IMPACT OF TEACHERS IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM TO ENHANCE LEARNERS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF DZONDO CIRCUIT, VHEMBE DISTRICT

by

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DECLARATION

I, **TSAKARIA NETSHISUMBEWA,** Student Number **11584324**, hereby declare that the dissertation titled:

"**The Impact of Teachers in School Management Team to Enhance Learners' Academic Performance: A Case of Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District"**

submitted by me, has not been submitted previously for a degree at this or any other institution or university, that is my designed and executed work, and that all the reference material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

Signature: Netshisumbewa Date: 01/06/2025

Tsakaria Netshisumbewa

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DEDICATION

This study project is dedicated to my late grandmother, Masindi Litshani Netshisumbewa, Nkhumeleni Henrick Netshisumbewa, Grace Netshisumbewa, Thifhatelwi Robert Munzhedzi, and my wife, Rinae Netshisumbewa, who supported me through the journey of life.

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ABSTRACT

Teachers are essential members of the School Management Team (SMT), with a significant impact on learners' academic performance. Their experience, guidance, and support help to create a positive and conducive learning environment. However, one major issue with the existing structure is that teachers are rarely actively involved in decision-making processes that have a direct impact on learners' academic and overall development. This lack of involvement impacts the full capacity of teachers to positively influence the school's management and, eventually, the learners' performance in school. Addressing this issue and acknowledging teachers' important contributions to decision-making processes within the SMT is critical for maximising the impact on learner academic performance. This research presented a study that aimed to explore the impact of teachers in SMTs on enhancing learner academic performance. The study adhered to the interpretive paradigm and utilised a qualitative case study approach to answer the research question. The target population consisted of departmental heads, deputy principals, and principals of primary and secondary schools in the Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District, Limpopo, South Africa. A non-probability sample was adopted in selecting 30 participants using an expert sample. Semi-structured interview schedule instruments were used to collect data. An interview template analysis style was employed, whereby categories were driven by the research questions. Data from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis to attain answers from the collected data. Three key findings from the research: Teachers play a vital role in school improvement through their participation in SMTs; SMTs contribute to improved academic performance via strong leadership, accountability, and partnerships within the community; and learners' performance is influenced by various interconnected factors. The findings of this study sought to have important implications for teachers, heads of departments, principals, curriculum advisors, and learners in imparting meaningful knowledge to learners. The study provided suggestions on remedial actions to be undertaken by SMTs to ensure that teachers supported the vision and mission of the school.

Keywords: Academic Performance, School Management Team.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPD	:	Continuing Professional Development
DHs	:	Departmental Heads
GHTC	:	Global Humanitarian Technology Conference
ICT	:	Information Communication Technology
IEEE	:	Institutes of Electrical and Electronics Engineers
IPPD	:	Individual Plan for Professional Development
MENA	:	Middle East and North Africa
OECD	:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RUB	:	Rabindra University of Bangladesh
SLA	:	Service Legal Agreement
SMTs	:	School Management Teams
TIMSS	:	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Teachers play a significant role in school management, while on the other hand, School Management Teams (SMTs) carry more school responsibilities. SMTs strongly influence learners' academic performance by creating a conducive learning environment through effective administrative processes and support for teachers (Herawan & Suryadi, 2019). According to Wardan, Susilo, Saraka and Sjamsir (2020), a teacher is an individual who imparts knowledge, guides, and instructs learners in school. In education, teachers play a crucial role in shaping the academic performance of learners. They are not just providers of knowledge, but also mentors, motivators, and role models for their learners (Ogal, 2020). They have the responsibility of managing various academic activities, both extracurricular and co-curricular, to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of learners. The problem arises when teachers are not given adequate support and resources to fulfil their role effectively. According to Ramos (2021), this can result in a negative impact on learners' academic performance and overall educational outcomes.

According to recent research, involving teachers in SMT has a positive impact on learner academic performance, as demonstrated in developed countries like the United States (Hirsch, Randall, Bradshaw & Lloyd, 2021). When teachers are included in decision-making processes and provided with the necessary resources and support, they are better equipped to address the diverse needs of their learners and create a positive learning environment, leading to improved learner engagement, academic performance, and overall school success (Li, Hassan & Saharuddin, 2023). However, in developing countries like South Africa, the role of teachers in SMT is often not fully recognized, and their input is frequently overlooked (Briones, Dagamac, David & Landerio, 2022). The SMT in developing countries may undervalue and underutilize the expertise and input of teachers in decision-making processes, which can result in

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a lack of teacher buy-in and ownership over school goals (Namale, Alale, Atingane & Upoalkpajor, 2021).

Teachers are also an integral part of the SMT, contributing to the overall management and governance of the school (Wardan et al., 2020). Their input in decision-making processes, curriculum development, and learner welfare initiatives are vital for creating a conducive learning environment. Moreover, according to Akbara and Akbar (2022), the collaboration between teachers and the SMT can lead to the implementation of innovative teaching methodologies and interventions tailored to address the diverse learning needs of learners.

Furthermore, the impact of teachers on learner academic performance extends beyond the classroom. Their ability to cultivate a positive and inclusive school culture, provide personalized support to learners, and address the social and emotional aspects of learning, all contribute to the holistic development of the learners (Amyanih & Sussanto, 2022). As the role of teachers in the SMT is multifaceted, it is essential to recognize the significance of equipping teachers with the necessary resources, professional development opportunities, and a supportive working environment (Khuluqo & Tenkahary, 2021). By doing so, educational institutions can enhance the capacity of teachers to positively impact learners' academic performance and contribute to the overall success of the school. The concept of collaboration between teachers and SMT is a well-researched, much-debated, and deliberated, yet least understood and ever-evolving topic (Sartika, Fitria & Wahidy, 2021). The problem that this study needs to investigate is the impact that teachers have on SMT, which enhances learners' academic performance.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Effective collaboration between SMT and teachers is essential for a school to function at its best and provide optimal academic performance for learners. Unfortunately, establishing such collaboration between these two groups can pose several challenges. One of the major challenges is that the importance of teachers in

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enhancing learners' academic performance is not always well recognized by School Management Teams (Briones et al., 2022). Therefore, the SMT and teachers must work together to create an environment that fosters and enhances learners' academic performance. Poor collaboration between these two groups can have a detrimental effect on learners' academic achievements.

The impact of teachers in SMT to enhance learner academic performance is a key research problem statement that highlights the role of teachers in contributing to the overall success of a school (Villanueva, Disu & Villanueva, 2021). Efforts to understand how teachers work within the SMT and their influence on learners' academic performance have been the focus of extensive research. Previous studies have explored the various ways in which teachers' involvement in decision-making processes and collaboration with other members of the management team can positively impact learners' learning performances (McGuire, Gabrielli, Hambrick, Abel, Guler & Jackson, 2021). These findings form a strong foundation for further investigation into the specific strategies and practices employed by effective SMTs to harness the potential of teachers in improving learner academic performance.

While existing research has explored the influence of teachers in the SMT on learners' academic performance, there is a research gap regarding the specific mechanisms and approaches utilized by successful SMTs to harness the potential of their teachers (Sartika et al., 2021). Further investigation is needed to understand the decision-making processes, collaboration dynamics, and leadership strategies within the SMT and how these aspects directly impact the academic performance of learners (Sartika et al., 2021). Addressing these gaps will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of teachers in SMT and their impact on learners' academic success (Wahab, Mansor, Hussin & Kumarasamy, 2020). Moreover, it would be beneficial to investigate any potential challenges or barriers that hinder the effective integration of teachers into the SMT and the subsequent impact on learner academic performance. This study seeks to investigate the impact of teachers in SMT to enhance learner academic performance in secondary and primary schools of Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe, Limpopo, South Africa.

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1.3 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This study aims to assess the impact of teachers in the SMT on enhancing learner academic performance.

The specific objectives to address the aim of the study:

- To explore and emphasise the pivotal role of teachers within the School Management Team.
- To investigate the role of SMT in enhancing learner academic performance.
- To identify factors that influence the academic performance of learners.
- To explore the specific mechanisms and approaches that successful SMTs employ to influence the potential of their teachers.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.4.1 Main Research Question

The main research question is: What is the impact of teachers in SMT on enhancing learner academic performance?

1.4.2 Sub-questions

To answer the main research question, the researcher investigates the following sub-questions.

- What role do teachers play in the School Management Team?
- What is the role of SMT in enhancing learner academic performance?
- What factors influence the academic performance of learners?
- How specific mechanisms and approaches can be employed by successful SMTs to influence the potential of their teachers?

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1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The outcome of this study will redound to the advantage of society, bearing in mind that the teachers and SMT plays a significant part in enhancing learner academic performance. This study seeks to explore the extent to which the involvement of teachers in the SMT influences the academic performance of learners. By analysing the current literature on this topic and conducting interviews with teachers and SMTs, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the role of teachers in school management and its effect on learners' performance. The findings of this study will be beneficial to various stakeholders, including teachers, school administrators, policymakers, and researchers. The study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between teachers and SMTs in enhancing learner academic performance. Furthermore, the research aims to identify the best practices and areas for improvement in this collaboration, offering practical recommendations for schools and teachers.

Moreover, the insights gained from this study will inform policy decisions aimed at fostering a more cooperative and effective relationship between teachers and SMTs, ultimately benefiting the overall academic performance of learners. Additionally, the findings can serve as a basis for future research in similar areas and can guide the development of professional development programs for teachers. As the study progresses, it will be crucial to gather diverse perspectives from teachers and SMTs to ensure a holistic understanding of the topic. Incorporating a range of viewpoints will enrich the study's findings, ultimately leading to a more robust and impactful contribution to the field of education.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores the pivotal role of teachers within School Management Teams (SMTs) in enhancing learners' academic performance. By examining key theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, this review highlights the significance of effective leadership, collaborative practices, and the empowerment of teachers in

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fostering a positive educational environment. Through a comprehensive analysis of relevant theories, including Kouzes and Posner's leadership practices, Distributed Leadership, Collective Efficacy and Instructional Leadership, this review seeks to illuminate how SMTs can leverage teacher involvement to drive academic success and improve learner outcomes.

1.6.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study centres on understanding the impact of teachers within School Management Teams (SMTs) on enhancing learners' academic performance. This framework integrates several key theories that provide a comprehensive understanding of effective leadership, collaboration, and instructional practices in educational settings.

1.6.1.1 Kouzes and Posner's five practices of exemplary leadership

This model serves as a foundational framework for exploring effective leadership within SMTs. Kouzes and Posner (2020) identify five essential practices that exemplary leaders exhibit:

- **Modelling the Way**: Leaders set an example by demonstrating the behaviors and values they wish to see in others, establishing credibility and trust within the team (Kouzes & Posner, 2020).

- **Inspiring a Shared Vision**: Effective leaders articulate a compelling vision that resonates with all stakeholders, motivating them to work towards common educational goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2020).

- **Challenging the Process**: Leaders encourage innovation and risk-taking, fostering an environment where new ideas can flourish and continuous improvement is pursued (Kouzes & Posner, 2020).

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- **Enabling Others to Act**: Empowering teachers and staff members is crucial for fostering collaboration and shared responsibility, which enhances the overall effectiveness of the SMT (Kouzes & Posner, 2020).

- **Encouraging the Heart**: Recognizing and celebrating the achievements of team members boosts morale and commitment, creating a culture of excellence (Kouzes & Posner, 2020).

1.6.1.2 Theories related to the impact of teachers in SMTs to enhance learner academic performance

Teachers are essential for improving learners' academic performance through their unique insights. Theories like Distributed Leadership, Collective Efficacy, and Instructional Leadership highlight the importance of collaborative educational leadership. By sharing responsibilities and focusing on instructional quality, School Management Teams (SMTs) can empower teachers and enhance learners' success. Understanding these theories is crucial for navigating modern educational challenges and improving academic outcomes.

1.6.1.2.1 Distributed Leadership Theory:

This theory posits that leadership should not be concentrated on a single individual, such as the principal, but rather distributed among various stakeholders, including teachers. Kumari (2021) emphasises that distributed leadership involves collaborative practices and collective decision-making, which can lead to improved school effectiveness and enhanced academic outcomes. This approach is particularly relevant in the context of SMTs, where teachers' involvement in leadership roles can leverage their expertise and insights to drive positive change (Nomtshongwana, 2023).

1.6.1.2.2 Collective Efficacy Theory:

Rashid and Latif (2021) discuss the concept of collective efficacy as a shared belief among teachers in their ability to positively influence learner learning outcomes. This theory highlights the significance of collaboration and mutual support among teachers in enhancing academic performance. When teachers believe in their collective ability

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to impact learners, they are more likely to engage in effective instructional practices and support one another in overcoming challenges (Sokang, 2019). This sense of collective efficacy can foster a supportive and empowering environment within the school community (Huynh, 2022).

1.6.1.2.3 Instructional Leadership Theory:

This theory emphasises the crucial role of school leaders in shaping instructional practices and ensuring alignment with educational objectives. Dewi and Sowiyah (2021) assert that effective instructional leaders focus on improving teaching and learning by setting high expectations, providing necessary resources, and actively monitoring instructional quality. This theory underscores the importance of SMTs in facilitating professional development and creating a positive school climate that is conducive to academic achievement (Miroj, Saputra & Gunawan, 2020).

1.6.3 Empirical Literature Review

The empirical literature on the role of teachers within School Management Teams (SMTs) reveals a significant relationship between teacher involvement and enhanced academic performance among learners. This body of research highlights how teachers, as key stakeholders, contribute to effective decision-making, foster a collaborative school culture, and implement instructional strategies that cater to diverse learner needs. By analysing various studies, this section aims to illuminate the mechanisms through which teachers influence educational outcomes, the pivotal role of SMTs in supporting professional development, and the broader factors that shape the academic environment. This exploration underscores the importance of integrating teachers into SMTs as a critical strategy for driving educational success and improving learner achievements.

1.6.3.1 The role of teachers within the SMT

Teachers are individuals who impart knowledge, guide, and instruct learners in school (Wardan, Susilo, Saraka & Sjamsir, 2020). These are people who are employed in primary and secondary schools. Teachers play a crucial role in the development of

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any educational institution. They are the most valuable asset of a school. It is the teachers who drive the performance of learners, as pointed out by Singh (2019), and this sentiment is supported by Hafid, Baharudin, Gusnadi and Rahman (2023), who emphasise the vital role teachers' play in managing the school's effectiveness and exposing the true picture of the environment and culture of the school. Larasati, Cahyaningtyas, Mangzila, Firawati, Yuanit, and Lesmana (2019) assert that teachers are the key to learners' success, serving as the source of knowledge and playing an essential role in curriculum development. They understand the needs of all stakeholders within the school and the psychology of learners, as explained by Mensah and Koomson (2020). These authors also highlight that teachers are evaluators responsible for assessing learning performance.

According to Azeem and Jaffar (2019), teachers must be involved in decision-making in the school. However, Mawajdeh (2022) notes that in many schools, teachers are excluded from the decision-making process by the SMT. These decisions are crucial for improving curriculum content knowledge, training, teaching methodologies, and acquiring new skills in technology development within the curriculum. Therefore, involving staff in decision-making related to the curriculum is essential in building a positive staff and education leadership relationship, providing an opportunity to work together and improve learner performance.

1.6.3.2 The roles of SMT in enhancing learner academic performance

SMT is a group of key stakeholders in a school, including teachers, administrators, and support staff, who work together to make decisions and set goals for the school's academic performance (Ramos, 2021). The role of the SMT in enhancing learner academic performance is crucial and multifaceted (Al-Abyadh & Azeem, 2022). Research has shown that effective SMTs can significantly impact the academic outcomes of learners (Al-Abyadh & Azeem, 2022). One of the key roles of the SMT is to provide leadership and direction for the school. This includes creating a positive school culture, setting high academic expectations, and developing strategies for academic improvement (Sharif, Nanyangwe-Moyo, Moyo, Zheng & Guo, 2020). Additionally, the SMT plays a critical role in the allocation of resources, such as

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staffing, budgeting, and instructional materials. By effectively managing these resources, the team can create an environment that supports learners' learning and academic performance (Jaya, 2020).

