensure that teachers teach the concepts in detail and thoroughly.

Dr Spaul (2020:1) is quoted by Maharaj (2021:2), where he states that the disruptions in the education system caused by the Covid-19 pandemic since April 2020 have resulted in learners losing about 20 months of education. He further explains that the 20 months mentioned were not due to declining educational standards, but because schools were shut and children were not attending school, so they had not been taught.

According to Spaul (2020:1), home schooling for the majority of South African children is a dream because of the socio-economic factors, in that they find themselves being born into, i.e., no money, no Internet access, parents are illiterate, and at school, this is where the learners get their only meal for the day. He further adds that the DBE lacks credible funding catch-up plans to remediate the 20 months learners have missed, leading him to advocate for schools to remain open amid the Level 3 lockdown.

1.10.4. The Reasons Why Leadership Styles Were Used by Primary School Principals During Covid-19

Harris and Jones (2020:2) claim that school leaders were forced to be the system's weakest link. They add that concerning COVID-19 responses, processes, procedures, and protocols, the principals drew on higher-level directives (District officials, DBE, Government, and more). The "fluid and changing staffing situations" school administrators had to deal with right away forced them to work much harder with fewer resources, or risk having their circumstances change at any time. According to Bubb and Jones, the principals were tasked with managing a crisis outside their roles (2020:1).

Ramos-Pla, Tintoré and Del Arco (2021:5) state that COVID-19 brought about different experiences of leadership among principals due to the lengthy period during which schools were closed. They further state that the crisis led to the development of a

situational management style, which required them to take on a variety of managerial responsibilities beyond honest communication, distributed leadership, and knowledge acquisition from uncertain situations, and to make decisions in ambiguous situations.

Shula (2023:162) states that during Covid-19, principals who used servant leadership strategies succeeded in motivating their teachers to devote themselves to their teaching profession and quality education. He further states that the strategies they used —such as listening to teachers' needs, providing support and guidance, fostering teamwork and collaboration, and showing appreciation and recognition —motivated teachers.

According to Bush (2021:1), the chaos caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which South African leaders had to deal with, can be described as a "perfect storm." He goes on to say that this pandemic put principals and other senior staff members to the test, severely testing their crisis management skills. According to Pollock (2020:38), principals focused on a "two-pronged approach" to manage public schools during the pandemic. She explains that they expanded their roles to include (a) safe schooling and creating the environment for future learning and (b) digital instructional leadership simultaneously. Unfortunately, not all schools had the systems to use digital stems, preventing principals from continuing to guide their staff, students, and the community during the pandemic.

1.10.5 Types of Leadership Styles

A leadership style is not gender-based but can be determined by the context in which the principal and the school find themselves. A principal needs to know which type of leadership is suitable for them to realise their vision for the school and be flexible enough to shift from one form of leadership to another, depending on the situation and context.

Van Deventer and Kruger (2012:6) redefine the prevalent leadership types used by principals in education. Hereunder are some of the examples:

- The laissez-faire leadership style;
- The autocratic leadership style;

- The democratic leadership style;
- Situational leadership style;
- Transactional leadership style, and
- Instructional leadership style.

The literature review chapter of the research report will describe each leadership style in detail.

1.10.6 Characteristics of a Good Leader

Van Deventer and Kruger (2012:6) define an effective leader as "someone who demonstrates the following abilities: create a horizontal and vertical two-way communication channel which everyone is aware of, delegate duties, tasks, responsibilities and authority to subordinates with a view to their development, motivate staff and learners...". They further state that the role of a successful and effective education leader is to activate, direct, guide, mentor, educate, and support all staff involved, ensuring they focus on a shared vision, strategy, and set of intended aims. More descriptions of the characteristics of a good leader will be provided in the research write-up.

Kapur (2020:1) defines the characteristics of effective leadership as follows

- Honesty,
- integrity,
- confidence,
- skills and abilities,
- commitment and passion,
- accountability,
- delegation and empowerment,
- creativity and innovation,
- empathy,
- resilience,
- emotional intelligence,

- humility,
- transparency,
- vision and purpose,
- teamwork,
- and instructional strategies.

He further explains that to truly understand the characteristics of effective leadership, one needs to identify a leader's manner and attributes. He states that, as an observer, you need to consider the inherent characteristics. These can be described as their Heenergy level, physical stamina, and stress tolerance.

1.11 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.11.1 Research Paradigm

According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017:26), a research paradigm is a term frequently used by educational researchers to describe their "worldview." According to their explanation (2017:26), this "worldview" can be considered a perspective, a way of thinking, a school of thought, or a collection of beliefs that illuminate the interpretation or significance of research data. They go on to say that a paradigm is a way of describing a worldview informed by philosophical assumptions about the nature of social reality. It describes non-concrete beliefs and principles that define the lens through which a researcher views the world. Khatri (2020:1435) further establishes the research paradigm as the theoretical or philosophical context for the research work. It is also called a worldview.

For this study, the interpretivism paradigm was utilised. Pham (2018:3) quotes Hammersley (2013:26), who defines the interpretivist paradigm as a paradigm grounded in the actuality of approaches used to understand knowledge associated with human and social sciences, as this cannot be the same as its practice in physical sciences because humans interpret their world and then act based on such interpretation, while the world does not. The author further states that a single

phenomenon may have numerous interpretations, rather than a single truth that a measurement process can verify.

The motivation for using this paradigm in the study is that it allowed me to subjectively examine the principals' experiences in implementing and managing leadership during the pandemic. I examined how their knowledge of leadership and the pandemic shaped their leadership styles to ensure effective guidance, leadership, and support for those who entrusted them to lead.

1.11.2 Research design

Boru (2018:2) quotes Creswell and Plano Clark (2007:58), who define a research design as the procedures for collecting, analysing, interpreting, and reporting data in research studies. In comparison, Sileyew (2019:2) states that a research design is envisioned to provide an appropriate framework for a study. He further states that a crucial decision in the research design process is choosing the research approach, as it determines how relevant information for a study will be obtained. However, the research design process involves many interrelated decisions that must be considered when making this choice.

Kunene (2020:13), quoting Durrheim (2004:29), defines a research design as an intentional outline for action that links research questions to the implementation of the research strategy. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:315) assert that qualitative research first involves accepting social phenomena from participants' perspectives.

Considering the study's primary research question, a qualitative exploratory approach was best. Conrad and Serlin (2011:148) define qualitative research as the process of discovering and comprehending participants' experiences, viewpoints, and ideas. May (2016:34) quotes them in support of their definition. An approach described as exploratory is utilised when there is insufficient information available about a phenomenon or a problem that has not yet been clearly defined (Boru, 2018:3, citing Saunders et al. (2007:3).

For this study, an exploratory qualitative research design was applied. This allowed the researcher some flexibility to explore further the study, which focused on the lived

experiences of principals during the pandemic. It also allowed the researcher to be flexible and adjust the questions during interviews to suit the individual and the situation being researched.

1.11.3 Research Methodology

Kunene (2020:9) defines research methodology as a structured approach to conducting research. He further states that research methodology provides a clear plan or set of rules that guide how a study should be carried out. It also includes the beliefs and ideas that shape how research is conducted.

Sreekumar (2023:1) describes the research methodology as the procedures and actions used to recognise and investigate data on a particular research topic. She further states that researchers conduct their studies in ways that allow them to realise their objectives using the preferred research instruments.

Whereas Bouchrika (2025:1) defines research methodology as the organised process used to explain a research problem by collecting information using several techniques, interpreting the collected information, and formulating conclusions from the research data.

As part of this study, interviews with principals of both sexes were conducted to better understand the challenges they faced in executing their leadership responsibilities and ensuring effective teaching and learning in their respective schools. Because perceptions cannot be measured, it was crucial to understand them. Since interviews can easily explore the sub-questions and provide answers to the study's central question, they were utilised to gather data. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2004:2) emphasise that participants in qualitative interviews can anticipate how they will define the world, which aligns with Netshitangani and Msila's (2014:261) analysis.

1.11.4 Selection of Population and Sampling

This subdivision gives a brief description of population and site selection, as well as sampling. Additionally, Chapter 4 explains this further.

1.11.4.1 Population

The study population is referred to as the "population of interest" by Majid (2018:3). Majid (2018:3) claims this group can be considered the study's intended subject population. According to Satishprakash (2020:1), the population refers to the set or group of all units on which the results of the research are to be applied. He further maintains that the population can be distinctly explained in the statement of the problem and the research title. Furthermore, he states that the study's objectives clarify the population, which is the group to which the research's findings can be applied or generalised.

Ahmad, Alias and Razak (2023:1) explain that population refers to the whole group or phenomenon being studied. They maintain that understanding the essence of the study's population allows the researcher to accurately define the interest group and highlight the importance of the study's conclusions. Furthermore, Willie (2024:1) defines the population of a study as the individuals with unpredictable characteristics under study and for whom research results can be generalised. He further explains that this can only be applicable to that specific population.

The study's population consisted of four principals from previously disadvantaged schools. Gender was a non-factor in understanding the study's main question. The researcher sought to determine how the pandemic affected principals' leadership styles and how information on management and effective teaching and learning was disseminated to teachers, parents, and learners. The population for this study comprised four primary school principals in Ekurhuleni North, Gauteng.

1.11.4.2 Sampling

According to Majid (2018:3), selecting a statistically representative sample of people from the target population is known as sampling in research. The researcher says sampling is essential for research studies because the population of interest typically includes many participants in any research project. According to Etikan and Balu (2017:215), judgemental or purposive sampling is a sampling strategy based on the researcher's assessment of who will provide the accurate information needed to meet

the study's objectives. They say that to gather the necessary information and find people willing to share it, the researcher will need to concentrate on those who share their viewpoints.

Bhardwaj (2019:158) defines sampling as a technique used to select a sample from individuals or a large population for a specific research target. She further states that sampling is used to manage time and reduce the number of populations studied. Furthermore, Verma, Gautam, Pandey, Mishra and Shukla (2019:1) define sampling as an act, method, or procedure of choosing a fitting sample, or a representative part of a population, for the purpose of deciding on bounds or characteristics of the whole population.

Moreover, Campbell, Greenwood, Prior, Shearer, Walkem, Young, Bywaters, and Walker (2020:652) state that purposive sampling is preferred because it allows for better matching of the sample to the research's aim and questions. They further state that it enhances the study's accuracy and the reliability of the data and results.

Purposive sampling was chosen as the data-gathering technique for the study. Stratton (2024:1) defines purposive sampling as a method in which a researcher chooses the research participants based on their presence in a population of interest, characteristics, experiences, or other criteria. Stratton (2024:2) further states that this sampling technique is beneficial to the researcher, as it requires fewer resources and less time than most traditional research methods.

Therefore, based on the above recommendations, the researcher chose purposive sampling to select participants. The criteria used to determine the purposive sampling method were:

- They needed to be principals at a primary school.
- The school needed to be situated in a previously disadvantaged area. Mainly Quintiles 1-3 schools.
- The community and area where the school was situated; No suburban areas; Only townships or rural schools were considered.
- Where access to the Internet or technology was limited.
- The schools ought to have suffered in the past (Quintiles 1–3).

The Ekurhuleni North District in the Gauteng province, located east of Johannesburg, was sampled for this study. This is because the area was easily accessible to the researcher, while some schools, such as those in townships or other formerly underprivileged areas, lacked the services and infrastructure needed to continue instruction and learning during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.11.5 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection is the process of gathering and analysing information on variables of interest (Kabir, 2016:202). This author further states that this method is conducted in a respectable, systematic manner, enabling one to respond to stated research questions, test hypotheses, and assess results. In contrast, Paradis, O'Brien, Nimmon, Bandiera and Martimianakis (2016:2) assert that the research question depends on the data-collection methods. They say this is because the researcher's methodology and analytical approach determine how the information is used and what elucidations it can produce.

According to Parveen and Showkat (2017:3), the two main types of data collection are primary and secondary. To ensure the question is posed, various methods can be used under these two main categories to gather and measure data on different or similar variables.

Kabir (2016:204) states that primary data is information from first-hand experience. He adds that these data are more trustworthy, authentic, and objective because they had not yet been printed. The validity of the data is higher than that of secondary data because it is not modified or altered by humans. According to Parveen and Showkat (2017:3), the only reliable data available to the general public are primary data, as there are no previous records. The following techniques could be used to obtain primary data:

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Focus groups

- Observations

According to Parveen and Showkat, secondary data is information gathered by a third party and is now accessible to the general public (2016: 4). Furthermore, they claim that when primary data from one research study are used again for another, they become secondary data. According to Kabir (2017:205), using secondary data has value because, on occasion, obtaining primary data can be challenging. In these circumstances, obtaining information from secondary sources is more straightforward and more practical. However, he warns against using this kind of data, noting that the researcher may have altered them to suit their needs. Types of sources that can be regarded as secondary data collection methods include: -

- Books,
- Records,
- Biographies,
- Newspapers,
- Published censuses or other statistical data,
- Data archives,
- Internet articles,
- Research articles by other researchers (journals),
- Databases, and others.

Based on the above secondary data collection methods, this study utilised document analysis, interviews, and observation of respondents. Kunene (2020:13) quotes De Vos (1998:358), who infers that, when working from a qualitative perspective, the researcher seeks a first-hand, complete understanding of a phenomenon, and that data collection are moulded as the investigation proceeds.

1.11.6 Data Analysis and Interpretation

According to Parveen and Showkat (2016: 4), secondary data is information gathered by a third party and is now accessible to the general public. Furthermore, they claim that when primary data from one research study is used again for another, it becomes secondary data. According to Kabir (2017:205), using secondary data has value because, on occasion, obtaining primary data can be challenging. In these circumstances, obtaining information from secondary sources is more straightforward and more practical. However, he warns against using this kind of data, noting that the researcher may have altered them to suit their needs.

The researcher utilised interviews, and notes were created from their transcripts. The notes from my observation were also used to inform further analysis and to provide a contextual understanding of the interviewees' answers. Parveen and Showkat (2017:4) define interviews as a technique for recording and analysing people's opinions, experiences, beliefs, and ideas on relevant topics. They further state that interviews can be structured or semi-structured. Structured interviews limit the researcher's ability to explore the subject/context of the answers, while semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to delve deeper into the answers and adapt questions to the context of the studied situation.

Based on the notes generated from the transcripts, the researcher was tasked with analysing the transcripts and minutes to decode more important facts and answer the questions posed by the proposed study's "thematic analysis". Thematic analysis is defined as a process that entails searching across a data set to identify, analyse, and report repeated patterns, states Braun and Clarke (2006:2), quoted by Kiger and Varpio (2020:4). Alhojailan (2012:40) describes thematic analysis as a process that a researcher uses to seek to discover answers to a phenomenon, using interpretations. Thematic analysis aims to ascertain the relationships between concepts and compare them with the replicated data.

The researcher coded and categorised more critical information gathered from the interviews to generate themes, as per Kiger and Varpio (2020:4), that emerged from the interview notes and observations. Coding symbols were utilised to retrieve and

organise similar ideas into categories. The identified categories were further grouped into themes concerning the study's research question.

Ngulube (2015:10) quotes Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007:2), who state that qualitative data analysis is one of the most significant phases in qualitative research because it helps the researcher make sense of their qualitative data. He further states that qualitative data is mainly gathered and composed from relatively few sources, but the amount of data generated tends to be extensive.

Lacey and Luff (2009:6) state that there is no proper technique for analysing qualitative data, as several approaches are available. Moreover, Kiger and Varpio (2020:1) quote Thorne (2000:5), where he states that data analysis has been labelled as 'the most complex and mysterious of all of the phases of a qualitative project, and the one that receives the least thoughtful discussion in the literature'. These authors further state that many qualitative research papers lack a clear narration of the methods used in data analysis. When these methods are included, the terms used to describe them are often used sloppily or are entirely mislabelled (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003:10; Sandelowski, 2010: 79).

For this study, the researcher utilised interviews, and the notes were transcribed from them. The notes from my observation were also used to inform further analysis and to provide a contextual understanding of the interviewees' answers. Parveen and Showkat (2017:4) define interviews as a technique for recording and analysing people's opinions, experiences, beliefs, and ideas on relevant topics. They further state that interviews can be structured or semi-structured. Structured interviews limit the researcher's ability to explore the subject/context of the answers, while semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to delve deeper into the answers and adapt questions to the context of the studied situation.

Based on the notes generated from the transcripts, the researcher was tasked with analysing the transcripts and the minutes to identify key facts and support the questions posed by the proposed study's "thematic analysis." According to Kiger and Varpio (2020:4), the researcher ought to code and organise additional pertinent information from the interviews to produce themes in the interview notes and observations. Coding symbols are applied to find and classify related ideas. In

accordance with the study's research question, the categories were further divided into themes.

1.11.7. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This section describes the limitations and delimitations of the study. They are defined first and then contextualised for the study.

1.11.7.1 Limitations of the Study

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018:156) and Miles (2019:2) define study limitations as potential flaws or restrictions that are typically beyond the researcher's control. They claim that these restrictions are directly related to the chosen research design, the limitations of the statistical models, the limitations of the funding, and other factors.

Furthermore, Ross and Bibler Zaidi (2019:216) believe that the study's limitations indicate flaws in the research design that may sway the outcomes and conclusions.

Below are the limitations of this study:

1. Historical perspective of COVID-19 information:

Kim and Asbury (2020: 1073) identify historical viewpoint as one of the limitations. They explain that as the study investigates educational leadership after the Covid-19 pandemic, it relies heavily on participants' recollections of past experiences, which may be subject to retrospective bias or selective memory. They further state that participants may unconsciously reconstruct events to appear more positive or coherent, potentially distorting their actual leadership experiences during the pandemic.

2. Context-specific conclusions:

The research was conducted within a specific educational context, specifically in primary schools in Gauteng, in the Ekurhuleni North District, East of Johannesburg. This limits the transferability of the findings to other educational settings, such as different provinces, districts, or schools, including combined/secondary schools. Vandeyar (2022:955) affirms that COVID-19 affected schools differently, and the leadership styles used by principals were shaped by the context in which the school found itself, the available resources, the infrastructure, and the institutional culture of the schools. Hence, the findings of this study may not be generalisable to all schools in South Africa or globally.

3. Shifting Landscape in the Post-Covid Era:

The study takes place amid ongoing changes in education systems, with schools continuing to adjust to transformations following the pandemic. Dahir, Ismail and Mohamed (2023: 217) believe that this situation may sometimes be a cause for concern, as some principals and other stakeholders might struggle to differentiate between leadership practices that are permanent adaptations and those that are short-term reactions to recovery policies. The researcher is cognisant that this shifting context could affect the long-term reliability of the study's findings.

1.11.7.2 Delimitations of the Study

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018:156) define delimitations as the limitations deliberately set by the researchers. They state that such delimitations are aspects of the study that the researchers decided to establish as restrictions or limits to ensure the study's aim and objectives remain achievable. Whereas Miles (2019:7) defines delimitations as primarily concerned with the scope of the study. He further states that a fascinating aspect of delimitations is that they infer limitations on the populations to which the study results can be generalised.

Bhosale (2024:1) understands delimitation as the specific qualities of the research project that the study will focus on. She further states that delimitation establishes parameters within which the study can be conducted, and these parameters are usually determined early in the research process to guide the rest of the project.

Below are the delimitations for this study:

1. The study focused solely on four schools categorised as Quintiles 1–3 in one South African province and district, which is part of a district with 38 schools in the same Quintile range.
2. These schools were chosen because they represent the segments of the public schooling system with the least resources. Therefore, the findings are not meant to be generalised to better-resourced Quintiles 4 or 5 schools, nor to independent institutions.
3. The study was limited to school principals and members of the School Management Teams (SMTs), excluding teachers, learners, district officials, and parents. This focus allowed for a specific in-depth examination of leadership experiences at the school level.

1.12 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

This section discusses the extent to which the study is reliable and trustworthy.

1.12.1 Reliability

According to Cypress (2017: 256), reliability is a research component that relies on stability and caution in the application of research practices. According to Cypress (2017: 256), such aspects are evident in the prominence of the research methodologies, analyses, and conclusions, which are presented in an honest account mindful of the research's limitations and preconceptions. Thakur and Chetty (2020: 3) note that for a qualitative study to be reliable, the researcher ought to show that both the process and the results can be repeated. The reason for this is that human

behaviour is never constant. To confirm the study's accuracy and dispel any doubts about the results, some researchers have replicated the findings in the past.

Whereas Nicolas (2023:1) defines reliability as the uniformity of the instrument used. He further states that if the collected data yield identical results when tested using different methods and sample groups, the information is reliable.

Analytical research was used during interviews to ensure data consistency and improve their reliability. The researcher must follow ethical standards when conducting interviews, with procedures in place to protect the participants. Code names were utilised to accomplish this, and participants received assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Before the results could be analysed, the transcripts were made available to the participants to ensure credibility and transparency. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time, and there were no risks to them.

The working definition of reliability for the study is the use of the sameness technique to gather data from all principals, aiming to ascertain their leadership style during Covid-19 to ensure effective teaching and learning in their schools.

1.12.2 Credibility

According to Kiger and Varpio (2020: 4) claim that finding consistency in a qualitative study is highly subjective because it depends on the individual's assessment of the phenomenon under investigation. They further add that one may need to use the triangulation technique to assess consistency in qualitative research by employing a variety of data sources or field methods to identify patterns repeatedly.

Whereas Team Zorgle (2023:1) asserts that credibility is determined by demonstrating that the study's findings align with the gathered information and participants' experiences. Furthermore, McLeod (2024: 1) defines credibility as the certainty that can be identified as the truth and precision of research findings. He further states that it ensures that the research results are credible, dependable, and accurately mirror the views and experiences of the contributors to the research study.

The working definition for the study's credibility is the assertion of the dependability of the information gathered, along with the lived experiences of the four principals, regarding the utilisation of the leadership style used during Covid-19 to ensure effective teaching and learning in their schools.

1.12.3 Dependability

According to Janas (2022:1), dependability is the thoroughness and reliability in criteria in qualitative research. Janas (2022:1) asserts that dependability can also be identified as consistency. In contrast, McLeod (2024:1) defines dependability in a qualitative study as the solidity and reliability of the research outcomes over time. He further states that dependability ensures what he calls “trackable variability”. He explains this as the variable that remains constant even when things change, ensuring that the study's outcomes can be traced back to its “identifiable sources,” making the research development both transparent and credible.

Furthermore, Ahmed (2024:2) states that dependability refers to the consistent and stable nature of research outcomes over time. He further states that to verify the reliability of a research study, the researchers ought to thoroughly document their approaches, methods for data collection, and techniques for analysing the gathered data.

Peer debriefing or peer scrutiny is an effective communication practice that builds trust in a relationship. To ensure participants fully understand the study's central question and their role in completing it, the researcher must set aside time to meet with them, explain the study's main findings, and invite their questions.

The working definition for the study regarding dependability is to ensure that the findings are believable and that other researchers can replicate them if another pandemic occurs, or to compare the findings by tracking the variability being studied.

1.12.4 Transferability

Drisko (2024:1) defines transferability as the process of extracting data from certain individuals, settings, and times and applying it to others who have not been directly studied. Furthermore, Ramos (2024:1) states that transferability implies that, in qualitative research, the outcomes of a study can be applied or adapted to other contexts, settings, or populations beyond the initial study sample. He further states that transferability in a study is important because it allows the reader to evaluate how the outcomes apply to their own contexts.

Likewise, Stalmeijer, Brown and O'Brien state that the concept of transferability as a characteristic of a qualitative study requires the researcher to present the study in a way that evokes a sense of familiarity or shared experience with the reader. This, in turn, will allow the reader to utilise the study's findings in other contexts, settings, or with different respondents.

This aspect of the qualitative design approach is challenging. This is because of the nature of the study, which cannot be repeated. However, qualitative researchers maintain that arrangements and explanations from one context may apply to another. In their words, transferability is possible only when a thick description provides a rich enough portrayal of the circumstances for application to others' situations, and usually at the behest of local constituents.

The working definition of the study's transferability is the ability to apply the research findings to other contexts and to respondents who were not part of the study sample.

1.12.5 Confirmability

According to Megheirkouni and Moir (2023:849), confirmability in research is used to determine whether the research information and its interpretations are fabrications of the researcher's ingenuity or whether they are entirely consistent with the respondents' statements.

McLeod (2024:1) states that confirmability in research refers to the extent to which the study's outcomes are justified by the data collected. He further states that this is to ensure that the outcomes are not merely the result of the researcher's own unfairness or inclinations. At the same time, Ahmed (2024:2) affirms that confirmability relates to the independence and fairness of the study's outcomes. He further states that confirmability ensures the study's outcomes remain unchanged by the researcher's prejudices or biases.

Confirmability is considered the most accurate representation of the topic under study. This means that qualitative researchers must immerse themselves in the lived realities of the subjects being studied to thoroughly understand their daily struggles and gain a sense of what they experience. Only then will they be able to comprehend the subjects and their decisions.

The researcher will address all four factors in this study to ensure its relevance for years to come, provide new knowledge, and expand the body of knowledge in leadership and management in South African schools during the pandemic.

The working definition for the study, regarding confirmability, is to ensure that the data collected have been interpreted correctly and that the findings are supported by the data and not influenced by the researcher's own biases.

1.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Unisa endorses ethical clearance when conducting a study. This ensures that the study adheres to Unisa's principles. Unisa has principles that participants need to adhere to. The four basic moral principles link to the four internationally recognised moral principles of ethics as bases for research, which are:

- Autonomy: Research should promote research participants' independence, rights, and dignity.
- Beneficence: Research should constructively contribute to the well-being of people and the field of study.

- Non-maleficence: Research should not cause harm to the research participant(s) in particular or people in general.
- Justice: The benefits and risks of research should be fairly distributed among people.

Confidentiality was paramount due to the nature of the study. To ensure and promote the confidentiality of all participants, their anonymity was protected by ensuring that the interview questions did not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, or background. The interview did not ask participants to disclose their names or schools. The names of the participants and the school were not be used in the research report to ensure their anonymity. I ensured that sensitive information provided by the participants is not portrayed in a way that could easily lead to their identification in the study.

Should any risk to the study or the participants occur, I will immediately report the incident in writing to the CEDU Ethics Committee and my supervisor, Prof. L.D.M. Lebeloane, for his attention and guidance.

1.14 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

This section outlines the key terms used throughout the study. The key terms are defined, and a definition for the study is crafted. The terms that will be defined are exploration, leadership, principal, pandemic, leadership style, Socio-Economic Status, case study, and coronavirus.

1.14.1 Exploring

The Cambridge dictionary defines the word explore as to think about, talk about, or study something, or to experience it, in order to find out more about it. While the Oxford Dictionary defines "explore" as a word normally used in research/ study. They explain that the word "explore" means to search or examine with continued care. They continue elaborating, stating that this word is used to describe the process of seeking something or pursuing someone.

Stebbins (2011: 4) defines exploration as not a substitute for qualitative research but a much bigger plan subject to many different definitions. He further states that exploration highlights the development of theory from data, whereas the second highlights methodology and the tangible data collection by which this development is accomplished. Whereas the SMS study (2016: 1) explained that an exploratory research design is conducted for a research problem when the researcher has no historical data or only a few studies for reference.

Furthermore, Hassan (2024:1) states that exploratory research is a method used to probe a research problem that is not evidently characterised. He states that exploratory research aims to gain understanding, identify patterns, and establish a foundational knowledge of a topic.

For this research, the term "explore" was used to examine the challenges principals face in understanding the envisioned case study.

1.14.2 Leadership

The concept of leadership is broad and is defined by its context. For this study, leadership will be defined in the context of education. According to Uleanya and Naicker (2024: 223), it is defined as the ability of an individual or group to exercise authority, guide, and govern other individuals within a particular setting through policies. Whereas Peng, Wang, Xu, Dai and Yu (2024: 1) state that educational leadership theory is an animated and complex subject that developed from enterprise leadership viewpoints. They further explain that this enterprise leadership viewpoint necessitated the affiliation with the practical aspects of educational management.

Furthermore, Liden, Wang and Wang (2025:2) define leadership as a social power to sway people. They further state that this is a method used by leaders (principals) to inspire and enable their followers (teachers) to contribute toward achieving collective goals.

For this study, leadership is defined as the process principals use in a school to lead a group of teachers to achieve a goal.

1.14.3 Principal

The South African School's Act 86 of 1996 (1996: 4) defines the term principal as an educator appointed or acting as the head of a school. The Norms and Standards for Educators, published under Government Notice No. 82 in the Government Gazette No. 20844 of 4 February 2000 defines the term principal as a role given to a leader of an institution who has the obligation of leading and managing a school and is answerable to the employer (Provincial Head of Department) and, through the SGB, to the school community. The Gazette also states that a principal is responsible for leading, managing and evaluating the curriculum. By doing this, the quality of teaching and learning will be guaranteed.

Williamson (2011: 1) defines the principal as the school's leader and sets the tone for the school's climate and culture of teaching and learning. "Principals are the ones who pastor the well-being of staff and students, as well as seeing that effective teaching and learning are accomplished in the school", says Johnson (2008), as quoted by Elisha (2012: 15).

For this study, a principal is defined as a person who serves as a curriculum leader and creates an environment conducive to teaching and learning, regardless of the socio-economic factors surrounding their school community.

1.14.4 Pandemic

The Oxford dictionary defines a pandemic as the widespread occurrence of an infectious disease across a whole country or the world at a particular time. Shereen Khan, Kazmi, Bashir and Siddique (2020: 91) state that coronavirus disease 19 (COVID-19) is a highly communicable and pathogenic viral infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). They further state that Covid-19 caused global contagion, resulting in a dramatic loss of human life worldwide.

Not only did Covid-19 affect the health system, but it also disrupted schooling worldwide. This is corroborated by Tan, Jang, Lam, Qi An and Venus Lo (2024: 3),

who affirm that COVID-19 had consequences in many fields, including education. They further state that, for principals to manage the crisis, they needed to offer “crisis care” to teachers, administrative staff, and learners. Additionally, the principals had to modify their leadership roles and responsibilities to include interested parties without formal leadership positions. Covid-19 is regarded as a pandemic due to its widespread prevalence across the country and the way everything changed or came to a standstill. For this study, Covid-19 is considered a pandemic, and it is important to understand how it has permanently changed the face of education.

1.14.5 Leadership Styles

The concept of leadership style is broad and is defined by its context. For this study, leadership style will be described in the context of education. Dimitrijevic (2023: 201) explains leadership in education as a groundbreaking and thought-provoking pedagogical phenomenon that offers the best means of recognising educational goals and school achievements. He further states that this realisation can be achieved by leading a dynamic team of teachers who are willing to teach, develop educational strategies, and encourage the desired behaviours and activities.

Whereas Ogunode Ojochnemi and Ayoko (2023:2) state that leadership involves motivating juniors to carry out specific functions to achieve organisational objectives. They further state that this approach becomes the key to institutional growth and development.

Furthermore, Agyeman and Aphane (2024: 2) quote Beri and Shu'aibu (2018:1), who state that school leadership is a method used to empower teachers, learners, and stakeholders in the school community to work together to reach educational goals effectively. They further state that as a result, principals are tasked with leading instructional activities that inspire, motivate, and guide teachers and learners to improve their teaching and learning.

This study investigated different leadership styles to determine their impact on the principals as they led their schools during the pandemic.

1.14.6 Socio-economic Status

APA Dictionary of Psychology (2023:1) defines Socio-Economic Status (SES) as a concept that involves not only income but also educational attainment, occupational status, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class. They further state that SES includes quality-of-life traits and the opportunities available to people within society.

Whereas Deshmukh and Akkilagunta (2020) refer to the socio-economic stance as an umbrella term for social delamination, which identifies individuals/households based on their current circumstances. Furthermore, Broer, Foncesca and Bai (2024: 7) explain that the basics of socio-economic inequities and the educational outcomes of efforts to decrease gaps in Socio-Economic Status are of immense interest to researchers around the world. They further state that this will help reduce the achievement gap, a shared goal for most education systems.

For this study, the term SES will be examined to show how the pandemic exposed the inequalities in our society, primarily through the education system.

1.14.7 Case Study

Crowe, Creswell, Robertson, Huby, Avey, and Sheikh (2011: 1) define a case study as an approach allowing in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in real-life settings. They further state that a case study approach is particularly beneficial when the goal is to acquire an in-depth understanding of an issue, event, or singular interest in its natural, real-life context.

Heale and Twycross (2018: 210) define a case study as a research methodology typically used in social and life sciences studies. They further state that a case study is an intensive study of a person, a group of people, or a unit, intended to generalise across several units. Alex (2024: 1) states that case study methodology allows researchers to explore intricate phenomena within specific contexts using various data sources and collection methods. She further asserts that by concentrating on one specific case, researchers can gain a profound understanding of the factors and

dynamics at play, as well as their intricate relationships, which might be overlooked in broader, more quantitative studies. For this study, we will examine how principals managed the environments they found themselves in, particularly in providing leadership during COVID-19.

1.14.8 Covid-19

Wiersinga and Prescott (2020:1) define coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) as a disease caused by a new coronavirus, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). They further state that coronaviruses are a cause of the common cold, but SARS-CoV-2, which likely originated in bats, causes more severe disease in many patients.

Whereas Cascella, Rajnik, Aleem, Dulebohn, and Di Napoli (2023:1) state that coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a highly contagious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). They further state that COVID-19 has had a catastrophic effect on the world, resulting in more than 6 million deaths worldwide.

This study examined how Covid-19 affected schooling worldwide, focusing on South Africa and primarily on Quintiles 1-3 schools.

1.15 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

Chapter one of this thesis provides an outline of the study. It presents background information on the impact of COVID-19 on the education system and on the influence of a particular leadership style used by principals. Then, the problem statement, the study's purpose, the research objectives, and the significance are presented. Finally, key terms are defined, and the study's delimitations are presented.

Chapter two presents the theoretical framework of the study. The characteristics and elements of the theoretical framework were explained, and pedagogical leadership theory was explored, focusing on how it offered a structured framework for principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools. The rationale for using pedagogical leadership theory is

explained. After that, the study explored the contextualisation of pedagogical leadership and drew a conclusion.

Chapter three reviews related literature on leadership styles and characteristics of a good leader. It highlights the literature's views on the effectiveness of the leadership style that principals employed during a pandemic. A review of the literature on leadership styles used by principals worldwide is also presented here. Finally, the chapter ends with a summary of the key points.

Chapter four presents the research methodology and design. It outlines the stages followed in conducting this empirical study. The study population and the tools used to produce the data are depicted. Finally, a data analysis outline and a chapter summary are presented.

Chapter five centres on the presentation, analysis, interpretation, and discussion of data. A Table with emerging themes was presented, followed by detailed discussions of each theme and a chapter summary.

Chapter six presents a summary of the study and its conclusions. Based on the findings, the chapter also recommends future studies and states the study's limitations.

1.16 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Exploring how principals lead during the pandemic can help educational policymakers and stakeholders understand leadership practices in times of crisis. Additionally, these insights could inform the creation of support systems and training programmes for school leaders to handle emergencies better. This study emphasised the importance of analysing leadership dynamics in schools amid the COVID-19 crisis. Focusing on Quintile 1, 3 schools in the Ekurhuleni North District, Gauteng Province. This research aimed to offer insights to guide decision-making and enhance student outcomes in underprivileged areas. The next chapter presents the study's theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 outlined the study's orientation. This chapter describes the study's theoretical framework. The chapter will commence with the definition of a theoretical framework, followed by its characteristics and elements. The pedagogical leadership theory will be described, along with how it offers a structured framework for principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools. The rationale for using pedagogical leadership theory will be explained. Thereafter, the study will present the contextualisation of pedagogical leadership, and a conclusion will be drawn.

2.2 DEFINITION OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Grant and Onsloo (2014: 572) define the theoretical framework as a set of interlocking ideas that serves as a lens through which researchers can examine data and draw meaningful conclusions about their topic. Kivunja (2018: 46) asserts that a theoretical framework is a critical outline that delineates a study's layout, methodology, and analysis. It also allows researchers to streamline their thoughts, establish links between variables and develop hypothetical propositions (2018: 46).

Nhan (2020: 1) defines a theoretical framework as applying different theories within a study, allowing researchers to share their fundamental values while providing a clear guideline on how new knowledge will be communicated or explored. Nhan (2020: 1) further states that using the theoretical framework in a study provides opportunities for other scholars to find their unique voice and build theories aimed at liberation rather than domination. Moreover, Hassan (2024: 1) defines a theoretical framework as a set of concepts, theories, ideas, and assumptions that provide a foundation for understanding a particular event or problem. He further states that a framework

aids researchers in designing and conducting their research, and analysing and interpreting their findings.

Quintao, Andrade and Almeida (2020: 43) endorse the statement above, noting that choosing a suitable theoretical framework is important for any research study because it enhances the accuracy and reliability of the research results. Vinz (2022: 2) maintains that adopting a theoretical framework enables researchers to logically arrange their research inquiries by giving order and structure to their investigation or study.

According to Simon and Goes (2011: 1), the theoretical framework increases the essence of the study. Adom, Hussein and Agyem (2018: 438) explain that the purpose of the theoretical framework is to guide and resonate with every aspect of the research process, which commences with the definition of the problem, literature survey, methodology, presentation and discussion of the findings, and conclusions that are to be drawn.

For this study, the theoretical framework is defined as a set of identified principles drawn from different and/or interrelated theories and used to guide the direction of the phenomenon being studied. This is done and carried out from the definition of the problem, which asks 'what are the leadership styles used by principals in Quintile 1-3 schools to lead their schools during a pandemic? ' Literature review: looking at the different styles used by principals all across the globe to lead their school, and what type of leadership style was more prevalent. The methodology used to gather and analyse information was interviews to explore the types of leadership, the presentation of the findings on how leadership styles assisted the principals in leading their schools effectively, and the conclusions drawn and suggestions for future studies.

2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section discusses the characteristics of the theoretical framework and contextualises them to the study.

2.3.1 Characteristics of the Theoretical Framework

According to Dawadi, Shrestha, and Giri (2021:18), using a theoretical framework helps researchers organise their ideas and findings and provides a basis for understanding, evaluating, and analysing data within a specific field of inquiry. These authors further state that organised methods are used to analyse events and verify complex perceptions or experiences, which are valuable factors that researchers seek and can be supported by frameworks.

Afribay (2020:3) states that a theoretical framework is a research approach that uses relevant past theories from existing literature to study current problems. This author further states that a theoretical framework focuses on historical context, structure, and the bridging of knowledge gaps.

Passey (2020:1) asserts that selecting and formulating a theoretical framework for research can be challenging, as the chosen framework can determine the extent to which a thesis or study contributes to a broader knowledge base. Ukwoma and Ngulube (202) agree that several researchers have had difficulties applying and understanding the effectiveness of their chosen research framework when conducting research. They further assert that the conclusions of these researchers have become less effective due to the incorrect application and understanding of these frameworks.

According to Hassan (2024: 2) for a framework to be considered a theoretical framework, it needs to consist of the following:

1. Identify the key concepts and variables: As a researcher, one must find a topic that interests one. One then has to identify the main concepts and variables one's research will explore. The concepts and variables could be applied to details such as motivation, behaviour, attitudes, and other relevant concepts.
2. Review relevant literature: Once a topic of interest is identified, the researcher should review the literature to identify the key theories and ideas related to that topic. This is done to help the researcher understand existing knowledge and theories relevant to their research and to provide a basis for their theoretical framework.

3. Develop a conceptual framework: Once the literature has been reviewed, a conceptual framework will be developed to outline the key concepts and their relationships. This framework should provide a clear and concise overview of the theoretical perspective that underpins their research project.
4. Identify hypotheses and research questions: Based on the conceptual framework, the researcher will identify the hypotheses and questions they want to investigate or explore in their research project.
5. Test your theoretical framework: Once the researcher has developed it, they will apply it to their research data. This will help the researcher to spot gaps or weaknesses in their framework and refine them as necessary.
6. Write-up the theoretical framework: Finally, the researcher ought to write up their theoretical framework clearly and concisely, using suitable terminology and referencing the relevant literature to support their arguments.

Sreekumar (2023: 3) emphasises that theoretical frameworks are thus significant components of the research process. Researchers should, therefore, devote ample time to developing a solid theoretical framework. The author states that this is done to guide the research in a suitable direction.

2.3.2 Contextualising the Concept of Theoretical Framework for the Study

According to Adom, Hussein and Agyem (2018:1), the benefits of having a framework in one's study include making research findings more meaningful, aligning with the theoretical constructs in the research field, and ensuring a universal approach. They further state that the benefits increase the study's curiosity while extending knowledge by providing direction and motivation for the research inquiry.

It is important to align the study within a framework to conduct a study on Quintiles 1-3 schools in the Ekurhuleni North District, Gauteng. This will assist the researcher in providing a structure for the entire research process, guiding the selection of research methods, data collection methods, and data analysis to address gaps in the existing

literature, draw meaningful conclusions, and make findings more credible, confirmable, and dependable.

The Covid-19 pandemic presented challenges for principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools, requiring them to adopt adaptive, effective leadership styles to ensure high-quality teaching and learning. The theoretical framework offers a lens for analysing how these principles addressed the challenges of managing resources, supporting teachers, and upholding high educational standards during times of disruption.

This study integrates multiple theoretical frameworks, explicitly focusing on the pedagogical leadership theory. This theory, discussed in detail below, offers a structured framework for exploring how school principals in Gauteng navigated their leadership roles during the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in Quintiles 1-3 schools in the Ekurhuleni North District.

2.4 PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP THEORY

2.4.1 Pedagogical Leadership Theory

Pedagogical leadership theory was identified as the study's theoretical framework. First, pedagogical leadership will be defined. Then, its foundations, elements, and characteristics are discussed. The rationale for utilising the pedagogical leadership theory will also be discussed. Lastly, the pedagogical leadership theory is contextualised for the study.

2.4.2 Definition of Pedagogical Leadership Theory

According to Varlık, Sorm and Günbayı (2021:1), the concept of pedagogical leadership was initially introduced by Sergiovanni (1998) in his influential work, "Leadership as pedagogy, capital development and school effectiveness". They further state that this concept was crafted with the interrelatedness of transformative and instructional leadership styles in a school setting in mind. Whereas Heikka, Kahila

and Suhonen (202:1) explain that pedagogical leadership is to be considered as a determined and deliberate method. They emphasise that pedagogical leadership is all about accepting responsibility for the collective understanding of the aims and methods of the learning and teaching of young children.

Berhanu (2024: 78) quotes Sergiovanni (1998), who states that pedagogical leadership differs from other leadership styles, such as bureaucratic and visionary leadership, in that it multiplies the worth of human capital. In contrast, bureaucratic and visionary leadership styles place greater emphasis on reducing the material and/or physical value. Berhanu (2024: 78) further quotes Fullan (2001), who argues that pedagogical leadership is a true style of leadership appropriate for an educational setting, as it is central to integrating moral issues, building relationships, and shaping conceptions of knowledge. This helps create an encouraging and effective learning environment for students.

According to Macneil, Cavanagh and Silcox (2024:2), leadership has a chameleon-like quality. They believe leadership changes with the era and the situation the leader finds themselves in. They further reference eras where instructional leadership was the preferred style of leadership in America, and how, now, pedagogical leadership is most preferred in Finland and in the Early Development Centres. Since pedagogical leadership emphasises the fusion of moral issues, the creation of relationships, and the conception of knowledge, which are considered the main focuses of this leadership theory compared to others. They further state that pedagogical leadership highlights the following as its base for creating knowledge, relationships, and morality issues:

1. It is centred around student learning.
2. It is linked to examples taken from real-life situations or the world around us.
3. Adopts a distributed leadership style.
4. Highlights the importance of professional learning communities.
5. The principal is regarded as a leader in teacher professional development.

Male and Palaiologou (2012:4) correspond to the sentiments above, defining pedagogical leadership style as 'the ecology of the community'. They believe that pedagogy no longer occurs in isolation or exclusively in educational environments, but is now a component of a broader socio-economic, political, philosophical,

psychological, and educational dialogue. Moreover, Male and Palaologou (2012: 5) define pedagogical leadership as a moral approach, which complements values and does not participate in any endeavour that will only advantage a single entity, but instead looks after the interconnectedness (ecology) of the community.

They craft what they call “pedagogical axes”. The pedagogical axes are leadership approaches that can be demarcated as pedagogical praxis, defined as a set of activities infused with theoretical elements and reinforced by a system they assert is the ecology of the community of education settings.

The axes are shown in the diagram below:

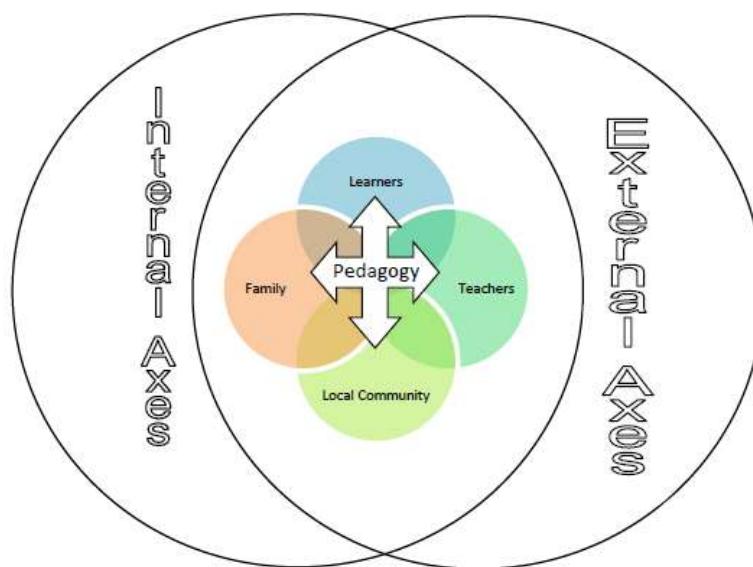


Figure 1: Interactions and relationships in learning environments in a pedagogical leadership theory: (source adapted from Male and Palaologou (2012: 5))

- Internal axes consist of values, beliefs, culture, religion, customs and local economy.
- External axes are made up of societal values, the global economy, mass media, social networking, information and communication technologies, the national curriculum, and the ‘academic press’ of student test scores.

Pedagogical leadership can be seen as the foundation for teaching and learning practices in an educational setting. This style of leadership aims to build knowledge through understanding learners’ identities, community ecologies, experiences, and

their meaning-making abilities. This encompasses situational and belief-based reasons in creating deep connections and relationships in education. Thus, pedagogical values are important mechanisms of the practical activities assumed by educational organisations.

Pedagogical leadership is an essential concept in educational leadership, particularly in fostering effective teaching and learning environments amid the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Gaines (2020:67) and Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2022:45), pedagogical leadership requires principals to promote effective teaching methodologies and learning practices. This demonstrates the principals' significant role in creating supportive environments, setting high academic standards and providing continuous professional development opportunities for teachers, thus integrating educational goals into the curriculum.

Aimed and Hawass (2022:34) explain that pedagogical leadership centres around a management style focused on advancing teachers. Ponts (2023:15) asserts this view, stating that the pedagogical leadership style acknowledges teachers' influence in shaping learners' cognitive development and aims to empower and maximise their potential. In doing so, pedagogical leadership supports professional growth, improves instructional practices, and contributes to the overall effectiveness of school culture.

Moreover, Elo and Uljens (2023: 3) explain pedagogical leadership as deliberately influencing and promoting other people's engagement in learning activities to understand oneself and one's relation to the world and others. They further state that pedagogical leadership aims to influence other stakeholders' perceptions, values, knowledge, understanding, or actions by enticing them to participate in activities that are likely to lead to learning.

Fonsén and Lahtero (2023: 159) endorse the statement above, noting that components that influence the success of pedagogical leadership include value, context, organisational culture, professionalism, and the management of substance. These authors further state that the work of a principal involves many responsibilities and duties, which can be described as both indirect and direct pedagogical leadership, using the concept of broad-based pedagogical leadership.

Fonsén and Lahtero (2023: 162) state that Finnish school leadership research assumed the concept of broad-based pedagogical leadership in Finland. This

leadership style examines school leadership from a broader perspective than instructional leadership. They further explain that principals in the United States of America (USA) were expected to be more active in managing school performance and student learning outcomes. In Finland, principals are expected to focus on improving teaching and learning. They further state that principals are expected to focus mainly on learning, teaching, and school development, which are relevant to the school's and pupils' success.

Pedagogical leadership served as a lens through which multifaceted educational leadership and management aspects were employed during the Covid-19 pandemic. As Berhanu (2024: 78) states, pedagogical leadership is closely related to other leadership styles, such as transformative and instructional leadership. The pandemic magnified the importance of effective leadership in ensuring that schools continued to function as centres of knowledge and stability despite disruptions to traditional learning modalities, and the only way to do so was for principals to multiply the value of human capital.

2.4.3 Distinction Between Pedagogical and Instructional Leadership

Fonsén, Szecsi, Kupila, Liinamaa, Halpern and Repo (2023:1) note that pedagogical and instructional leadership are similar in terms of the tenets of the two-leadership concept. They state that this is due to the two tenets' overarching need to improve teaching and learning. They further maintain that the two tenets differ in scope, focus, and theoretical underpinnings.

2.4.3.1 Instructional Leadership

Hallinger, Gümüş and Bellibaş (2020: 1632) define instructional leadership as a leadership style that aims to change the school climate and culture while influencing classroom teaching and learning processes, to improve learning for all students. They further state that a principal who employs this style of leadership is thought to have greater influence on teaching and learning in the school and to be knowledgeable about educational developments to better support teachers.

The Education Improvement Research Centre (2022:1) defines instructional leadership as a fundamental characteristic of the successful school leadership concept. They state that instructional leadership is focused on ongoing improvement in quality teaching and learning. The Education Improvement Research Centre (2022:2) identifies the following as the fundamental elements of instructional leadership style:

- **Defining shared expectations**

Ralebese, Jita and Badmus (2025:13) explain that principals occupy a comprehensive role when employing an instructional leadership style in their schools. This is because they oversee curriculum delivery, ensuring that policies are implemented to a higher standard to ensure compliance. They maintain that the principals' duties are not limited to being policy implementers; they are also regarded as visionaries who adapt policies to suit their school contexts.

The view above is supported by Akomodi (2025: 178), who maintains that if a principal clearly articulates sound expectations to teachers, this contributes to creating a focused and purpose-driven learning environment.

- **Resourcing strategically**

Papadakis, Kanadlı, Kardas, Tuluba, Karakose and Polat (2024:2) state that successful resource allocation is essential to the effective implementation of instructional leadership in a school environment. They allude to the fact that, as a principal, it is one's duty to ensure that teachers and learners have the materials needed to teach and learn effectively.

Ralebese, Jita and Badmus (2025:13) concur with the views above because they believe that as a principal, one's duty is to shape and endorse the school's mission in ways that mirror one's personal beliefs and agendas, as well as being considerate of the curriculum policy. This they attribute to the principal's ability to procure the required LTSM in time so that teaching in the school goes undisturbed. Furthermore, Akamodi (2025:178) asserts that principals who procure resources and create opportunities for

educators to improve their skills ensure that the teachers in their school remain informed about current affairs related to teaching and learning, thereby benefiting learners and affording them opportunities to compete fairly with their peers.

- **Managing the instructional programme**

According to Ralebese, Jita and Badmus (2025:13), principals who actively participate in managing teaching and learning in the school have a better view and understanding of what is taking place in the school. They state that for the principal to do that, there should be tools the principal uses to manage the effective running of the school and monitoring. These tools can include, but are not limited to, routine and random classroom checks, supporting teaching and learning, and modifying feedback to individual teacher needs. They further allude that doing so cements the principal's commitment to upholding instructional quality in the school amid the challenges posed by systemic demands and the limited instructional leadership training provided to them.

Whereas Akomodi (2025:179) affirms that when a principal is an effective leader and a driver of instructional leadership, their tactics promote advanced teaching practices that ensure learners are consistently engaged and that their learning is enhanced. He further states that when a principal inspires their teachers to try new teaching methods, it fosters a more self-motivated and effective educational environment that encourages teachers to go above and beyond for their students.

- **Promoting a positive school learning environment**

Ralebese, Jita and Badmus (2025:13) state that a principal is expected to create a favourable school climate. They further state that a principal's duty is to encourage teachers, foster social unity, and attend to teachers' personal needs. Moreover, Akomodi (2025:179) states that when a principal creates a positive learning environment in their school, they cultivate a culture of high expectations from both the teachers and learners. He further states that such a culture (high expectations) is associated with increased learner motivation and achievement, as well as staff morale.

- **Developing leadership skills and knowledge**

Akomodi (2025:179) states that a principal who utilises an instructional leadership style emphasises ongoing professional development for their staff. He further states

that such a principal ensures that their staff have the resources and opportunities to improve their skills and stay relevant through effective instructional approaches. Moreover, Akomodi (2025:179) maintains that, as a principal who utilises the instructional leadership style, it promotes teamwork among teachers, inspiring them to share best practices and learn from one another.

2.4.3.2 Pedagogical Leadership

Heikka and Hujala (2020: 57) state that pedagogical leadership encompasses instructional leadership style to foster the moral, emotional, and relational components of schooling or the school environment. These authors further explain that pedagogical leadership is focused on all-inclusive learning and development. Moreover, Heikka and Hujala (2020: 57) state that pedagogical leadership emphasises the development of a learning culture that values reflection, collaboration, and teacher autonomy.

Whereas Male and Palaiologou (2021:89) state that a principal who uses a pedagogical leadership style employs it to enable their teachers to be part of the decision-making and reflective practice. Furthermore, Male and Palaiologou (ibid) assert that the teachers are viewed as knowledge builders with their voices actively shaping school practice and policy.

In conclusion, the instructional leadership style is a crucial part of the broader concept of pedagogical leadership. Leithwood (2020:7) states that while instructional leadership emphasises teaching and learning practices, pedagogical leadership includes these elements and encompasses the organisational, cultural, and ethical aspects of education. Thus, the utilisation of pedagogical leadership makes it an appropriate leadership style for resource-constrained schools such as Quintiles 1–3 during the Covid-19 pandemic, where leaders ought to balance direct instructional oversight with broader community, equity, and well-being concerns.

2.4 4 Foundations of pedagogical leadership theory

2.4.4.1 Instructional Leadership and Teacher Learning

Shaked and Schechter (2020: 233) explore how instructional leadership influences teacher learning. They highlight that principals who provide structured opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practices, share insights, and collaborate contribute to improving teaching effectiveness. A teacher who reflects on their teaching can improve their method, ensuring they cater to all learners and grow in their practice.

Berhanu (2024:80) states that principals who practise pedagogical leadership in their schools have a significant impact on student learning. He believes that their leadership is interchangeable with that of the teachers in the classroom. Moreover, Berhanu (2024:80) firmly believes that a pedagogical leader plays an important role in fostering a collective vision and mission to improve student learning. This can only be done once the leader has the buy-in of all stakeholders, including teachers and administrative personnel. This is where distributed leadership comes in, as identified by Macneil, Cavanagh and Silcox (2024:2), in an afore-mentioned paragraph.

2.4.4.2 Pedagogical Leadership in Early Childhood Education

Heikka, Waniganayake, and Hujala (2019: 403) examine pedagogical leadership in the context of early childhood education. Their focal point is distributed leadership, in which the principal and teachers share responsibility for learning outcomes, thereby promoting a strong professional learning community. This ensures a shared vision of attainment for all involved. School, teaching, learning, and leadership are not seen as the principal's domain but as something everyone can share and build together.

According to Fonsén, Szecsi, Kupila, Liinamaa, Halpern and Repo (2023:2), effective leadership in Early Childhood Centres (ECE) is vital to preserving the quality of ECE programmes and sustaining children's growth and learning. They further state that this can be achieved when a pedagogical leader holistically improves the organisation's shared understanding of values and the vision of pedagogy. That can be done when a distributed leadership style is utilised, where the teachers feel and are affirmed as leaders in the organisation. Where they feel that they matter and their insight and opinions are valued.

Fonsén (2013:186) quotes Sergiovanni (2001, 54), who explains that leadership in ECE needs to be “ideal-based leadership”, which means value-based and shared leadership. She states that this is because the pedagogy of ECE blends education, teaching, and caregiving (ECEC). She further states that the curriculum in ECEC is viewed as age-related and child-centred, with the involvement and contributions of children highlighted. Fonsén (2013:186) further asserts that collaboration between parents and teachers plays a vital role, as it extends beyond mere co-operation and can shape the child into a model citizen.

2.4.4.3 Pedagogical Leadership and Professional Development

Dönmez (2022: 17) centres his understanding on the role of pedagogical leadership as a force that drives teacher professional development. He states that principals who emphasise professional growth establish a more adaptive and innovative teaching culture in their schools.

According to Berhanu (2024:80), who quotes Hargreaves (2016), one of the core dimensions identified by Sergiovanni (1998) in his model of pedagogical leadership is that of professional capital. He describes professional capital as a dimension that highlights the importance of human capital, underscoring the professional growth of staff through professional development and continuing education to promote effective teaching and learning in the school. Berhanu (2024:80) also states that professional capital centres on the decisional capital of staff, which refers to teachers' wisdom, judgement and expertise regarding the instructional and learning of students, as reflected in and shaped by colleagues' feedback.

This type of leadership promotes collaboration, continuous learning, and high expectations in classrooms. Pedagogical leadership is about leading teaching and learning, while professional development ensures teachers are prepared and continually improving in this role.

2.4.4.4 Leading with Pedagogy

Gümüş, Bellibaş, Esen and Gümüş (2022: 11) explain that pedagogical leadership can be centred on enhancing instructional quality. This foundation emphasises the need

for principals to be actively involved in the teaching processes and to understand the curriculum deeply to guide teachers effectively. One cannot lead the curriculum if, as a principal, one does not know what is expected of the teacher in the classroom.

Berhanu (2024:80) describes the four core (or basic) dimensions of pedagogical leadership, identified by Sergiovanni (1998 & 2001), as a model for understanding the impact of pedagogical leadership in a school setting. One of the core dimensions, is the academic capital, as identified by Berhanu. He explains this core dimension as a dimension that puts an emphasis on endorsing an in-depth quality teaching and learning culture by utilising focused communities. He further states that, to achieve this, “focused communities,” the teaching and learning process, and effective classroom pedagogy are essential in the school setting.

Berhanu (2024:80) further asserts that teachers need to understand how their students learn, be allowed to teach in ways that help their students learn optimally without being restricted by policies, and be afforded the independence to design educational activities that support their students' learning styles, interests, and needs. Furthermore, Berhanu (2024:80) states that a pedagogical approach fosters a culture of effective teaching and learning while offering support and guidance to those who might need it.

2.4.4.5 The Role of Pedagogical Leadership in Promoting Inclusive Education

Blackmore and Hutchison (2021:85) define this foundation as a pedagogy that principals can use to promote inclusivity in their schools by encouraging practices that ensure all learners are active participants in their learning. This will ensure that, regardless of the learner's background or abilities, they can access high-quality education. They further argue that inclusive pedagogical leadership demands ongoing reflection and adaptation of teaching strategies.

Male and Palaiologou (2012:5) quote Taguchi (2010), who explains that learners learn differently and that, as teachers, we need to cater to their needs. Taguchi (2010) recommended a new pedagogical approach, which he calls the ‘Intra-active Pedagogy’. He explains this new method of learning as one that pays attention to learners' involvement, the significance of previous experiences and activities, and the

creation of knowledge as a means of creating meaning. Moreover, Male and Palaiologou (2012:5) clarify that intra-active pedagogy shifts the awareness of creating knowledge from traditional ways of establishing a learning environment to intra-active relationships between learners and their use of immediate settings in everyday life, such as artefacts, spaces, and places.

2.5 ELEMENTS OF PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP THEORY

Effective pedagogical leadership is founded on theories and frameworks that provide direction for school principals and their duties and roles. Carroll-Lind, Smorti, Ord and Robinson (2009:1) explain that pedagogical leadership refers to the way in which the dominant task of enhancing teaching and learning in an educational setting is achieved. Thomas and Nuttall (2014:101) assert that pedagogical leadership is focused on curriculum and pedagogy rather than on management and administration. Therefore, pedagogical leadership is a style of leadership used for learning, not exclusively for children, but that promotes learning within teaching teams.

Leithwood et al. (2022: 76) state that to successfully implement pedagogical leadership theory, a principal ought to take into consideration the following:

2.5.1 Application of Flexible Learning Strategies

Principals needed to suddenly adjust their teachers' and learners' teaching and learning styles from static (in-class) to remote and blended learning settings, ensuring effective teaching and learning while prioritising the health and safety of all stakeholders (teachers, learners, and parents).