Furthermore, the SMT collaborates with teachers to develop and implement instructional strategies that meet the diverse needs of learners. This collaborative approach can lead to the implementation of the best practices that enhance teaching and learning throughout the school (Aryanti & Suhardan, 2020). In conclusion, the SMT's leadership, resource allocation, and collaboration with teachers all play a vital role in enhancing learner academic performance (Sharif et al., 2020). One aspect of the SMT's impact on academic performance is its support for professional development opportunities for teachers. Research has consistently shown that ongoing professional development for teachers leads to improved learner performance (Abakah, Widin & Ameyaw, 2022).

The SMT can facilitate this by providing access to relevant training, workshops, and resources that empower teachers to enhance their instructional practices. Moreover, the SMT also fosters a positive and supportive working environment for teachers, which directly influences their effectiveness in the classroom (Japemar, Rusdinal & Fauzan, 2020). When teachers feel valued, supported, and part of a collaborative team, they are more likely to be motivated and engaged in their roles, ultimately benefiting learners' academic performance. In addition to this, the SMT's role in fostering effective communication and partnership with parents and the broader community also contributes to learners' academic performance (Abakah, Widin & Ameyaw, 2022). By involving parents in their children's learning and creating strong community partnerships, the SMT can further enhance the support system for learners, leading to improved academic performance and overall well-being. Overall, the impact of the SMT on learner academic performance goes beyond the administrative aspects and encompasses a holistic approach to creating an environment conducive to educational excellence (Jaya, 2020).

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1.6.3.3 Factors that influence the academic performance of learners

Academic performance is a crucial aspect of a learner's educational journey. It determines their future career prospects and shapes their personality. Several factors influence learners' academic performance, including educational leadership, teachers or staff, learners' attitudes, families, and schools. In this context, this study discusses these factors that contribute to the academic performance of learners. Educational leadership is a crucial aspect of a school's overall operation. It plays a significant role in building an academic culture that promotes learners' performance (Howard & Knight, 2022). The leadership style adopted by the school's leaders also has an impact on learners' performance (Julidawati, Nofelia & Gitituati, 2022). Howard and Knight (2022) also suggest that if school leadership affects learners' academic performance and the goal is to improve academic success, leaders should develop behaviours that provide every opportunity for learners to achieve performance. Several factors influence learners' academic performance. Firstly, teachers or staff are a significant factor. Teachers are the primary source of knowledge for learners, and as such, learners' performance relies heavily on their teaching methods and motivation (Zhang, 2021).

Secondly, learners' attitudes towards academic performance play a crucial role. Learners' attitudes can positively or negatively affect their academic performance. According to Pambudi and Gunawan (2020), learners can perform well in their subjects if they know how to take notes in the classroom and frequently ask questions about subject matter that they don't understand. Thirdly, families play a vital role in nurturing learners as they grow and can affect their performance positively or negatively. According to Zhang (2021), learners who receive support in terms of materials, motivation, and emotions from their parents perform better in their studies than those who do not receive such support. Lastly, schools play a critical role in learners' academic and social growth. According to Sandar and Kálmán (2022), SMT has a positive or negative impact on learner performance. SMT plays a key role in motivating educational reform. According to Rifai and Harlanu (2020), leaders who fail to provide sufficient teaching materials, good facilities, and adequate staff training contribute to poor academic performance among learners.

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1.6.3.4 The specific mechanisms and approaches that successful SMTs employ to influence the potential of their teachers

As teachers and researchers continue to explore ways to improve learner performance in schools, the role of teachers in SMTs has emerged as a critical factor. In this context, this study explores the mechanisms and approaches that successful SMTs employ to influence the potential of their teachers. There is a consensus among researchers that the role of teachers in SMTs has a significant impact on enhancing the academic performance of learners (Itamunya & Edabu, 2023; Khan, 2023). Research indicates that the influence of teachers in SMTs goes beyond just the classroom. Teachers who are actively involved in the decision-making processes of an SMT have been found to contribute to a positive school culture and climate (Widyaningsih & Arfiansyah, 2020). This, in turn, has a direct impact on the academic performance of learners. Evidence suggests that when teachers are given a voice in shaping school policies, curriculum development, and resource allocation, they feel a greater sense of ownership and commitment to the overall success of the school (Japemar et al., 2020). This level of involvement can lead to increased motivation and professional satisfaction among teachers, ultimately translating into better instructional practices and learner performance.

Furthermore, according to Yani, Arafat and Puspita (2021), successful SMTs create opportunities for ongoing professional development and collaboration among teachers. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement, these teams empower teachers to stay current with effective teaching strategies and interventions, leading to improved learner learning performance. In addition, the supportive and collaborative relationships forged within SMTs can positively impact teacher retention and job satisfaction (Basuki & Widodo, 2020). When teachers feel valued and supported by their colleagues and administrators, they are more likely to remain in the profession and contribute to sustained academic growth. The impact of teachers in SMTs is multifaceted, reaching into various aspects of school dynamics and directly influencing the academic performance of learners.

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1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS OR CONCEPTS

1.7.1 Academic Performance

Academic Performance can be defined as performance outcomes that indicate the extent to which a person has accomplished specific goals that were the focus of activities in instructional environments, specifically in school, college, and university (Briones, Dagamac, David & Landerio, 2022). According to Islam and Tasnim (2021), academic performance can be defined as the level of achievement and success that learners demonstrate in their academic pursuits, such as test scores, grades, and overall knowledge and skills gained. In this study, academic performance refers to progress made by learners towards the goal of obtaining educational skills, materials, and knowledge, usually spanning a variety of disciplines.

1.7.2 The School Management Team

The School Management Team can be defined as a group of key stakeholders in a school, including teachers, administrators, and support staff, who work together to make decisions and set goals for the school's academic performance (Ramos, 2021). According to Ayubi and Wibowo (2020), school management team can be defined as a group of individuals who are responsible for overseeing the overall management and operation of a school. In this study, SMTs comprise principals, deputy principals, departmental heads, and selected teachers in low-enrolment schools.

1.8 RESEARCH PARADIGMS

According to Creswell (2021), a paradigm can be defined as an important collection of beliefs shared by scientists, a set of agreements about how problems are to be understood, how we view the world, and how to go about conducting research. Kankam (2019) emphasised that for defining valid research, the most recommended method is to follow the research paradigm. This is important because by selecting a

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specific paradigm, the researcher does not abide by their philosophical know-how and gets a better stance on other alternatives. A paradigm comprises four elements, namely: Epistemology, Ontology, Methodology and Axiology. Paradigms are positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism. The study is underpinned by interpretivism paradigm.

1.8.1 Interpretivist paradigm

The research question being explored is qualitative in nature, and the interpretive paradigm is considered to be the most appropriate approach in this case. According to Brown and Dueñas (2020), the interpretive paradigm is a research approach that places emphasis on interpretation and understanding in the research process and recognizes that knowledge is socially constructed. It acknowledges that individuals' perceptions and interpretations of the world are influenced by their experiences and interactions (Okia, Naluwemba & Kasule, 2021). The importance of understanding subjective experiences and social meanings to gain insights into human behaviour and interactions is also recognised. This approach is particularly well-suited for qualitative studies that seek to understand the impact of teachers in SMTs on enhancing the academic performance of learners. By recognising the importance of individual perspectives and social context, the interpretive paradigm allows researchers to explore the complexities of educational settings and the interactions between teachers and SMTs.

In the interpretive paradigm, researchers focus on the subjective experiences and social meanings of individuals to gain insights into human behaviour and interactions (Otani, 2020). This approach is particularly well-suited for understanding the impact of SMTs on academic outcomes. SMTs are groups of teachers and administrators who work together to manage schools. By exploring the dynamics of these teams and the interactions between teachers and SMTs, researchers can gain valuable insights into the impact of school management on academic performance. According to Wang and Ho (2020), the interpretive paradigm recognises that social context plays a significant role in shaping individuals' perceptions and interpretations of the world. By examining the social context in which SMTs operate, researchers can gain insights into the

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impact of this context on school management and academic performance. This approach can provide valuable insights into the dynamics of the impact of teachers on SMT to enhance learner academic performance.

1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.9.1 Research Design

Research design can be defined as a plan and method for a study that distances the decisions from general hypotheses to definite techniques for data collecting and analysis (Creswell, 2021). It combines philosophical presumptions, investigative techniques, and methodologies. This research uses qualitative methods to explore individuals' subjective experiences and interpretations, aiming to understand the social and cultural context in which they reside (Djafar, Yunus, Pomalato & Rasid, 2021). By adopting an interpretive paradigm, this research prioritises understanding individual perspectives and meanings rather than seeking generalisable findings. This study's type of research design is a case study, as it can be used to examine a person, group, community, or institution. This study uses qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews, to collect rich and detailed participant data. This study uses the design to investigate the research question.

1.9.2 Research Methodology

Research methodology has many meanings, Harrison, Reilly and Creswell (2020) explain it as a set of specific procedures, tools, and techniques to gather and analyse data within the context of a particular paradigm. In other words, research methodology follows certain ways to find and analyse data in a particular field to reach dependable results about certain problems. This study adopts a qualitative research methodology. The procedure to be followed for the collection of the necessary data will now be discussed. In the succeeding section, the researcher discusses the procedure used in the collection of the necessary data.

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1.9.2.1 Qualitative research methodology

The qualitative research methodology uses a one-on-one interview as a data collection method in which a researcher asks an individual direct questions. The questions frequently seek not just knowledge and ideas but also allow the interviewer to examine the depth of emotions and reasons around the topic. Creswell (2021) defines qualitative research as a type of educational research in which the researcher relies on participants' perspectives, asks broad, general questions, collects data primarily in the form of words from participants, describes and analyses these words for themes, and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner. According to Gu (2023), the main types of qualitative design are ethnography, phenomenology, case study, grounded theory, and critical studies. This study adopts a case study to answer the research questions.

1.9.2.2 Case study

A case study attempts to shed light on a phenomenon by studying in depth a single case example of the phenomenon (Harrison, Reilly & Creswell, 2020). The case can be a person, an event, a group, or an institution. In qualitative research, a case study is a detailed, in-depth study of a single instance or event (Djafar, Yunus, Pomalato & Rasid, 2021). It involves gathering and analysing data from a particular case to gain a rich understanding of the context, processes, and outcomes involved. Case studies are often used to explore complex or unique phenomena in their natural settings, allowing researchers to capture the richness and complexity of the subject being studied (Caduff, Bhangu & Provost, 2023). Researchers typically employ various data collection methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis to gather a comprehensive understanding of the case. The goal of a case study in qualitative research is to provide detailed insights into the specific case being examined and to potentially uncover new perspectives or insights that can contribute to broader theoretical understanding (Harrison, Reilly & Creswell, 2020). In qualitative research, a case study is a valuable method for gaining a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon or instance. The researcher therefore gains an understanding of the phenomenon from the population.

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1.9.3 Population

The population of a study is the entire group of people or set of objects and events that the researcher is interested in gaining information and drawing conclusions (Stratton, 2021). The target population is a refinement of a general population containing no attributes that might jeopardise the research goal (Caduff, Bhangu & Provost, 2023). The population for this study is a subset of the target population from which the researcher draws the sample. The researcher identified topics related to teachers and SMT in the field of work based on their involvement in school teaching in primary and secondary schools in Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District (Gu, 2023). The particular group are employed by the Department of Basic Education, and the researcher believes they possess the necessary experience and reality that could assist in answering the research questions posed (Stratton, 2021). The population of interest of this study are the DHs, deputy principals, and principals who fall under the Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District.

1.9.4 Sampling

In this study, the researcher choses non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling allows the researcher to select the sample from the population because they are easy to access (Berndt, 2020). Several methods can be used to select a sample for the study. In this study, expert sampling is implemented as a method of collecting data. Members considered to be of high quality are chosen for participation. According to Gill (2020), the logic and power of expert sampling lies in selecting people to study or interview who are especially knowledgeable about a topic and are willing to share their knowledge. In this study, 30 participants who are part of SMTs from both primary and secondary schools in the Dzondo Circuit are sampled as participants to answer questions. These are departmental heads, deputy principals, and principals.

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1.9.5 Data Collection

Data collection is a structured approach to obtaining and analyzing information in order to gain insights and a better understanding of a particular topic or phenomenon (Shi, Huang & Liang, 2023). Collecting data is at the heart of the research task. The process of data collection supports the researcher in carefully gathering appropriate information that can be used to provide answers to the research questions (Mazhar, Anjum, Anwar & Khan, 2021). The researcher uses a semi-structured interview instrument to collect data with the aim of validating the results.

1.9.5.1 Data collection instruments

In this study, data is collected qualitatively using semi-structured interviews. Qualitative data is collected from DHs, deputy principals, and principals using semi-structured interviews. This research is guided by the following instruments to collect data from qualitative approaches:

1.9.5.1.1 Qualitative data collection procedure: Semi-structured Interview

Data is collected using semi-structured interviews. Jain (2021) describes interviews as open-ended questions that gather data on how participants interpret their lives, specifically, how they perceive their world and make sense of significant events. Mazhar, Anjum, Anwar and Khan (2021) emphasise that interviewing is an important way to check the accuracy of the impressions that have been gained through observation.

1.9.6 Qualitative Data Analysis

In describing qualitative data analysis, Lester, Cho and Lochmiller (2020) mention that it is a process wherein data collected is interpreted and classified to make meaning through which practices and experiences are described. The researcher uses semi-structured interview questions, which generates themes. In this study, a thematic analysis is used as a data analysis process. This method involved a systematic

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examination of interview content to identify, analyse and categorise principal themes emerging from participants' responses. In this case, the researcher analyses the impact of teachers on SMT in the Vhembe District.

1.10 MEASURES OF QUALITY CONTROL

The researcher should point out the type of quality control used in a particular study. The trustworthiness of the qualitative research is selected.

1.10.1 Trustworthiness of the Qualitative Research

This study ensures trustworthiness through credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

1.10.1.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to confidence in the truth of the data and the interpretation thereof (Adler, 2022). In this research, credibility is established through triangulation and prolonged engagement.

1.10.1.2 Dependability

Dependability refers to the provision of evidence such that if it were to be repeated with the same or similar participants in the same or similar contexts, its findings would be similar (Adler, 2022). To establish dependability, an independent auditor reviews the activities of the researcher to see how well the techniques for meeting the credibility and transferability standards have been followed.

1.10.1.3 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the potential for congruency of the data in terms of accuracy, relevance, or meaning (Adler, 2022). Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination but derived from the data. The researcher uses direct quotes and narratives from the participants to provide tangible information. To establish confirmability, findings are

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based on the participants' narratives and words rather than potential researcher biases. In this study, the responses of DHs, deputy principals and principals regarding educational leadership are quoted directly from the participants who were interviewed without any additional information.

1.10.1.4 Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability to apply the findings in other contexts or to other participants (Adler, 2022). To establish transferability, the researchers describe the research context and the assumptions that are central to the research. The person who wishes to "transfer" the result to a different context is then responsible for making the judgment of how sensible the transfer is. Transferability in this study is ensured by comparing the literature.

1.11 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Delimitations are factors that may affect the results of the study over which the researcher generally does have some degree of control (Akanle, Ademuson & Shittu, 2020). This study is confined to one selected circuit, which is Dzondo in Vhembe District. Consequently, considering the size of the sample and the qualitative method of data collection, the findings of the study cannot be generalised beyond the other circuits of Limpopo. However, the aim of the study is not to indicate general trends but to seek detailed information from the point of view of the participants in the interviews. The focus is on DHs, deputy principals, and principals.

1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethical consideration is critical in data collection, safeguarding participants' confidentiality, dignity, and overall well-being (Suri, 2020). Suri (2020) further states that working with people as participants in a study is accompanied by ethical issues concerning how they are treated during their interaction with the researcher.

The following is a summary of the ethical aspects that are considered in this study:

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1.12.1 Protection from Harm or Deprivation

The researcher makes sure that the participants are treated with respect at all times and protects them from any stigma as a result of the research.