Varga, Dijana and Peko (2020: 174) explain that pedagogical leaders emphasise creating a school setting that supports students' learning more effectively. They further state that pedagogical leadership can be understood as direct and indirect forms of leadership by school leaders (principals), as they impact learners' achievement in the learning process.

2.5.2 Offering Support to Teachers

Principals needed to assist teachers in training for online teaching, integrating technology into lesson delivery, and providing emotional and professional guidance, ensuring that teachers still felt valued and competent in implementing the new teaching and learning methods.

Berhanu (2023:81) states that a pedagogical leader assists in providing coaching and mentoring; by doing so, the principal aids in enhancing the teaching drive amongst the teachers in her school. Mangin (2021:2) asserts that by doing so, the principal provides educators with opportunities to demonstrate their best practices, which, in turn, boosts teachers' confidence and morale in teaching as a whole. Berhanu (2023:81) further states that the overarching goal of pedagogical leadership is to foster professional development, which aims to inspire teachers by encouraging self-reflection on their teaching methods.

Moreover, Silva (2021:1) highlights the need for teachers to undertake comprehensive training in understanding learner diversity, effective teaching methods, assessment techniques, and technology integration. Silva (2021:1) explains that this underscores the importance of consolidating school-based learning support groups to strengthen teacher support and, later, improve student outcomes.

Berhanu (2023:81) believes that pedagogical leadership is a testament to the transformative power of coaching, mentoring, and collaborative learning in education. Jamhari (2023:3) asserts this by stating that such training programmes serve as a means of improving teachers' abilities, allowing them to grow into effective implementers of learning.

2.5.3 Nurturing a Culture of Collaboration

Principals were responsible for ensuring that their schools' sense of community and collaboration did not diminish. Teachers were encouraged to collaborate virtually, sharing resources, exchanging ideas, and collaborating to overcome challenges in

remote teaching. This fostered a sense of being a team and ensured students knew someone cared and understood their struggles and frustrations.

Berhanu (2023:80) defines this element as social capital. He states that these elements emphasise customs, responsibilities, and trust amongst people in a school and society by cultivating caring relationships. Berhanu (2023:80) further states that in a thoughtful school setting, learners, educators, and families always feel welcomed in numerous ways. Moreover, he states that in a school where learners feel welcomed and heard by their teachers, their learning increases substantially, and the learners feel part of a respected and appreciated member of the school community.

2.5.4 Ensuring Equity

While ensuring that the teachers felt recognised, supported, and valued, the principal also had a significant task of ensuring that the learners were not discriminated against. This meant that those without access to technology still had access to the resources being shared and the learning taking place.

According to Adebayo (2022:1), principals need to understand the differences between equality and equity to ensure equitable learning for all students, especially during a crisis. He further states that principals were tasked with making equitable, high-quality learning available to all learners, even to those without Internet access or support at home.

2.6 CHARACTERISTICS OF PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP THEORY

Leithwood (2021: 77) states that pedagogical leadership revolves around creating a school environment that prioritises the teaching and learning process. This proved important during the Covid-19 pandemic as a school was seen as a “safety net” for some learners in the community, especially those in Quintiles 1-3, as they mostly received their only meal of the day at school (Spaull & Jansen, 2020: 4). Hokron (2023:314) explains that the unexpected shift to distance learning interrupted the

school's daily tasks and created misperception and debate among principals and teachers on how to best cater for their learners and maintain quality education for all.

This made principals employ a pedagogical leadership style. Therefore, below are characteristics of a pedagogical leader during uncertain times:

2.6.1 Visionary Leadership

Cummings and Morris (2020: 320) state that a pedagogical leader must be visionary and set clear, long-term goals for teaching and learning in their schools. They further state that visionary leadership helps shape a united approach to teaching and learning in the school and fosters a shared commitment to learners' success.

Candrasari, Yorman, Mayasari, Yulia and Lake (2023:452) quote Taylor et al. (2014), who define visionary leadership as the principal's most distinctive characteristic, which assists in effectively managing the school. They further state that a visionary leader ensures that their vision aligns with the changing needs of students, society, and the educational landscape. This was significant during Covid times, as a visionary principal can ensure that the school's core duty is always maintained.

Moreover, Candrasari, Yorman, Mayasari, Yulia and Lake (2023:452) state that a visionary leader promotes a culture of innovation and adaptation within their schools. They assert that such a leader incorporates new philosophies, technologies, and teaching methodologies to ensure they remain relevant and deliver on their core business, that is effective teaching and learning.

2.6.2 Collaborative Culture

Shaked and Schechter (2020:235) identify collaborative culture as one of the characteristics of pedagogical leadership. They state that a pedagogical leader encourages teamwork among teachers, shares best practices, and engages in insightful discussions, thereby strengthening the collective teaching capacity of the

school's teachers. One knows who to go to for help when needed because the school culture thrives on helping one another.

Berhanu (2024:81) defines this characteristic as professional capital. He states that a pedagogical principal fosters professional capital amongst teachers in their school by fostering communities of practice. He further quotes Hargreaves (2016), who states that professional capital emphasises the importance of attending to teachers' professional growth through professional development and continuing education. Moreover, Berhanu (2024:810) believes that professional capital allows teachers to be decision-makers in the school, where their insights, decisions, and know-how are valued, and their experience regarding students' instruction and learning, in the form of reflection and feedback from colleagues, is valued.

2.6.3 Focus on Instructional Improvement

According to Gümüş et al. (2022:115), pedagogical leaders are more concerned with improving teaching and learning at the school. They further state that they actively observe teaching, provide feedback, and use data-driven strategies to support teachers in improving their teaching methods and achieving better learning outcomes for their learners.

Al-Bahrani and Hokroh (2022:313) state that one of the challenges pedagogical principals face is sustaining their schools' effectiveness and learner performance when it comes to the new online learning setting. They further state that offering unceasing support, prioritising topics in the curriculum, and ensuring the well-being of students and staff are significant features of supporting leadership pedagogy.

2.6.4 Emphasis on Professional Development

Heikka et al. (2019: 406) identified the commitment to ongoing professional development as an important characteristic of pedagogical leadership. They state that principals who support continuous learning opportunities for teachers to improve their

skills and stay up to date with best practices in pedagogy are better prepared to realise their vision for the school.

Berhanu (2024:81) quotes Sergiovanni (2001), who emphasises the importance of teacher development in creating intellectual capital for educators. This will assist educators in increasing their subject knowledge —the pedagogical-content knowledge they need to teach their subject effectively. Moreover, Berhanu (2024:81) states that the school's intellectual capital can be enhanced through a professional learning community. This professional learning group consists of teachers who are motivated by a vision of learning and who support one another towards cultivating a culture of student achievement.

2.6.5 Fostering Reflective Practice

Blackmore and Hutchison (2021:88) emphasise the importance of encouraging reflective practices among teachers. They state that pedagogical leaders create environments where educators regularly analyse their teaching methods, assess their effectiveness, and make necessary adjustments to meet their learners' needs.

Machost and Stains (2023:22) refer to Dewey (1933:9), who is viewed as the father of reflective learning or practice. They state that the function of reflection in the context of pedagogical leadership is meant to show a *process*. They further state that Dewey (1933:9) was highlighting the need for effective thinking when facing challenges and glitches. This proved effective with principals who needed to be reflective leaders, ensuring that the challenges posed by Covid-19 were seen as a process and that they activated their “effective thinking process” to address the challenge. Moreover, Machost and Stains (2023:22) explain that reflection requires the principal to ponder or present experiences and learner outcomes. Therefore, Machost and Stains (2023:22) explain that a pedagogical leader who employs this practice ensures that the teachers who utilise it are actively involved in improving the teaching and learning of their learners.

2.6.6 Inclusive Leadership

Dönmez (2022:19) explains that inclusive leadership is an important characteristic of pedagogical leadership. He states that inclusive leaders (principals) focus on equity in education by creating supportive learning environments that address the various needs of all pupils, ensuring that no one is left behind. These characteristics form the foundation of effective pedagogical leadership, ensuring improvements in teaching and learning environments.

Oswal (2024:1) states that a pedagogical leader understands the influence of collaboration in an organisation. She further states that, as leaders, they endeavour to cultivate a culture of teamwork among educators, students, and parents. Moreover, Oswal (2024:1) states that a leader who recognises collective efforts is on a better path to realising greater success. Furthermore, she asserts that collaboration enhances the overall learning experience and fosters a sense of community within the educational environment.

2.7 RATIONALE OF PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP THEORY FOR THE STUDY

As Martin Luther King Jr. once stated, “The purpose of education is to teach one to think intensively and critically. Intelligence plus character; that is the goal of true education.” This can best be understood through the concept of pedagogical leadership: as a leader practising pedagogy in one’s school, leadership does not merely mean managing a school; it involves creating a positive learning environment where teachers and students grow together. It can also be understood as intentional in improving teaching and learning, not being afraid to try new teaching methods, and helping students become both intelligent and kind. Pedagogical leadership guides principals to concentrate on what really matters: assisting students to learn, grow, and love learning for life.

The use of pedagogical leadership in this study is appropriate because it focuses on improving teaching and learning methods, which are particularly significant for Quintiles 1-3 schools, where learners and teachers often face significant resource challenges. Smith (2020:3) states that pedagogical leadership is necessary to provide direction, promote collaboration, and encourage new teaching and learning methods

during uncertain times. The statement above is corroborated by Leithwood and Azah (2021:53), who assert that during crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, principals in low-income schools, such as Quintiles 1-3, should adopt pedagogical leadership theory to support teachers in adjusting to the new instructional requirements for teaching and learning. They further state that this leadership style is important for helping teachers transition to remote or hybrid learning and for ensuring educational continuity in disadvantaged settings. Sanchez and Watson (2021:8) agree with the statement above that instructional improvement can be considered the foundation of pedagogical leadership.

They claim that an effective pedagogical leader is actively involved in classroom observations to monitor teaching and learning closely. Beyond observation, a pedagogical leader can provide constructive feedback to support their teachers' professional growth and enhance their instructional practices in the classroom. They also enable the implementation of best practices by ensuring educators have the required resources and support, thereby promoting an environment where continuous learning and development are highly valued.

According to Henderson (2020:452), principals who used pedagogical leadership in their schools actively promoted teacher collaboration. The author further states that their actions played a vital role in creating an atmosphere that encourages ongoing improvement in remote learning methods. This demonstrates that pedagogical leadership assisted principals in addressing urgent needs, including adapting to remote learning, ensuring equity, fostering collaboration, and maintaining effective teaching and learning in an environment of uncertainty and crisis. This leadership style is particularly suited for these under-resourced contexts because it directly supports the educational mission, even amid constraints and adversity.

2.8 CONTEXTUALISATION OF PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP THEORY FOR THE STUDY

The significance and utilisation of pedagogical leadership theory are to be considered within the specific socio-educational context of this study. This research emphasises the leadership styles utilised by school principals in Quintiles 1 to 3 in South Africa

during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is an era marked by increased difficulty, indecision, and interruption of the education sector. Spaul and Van der Berg (2020:5) state that the Quintiles 1-3 schools are situated in economically disadvantaged communities, often face dire resource limitations, infrastructural backlogs, and learner support challenges, which are conditions that were worsened by the pandemic.

The principals in these schools were tasked with addressing critical resource shortages, ensuring equitable access to education, and supporting their teachers and learners in adjusting to the new learning method. Bush (2020:102) states that a principal using a pedagogical leadership style needs to be flexible and adaptable to address the unique demands posed by a crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic.

Pedagogical leadership provided a framework for these principals to focus on instructional leadership, foster collaboration, maintain learners' participation in the learning process, and manage their teachers' emotional well-being during this unique crisis. This leadership style was especially relevant in this setting, as it prioritised teaching and learning while adapting to the unique challenges faced by low-income schools.

This study, therefore, contextualises pedagogical leadership as an appropriate leadership style for this situation. Thus, the theoretical framework chosen for this study is not only for theoretical purposes but also allows for the flexible adaptation of leadership principles in disastrous conditions or pandemic situations. By incorporating transformational, distributed, and constructivist perspectives or leadership styles, the study investigated how principals in these disadvantaged schools navigated the friction between curriculum delivery and learner well-being while managing teachers in undefined, resource-scarce conditions.

2.9 SUMMARY

This chapter presented and discussed the theoretical framework utilised for the study. The theoretical framework was defined, and the chosen theoretical framework, pedagogical leadership, was introduced and explained in detail. The elements of pedagogical leadership were then discussed in detail, and the characteristics of

pedagogical leadership were outlined to provide a better understanding of the study's suitability.

The theory of pedagogical leadership was selected as the appropriate theoretical framework for this study, and its rationale was presented. The purpose of utilising the pedagogical leadership theory in this study was to allow the researcher to investigate the types of leadership styles used by principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools during the Covid-19 pandemic, to ensure effective teaching and learning while respecting the SOPs.

This chapter intended to contextualise the elements and characteristics of pedagogical leadership style within the study. This was achieved by reviewing literature to understand the implications of leadership styles during Covid-19 in Quintiles 1-3 schools. By reviewing the literature, the elements and characteristics of pedagogical leadership were clarified, which helped distinguish between instructional and pedagogical leadership, as well as the study's fundamentals for leadership utilisation during the Covid-19 pandemic in a school context.

The following chapter reviews relevant literature for this research.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the literature on the leadership styles of primary school principals during COVID-19. It also reviews related literature on the type of leadership style Quintiles 1-3 primary school principals utilised. This chapter reviews the literature on principals' leadership styles during COVID-19, focusing on ensuring effective teaching and learning in their schools. I examined the types of leadership styles available, the impact of COVID-19 in school leadership, contextual factors for understanding types of leadership styles and implementation of these different leadership styles during a pandemic, the effectiveness of leadership styles in a South African schools' context during the Covid-19 pandemic, leadership and policy compliance during COVID-19 in South Africa: challenges and strategic responses, and lastly a conclusion is drawn.

3.2 LEADERSHIP

This section discusses what leadership is and the types of leadership styles utilised in formal school teaching in general.

3.2.1 What Is Leadership?

McBrayer, Akins, de Blume, Cleveland and Pannell (2020: 2) quote Maxwell (1993: 1) and Goolamally and Ahmad (2014: 2) as they define leadership as a determinant factor in the success and significance of an organisation. They further state that leadership is a fundamental element for school improvement. This is corroborated by Bush (2021: 687), who defines leadership as the second most important school-based factor in improving learners' results, after classroom teaching.

According to Shava, Heystek, Chasara, Kepemimpinan, Pengajaran and Pembelajaran (2021: 1), leadership is a concept that aims to adopt a culture of teaching and learning in a school community. These authors further state that leadership is a key element of productive teaching and long-term school improvement. The Education Improvement Research Centre (2022:1) states that school leadership has an important impact on promoting learners' achievement. They further state that leadership influence is greatest when it focuses on improving teaching and learning, and even greater when responsibility for leading teaching and learning is broadly dispersed across the school. Pandey (2023: 2) asserts that leadership motivates and guides team members to achieve a common goal. He further asserts that the actions of a group of individuals or an organisation can be considered leadership.

Zuo (2023:1) defines leadership as the deliberate influence applied to others. This is done to guide, structure, and enable tasks and relationships in a school. Whereas Linden, Wang and Wang (2025:1) explain that leadership refers to a communal impact process in which principals seek to inspire and enable teachers to participate in realising collective goals. They further state that communal impact involves a dependency relationship in which teachers submit their power or control to their principal to describe and understand reality. Therefore, for principals to successfully apply impact, they should be perceived as powerful by their teachers.

DanDan and Alias (2024:2227) quote Okumbe (1998), who summarises leadership as the precise outlook a leader nurtures towards their juniors to motivate and direct them in achieving the organisation's aims and goals. They further state that leadership is the competence and practical knowledge of persons, organisations, or establishments that inspire, encourage, or guide others in the said establishment.

According to Phuc, Parveen, Tran and Nguyen (2021:3), leadership encompasses a leader's approach to setting goals, applying strategies, and inspiring juniors. They further state that a leader uses numerous leadership styles based on specific conditions.

For this study, leadership is defined as the ability to provide direction and “sell” the school's vision to all stakeholders in a way that makes it attainable for all concerned.

3.2.2 Types of Leadership Styles

This section discusses the leadership styles that principals typically use in a school environment.

Özkuş and Yıldızbaşı (2025:2) define leadership as a significant factor in guiding and categorising the relationships that should be established among people working together. They further state that in schools, principals need to ensure the highest level of coordination across all organisational mechanisms to achieve organisational goals. In comparison, DanDan and Alias (2024:2227) explain that the main duty of a principal in leading their schools is to oversee and organise several school-related projects, bringing leadership and guidance in the school setting. They further assert that the success of every school depends on the skills and leadership of its principal.

According to Shaturaev (2021:1), educational leadership can be understood as a purposeful process designed to achieve specific goals. Within the school context, it involves the effective use of resources, the supervision of procedures, and the achievement of quantifiable outcomes. While various leadership models exist, the section below focuses on selected styles: instructional leadership, situational leadership, and transformational leadership. Each of these leadership styles offers different perspectives on how school leaders can impact teaching, learning, and overall school effectiveness.

a. Instructional leadership

Shaked (2023:1) defines instructional leadership as a form of school leadership that emphasises the promotion of teaching and learning. The definition, as concurred by Akamodi (2025:1), emphasises that instructional leadership highlights the importance of learner achievement and the quality of teaching. He further states that a principal who utilises an instructional leadership style is expected to create and embody a vision for academic success, nurture a collective culture among teachers, and utilise information to inform instructional decisions.

Moreover, the Education Improvement Research Centre (EIRC) (2022:1) defines instructional leadership as a system that positions teaching and learning at the

forefront of school decision-making. They further define the elements of instructional leadership as:

- Defining shared expectations.
- Resourcing strategically.
- Managing the instructional programme.
- Promoting a positive school learning environment; and
- Developing leadership skills and knowledge.

They further state that instructional leadership has an all-encompassing emphasis that provides structure for the daily running of the school, as evidenced by central leadership practices and skills that support teaching and learning outcomes and initiate school improvement and continued success.

Cagle (2023: 1) defines instructional leadership as a deliberate action and process to guide and support effective teaching and learning in a school environment. The author further states that many school principals request insight and practical ways to improve their leadership skills in this domain.

Moreover, Munna (2023:39) explains that instructional leadership is not a stationary term. He describes it as a term that does not mean the same thing in different contexts. He gives examples of the word's context in different settings, stating that in a modest school an instructional leader will be quite hands-on, while in a larger school an instructional leader will focus on building the leadership skills of their other staff.

DuFour (2002: 2) states that an instructional leader needs to have up-to-date knowledge in three areas of education:

- Curriculum.
- Instruction; and
- Assessment curriculum.

He explains that a principal needs to be aware of educational developments, especially those related to the curriculum, to guide and support his teachers and foster a culture of effective teaching and learning. He must be aware of educational

philosophies and beliefs, curricular sources and conflicts, and curriculum evaluation and improvement.

As emphasis shifts from teaching to learning, some have proposed the term “learning leader” over “instructional leader” (DuFour, 2002).

An instructional principal needs to know about various strategies used in teaching, the theoretical motives for adopting a particular teaching strategy, and the theories pinned to the technology-based learning environment. Assessment principals ought to know the principles of learner assessment, assessment procedures that emphasise differentiated learning, cater to different cognitive levels, and employ alternative assessment methods. Assessment techniques need to be sought to improve student learning.

Shava, Heystek and Chasara (2021:118) explain that principals need to acquire and exhibit a gradually multi-faceted and varied set of technical and adaptive leadership skills to reinforce learning by focusing on the teaching-learning method and the conditions that sustain it. They further state that schools are changing, and the types of learners in schools differ from other eras or periods.

Lashway (2002: 1) explains that an instructional principal ought to acquire specific skills to carry out the tasks associated with this leadership style. Those skills are:

- **Interpersonal skills**

Relationships are built on trust, and tasks are achieved through motivation and inspiration, with teachers involved in the planning, designing, and the evaluation of instructional programmes initiated by the teacher.

Mehmood, Taresh and Hassan (2023:38) believe that school principals' interpersonal skills are vital for improving teaching and learning and enhancing the school climate. They further state that the interpersonal skills a principal needs include communication, trustworthiness, empathy, and problem-solving.

These interpersonal skills are illustrated in the diagram below:

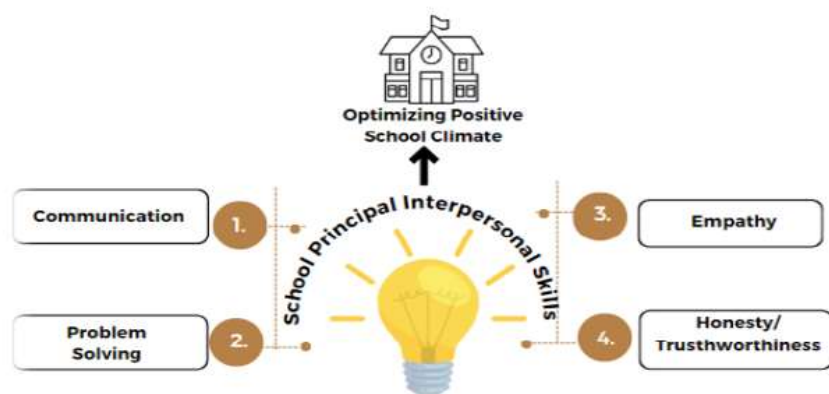


Figure 3: interpersonal skills (Source adapted from Taresh and Hassan (2023:38))

They believe these interpersonal skills are “soft skills”. They further state that they are considered soft skills because they help create a positive school climate that enhances learners' academic achievement.

Moreover, Mehmood, Taresh and Hassan (2023:44) quote Leithwood and Jantzi (2000), who state that a school principal is a key player in a school. They believe that as a leader, he/she must have numerous characteristics in several areas, i.e academic and professional excellence, intelligence, leadership, motivation, and emotional stability. Additionally, these characteristics will help teachers be go-getters and creative, fostering a positive climate in the school.

Shava, Heystek and Chasara (2021: 121) state that this aspect of instructional leadership focuses on the principal's role in working with teachers to ensure that the school has reliable, quantifiable, time-based targets focused on learners’ academic progress.

They further utilise the diagram crafted by Hallinger and Murphy's instructional management system from 1985 to explain this part of instructional leadership style in context, as seen below:



Figure 4: Hallinger and Murphy's instructional management system from 1985. (Source adapted from Shava, Heystek and Chasara (2021: 121))

Shava, Heystek and Chasara (2021: 121) state that one of the responsibilities of an instructional leader is to set the school's goals and communicate them to all stakeholders (teachers, parents, and learners). They further state that working with teachers to outline the school's mission involves verifying that the school has clear, attainable priorities that are communicated to the school community. Furthermore, they emphasise that creating goals for the school (its mission and vision) is seen as less important than the results themselves. Likewise, the aim mainly concerns the learners' academic progress, which ties in nicely with the goal of interpersonal skills for an instructional leader.

- **Planning skills**

Planning starts with clearly identifying goals or a vision to work towards and initiating commitment and enthusiasm. An instructional leader is organised and plans time.

Shava, Heystek and Chasara (2021: 121) assert that an instructional leader pays attention to the planning and monitoring of instruction and curriculum. This is done to ensure that the school is seen as a hub for effective teaching and learning. They further believe that planning skills for an instructional leader involve three leadership purposes: supervising and assessing teaching, curriculum coordination, and learner progress tracking. Moreover, possessing this skill as an instructional leader requires principals to be active participants in inspiring, supervising, and overseeing teaching and learning in the school.

They further utilise the diagram crafted by Hallinger and Murphy's instructional management system from 1985 to explain this part of instructional leadership style in context as seen below:

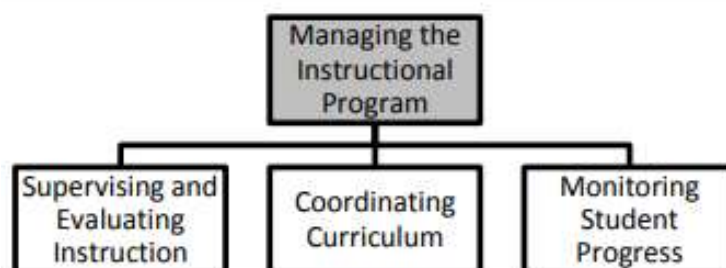


Figure 5 Hallinger and Murphy's instructional management system from 1985. (Source adapted from Shava, Heystek and Chasara (2021: 121))

Moreover, Shava. et al. (2021:122) state that educational leadership is the same as instructional leadership in that principals are mandated to focus on improving teaching and learning environments and, as a result, student achievement. They believe that a principal who practices the style of instructional leadership endeavours to improve instructional efficiency in their schools by relating with teachers and winningly supervising them.

- **Instructional observation skills**

These skills aim to provide teachers with feedback. Teachers who receive feedback know where they need to improve to meet the objectives set for a task or to realise the school's vision.

Suryani, Somantri and Kartiwi (2020: 1) define instructional leadership as the ability of a principal to guide, support, and empower teachers to improve their instructional practices, one of which is instructional observation. Ahmad and Ahmad (2024:3) concur with the sentiments above, stating that an instructional leader is actively involved in tasks such as classroom observation, providing feedback, and facilitating professional development opportunities in their school to improve teaching and learning and support teachers' professional growth.

Moreover, He, Guo and Abazie (2024:4) explain that supportive supervision is a significant form of instructional leadership. They state that this factor of instructional leadership promotes a culture of teacher development. He et al. (2024:1) maintain that this factor comprises regular monitoring and feedback sessions between the principal and teachers, during which the principal offers positive feedback and guidance to help teachers improve their instructional practices.

Yosep (2023:1) believes that academic supervision is an important purpose within the overall education programme. He states that this “important purpose” encompasses the principal’s attitude when distributing responsibilities to teachers under supervision, analysing, and making decisions about the teaching challenges educators face. Moreover, Yosep (2023:1) holds that it is the academic supervisor’s responsibility to ensure that teachers understand their educational roles and learners’ needs, thereby enabling them to plan lessons better suited to their learners and the school’s context. Furthermore, he asserts that supervision tasks promote co-operation, enabling more efficient completion, the use of more realistic methods, and better results than working independently. From this, Muhsin, Sudadi, Mahmud and Muadin (2023:2) concur that academic supervision is an ongoing effort by the principal to improve teachers’ skills in overseeing the learning process through guidance and collaboration, guaranteeing that learning aims are attained effectively and professionally.

Ngatini, Kusumaningsih, Nurkolis and Baldemor (2025:604) assert that the quality of learning in a school is influenced not only by instructional leadership but also by academic or instructional supervision. They state that academic supervision is a control mechanism that helps teachers develop and improve their ability to oversee the learning process and achieve the institution’s ideal educational goals. They further state that, in this context, academic supervision is a commitment to continually encourage, coordinate, and inspire teachers’ professional growth, both individually and in groups, to make them more effective in their teaching duties. Furthermore, Ngatini et al. (2025:605) state that a robust relationship between instructional leadership and effective academic supervision can produce a school climate that is more focused on improving teacher competence and student learning outcomes.

Therefore, principals need to support teacher development and set precise, well-defined academic goals. Academic supervision should place greater emphasis on delivering beneficial feedback and mentoring.

- **Research and evaluation skills**

Based on the articles above, instructional leadership can be defined as a leadership style that promotes effective teaching and learning. This style requires the principal to be informed about educational developments and measures to improve teaching and learning in their school.

Dasor (2024:1) states that a principal's endeavour to improve the quality of education must start with strengthening classroom learning, supported by school leadership that emphasises developing teacher professionalism and increasing learning effectiveness. He further states that this is key to improving teacher output and well-being. Moreover, Dasor (2024) states that to achieve this, principals can use the following approaches: performance rewards, effective communication, empowerment, recognition, and professional training to achieve the ideal school climate that promotes effective teaching and learning.

Ngatini, Kusumaningsih, Nurkolis and Baldemor (2025:603) maintain that a school principal has a vital role in cultivating quality learning by encouraging teachers to develop ground-breaking and inspiring teaching methods. They further state that teachers must have strong pedagogical skills to ensure effective learning in their classrooms.

As a result, the quality of teachers a school has directly influences the creation of a conducive learning space for learners in the school. Effective learning relies on the participation of teachers, learners, the curriculum, teaching materials, media, infrastructure, and learning methodologies to create a vibrant climate conducive to learning. Therefore, improving teacher capability is important in supporting quality learning in line with curriculum demands.

b. Situational leadership

Maisyaroh, Juharyanto, Imron, Satria, Burhanuddin and Puspitaningtyas (2020:73) state that for a leader to be classified as effective, his/her conduct depends on a variety of factors. They state that a leader needs to acclimatise to the organisation's context to bring about effective change. Furthermore, they believe that a leader in such a situation will need to utilise a situational leadership style. This leadership style will ensure that the leader utilises current leadership models to attain leadership goals that are suitable to the anticipated situation and to achieve the organisation's ultimate goals.

Sharma (2024: 1) explains that effective leadership is not a one-size-fits-all approach. She further explains that different situations call for different leadership styles. What might work for one team member may not work for another. Whereas Lindberg corroborates the view above (2022: 1), who defines situational leadership as where the contingency theory approach is utilised the most. Herrity (2024: 2) states that situational leadership has stages. As employees develop and improve their workplace skills, situational leaders shift their leadership style to meet company and employee needs.

According to Kenton, Yashina, and Logan (2024: 2), a single reference does not define situational leadership. They state that a leader who uses situational leadership mainly focuses on workplace factors. They believe that this leadership style compels leaders to adjust their style to match their employees' abilities.

Principals can never say they use only a specific leadership style in a school setting. When situations arise, they need to be flexible, read the context, and use a leadership style that fits that situation. This type of leadership ensures that teachers can meet their obligations and teach with fewer or no disruptions. As Maisyaroh, Juharyanto, Imron, Satria, Burhanuddin and Puspitaningtyas (2020:76) state, a situational leadership style is based on the leader's ability to pay close attention to the situation of his staff in an organisation and to apply leadership methods that best support the current situation. They believe leadership needs to be flexible and adaptable to the different situations in the organisation. There is no one-size-fits-all type of leadership.

c. Transformational leadership

According to Campos (2020: 1), transformational leadership is a leadership theory where a principal works with teachers to identify the adjustments needed, establish a vision through inspiration, and implement the change with a group of highly committed teachers. Guo, Cui, Arendt and O'Brien (2024: 1) define transformational leadership as a style of leadership that is utilised to inspire and motivate teachers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their leadership capacity. Whereas Needle (2024: 1) states that transformational leadership allows teachers to make decisions. He further states that independence is encouraged and that support and guidance are provided to explore new problem-solving techniques.