1.12.2 Voluntary Participation

The researcher informs the participants that even if they agree voluntarily to take part in the research, they are free to withdraw at any time without being penalised for the withdrawal.

1.12.3 Informed Consent

The researcher ensures that all participants understand the nature of the study and have full information about their role and part thereof.

1.12.4 Confidentiality

The researcher keeps all the information confidential and undertakes this through an agreement that is signed with the participants and their organisations. Even the recordings made during the interview are kept confidential.

1.12.5 Anonymity

The researcher protects the privacy of the participants by not revealing any particulars or information about them or their school, in writing or any other form of communication. In all documents emanating from the research, the researcher uses pseudo-names when referring to specific individuals or their schools (Babbie, 2020).

1.13 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

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This research report consists of five chapters. The structure of the report is presented below:

- **Chapter 1: Orientation to the study**
- It provides a description of the aim, significance, objectives, and research questions of this study. It further provides a description of the methods used as well as a summary of the study outcome.
- **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The research is dedicated to conducting a literature review, which is an essential step in identifying the existing knowledge and gaps related to the research topic. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the current literature on the subject, analysing and synthesising relevant research studies, articles, and theories.

- **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

The research design and methodology are thoroughly discussed and explained. The research design and methodology chapter provide a comprehensive overview of the chosen research approach, methods, and design. It discusses how these choices are aligned with the research objectives and addresses any potential limitations or challenges.

- **Chapter 4: Data Analysis**

This chapter of the research focuses on data analysis techniques and methodologies. It presents a detailed examination of the data analysis techniques and methodologies employed in this research. It discusses the process of analysing the data collected, including the statistical tools and software used for data manipulation and interpretation

- **Chapter 5: Summary Findings and Recommendations**

This chapter provides a summary of the main findings and limitations of the research and offers recommendations based on these findings.

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature review is essential to this research project and presents an in-depth examination of all current studies and theories about the impact on academic performance from teacher involvement in School Management Teams (SMTs). Moreover, this chapter intends to summarise current literature on teacher functions in school management generally, especially those related to South Africa's own education difficulties of historical inequality and lack of resources. It must be remembered that teachers are responsible not just for transmitting knowledge but also for actively engaging as the standards bearer of school traditions, making the school environment collaborative and prizing the diverse needs of learners (Nomtshongwana, Buka & Nqabeni, 2020). The review critically assesses the past research and therefore uncovers areas that have not been investigated and problems experienced by teachers. For example, looking at teaching duties or adhering to an administrator's timetable while grappling with socio-political issues becomes increasingly complex (Mensah & Baidoo-Anu, 2022). Next, methods to cultivate teacher empowerment through professional development are discussed in depth. Successful implementation of these can lead to better teaching quality both within SMTs and overall, while benefiting those learners who never before had access to a decent education. This review of prior research is intended to supply a strong theoretical basis for clarifying how school culture, in some cases, realised by SMT teacher involvement, can further enhance learner academic achievement. The review also forms part of the larger debate on appropriate school management and educational leadership (Balikc, 2020).

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework is a crucial and fundamental component of a research study, as it serves as the guiding structure and foundation upon which the entire

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research is based (Gamala & Marpa, 2022). According to Silva (2021), it provides the necessary framework to effectively investigate the research problem, define the key concepts involved, and establish the relationships between the various variables under examination. The theoretical framework is essential in ensuring the study is grounded in relevant theories, empirical evidence, and a sound conceptual understanding of the phenomena being studied. This study was based on the theory and model of Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, which serves as the guiding structure for exploring how the teaching quality and managerial skills of teachers in school management teams can impact and enhance the academic performance of learners.

2.2.1 Theories on SMTs and Teaching Effectiveness

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are rooted in the extensive body of research on SMTs and their impact on teaching effectiveness and learners' performance. Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership model provides a framework for understanding the critical skills and behaviours that contribute to effective leadership within the SMT context (Silva, 2021; Gamala & Marpa, 2022).

2.2.1.1 The five practices outlined in this model are:

Modelling the Way: Exemplary leaders set the tone by consistently demonstrating the behaviours and values they wish to see in others. They lead by example, acting as role models who embody the desired qualities and expectations for the school community (Gamala & Marpa, 2022).

Inspiring a Shared Vision: Effective school leaders are able to articulate a clear and compelling vision for the school that resonates with and inspires the commitment of all stakeholders, including teachers, learners, and the broader community (Adams & Velarde, 2021). They work collaboratively to develop a shared understanding of the school's mission, goals, and values, and they effectively communicate this vision in a way that motivates and aligns the entire school community towards a common

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purpose. By fostering a shared sense of ownership and responsibility, school leaders can cultivate a positive and supportive environment that enables teachers to thrive and learners to achieve their full potential.

Challenging the Process: Successful SMTs are not afraid to challenge the status quo and take calculated risks in order to drive innovation and continuous improvement within their school. They actively encourage an environment that is open to new ideas, experimentation, and calculated risk-taking, empowering teachers to engage in creative problem-solving and to implement evidence-based best practices that can enhance teaching and learning effectiveness. By fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability, these leaders are able to propel their schools forward and ensure they remain at the forefront of educational excellence (Sewani & Bibi, 2023).

Enabling Others to Act: Effective school leaders recognise that they cannot achieve success alone; rather, they must empower and enable their team of teachers and staff to take ownership of their roles and responsibilities. They foster a collaborative, trusting, and supportive environment in which teachers feel empowered to contribute their unique skills and perspectives, to take risks, and to work collectively towards a shared vision for the school's achievement (Aas, Andersen & Vennebo, 2020). By cultivating a culture of shared leadership and distributed responsibility, school leaders can harness the collective intelligence and creativity of their teams to drive meaningful and sustainable change (Aas et al., 2020; Adams & Velarde, 2021).

Encouraging the Heart: Successful school leaders understand the importance of recognising and celebrating the achievements and contributions of their teachers and staff. They take the time to acknowledge and appreciate the hard work, dedication, and successes of their team members, providing encouragement, praise, and tangible rewards that demonstrate their value and foster a sense of pride and purpose within the school community (Syafaruddi, Nahar & Imran, 2021) By fostering a culture of appreciation and celebration, school leaders can boost morale, strengthen commitment, and inspire their teams to continue striving for excellence.

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2.2.2 Implementing the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership

The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, outlined by Kouzes and Posner, provide a robust framework for understanding and cultivating effective leadership within the SMT context. By consistently modelling the desired behaviours, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the status quo, empowering their teams, and recognising and celebrating achievements, school leaders can create a dynamic and supportive environment that enables teachers to thrive and learners to excel academically (Samancıoğlu, Baglibel & Erwin, 2020).

Through the strategic implementation of these five practices, SMTs can effectively leverage the expertise, creativity, and dedication of their teaching staff to drive continuous improvement and enhance learner academic performance. Specifically, by modelling the way, inspiring a shared vision, and challenging the process, school leaders can empower their teams to engage in innovative, evidence-based teaching practices that address the unique needs and learning styles of their learners (Lamçja, 2022; Aas et al., 2020). Furthermore, by enabling others to act and encouraging the heart, school leaders can foster a positive, collaborative, and supportive school culture that boosts morale, strengthens commitment, and ultimately leads to improved learner academic performance (Sewani & Bibi, 2023).

Ultimately, the success of any school is largely dependent on the quality and effectiveness of its SMTs. By embracing the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, SMTs can cultivate a thriving, high-performing educational environment that empowers teachers and enables learners to flourish academically (Sewani & Bibi, 2023; Aas et al., 2020).

2.2.3 Theories Related to the Impact of Teachers in SMTs to Enhance Learner Academic Performance

Teachers' role is critical in increasing the academic performance of learners within schools, as they bring unique perspectives and experience to a learning environment.

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Teachers are increasingly regarded in this dynamic, as proven through many theoretical frameworks, which all stress that education leadership is a joint endeavour. The three theories include: theories such as Distributed Leadership Theory, Collective Efficacy Theory, and Instructional Leadership Theory. They provide valuable angles on how teachers can collectively impact learning outcomes. By allocating leadership responsibilities across teachers, cultivating a shared belief in their capabilities, and stressing the quality of instruction, SMTs can create a nurturing atmosphere that not only fuels teachers themselves with power but also significantly leverages dramatic rises in learner success. As educational institutions work to navigate the complexities of modern teaching and learning, understanding these theories becomes vitally important in order to maximise the impact teachers have within SMTs and ultimately also to improve learners' academic performance.

2.2.3.1 Distributed Leadership Theory

This theory posits that leadership within schools should be distributed across multiple individuals, rather than concentrated on a single individual (e.g., the principal). By empowering teachers and other staff to take on leadership roles and responsibilities, schools can leverage the collective expertise, creativity, and commitment of the entire school community to drive positive change and enhance learner academic performance (Aas et al., 2020). This study is based on Distributed Leadership Theory, which provides a useful lens for understanding the critical role that teachers play as part of the SMT in driving academic excellence. This theory posits that effective leadership is not the sole responsibility of the school principal but rather is a distributed process that involves the collaborative efforts and contributions of multiple stakeholders within the school community, including teachers (Nader, Aziz & Khanam, 2019).

Distributed Leadership Theory challenges the traditional, top-down model of school leadership and instead emphasises the importance of shared responsibility, collective decision-making, and the harnessing of the unique skills, knowledge, and expertise of all members of the school community (Bubale, Kasule & Mbabazi, 2021). By embracing a distributed leadership approach, SMTs can leverage the diverse talents

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and perspectives of their teaching staff to drive continuous improvement and enhance learner academic performance.

2.2.3.2 Collective Efficacy Theory

According to Sokang (2019), the Collective Efficacy Theory posits that when teachers collaborate as a cohesive team and share a belief in their collective capacity to positively influence learner learning, they are more likely to implement effective instructional strategies and achieve greater academic performance for their learners. This theory emphasises the significance of teachers working together and supporting one another in their efforts to enhance learners' academic performance (Subagia, 2020). Collective efficacy refers to the shared belief among teachers that, through their combined efforts, they can make a positive impact on learners' learning and achievement, even in the face of challenging circumstances (Sokang, 2019). When teachers exhibit high collective efficacy, they are more inclined to work collaboratively, share best practices, and support one another in implementing effective teaching approaches. This shared belief in their ability to make a difference fosters a supportive and empowering environment within the educational community (Geronimo, 2021).

By cultivating collective efficacy, educational institutions can establish a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility, where teachers feel empowered to take risks and explore new approaches to improve learners' learning (Aul, 2020). This theory highlights the significance of building a strong professional community where teachers can rely on each other for support and guidance, ultimately leading to enhanced learner performance. The Collective Efficacy Theory emphasizes the positive impact of teachers working together and believing in their collective ability to influence learners' learning and achievement. According to Fisher, Frey and Almarode (2020), this shared belief promotes a collaborative and supportive environment that can lead to the implementation of effective instructional practices and improved academic performance for learners.

The Collective Efficacy Theory has significant implications for the impact of teachers' involvement in SMTs on enhancing learners' academic performance. When teachers

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are actively engaged in the SMT and work together cohesively, believing in their collective ability to positively influence learner learning, they can play a pivotal role in improving academic performance for their learners (Geronimo, 2021). By integrating the principles of collective efficacy into the SMT, teachers can contribute to a collaborative and supportive environment that fosters effective instructional practices. When teachers are empowered to collaborate and share best practices within the SMT, they can collectively implement strategies to address the diverse learning needs of learners, leading to improved academic performance (Kolleck, 2019). Furthermore, when teachers are actively involved in the decision-making processes within the school management team, they can leverage their collective efficacy to advocate for resources, support, and professional development opportunities that can enhance their instructional effectiveness (Geronimo, 2021). This collaborative approach to school management empowers teachers to take ownership of their professional growth and development, ultimately benefiting the academic performance of their learners.

2.2.3.3 Instructional Leadership Theory

This theory emphasises the critical role of the school leader in directly shaping the instructional practices of teachers and ensuring that the school's educational programs are clearly aligned with learners' learning objectives (Iqbal, Munir & Nawaz, 2021). According to Llave and Genon (2022), instructional leadership is characterised by a focus on improving teaching and learning, setting high expectations for both teachers and learners, and fostering a positive school climate that is conducive to academic achievement. Instructional Leadership Theory highlights the critical role that school leaders play in shaping the instructional capacity of their teachers and creating a supportive environment for effective teaching and learning (Llave & Genon, 2022). According to Evert, Ellefson and Hadlock (2022), effective instructional leaders focus on actively monitoring and supporting the quality of instruction within their schools, ensuring that teachers have access to the necessary resources, professional development, and guidance to implement evidence-based teaching practices that meet the diverse needs of their learners.

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By aligning their leadership practices with the principles of Distributed Leadership Theory and Instructional Leadership Theory, SMTs can foster a culture of shared responsibility, collaborative decision-making, and continuous improvement that ultimately leads to enhanced learner academic performance. These practices have been widely recognised as essential for fostering a positive school culture, promoting collaborative teamwork, and driving continuous improvement in teaching and learning (Leithwood, Sun & Schumacker, 2020).

2.2.4 Implications for SMTs

The existing literature emphasises the importance of SMTs in creating an environment that supports effective teaching and learning (Gamala & Marpa, 2022). Effective SMTs are characterised by strong leadership, clear communication of goals and expectations, and a commitment to professional development and continuous improvement (John & Mkulu, 2020). Furthermore, the research highlights the critical role of teamwork and collaboration within the SMT. When team members work together effectively, they are better able to identify and address challenges, make informed decisions, and implement strategies to enhance learner academic performance (Virgana & Suradika, 2022). By fostering a culture of collaboration and shared leadership, SMTs can leverage the diverse skills and expertise of their members to drive continuous improvement in teaching and learning. This, in turn, can lead to improved academic performance and better outcomes for learners.

2.3 EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature emphasises the importance of SMTs in creating an environment that supports effective teaching and learning (Gamala & Marpa, 2022). Effective SMTs are characterised by strong leadership, clear communication of goals and expectations, and a commitment to professional development and continuous improvement (John & Mkulu, 2020). Furthermore, the research highlights the critical role of teamwork and collaboration within the SMT. When team members work together effectively, they are better able to identify and address challenges, make

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informed decisions, and implement strategies to enhance LAP (Virgana & Suradika, 2022). By fostering a culture of collaboration and shared leadership, SMTs can leverage the diverse skills and expertise of their members to drive continuous improvement in teaching and learning. This, in turn, can lead to improved academic performance and better outcomes for learners.

2.3.1 The Pivotal Role of Teachers Within the School Management Team

Teachers play a central role in School Management Teams (SMTs). Here, they provide crucial input to the success of national policies being implemented, the delivery of curriculum, and the maintenance of an encouraging environment for learners. This section discusses how teachers in SMTs perform a multitude of roles, spotlighting their functions as leading figures upwards and decision-makers; collaborators, in other words, with learners themselves as well as parents or coworkers or peer teachers. Understanding the importance of teachers in SMT also necessitates developing comprehensive strategies to promote their professional growth and to give them a leading role in the South African educational system (Aureada, 2021; Nomtshongwana, Buka & Nqabeni, 2020).

In South Africa, the role of teachers in school management is deeply intertwined with the country's unique educational landscape. Unlike developed countries where educational resources and support systems are often more readily available, teachers in South Africa face numerous challenges in fulfilling their role effectively (Nomtshongwana, Buka & Nqabeni, 2020). According to Sijuola and Davidova (2022), historical inequalities, socio-economic disparities, and resource limitations greatly influence how teachers operate within the school management structure. As a result, teachers in South Africa often find themselves not only delivering the curriculum but also taking on administrative duties, managing resource constraints, and navigating complex social dynamics within their school communities (Bernstein & Batchelor, 2022). The multifaceted nature of their role requires a deep understanding of the local context, strong leadership skills, and the ability to adapt to ever-changing circumstances.