Suryadi, Dewi, Trisnawati and Al-Amin (2024:65) define transformational leadership as a leadership approach that is more concerned with encouraging and motivating teachers to achieve higher performance and organisational goals. They further state that a transformational leader is inclined to have unblemished vision and can communicate it effectively to teachers, inspiring and motivating them to go the extra mile.

Andriadi and Sulistiyo (2024:526) explain that instructional leadership improves teacher performance and job satisfaction by offering defined support and guidance. Transformational leadership motivates, increases job satisfaction, and enhances learner achievement through encouragement and teamwork. They believe that the interaction of these leadership styles improves educational outcomes, with principals effectively utilising both methods.

Cherry (2024: 1) identifies the four main elements of transactional leadership as follows:

1. Intellectual stimulation

A transformational principal not only defies the status quo but also inspires teachers' imagination. The principal encourages the teachers to explore new ways of doing things and learning opportunities.

Shafi, Lei, Song, Sarker and Zoya (2020: 1) state that transformational leadership also encompasses intellectual motivation. They further state that in this type of leadership style, a leader inspires employees to think critically and creatively. Moreover, they state that this leadership style is appropriate for recognising new opportunities within an organisation and for developing staff members' capabilities. Shafi et al. (2020:1) believe that transformational leaders boost employees' confidence and standards in executing their duties, and, as a result, the organisation can realise its main objective.

Suryadi, Dewi, Trisnawati and Al-Amin (2024:70) assert that the intellectual stimulation or motivation offered by transformational leaders contributes to increasing employees' intrinsic motivation. They state that a transformational leader can encourage their employees to think creatively and critically, and to explore innovative solutions to the problems they face. Furthermore, Suryadi et al. (2024:70) believe that intrinsic motivation not only challenges employees to grow and learn but also offers profound personal satisfaction when they effectively overcome the challenge.

James (2025:3) states that principals who utilise intellectual stimulation as part of their transformational leadership style tend to favour innovation and creative problem-solving. He further states that these kinds of leaders will challenge premises, endorse inquiry-based learning, and encourage experimentation with new teaching approaches and skills. James (2025:3) believes that by creating a safe setting for people to take intellectual risks, one can fuel both teachers and learners to think outside the box and grow intellectually, promoting an energetic and flexible learning culture in the school.

2. Individualised consideration

A principal with a transformational leadership style ensures that the school environment is supportive and encouraging for all teachers. To ensure the school environment is supportive and transformational, transformational principals keep lines of communication open so that teachers feel free to share ideas and receive immediate appreciation for their rare contributions to the group.

Bakker, Hetland, Olsen and Espevik (2022:1) believe that a transformational leader is one who exhibits individual consideration towards followers and motivates them to be at their best and to nurture their own leadership skills. They further state that employees who work under a transformational leader are more content and driven and perform better. Bakker et al. (2022:1) affirm that when employees utilise their strengths and take a lead, they excel at the task at hand because they have applied the “self-starting approach” to their work goals and tasks.

Shafi, Lei, Song, Sarker and Zoya (2020:3) state that, because of individualised consideration, leaders can focus solely on individual employees to ensure they meet and realise their potential. They further state that transformational leaders who possess this characteristic can support their employees, helping them overcome fear of risk and transform repetitive ways of working. This then leads to a higher level of creativity, which, in turn, benefits the company.

James (2025:3) states that this component of transactional leadership includes identifying the exclusive needs, strengths, and ambitions of each teacher and learner. He further states that a transformational leader serves as a mentor or coach, offering tailored support, reassurance, and professional development opportunities. Furthermore, James (2025:3) believes that providing distinguished teacher training, offering learners mentoring programmes, or implementing feedback procedures that address individual growth ensures that individuals see they matter. Hence, the goal for this component in a transactional leadership approach is to nurture potential and endorse the holistic development of all stakeholders.

- **Inspirational motivation**

Transformational principals have a clear vision that they can express to teachers without ambiguity. A principal who uses this leadership style can motivate teachers to share the same passion and inspiration to achieve these goals.

Shafi et al. (2020:3) state that inspirational motivation rests solely on a leader's ability to motivate and encourage their employees to realise their most impressive goal (s). They further state that, because of their leaders' hopefulness and eagerness, the employees feel inspired and confident that they will succeed in whatever task they are given.

Suryadi et al. (2024:70) concur with the above statement, stating that transformational leaders tend to have a clear vision and communicate it effectively to employees, thereby inspiring and motivating them to work better. Leaders who can effectively inspire and motivate employees can create a dynamic, productive organisational culture.

James (2025:3) states that a transformational leader (principal) communicates a clear and convincing vision for a school's future. He further states that a principal who uses this leadership style employs eagerness, hopefulness, and convincing communication to encourage and boost teachers' and learners' morale. Moreover, James (2025:3) maintains that in a school setting, this might entail creating high expectations for learning, fostering a sense of purpose, and emphasising the belief that the school community can achieve great outcomes together. He believes this communal vision can unify efforts and boost the morale of all involved.

- **Idealised influence**

A transformational principal can be identified as a role model for the teachers. Because teachers trust and respect the principal, the principal tends to imitate their ideals. In a school environment, a principal who uses this leadership style can influence the school culture with the support of the teachers who feel included in the decision-making process. The school is not the principal's, but the whole community's.

Shafi et al. (2020:3) maintain that by utilising this idealised influence phenomenon, leaders can motivate their employees and gain their respect and loyalty. Hence, transformational leaders encourage and motivate their employees to achieve the organisation's goals by articulating a clear vision and a clear path to follow.

James (2025:3) states that this element of transactional leadership comprises a leader who is seen as a role model, a leader who is admired, respected, and trusted by his followers. He further states that in a school setting, a principal should possess ethical behavioural traits, show commitment to the school's mission, and always lead by example. Furthermore, James (2025:1) believes that the integrity of the principal nurtures a trusting relationship between the principal and his/her staff and learners, whilst inspiring others to imitate his/her behaviour and values in their daily lives. This, in turn, makes teachers feel more dedicated and affiliated with the school's goals.

d. Servant leadership

According to Lopez-Gomez (2022:1), servant leadership is a style of leadership that prioritises serving the greater good. He further states that a leader who utilises this leadership style tends to serve their team and organisation first. They do not prioritise their objectives. Whereas, Keton, James and Rosenston (2024:1) state that servant leadership is a leadership style and belief in which a leader interacts with others in a management or fellow-employee capacity. These authors further state that a leader who uses this style aims to achieve authority rather than power and that this system represents a decentralised organisational structure.

Makirimani and Naicker (2024:2) quote Lefa (2025), who likens the servant leadership style to the concept of Ubuntu. They state that the Ubuntu philosophy is defined as an act of being human, caring, sympathetic, empathetic, and forgiving, and as the display of values of humanness towards others. It is often translated by the phrase 'I am because we are'. They believe that a servant leader will always put their needs after those of others and the organisation.

Jonker and Dube (2025:1) define servant leadership as a leader who oversees organisational challenges by prioritising positive organisational outcomes over personal welfare. They further state that this type of leadership is philanthropic, as it allows the leader to encourage and empower their followers actively.

Hawley (2024:1) identifies these characteristics as the key characteristics that define servant leadership:

- 1) Empathy: Servant leaders endeavour to understand and have compassion for others. These leaders demonstrate care and concern for their teachers' professional and personal well-being. A principal uses this leadership style to focus on personal relationships and the continuous growth of their staff, prioritising long-term goals and empowering others within the organisation.

Zivkovic (2022:454) states that leaders who practice empathy in their leadership allow for various groups to feel acknowledged, supported, and able to contribute fully to the organisation. She further states that

leadership efficiency can be improved through empathy, which can rally and encourage supporters towards attaining organisational aims.

Makirimani and Naicker (2024:2) state that empathy is shown when a leader can place themselves in the follower's shoes and differentiate between their personal interests and those of the followers. They further state that the ability to empathise endorses trust and tolerance between leader and followers. Furthermore, Makirimani et al. (2024:2) believe that a principal should be able to empathise or put themselves in another's place to comprehend their work and the challenges they confront, thereby better attending to their needs.

Thus, a principal who endeavours to empathise with teachers is better able to understand the work and the challenges teachers confront than one who is detached from the daily happenings of a classroom.

- 2) Listening: When a principal uses this leadership style, being an effective listener becomes central to their leadership. These types of principals pay careful attention to their teachers' contributions and concerns and make decisions based on this collective insight.

Makirimani and Naicker (2024:2) state that a principal who practices servant leadership needs to be able to listen to understand, not to answer. They state that such a skill is shown through dialogue, coaching, reflective thinking, and counselling offered by the principal. Likewise, Makirimani et.al (2024:2) believe that listening fosters a culture of understanding different viewpoints on a matter.

As a result, in a school context, a principal should be able to listen to teachers, learners, and the community to understand their needs and serve them accordingly.

- 3) Healing: A servant principal identifies the teachers' personal and professional challenges and wants to heal and support them. This creates an environment that thrives on being a supportive work environment.

Makirimani and Naicker (2024:3) define healing as a process of looking after people's emotional well-being and helping them feel whole. They also explain that a servant leader assists their followers and community in healing by providing physical and emotional support, which is important for a healthy, positive workplace.

Makirimani et al. (2024:3) believe that principals should be able to create a sense of unity amongst the teachers in their school. They further assert that emotional health problems are common today and can lower the motivation of individuals in any job, and teachers in public schools are not an exception.

- 4) Awareness: Servant principals are conscious of themselves and their actions' impact on the teachers and the organisation.

According to Makirimani et al. (2024:3), awareness is the capacity to fully understand and know the surroundings, as well as to react appropriately to surrounding situations. Furthermore, Makirimani et al. (2024:3) state that the stage of awareness involves the comprehension of matters relating to ethics, power, and values.

Consequently, awareness encompasses a leader's skill to read cues from the environment and be well adjusted to the surroundings. Furthermore, principals need to understand the values and beliefs that guide the school community so they can serve everyone involved appropriately.

- 5) Persuasion: Instead of using authority to dominate, a servant-leadership style relies on persuasion to influence and encourage teachers in the organisation. This builds trust and commitment rather than compliance through power or threats.

As stated by Makirimani et al. (2024:3), persuasion is the capacity of a leader to make decisions with the team without intimidation. They further believe that persuasion clearly distinguishes servant leadership from traditional leadership styles, in which authority is used to reach agreement. Furthermore, Makirimani et al. (2024:3) believe that a

servant leadership principal uses expert power rather than authority to gain consensus from their teachers. For this reason, a principal who lacks persuasion as a leadership skill will be inclined to micro-manage teachers and lean more towards an authoritarian style of leadership.

- 6) Conceptualisation: A servant principal can see the bigger picture and visualise the future. This helps them to plan and set goals that support the organisation's values and the greater good.

Makirimani et al. (2024:3) state that conceptualisation includes the futuristic feature of leading and being seen as a forward thinker. They further state that traditional leaders are engrossed in achieving short-term operational goals, whereas servant leaders broaden their perspective beyond these goals to realise the organisation's mission and vision. Moreover, Makirimani et al. (2024:3) argue that a servant leader needs to be seen as a holistic leader who utilises their abilities to see the bigger picture and understand how different parts of the organisation (including operations and strategy) connect and affect each other.

Thus, a principal who practices servant leadership should be mindful that the school should be seen as a complete unit and make choices that benefit the organisation as a whole.

- 7) Foresight: Servant principals use past experiences, present realities, and the likely influence of decisions in the future to predict outcomes of certain situations or events.

According to Makirimani et al. (2024:3), foresight is the competence to learn from the past, comprehend the reality of the current context, and anticipate the likely consequences of future choices. They further state that foresight is displayed in reflecting on past experiences, forecasting, and preparing for the future. Therefore, a principal who utilises foresight by contemplating and making decisions that benefit teachers, learners, and the community is practising servant leadership style in their organisation.

- 8) Stewardship: A principal utilising servant leadership takes accountability for the roles assigned to them and acts in a committed way to serve the needs of those entrusted to them. They maximise the responsible use of the organisation's resources for the greater good.

Makirimani et al. (2024:3) define stewardship as the sense of responsibility and commitment that stakeholders should have in managing and caring for their institutions on behalf of society, ensuring they serve the greater good. They further assert that stewardship involves taking care of something for the benefit of others.

As a result, a servant leader should be dedicated to serving followers' needs and be open to contributions from all stakeholders.

- 9) Commitment to growth: The servant principal is committed to each individual's personal or professional growth within the organisation.

According to Makirimani et al. (2024:3), commitment to growth is the duty of a servant leader to be there for others. They further believe that this element of servant leadership is utilised to foster followers' growth, both personally and professionally. Moreover, Gupta and Nambudiri (2022:21) believe that a principal who practices servant leadership can encourage followers to grow professionally, personally and spiritually. Furthermore, Gupta and Nambudiri (2022:21) maintain that such principles nurture teachers' personal and professional development and include teachers in decision-making.

- 10) Community building: Servant leaders increase personal involvement and the team's collective values by fostering a sense of belonging and community in the workplace.

According to Makirimani et al. (2024:3), building a community entails fostering a social culture in an establishment to promote unity among people. Gupta and Nambudiri (2022:22) concur with these sentiments, stating that the tenderness and love that persons have for each other are shaped through service and caring for one another, and that this is essential in building a community. They further state that principals

should aim to establish such an environment in their schools, where teachers and the community are part of and participate in the school's development.

This leadership style ensures genuine commitment from the organisation's teachers. The leader becomes more relatable to employees when they do not see themselves as superior to those they lead.

e. Democratic leadership

Lee (2023: 1) states that democratic leadership is commonly known as participative leadership. She states that this leadership style allows several people to contribute to decision-making. Shinde (2024: 2) describes democratic leadership as an approach that gives the impression that everyone's input is valuable. He further states that a whole is more useful than any individual.

Woods (2020: 1) asserts that democratic leadership involves people rather than regarding them as followers of the leader. The author further states that democratic leadership seeks to enhance others' participation and influence in decision-making, encouraging discussion and debate while fostering a sense of identity as co-creators of a community.

Dike and Madubueze (2019: 129) state that democratic leadership styles have enabled leaders to make the right decisions, contribute to the team, and delegate some decision-making authority. They further state that another benefit of this leadership style is the potential to build advanced levels of trust, which leads juniors to respond with higher organisational accomplishment.

Chukwusa (2019: 4) states that a democratic leadership style accentuates group and leader involvement in creating policies that guide organisational processes. This author further states that a democratic leader gains power and authority from his followers. He states that a democratic leader keeps their staff informed about everything that affects their work and shares decision-making and problem-solving responsibilities.

Gonzales, Roberts and Tegano (2022:1) state that COVID-19 has vividly altered ideas about leadership and leadership practices. They further state that, even though principals are still guiding their schools, they are “guiding and steering their ship” from their laptops. They are now regarded as distant, isolated leaders.

Kwatubana and Molaodi (2021: 110-111) maintain that teamwork in a crisis is crucial, as it strengthens relationships. They further state that intentional attention to teamwork is mandatory for teachers to uphold suppleness and endure coordinated performance, which, in turn, can ease the stress triggered by the heavy workload and work-life imbalance. Moreover, they maintain that principals ought to look after their own well-being. They assert that principals need to be keen to delegate authority, make the most of teachers with expertise within the school, and build infrastructure to leverage the leadership of several teachers. Therefore, distributing leadership duties is more successful than other leadership styles in times of crisis. Hence, distributive leadership becomes key in safeguarding the effectiveness of distant leadership.

Hudson, Mahendrarajah, Walton, Pascaris, Melim and Ruttenberg-Rozen (2020:18) state that during a time of crisis, rapid changes may allow for leaders to integrate a distributed leadership framework in their leadership style. They further state that this is done to swiftly navigate a multitude of issues.

Effective leadership is crucial for democratic leadership to be successful. Democratic leadership in a school thrives on influencing teachers to perform optimally and realise the school's vision.

3.3 IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN-SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

This section discusses the impact of COVID-19 on school leadership. It emphasises the leadership styles principals used to lead their schools. It also explores the methods used by primary school principals in South Africa to maintain effective teaching and learning and to manage finances and allocate resources.

3.3.1 The Impact COVID-19 Had on School Leadership

Countries were examined, and literature was reviewed on how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the principal's leadership style. Below are the countries that were reviewed:

A. United States of America

Wharton-Beck, Chou, Gilbert, Johnson and Beck (2022: 1) state that the long-term effects of COVID-19 pose new leadership challenges and continue to increase the need for change during the global health crisis. They further state that the challenges faced by the principals involved the digital divide, staffing shortages, online instructional practices, communication with families, and staff professional development. McLeod and Dulskey (2021: 1) state that most school systems were caught unprepared for the magnitude of this pandemic, although many locations had several months of warning.

Shamir-Inbal and Blau (2021:3) assert that most schools with fewer resources were underprepared throughout the lengthy transition to online learning. They further state that the schools lacked satisfactory pedagogical and technological knowledge to function well. Furthermore, principals encountered the relentless challenges of ever-changing school policies, supporting staff shortages and mental health, and managing daily crises related to students, families, staff, and the communities, states Beauchamp, Hulme and Clarke (2021: 21). Wharton-Beck, Chou, Gilbert, Johnson and Beck (2022: 3) contend that the principals expressed overwhelming concerns about the inequity in technology distribution. They further assert that the pandemic exposed inequities and gaps in the system.

Grooms and Childs (2021:1) state that the Covid-19 pandemic mandated that schools across the United States close their doors, as did schools in other countries worldwide. The closure of schools forced teachers to adapt and work from home. They further state that principals needed to grasp the comprehensive societal effects of the pandemic on their students, beyond the impact of school closures. Moreover, Grooms and Childs (2021:1) demonstrate that principals needed to direct and make sense of policies and guidelines shaped by top officials and other powerful external stakeholders, while also catering to the needs of teachers and learners. Ensuring that teaching and learning were taking place in their schools.

McLeod and Dusky (2021:3) state that the worldwide pandemic posed a unique challenge for school leaders (principals). They further state that the Covid-19 pandemic laid bare the discrimination and inequalities in our educational systems, as well as the lack of principals' preparation for crisis leadership. Moreover, they state that the USA has seen crises before, such as snow and school shootings, but none like this one. The principals and administrators did not know how long the pandemic would last. Therefore, they were working in the dark without any knowledge or guidance of a pandemic like this, as this was one of a kind. They had no reference point and were "looking for a needle in a haystack" while being expected to guide and support the teachers.

B. Turkey

Evrin and Esen (2022: 1) state that school principals were bound to have complications in strategic, instructional, and social leadership due to the pandemic. They further state that, due to the need for education to continue regardless of school closures, distance education applications based on information and communications technology (ICT) began replacing face-to-face education.

According to Toker-Gokce and Sarikaya (2024: 1), during the Covid-19 pandemic, principals were assigned tasks without regard for their initial roles or positions. They further state that this exposed a myriad of emotional encounters among the participants, ranging from fear and anxiety to feelings of satisfaction and commitment.

Aytaç (2020:57) reports that school administrators identified the most common problems faced during the Covid-19 pandemic as students' low learning motivation, parents' inability to create a learning environment at home, and the lack of access to live broadcasts from the Education Information Network (EBA) TV or education portal. The majority of school administrators observed that teachers were reluctant to teach in live lectures via the EBA education portal or other programmes, and their motivation gradually decreased over time. It was observed that half of the school administrators lacked an emergency action plan for the pandemic and followed the instructions issued by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE).

Özer, Suna, Perc, Sensoy and Ilikhan (2022:1) state that education is one of the areas significantly affected by these negative effects because schools, among the main sources of social and cultural mobility, had been closed in many countries within the

scope of pandemic measures. The duration of school closures in Turkey was longer than in most OECD countries; thus, Turkey prioritised school re-openings in the 2021-2022 academic year to mitigate possible adverse outcomes of closures.

With school closures, many countries quickly transitioned to distance learning to resume educational activities. Although distance learning can provide continuity of education in the short term, the countries' readiness to provide this remote instruction, coupled with difficulties in accessing the services, caused significant frustration and debate. Technological challenges that hinder access to distance education and digital literacy differences among students continue to perpetuate socio-economic disparities in learning, both locally and globally. The closure of schools also limits both peer and student-teacher interaction, which are critical for the development of many cognitive and social skills.

C. France

According to Bonnéry (2020: 1), on March 17 2020, the French government closed schools until further notice. The teachers and parents were ordered to "home-school" learners "remotely" to ensure "pedagogical continuity." She further states that learners were brought in, in staggered phases, some higher grades had to postpone their exams, and continuous assessment was utilised.

Furthermore, Bonnéry (2020:3-6) states that the outbreak of the coronavirus in 2020 thrust the French school system into largely uncharted territory. The risk of children falling behind during lockdown was very real, so the swift introduction of distance learning methods was crucial. It soon became clear, however, that ministers were assuming that every pupil had a private room to study in and belonged to a family that owned at least one computer with software for office work (not just for leisure), a printer, and broadband (for videoconferencing lessons) or even several computers when parents and various siblings were all working or studying remotely. However, the teaching materials available during lockdown were not designed for use without a teacher but for use in class, in conjunction with the teacher's spoken instructions and guided activities. The majority of parents, with limited education and working in low-level or unskilled jobs, struggled to understand the purpose of tasks and to impart the basic knowledge required.

Kniffin, Narayanan and Van Vugt (2021: 1) state that during the lengthy period of the Covid-19 pandemic, the long-term demands placed on school principals are bound to exceed their personal strengths and employment resources, therefore making them susceptible to their leadership roles, home-school navigation, tiredness, and high burnout risks of both administrative and managerial roles. They further state that most school principals lacked the knowledge and capacity to meet the demands of the crisis.

Dare and Saleem (2022: 2) emphasise the emotional intelligence of principals to lead their schools effectively during the Covid-19 pandemic. The principals' attempts to deliver mixed, face-to-face, and online learning may be strengthened by applying emotional intelligence. They further state that emotional intelligence is a combination of emotional and social competencies, adaptive skills, and personal characteristics for leading others. A principal needed to be able to do that effectively to win the trust of all stakeholders during the times of the Covid-19 pandemic.

D. Germany

Burkot and Demeshkant (2021: 620) state that teachers worldwide were not ready for such an unexpected change in education, both in terms of mental, technological, and methodical preparation. They further state that teachers were trained in their teaching and training in direct contact with their learners inside a classroom throughout the years. They abruptly shifted from classroom teaching to online learning.

Eurydice (2021: 56) states that the Covid-19 pandemic propelled a decentralised approach to educational responses, with individual states applying various strategies to suit their local conditions and resources in Germany. She further states that this “decentralised method” enabled states to adjust their responses to the virus based on infection rates, local health guidelines, and the availability of digital infrastructure.

Kerres (2020: 4) states that due to Germany's resistance to online learning or any form of technology in the classroom, the move to online learning was not seamless, as teachers were not taught or encouraged to use technology in their lessons. The author further states that Germany's uncertain relationship with technology extends across many aspects of German culture, including philological and educational heritage. The Germans believed that introducing and pushing technology would lead to an inactive society. This stance proved troublesome for the principals in effectively convincing and leading their schools.

Huber (2020:1) reports that, in the first phase of the school lockdown, educators were allowed to repeat only content that had already been taught. Teaching of new content was not intended. During the school lockdown, however, this changed, and new curriculum content was delivered.

Huber (2020:8) explains that teachers who had developed their teaching skills through face-to-face interaction with students had to change their approach and adapt to digital technology. This shift brought several challenges, including limited access to computers, tablets, and the Internet, as well as a lack of proper training for teachers to conduct online lessons. Organising and delivering remote classes became more difficult and time-consuming, leading to digital fatigue among both teachers and students. Despite these challenges, there was increased communication between teachers and students after lessons. From a leadership perspective, principals recognised the benefits of digital technologies and showed a willingness to continue using some of these tools after the pandemic. They also provided psychological support for both students and staff and encouraged collaboration and mutual support between teachers and school leaders.

E. Japan

In 2019, the Global and Innovation Gateway for All (GIGA) school concepts were introduced. The GIGA programme aimed to develop adequate infrastructure for ICT use at schools, states Dennen, Dickson-Deane, Ge, Ifenthaler, Murthy and Richardson (2022: 1). These further state that the GIGA school programme specified “1 device for one student with a high-speed network in schools,” thus granting improved and creative learning for all students who lived in Japan at the time.

Sato (2024: 2) states that in the pandemic context, the principal's methods were to monitor the increase or decrease in the number of individuals infected with the new coronavirus as the basis for his decision and then to ensure safety measures. This put so much pressure on the principals to lead their schools effectively.

F. Indonesia

According to Karwanto (2020: 331), the 2019 coronavirus disease pandemic, or COVID-19, significantly affected many people's lives, including school principals, who had to ensure effective teaching and learning in their schools. The author further states

that almost all schooling had to be suspended, and learning had to be adjusted in several ways.

Hasim and Hasanah (2020: 1-5) state that the success of schools in achieving educational goals cannot be separated from the principal's responsibilities. They further state that a principal's main duty is supervising the implementation of educational and learning events in schools.

Nurdiansyah (2021:1) states that school principals during Covid-19 had inadequate knowledge of the distance learning model. He further states that there were skills lacking in the principal's leadership style for mitigating this distance-learning model. Some of the skills they lacked were offering advice on creating interesting tasks for teachers, skills in operating educational applications, applying multiple distance learning models/strategies, retrieving information from the numerous online sources, undertaking academic supervision, offering training related to online learning for teachers, and managing the well-being of teachers and students. Moreover, Nurdiansyah (2021:2) asserts that principals reported numerous challenges during distance learning implementation, including distance learning infrastructure, teachers' basic qualifications, and the need to adjust offline curriculum materials for online delivery.

Werang, Agung, Jampel, Sujana and Asaloei (2023: 2) coined "outside-the-box leadership". They defined the term as a school principal who always thinks and acts out of context, leaving room for "wild" ideas that are, therefore, sometimes controversial. They further explained that, given the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the principals had to be creative in their leadership to ensure that lesson delivery in their schools was not disrupted. Hence, they had to employ "outside-the-box leadership".

Indra Ritonga and Kustati (2020:2) quote Hamzah et al. (2021), who state that a principal must not only be able to guide and influence others but also know how to use online tools to help manage the school. They further state that e-leadership is not only expected to integrate technology into leadership practices but also to bring about changes in teacher behaviour and performance, moving from predictable teaching methods to online-based learning.

G. Kenya

Gathuru and Mweyeri (2021: 1) state that Kenya was not exempt from the harsh realities of the Covid-19 pandemic, as with all African countries and other countries worldwide. They further state that to reduce the spread of the virus, the Kenyan government closed all schools and universities. Learning institutions were expected to employ online learning using technology and the Internet. They state that teachers were instructed to prepare work for learners to take home. However, the lack of broadband Internet and the cost of Wi-Fi in some remote areas limited the availability of e-learning to learners.

Githinji and Oywer (2020: 67) corroborate the statement above, noting that principals in Kenya implemented platforms such as online learning systems and mobile educational apps to ensure effective teaching and learning. They further state that virtual classrooms became a new teaching method, enabling teachers to deliver classes, provide interactive lessons, and engage learners in real-time learning activities.

Gathuru and Mweyeri (2021: 1) state that due to the socio-economic inequalities in Kenya, the learning gap increased as most of the learners were omitted from online education. This was due to a lack of Internet access and reliable electricity. Furthermore, most parents could not afford any school-related expenses, such as learning materials and daily bundles, because they did not work. This further amplified the gap between the haves and the have-nots. Even in areas with electricity and technology, the cost was too high for parents to foot the bill.

Baingana (2024:78) states that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Kenya developed strategies to reduce learning losses upon the reopening of schools. He further states that the government of Kenya initiated distance learning through broadcasts from the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, primarily via radio, television, and online platforms. Moreover, Baingana (2024:78) asserts that, owing to unexpected interruptions to learning in schools, numerous rural schools were not equipped to deliver remote learning to learners at home, even though some teachers tried to keep in touch with learners, provide basic instruction, and monitor their well-being. Nonetheless, he states that some private and a few other primary schools

provided learning materials to their learners, whereas a few well-off families could provide the necessary devices and data for learning. Meanwhile, in public primary schools, learners from poor households and rural areas remained disengaged and lacked learning support during the Covid-19 pandemic.

H. South Africa

According to Harris (2020: 2), the Covid-19 pandemic has precisely placed schools and principals under massive strain to move to online teaching and learning methods. He further states that the South African context and the socio-economic inequalities continue to exist in the country and the education sector. COVID-19 put many communities, including schools, under pressure to develop plans that accommodate a wide range of learners. This is corroborated by Zhao (2020: 1), who states that all forms of schooling had to be paused, and teaching had to be re-organised in several ways to cater for the different communities and the socio-economic standards of the South African status.

Azorin (2020:1) asserts that COVID-19 offered school principals an opportunity to exercise leadership in education by applying e-leadership principles. He further states that this made it mandatory for principals to be better prepared to respond to and adapt to these changing times. Thus, he further believes that the core leadership capabilities of a principal must include, among others, leading and influencing staff members, creating a learning environment suitable for teaching and learning, developing motivational approaches, clearly outlining power scopes and activities, and lastly distributing and assigning responsibilities.

As a result, principals should be able to create a connection between the school and the community. Also, there should be harmonious partnerships between the school and other stakeholders. Azorin (2020:1) believes that a principal who possesses these skills can foster harmonious partnerships, enabling the school to benefit from community support.

According to Hargreaves (2020:3), 'we are presently wedged in a long, dark tunnel with COVID-19'. He further states that by the time we emerge from the tunnel, we ought to do things differently from the post-COVID-19 period, and that this should involve school leadership. Moreover, he says that we now exist in a society that is becoming more varied, globalised, multi-faceted and media-rich (ibid).

Harris (2020:1) explains that schools were the most significant societal organisations affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. He further states that the principal's leadership styles were redirected towards network practices, which favoured detailed, clear communication and collaboration during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is corroborated by Zhao (2020:3), who maintains that education and the principals' duties were reshaped and recrafted during the Covid-19 pandemic.

For this reason, principals' leadership styles changed due to COVID-19. This shifted principals' leadership style on its axis and is unlikely to return to normal in the near future.

Du Plessis (2021: 316) states that confusion and anxiety reigned among the principals due to the government's lack of decisions and guidance regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. This was intensified by the absence of stakeholder decision-making in education, such as at the district level, which left many school principals making key decisions daily, often doubting the support of departmental officials. The author further states that principals had to lead teachers and schools to do their best to function effectively in unknown territory, where teachers had to move to online teaching.

The Human Sciences Research Council (2021: 453) states that the pandemic worsened existing economic gaps in the South African education system. They further state that the school closures unfairly impacted learners from low-income families. In areas without access to technology or reliable Internet for schooling, those learners were "left behind".

This shows that COVID-19 truly changed how we perceive school leadership and how principals were expected to lead their schools. The principals were challenged beyond their limitations. They had to provide guidance and assistance to all while waiting for guidance themselves and needing support from the powers that be.

Kgwete (2025:1) states that, like any other leadership in an organisation, school leadership is expected to change and keep pace with the times. He further states that a successful principal should be able to guide their staff successfully even in a crisis. Furthermore, Kgwete (2025:3) argues that, universally, principals were not ready to deal with the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.4 METHODS EMPLOYED BY PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS DURING COVID-19 TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

3.4.1 Learner-to-teacher Ratio

Gustafsson and Maponya (2021: 1) state that in a South African classroom, a class in a primary school will have 40 or more learners. With COVID-19 and attempts to contain it through measures such as social distancing, learners sitting 1m apart in a classroom, and not sharing desks, it was challenging for some principals.

The primary, secondary, and tertiary education systems in South Africa have always had to deal with major challenges such as the large numbers of learners in classrooms, inadequate learner support material, lack of clean water, insufficient and unhygienic 'bathroom' facilities, poor quality of teaching, and inadequate support, especially in disadvantaged communities (Pillay, 2021). Finding sufficient classroom space to accommodate more learners during the pandemic was a major challenge for most schools.

Some principals saw this challenge as an opportunity. Maree (2022: 251) states that careful planning and accurate measurements were employed to limit the space of desks and provide a space for social distancing. She further asserts that, to achieve sufficient space, some teaching resources, such as a reading corner, were removed in some classrooms because learners could not share the resources, and there was insufficient open space to meet the 1m apart regulation.

Sithole (2021: 1) states that some of the schools had to implement the following three time-tabling models during the pandemic:

1. Students rotated daily at the school on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The second group would have school on Tuesdays and Thursdays that week.
2. Weekly rotation: learners were split into two groups. Group A would attend the whole week, while Group B would attend the second week. Teachers had to ensure that all the learners had work to do at home during the week they were not attending.

3. Hybrid: Learners were taught using Apps such as Google Classroom, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp groups, and more.
4. Platooning: A school day was split into two sessions, roughly five and four and a half hours, to ensure all learners attended all classes. Du Plessis (2020:317) explains that the DBE introduced plans for curriculum recovery during and after COVID-19 to reduce the pandemic's impact on education. He further states that learners returned to school in a staggered fashion in schools where platooning had been phased in. Moreover, he states that exams were revoked and replaced by continuous assessment activities or by other modalities, such as online testing for final exams.

It should be noted that, while great care was taken in planning and implementing COVID-19 protocols in schools, schools generally did their best to ensure protocols aimed at curbing the virus's spread were carried out effectively.

3.4.2 Online and Digital Education

Nzimande (2021: 1) highlights the important lessons that society and our government had to learn and may have learned during COVID-19, which is the importance of enhancing education societies' capacity to revolutionise and digitalise development systems that promote learner digital teaching and learning skills.

In addition, Nzimande (2021:1) highlights the significant lessons that ought to be learned during a pandemic concerning the importance of improving society's educational capability. He states that such capabilities can be utilised to modernise and digitalise development systems, which endorses students' digital teaching and learning (TEL or technology-enhanced learning) skills.

Maree (2022: 251) maintains that during COVID-19, it became clear that private schools and schools in more well-off areas adapted reasonably well and were quite successful in using a combination of in-person, hybrid online, and digital teaching and learning formats. She further states that many schools in disadvantaged, impoverished, and resource-scarce regions struggled to transition from teaching almost exclusively in person to online teaching and learning. Furthermore, Maree

(2022: 251) states that several schools in underprivileged, poor, and resource-scarce districts struggled to make the transition from teaching almost entirely in an in-person format to teaching and learning successfully online. She proclaims that learners in these districts and learners from low-income families attending schools in wealthier areas either did not have smartphones or access to the Internet or to Wi-Fi, or did not have the abilities needed to use the available online resources. She believes that this predicament significantly affected these learners' ability to benefit from online and digital learning platforms.

Fricker and Alhattab (2021:3) quote UNICEF (2021), which states that some learners lost between 9 months and a whole school year between the start of the pandemic and July 2021. They further state that, though the amount of time lost from schooling varies from school to school, those in well-equipped schools with reliable infrastructure and a high percentage of motivated, highly trained teachers were able to devise measures to minimise time lost during this period.

Fricker and Alhattab (2021:3) state that trying to catch up on all the lost teaching and learning time was not without its challenges. They maintain that to mitigate the challenges and difficulties brought by Covid-19, the following could be implemented:

- To re-employ experienced 'retired' teachers,
- educators who have taken package deals,
- and unemployed educators.
- Parents should be supported in helping their children with their studies.
- Well-funded schools are urged to assist disadvantaged schools where they can.

3.5 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION DURING COVID 19 IN SOUTH AFRICA

Du Plessis (2022: 1) explains that the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSF) (RSA, 1996b) denounces the funding of schools in terms of socio-economic categories, with more public funds allocated to the poorest schools. He further states that the least poor schools —Quintiles 4 and 5 —receive lower financial allocations from the state. Thus, these schools depend heavily on school fees, private

donations, and other resources to supplement school budgets and maintain educational standards.

Mestry corroborates the statement above (2020: 5), which states that the ANSSSF policy stipulates a legal basis for funding schools. This is done by ranking them into wealthy Quintiles and subsidising them accordingly. This suggests that schools serving poorer communities would receive more state funding than schools serving affluent communities. He further asserts that poorer schools are classified as Quintiles 1, 2, and 3, and well-off schools are classified as Quintiles 4 and 5. This ranking is based on the community's unemployment and literacy rates surrounding the school. This means that Quintiles 1, 2, and 3 schools (no-fee schools) receive a non-personnel resource allocation budget approximately 7 times higher than that of affluent schools.

According to van der Berg and Spaull (2020: 17), lockdowns and school closures have had a harsh economic outcome for many families, particularly those working in the informal sector. This affected the school fee collection of the Quintiles 4-5 schools as they are reliant on the fees because they do not receive the most money from the government, states van Dyk and White (2019: 16). They further state that Quintile 1 schools are still inferior when compared to Quintile 5 in terms of resources and composition even though they get allocated a higher amount. Thus, it may still be the case that some schools in Quintiles 2, 3, and 4 have greater needs than Quintile 1 schools, a result of the current Quintile ranking system, which can lead to incorrect rankings.

Du Plessis (2020: 8) agrees with the statement above by stating that Quintiles 1 to 3 schools in South Africa are the most disadvantaged and are categorised as belonging to the lower socio-economic areas of the country. He further states that schools categorised as Quintiles 1–3 do not collect school fees from learners' parents/guardians, as they receive larger government subsidies than those classified as Quintiles 4 and 5. Quintile 4 and 5 schools can charge school fees and receive only a minimum subsidy per learner from the state.

Maree (2022:4) maintains that the South African schooling system is extremely imbalanced. She further states that, as a whole, well-equipped schools were better placed to deal with the challenges posed by the pandemic and the measures put in place by the government. Even though the principals in the disadvantaged schools

wanted to implement the measures given by the government, they encountered challenges based on the infrastructure, teacher-learner ratio, and internet connectivity.

3.6 LEADERSHIP AND POLICY COMPLIANCE DURING COVID-19 IN SOUTH AFRICA: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC RESPONSES

Mchunu, Zondi and Nzimande (2022: 3) state that the DBE, under the direction of the Department of Health (DoH), established Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to ensure that all administrators were at par with the guidelines on how to stop the spread and manage COVID-19 cases within schools. They further explain that the SOPs outlined procedures and protocols to be followed in the education sector to safeguard the health and safety of all stakeholders (teachers, learners, ground staff, admin staff, and all support staff) against COVID-19 infections.

Gonzales, Roberts and Tegano (2022: 97-98) utter that principals voiced out that as much as they had the SOPs to guide their daily running to curb the spread of Covid-19, the most pertinent yet frustrating aspects of the SOPs were the constant changes in the implementation of policies, available resources and the lack of guidance to help them manage and lead their school community. They further state that they were thrust into the deep end during the transition to distance learning. Furthermore, Gonzales, Roberts and Tegano (2022: 97-98) observed that one of the principals in their study noted that one of the difficult parts of leading during a pandemic was waiting for the district to provide updates and directives. The participant further stated that they had to act and make decisions, apply policies that benefit their school community at their own discretion. Moreover, Gonzales, Roberts and Tegano (2022: 97-98) pronounce that principals had to make hasty decisions without any policy to guide them. They also maintain that some of the policies developed were not equitable or rational, in that they did not take into consideration the context of the schools and the socio-economic status of the communities in which the schools are located.

Mchunu, Zondi and Nzimande (2022: 3) affirm the challenges faced by principals in implementing the policies in matters such as phasing in all grades, ensuring continuity of teaching and learning due to sporadic outbreaks of COVID-19 infections. They further observed that such factors resulted in the loss of instructional time due to school closures and teacher absences, negatively impacting curriculum delivery.

Notwithstanding the poor infrastructure and the lack of disaster management policies and structures to manage the crisis in schools, which also worsened the chaos that prevailed at both the education policy level and the school level.

Mchunu, Zondi and Nzimande (2022: 5) maintain that with all this discord at policy development and at the lower level, which is policy implementation, a disjuncture was created between what was depicted as the situation that existed at the schools by those who experienced the disjuncture firsthand, and what the districts were reporting to the national and provincial departments. They further maintain that the principals found themselves under pressure from both the national and provincial education departments to implement the COVID-19 response guidelines in a multifaceted, tempestuous environment with little or no guidance and disregard for the school's context.

3.7 SUMMARY

This chapter offered an inclusive review of the literature on the impact of COVID-19 on school leadership. It investigated the contextual factors shaping different leadership styles, their implementation during the pandemic, and their effectiveness within South African schools. In addition, it addressed leadership in relation to policy compliance, highlighting the challenges faced and the strategic responses adopted during COVID-19. The review focused on the above-mentioned topics to better understand the impact of Covid-19 and the challenges and successes principals face in leading their schools effectively.

Studies have shown that Covid-19 exposed inequalities in the education system worldwide. The haves were able to continue with their education while the have-nots were not. The stark difference in the education system perpetuated the importance of keeping up with the times. Education has been evolving, but leadership has remained stagnant in its style, which is traditional. E- leadership was seen as something for the future. Covid-19 thrust the principals into the E-leadership style in managing their schools. Most principals found themselves unprepared or under-prepared for the magnitude of such a leadership style. Literature reveals that some principals found comfort in using distributed leadership style, situational leadership style, and transformational leadership style, where they utilised the “human capital” found within

their school setting to assist them in leading the schools remotely (Maree, 2022; van der Berg & Spaull, 2020; Du Plessis, 2023).

The South African education system was not spared when it comes to the effects of Covid-19. The education system, having been through the apartheid system and the Bantu Education Act of 1953, is still recovering. This is despite the 26 years of democracy. The education system is divided into five categories (Quintiles) for government subsidy purposes. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic were worst hit on the Quintiles 1-3 schools. These schools lacked proper infrastructure (classrooms, running water, desks and chairs) and, if not all, were stuck in the 1800s without electricity and Internet connectivity. Most of the learners come from very disadvantaged backgrounds where parents have no or have limited educational background, which means that they cannot assist their children at home. The literature revealed that the challenges driving the principals in these schools were able to provide some form of education to learners to ensure they were not further disadvantaged by their situation and the pandemic. A lot still needs to be done to improve these schools and prepare them for a similar pandemic in the future.

The next chapter will outline the research design and methodology utilised in this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Literature was reviewed in Chapter 3. This chapter discusses the research methodology and design, research paradigm, population, sampling strategy, data collection methods, relevant documents, data analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and the rationale for selecting a qualitative research methodology that frames this study. The methodology is influenced by an interpretivist paradigm, allowing an in-depth examination of the leadership styles implemented by the Gauteng primary school principals during the Covid-19 pandemic in Quintiles 1-3 schools. A pedagogical framework lens was the blueprint for the study. The final sections focus on trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, confirmation reliability, how these are addressed in the study, and how ethical considerations were resolved. Finally, the chapter concludes.

4.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Dissanayake (2023:2) states that research methodology is essential to a dissertation or thesis. He maintains that it helps ensure reliability among the chosen tools, techniques, and underlying philosophy. Stapleton (2024:1) argues that research methodology is the main component of any successful study, providing a structured approach to collecting and analysing data. He further asserts that research methodology encompasses a range of methods, each with specific processes and applications tailored to answer distinct research questions.

Pedamkar (2024: 1) defines research methodology as the methods and techniques utilised to demonstrate the research effectively. She further states that it concerns the logical design of a study to secure an outcome that meets the aim and objectives of the study. Harish (2024:1) asserts that research methodology is the primary component of a credible study, guiding data generation and analysis to solve research queries. He further asserts that the research methodology encompasses not only the

practical aspects of data collection but also the theoretical framework that shapes the study's direction, a unique methodology in research from ordinary methods.

For this study, research methodology is defined as a systematic and methodical approach to conducting research that addresses the main question and the study's aim and objectives.

4.3 RESEARCH APPROACH/ PARADIGM

The study is positioned within the interpretivist paradigm, which highlights the understanding of subjective experiences and meanings that individuals assign to their realities (Robinson, 2021:3). Yong, Husin and Kamarudin (2021: 1) describe a paradigm as a crucial factor that guides scientific research and discoveries through their beliefs and origins. These authors further maintain that when a researcher is knowledgeable about different research paradigms, it decreases the likelihood of research-method bias and enables the development of better research instruments and their utilisation.

According to Gretschel, Ramugondo and Galvaan (2023:1), a research paradigm illustrates how a researcher defines the nature of reality and influences how they conduct the research to create knowledge from that reality. They further assert that influence is the main idea that controls how the individual actions of the researcher and the participants, and their interactions, create different perspectives of reality.

Furthermore, Nicolas (2024:1) believes that a research paradigm denotes the beliefs and ideologies that effectively help the researcher accurately organise the research study. He further states that a paradigm helps researchers understand how to employ different theories and practices in their research. Robinson (2024:1) asserts that a paradigm explains how a research question is designed, what methods are utilised, and how data collection and analysis are conducted.

For this study, the working definition of the concept paradigm is the system used to craft and utilise the process followed to gather information and analyse it, ensuring fairness is always adhered to. This paradigm supports the exploration of complex leadership practices within the socio-cultural and crisis context of the pandemic.

4.3.1 Interpretivism

Nickerson (2024:1) argues that interpretivism relies on qualitative methods, such as personal documents, participant observation, and unstructured interviews, to utilise this lens. Nicolas (2024:3) supports this, stating that people experience and comprehend reality differently in our society. He further states that there could be only one reality, but everyone interprets it according to their perspective.

Israel (2023:100) states that it is important to recognise the context in which the research will be conducted. She quotes Alharahsheh and Pius (2018:52), who state that the essential objective of the interpretivism lens is to understand social behaviour by examining social interactions in their natural surroundings. Thus, this study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, as the participants assume committed roles across all stages and processes in running their schools, ensuring they lead the institution effectively during COVID-19, while safeguarding the safety of teachers and learners and maintaining effective teaching and learning.

Based on the preceding definitions, interpretivism theory is defined, for purposes of this study, as the lived experiences of the participants. According to the interpretivism theory, the researcher had to gather data not using one participant but four participants, as they might experience the pandemic but experience it differently. And that allowed the researcher to visit the participants' natural habitat.

This paradigm endorsed the following research objectives:

- Objective 1, which delineates the leadership styles adopted, is approached from an interpretive lens that allows principals to declare their own understanding and justification of the leadership style they utilised.
- Objective 2, which explores the influence of leadership style on teaching and learning, required participants to develop a vision and awareness of how these styles affect classroom realities and school functioning during the pandemic.
- Objective 3 concerning communication with parents and information distribution, benefitted from rich descriptions and understandings around relational and practical leadership practices in unfamiliar conditions.

- Objective 4, which examines support for principals, aligns with the interpretivist paradigm's focus on contextual experience. This allowed the study to denote how institutional, governmental, and personal support influenced leadership capacities and stakeholder engagement.

4.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is framed within a pedagogical leadership theoretical lens, which prioritises leadership that directly impact teaching and learning processes, builds professional capacity, and nurtures a culture of collaboration and innovation within schools (Male & Palaiologou, 2019:12). Pedagogical leadership style surpasses managerial responsibilities and emphasises on instructional guidance, teacher empowerment, and learner achievement—roles that became even more valuable during the disruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic (Ngcobo & Tikly, 2020:339).

To explore the pedagogical leadership theoretical lens and examine the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the principal's school management style, a qualitative case study design was utilised. This design is compatible with the study for investigating the multi-faceted and context-bound realities of school leadership in crisis conditions (Yin, 2020:15). This allowed for a thorough examination of how principals implemented pedagogical leadership during the pandemic, including how they revised teaching strategies, supported educators, and maintained learner engagement amongst the uncertainty and resource constraints.

Maher and Dertadian (2018:31) state that qualitative research constitutes an investigative approach that intricately explores real-world phenomena to achieve profound insights. They further assert that, unlike its quantitative counterpart, which deals with numerical data and controlled interventions, qualitative research seeks to formulate hypotheses that deepen understanding of quantitative findings. In comparison, Asenahabi (2019:81) defines qualitative research as an approach to understanding or explaining events in terms of individuals' meanings.

Mohajan and Mohajan (2019:23) contend that qualitative research is inductive, implying that the researcher seeks meaning and insight into a situation. However,

Cibangu (2021:38) suggests that qualitative research encompasses a variety of methods for understanding how individuals interpret and comprehend their experiences, thereby revealing the social reality of human life.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011: 4) explain that qualitative research aligns itself with interpretivist and constructivist paradigms, seeking to intensely understand a research subject rather than guess the outcomes, as in the positivist paradigm. Creswell and Poth (2018: 2) affirm that interpretivism seeks to construct knowledge by understanding individuals' distinctive perspectives and the meaning attached to those perspectives.

For this study, qualitative research is defined as a method used to explore the lived experiences of the four principals regarding the leadership style they utilised during COVID-19 to run their schools effectively.

4.4.1 Case Study

Erickson (2018: 57) states that case studies gauge an individualised programme or policy and grant sweeping statements. Yin and Campbell (2018: 19) state that a qualitative research method develops a theory that helps researchers understand similar occurrences, incidents, or circumstances and observe their outcomes in real time.

Erickson (2018: 56) states that a case study has a distinct viewpoint, categorising it as a "holistic research strategy". This is due to its ability to combine data-gathering methodologies to investigate events in real-life contexts rather than by object or particularity. Yin (2018: 22) states that a case study also allows researchers to grasp the severity of difficult situations or items and to complement the knowledge already available in their research field.

McCombes (2019: 1) defines a case study as an in-depth research approach to explore a specific subject, such as a person, group, place, event, organisation, or phenomenon. She further states that case studies are beneficial for describing, comparing, evaluating, and understanding different portions of a research problem.

Salmons (2021: 1) states that a case study research approach is described as a technique, given approaches used to collect and analyse data. He further asserts that case study research is conducted by almost every social science discipline. This method relies on multiple sources and is a natural choice for researchers interested in multidisciplinary studies. Israel (2023: 97) states that the purpose of the qualitative case study as a research approach is to explore intricate phenomena by identifying components that interact with one another.

Dhanya (2024: 1) defines a case study methodology as a thought-provoking opportunity to explore complex events within a specific environment using various information and collection methods.

The research design choices not only align with but also advocate for the pedagogical lens to foster an understanding of how leadership, during the Covid-19 pandemic, influenced the essential pedagogical functions of schools.

4.5 RATIONALE FOR SELECTING A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study's objectives influenced the decision to use a qualitative research method to explore the leadership styles used during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Qualitative research methodology enabled the researcher to understand the context and settings in which the problem occurred. It also ensured that the researcher could find information more effectively when other research methods proved inadequate. Qualitative data were collected to understand the experiences, settings and relevant interactions of the four primary school principals to achieve the aim of the study, which is to examine the leadership philosophies of the principals of four Gauteng primary schools during the Coronavirus-19 pandemic.

This resulted from COVID-19 challenging the conventional leadership model and altering the educational landscape. The qualitative data collection method utilised in the study was semi-structured interviews to answer the study's research questions. This method helped the researcher explore the contextual factors underlying the leadership styles of the four principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools. A case study research

approach assisted the researcher in obtaining information that led to changes in the leadership styles of the four principals, ensuring that their schools continued to deliver effective teaching to all their learners, despite their Socio-Economic Status.

Hence, the purpose of utilising a case study in a qualitative research approach for this study was to examine the results and findings to demonstrate a thorough understanding of the study's problem before concluding.

4.6. POPULATION

Majid (2018:3) defines the population as the target population the researcher intends to study. He further states that it is sometimes not feasible to research the entire study population; instead, the researcher selects a sample from the “population of interest” to include in their study. Polit and Hungler (2022:37) denote population as an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects, or members that match a set of specifications they have for their study.

Wille (2024: 76) defines the population in research as the cornerstone of research methodology, referring to a collective of individuals who share characteristics within a defined geographic or institutional domain. He further states that defining the study population lays the foundation for research undertakings, and serves as the key framework for creating research questions and hypotheses.

In addition, Shukkla (2020:1) defines population as a set of all units with varying characteristics under study, for which research findings can be generalised. This, in turn, impacts the research study's objectives, and generalised outcomes from the sample to the population of interest are interpreted as the study's key findings and used to further our understanding of the subject matter. This study adopted the definition presented by Shukkla (2022:1).

This study's population consisted of four principals from Quintiles 1-3 schools in the Ekurhuleni North District. Gender was a non-factor in interpreting the study's central question, as the researcher sought to identify the leadership styles used by principals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thacker (2020:3) asserts that research populations fall into two categories: the target population and the accessible population. He defines the accessible population as a subset of the target population that is readily available for study. The target population is a comprehensive subdivision of the people of interest. Israel (2023:101) states that the limitations of the population of interest characterise the members of the target population.

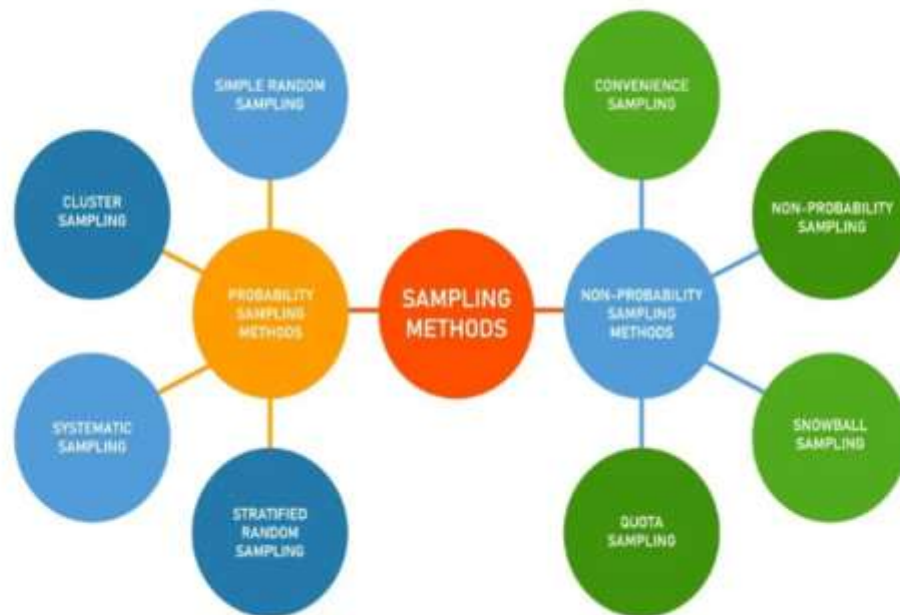
For this study, a 'target population' method was utilised. This was done to eliminate participants who did not meet the study's requirements and to avoid bias towards the population of interest. This study's target population comprised the four principals of primary schools at a previously disadvantaged area. The primary school had to be categorised as a Quintiles 1-3. The area where the school was situated had to be classified as a township or rural school with limited internet or technology access.

4.7 SAMPLING

Bhardwaj (2018:157) defines sampling as a technique to choose a sample from an individual or a large group of people for a specific research purpose. She further states that the advantage of sampling a population is that it yields more precise findings than if a trained and experienced researcher had conducted the study.

Israel (2023:104) quotes Creswell and Poth (2018:134), who describe sampling as a method used for selecting study participants from a large group of individuals (population). She further states that this method determines which people, venues, events, behaviours and social processes are to be investigated. Akman (2023:1) defines sampling as a representative sample of a larger group. She further states that this is a subdivision of people with traits from a broader population. Moreover, she asserts that samples are employed when the population is too large for the test to include all prospective contestants or observations.

Probability and non-probability sampling are the two basic types of sampling. These two types of sampling are further illustrated below:



Above is a diagram of the types of sampling techniques as illustrated by McLeod (2023:1)

According to Bhardwaj (2019:157), probability is a technique used to study a relatively homogenous population. She asserts that using this technique ensures that every member of the population is the target respondent of the research. Moreover, she states that the sample collected represents the population under study.

McLeod (2023:1) defines probability sampling as selecting participants so that every individual in a population has a known, non-zero chance of being chosen, thereby safeguarding representativeness and enabling statistical interpretation. In comparison, Bhardwaj (2023:161) states that non-probability sampling is a type of sampling in which each member of the population does not have a known likelihood of being selected into the sample. She further states that this type of sampling uses methods that allow for purposive sampling to gather information. McLeod (2023:1) corroborates the definition above by stating that non-probability sampling does not guarantee every individual a known or equal chance of selection. As an alternative, it depends on convenience or judgement.

For this study, purposive sampling was preferred as a technique. The researcher's objective was to select individuals, locations, or events based on their ability to provide the necessary information. Thus, purposeful sampling was beneficial for the researcher as it addressed the research questions.

This study's population consisted of four principals from Quintiles1-3 schools in the Ekurhuleni North District, East of Johannesburg. These are primary school principals who led their schools during the 2020–2021 COVID-19 lockdown period. Quintiles1-3 schools are schools which normally serve disadvantaged communities, where their leadership challenges were particularly severe due to the context of the school and the socio-economy of the community the school serves.

Purposive sampling was chosen due to:

- It supports the interpretivist paradigm chosen for the study, which favours the contextualised perception over sweeping statements.
- It guarantees that only persons directly involved in school leadership during COVID-19 were considered for the study
- Only primary school principals in Ekurhuleni North, East of Johannesburg, Gauteng, who were in active leadership roles during 2020–2021 (the peak pandemic period) were considered.

Below is a table showing the population sampled for the study.

Table 1: Population and Sampling

No Of Participants	Employees	Age Group	Male	Female
4	PRINCIPAL	40-60	2	2
Total			2	2

The study did not regard gender as a variable. Its focus was on identifying principals' leadership styles during the COVID-19 pandemic. The target population comprised four principals from primary schools in Quintiles 1–3. These schools were located in townships or rural areas and had limited access to the internet and technology.

4.8 INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Keung, McElroy, Ladner, and Grubbs (2020:1) define inclusion and exclusion criteria as a lens for determining who is eligible to participate in the study. They further state that selection or eligibility criteria are determined during the study's planning phase, with the study's objective in mind. According to Casteel and Bridier (2021:341), the target population defines the inclusion and exclusion criteria for individuals and the type of primary school (categorised by quintile status) eligible to participate in the study. They further state that the traits identified by the researcher for their study's sample can be identified as inclusion criteria.

To ensure the study's relevance, validity, and focus, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied when identifying participants for this research on leadership practices of school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.8.1 Inclusion Criteria

Participants were chosen based on the following criteria:

1. School leadership role: The participant must be a currently serving principal of a public primary school (during the Covid-19 pandemic).
2. Quintile categorisation of the school: The participant must be a principal of a school categorised as Quintile 1, 2, or 3 as classified by the DoE.
3. Leadership during COVID-19: The participant must have occupied the principalship during the pandemic period (2020–2022) and actively managed and guided their school during that time.
4. School's geographical location: The school should be located within the targeted district/region as defined in the scope of the study, namely a rural/township school in the Ekurhuleni North District, East of Johannesburg, in the Gauteng Province.
5. Willingness to Participate: Must be willing and able to provide informed consent and participate in an in-depth interview.

4.8.2 Exclusion Criteria

The following criterion was used as an exclusion criterion for the study:

1. Principals from Quintiles 4 or 5 Schools: These schools are regarded as well-resourced, and their socio-economic contexts are vastly different from those the study focused on.
2. Newly appointed principals: Principals who were employed in the principal position after the COVID-19 pandemic were excluded. This is due to their not having led a school during the crisis period.
3. Principals in Independent or Private Schools: These schools function under different governance and funding models. They were excluded to preserve the focus on public education contexts.

4.9 SITE SELECTION

The researcher resides in the Ekurhuleni North District of Gauteng Province, where the study was conducted. Four public primary Quintiles 1-3 schools were randomly selected as the study sites in the Ekurhuleni North District of Gauteng Province.

Four primary schools classified as Quintiles 1-3 were randomly selected as relevant sites for the study.



Figure 4.1 shows a map of Ekurhuleni North and the locations of research sites.

(Source: adapted from Ekurhuleni, Gauteng [bing.com/maps](https://www.bing.com/maps): 2024)

At the time of the study being conducted, the Ekurhuleni North District had 144 primary schools. Quintile 1 has 11 schools, Quintile 2 has two schools, and Quintile 3 has 25 schools. The Ekurhuleni North District has 38 Quintiles 1-3 schools, 10% of which were selected for the study.

The researcher collected data at the primary schools from four participants using semi-structured interviews.