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According to Mensah and Baidoo-Anu (2022), teachers across the globe share common responsibilities in SMTs; the specific challenges and opportunities they face in South Africa underscore the need for tailored support and professional development. By gaining a deeper understanding of the complexities of the teacher's role in school management within the South African context, teachers and policymakers can develop targeted strategies to empower teachers, address systemic barriers, and ultimately improve the quality of education for all learners (Balıkçı, 2020). In developed countries, teachers often have access to extensive professional development opportunities, robust support frameworks, and well-equipped school facilities to aid their role in school management (Agusta & Kristiawan, 2021). According to Bernstein & Batchelor (2022), this contrasts with the situation in South Africa, where teachers frequently have to navigate resource constraints, large class sizes, and limited access to training and support.

The dynamic socio-political context in South Africa adds another layer of complexity to the role of teachers in school management. Addressing diversity, inclusivity, and historical injustices becomes an inherent part of their responsibilities, shaping their interactions with learners, colleagues, and the broader community (Aureada, 2021). According to Nomtshongwana, Buka and Nqabeni (2020), understanding these contextual differences is crucial for developing tailored strategies that effectively support the role of teachers in South African SMTs. By recognising these unique challenges and addressing them with targeted initiatives, it becomes possible to empower teachers and improve the overall educational landscape in South Africa. The existing literature highlights the importance of understanding the context within which teachers in South Africa operate, as it significantly impacts their role in school management. It is evident that the role of teachers in SMT is highly influenced by the specific context within which they operate. According to Bernstein and Batchelor (2022), in South Africa, the challenges faced by teachers are myriad, ranging from historical inequalities to resource limitations and the need to navigate complex socio-political dynamics.

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In light of these challenges, it becomes imperative to develop tailored strategies that effectively support the role of teachers in South African SMTs. Initiatives aimed at addressing resource constraints, providing targeted professional development, and fostering inclusivity and diversity within educational settings can play a pivotal role in empowering teachers and improving the overall educational landscape in the country (Huynh, 2022). Moreover, according to Balıkçı (2020), by acknowledging and addressing the unique contextual factors that impact the role of teachers in school management, it becomes possible to create a more conducive and supportive environment for teachers to thrive and contribute to the holistic development of learners and the broader school community.

2.3.1.1 Teachers' contributions to decision-making in the SMT

Studies by Pont (2020) and Yalçınkaya, Dağlı, Altınay, Altınay and Kalkan (2021) have explored the importance of involving teachers in school management and decision-making. They indicated that participation in decision-making is not just about taking part, but also about feeling valued by one's colleagues. According to Hillary-Shikokoti (2023), teachers are more likely to be willing to participate in decisions related to personnel, curriculum, staff development, and general administration if they have positive working relationships with the school principal. Previous research by Tallman (2021) and Akporehe and Asiyai (2023) have shown that when teachers are involved in decision-making processes within the School Management Team, it leads to a more collaborative and supportive school environment. By including teachers in important decisions related to personnel, curriculum, staff development, and general administration, schools can benefit from the diverse perspectives and expertise that teachers bring to the table. Hossein-Mohandnd a Hossein-Mohand (2023) added that when teachers feel valued and respected for their contributions, they are more likely to be motivated and committed to the overall success of the school. This ultimately leads to improved morale and job satisfaction among the teaching staff, which has a positive impact on learner achievement and the overall school climate.

According to Taiwo and Ogunlade (2020), teachers who are actively involved in decision-making processes within the School Management Team play a crucial role in

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shaping the direction of the school. By engaging in discussions about personnel, curriculum, staff development, and administration, teachers provide insights that enhance the school. This collaborative approach not only promotes a supportive and inclusive environment but also fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among the teaching staff (Tallman, 2021). Furthermore, according to Maral (2022), when teachers feel empowered to contribute to decision-making processes, they are more likely to invest their time and effort into implementing these decisions, ultimately leading to the successful execution of strategies and initiatives (Maral, 2022). This sense of responsibility can have a significant impact on learners' achievement and the overall school climate. As a result, it is imperative for school leaders to create avenues for meaningful teacher involvement in decision-making, thereby building a more cohesive and effective School Management Team (Taiwo & Ogunlade, 2020).

Research has consistently shown that when teachers are not involved in critical school decisions, it can lead to low commitment and job satisfaction (Taiwo & Ogunlade, 2020; Karim, Agus, Nurnilasari, Widiantari, Fikriyah, Rosadah, Syarifudin, Triono, Lesmi & Nurkholis, 2023). According to Zulu, Bhengu and Mkhize (2021), this emphasises the importance of school leaders considering the concerns and perspectives of all stakeholders, as their buy-in and support are essential for the successful implementation of any decisions. Teachers' involvement in decision-making processes within the School Management Team is crucial for the overall success and effectiveness of the school. Studies have consistently demonstrated the positive impact of teacher participation in shaping school policies, curriculum development, and staff management. When teachers feel valued and respected for their contributions, they are more likely to be motivated and committed to the school's goals and objectives (Voogt, Pieters & Roblin, 2019).

In the context of School Management Teams (SMTs), teachers play a pivotal role that extends beyond traditional classroom instruction. In actively engaging in decision-making processes, teachers contribute their diverse perspectives and expertise, fostering a more collaborative and inclusive school environment (Taiwo & Ogunlade, 2020). This involvement not only enhances overall morale and job satisfaction among

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the teaching staff but also directly influences the learner's academic performance and the overall school climate. Recognising the significance of teacher contributions, it becomes imperative for school leaders to prioritise and create opportunities for meaningful teacher involvement within SMTs (Taiwo & Ogunlade, 2020). By doing so, school leaders can cultivate a more cohesive and effective School Management Team, which in turn leads to improved commitment and job satisfaction among teachers. This collaborative approach ultimately benefits the entire school community, creating an educational atmosphere that is conducive to enhanced learner outcomes and a positive school culture. Understanding and supporting the multifaceted role of teachers in SMTs is essential for developing strategies that empower teachers and improve educational quality (Klinck, Thutulwa & Pelser, 2023).

2.3.1.2 Teachers' collaboration with SMT for positive learning environment

The SMT, comprised of the principal, deputy principals, and other administrative staff, is responsible for providing the strategic direction, leadership, and coordination necessary to ensure that a school's educational and operational objectives are met (Ford, Lavigne, Fiegener & Si, 2020). Teachers, as key members of this team, play a crucial role in contributing to the decision-making process, advocating for learners' needs, and fostering a collaborative and inclusive school culture (Medallo & Constantino, 2020). One of the primary ways teachers collaborate with the SMT is through their participation in regular meetings, where they have the opportunity to voice their perspectives, share insights from their classroom experiences, and contribute to the development of school policies and initiatives.

According to Nawati, Ardansyah, Warganegara, Dharmawan and Sari (2023), teachers often serve on various committees and work groups within the SMT, allowing them to provide input on a range of issues, such as curriculum development, instructional strategies, learner support services, and professional development. Additionally, teachers may work closely with the principal and deputy principals to identify and address the specific needs of their learners, such as academic interventions, social-emotional support (Wetcho, Na-Songkhla & Wang, 2023). Another key aspect of the teacher's role in the SMT is their ability to act as a bridge

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between the administrative team and the broader school community, including learners, parents, and other stakeholders (Shurr, Bouck & McCollow, 2021). Teachers' intimate knowledge of their learners' strengths, challenges, and learning styles, combined with their understanding of the school's policies and procedures, enables them to effectively communicate and collaborate with the SMT to develop and implement strategies that meet the diverse needs of the school population.

Furthermore, teachers' participation in the SMT can foster a greater sense of ownership and investment in the school's overall success (Medallo & Constantino, 2020). When teachers feel that their voices are heard and their contributions are valued, they are more likely to be engaged and committed to the implementation of school-wide initiatives and the achievement of the school's shared goals.

2.3.1.3 Challenges faced by teachers in the SMT and approaches to supporting learner academic performance

Over the past decades, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of involving teachers in school management and leadership roles, beyond their traditional responsibilities of classroom instruction and learners' learning (Dewi & Sowiyah, 2021). This shift towards a more distributed and collaborative approach to school leadership has been driven by the belief that teachers, with their intimate knowledge of the classroom and learner needs, can provide valuable insights and perspectives that can enhance the effectiveness of school decision-making and improve overall school performance (Kamaruzaman, Musa & Hashim, 2020). This is echoed in the literature, which highlights the multifaceted nature of teacher leadership and the various ways in which teachers can contribute to SMT (Pont, 2020). For instance, teachers can take on roles such as curriculum development, professional development for their peers, and even serving on school-wide committees and task forces. Importantly, the literature suggests that these expanded roles for teachers not only benefit the school but also contribute to teachers' own professional growth and job satisfaction (Angtud & Sasan, 2023).

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At the same time, the literature also acknowledges the challenges that teachers can face in navigating these leadership responsibilities, particularly in the context of their existing workload and the need to balance classroom teaching with broader school-level responsibilities (Kamaruzaman et al., 2020). Teachers may struggle to find the time and energy to effectively contribute to school management while still meeting their primary obligations in the classroom (Dewi & Sowiyah, 2021). Additionally, the literature highlights the importance of clear role definitions and collaborative decision-making processes to ensure that teacher leadership is effective and sustainable. Ambiguity around the scope and expectations of teacher leadership roles can lead to conflict and resentment, particularly if some teachers are not comfortable with the expanded responsibilities (Schott, Roekel & Tummers, 2020).

The literature suggests that for teacher leadership within the SMT to truly thrive, schools must carefully structure and support these roles in a way that empowers teachers, provides them with the necessary resources and autonomy, and ensures that their contributions are strategically aligned with the broader goals of the school (Daniëls, Hondeghem & Dochy, 2019; Wang & Ho, 2020; Kamaruzaman et al., 2020; Pont, 2020). According to Kamaruzaman et al. (2020), there are challenges that teachers face in their role within the SMT, but they work to overcome these challenges in order to support the learner's academic performance. As teachers take on expanded roles within the SMT, it is essential to address the challenges they face in order to effectively support learner academic performance. One of the primary challenges is the need to balance their existing workload and classroom responsibilities with their broader school-level roles (Waziana, Andewi & Suningsih, 2022). Finding the time and energy to contribute meaningfully to school management while still meeting their primary obligations in the classroom can be a significant challenge for teachers.

By addressing these challenges and providing the necessary support, teachers can effectively leverage their intimate knowledge of the classroom and learners' needs to enhance school decision-making and improve overall school performance, ultimately leading to greater learner academic performance (Kahn & Bullis, 2023). There are leaders who do not involve teachers in the decision-making process, which can be a

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significant barrier to effective SMT and learner academic performance (Alyami & Floyd, 2019). It is evident that involving teachers in decision-making processes is essential for effective SMT and learner academic performance. Teachers are the ones who have direct interactions with learners on a daily basis and understand their needs and challenges (Bhutoria & Aljabri, 2022). Their valuable insights and perspectives can significantly contribute to the improvement of overall school performance. However, the lack of involvement in decision-making processes is a significant barrier that some school leaders and administrators face (Kahn & Bullis, 2023). This can lead to a disconnect between the strategies implemented at the school management level and the actual needs and experiences of the learners and teachers. In order to overcome this barrier, it is crucial for school leaders to recognise the importance of teacher involvement in decision-making and actively seek their input in shaping policies and strategies that directly impact the classroom environment and learner academic performance.

The relationship between teacher participation in SMTs and improved learner academic performance is particularly pertinent to the topic of this research study, "The Impact of Teachers in School Management Teams to Enhance Learners' Academic Performance: A Case of Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District. This highlights the need to understand and respond to the multifaceted role of teachers in SMTs, to inform how to empower teachers and improve educational quality. Promoting the integration of teachers into how their schools are run would directly respond to the broad aim of this research, as there exist unique challenges for teachers in the Dzondo Circuit that can be rectified through the meaningful participation of teachers in school management. This is an approach proven to enhance learner improvement. The study aims to demonstrate how SMTs can promote the engagement of teachers as a key to academic excellence and collaborative participation of teachers in creating a positive learning environment for all learners.

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2.3.2 The Roles of SMT in Enhancing Learner Academic Performance

Effective SMT is essential for the delivery of quality education services (Anand, Atluri, Crawfurd, Pugatch & Sheth, 2023). The success or failure of a school in achieving its objectives is largely dependent on the effectiveness of its principal (Odo, 2023). As the SMT leader, the principal plays a crucial role in creating an environment that supports and enhances learners' academic performance. This involves various aspects such as curriculum design, teacher development, resource allocation, and creating a positive school culture. In this literature review, the researcher delves into the research and theories surrounding the specific roles and responsibilities of the SMT in fostering learner academic performance.

The SMT, led by the principal, is responsible for various functions that impact learner academic performance. Effective schools can increase the mastery of knowledge and skills of teachers, which in turn enables them to support their learners' independence in learning, exploration, and application of knowledge (Khan & Jan, 2020). According to Miroj, Saputra and Gunawan (2020), this is achieved through a range of strategies employed by the SMT, including modelling, monitoring, and communication. The principal, as the instructional leader, has a positive influence on learners' learning, although indirectly (Dewi & Sowiyah, 2021). The principal's role is to lead an instructional leadership team, which may include assistant principals and content experts, to collectively drive improvements in curriculum and instruction (Sharif, Nanyangwe-Moyo, Moyo, Zheng & Guo, 2020). An effective principal will focus on establishing a school culture that emphasises learning and provides the necessary support for teachers to deliver high-quality instruction.

Principals who are successful in promoting school effectiveness have been found to utilise specific factors, such as instructional leadership, setting high expectations, tracking learners' progress, and clearly communicating the school's mission (Nicolaou & Anastasiou, 2023). The principal's ability to empower teachers and create a learning community or culture within the school is also crucial for enhancing academic performance. According to Miroj et al. (2020), the SMTs' support for academic

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performance improvement extends beyond curriculum and instruction. The team also plays a significant role in fostering a positive school climate and providing resources that promote learners' academic performance. Creating a safe and inclusive school environment, implementing behavioural support systems, and ensuring that learners have access to necessary learning materials are all part of the SMT's responsibilities in supporting learner academic performance improvement (Suleiman, 2021).

2.3.2.1 Dimensions of the SMT's role in enhancing learner academic performance

Throughout the upcoming sections of this literature review, the researcher delves into the various dimensions of the SMT's role in enhancing learner academic performance. This involves a closer look at the impact of teacher professional development, resource allocation, and the establishment of a supportive school culture. In addition, the researcher explores case studies and best practices that illustrate effective strategies employed by SMTs to support learners' academic performance.

2.3.2.2 Professional development of teachers

One of the key responsibilities of the SMT is to ensure the professional development of teachers. High-quality professional development is crucial for enhancing teachers' content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and ability to effectively address the diverse needs of learners (Medallo & Constantino, 2020). The SMT plays a critical role in designing and implementing professional development programs that are aligned with the school's improvement goals and the specific needs of teachers. According to Acuña and Ancho (2022), when the SMT prioritizes teacher professional development and provides ongoing support, it leads to improved instructional practices, which in turn positively impact learner learning outcomes. For instance, a study by Acuña and Ancho (2022), has found that effective professional development opportunities, such as collaborative learning communities, coaching, and modelling, can significantly enhance teachers' instructional skills and their ability to manage classrooms effectively. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of aligning professional development with the specific context and needs of the school, as well as providing ongoing support and feedback to teachers. Similar research by Medallo and

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Constantino (2020) found that when the SMT actively engages teachers in professional development, it fosters a collaborative environment where teachers are empowered to share best practices, reflect on their teaching, and continuously improve their instruction.

Teachers are empowered to share best practices, reflect on their teaching, and continuously improve their instruction (Qazi & Mtenzi, 2023). To ensure the effectiveness of professional development, the SMT should adopt a comprehensive and strategic approach. This entails carefully assessing the specific needs of teachers, setting clear and measurable goals for professional development, selecting or designing professional learning activities that are tailored to address those needs, and consistently evaluating the impact of the professional development initiatives while providing ongoing support and feedback to teachers (Wenning & Vieyra, 2020). By prioritizing and effectively managing teacher professional development, the SMT can contribute to the overall growth and development of the school, ultimately leading to improved learner learning performance (Komba & Mwakabenga, 2019). This involves regularly assessing the specific needs and goals of teachers, then designing and implementing targeted professional development programs that address those needs. For example, the SMT could organise collaborative learning communities where teachers can share best practices, reflect on their instruction, and work together to continuously improve their pedagogical skills (Ginting & Linarsih, 2022). Additionally, the SMT could provide coaching and modelling opportunities, where experienced teachers or instructional leaders guide and support their colleagues in implementing new teaching strategies within their classrooms. Ongoing support and feedback are crucial for ensuring the effectiveness of these professional development initiatives. The SMT should closely monitor the impact of the programs, provide teachers with opportunities to apply their new knowledge and skills, and offer constructive feedback to help them refine their instructional practices (Rahyasih, Hartini & Syarifah, 2020). By fostering a collaborative and supportive environment for teacher growth, the SMT can empower teachers to enhance their content knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and ability to meet the diverse needs of all learners, leading to measurable improvements in learner learning performances (Leithwood, 2021).

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2.3.2.3 Allocation of resources and support

The SMT's role in allocating resources and providing support is crucial for creating an environment that enables learners to thrive academically (Ober, Lehman, Gooch, Oluwalana, Solyst, Phelps & Hamilton, 2023). One key aspect of this is ensuring that teachers have access to the necessary instructional materials, technology, and professional development opportunities to enhance their teaching effectiveness (Wetcho et al., 2023). The School Management Team's ability to prioritise and allocate resources strategically can have a significant impact on the quality of instruction and the overall learning experience for learners. In addition to material resources, the School Management Team also plays a vital role in providing academic and social-emotional support for learners. This may include implementing targeted interventions, such as tutoring programs, mentoring initiatives, and counselling services, to address the diverse needs of learners and support their academic progress (Sari & Mediatati, 2023). According to Khan (2023), when the SMT takes a proactive approach to resource allocation and support, it can lead to improved attendance, reduced disciplinary issues, and ultimately enhanced learner academic performance.

For instance, a study by Bakar, Yusop, Ali and Bakar (2023) found that schools where the SMT allocated resources to hire additional support staff, such as counsellors and social workers, experienced a significant decrease in behavioural problems and an increase in academic achievement. Similarly, another study highlights the importance of the SMT's role in providing technology-based resources and professional development to teachers (Sabra & Daigham, 2020). The researchers found that when teachers were equipped with the necessary technological tools and skills, they were able to effectively integrate technology into their teaching, leading to improved engagement and learner academic performance.

2.3.2.4 Establishing a supportive school culture

The SMT's role in cultivating a positive and supportive school culture is crucial for enhancing learner academic performance (Sophianingreki, 2019). When the SMT prioritises the creation of a collaborative, inclusive, and achievement-oriented environment, it can have a profound impact on learners' motivation, engagement, and

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ultimately, their academic performance. According to Khan (2023), when the School Management Team fosters a culture of high expectations, shared responsibility, and open communication, it can lead to improved teacher morale, increased parental involvement, and a stronger sense of community among all stakeholders. For instance, a study by Montejo and Patino (2021) found that schools where the School Management Team actively engaged with teachers, parents, and the broader community in setting high academic standards and supporting learners' well-being, experienced significant improvements in learner academic performance, as well as decreased dropout rates and behavioural issues. Similarly, another study by Taiwo and Ogunlade (2020) highlighted the importance of the SMT's role in promoting a culture of collaboration and shared decision-making. The researchers found that when teachers and school leaders work together to address challenges and implement evidence-based practices, it fosters a sense of collective efficacy and a shared commitment to learners' performance.

2.3.2.5 External factors influencing the SMT's impact on learner academic performance

This literature review explores the relationship between SMT, school environment, and learner academic performance. The concept of the "learning organization" has been proposed as a framework for understanding how schools can enhance their capacity to support learners' academic performance (Gamala & Marpa, 2022). Senge's five disciplines - systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning - provide a model on how school leaders can foster a culture of continuous improvement and collective learning within the school community (Gamala & Marpa, 2022). Researchers have examined the potential for applying these principles in the school context, highlighting the importance of building a shared vision, empowering staff, and promoting collaborative problem-solving. However, according to Gamala and Marpa (2022), the implementation of this approach in practice can be challenging, and the conditions necessary for its success are not yet fully understood. Effective school leadership has also been identified as a critical factor in supporting learners' academic performance. Lepardo and Caingcoy (2021) have proposed frameworks for conceptualizing the specific skills and behaviours that characterise

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impactful school leadership, such as developing a vision for learning, allocating resources strategically, cultivating a positive organizational culture, and advocating for the school community's needs. These leadership dimensions have been linked to various indicators of school performance, including learners' test scores and teacher satisfaction. However, according to Gamala and Marpa (2022) and Antoci and Ceobanu (2022), the relationship between leadership and learner academic performance is complex and mediated by a range of contextual factors. The resources available to the school, the level of community engagement, and the socioeconomic status of the learner population can all shape the ability of school leaders to effect positive change. Therefore, while strong SMT is crucial, it must be considered within the broader ecosystem that supports learner academic performance.

According to Gamala and Marpa (2022), effective school leadership, including technical, leadership, controlling, planning, and decision-making skills, is crucial for creating an environment that supports high levels of learner academic performance. Additionally, specific dimensions of the school environment, such as learner support, affiliation, professional interest, staff freedom, participatory decision-making, innovation, resource adequacy, and work pressure, have been found to be related to learners' performance. According to Gamala and Marpa (2022) and Khan (2023), effective school leadership and a positive school environment are both important factors in supporting learners' academic performance. School leaders who can cultivate a collaborative, innovative culture focused on continuous learning and improvement are more likely to see gains in learner academic performance (Lepardo & Caingcoy, 2021). At the same time, the broader community context, including the availability of resources and level of parental/community engagement, can significantly impact the school's capacity to support academic performance (Brew et al., 2021). Gaps in the literature remain regarding the specific mechanisms through which school management and environment influence academic performance, as well as how these factors interact with external community-level variables (Brew et al., 2021).

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The role of SMTs in improving learner performance is an essential research hotspot. SMTs execute a variety of functions which have a direct bearing on learner academic performance: curriculum design, human and material resource allocation, and encouraging a favourable school climate (Odo, 2023).

2.3.3 Factors that Influence the Academic Performance of Learners

Understanding the factors that affect academic performance is important to enhance the targeting of interventions and support services towards learners at risk of academic difficulties (Selvarajoo & Baharudin, 2023). Research by Uretsky and Henneberger (2020) shows that academic performance is a complex phenomenon affected by multiple social, environmental, intrinsic, and systemic factors. At a more local level, the findings of the paper are helpful in informing interventions focused on improving learner performance, especially in South African schools where disparities in educational quality exist and differ in terms of school type, place, or population the education system serves.

2.3.3.1 Social and environmental factors influencing academic performance

Social and environmental factors play a significant role in shaping academic performance. According to Brew et al. (2021), a comprehensive literature review examined factors affecting adult learners' persistence, highlighting the importance of family support, work-life balance, and access to educational resources. Muntean, Nireștean, Sima-Comaniciu, Mărușteri, Zăgan and Lukacs (2022) further validate these findings by presenting a model of 12 key persistence factors through quantitative testing, emphasising that learners' academic performance is often contingent upon their social support systems and environmental conditions. Family support is particularly crucial; learners who receive encouragement and assistance from family members are more likely to excel academically (Uretsky & Henneberger, 2020). Conversely, those lacking such support may struggle to navigate academic challenges, leading to lower performance. This is especially relevant for adult and non-traditional learner populations, where balancing educational pursuits with work and

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family obligations can significantly impact academic outcomes (Uretsky & Henneberger, 2020).

2.3.3.1.1 Traumatic factors

In addition to social and environmental factors, traumatic life experiences can severely affect academic performance. Juhan, Hussin, Rajak and Bakri (2022) point out that traumatic events can create significant obstacles and stressors that hinder a learner's ability to concentrate and engage in their studies. Green and Hennefield (2023) emphasise the importance of addressing the needs of learners who have experienced trauma, as their academic performance can be profoundly affected. Teachers play a pivotal role in mitigating the effects of trauma on learners' academic performance. By creating nurturing environments characterized by empathy and support, teachers can help learners navigate their challenges (Mansha & Khanam, 2023). Furthermore, collaboration with SMTs is crucial for devising effective plans and interventions that assist learners in managing trauma, thereby lessening its adverse impact on academic progress. Recognizing and addressing the needs of traumatized learners is essential for fostering educational settings conducive to academic success (Foreman & Bates, 2021).

2.3.3.1.2 Intrinsic factors

Intrinsic factors, such as learners' attitudes, behaviours, and learning strategies, also significantly influence academic performance. Studies by Brew et al. (2021) have indicated that non-cognitive factors, including self-regulation, persistence, and academic mindsets, can be as important, if not more so, than cognitive abilities in predicting long-term academic performance. Teachers have a profound impact on these intrinsic factors through their teaching styles, mentorship, and encouragement (Sari, 2021). By fostering a positive view of education, teachers can help instil resilience in learners, equipping them to overcome obstacles and develop effective study techniques. Creating a supportive and caring atmosphere enables teachers to cultivate learners' self-management abilities and scholarly attitudes, which ultimately boosts educational achievements (Suico, 2021). This highlights the critical role that

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teachers play in shaping the intrinsic motivations of their learners, directly influencing their academic performance.

2.3.3.2 Absence of teachers in the SMT factors

Recent studies by Hill, Mancenido and Loeb (2024) and Mario and Tran (2024) have underscored that the lack of teacher representation in the SMT can detrimentally affect learner academic performance. Teachers play a crucial role in supporting learners, and their absence from essential decision-making processes can impair their capacity to effectively support and represent learners' needs (Ernawati, Arifin & Mansyuret, 2022). Additionally, the oversight of many SMTs in acknowledging and leveraging teachers' contributions to learners' education can weaken the support provided, consequently impacting learner performance (Sunarsi, Sukawi, Khoiri, Salam & Ilham, 2022). Thus, the exclusion of teachers from the SMT should be viewed as a significant barrier to learner academic performance. Moreover, teachers can enhance learners' academic achievement by cultivating supportive relationships, providing effective instruction, and advocating for the needs of their learners.

The research into these factors on academic achievement relates directly to this research topic, "The Impact of Teachers in School Management Teams to Enhance Learners' Academic Performance: A Case of Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District." This research seeks to create understanding by identifying the various elements that affect learner performance to understand how SMTs can effectively tackle these challenges and create an environment conducive to academic excellence. Although there is a substantial body of literature on these variables, there are important gaps that this research can help fill. First, although studies have extensively covered the impact of socio-economic status, family support, and traumatic experiences, there has been a lack of systematic research on the interaction of these factors within the Vhembe District context. Second, the extent to which teacher involvement in SMTs mediates the relationship between these factors has yet to be fully examined. Moreover, the study hopes to fill this gap by presenting findings that assist SMTs in understanding these influences and the identification of targeted strategies that can improve academic performance in the Dzondo Circuit. In doing so, this study aims to provide

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new perspectives that will enhance policy and practice that can create a more conducive and effective learning setting for all learners.

2.3.4 The Specific Mechanisms and Approaches that Successful SMTs Employ to Influence the Potential of their Teachers

Numerous studies by Ya, Giatman, Rizal and Wulansari (2020); Aas, Andersen and Vennebo (2020) have underscored the pivotal role of collaborative and cooperative practices among school personnel in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning within educational settings. Historically, teaching has often been characterised by a sense of isolation, with teachers working individually in their own classrooms (Budiasih & Wijayanti, 2020). According to Aas, Andersen and Vennebo (2020), their research has emphasised the considerable benefits of fostering teamwork, professional collaboration, and collegiality among teachers. These collaborative practices have been shown to positively impact various aspects of the educational process, from curriculum development to instructional strategies and learners' performance. As such, understanding the mechanisms and approaches that can effectively promote such cooperation within SMTs has become an area of increasing interest and importance in the field of education.

As teachers and researchers continue to explore ways to improve learners' performance in schools, the role of teachers in SMTs has emerged as a critical factor. In this context, this study explores the mechanisms and approaches that successful SMTs employ to influence the potential of their teachers. There is a consensus among researchers that the role of teachers in SMTs has a significant impact on enhancing the academic performance of learners (Itamunya & Edabu, 2023; Khan, 2023). Research indicates that the influence of teachers in SMTs goes beyond the classroom. Teachers who are actively involved in the decision-making processes of an SMT have been found to contribute to a positive school culture and climate (Widyaningsih & Arfiansyah, 2020). This, in turn, has a direct impact on the academic performance of learners. Evidence suggests that when teachers are given a voice in shaping school policies, curriculum development, and resource allocation, they feel a

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greater sense of ownership and commitment to the overall success of the school (Fauzan, 2020). This level of involvement can lead to increased motivation and professional satisfaction among teachers, ultimately translating into better instructional practices and learner performances.

Furthermore, according to Yani, Arafat and Puspita (2021), successful SMTs create opportunities for ongoing professional development and collaboration among teachers. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement, these teams empower teachers to stay current with effective teaching strategies and interventions, leading to improved learning outcomes. In addition, the supportive and collaborative relationships forged within SMTs can positively impact teacher retention and job satisfaction (Basuki & Widodo, 2020). When teachers feel valued and supported by their colleagues and administrators, they are more likely to remain in the profession and contribute to sustained academic growth. The impact of teachers in SMTs is multifaceted, reaching into various aspects of school dynamics and directly influencing the academic performance of learners.

2.3.4.1 Perceptions and knowledge of teamwork

Research suggests that the perceptions and knowledge of teamwork among SMTs and teachers can significantly impact the effectiveness of collaborative practices within educational settings (Tallman, 2021). Studies have found that school leaders and teachers with a strong understanding of the principles and benefits of teamwork are more likely to engage in and promote cooperative practices within their schools. This includes recognising the essential skills and competencies required for effective teamwork, such as clear and open communication, problem-solving abilities, conflict resolution strategies, and the capacity to build trust and foster a cooperative spirit among team members. When school personnel have a well-developed comprehension of the value and intricacies of teamwork, they are better equipped to cultivate a collaborative culture that enhances the quality of teaching and learning (Tallman, 2021).

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Furthermore, a positive perception of teamwork can motivate school leaders and teachers to actively seek out and participate in professional development opportunities that further strengthen their teamwork skills and abilities (García-Martínez, Montenegro-Rueda, Molina-Fernández & Fernández-Batanero, 2021). A study by Meyer, Richter and Hartung-Beck (2020) has found that school principals who actively encourage and support collaborative practices among their teaching staff are more likely to foster a culture of cooperation and collective responsibility for learner performances. This suggests that the perceptions and leadership approach of school administrators can significantly shape the extent to which teamwork is embraced and effectively implemented within educational institutions.

2.3.4.2 Benefits and challenges of teamwork

The existing literature has highlighted a range of potential benefits associated with effective teamwork among school personnel. These benefits include improved communication, enhanced problem-solving and decision-making capabilities, increased collegiality and the exchange of ideas, and the expansion of individual knowledge and skills through exposure to diverse perspectives (Tallman, 2021). Importantly, research has also suggested that collaborative practices can positively impact learner performances, with teamwork among teachers and school leaders contributing to more effective instructional planning, increased parent involvement, and better-coordinated support for individual learner needs (Sandar & Kálmán, 2022). Despite these potential advantages, the literature also acknowledges the significant challenges that can arise in the context of school-based teamwork. These challenges may include scheduling conflicts, power imbalances, differing priorities and agendas among team members, and the inherent complexities of navigating interpersonal dynamics within a collaborative setting. Addressing these challenges and cultivating an environment that is conducive to effective teamwork requires a deliberate and multifaceted approach from school leadership (Tallman, 2021).