4.10 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

According to Jones and Smith (2019: 52), collecting data involves planning and carrying out the process of obtaining information from both secondary sources. Patel and Patel (2019:52) affirm that data collection requires a researcher's plan for collecting data from primary and secondary sources. Hence, Smith (2019;115) asserts

that data collection is an approach in which the researcher uses tools, such as structured interviews, observations, or measurements, to gather all the information needed to answer the research question.

Brown, White and Green (2021:679) maintain that data collection includes collecting, assessing, and measuring data using recognised techniques to gather first-hand information about the issue being researched. Moreover, Hill and Bailey (2021:679) acknowledge that data collection is a process of gathering, evaluating, and quantifying accurate data using accepted, recognised methods to get first-hand information about the research problem.

Hereunder follows a discussion on different methods used to collect data, namely secondary data and primary data

4.10.1 Secondary Data

According to Johnson and Smith (2018:226), secondary data is information which is printed. Official documents outline organisational functions and values, providing crucial data for qualitative research.

Beins (2019:121) explains secondary data as a nonintrusive method of gathering information, protecting the reliability of the location without influencing it through direct observation. He further states that this method facilitates access to information on how school principals adjusted their leadership styles amid conditions characterised by remote learning and health protocols.

Israel (2023:111) states that secondary data are used to double-check the qualitative data collection procedures of a study. She further states that significant policies and other important papers are investigated to extend the qualitative data collected through interviews.

Authorisation to analyse documents was granted by the authorities, such as the Institutional Developmental and Support Officer (IDSO) at the schools participating in the research. No explicit permissions were needed for documents. Documents analysed as secondary data were:

- DBE guidelines for schools on maintaining hygiene during the Covid-19 pandemic,

- Disaster Management Act, 2002,
- DBE Standard Operating Procedures; and
- Guidelines for quarantine and isolation in relation to COVID-19 exposure and infection.

Analysing secondary data helped the researcher understand the frameworks, policy implementations, and leadership approaches adopted by school principals, as well as the difficulties they faced during disruption.

4.10.2 Primary data

Taherdoost (2021) states that primary data collection is founded on the processes by which you collect the data yourself for your study. He further states that no one has access to use the collected data until the study is published. Taherdoost (2021:1) believes that utilising primary sources aids in obtaining high-quality data, which can advance the results, and affords the researcher the opportunity to expand on questions or data to be collected when needed during the research procedures.

Costa (2022:1) defines primary data collection as the method of gathering data received strictly from the immediate source. She further states that this method involves surveys, interviews, observation, and focus groups.

Ajayi (2023: 1) defines primary data as a process that can be achieved through a primary source (the researcher is the first person to obtain the data). He further states that the researcher gathers primary data for the first time. Also, Ajayi (2023: 1) states that primary data is collected with the intention of obtaining a solution to the problem at hand. Ajayi (2023: 1) further quotes Mesly (2015), who explains that primary data is considered real-time data. Mesly (2015) further explains that this type of data is gathered to address the problem at hand. He also believes that primary data collection is a highly engaged process that involves surveys, observations, experiments, questionnaires, personal interviews, and more.

For this study, primary data are defined as a data collection method used to obtain information directly from the source without dilution. It involves getting a firsthand account of experience.

Since this study employed a qualitative research method, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection.

4.10.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews describe how participants view and interpret factors, especially when dealing with important events or challenges in their work environments, states Roberts (2020;118), Anderson (2019;58) and Thompson (2021;113), respectively. Anderson (2019;58) further explains structured interviews as guided discussions using a flexible interview guide that involves key topics and follow-up questions. He states that these semi-structured interviews usually last about an hour or more.

Casteel and Bridier (2021: 353) assert that semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to ask specific questions to guide the discussion and to provide opportunities for real-time investigation of participants' responses. They further state that the interview data will likely be more detailed than written sources.

During this research, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the approach to investigate how school principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools in the Ekurhuleni North District, Gauteng Province, demonstrated their leadership styles amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The study involved school principals who were responsible for overseeing their schools during this time.

This study used semi-structured interviews as a data collection method to explore leadership styles used by principals in Quintiles1-3 schools during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Ekurhuleni North District. Thus, the principals were requested to provide perspectives based on their experiences and acquired knowledge about the study's topic of interest. The interviews permitted the researcher to acquire a deeper understanding of the interviewees' perspectives to answer the research question and sub-questions in detail (Ashengeeti, 2014:43). This method also provided room for

adaptability, in questioning, enabling the participants to share their stories embedded in their encounters and knowledge about the pandemic while leading their schools (Brown & Green, 2014;43).

Before the semi-structured interviews commenced, the participants received the interview guide to familiarise themselves with the topic of interest. Permission was requested to record the interviews for accurate data capturing, supplemented by handwritten notes (see Appendix E). Each interview lasted for approximately an hour.

During the interviews, the researcher maintained a conversational approach and referred to the interview questions to ensure thorough coverage. Participants' responses were minimally influenced to maintain the authenticity of their narratives (see Appendix F for the interview questions used). The interview method thoroughly probed the leadership styles used by principals to address the challenges posed by the pandemic in Quintiles 1-3 schools in the Ekurhuleni North District. Data must be analysed and understood once they have been collected. The data analysis process is explained first. It is followed by data interpretation.

4.11. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.11.1 Definition

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018: 96), data analysis involves a thorough process, which is fundamental for understanding stories and viewpoints in research. However, Aspers and Corte (2019:150) define data analysis as methodically using approaches to clarify, explain, compress, repeat and assess data. At the same time, Ravindran (2019:41) describes data analysis as the summary of obtained data for investigative and coherent reasoning to find patterns, connections, or trends.

For this study, data analysis is a technique used to analyse information collected to answer the question posed by the study. Israel (2023:113) asserts that data analysis can focus on individuals or groups. She further states that the analysis can also compare several individuals or groups to see what they have in common or how they differ. The four principals interviewed are principals in a primary school and Quintiles

1-3 schools. Their leadership styles differ, yet are very similar due to the type of school they serve and the community in which their schools are situated.

4.11.2 The Importance of Data Analysis in Research

Dibekulu (2019:2) states that data analysis is an important part of research and that the findings should be more operational. He further states that data analysis supports the researcher's conclusion. Eldridge (2024) emphasises the importance of data analysis techniques for deriving valuable insights from collected data. He further states that this can be used to make operational decisions or guide future research.

Raskind, Shelton, Comeau, Cooper, Griffith and Kegler (2019:2) state there is no singular, distinctive way to engage in qualitative analysis. These authors further state that the guiding inquiry framework, research questions, participants, context, and the type of data collected should all serve as directives for the choice of analytic method. Babbie (2021:35) emphasises that a qualitative researcher aims to explore the workings of a limited number of cases rather than to generalise statistically.

Creswell and Creswell (2018:4) state that qualitative research is an approach that is used to understand the meanings of individuals or groups in relation to a social or human issue. Thus, they believe that qualitative analysis usually invokes inductive reasoning. Thematic analysis was utilised as a data analysis technique in this study.

4.11.3 Thematic Analysis

According to Flick (2022:1), thematic analysis is a method for analysing qualitative data. Flick (2022:1) further asserts that this technique involves identifying and reporting patterns in a data set, which are then interpreted for their inherent significance. Naeem, Ozuem, Howell and Ranfagni (2023: 1) define thematic analysis as a research method to recognise and clarify patterns or themes in a data set. They further state that thematic analysis often leads to new visions and understanding. Moreover, they assert that the principles of the thematic analysis technique —such as

data coding, theme identification, theme refinement, and reporting the findings —are relevant to qualitative methods.

Creswell (2018:3) states that using the thematic analysis method can be considered an in-depth description of how qualitative analysis is performed. He further states that this method is easy to follow, flexible, and incorporates various factors encountered by the qualitative researcher during data analysis. The six steps are explained below and contextualised to the study:

1. Reading through all the data

Jones (2022:1) states that becoming acquainted with the collected data is the most important step. The researcher collected the data herself and began taking notes on the areas of interest discussed by the participants. All transcription was done by the researcher, which made her very familiar with the dataset.

Naeem, Ozuem, Howell and Ranfagni (2023:2) identify this step as the **initial** phase of the thematic analysis process. They further state that this 1st step comprises transcribing the data and becoming familiar with the data collected.

2. Coding data for analysis

Jones (2022:1) asserts that coding for analysis involves identifying a word or short phrase that conveys the meaning of a specific quote. He states that the codes one uses vary depending on what is said within and the purpose of one's research. The researcher posed specific questions to answer the main and sub-questions of the study. The research is exploratory, meaning the data were inductive, and the themes formulated depended on the data collected.

Naeem et al. (2023:4) state that this phase involves careful examination of data, whether from interviews, focus groups, or visual content. They further explain that researchers recognise recurrent patterns, terms, or visual elements and label them as keywords.

3. Description themes

According to Jones (2022:2), a theme is a concept broader than a code. He states that themes often combine several codes into a single theme and include interpretations of the codes and the data. Moreover, he states that a theme portrays something important about the data in relation to the research purpose. The researcher started by organising all the codes and identifying recurring themes. By doing this, the researcher removed all data extracts associated with the specific codes and began grouping them.

Naeem et al. (2023:4) explain that this stage streamlines compound textual data by converting it into a theoretical form and aids in classifying elements related to the research questions. They assert that keywords play an important role in coding, as they form the backbone of the analysis and help convert raw data into insightful, convenient units.

4. Interrelating themes/descriptions of In-depth data

Jones (2022:2) maintains that themes should be clear and distinctive, and that they should convey a story. He states that this process will assist the researcher in identifying new themes they might have missed and ensure that they are beneficial and accurately represent the data collected.

The researcher did this by drawing up a thematic map. The use of thematic analysis suits the lens chosen for this study as it allows the implementation of the systematic identification of patterns in principals' accounts of their lived experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly those concerning curriculum continuity, teacher collaboration, learner support, and school culture (Braun & Clarke, 2022:6). Through thematic analysis, the study captured the gist of how school leaders responded to the pandemic in ways that reflected or redefined pedagogical leadership principles, therefore adding an analytical depth and relevance to the chosen theoretical framework.

Naeem et al. (2023:4) state that this phase of thematic analysis involves the researcher creating a detailed analysis of codes and categories, leading to a more concrete interpretation, and then developing themes. They further explain that these themes go beyond mere repetition, as they symbolise decorative meanings that connect the research questions and the data.

5. Interpreting the meaning of themes/descriptions

According to Jones (2022:2), when one interprets meaning and descriptions, as a researcher, one needs to go beyond just describing one's data. He states that one needs to include one's analysis to make an argument for the claims and the story one presents. The researcher ensured that she did not just paraphrase the data but also told a coherent story about it, and that quotes were chosen to support the points made.

Naeem et.al (2023:4) state that researchers classify social patterns and refine them into definitions that support their research. They further state that the researchers do this by employing figures, such as diagrams or models, to understand the relations among these concepts. They assert that the worth of these definitions is measured by lucidity, correctness, consistency, pertinence, and their contribution to the theory and practice of the study.

4.11.4 Data Interpretation

Berli (2021:776) defines data interpretation as discovering the actualities that explain patterns or correlations in the provided data. In contrast, Babbie (2021:226) states that data interpretation is the process of concluding the meaning of the study findings or conclusions by thoroughly examining the patterns in the data. Flick (2002:176) defines data interpretation as the fundamental part of qualitative research. He states that data interpretation requires the assessment, analysis, and interpretation of the empirical evidence collected.

Ngulube (2015:18) quotes Creswell (2007:37), who states that the researcher's insights, prejudices, and personal beliefs should also be accounted for. He explains

that the interpretation “includes the voices of participants, the reflectivity of the researcher, and a complex description... of the problem”.

In this study, the qualitative data were interpreted in support of the study’s objectives, namely:

- To establish which leadership style/s were used by primary school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Gauteng province.
- To ascertain how different primary school principals used leadership styles during COVID-19 in the Gauteng province.
- To determine when primary school principals used different leadership styles during COVID-19 in the Gauteng province.
- To find out why primary school principals used different leadership styles during COVID-19 in the Gauteng province.

Other secondary sources, such as memorandums, circulars, policies, and manuals issued by the GDE to schools to guide COVID-19 management, were used throughout data interpretation to support the study's primary data. Ultimately, this study's complete data interpretation process ensured the presentation of practical qualitative findings, which explored the types of leadership skills used by primary school principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trustworthiness and triangulation are significant elements of data analysis and interpretation. Israel (2023: 118) states that trustworthiness and triangulation in research are essential in qualitative research. She states that this is because the researcher’s prejudice may conceal data interpretation, and the scientific community frequently questions or views study conclusions with suspicion.

4.12 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017:1) explain that trustworthiness is one way researchers can influence themselves and readers to believe their research findings are valuable and worthy of attention. They further state that if readers are unclear

about how researchers analysed their data or what assumptions informed their analysis, evaluating the trustworthiness of the research process becomes challenging.

Ahmed (2024:1) states that confirming trustworthiness is important for determining the credibility and reliability of qualitative findings, given the researcher's bias. He further states that trustworthiness in qualitative research comprises several fundamental elements, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Considering the above-mentioned statements, ethical considerations, particularly confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent, were maintained through compliance with the UNISA ethical research guidelines. Participants were provided with detailed information about the purpose of the study, the risks (or lack thereof) associated with the study, and the study's benefits to the education sphere, and consent was obtained prior to participation. Anonymity was ensured through the use of pseudonyms and secure data storage, in accordance with current ethical standards in qualitative research (Birt & Scott, 2021:238). These steps guarantee the protection of the participant's identity, maintain trust, and support the ethical integrity of the study. In this manner, the study considers the interpretivist commitments to contextual meaning-making alongside the ethical and methodological rigour demanded in scholarly research.

4.12.1 Transferability

According to Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017:3), transferability refers to the generalisability of the study. These authors further explain that qualitative research involves a case-by-case approach. Drisko (2024:2) defines transferability as a process of deduction used to apply information drawn from specific persons, settings, and eras to others that have not been directly studied. It is often linked to generalisation, a similar process that is much more widely discussed in the social science literature.

The Complete Dissertation Blog (2024:1) defines transferability as an established technique for providing readers with testimony that the research study's findings could be relevant in other contexts, situations, times, and populations. Moreover, Stalmeijer,

Brown, and O'Brien (2024:1) state that transferability is usually considered a quality criterion in qualitative research.

Ahmed (2024:2) states that transferability relates to the extent to which the research findings can be inferred to alternative contexts or situations. He further states that by providing comprehensive, all-inclusive explanations, researchers enable readers to gauge the validity of the findings in similar situations, thereby refining the study's transferability.

For this study, transferability was utilised to ensure that the findings precisely imitate participants' lived experiences and are supported by transparent documentation and reflexivity (Nowell et al., 2022:3).

4.12.2 Credibility

According to Ahmed (2024:2), credibility in qualitative research is defined as an extended engagement with the participants in their immediate environment. He further states that the researcher spends sufficient time in the field, building a bond with participants to understand their perspectives deeply. Norman, Stahl, and King (2022:1) define credibility as involving participants in authenticating the researchers' interpretations after the fact. They further state that this method is often called member checking, in which "member" refers to participants in multiple roles within a given qualitative study. Moreover, they state that the research participants are given a pre-publication copy of the research write-up to request their feedback regarding the accuracy of the data interpretation.

Israel (2023:120) states that a secondary data approach is used to obtain additional data, lending credibility to the conclusions. She further states that the credibility of the data can be increased by aligning it with the researcher's handwritten field notes and the interview transcripts, thereby cross-checking whether the participants' perspectives are appropriately reflected in the interpretation of the data.

Maher et al. (2022:6) state that credibility is enhanced through lengthy engagement with participants, detailed field notes, and verbatim transcription of interviews. For this study, each participant was invited to a Microsoft Teams meeting, where data

interpretation was discussed to ensure their views were accurately portrayed and that their identity was not identifiable in the study.

4.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Creswell and Poth (2018:245) define ethics in research as what is lawful to do and what honourable research procedures entail. In contrast, Enago Academy (2023:1) defines research ethics as playing a key role in ensuring the responsible conduct of research. They further state that research ethics protect the rights and well-being of participants, uphold the integrity of research findings and influence the positive impact of research on individuals and society.

According to McGregor (2018:35), research ethics concerns the principles governing what is morally acceptable in conducting research and involves considerations of integrity, respect, and responsibility towards participants. Thus, an ethical dilemma emanates when one's behaviour does not correspond to a code or set of standards (Babbie, 2021:209).

For this study, the researcher ensured that all ethical considerations were adhered to that could have affected the well-being of the participants and the trustworthiness of the study's conclusions. She further ensured that the participants participated willingly and without pressure. This was accomplished by ensuring all participants explicitly provided informed consent to participate in the study.

The participants were informed that the primary goal of this study was to explore the leadership styles used by primary school principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools. Strict measures were taken to ensure that participants' anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality were respected. The researcher ensured that no participant's privacy or identity was compromised during the study. She further ensured that the information collected from the participants was handled discreetly and not released in its raw form to anyone. No data-gathering devices were used without the participants' consent or prior knowledge.

Moreover, the research adhered to the ethical criteria instituted by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa (Unisa). The study was managed in accordance with the Unisa Ethics Approval Certificate 2023/02/08/48048844/13/AM

(cf. Appendix A). Lastly, the study was ethically reviewed by the Unisa Ethics Committee at the proposal phase to ensure that the collection, distribution, and publication of the study findings would be conducted in the best interests of the participants and the community, without causing them harm.

4.14 SUMMARY

This chapter defined the research methodology and the study design. The study implemented a qualitative research approach with a case study design. The chapter clarified how purposive sampling was used to select the study sample, and it provided a thorough description and discussion of the research methods and processes used to collect, analyse, and interpret the data. Semi-structured interviews were justified as a method for collecting data and explained how they were applied in the study. Thematic analysis was described as a method for interpreting the collected data.

While this study was informed by an interpretivist paradigm, traditional concerns such as rigour, reliability, and ethical integrity remained vital and were addressed through the qualitative research criteria of trustworthiness and ethical transparency. Within this paradigm, rigour is devised through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, guaranteeing that the findings correctly replicate the participants' lived experiences and are reinforced by transparent documentation and reflexivity (Nowell et al., 2022:3). The following chapter attends to the presentation and interpretation of findings employed in this study.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and interprets data. It refers to the preceding chapter (Chapter 4) on the study's research methodology and design. The research methodology and design on exploring leadership styles of quintiles 1-3 primary schools' principals during the Coronavirus-19 pandemic in the Ekurhuleni North District was discussed in chapter four. According to what was discussed in the aforementioned chapter, the interpretivist research paradigm and a qualitative approach were employed to guide the collection and interpretation of data for this study. The empirical research necessitated thorough primary data collection through semi-structured interviews, while secondary data gathered from various relevant documents was also analysed. The empirical findings emerged from the four sub-questions:

- What type of leadership style was employed during the coronavirus-19 pandemic?
- Did the type of leadership style yield favourable results when it comes to ensuring that effective teaching and learning were taking place during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How was information pertaining to learning and communication with the parents disseminated in the school during the hard lockdown?
- What type of assistance and guidance was given to you to lead the school and all stakeholders involved during the pandemic?

These findings answer the main research question: *What are the experiences of primary school principals in leading the schools during the Covid-19 pandemic?*

This chapter commences by presenting the biographical information of the study's participants. Next, the empirical findings are presented in accordance with themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis. Reflections on leadership

challenges, adaptations, and implications for educational leadership are also discussed. Lastly, the chapter is summarised.

5.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

This section presents the biographical information of the study's sampled participants.

A sample of four participants volunteered to participate in the study (refer to Appendices B, C, and D). The sample comprised four primary school principals from Quintiles 1-3 schools in the Ekurhuleni North District, who demonstrated their leadership styles amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all four participants.

Table 5.1: Biographical data of participants. It also outlines their gender, age group, and qualification level.

Principal ID	School Quintile	Gender	Years of Experience in Leadership Role	NQF Level and Qualification
P1	3	Female	12	NQF 9 (Master of Education)
P2	2	Male	18	NQF 9 (Honours in Education)
P3	1	Female	10	NQF 9 (Master of Education)
P4	2	Male	15	NQF 10 (Doctor of Philosophy)

5.2.1 Interpretation of Table Data

- Principal ID

To protect the participants' confidentiality in line with research ethics, each principal was assigned a pseudonym. They were identified as P1 to P4.

- **School Quintile**

The four principals manage schools classified as Quintiles 1-3. These schools are classified by the communities they serve. For example, Quintile 1 is a group of schools in each province serving the poorest 20% of schools. Quintile 2 schools are the next poorest 20% of schools, while Quintile 3 schools represent the least poor schools compared to Quintile 1 schools (School Guide, 2023:1). In addition, due to their classification, schools receive government funding according to the quintiles. Quintile 1 schools receive the highest allocation (money) per learner, while Quintile 5 schools receive the lowest allocation.

- **Gender**

Gender was not a criterion for selecting participants in the study. Gender did not influence the leadership style principals used to lead their schools, as the COVID-19 pandemic was “unchartered waters” for all concerned.

- **Years of experience in a leadership role**

The years each participant in the study had been a principal varied. The participants noted that they had been through each rank in education, i.e. PL1, PL2, PL3, and now PL4. For PL4, the years of being a principal differ, and that will be looked at in detail as it influenced their leadership style during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- P1 had been a principal for 2 years before the COVID-19 pandemic started.
- P2 had been in the principal position for 6 years before COVID-19 started.
- P3 had been in the post for 1 year before COVID-19 started in South Africa.
- P4 has been a principal for 10 years before COVID-19 started.

- **NQF level of qualification**

In addition to holding a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree, all participants held postgraduate degrees ranging from Honours to Doctorate. This highlights their

academic preparedness and educational leadership expertise, which are essential for navigating complex educational environments.

5.3 PRESENTATION OF THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study, elicited from semi-structured interviews and document analysis. It examines how South African primary school principals led their schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting leadership styles, teaching and learning methods, resource management, and policy compliance. The findings provide evidence-based perceptions into the challenges faced and styles adopted by school leaders in managing a crisis. The chapter is structured around key themes that emerged from the data, which are presented and analysed in the sections that follow.

According to Palo Alto University (2023: 1) empirical research is a study founded on facts, systematic observation, or experiment instead of theory or general philosophical principle. This is supported by George (2024 :1) defines empirical research as a technique used to gather and study real, observable data. She further explains that empirical research is an effective method because it requires the researcher to remain objective by relying on observable data, thereby reducing the impact of personal biases. She also attests that the effectiveness of empirical research enhances the trustworthiness of research findings. Cahoy, Woods and Lear (2025:1) state that empirical research is based on experiential and calculated phenomena. They further state that this technique obtains knowledge from authentic experience rather than from theory or belief.

For this study, empirical research is defined as a method for extracting information from a subject or phenomenon while controlling for bias. This is achieved by engaging with the subjects in their own setting.

The analysis of the data generated respective key themes, which are presented in the table below. These themes and sub-themes offer an insight into the leadership practices, challenges, and responses of principals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 5.2 summarises the themes and sub-themes derived from the qualitative data analysis.

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
1. Contextual factors influencing principals' leadership styles during the COVID-19 pandemic.	• Type of leadership employed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
	• Challenges and obstacles in ensuring effective teaching and learning amidst disruptions.
	• Policies governing the prevention and management of COVID-19 transmission in schools.
2. The necessary interventions primary school principals need to lead institutions (Support structure).	• Inter-District Support Office (IDSO).
	Role of Circuit Managers in supporting school leadership.
	• Engagement and collaboration through Principal's Forums.

The following subsections thoroughly present key findings for the themes and subthemes outlined in Table 5.2.

5.3.1.1 Theme 1: Contextual Factors Influencing Principals' Leadership Styles During the Covid-19 Pandemic

This topic explored the factors that shaped primary school principals' leadership styles and the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The principals focused on the following aspects of their leadership: the types of leadership used, the challenges faced in maintaining education, and the outcomes of government measures to control the spread of COVID-19 in schools. To contextualise the study, the participants' verbatim responses are presented in italics below:

A. Types of leadership used during the Covid-19 pandemic

Principal 1 highlighted that:

The utilisation of situational leadership, where decisions were contextually driven to ensure effective teaching and learning despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. They emphasised the role of assessing each situation individually to apply appropriate measures, which proved crucial in minimising disruptions caused by COVID-19 infections among staff and students.

Principal 2 echoed that:

This sentiment cites a reliance on situational and transformational leadership styles. They underscored the importance of community engagement and informal networks to disseminate critical information and support learning activities when direct communication avenues were limited.

Principal 3 embraced that:

A democratic leadership approach, distributing leadership responsibilities among school committees. This inclusive style facilitated collaborative decision-making, ensuring that diverse stakeholder perspectives were considered in maintaining educational continuity.

Principal 4 said,

Drawing from past experiences as a deputy principal, integrated multiple leadership styles, including situational, transformational, and transactional approaches. Their adaptive leadership strategy underscored the importance of flexibility and responsiveness to evolving circumstances, crucial during a period marked by uncertainty and rapid change.

The COVID-19 pandemic did not affect schools equally. In South Africa and globally, socio-economic inequalities played a vital role in shaping how principals implemented their leadership styles in their schools. Schools in disadvantaged communities, and mainly those in Quintiles 1 to 3, faced severe challenges when it came to online learning, food insecurity, as most of their learners depended on the food provided by the school to sustain them throughout the day, and high number of or lack thereof of

parental involvement in their child's learning due to illiteracy and unemployment concerns. These factors significantly influenced the deliberate and emotional leadership responses expected of the principals (Chikoko & Mthembu, 2023:4).

Mestry (2021:68) states that these structural inequalities compelled the principals to assume a more flexible, sympathetic, and community-oriented leadership style. He further states that the principals had to move from an instructional leadership style, which is seen as the most traditional leadership style used by principals in schools before Covid-19, to a more servant, transformational and situational leadership style to meet the instantaneous needs of the learners and staff, which may have been of a social and emotional needs in nature. Moreover, Naicker (2022:112) maintains that the lack of preparedness for online learning in Quintiles 1–3 schools highlighted the urgent need for adaptive leadership qualified to address systemic inequalities while ensuring the continuation of teaching and learning.

As stated by Mokoena (2020:201), due to the Covid-19 pandemic, principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools were not only education supervisors but also crisis leaders who had to steer multifaceted socio-political realities, showing flexibility and innovation amidst severe constraints.

B. Challenges and obstacles in ensuring effective teaching and learning

The principals acknowledged the difficulties of continuing education amid the pandemic. An important feature of leadership during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic is adjusting leadership methods to meet changing settings. This flexibility was evident in their encounters, defining approaches focused on maintaining consistency while emphasising the safety and welfare of learners, teachers and the broader school population. Chew and Cerbin (2020: 3) state that the emphasis of teaching should not be on how well the information is presented but on how well we establish conditions in which most learners can learn.

Principal 1 emphasised that:

The innate instability of Covid-19 requires repeated variation of leadership strategies to handle the disruptions. She praised the important role of situational leadership in navigating through uncharted territory where traditional operational norms were disrepute.

Principal 2 elaborated that:

On the difficulties posed by socio-economic differences within our community, where access to digital learning resources is limited. Despite these challenges, he highlighted the strength of the school community in asking for assistance from the local businesses to ensure educational support reached all learners, notwithstanding through non-traditional means.

Principal 3 adopted:

A democratic leadership model, distributing leadership responsibilities across various school stakeholders to ensure inclusive decision-making and stakeholder engagement. This participatory approach proved instrumental in acquiring support for pandemic response measures and maintaining morale among teachers, learners, and parents alike.

Principal 4 emphasised that:

The need for instructional leadership, particularly in curriculum delivery and assessment strategies designed for remote learning contexts. He described initiatives such as the distribution of Learning Activity Packs (LAPs) and the use of WhatsApp groups for communication, showing adaptive responses to ensure educational continuity despite physical closures.

Maphosa and Mahlomaholo (2020:160) state that the COVID-19 pandemic created unique challenges that laid bare problems in our education system. Principals were tasked with ensuring effective teaching and learning took place in their schools. They further state that principals were in the lead, navigating all the obstacles and challenges posed by Covid-19 in their schools. These challenges included erratic learner attendance, limited (WhatsApp) or no access to online learning, educator anxiety, and curriculum coverage pressures. Mahlangu (2022:95) states that Quintiles 1-3 schools struggled to make the shift to online or blended learning as the schools lacked the infrastructure to do so. In addition, the teachers were not trained and equipped to make the change and there was an insignificant number of parents that could assist their children or had the means to assist and support them due to literacy and internet access at home.

Zulu and Zulu (2021:217) observed that with the infrastructure and parental involvement or the lack thereof, challenges that the principals were already facing, there was also another “elephant in the room” which was staff shortages due to illness or fear of infection, while also trying to encourage disheartened teachers and learners coping with trauma and doubt. They further state that ‘the elephant in the room’ exposed the brittleness of teaching and learning systems and the need for leadership that was not only instructional but also deeply responsive and empathetic.

As a result, Sithole (2023:48) asserts that the gist of the collective challenges posed by the pandemic compelled principals to rethink their most trusted and go-to style of leadership when leading their schools which is the traditional leadership style and assume a more flexible and distributed leadership style that could assist in ensuring the steadiness in academic engagement amidst the quick changing conditions of Covid-19 pandemic. These measures included amending timetables, managing rotational attendance, and implementing corrective interventions for learners who struggled to keep up with the pace and/or did not have the means to participate in the online learning structures.

B. Policies governing the spread and containment of Covid-19 in schools

The principals played a role during the pandemic, focusing on following government regulations and recommendations to control and manage COVID-19 cases in schools. Nhamo and Mutanda (2024: 1) state that such bravado is emphasised in the context of the need for sensible policy measures, decision-making decentralisation, autonomy of decisions, and balancing change and stability.

Principal 1 recognised that:

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) provided by the district for their school's effective containment measures, limiting the spread of infections and maintaining a safe learning environment.

Principal 2 highlighted that:

The pivotal role played by Internal -District Support Offices (IDSOs) and district authorities in providing comprehensive guidance on COVID-19 management protocols.

Principal 3 emphasised that:

The importance of strict adherence to SOPs enforced by safety and security coordinators, ensuring compliance and safety across school operations.

Principal 4 recalled that:

Collaborative efforts with their previous principal to implement proactive measures such as LAPs distribution and parent engagement via digital platforms. These initiatives were instrumental in bridging communication gaps and maintaining academic momentum amidst prolonged school closures and staggered reopening phases.