2.3.4.3 Challenges and guidelines for effective teamwork

While the benefits of teamwork and collaboration within schools are well-documented, the literature also highlights the challenges that can arise in implementing these

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practices effectively. These challenges can include issues such as conflicting priorities, power dynamics, and resistance to change among school personnel (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019). To address these challenges, the literature suggests that SMTs should focus on developing and implementing clear guidelines and strategies for fostering effective teamwork. This may include establishing clear roles and responsibilities, providing ongoing training and professional development opportunities, and creating structures and processes that support collaborative decision-making and problem-solving (Feitosa & Salas, 2021). For instance, School Management Teams could employ various strategies to nurture effective teamwork, including (Lamçja, 2022; John & Mkulu, 2020):

- Clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of team members.
- Providing regular opportunities for team members to engage in professional development and skill-building activities.
- Establishing transparent communication channels and decision-making processes.
- Fostering a positive and supportive team culture that encourages openness, trust, and mutual respect.

By implementing these types of strategies, SMTs can work to overcome the challenges associated with collaborative practices and harness the considerable benefits that teamwork can offer in terms of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning within their schools.

2.3.4.4 Strategies and initiatives implemented by teachers to support and enhance learner academic performance within the SMT

Teachers, as integral members of the SMT, are uniquely positioned to offer invaluable insights and perspectives that can significantly shape the decision-making processes within the school (Balıkçı, 2020). According to Jeet and Jain (2019), their involvement in the SMT not only allows them to contribute their expertise in the classroom but also empowers them to advocate for the needs of both learners and the broader educational community. As classroom practitioners, teachers possess a deep understanding of the daily challenges, successes, and emerging trends that impact

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learners' learning, and this firsthand knowledge is an invaluable asset to the SMT (Egeberg, McConney & Price, 2020). Through their active participation, teachers can ensure that the decisions made within the team are grounded in the realities of the classroom and truly serve the best interests of the learners. Furthermore, teachers can leverage their position within the School Management Team to implement targeted strategies and initiatives that enhance learner academic performance (Bhujel, 2021).

One strategy that teachers often champion within the SMT is developing and implementing differentiated instructional approaches (Çelik, 2019). Recognising that learners possess diverse learning styles, strengths, and needs, teachers can advocate for an adoption of instructional methods that cater for this diversity, ensuring that all learners have the opportunity to engage with the curriculum meaningfully. According to Solone, Thornton, Chiappe, Perez, Rearick and Falvey (2020), this may involve integrating technology-based learning tools, incorporating project-based learning activities, or implementing flexible grouping strategies, all of which can be effectively coordinated and supported through the collaborative efforts of the SMT.

Another key area where teachers can contribute to the enhancement of learner academic performance is the development and refinement of assessment practices (Salone et al., 2019). According to Rivera, Bonite and Pesigan (2021), within the SMT, teachers can share their insights on the effectiveness of existing assessment methods, identify areas for improvement, and advocate for the adoption of assessment strategies that provide a more comprehensive understanding of learners' learning. This may include the incorporation of formative assessments, the implementation of authentic performance-based tasks, or the utilisation of data-driven decision-making to tailor instructional approaches to the specific needs of individual learners.

Additionally, teachers can leverage their involvement in the SMT to promote the integration of social-emotional learning initiatives within the school's curriculum and culture (Greenberg, 2023). Recognizing the profound impact that social-emotional well-being has on learners' academic performance, teachers can advocate for the

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implementation of programs and strategies that support the holistic development of learners, including the fostering of resilience, empathy, and self-regulation (Hachem, Gorgun, Chu & Bulut, 2022). Through the collaborative efforts of the SMT, these initiatives can be seamlessly woven into the fabric of the school, creating an environment that nurtures both academic and personal growth. Furthermore, according to Rani, Yuliasri, Mujiayanto and Astuti (2023), teachers can utilise their position within the SMT to facilitate the development and implementation of professional learning opportunities for their colleagues. By sharing their own successful classroom practices, engaging in peer-to-peer collaboration, and accessing targeted training and development resources, teachers can collectively enhance their pedagogical skills and strategies, ultimately leading to improved learner academic performance.

2.4 CONCLUSION

This literature review, in brief, has shown that academic performance is the result of many complicated factors influencing learners. It has also emphasised the key role teachers play in the SMT in resolving these issues as noted above. The issue to be addressed by this research is “The impact of teachers in SMT to enhance learner academic performance: A case of Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District". The literature argues that it is imperative for SMTs to understand how teacher involvement can make a real impact on academic development in such an environment of socio-economic disparity and historical inequality. Social and environmental factors, traumatic events, and teacher representatives' non-participation in SMT are all named as key aspects of poor academic performance. It is clear that groups can enter or be excluded from any educational system owing to their economic condition and family support. Traumatic personal life events have the potential to detract learners from substantial stretches of academic engagement. Learners’ motivation and self-regulatory ability in themselves are one of the most important determiners of whether they will succeed in school or not, and teachers are extensively affected by these aspects through their own personal influence on learners both in and outside classroom settings. Teachers' active participation in SMTs is essential to make the school a hospitable and inclusive

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environment in which all learners' needs are met. Once teachers have a role in making decisions through SMT processes, they can fight for sufficient resources and lend their ideas to the development of curriculum while creating a beneficial climate above all requirements, which together make for better learning by all learners. Indeed, the fact that teachers are not represented on the SMT would most likely (as is observed from many case examples) lead to a decline in educational performance.

This chapter also explored the roles, working relationships, and other interactions involved in teachers' participation in SMT groups at Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District. For instance, by examining how teachers can utilize their roles to resolve the various aspects affecting academic performance, the study will hopefully provide support for targeted interventions and policies that empower teachers themselves to enhance the overall educational environment.

The theoretical framework guiding this research is based on the Distributed Leadership Theory and the Collective Efficacy Theory. Distributed Leadership Theory holds that good leadership within schools is shared, featuring collaborations among all participants, such as staff members and learners (Aas et al., 2020). From this perspective, the theory supports the view that teachers' involvement in SMTs contributes positively to improved decision-making and educational practice alike. Similarly, Collective Efficacy Theory stresses that through joint action among teachers who share a common commitment to their learners' welfare, they may collectively influence learner performance in a favourable manner (Sokang, 2019). By building on both these theories for the study, it seeks to find how cooperative practice within an SMT can enhance educational performance in the Dzondo Circuit. Ultimately, recognising the relationships between these factors and the key place occupied by teachers in school management seems essential if we are to engender a fairer and effective education system. The result of this study should not only advance the academic discourse but also offer practical ways forward for school leaders and policymakers who are trying to improve learner performance in South Africa's uniquely complex educational environment. If we emphasise teacher participation in SMTs and deal with the many-sided problems faced by learners, we could move closer towards

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setting up a more comprehensive system of education that has effective standards where all children attending school in the Dzondo Circuit or beyond may achieve their full potential academically.

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CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The research design and methodology play a crucial role in ensuring the reliability and validity of a study. This chapter provides a detailed overview of the research design, population and sampling procedures, data collection instruments, and data analysis techniques employed in this study on the impact of teachers in school management teams on enhancing learners' academic performance in the Dzondo Circuit of the Vhembe District. The research design outlines the specific approach used to investigate the research problem, while the population and sampling procedures describe how the study participants were selected. The data collection instruments section explains the tools and methods used to gather the necessary information, and the data analysis techniques section details the statistical and qualitative methods utilised to interpret the findings.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

According to Creswell (2021), a research paradigm can be defined as an important collection of beliefs shared by scientists, a set of agreements about how problems are to be understood, how we view the world, and how to go about conducting research. Kankam (2019) emphasised that for defining valid research, the most recommended method is to follow the research paradigm. This is important because by selecting a specific paradigm, the researcher does not abide by their philosophical know-how and gets a better stance on other alternatives. According to Jahja, Ramalu and Razimi (2021), there are several research paradigms available, including positivism, interpretivism, and critical theory.

In the view of positivism, knowledge comes from observation, and the social world can be studied scientifically as if it were part of the natural sciences. The positivist values

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objectivity and quantitative methods, such as questionnaires and experiments, for finding out general laws or patterns of causation. This perspective holds that reality is stable and capable of being represented by numbers through the formulation of statistically testable hypotheses (Brown & Dueñas, 2020). By contrast, interpretivism highlights how individuals in their own social contexts give meaning to events and experiences (Okia, Naluwemba & Kasule, 2021). Interpretivists who follow this paradigm tend to use qualitative methods like interviews or participant observation, from another perspective on the world, for capturing human behaviour in all its subtlety and the complexities suffered through social interaction. Interpretivists argue that reality is socially constructed and that participants must be involved in research, so researchers get an understanding of their points of view (Phetherbridge, 2024).

Critical theory approaches knowledge and societal structures differently by examining power balances as well as social injustices. Researchers in this field aim to uncover oppressive systems and challenge them throughout the entire research process, from formulation to publication. Critical theorists often use a combination of qualitative methods (such as interviews or participant observations) and quantitative ones, stressing hermeneutical skills and the position of the researcher in their work (Phetherbridge, 2024).

This research is qualitative in nature, and given its interpretive nature, the interpretive paradigm seems the best fit for this study. This method is particularly useful for qualitative studies that try to understand the impact of teachers in the SMT on learners' academic performance. By acknowledging the importance of individual perspectives and social context, researchers are able to go deeper into the complexities of educational settings. The interpretive paradigm might be especially helpful for this research, mainly because it emphasises understanding people's lived experiences and interrelation principles. In educational settings, principals, deputy principals, and department heads are key stakeholders. Without their insights, we would find it difficult to comprehend how the leadership influences learners' academic performances in practice. Their special positions enable them to perceive and interpret the way things work within school life, and also the connections between teachers and learners.

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Through engagement with these educational leaders, the research can capture a mixed variety of views that mirror the lived experiences of people involved in teaching and learning processes. This approach not only deepens investigation sufficiency; it also recognises the important contributions they make to educational outcomes, so they are ideal candidates for this qualitative study.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study that aims to explore the impact of teachers' involvement in SMT to enhance learners' academic performance in the Dzondo Circuit of the Vhembe District. This qualitative research design is very appropriate for exploring the understanding and perception of people involved in SMTs, as well as their interactions with each other and the contextual dynamics that shape their roles (Creswell, 2021). This research employs qualitative methodologies, such as semi-structured interviews, which allows for a richer, more in-depth understanding of how teachers view their contributions to SMTs and the impact their contribution has on learners' academic performance (Todorova, Byrum, Mackintosh, Jamshidi-Parsian, Gies, Washam, Jenkins, Spiva, Bowman, Reyna & Griffin, 2023). This study is framed within the interpretive paradigm, which posits that knowledge is understood through social interaction and through the experiences and interactions of participants (Brown & Dueñas, 2020). Such a qualitative and interpretive research approach allows the study to delve into the complexities of educational leadership dynamics, with the goal of adding meaning to the Department of Basic Education.

3.4 METHODOLOGY

This study follows a case study research design to investigate the influence of teachers in school management teams over learners' academic performance in the outstretch of Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District. Using semi-structured interview guides, the study gathered data from school management teams and teachers at target schools, taking a systematic look at how teacher roles in management translate into learner outcomes. According to Mukhula, Manyiraho, Atibuni and Olema (2021),

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interviews are conversations characterised by the interviewer asking questions and seeking information from the interviewee. This approach is appropriate since it permits an in-depth investigation of the subject matter, generating rich and elaborated data (Karlgren, Li & Milgrom, 2020). In this sense, researchers can understand, through the perspective of participants, their experiences and opinions on the influence of teachers in schools, and hence the academic performance of learners (Todorova et al., 2023).

In addition, interviews can provide fine-grained details that cannot easily be found through other means of data collection, such as surveys (Karlgren, Li & Milgrom, 2020). This depth of understanding is important for a thorough understanding of the research issues because it enables researchers to account for the nuances of how teachers' participation in management teams influences achievement. The semi-structured nature of interviews allows for a mixture of structure and flexibility that permits particular areas to be covered but also for participants to express their own opinions and experiences (Surawy-Stepney, Provost, Bhangu & Caduff, 2023).

Interviews were also held with the departmental heads, deputy principals, and the principals of the sampled schools in the Dzondo Circuit. The focus of these interviews was to obtain an understanding of how teachers' impact on the SMT shapes the academic performance of learners. The semi-structured process allowed for flexibility and enabled exploration on related subjects while still being guided to ensure that important areas of interest were covered (Alshammari, 2022). This approach also allowed the researchers to glean insights from school leadership that can guide interventions to enhance the effectiveness of School Management Teams in improving learner outcomes. The interviews were audio recorded using a cell phone, and notes were taken in the course of the interview (Maryani et al., 2021). Transcribed interview materials were recorded word for word to guarantee the authenticity of the extracts, that the voices of the subjects were engaged. The study, which aimed to collect knowledge specifically in the context of Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District, provides knowledge on a strategic insight regarding the crucial role played by teachers in SMTs in effectively improving the academic performance of learners.

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3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The population and sampling procedure are discussed in the succeeding sub-sections.

3.5.1 Population

The population of a study is the entire group of people or set of objects and events that the researcher is interested in gaining information and drawing conclusions about (Stratton, 2021). This study focuses on the specific group that is employed by the Department of Basic Education. The researcher believes the selected group possess the necessary experience and reality that could assist in answering the research questions of the study. The population of interest of this study comprises in the SMTs, DHs, deputy principals, and principals who fall under the Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District.

3.5.2 Sampling Procedure

Sampling is the process of selecting a subset of individuals or items from a larger population to represent the characteristics of the entire group. It's a fundamental concept in research and statistics because studying an entire population is often impractical, expensive, or even impossible. The goal is to gather information from the sample and then generalise those findings to the broader population from which it was drawn (Andrade, 2020). In this study, the researcher made use of non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling allowed the researcher to select the sample from the population because it was easy to access (Berndt, 2020). Several methods could be used to select a sample for the study. In this study, expert sampling was implemented as a method of collecting data. Members considered to be of high quality were chosen for participation. According to Gill (2020), the logic and power of expert sampling lie in selecting people to study or interview who were especially knowledgeable about a topic and were willing to share their knowledge. In this study, 30 participants who were part of SMTs from both primary and secondary schools in the Dzondo Circuit were sampled as participants to answer questions. These

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participants included teachers who were part of SMTs, departmental heads, deputy principals and principals.

3.5.3 Sample Size

Sample size is the total sample size of participants (Bolarinwa, 2020). It is one of the most important design factors in a study, influencing the rigor and ability to apply the findings more generally. According to Andrade (2020), an inadequate sample size can result in a failure to accurately reflect the characteristics of the population, which may lead to unreliable findings. On the other hand, a sample that is too large may become overly cost-prohibitive. The choice of sample size depends on several factors, including the nature of the research question, the variability of the target population, the level of precision needed, and practical resources. The sample size of the study is given in the table below.

Table 3.1: Number of Participants

Participants	Number of Participants
Departmental Heads	15
Deputy Principals	3
Principals	12
Total	30

3.6 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The data collection procedure for the study on "The Impact of Teachers in School Management Teams to Enhance Learners' Academic Performance: A Case of Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District" involved a systematic approach to gather qualitative insights from participants actively engaged in school management. Initially, the researcher identified and selected participants, including, DHs, deputy principals, and principals, who are members of the School Management Teams (SMTs) within the Dzondo

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Circuit. Utilizing a semi-structured interview format, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews, which facilitated an open dialogue and allowed participants to express their thoughts, experiences, and perspectives regarding their roles in SMTs and their influence on learners' academic outcomes. Each interview was designed to last approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted in a comfortable setting to encourage candid responses. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and supplemented by handwritten notes to capture non-verbal cues and additional insights. Following the interviews, the recorded data was transcribed to ensure accuracy and prepare it for analysis. This comprehensive data collection procedure aimed to provide rich, contextualised information that would contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics within SMTs and their impact on academic performance.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis is a nuanced process that involves the careful interpretation and classification of data collected through various methods, aiming to derive meaningful insights and understanding of practices and experiences (Gomanie, Day, Weaver, Roy, Moros & Mehta, 2020). According to Lester, Cho and Lochmiller (2020), this analytical process ensured that researchers could thoroughly describe the phenomena they investigated, thereby adding depth to their study. In the research conducted, semi-structured interview questions were employed as a primary data collection tool. This approach allowed for flexibility in responses while ensuring that key topics of interest were addressed, leading to the generation of significant themes (Shi, Huang & Liang, 2023).

The interviews provided rich, descriptive data that was systematically analysed to unveil underlying patterns and insights. For the data analysis, a thematic analysis approach was employed, as outlined by Çelik, Baykal and Memur (2020). This method involved a systematic examination of interview content to identify, analyse, and categorise principal themes emerging from participants' responses. Thematic analysis facilitated a deep engagement with the textual data, ensuring that participants' voices

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and experiences were accurately represented. The process began with transcribing interviews, followed by familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes from significant statements, and grouping these codes into broader themes that captured the essence of the participants' insights regarding their roles in SMTs. Through iterative refinement, the researcher ensured that the themes accurately reflected participants' perspectives, ultimately illuminating the impacts of teachers on SMTs and enhancing the understanding of the educational environment in which these teams operated. In this context, the study aimed to analyse the impact that teachers had on School Management Teams (SMT) within the Vhembe District.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethical considerations in research are a set of guidelines and principles that ensure that the safety, well-being, and rights of participants are protected throughout the research process (Kessio & Chang'ach, 2020). These considerations are crucial for maintaining the integrity of the research and upholding ethical standards. Ethical considerations are of paramount importance in any research study involving human participants. Researchers have an obligation to protect the rights, safety, and well-being of all individuals who take part in their investigations. In the context of this study, several key ethical principles were carefully observed as explained in the next successive sub-headings.

3.8.1 Permission for Inclusion as a Participant

To obtain permission for inclusion as a participant in the research study titled "The Impact of Teachers in School Management Teams to Enhance Learners' Academic Performance: A Case of Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District," the researcher developed a comprehensive consent process that ensured participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights. An informed consent was created outlining the objectives of the research and the significance of their participation, emphasising that involvement was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequences. The informed consent also assured participants of

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the confidentiality of their responses and the ethical handling of their data. This letter was distributed to potential participants, including DHs, deputy principals, and principals within the Dzondo Circuit, and provided them with a consent form to sign if they agreed to participate. This approach not only facilitated transparent communication but also fostered trust and encouraged participants to share their insights and experiences candidly.

3.8.2 Anonymity

To ensure anonymity in the research study, the researcher implemented several key strategies throughout the data collection and analysis process. First, unique identification numbers were assigned to each participant, which replaced their names on all interview transcripts and data records. This practice helped to dissociate individual responses from identifiable information, thereby protecting the participants' identities. Additionally, participants were informed during the consent process that their responses would remain confidential, and that no identifying information would be included in any reports or publications resulting from the study.

Furthermore, the researcher took care to avoid any details in the presentation of the findings that could potentially reveal the identity of participants or their schools. This included aggregating data where possible and ensuring that direct quotes used in the analysis were presented in a way that maintained the participants' anonymity. By employing these measures, the researcher aimed to create a safe environment for participants to share their insights openly, ultimately enhancing the integrity and credibility of the research findings.

3.8.3 Confidentiality

To maintain confidentiality in the research study, the researcher implemented several important measures throughout the research process. First, all participants were informed about the confidentiality of their responses during the consent process, assuring them that their identities would not be disclosed in any reports or publications

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resulting from the study. The researcher ensured that all data collected, including audio recordings and transcripts of interviews, were securely stored in password-protected files and accessible only to authorised personnel involved in the study.

Additionally, any identifying information, such as names, specific school details, or personal identifiers, was removed or anonymised before analysis. The researcher also employed unique identification codes for each participant to further protect their identities. Furthermore, when presenting findings, care was taken to aggregate data and use general terms that would not allow for the identification of individual participants or their specific contributions. By implementing these measures, the researcher aimed to create a safe and trusting environment for participants, encouraging open and honest sharing of their experiences while safeguarding their privacy.

3.8.4 Rights of Participants

To maintain participants' rights in the research study, the researcher implemented several key practices throughout the study. First and foremost, participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, and their rights prior to participation. This information was clearly communicated during the consent process, ensuring that participants understood their voluntary involvement and the option to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

The researcher also emphasised the right to confidentiality and anonymity, reassuring participants that their identities would be protected and that their responses would be used solely for research purposes. In addition, participants were encouraged to ask questions and express any concerns they might have about the study, fostering an environment of transparency and trust. To further uphold participants' rights, the researcher ensured that the data collection methods were respectful and non-intrusive, allowing individuals to share their experiences and insights in a manner that felt comfortable to them. By prioritising these practices, the researcher aimed to create

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a supportive and ethical research environment that respected the dignity and autonomy of all participants.

3.8.5 Informed Consent

In the research study, informed consent was a critical aspect of the ethical research process. The researcher ensured that informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. This process began with the development of a comprehensive consent form that clearly outlined the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, as well as the participants' rights. During the consent process, the researcher conducted an initial meeting with potential participants to explain the study in detail, allowing them to ask questions and seek clarification on any aspects they found unclear. Participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without facing any penalties or repercussions. The researcher emphasised the importance of confidentiality and assured participants that their responses would be kept anonymous and used solely for research purposes.

Once participants felt adequately informed and comfortable with the study's parameters, they were asked to sign the consent form, indicating their willingness to participate. The researcher provided each participant with a copy of the signed consent form for their records. This approach not only ensured compliance with ethical standards but also fostered trust and transparency between the researcher and participants, ultimately contributing to a more robust and ethical research process.

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the criteria that establish the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of findings. According to Stenfors, Kajamaa and Bennett (2020), these criteria are essential for ensuring that research accurately represents the participants' experiences and perspectives, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of study outcomes. Trustworthiness

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allows researchers to demonstrate that their findings are credible, reliable, and applicable across different contexts, ensuring the research contributes meaningfully to the field. In this study, the researcher implemented several strategies to uphold these trustworthiness criteria.

3.9.1 Credibility

Credibility was established through triangulation, where data were collected from multiple sources, including interviews with DHs, deputy principals, and principals. This method allowed for the corroboration of findings and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences regarding their roles in SMTs (Todorova et al., 2023). Additionally, the researcher engaged in prolonged engagement with participants, spending sufficient time in the educational context to build rapport and gain deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions. This approach not only fostered trust but also enhanced the credibility of the research by allowing the researcher to observe the dynamics within SMTs firsthand.

3.9.2 Dependability

To ensure dependability, the researcher maintained a detailed audit trail throughout the study. This included documenting each step of the research process, from participant selection to data collection and analysis techniques. By providing a clear account of the methodology, the researcher ensured that the study could be replicated in similar contexts, thereby enhancing the reliability of the findings (Djafar, Yunus, Pomalato & Rasid, 2021). Furthermore, the researcher regularly consulted with peers and mentors during the research process to validate the methods and interpretations, which contributed to the overall dependability of the study.

3.9.3 Confirmability

Confirmability was addressed by actively reflecting on personal biases and assumptions that could influence data interpretation. The researcher employed

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reflexivity, regularly considering how their own beliefs and experiences might shape the analysis of the data (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). By grounding findings in the participants' voices and using direct quotes in the reporting, the researcher aimed to ensure that the conclusions drawn were based on the data collected rather than personal interpretations.

3.9.4 Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research refers to the applicability of study findings to other contexts, settings, or populations, emphasising the importance of rich contextual descriptions that allow readers to assess the relevance of findings to their own environments (Stalmeijer, Brown & O'Brien, 2024). In this study, the researcher enhanced transferability by providing detailed descriptions of the educational environment, participant demographics, and the characteristics of the SMTs involved. Additionally, the researcher documented the methodologies used, including data collection and analysis techniques, to enable replication in similar contexts, thereby fostering credibility (Creswell, 2021). By engaging with existing literature on SMTs and academic performance, the researcher highlighted common themes that reinforced the potential for transferability, ultimately aiming to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of teachers in SMTs across diverse educational settings.

3.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a comprehensive overview of the research design and methodology employed in the study investigating the impact of teachers in School Management Teams (SMTs) on learners' academic performance in the Dzondo Circuit of the Vhembe District. The chapter begins by emphasising the importance of a well-structured research design, population sampling, data collection instruments, and data analysis techniques in ensuring the reliability and validity of the study. It identifies the interpretive paradigm as the guiding framework, which emphasises understanding knowledge as socially constructed and highlights the significance of individual experiences and perspectives in educational settings. The research adopts a

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qualitative approach, utilising semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth insights from key stakeholders, including SMT teachers, DHs, deputy principals, and principals. A case study design is employed, focusing on the dynamics within SMTs and their influence on academic performance. The sample consists of 30 participants selected through non-probability expert sampling, ensuring that knowledgeable individuals contribute to the study.

Data collection is methodical, involving audio-recorded interviews that are transcribed for analysis. Thematic analysis is employed to identify and categorise key themes from the qualitative data, enabling a nuanced understanding of the role of teachers in SMTs. Ethical considerations are rigorously adhered to, with measures in place to ensure informed consent, confidentiality, and the protection of participants' rights. Trustworthiness of the research is established through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, ensuring that the findings are reliable and applicable to similar contexts. Overall, this chapter provides a detailed framework for understanding the research methodology, laying the groundwork for analysing the complex interactions within SMTs and their impact on learners' academic outcomes.

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CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This study uses semi-structured interviews to gather data from twelve schools in the Dzondo Circuit of Limpopo Province. The research methodology includes a thematic analysis of the collected data. The interviews were conducted with 15 DHs, three deputy principals, and 12 Principals. The data is presented and discussed in relation to the study's objectives and research questions. The theoretical framework and literature review from Chapter 2 are integrated into the data presentation. The study focuses on the role of teachers within School Management Teams (SMTs) in enhancing learners' academic performance. The empirical data collected is analysed, compared, and interpreted to address identified areas of inquiry. The chapter concludes with a summary.

4.2 PROFILING OF PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS AND PARTICIPANTS

The profiling of participating schools and individuals was conducted as part of the study based in the Dzondo Circuit of the Vhembe District. A total of twelve schools were visited for this purpose. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, a system of various codes was implemented throughout the research process. This approach aimed at protecting the identities of both the schools and the individuals involved, allowing for unbiased and honest feedback within a secure framework. The texts were analysed through a process known as coding, which involved segmenting them into smaller, more manageable chunks. This method enhanced the analysis and comprehension of data patterns, clarifying user responses and enabling the development of various forms of knowledge. The researcher conducted interviews with 12 principals, three deputy principals, and 15 DHs. To ensure confidentiality, the participating schools were designated by letters rather than

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using the individuals' real names. The table below shows the profiling of participants and their experience:

Table 4.1: Biographical Information of Participants

Designation	Gender & Age	Qualifications	Years of Experience in Current Post
Departmental Head 1	Female-62	Advanced Certificate in Education	13 years
Departmental Head 2	Female -52	BED Honours in Educational Management	1 year
Departmental Head 3	Female- 42	BED Honours in Educational Management	1 Year
Departmental Head 4	Male – 56	Advanced Certificate in Education	9 years
Departmental Head 5	Female -61	BED In Foundation Phase	14 years
Departmental Head 6	Male -58	Advanced Certificate in Education	8 years
Departmental Head 7	Female- 49	BED Honours in Curriculum Management	6 years
Departmental Head 8	Male -49	BED Honours in Educational Management	5 years
Departmental Head 9	Female- 52	BED In Foundation Phase	9 years
Departmental Head 10	Male- 51	Advanced Certificate in Education	12 years
Departmental Head 11	Female -46	BED In Foundation Phase	5 years

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Departmental Head 12	Female -50	National Professional Diploma and Advanced Certificate in Education	10 years
Departmental Head 13	Female-39	PGCE in Life sciences and Natural sciences	2 years
Departmental Head 14	Female- 60	Advanced Certificate in Education	20 years
Departmental Head 15	Male-53	Advanced Certificate in Mathematics	11 years
Deputy Principal 1	Male -54	Advanced Certificate in Education	4 Years
Deputy Principal 2	Female-50	BED-Honors in Foundation Phase	1 Year
Deputy Principal 3	Male-62	Advanced Certificate in Education	7 years
Principal 1	Female- 48	BED Honours in Educational Management	8 years
Principal 2	Female-60	BED-Honors in Educational Management	22 years
Principal 3	Female-52	BED-Honors in Curriculum Studies	12 years
Principal 4	Male-56	Advanced Certificate in Education Management	16 years
Principal 5	Female-49	BED-Honors in Educational Management	7 years
Principal 6	Male-57	Advanced Certificate in Education	17 years
Principal 7	Female-54	BED-Honors in Educational Management	9 years
Principal 8	Female-59	National Professional Diploma in Education	21 years

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Principal 9	Male- 52	BED-Honors in Educational Management	8 years
Principal 10	Female-51	BED in Foundation Phase	5 years
Principal 11	Female- 64	National Professional Diploma in Education	16 years
Principal 12	Female- 54	Advanced Certificate in Education	8 years

In this study, expert sampling was implemented as a method of collecting data. Members considered to be of high quality were chosen for participation. According to Gill (2020), the logic and power of expert sampling lie in selecting people to a study or interview who were especially knowledgeable about a topic and were willing to share their knowledge. In this study, 30 participants who were part of SMTs from both primary and secondary schools in the Dzondo Circuit were sampled as participants to answer questions. These participants include 15 departmental heads, of whom 10 were females and 5 were males, 3 deputy principals, of whom 2 were males and 1 female, and 12 Principals, of whom 9 were females and 3 were males from both primary and secondary schools.

4.3 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA COLLECTED THROUGH INTERVIEWS

In the research conducted, semi-structured interview questions were employed as a primary data collection tool. This approach allowed for flexibility in responses while ensuring that key topics of interest were addressed, leading to the generation of significant themes. The interviews provided rich, descriptive data that could be systematically analysed to unveil underlying patterns and insights. Thematic analysis was implemented in this study to systematically identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes within the qualitative data collected from interviews. The process began with the transcription of audio-recorded interviews, which provided a textual representation of participants' voices and experiences. Once the transcripts were

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prepared, the researcher familiarised themselves with the data by reading through the texts multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content and context.

Following this initial familiarisation, the researcher employed an open coding approach to generate initial codes from the data. This involved highlighting significant statements and phrases that reflected participants' experiences and insights related to their roles in SMTs. Each code was noted and organised to capture the essence of the data. After generating a comprehensive list of codes, the researcher began to group related codes into broader themes, identifying patterns that emerged from the data. This thematic organisation allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics within the SMTs and the impacts that teachers had on academic performance. The researcher continuously refined these themes through iterative analysis, revisiting the data to ensure that the themes accurately represented the participants' experiences and perspectives. This involved checking the themes against the original data to confirm that they were grounded in the participants' voices. Finally, the researcher defined and named each theme, providing clear descriptions that encapsulated the key insights derived from the data. This rigorous application of thematic analysis not only facilitated a deeper understanding of the educational environment in which the SMTs operated but also contributed to the overall richness and depth of the study's findings. The information gathered through interviews led to the development of the following themes:

- **Theme 1:** The role that teachers play in the School Management Team.
- **Theme 2:** The role of SMT in enhancing learner academic performance.
- **Theme 3:** Factors that influence the academic performance of learners.
- **Theme 4**: Mechanisms and approaches that successful SMTs employ to influence the potential of their teachers.

Below is the analysis of the above four themes in detail.

4.3.1 Theme 1: The Role that Teachers Play in the School Management Team

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Just in terms of the SMT, teachers have a decisive influence and hold significant responsibility. With the knowledge they gain from the classroom, they identify areas for improvement and provide educational objectives, and this ensures that learners' needs are given priority. Through skillfully conducting classroom activities and helping those who have fallen behind, teachers contribute greatly to the positive learning atmosphere. Moreover, they need ongoing professional development in order to improve their skills and adapt to different learner needs. Ultimately, teachers' participation in the SMT is essential to promote a collaborative approach to school management while enhancing standards for learners.