According to Mhlanga and Moloi (2020:87), the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted government officials and education departments across the world to implement emergency policy measures to reduce the spread of the virus within school environments. They further state that, in South Africa, policies introduced by the DBE were focused on health measures such as mandatory mask-wearing, social distancing, rotational timetables, and regular sanitisation of hands. Furthermore, Mhlanga et al. (2020:87) believe that while the above-mentioned procedures were necessary to curb the spread of the virus, they drastically changed the daily routine of a normal school in SA and placed additional managerial and emotional obligations on principals.

Spaull et al. (2021:12) state that principals were required to serve as policy implementers and health supervisors, and to cultivate connections with the community. They further state that the requirements stated above were to be done with limited resources or training. In comparison, Govender (2022:73) maintains that agreeing with the safety regulations necessitated the SMT in a school to recognise the daily fuss such as changing the timetable, obtaining PPE, and continuous monitoring of symptoms among staff and learners.

These were not without the challenges facing schools during Covid-19, as acknowledged by Duma (2021:184). Duma (2021: 184) states that the erratic communication from authorities and irregular updates to procedures created confusion and logistical challenges for principals, especially those in Quintiles 1-3 schools. Naicker and Mestry (2023:102) agree with the sentiments above, believing that Covid-

19's ever-changing policy demands required principals to practise a quick, reactive leadership style while ensuring adherence to health protocols, thereby ensuring that effective teaching and learning continued under limiting conditions. They further uphold the notion that adhering to policy was not just administrative. It was an important aspect in leading their school through the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.3.1.1a Consolidation of Theme 1

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, school principals explored how contextual factors and adaptive leadership strategies can influence leadership. Charalampous, Papademetriou, Reppa, and Athanasoula-Reppa (2023: 2) state that educational leadership is continually remodelled and altered to the current social, cultural, and economic circumstances. This research has implications for shaping crisis management protocols and providing support to principals in managing emergencies effectively. The findings emphasise the importance of development in fostering leadership agility and crisis response skills.

Looking at theme 1, it is important to be cognisant that the four principals agreed that the Covid-19 pandemic exposed inequalities in the South African schooling system. The principals who led the Quintiles 4 and 5 (well-resourced) schools were able to continue teaching and learning, in their schools, with minimal disruption. At the same time, they had to manoeuvre and manage different obstacles almost daily due to the constraints of infrastructure, resources (human and technical) socio-economic factors and food insecurities in the children's homes (Chikoko & Mthembu, 2023:4). In response, to these challenges, the principals stated that they had to be flexible and creative in their leadership and implementation of leadership style. They state that they had to abandon the traditional leadership style and consider implementing distributive leadership, situational leadership, and transformative leadership to cater for the larger school community at hand, including the parents of the learners (Naicker, 2022:112; Mestry, 2021:68).

Not limited to this, the principals also stated that absenteeism was a problem because teachers were scared they would be infected or infect learners with the virus, which put their health and that of those they love in jeopardy. The learners' parents were also not so convinced that sending their children to school was the best decision. They were anxious that the learners would come to school infected and, in turn, infect them

and the elderly family members they stayed with. This worsened absenteeism at the school and negatively affected syllabus coverage. Principals had to manage the situation. They had to be brave and build courage and trust with the school community at large, and that the measures that the DBE and health department put in place were working and minimised the spread of the virus in the school and at home (Maphosa & Mahlomaholo, 2020:160; Sithole, 2023; Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020:87; Govender, 2022:73:48). The principals all agreed that these challenges compelled them to think on their feet and be flexible in their decision-making. They all agreed that they had to trust and believe in themselves more amid confusing protocols to be followed (Naicker & Mestry, 2023:102; Spaul et al., 2021:12).

In this multifaceted educational landscape posed by Covid-19, pedagogical leadership emerged as a vital theoretical framework at the core of many decisions made by principals during this time. This is because pedagogical leadership ensures that teaching and learning are at the heart of school leadership and aims at developing a supportive environment where both learners and educators can flourish. Male and Palaiologou (2017:3) affirm that pedagogical leadership underscores collaboration, professional development, and shared vision in a school, values reflected in how principals enabled peer support, distributed responsibilities, and encouraged innovation during the pandemic. Furthermore, the importance of curriculum continuity, teacher support, and learner well-being aligns directly with the core beliefs of pedagogical leadership theory.

The pandemic emphasised the need for strategic preparedness in educational leadership. Principals who had conducted proactive planning and scenario-based preparation were better equipped to mitigate the impact of disruptions on teaching and learning. This preparedness encompassed logistical considerations, such as technology infrastructure, remote learning protocols, and proactive communication with stakeholders to maintain transparency and trust amid uncertainty.

The adaptive leadership strategies principals demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic underscore the need for leadership agility in crisis response. The concept of situational leadership, as articulated by the four principals, emerged as a primary approach characterised by the ability to rapidly assess evolving situations and deploy appropriate responses. This flexibility was important for navigating dynamic

challenges, such as fluctuating infection rates, changing public health guidelines, and varying levels of community accountability regarding preventive measures.

The combination of transformational and democratic leadership approaches nurtured resilience in school communities by encouraging teamwork and involving everyone in decision-making. Principals who empowered their teachers and shared leadership duties efficiently tapped into wisdom and creativity, thus boosting the school's ability to adjust and develop ideas in challenging times.

In conclusion, Theme 1 divulges that successful school leadership during COVID-19 required more than administrative oversight. It necessitated an intense, responsive, context-sensitive, and pedagogically grounded leadership. Furthermore, these findings recommend that leadership preparation programmes should ensure that pedagogical leadership frameworks are seen as the most important to support and reinforce in managing teaching and learning during a pandemic or crisis. This will assist in developing principals who are not only effective leaders but also visionary educators, capable of leading in chaotic situations with compassion, creativity, and resilience.

The upcoming sections explore the second theme identified in Table 5.2.

5.3.1.2 THEME 2: The Necessary Interventions Needed by Principals in Primary Schools to Lead and Manage Their Schools (Support Structure)

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unmatched challenges for principals worldwide, demanding swift adaptation, innovative problem-solving, and resilient leadership. In this context, the role of support structures for principals in primary schools was pivotal, highlighting the establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and the ancient African philosophy of *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu*, derived from the Zulu phrase "*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" (I am because we are), embodies a profound humanistic philosophy emphasising interconnection, collective responsibility, and communal support. This philosophical framework posits that individuals thrive through mutual support and collaboration within their communities, a concept that resonated deeply with educational leaders in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis.

During the pandemic, principals employed *Ubuntu* principles to promote resilience and solidarity within their school communities. The philosophy emphasised the

interconnectedness of stakeholders—principals, teachers, learners, parents, and the wider community—and highlighted their shared responsibility for ensuring educational continuity, safety, and well-being.

Principals embraced the *Ubuntu* philosophy by creating environments that fostered respect, empathy, and collaborative decision-making. This inclusive approach enabled all stakeholders to navigate the difficulties of adjusting teaching methods and ensuring student learning despite the challenges posed by school closures, remote learning shifts, and health safety measures.

During the pandemic, key support for principals came from PLCs, which served as networks that allowed principals to share knowledge, exchange practices, and solve problems collectively. These PLCs offered a platform for principals to discuss challenges, seek guidance, and draw on shared insights to shape their decision-making and leadership approaches.

Principals engaged in ongoing professional development within PLCs, honed leadership skills, and gained insights into effective crisis management. These communities fostered a culture of continuous learning and growth, enabling principals to stay informed about evolving educational policies, technology integrations, and instructional innovations necessitated by the pandemic's exigencies.

A. Inter-District Support Office (IDSO)

According to Raath (2012: i), the role of IDSOs in South African schools has not been researched much. This was confirmed as I searched for the role of IDSOs in supporting and guiding principals during the Covid-19 pandemic. Raath (2012: i) states that there is an increasing interest in understanding the significant role the IDSO could play in supporting schools and principals. She further states that one of the most significant aspects in shaping school effectiveness is the implementation of the management and leadership styles provided by the Institutional Development and Support Official (IDSO).

Exploring the involvement and support offered by the IDSO to the principals during Covid- 19 is as follows, looking at the verbatim notes by the four participants:

Principal 1 highlighted that:

Our IDSO is very supportive. He was available to me at any time should I need guidance in implementing the SOP and interpret it accordingly.

Principal 2 elaborated that:

My IDSO was very knowledgeable and when he was not sure, he was not afraid to say and said he will find out which lessened the stress of finding out what was required of me and that freed me to attend to other challenges as infrastructure, time-tabling etc.

Principal 3 acknowledged that:

I was blessed to have such a leader to rely on. With my limited experience in leadership, I heavily relied on his guidance and support to lead my school effective.

Principal 4 emphasised that:

I might have the book knowledge when it comes to leadership and has never in my 15 years faced such a challenge. Having an IDSO that was available to help me and having the book knowledge of knowing which leadership styles work and which ones don't/ will prove challenging assisted me to lead my school.

Based on the perspectives shared above, the four principals showed deep appreciation for the invaluable support provided by their Institutional Development and Support Officer (IDSO) during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. They praise the IDSO's availability, guidance, and willingness to seek clarity when needed, which gave them a sense of comfort and allowed them to focus on other challenges posed by the pandemic in leading their schools, such as accessing online lessons, social distancing, and more.

Bush (2023:1) states that middle leaders are a fundamental part of a distributed leadership approach. The IDSO's role in assisting the principals' lead enabled them to lead their schools and build confidence in their leadership capacity. A distributed leadership style was utilised, and this is what the principals did in their schools: they empowered teachers to lead in their own little corners to ensure effective teaching and learning. Having said that, these reflections by the principals collectively highlight the

importance of responsive, knowledgeable, and accessible support in fostering effective school leadership, especially for principals with limited experience.

B. Role of Circuit Managers in supporting school leadership

According to Myende, Ncwane and Bhengu (2020:1), the work of circuit managers is strongly associated with and influenced by the socio-economic factors that surround the school and its community. They further state that circuit managers would generally assume a relationship-driven leadership. This will ensure that the vision and mission they have for the school are not seen as theirs but as a collective “dream” for the school and community at large, in turn empowering all those who are associated with the school.

Ndlovu (2017: 1) states that circuit managers are the main supervisors of the principals in their circuits/districts. He further states that circuit managers are expected to support and guide the principals and ensure that they are professionally developed through the Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) points system. Furthermore, Ndlovu (2017:2) states that policy mandates that circuit managers are the first in line to ensure that principals acquire professional skills and knowledge to advance their leadership and management in schools.

Ndlovu (2017: 2) believes that principals are required to serve a dual role to ensure effective management of their schools. Those roles are to serve as leaders in learner learning and to improve school quality. Thus, principals must be familiar with both the academic content and pedagogical techniques to improve student achievement in their schools.

Bantwini and Moorosi (2018:1) agree with the sentiments above, believing that the functions of circuit managers are an indispensable component of school district leadership. They believe that such a function necessitates a link between schools and government. Moreso, Bantwini and Moorosi (2018:1) maintain that the district leadership has a secondary but vital outcome on student achievement.

This was seen in how the circuit managers assisted the principals in leading their schools during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Principal 1 stated:

Having the support and guidance of the district director and that of the circuit manager indicated the pivotal role of institutional support in navigating complex educational landscapes and ensuring effective school management.

Principal 2 elaborated that:

A comprehensive support network which demonstrated the multi-faceted support system that offered diverse perspectives and resources crucial for informed decision-making.

Principal 3 acknowledged:

District-level support, affirming, "Yes, we rely on our IDSO, the circuit manager, and the district, all of whom provide robust support," underscoring the hierarchical layers of support critical for leadership resilience and strategic planning.

Principal 4 responded:

A collaborative network between the IDSOs, Circuit managers, and the District director gave us the confidence that we are not on our own, that more hands make the load lighter, and I definitely felt that during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The four principals shared their perspectives on the supportive role their circuit manager played in managing the spread of Covid-19 in their schools. They highlighted the essential function of a multi-tiered institutional support in managing a crisis. The multi-tiered institutional support ensured effective, functional leadership, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Raath (2012;1) states that in the education sector, hierarchy is important as it gives structure. The district is closer to schools than the DBE and can have a significant influence on school development and leadership.

Bantwini and Moorosi (2018:2) assert that circuit managers are mandated to offer management support and administrative services to principals and schools. They are also required to provide training for principals to lead their schools. Furthermore, Bantwini and Moorosi (2018:2) maintain that the tasks of circuit managers are central to ensuring the provision of high-quality basic education in schools. It establishes clear connections to the tenets of pedagogical leadership theory that the principals followed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

One of the tenets of pedagogical leadership that aligns with the support circuit managers gave to principals is professional capital. According to Berhanu (2024:80), this tenet highlights the importance of continuous professional development in empowering principals. This will then allow the principals to have more knowledge when making decisions that best suit their school context.

In this context, the role of Circuit Managers is important because they are not seen only as administrative supervisors but also as instructional leaders who support and assist principals in leading their schools. Thus, circuit managers are tasked with ensuring that principals have access to professional development opportunities and help cultivate an environment that allows for collaborative learning communities to thrive, states Sithole (2017:2). Consequently, Bantwini and Moorosi (2018:2) assert that the circuit managers are proactive in ensuring the development of professional capital within schools, hence reinforcing the objectives of pedagogical leadership which is to promote quality teaching and learning.

C. Engagement and collaboration through Principal's Forums

Karabay, Korumaz and Kocabaş (2021:3) state that during the COVID-19 pandemic, communication became more important as a management tool of the virus. They further state that communication skills are one of the most important skills a principal needs to have to run their school effectively. Whereas Akbari and Pratomo (2023:1) maintain that principals play a vital role in determining organisational culture, highlighting the organisation's founding of a collective and reciprocal ethos. They further maintain that communication in leadership helps solidify and instil the organisational culture in a school.

Looking at the sub-theme above, we will now examine how principals forming groups or professional learning committees (PLCs) assisted in managing the spread of Covid-19 and in offering one another support during times of chaos and pandemic.

Principal 1 stated:

The regular virtual meetings with the other principals in their circuit created a communal platform for me to discuss the safety protocols, follow infection rates in other schools to determine a rise/ decline in the spread of the virus and ensures that

my school was in accordance with the implementation of measures put in a place to stop the spread of the disease.

Principal 2 mentioned that:

The platforms, be it WhatsApp / Microsoft, created an open channel of communication that allowed the principals in our area/ circuit to quickly communicate pressing updates from the DoE or district and it also allowed us to implement uniformed understanding of the policies across all the schools, avoiding confusion amongst staff, parents and learners.

Principal 3 highlighted that:

What I liked about the platforms we used during covid-19 to communicate was the ability to let us as principals work together and lived the concept of Ubuntu in that we were able to share resources such as PPE, learning materials and digital tools. This allowed us to bridge gaps and maintain continuity in teaching and learning. instead of the competition we normally see between schools. We really worked well and supported each other which I really liked and valued.

Principal 4 maintained:

For me, the PLCs instituted the sense of collaborative effort which fostered a sense of unity and collective leadership. I felt that by us working together, we were able to carry the load together and allowed the district to guide and support us equally without feeling that one school was being favoured more than the other. We were also supported in a time efficient manner because of the nature of the virus. One will get information and share with the group. There was no gate keeping of information.

Hardley (2024:1) states that collaborative leadership is important in tackling the global challenges our world faces today. He further states that collaborative leadership highlights the importance of teamwork and shared decision-making. And no doubt, the Covid-19 pandemic was a global challenge that saw our principals coming together to lead their schools.

Based on the analysis above, the four principals showed a convincing understanding and application of pedagogical leadership by establishing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that encompassed all schools in their area/circuit/district. This

working together demonstrated collaborative leadership and the *Ubuntu* Culture concept for which South Africans are known. Situational leadership style was also utilised, as the principals' leadership was guided by the progression of the disease, or its absence, and applying this across a certain district allowed them to lead with the "safety net" of a collaborative leadership style (Schechter et al., 2022; Hardley, 2024).

Use of WhatsApp groups and/or Microsoft Teams enabled the principals to lead as a team and make decisions collectively, with guidance from the circuit managers and IDSOs. This aligns with the ideas of Harris and Jones (2020:5) regarding distributed leadership. Harris and Jones (2020:5) believe that communication networks improve shared understanding and consistency in instruction. By having one group and as per the utterances of Principal 2, the PLC ensured that there was one uniform communication and application of the SOPs with less confusion and ambiguity amongst the stakeholders involved.

One can deduce that the formulation of PLCs greatly assisted in disseminating information quickly and in helping principals manage and lead their schools. It also created a community among the schools, with the principals knowing they could rely on each other without wanting to outdo the others or look more proficient at managing the virus. As stated by Maalouf (2019:1), there is a positive relationship between collaborative leadership and performance in ensuring that a school functions optimally. Furthermore, Kitch (2024:1) maintains that in a collaborative leadership environment, there is no 'me' but a 'scenario type' setting. He further states that the positives of a using collaborative leadership style in times of a crisis is that as a leader, one does not make decisions on their own, instead all ideas from the group are considered and discussed in detail which proves to be a plus for the organisation as everyone in the group feels like they matter and their ideas matter and are contributing to finding the solution.

5.3.1.2 b Consolidation of Theme 2

Theme 2 underscores the effectiveness of school leadership in dealing with a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Three sub-themes were formulated: the Inter-District Support Office (IDSO), the role of circuit managers in supporting school leadership, and engagement and collaboration through Principals' Forums. These

procedures jointly reinforced the role of school principals in leading their schools amid a pandemic and ensuring effective teaching and learning.

The tenets of pedagogical leadership were most evident in the theme, which emphasised professional, social, and academic capital. According to Whitty and Baird (2022:8), a fundamental principle of pedagogical leadership is the fostering of supportive relationships. This principle was evident in the forums formed and in the guidance provided by IDSOs and circuit managers to assist principals with instructional leadership.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, primary school principals widely recognised and appreciated the valuable support provided by IDSOs Circuit Managers and Principal Forums. These support networks offered guidance, boosted morale, and encouraged development and teamwork among principals.

The IDSOs emerged as important figures in assisting principals throughout the pandemic. Principals emphasised the role of IDSOs in providing advice on adjusting curricula, implementing health protocols and managing administrative strategies to ensure continuous education despite disruptions. With their expertise and proactive involvement, IDSOs helped principals navigate the challenges of changing policies and operational hurdles. They also advocated for principals within district administrations to secure resources, share information, and align school-level efforts with district objectives. Through their approach, IDSOs empowered principals to implement solutions swiftly, address emerging issues proactively, and maintain educational standards amidst unprecedented situations.

To conclude, the connection between institutional support, circuit-level pedagogical leadership, and professional collaboration created a strong network that supported principals during a time of crisis. Each theme supplements the other, indicating that strong leadership is not a remote function but one rooted in systemic support, professional capacity-building, and collaborative networks.

5.4 SUMMARY

This chapter presented and interpreted the qualitative findings using the thematic analysis method to extract themes from the data gathered through the lived

experiences of the four principals from Quintiles 1-3 schools, as they led their schools during a pandemic. The two themes capture the essence of pedagogical leadership utilised during COVID-19. The chosen theory's contextualisation is fitting for the study, given the schools' location and the socio-economic factors of the community they serve. As Bush (2020:102) states, a principal using a pedagogical leadership style needs to be flexible and adaptable to meet the unique demands posed by a crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic.

Building on these findings, the next chapter, Chapter 6, synthesises the study's results with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2 and the literature review presented in Chapter 3, thereby situating the study's contributions within the broader body of knowledge.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, SYNTHESIS OF EMPIRICAL

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 described the qualitative findings, which were interpreted and presented thoroughly. The findings were developed from the analysis of semi-structured interviews and documents from which secondary data were gathered. Chapter 6 presents a summary, synthesis, and conclusions of the study's empirical findings, recommendations, and conclusions. It does so by outlining the study's aim and providing a synopsis of the previous chapters. This chapter synthesises the study's key empirical findings from Chapters 2 to 5 and then presents the conclusions. The findings and conclusions informed the development of a pedagogical theory for leading schools through a pandemic or crisis. This model is presented in the following section to support effective teaching and learning amid a pandemic. The chapter also provides recommendations through an empirical study to lawmakers, district officials, and principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools, based on the utilisation of pedagogical leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic, and how this ensures effective teaching and learning. Lastly, the chapter emphasises the recommendations for additional research, the study's limitations, and its conclusions.

6.2 THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was shaped by the main research question: *To what extent do the leadership styles of Gauteng Primary School Principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools influence the effectiveness of teaching and learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic?* was used to realise the pedagogical leadership style to facilitate a successful leadership style to ensure effective teaching and learning through a pandemic in under-resourced schools. As presented in Chapter 1, Section 1.3, Pollock (2020:38)

states that COVID-19 presented challenges to principals in "creating conditions for students to learn and teachers to teach, while at the same time seeking new ways to support online learning and the operations of public schooling through what they call 'extensive digital instructional leadership'". Amnesty International (2020: 6) maintains that although SA has made significant strides since the end of apartheid in expanding access to schools, this has not always resulted in top-notch instruction for all students. They also state that the extreme disparities between the "haves and have-nots" in SA's economic and societal situation have grown, as evidenced by the onset of COVID-19. This is concurred by Spaul (2020:23) and Jansen (2020:2), who both agree that the disparities between rich and poor schools were worsened during Covid-19.

From the findings and the scrutiny of the literature in this study, it was verified that amidst the challenges posed by Covid-19 pandemic, the principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools utilised pedagogical leadership to lead their schools and ensure that effective teaching and learning was taking place by not allowing the infrastructure, socio-economic factors, and literacy level of the context of the school to make them despondent. Thus, to support the pedagogical leadership theory, the researcher intended to develop a clear understanding of the lived experiences of the four principals who faced challenges head-on, and inspired courage and trust within their school's immediate community. The sentiments above concur with Grint's (2020: 4) views, where he states that in times of crisis, leadership is crucial than management. He further states that leaders do not lead consistently in hard times as they do in ordinary settings.

6.3 SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

This study explored the utilisation of pedagogical leadership by principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools during a pandemic to ensure effective teaching and learning. A summary of the preceding chapters of this study is outlined in this section.

Chapter 1 summarised the study's orientation (*cf.* Chapter 1). This chapter underlined the introduction and the background of the study (*cf.* Chapter 1, Sections 1.1 & 1.2). The chapter also outlined the study's challenges posed by Covid-19 to principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools, to ensure effective teaching and learning amid the infrastructure and socio-economic factors prevalent in their schools and communities (*cf.* Chapter 1, Section 1.3). The chapter comprises the main research question, sub-questions and the aim of the study. The overview of the theoretical framework (*cf.* Chapter 1, Section 1.8), the literature review (*cf.* Chapter 1, Section 1.9), and the research methodology (*cf.* Chapter 1, Section 1.10) were briefly discussed. The chapter presented an extract of the data analysis, reliability and validity, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study (*cf.* Chapter 1, Sections 1.11, 1.12, 1.13, 1.14). The study's keywords were explained, and a concise outline of the chapters was provided.

The theoretical framework of the study, which serves as its blueprint, was presented in *Chapter 2*. Furthermore, the conceptual and theoretical framework was defined. The theory of the pedagogical leadership framework was also explained, followed by a discussion of its characteristics and elements (*cf.* Chapter 2, Section 2.3). The rationale for using pedagogical leadership theory was explained (*cf.* Chapter 2, Section 2.4). Lastly, the utilisation of pedagogical leadership during a crisis was contextualised to the study (*cf.* Chapter 2, Section 2.5). The use of this theory influenced the interpretation and discussion of findings on how the principals in Quintiles 1-3 led and remained instructional leaders in their schools during a pandemic.

Chapter 3 outlined an analysis of the literature on principals' leadership styles during COVID-19, ensuring effective teaching and learning in their schools (*cf.* Chapter 3, Sections 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5). It examined scholarly literature about the types of leadership styles available, the impact of COVID-19 in school leadership, contextual factors for understanding types of leadership styles and implementation of these different leadership styles during a pandemic (*cf.* Chapter 3, Sections 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.3.1, 3.3.2, 3.4.1, 3.4.2, 3.5.1, 3.5.2). The chapter further investigated the literature on the effectiveness of leadership styles in a South African school context during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as leadership and policy compliance during COVID-19 in South Africa: challenges and strategic responses (*cf.* Chapter 3, Sections 3.2.3, 3.3.3, 3.4.3, 3.5.3).

The research methodology and design utilised for the empirical investigation were presented in *Chapter 4* (*cf.* Chapter 4, Sections 4.2 & 4.3). Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to collect data from key participants. The study utilised four Quintile 1-3 principals from the Ekurhuleni North District (*cf.* Chapter 4, Section 4.3.3). This chapter presented the characteristics of using thematic analysis to analyse data and positioned the data analysis method in the study (*cf.* Chapter 4, Section 4.5.1). The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. Lastly, the chapter outlined how trustworthiness and ethical considerations were ensured (*cf.* Chapter 4, Section 4.6).

Chapter 5 began by reminding the reader of the four sub-questions to guide the empirical findings. The participants' biographical information was outlined and discussed in relation to each person's experiences. The empirical findings of the study, obtained through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, were subsequently presented for analytical purposes. (*cf.* Chapter 5, Section 5.4). The presented findings are supported by verbatim responses from the four interviewed principals in the Quintiles 1-3 schools. The findings revealed the themes of contextual factors influencing principals' leadership styles during the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessary interventions primary school principals need to lead institutions (Support structure). Furthermore, qualitative data afforded the researcher insight into the challenges principals face, particularly in Quintiles 1-3 schools, in ensuring that teaching and learning took place in their schools (*cf.* Chapter 5, Section 5.3).

6.4 SYNTHESIS OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This segment presents the synthesis of the study's findings obtained from the theoretical framework in Chapter 2, the literature review in Chapter 3, and the themes reviewed in Sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 of Chapter 5. The synthesis of the findings is organised into two key themes that emerged from the analysis of the semi-structured interviews and document analysis presented in Chapter 4, Section 4.4. These themes comprehensively outline the measures implemented by the four principals in Quintiles 1-3 to address the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The two main themes

of the findings are interrelated and mutually reliant, as will be understood and realised in the synthesis that follows.

Sergiovanni's (1998) theory of pedagogical leadership was utilised to shape the study's framework. Sergiovanni's theory was chosen because it was deemed befitting of the period the researcher purported to understand. As Smith (2020:3) states, pedagogical leadership is necessary for creating direction, promoting collaboration, and encouraging new teaching and learning methods during uncertain times. Hence, the theory of pedagogical leadership was chosen, as it centres on providing distributive or collective leadership and instructional leadership in times of crisis. Furthermore, Sergiovanni emphasises the tenets that embody this pedagogy: capital staff, academic staff, professional staff, and individualised attention in managing a crisis, while ensuring the organisation functions accordingly. Thus, this was seen in how the principals managed their schools during the Covid-19 pandemic (cf. Chapter 5, Section 5.4). The participants demonstrated, through their leadership style, the tenets of pedagogical leadership utilised when managing their schools during the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure effective teaching and learning.

The literature reviewed in this study offered a deep understanding of how principals in other countries responded to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in under-resourced schools. This highlighted the need for change in the education system and in the leadership style utilised by principals in their schools. The need for flexibility, principals' pedagogical knowledge and understanding, and the influence of these on the culture of teaching and learning in the school.

The utilisation of pedagogical leadership garnered much interest among the principals in managing their ever-increasing duties as COVID-19 behaviour was erratic (cf. Chapter 3, Sections 3.2.2, 3.3.2, 3.4.2, 3.5.2). Implementing the theory meant some "free" time for the principals as they could then attend to other duties compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic. This was not easy to implement in African countries and South Africa, as the principals in Quintiles 1-3 faced more challenges than those in Quintiles 4-5 schools. They faced a lack of infrastructure (bathrooms, running water, desks, and chairs), a high learner-to-teacher ratio in class —most schools in Quintiles 1-3 have more than 40 learners —and social distancing was a challenge. The schools serve the poor of the poorest communities, and those parents cannot afford technologies to

assist their learners to learn online and/or have money to buy those technologies (*cf.* Chapter 3, Sections 3.2.3, 3.2.1, 3.3.3, 3.4.3, 3.5.3).

The review in Chapter 3 concluded by highlighting the need to train and empower principals with skills in crisis management and school leadership. The scholarly literature emphasised that pedagogical leadership theory would be suited to empower principals, be it in Quintiles 1-3 schools or Quintiles 4-5 schools, to lead their schools in a crisis, be it Covid-19 pandemic or other unseen or unheard of pandemics in the new future (*cf.* Chapter 3, Sections 3.2.4, 3.3.4, 3.4.4, 3.5.4).

6.4.1 Contextual Factors Influencing Principals' Leadership Styles During the COVID-19 Pandemic

A theory of pedagogical leadership emphasises the importance of identifying, understanding, and recognising the environment in which the theory is to be implemented. (*cf.* Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2.1). This notion is supported by Ponts (2023:15), who states that the pedagogical leadership style acknowledges teachers' influence in shaping their learners' cognitive development and aims to empower and maximise their potential. In doing so, pedagogical leadership supports professional growth, improves instructional practices, and contributes to the overall effectiveness of the school culture. Principals utilising this leadership style are required to have a thorough understanding of the context in which their school is located, the type of community the school serves, and its historical context. Thus, it is presumed that the principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools are equipped to manage and lead their schools, utilising the resources, or lack thereof, to do so effectively (*cf.* Chapter 3, Section 3.5.3).

Utilising different leadership styles to lead the schools during Covid-19 pandemic, the principals were guided by the pedagogical leadership theory. The study identified, described, and related the context of Quintiles 1-3 schools in leading their schools (*cf.* Chapter 5, Section 5.3.1.1). The principals utilised leadership styles such as distributed leadership, transformational leadership, and collaborative leadership to lead their school. As deduced from the data gathered, utilising different leadership

skills enabled the principals to avoid having their capabilities spread thin and to maximise the use of human capital in their schools.

The data revealed that participants encountered several contextual factors that posed as obstacles and hindered the teachers' ability to provide effective teaching and learning. Among these factors, one of the main hindrances was the lack of adequate infrastructure to deliver lessons online, the community's socio-economic factors, and the school's status as a non-fee-paying school. When the other Quintiles 4-5 schools were transitioning seamlessly to face-to-face learning, the Quintiles 1-3 schools could not; hence, the use of WhatsApp and Learner Activity Packs (LAPs) to ensure effective teaching and learning. However, with the activity packs, some learners were unable to be assisted by their parents, as their parents were either illiterate or working and could not be fully available to teach them. This was another obstacle that the principals had to manoeuvre. The use of social media such as WhatsApp assisted greatly even though some of the learners could not access the classes daily due to finances where parents had to choose to either buy food or data while others, due to the financial constraints at home, did not have smart phones which resulted to their children not joining the classes (*cf.* Chapter 5, Section 5.3.1.2.)

The policies issued by the DoE were also found to be confusing and not implemented in time. However, having them in the background offered a safety net for the principals as they navigated the uncharted waters of the Covid-19 pandemic. As supported by Spaul et al. (2021:12), who state that principals were required to be policy implementers, health supervisors, and to cultivate connections with the community. They further state that the requirements stated above were to be done with limited resources or training. This is further supported in the review of literature (*cf.* Chapter 3, Section 3.4.5)

From the above discussion of the contextual factors, it is evident that the utilisation of pedagogical leadership theory to lead schools proved beneficial for the learners, teachers and especially the principals as it allowed them to be instructional leaders in their schools still, develop leadership roles and capacity in other staff members and build trust and support with the broader community amid the confusing times of the Covid-19 pandemic saga.

6.4.2 The Necessary Interventions Primary School Principals Need to Lead Institutions (Support Structure)

The review of literature, analysis of interview data and document analysis highlighted that pedagogical leadership theory is rooted in collaborative leadership, professional development, and the essence of *Ubuntu* to realise the goals of multi-layered institutional support. Hence, the qualitative data analysis showed that there is power in belonging to a community and having people to depend on in times of crisis to navigate the challenges.

Collaborative leadership, the formation of PLCs, and multi-layered support from the district and IDSOs were seen as positive aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic created a community of professionals who depended on each other to navigate and offer support. It allowed them to share best practices for leading their schools, promoting effective teaching and learning, and guiding the community at large. As supported by Harris and Jones (2020:5), who believe that communication networks improve shared understanding and consistency in instruction.

The literature reviewed indicated that principals who utilised pedagogical leadership theory in their schools were most likely to navigate the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, as they were able to be flexible in their leadership and to utilise transformational and distributed leadership styles. Thus, Kwatubana and Molaodi (2021: 110-111) maintain that teamwork in a crisis is crucial, as it strengthens relationships. These authors further state that intentional attention to teamwork is mandatory for teachers to uphold and endure coordinated performance, which, in turn, can ease the stress triggered by the heavy workload and work-life imbalance.

In conclusion, the findings reveal that pedagogical leadership thrives in a collaborative and distributed leadership environment. From the literature reviewed (*cf.* Chapter 3, Section 3.5.4) and the findings (*cf.* Chapter 5, Section 5.3.2), the utilisation of multi-layered leadership successfully navigated the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and demonstrated the power of teamwork and shared vision in managing an institution.

6.5 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

The study's conclusions are presented in this section.

The study's primary research question: *To what extent do the leadership styles of Gauteng Primary School Principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools influence the effectiveness of teaching and learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic?* was explored. This study investigated the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic for principals in Quintiles 1-3 in leading their schools effectively. A conclusion of the findings is presented for each of the study's sub-questions, to address the main question.

- a. What type of leadership style was employed during the Coronavirus-19 pandemic?

This sub-question investigated the leadership styles utilised by principals, especially those in Quintiles 1-3 during COVID times. The COVID-19 virus posed a unique disruption to the global education system. This necessitated that principals across the globe adopt adaptive, responsive leadership styles to lead their schools. The findings from this study reveal that transformational, distributed, and instructional leadership styles were widely utilised by principals worldwide during the pandemic, often in hybrid or situational forms.

Chapter 3 scrutinised the literature on leadership styles used by principals in different countries to lead their schools during Covid-19. This study showed that the Covid-19 pandemic affected all countries and all schools. Some were affected more than others, where teaching came to a standstill, and the principals had to be more creative and flexible in leading their schools.

In Chapters 4 and 5, when analysing the most preferred leadership styles among the principals, transformational leadership emerged as the most preferred. This was done to motivate staff and learners through a shared vision of endurance and safety, while ensuring effective teaching and learning in the school. The principals were tasked with inspiring trust and maintaining high

morale amid the pandemic. According to Bush (2020), transformational leaders play a significant role in inspiring hope and resilience during the pandemic.

Given the intricacy of pandemic-related challenges, distributed leadership became indispensable. This is supported by Menon and Motala (2021: 2) who state that while the pandemic engulfed all spheres of a country, a predicament developed around the management and planning needed to be able to continue teaching, learning, research and other central duties of an education institution amid a challenging context. This further allowed the principals to share the decision-making responsibilities amongst senior management teams, heads of department, and even educators. Based on the findings of the study, sharing the decision-making responsibilities allowed all stakeholders to take ownership, and due to the urgency and breadth of tasks such as applying the health protocols, managing remote learning, and liaising with parents, this leadership style allowed them to be accountable and lead in their “spaces” as well.

Naicker and Mestry (2021:3) argue that distributed leadership promotes quicker decision-making and prepares the teams to respond effectively to changing regulations and school requirements. They further state that this leadership style allows principals to share responsibilities and permits individuals to take ownership, leading to more responsive and alert school environments.

Amid the pandemic, many principals sustained a strong focus on instructional leadership. This helped them ensure that teaching and learning continued as effectively as possible. This was done through online platforms or rotational attendance systems. Principals actively encouraged their teachers in curriculum adaptation and learner assessment.

The study also emphasised the role of situational leadership, with principals employing their leadership styles during the Covid-19 pandemic. It further stresses that the principals had to adjust their leadership styles based on the severity of the infection rate, resource availability, and the socio-economic realities of their communities. It further suggests that, in many under-resourced

schools, principals had to be logical, blending directive and supportive strategies.

In answering the sub-question 1: What type of leadership style was employed during the coronavirus-19 pandemic? We can conclude that the leadership styles used by principals worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic were not rigid; rather, they were context-based and flexible. Principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools showed flexibility, emotional intelligence and the capacity to share, work together, and prioritise both effective learning and health protocols.

- b. Did the type of leadership style yield favourable results when it comes to ensuring that effective teaching and learning were taking place during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The findings from this study suggest that the leadership styles used by the principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools during the COVID-19 pandemic did, to a significant extent, yield favourable results in sustaining effective teaching and learning, notwithstanding many of the obstacles the pandemic presented. The success of the leadership style used was influenced by contextual factors such as resource availability, staff capacity to teach remotely, school infrastructure, and the level of parental involvement.

Chapter 2 examined the theoretical framework that guided this study, enabling the selection of an appropriate leadership style for the pandemic. Pedagogical leadership theory enables the principal to ensure that, during the uncertain times of the pandemic, they can utilise instructional leadership while empowering their teachers through transformational and distributed leadership styles. It also allows the principals to “read the room” and be able to be flexible in the implementation of a leadership style guided by the severity of the virus and the guidelines of the SOPs, with the help of their fellow principals and district officials.

Also, in Chapter 2, the contextual factors underlying the choice of this theoretical framework were outlined, which assisted in answering sub-question

2. The school context was examined to identify the most appropriate leadership style to guide the principals. Socio-economic factors and resource availability were considered.

Analysing the data from Chapter 4, one could clearly see that the leadership style employed by the principals was befitting for the context they found themselves in. Their ability to adopt a leadership style is to be commended. This trait allowed them to lead “effortlessly” and to gain the trust of their followers, colleagues, and officials in managing the virus while ensuring that teaching and learning continued.

Sub-question 2 was explored in detail, as the study demonstrates that the leadership styles used by Quintiles 1-3 principals during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic produced largely favourable results in providing effective teaching and learning in their schools. However, the effectiveness was context-based. Schools led by flexible, collective, and instructionally focused principals coped better with the pandemic while ensuring learning continuity. The study underscores that leadership, while significant, must be supported by adequate resources, training, and community engagement to fully understand its impact on education during crises fully.

- c. How was information pertaining to learning and communication with the parents disseminated in the school during the hard lockdown?

From the findings, it was revealed that principals and educators used a diverse range of communication strategies and platforms to disseminate information about learning and maintain contact with parents during the peak of lockdown and Covid-19. These methods for communication and the distribution of teaching and learning were informed mainly by resource availability, technological infrastructure, and the socio-economic context of the school community.

In Chapter 3, through a literature review, we were informed of measures such as WhatsApp used by the teachers to teach their learners concepts so as not

to have the learners fall behind in their learning when compared to their peers. We were also introduced to the use of LAPs to ensure that learners who could not join via the WhatsApp channel were able to continue learning at home using the hard copies.

With these measures in place, we are reminded that in Chapters 4 and 5 of the study, the challenges principals faced with the two measures to disseminate information and teaching materials are discussed. Some of the parents are illiterate, and even though they were willing, they could not assist their children. Others, due to the socio-economic factors they find themselves in, were unable to assist their children because of work commitments, coming home late and leaving early for work. Some, because of their living conditions, had no conducive space to learn.

Some parents' financial constraints prevented learners from joining classes via WhatsApp. Parents could not afford data. They had to make the hard decision between feeding their family or buying data for their children to learn. This posed a challenge for the teachers and management of the school in disseminating information regarding Covid-19 and measures to curb it at school, so that learners did not fall far behind, compared to those in Quintiles 4-5 schools.

Chapter 5 states that the formulation of a forum for the principals was a good solution to disseminate information. The principals could then speak with one voice. That whatever one shared in their school, the parents would share with those who did not have the means to get data, and one message was going to the community, irrespective of which school one's child attended. They sorted out the power of *Ubuntu* and word of mouth in running their schools during the hard lockdown brought by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The study can conclude that communication with parents during the hard lockdown was reliable, inventive, and context-based. We can further attest that, based on the analysed data, the digital platforms were utilised to a certain extent. The school investigated in Quintiles 1-3 relied on low-tech solutions

such as printed materials (LAPs) and community-based communication (word of mouth). The principals' ability to adjust communication methods to meet the needs of their parent communities was vital in ensuring continued learning support during the pandemic.

- d. What type of assistance and guidance was given to you to lead the school and all stakeholders involved during the pandemic?

The study's findings show that the school principals interviewed received a combination of institutional, professional, and peer-based support during the COVID-19 pandemic. This type of support ensured that the principals could steer the multifaceted, rapidly changing educational environment. The type of support received varied across contexts, but various key forms of support were steadily emphasised.

In Chapter 4, the principals praise the support they received from their IDSOs. They all agree that the IDSO became a source of strength in leading their schools. They state that the IDSO served as a sounding board on matters they were unsure about. That the IDSO was readily available to explain, guide, and support them in understanding and implementing policies and procedures.

They further alluded to the multi-tiered leadership guidance that they received from their circuit manager. They stated that, as much as the IDSO was there to support and guide them, the circuit manager provided another layer of support to ensure that, while they were navigating the challenges of curbing the spread of the virus, they did not neglect their core duties, which were instructional leadership. The circuit managers allowed them to be flexible and adaptable in implementing measures that supported their learners' education while considering the socio-economic factors of the community and the school, and the infrastructural deficiencies they faced as a school.

They further praise the engagement and collaboration afforded to them through the formulation of the principals' forum. They believe this forum provided a safe space to discuss and implement policies across the district or circuit. Knowing whatever one school does, the other would follow. Similar information was shared with the parents and community. Some principals said that, as bad as Covid-19 was, the good thing that came out of it was the collaborative leadership between schools that ensued. That there was no competition between the schools. They all had one goal: to provide

effective teaching and learning while limiting the spread of the virus, always keeping their teachers and learners safe.

The study concludes that the support and guidance afforded to the principals interviewed during the pandemic were multi-layered. This was done by compounding formal instruction from educational authorities (IDSOs, circuit managers), collaborative peer support (principals' forum), limited professional development, and community-driven engagement. While this support was vital in empowering the principals to manage multifaceted challenges, significant gaps were noted — particularly in mediating policies, managing frequent changes in policy implementation, ensuring timely delivery of resources, providing consistent training, and supporting the emotional well-being of principals themselves. Attending to these areas in the future, should we face another pandemic, will be fundamental to building robust educational leaders in future crises.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the study's findings, there are suggestions for managing leadership in emergencies. To start, leadership development courses should emphasise the value of a method that equips school principals to combine leadership approaches. Additionally, this training should emphasise emotional intelligence, helping principals refine the understanding and insight needed to support their teachers and learners should a similar pandemic hit South Africa.

Leadership should also focus more on flexibility and adaptability. Principals need to improve their perceptions and be ready to adjust their strategies to their environments. To help with this, the principals should have access to up-to-date information and resources to make well-informed decisions. It is crucial to continue assisting principals by providing them with access to mental health services and opportunities for growth. Leading amidst a crisis can be incredibly stressful and demanding, so it is vital to ensure they receive the support they need to keep going.

6.7 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This research study makes numerous substantial contributions to both theory and practice within the field of educational leadership, mainly in the context of crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. Theoretical Contribution

The study contributes to current understandings of pedagogical leadership by exploring how school principals modified their leadership styles during the COVID-19 pandemic. It underscores the role of professional capital, collaboration, and emotional intelligence in leading and managing schools through pandemics in the near future. The findings also provide a contextualised implementation of leadership styles during a pandemic, particularly in under-resourced South African schools (Quintiles 1-3).

2. Practical Contribution

This research offers practical understandings for principals, policymakers, and circuit managers on how to successfully support Quintiles 1-3 schools during a crisis or pandemic. It further recognises successful communication strategies, collaboration platforms, and leadership styles that helped create a climate conducive to effective teaching and learning. The findings of this study can inform future policies on crisis preparedness, crisis management, and school management support structures.

3. Methodological Contribution

The utilisation of qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews and document analysis, demonstrates how detailed, contextual data can lay bare the lived experiences of principals, especially those in Quintiles 1-3 schools during a pandemic such as Covid-19. The study outlines a methodological pattern for future researchers interested in exploring leadership in erratic, challenging environments.

4. Social Contribution

The study highlights the inequalities in our education system post-apartheid. The pandemic exposed these inequalities, showing that 75% of South African children are still affected by the aftereffects of the system (post-1994), where socio-economic factors played a role, and the lack of infrastructure and teacher training compounded these challenges. These inequalities were most evident and felt among learners attending schools in Quintiles 1–3. Furthermore, the study stresses the importance of community engagement, parental involvement, and socio-emotional support for learners and educators. These findings can promote social dialogue and encourage more unbiased resource allocation and systemic support.

6.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This section outlines the study's limitations in relation to its emphasis on school leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. By recognising these limitations, the discussion situates the findings in their proper context, ensuring transparency and guiding the interpretation of the results presented in this chapter.

The research offers perspectives on how primary school principals demonstrated leadership during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is essential to note that the study has its constraints. To begin with, the investigation was carried out in a setting concentrating on Quintiles 1-3 schools within the Ekurhuleni North District of Gauteng, South Africa. Consequently, the results may not broadly apply to other districts, provinces, or quintiles.

The research also used information reported by school principals, which could influence the results. Principals might have presented their leadership methods, potentially inflating the perceived effectiveness of their strategies. Furthermore, the study did not consider the viewpoints of teachers, learners or parents, which could have offered an insight into how leadership styles impact outcomes.

The research did not probe the lasting effects of the leadership methods during the pandemic. Although the results shed light on how well various approaches worked, further studies are needed to understand the enduring consequences and viability of these leadership styles.

6.9 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several recommendations for further research are listed below:

1. Conduct research to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced leadership practices and educational outcomes over time.
2. Conduct research comparing districts, provinces and school environments to expose similarities and distinctions in how principals addressed the pandemic.
3. Explore how leadership styles influenced learners' progress and well-being during the pandemic.
4. Investigate how professional development initiatives improve school principals' leadership abilities.
5. Explore how technology aided leadership during the pandemic, encompassing utilising resources for communication, remote education and administrative responsibilities.
6. Examine how different leadership approaches tackle concerns of fairness and diversity in times of crisis.
7. Examine the impact of policy on decision-making and the development of policies and procedures.

6.10 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 6

This study aimed to explore how principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools employed their leadership styles during the COVID-19 pandemic. More attention was placed on the methods they used to communicate with stakeholders, manage teaching and learning under limiting conditions, and work with district officials and professional networks to maintain the effective functioning of their schools during a pandemic. Through the lived experiences of the four principals interviewed, the study showed the realities and challenges they faced, especially in disadvantaged schools (Quintiles 1-3), and the flexible leadership styles they utilised to navigate a period of unique worldwide disruption.

The findings further show that, notwithstanding the lack of preparation for such a crisis, the primary school principals in Quintiles 1-3 schools rose to the occasion by welcoming innovation, exercising elasticity, and leaning on collaborative organisations afforded to them, such as principals' forums, virtual networks and support of the IDSOs and circuit managers. Moreover, leadership during the pandemic required not only administrative capability but emotional intelligence, compassion, and the ability to respond speedily to changing situations.

This research adds to the growing body of knowledge on crisis leadership in education, emphasising the importance of continuous professional development, policy support, and inclusive communication strategies for managing crises and leading schools effectively. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of fairness and impartiality in resource distribution and stakeholder involvement to ensure that no learner is left behind during crises.

Finally, while the COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep systemic challenges in the South African education system, it also allowed us to reevaluate our school leadership, strengthen community ties, and build more robust educational settings for the future.

6.11 CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

/The COVID-19 pandemic presented unique challenges for education systems globally, but it also highlighted the potential of innovative leadership in crisis

management. In the Ekurhuleni North District of Gauteng, primary school principals in Quintiles 1–3 schools showed incredible adaptability, going beyond predictable practices to ensure learners continued to access quality education.

Working in a school with limited resources, these principals used methods such as WhatsApp groups, Learner Activity Packs, and engaging community resources. Their actions illustrated that effective leadership could overcome structural limitations when steered by creativity, commitment, and a clear focus on the learner outcomes.

While schools in Quintiles 1-3 often face logistical and financial challenges, the approaches taken by these principals offer a conflicting perspective. Their flexible, responsive leadership not only reduced the disruptions caused by the pandemic but also laid the foundation for long-term educational equity.

By embracing technology, fostering community partnerships, and unwaveringly advocating for their schools' needs, these principals showed that the fundamental limitation is not a lack of resources but a lack of imagination. The study underscores that with flexible, empathetic, and community-focused leadership, optimistic and sustainable changes in education are attainable, even in the most challenging contexts.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethical Clearance Certificate



UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2023/02/08

Ref: **2023/02/08/48048844/13/AM**

Name: Mrs EB Kunene

Student No.: 48048844

Dear Mrs EB Kunene

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2023/02/08 to 2028/02/08

Researcher(s): Name: Mrs EB Kunene
E-mail address: 48048844@myunisa.mylife.ac.za
Telephone: 082 780 8279

Supervisor(s): Name: Prof LDM Lebeloane
E-mail address: leblldm@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 012 429 4433

Title of research:

**EXPLORING LEADERSHIP STYLES OF GAUTENG PRIMARY SCHOOLS' PRINCIPALS
DURING CORONA VIRUS-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY**

Qualification: PhD Education Management

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2023/02/08 to 2028/02/08.

*The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2023/02/08 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.



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3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2028/02/08**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2023/02/08/48048844/13/AM** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Kind regards,



Prof AT Motlhabane
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
motlhat@unisa.ac.za



Prof Mpine Makoe
ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN
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Appendix B: Information sheet

Disclaimer: Pseudonyms have been used in these requests for permission letters to the higher education institutions, as the respondents did not want their names or the names of the institutions disclosed in the study. In addition, their names and the names of the institutions have been blocked out.



Date:

Title: **EXPLORING LEADERSHIP STYLES OF GAUTENG PRIMARY SCHOOLS' PRINCIPALS DURING CORONA VIRUS-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY**

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

My name is Enicah Kunene. I am a registered PhD degree student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Management, School of Educational Studies, College of Education at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Prof L.D.M. Oupa Lebeloane of the Department of Science and Technology Education, School of Teacher Education, College of Education, UNISA, is my supervisor.

I hereby invite you to participate in a study entitled: **EXPLORING LEADERSHIP STYLES OF GAUTENG PRIMARY SCHOOLS' PRINCIPALS DURING CORONAVIRUS-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY**. The study is funded by UNISA.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could:

- Assist the department in ensuring that principals are given adequate support to assist them in attaining their vision for their schools during a pandemic.
- Understands the challenges principals have encountered because of the lack of infrastructure and perceptions that other stakeholders might have.
- How perceptions of the Quintile 1-3 principals can affect the culture of teaching and learning in the school.

WHY AM I INVITED TO PARTICIPATE FOR THIS STUDY?

You are invited because of the following reasons:

- This study may increase awareness of the challenges principal experienced in providing leadership due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The awareness of the challenges that principals encountered may provide different styles of leadership that could be used in a school environment.
- There is no right or wrong answer. The knowledge gained may provide insights and assist in ensuring that should a pandemic hit, principals are adequately supported.
- Participation is voluntary; therefore, there are no rewards or benefit for participating in this study. You will not be forced to disclose what you do not want to reveal.

Your contact details from the school and will only be used for the research purposes and only with your endorsement.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

- The study will involve having an individual face –to-face interview with the researcher whenever and wherever is convenient for the interviewee at the school.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

By taking part in this study, you will be assisting us to gain a deeper knowledge of how female principals can be assisted to ensure that they are better prepared and equipped to lead a school. The principals will also have a chance to understand what you as the teachers expect from them as their leaders, they also will have a benchmark to start from. From a societal point of view, we will have knowledge of how society views female leaders as a whole and especially in a schooling environment and how such views affect how the teachers view a female leader and how a female leader views themselves in such a position.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

- The questions will be designed in a way that will limit any risk of being identified as a participant and with the research open to every staff member, the risk of being identified are limited.

- I will have no knowledge of the principal and the leadership style employed by the principal at the school. This will ensure that there is no or minimal breach of confidentiality and confidentiality will be sustained to avoid any legal and/ or economic perils.
- The name of the school and that of the participants in the study will NOT appear anywhere on the report/ findings. Codes and/or pseudonyms will be used throughout the study.
- To ensure impartiality and objectivity in the data collection process, the researcher will use a code number or a pseudonym when referring to the participant's answers in her study to ensure that no one can be identified.
- A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such the study.
- As a researcher, I will endeavour to be open and transparent in addressing any phase of the study from the initial stages of collecting data, analysing data and interpreting data and distribution of the findings to all stakeholders concerned.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you given. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at home. For future research or academic purposes, electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. After the 5 years' period has lapsed, hard copies will be shredded and/or electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer using a relevant software programme.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

No incentives or payment will be given to the participants.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the CEDU, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

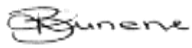
If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Enicah Kunene on 082 780 8279 or email 48048844@mylife.unisa.ac.za. The findings are accessible for 6 weeks after collecting data after that, they will be locked away for safe keeping and for submission for the completion of the degree.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact E Kunene on 082 780 8279 / 48048844@mylife.unisa.ac.za.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Prof L.D.M. Lebeloane on lebelldm@unisa.ac.za.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.



E B Kunene

Student number: 48048844

Cell number: 082 780 8279

Appendix C: Request for Permission to Conduct Research



**Request for permission to conduct research at _____
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Title of the title of your research: **EXPLORING LEADERSHIP STYLES OF GAUTENG
PRIMARY SCHOOLS' PRINCIPALS DURING CORONA VIRUS-19 PANDEMIC: A
CASE STUDY.**

Date:

Name of the person to who you address the request: XXXX

Department of the person: Principal

Contact details of the person: XXXXX

Dear XXXX

My name is Enicah Busisiwe Kunene. I am a registered PhD degree student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Management, School of Educational Studies, College of Education at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Prof L.D.M. Oupa Lebeloane of the Department of Science and Technology Education, School of Teacher Education, College of Education, UNISA, is my supervisor.

I hereby invite you to participate in a study entitled: **EXPLORING LEADERSHIP STYLES OF GAUTENG PRIMARY SCHOOLS' PRINCIPALS DURING CORONA VIRUS-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY.**

The study will entail interviewing:

- You will be interviewed as the (acting) school principal to find out what leadership style(s) was (were) used to ensure effective teaching and learning was always taking place during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The potential benefits of this study are:

- How the style of leadership employed during height of Covid-19 pandemic influenced the teaching and learning that took place at your school?
- For the education fraternity, it will allow us to ensure that there are measures put in place to support and guide female principals when accepting the role of leadership in a school environment.
- From a societal point of view, we will have knowledge of how society views leaders as a whole when a pandemic struck and especially in a schooling environment and how such views can affect the morale of all stakeholders involved in the Education sector.

Potential risks are:

- Due to the nature of the study, there might be some discomfort in you critically evaluating your leadership style and how that leadership style impacted on the teaching and learning in your school. This is not meant to cause conflict among you but you will be assisting me to gain a deeper knowledge of how the style of leadership employed by the principal in a primary school can be replicated to ensure that should we face a similar situation we are better prepared and equipped to lead the Quintile 1-3 schools effectively.

Confidentiality is paramount due to the nature of the study. To ensure and promote confidentiality, anonymity in the study will be maintained and guaranteed by ensuring that the participant's interview notes are not marked in any way to identify the name of the participants. The name of the participants and of the school will not be used anywhere in the research report as not to identify them as participants in the study. I

will also ensure that sensitive information given to me by the participants is not portrayed in a way that easily leads to them being identifiable in the study.

Further to what I have outlined above, the research will be conducted according to the ethical standards enshrined by the Unisa Ethics Committee. Should any risk to the study and/or the participants occur, the incident will immediately be reported in writing to the CEDU Ethics Committee and to my supervisor, Prof L.D.M. Lebeloane for his attention guidance.

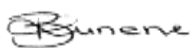
WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

Feedback procedure

- A summary report of the findings will be sent to the you as you are the key participants in the study to peruse and read. Should you feel that you would like to have your responses removed/modified, you will be given enough time to email the researcher and state your concerns.
- I am required by the GDE to inform them as well of the findings and/ or give them the copy of the report for their files and data collection as well.
- The final research report will also be uploaded on UNISA online repository and be easily accessible to other students should they want to conduct a similar study and/ or expand on what I have done.

Yours sincerely



ENICAH B. KUNENE

Student number: 48048844

Appendix D: GDE Letter of Permission to Conduct Research



GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	23 February 2023
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2023– 30 September 2023 2023/08
Name of Researcher:	Kunene EB
Address of Researcher:	31 Wagenaar Road Edenglen Edenvale
Telephone Number:	082 790 3379 / 011 602 5206
Email address:	busekwe.epicah@gmail.com
Research Topic:	Exploring the leadership styles of Gauteng Primary Schools' Principals during the Corona-19 pandemic
Type of qualification	PhD
Number and type of schools:	5 Primary Schools
District/s/HO	Ekurhuleni North

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

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

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

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshekiso@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

1. The letter would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
2. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.
3. Because of the relaxation of COVID 19 regulations researchers can collect data online, telephonically, physically access schools, or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate.
4. The Researchers are advised to wear a mask at all times, Social distance at all times, Provide a vaccination certificate or negative COVID-19 test, not older than 72 hours, and Sanitise frequently.
5. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s has been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
6. A letter/document that outlines the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs, and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.
7. The Researcher will make every effort to obtain the goodwill and cooperation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers, and learners involved. Persons who offer their cooperation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.
8. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school program is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.
9. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.
10. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.
11. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.
12. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes, and telephones, and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
13. The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers, and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.
14. On completion of the study, the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.
15. The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings, and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.
16. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a summary of the purpose, findings, and recommendations of the research study.

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

Kind regards



Dr. Gumani Mukatuni

Acting DES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 28/02/2023

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

Appendix D:

Sample of Consent Form



CONSENT FORM FOR THE PRINCIPAL (Return slip)

I, _____ (participant name),
confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me
about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of
participation.

I have read and /or had explained to me and understood the study as explained in the
information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in
the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any
time without penalty (if applicable).

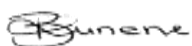
I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report,
journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be
kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname. (Print please)

Participant Signature Date

Researcher's Name & Surname (please print): E KUNENE

E. Kunene

Researcher's signature Date:

Appendix E:

Interview Guide Principals



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE PRINCIPAL

1. How long have you been the principal of the school?

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2. Why did you want to be a principal?

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3. What have been the highlights for you being a principal at this school?

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4. Do you have a preferred leadership style that you employ at your school? How is that leadership style received by the teachers, learners and parents?

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5. What challenges have you faced when managing a functional school like this one? And how have you/ are dealing with them?

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6. What style of leadership did you employ during the COVID-19 pandemic?

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7. What adjustments did you have to make (if any)?

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8. Do you have a support structure of principals that you can go to for guidance and morale support?

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9. If no, do you think such structures are needed and why? If yes, are these structures beneficial to principals and why?

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10. If there is one thing, you would like for your staff to know about you and your leadership, what would it be and why?

- You:

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- Leadership:

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Editing Declaration

20 December 2024

DECLARATION OF PROFESSIONAL EDIT

I declare that I have edited and proofread a PhD Thesis entitled: **EXPLORING LEADERSHIP STYLES OF GAUTENG PRIMARY SCHOOLS' PRINCIPALS DURING CORONA VIRUS-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY** by ENICAH BUSISIWE KUNENE.

My involvement was restricted to language editing: contextual spelling, grammar, punctuation, unclear antecedent, wordiness, vocabulary enhancement, sentence structure and style, proofreading, sentence completeness, sentence rewriting, consistency, referencing style, editing of headings and captions. I did not do structural re-writing of the content. Kindly note that the manuscript was formatted as per agreement with the client.

No responsibility is taken for any occurrences of plagiarism, which may not be obvious to the editor. The client is responsible for ensuring that all sources are listed in the reference list/bibliography. The editor is not accountable for any changes made to this document by the author or any other party subsequent to my edit. The client is responsible for the quality and accuracy of the final submission/publication.

Sincerely,



PhD Communication [Candidate]

MA Communication Science [Cum Laude]

BA Honours Communication Science

BA Humanities



Pholile Zengele
Associate Member

Membership number: ZEN001
Membership year: March 2024 to February 2025

076 103 4817
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www.editors.org.za

Appendix F

Turnitin Report

Similarity Report

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hD Study 10 Sept 2025 1.docx**

AUTHOR

ENICAH BUSISIWE KUNENE

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CHARACTER COUNT

405874 Characters

PAGE COUNT

276 Pages

FILE SIZE

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