Three subthemes emerged from the main theme:

4.3.1.1 Subtheme 1: Collaboration and decision

It is important to understand how teachers contribute to school policies and strategies that influence the academic outcomes of learners. Principals emphasised the importance of teachers in the decision-making processes within the SMT. Principals noted that teachers share valuable insights from their classroom experiences, which help shape school policies and strategies. This collaboration ensures that decisions are informed by those who understand the direct needs of learners.

Five principals and one deputy principal said that:

Principal 1:

> *Teachers play an important role in the school as they assist the principal with planning educational programmes. They are the ones who identify areas that need to be improved and inform the principal.*

Principal 2:

> *Teachers play a key role in the SMT. They help set and reach education goals. They share useful ideas from their classes and work with learners.*

Principal 3:

> *I see teachers playing a key part in the SMT. They bring useful ideas and views from the classroom that guide our decisions. Teachers help*

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with decisions by taking part in meetings, sharing data and assessments, and providing ways to help learners' performance.

Principal 4:

Teachers are very important in our SMT. Their active involvement is not just helpful, but absolutely important. They play a key role in making the school run smoothly and helping learners succeed. Teachers share what they've learned from working with learners, and this helps the SMT make decisions.

Principal 9*:*

We have an SMT where teachers are very important. Teachers play a big part in helping decide things within the SMT. They do this by actively joining in discussions, sharing their ideas and experiences.

Deputy Principal 1*:*

Teachers on the SMT provide important insights into learners' needs and academic progress. They take part in decision-making by sharing their observations, data, and suggestions to guide policies and plans.

The DHs also agreed with what principals emphasised about the importance of teachers in the decision-making processes within the SMT. The DHs also noted that teachers share valuable insights from their classroom experiences, which help shape school policies and strategies. This collaboration ensures that decisions are informed by those who understand the direct needs of learners.

Four DHs said that:

DH1:

SMT cannot manage the school alone; they need teachers to manage the classes while they manage the school. Teachers are important as they are close to learners, and they can oversee the needs of the

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learners that SMT cannot see. Teachers also contribute to the decision-making process within the school as they know the needs of learners and they know what's best for the learners.

DH2:

The first priority of the teachers is to teach learners guided by subject policies. Teachers are responsible for extra-curricular activities, these activities allow teacher to know their learners even outside class. Teachers contribute to decision-making, and SMT must involve teachers in things that concern school running.

DH3:

In my view, teachers play an important role in the SMT. They give valuable advice on policies and procedures, using their experience in the classroom to help with decision-making.

DH6:

As a Department Head in the SMT, I think an important role is planning and putting academic programs into action. The teacher's opinions are important when making decisions, since this affects our teaching and learning environment.

4.3.1.2 Subtheme 2: Classroom management and learner support

There are different ways in which teachers address classroom challenges and support struggling learners. Several principals mentioned the necessity for teachers to effectively manage classroom dynamics. They highlighted that teachers are pivotal in creating a conducive learning environment, which directly impacts learner performance. They also play a vital role in identifying learners who need additional support and intervening accordingly.

Four principals and one deputy principal said that:

Principal 1:

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Teachers utilize data analysis to identify learners who are struggling so that they can be assisted.

Principal 4:

> *Teachers led the way in trying new teaching methods, designing personalized learning plans, and giving extra help to learners who need it. Teachers work closely with the other members of the SMT, like the administrators, social workers, and other staff, to create a positive and supportive environment for learners. Teachers use different data to figure out the best ways to help learners do better.*

Principal 6:

> *Teachers work closely with the principal and other staff to create a safe, supportive, and fun learning place for all learners. Teachers use different data, like learner test scores, classroom visits, and feedback from parents and learners, to guide their decisions and improve learner learning.*

Principal 10:

> *On the SMT, teachers try new teaching methods, check how learners are doing, and give extra help to learners who need it. Teachers work with the principal, parents, and community members to create a supportive and fun learning environment for all learners.*

Deputy Principal 1:

> *Teachers create a sense of belonging, promote respectful relationships, and use strategies to address learner behaviour and well-being. They make sure their teaching methods match learners' needs and goals.*

DHs agreed with what the deputy principals and principals mentioned about the necessity for teachers to manage classroom dynamics effectively. They highlighted

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that teachers are pivotal in creating a conducive learning environment, which directly impacts learner performance. They also play a vital role in identifying learners who need additional support and intervening accordingly.

Three DHs said that:

DH1:

Teachers come up with strategies to help learners who are struggling to learn catch up with fast learners.

DH5:

> *Some of the key things they have helped put in place include planning lessons based on data, providing extra help for learners who are struggling, and working together with other teachers. By working closely with the school leaders, counsellors, and other team members, they try to create a positive and supportive environment where all learners can succeed.*

DH14:

> *Teachers collaborate with each other through regular meetings, shared planning, and problem-solving to ensure a unified and supportive approach to school improvement. Creating a positive and supportive learning environment involves helping learners feel they belong, promoting respectful relationships, and using strategies to address learner behaviour and well-being.*

4.3.1.3 Subtheme 3: Professional development and capacity building

Principals frequently referred to the need for ongoing professional development for teachers. Principals pointed out that providing training and resources enhances teachers' abilities to meet diverse learner needs. The capacity building of teachers is essential for fostering effective teaching practices that improve learner performance.

Three principals and one DH verbalised that:

Principal 7:

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We support the teachers by offering ongoing training, useful resources, and structural support. This helps teachers overcome challenges and participate fully in the SMT, which leads to a collaborative environment for making informed choices.

Principal 9:

The school leaders really want to help teachers by doing workshops. This way, teachers can tackle challenges more easily and get involved in the SMT. By working together and communicating openly, we can make better decisions that will help both teachers and learners.

Principal 12:

To make sure teachers are well-prepared and always getting better, the school leadership works to give them access to advanced training, lots of helpful resources, and steady, reliable support.

DH3:

However, we do face challenges, especially with limited resources and support from the school management. To address these issues, we ask for the resources we need and look for professional development opportunities.

Based on the above data in the educational landscape, teachers play a pivotal role, contributing significantly to various aspects of school management and learner performance as well. They help principals to plan educational programmes by indicating problems or areas in which improvements are needed. Having learned much from what they experience in their classrooms, teachers share valuable insights about problems that schools are facing and strategies for addressing them. As active participants in SMTs, teachers are important contributors to the process of making decisions. On the basis of their close contact with learners, they can point out learners' needs and achievements. In the classroom, teachers are responsible for cultivating a good learning environment. A good environment directly affects learner performance,

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and classroom management is therefore their key responsibility. But also, they must work to create communities within the classroom and, for learners who need extra attention or support, develop strategies such as personalised learning plans and other forms of remediation.

Another important aspect of a teacher's role is continuous professional development. To enhance their skills and effectiveness, teachers participate in ongoing training. When working with school leaders and colleagues in schools nearby, teachers increase their role in co-authoring articles, drawing on their experiences as practitioners, and thereby publish in professional journals. Teachers also collaborate with their colleagues on best practices, improving materials to take back to their school communities that support their own growth as professionals. Teachers do much more than they teach. They help keep learner relationships healthy and orderly, giving support for a sense of community with peers. They also arrange extracurricular activities, which allow them to get to know children outside the classroom. Overall, teachers are an integral part of the educational ecosystem, influencing planning, decision-making, classroom management, and their own professional development, all of which contribute to improved learner performance.

4.3.2 The Role of SMT in Enhancing Learner Academic Performance

The SMT is essential in improving learners' academic performance. Through setting clear goals, providing support to teachers, and fostering community engagement, the SMT creates an environment conducive to learning and success. Their collaborative efforts are key to enhancing educational performance for learners.

Based on responses, three subthemes emerged:

4.3.2.1 Subtheme 1: Goal setting and accountability

Establishing academic goals and diligently monitoring progress are vital steps in unlocking a learner's full potential and fostering exceptional performance. Many principals stressed the significance of setting clear academic goals. They noted that

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the SMT is responsible for monitoring curriculum coverage and ensuring accountability, which helps maintain high academic standards and improves learner performance.

Six Principals and one deputy principal verbalise the following:

Principal 2:

SMT makes sure the curriculum is working well and works with parents and the community. We help learners improve by setting clear goals and expectations for them. To help learners succeed, we use different teaching methods for each learner's needs.

Principal 4*:*

I can share what the SMT does to help learners do better in school. The SMT, which I am part of, is very important for improving academic performance.

Principal 8:

As the School Principal, I know that the SMT is very important for helping learners do well in their studies. Our team works hard to find ways to improve learner learning.

Principal 9:

The SMT is important for improving learners' academic performance. The SMT provides teachers with training, resources, and support by monitoring progress and setting goals.

Principal 10:

According to my experience as the School Principal, the SMT is a tool to increase academic performance. The role of SMT is to support learners by providing a safe and healthy learning environment.

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Principal 11:

I can say that the SMT is very important in helping learners do better in their studies. We support teachers and learners by setting goals, checking their progress, and giving them resources.

Deputy Principal 2*:*

The SMT sets the school goals and makes sure resources are used well. To help improve academic performance, they hold regular workshops and training for teachers to improve their teaching skills.

Seven DHs agreed with the Principals and Deputy principal on the significance of SMT in setting clear academic goals. They noted that the SMT is responsible for monitoring curriculum coverage and ensuring accountability, which helps maintain high academic standards and improves learner performance.

Seven DHs responded in this way:

DH1:

The role of SMT is to encourage teachers and learners to do their duties. To improve the academic performance of learners, SMT encourages teachers to go the extra mile in teaching learners with barriers to learning.

DH2*:*

The role of SMT in enhancing learner academic performance is to monitor teacher curriculum coverage before learners write the exam; if the curriculum is not covered, the teacher has to come up with strategies to recover the time lost. SMT sets goals for each term when schools open, and there must be accountability at the end of the term. Monitoring helps SMT to see how teachers are struggling and offer support to improve learners' academic performance.

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DH3:

The SMT plays a key role in helping learners do better in school. They set clear goals and expectations, creating a focused environment for teachers and learners.

DH4:

The role of SMT is to provide support and resources for teachers. We monitor and evaluate the academic performance of learners by making sure that learners are taught and assessed.

DH5:

The SMT enhances learners' academic performance by setting educational goals, creating supportive environments, and implementing impactful policies.

DH6:

The SMT plays a big part in helping learners perform better. They set clear goals and rules. They use information to make smart choices about what to improve, which really helps.

DH10:

As far as I know, the SMT is directly responsible for setting the academic tone and making sure resources are used well. We check on how learners are doing and fix any problems that come up.

4.3.2.2 Subtheme 2: Support strategies for teachers

SMT initiatives are dedicated to empowering teachers by offering valuable resources and support, fostering an environment where effective teaching practices can truly flourish. Principals discussed various strategies SMTs employ to support teachers. They emphasised the importance of providing resources and guidance to teachers, which enables them to focus on enhancing learner learning. This support is crucial for addressing challenges that teachers face in their classrooms.

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Four principals explained the following:

Principal 3:

To support academic performance improvement, we organize regular workshops and training sessions for teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills. One particularly successful intervention implemented by the SMT was the introduction of a school-wide science enrichment program that provided learners with hands-on learning experiences in science.

Principal 4:

The SMT, which I am part of, is very important in improving academic performance. We use specific strategies like giving teachers professional training, using data to make decisions, and working closely with teachers and learners.

Principal 5:

Our SMT supports academic performance improvement through collaborative efforts and strategic planning. We implement specific strategies to enhance learner achievement, such as setting high expectations, providing targeted support, and promoting a positive school culture.

Principal 7:

From my perspective as a school principal, I understand that the SMT plays an important role in helping academic performance by providing professional development opportunities for teachers. For example, we have provided training on different teaching methods to help teachers better meet the various needs of their learners.

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DHs support what Principals indicated above on the various strategies SMTs employ to support teachers. They also emphasised the importance of providing resources and guidance to teachers, which enables them to focus on enhancing learner learning. This support is crucial for addressing challenges that teachers face in their classrooms.

Four DHs are in agreement with what the principals said, they emphasize that:

DH1:

The role of SMT is to encourage teachers and learners to do their duties. To improve the academic performance of learners, SMT encourages teachers to go the extra mile in teaching learners with barriers to learning.

DH5:

We analyse learner data to identify needs, provide professional development for teachers, and foster a culture of continuous improvement. Specific strategies include targeted interventions for struggling learners and engaging parents and the community in learning initiatives.

DH8:

The SMT plays an important role in supporting and improving learner performance. We try different ways to get better results, like offering training for teachers, giving resources to learning projects, and helping teachers and learners work together.

DH9:

The SMT plays a key role in improving academic performance. We create a positive learning environment and make sure teachers have the resources they need. The team sets clear academic goals and regularly checks progress. To help improve academic performance,

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they organize workshops and training for teachers to improve their teaching skills.

4.3.2.3 Subtheme 3: Community engagement

Community involvement plays a crucial role in supporting the academic environment and performance of learners. The role of community involvement was highlighted by several principals. Principals mentioned that strong relationships with community members help create a supportive environment for learners. Engaging parents and local leaders can significantly enhance academic performance by fostering a culture of support for learners.

Four principals and one deputy principal emphasise that:

Principal 1:

External factors play a vital role, for example, traditional leaders here help us with parents who come and cause trouble in the school; they take them to the royal council to discipline them. By so doing, it sets an example to the other parents not to interrupt with learning.

Principal 3:

External factors, such as parental involvement and community support, can significantly influence the SMT's ability to impact learner academic performance.

Principal 4:

Factors outside the school, like community involvement and available resources, can also affect how much we can help learners. We try to get the community involved and get the resources we need to support our efforts.

Principal 6:

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The SMT works with teachers and learners to improve academic results through workshops. But the team's ability to affect learner performance also depends on outside factors like community support, funding, and government policies.

Deputy Principal 2:

We get support outside the school, like how much parents are involved and how much the community supports the school, which can greatly affect how well the school leadership team can impact learners' academic performance.

Concurring with what Principals and deputy principals said, DHs also acknowledge how community leaders contribute to enhancing learner performance, four DHs said:

DH1:

Community leaders work hand in hand with SMT to make sure that nothing from the community affects learners' learning. They make sure that there are no shebeens and loud radios near the school.

DH3:

The SMT also builds strong ties with the community, leading to partnerships that provide mentoring and tutoring, which further support learners.

DH6:

And good relationships with the community can help a lot too; they often lead to partnerships that offer mentoring and tutoring, which really support the learners.

DH:

Good partnerships with local groups and access to funding or technology can really help the SMT do its job effectively.

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Based on the above data, the findings suggest that the SMT is a key factor in raising learners' academic achievements by setting targets and mechanisms to ensure that the performance is based on ability or effort. Establishing clear academic goals and closely monitoring progress were both suggested as a way to guarantee high quality. SMTs should hold regular checks on the extent of curriculum coverage. Through providing teachers training resources day by day and step by step, the SMT encourages improvement to teaching methods even for senior teachers so that they can adapt to diverse learner needs and create a conducive learning environment.

In addition, collective efforts between the school and communities emerge as a vital factor in helping learners to perform well. The SMT's cooperation with parents and local leaders works to build an encouraging atmosphere for learning, which benefits academic results. Several principals observed that strong community relations help confront conditions outside the school that may disrupt learning, such as family circumstances and local conditions. By helping to form relationships and promoting community involvement, the SMT not only strengthens the educational environment, but also ensures learners receive necessary support in achieving academically. All in all, the SMT's multi-faceted approach contributes decisively to improved education results for learners.

4.3.3 Factors that Influence the Academic Performance of Learners

The academic performance of learners is shaped by a variety of interconnected factors that significantly influence their educational performance. This analysis explores three subthemes that emerged: the impact of motivation and home environment, the quality of teaching and teacher support, and the role of mentorship and peer support. Insights from school principals and deputy principals highlight how supportive family backgrounds, effective teaching strategies, and mentorship programs collectively contribute to enhancing learner motivation and performance. Understanding these factors is essential for fostering an environment that promotes academic success and personal growth among learners.

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4.3.3.1 Subtheme 1: Motivation and home environment

The researcher interviewed participants about how learner motivation and family background impact academic success. Principals acknowledged that a learner's home environment plays a critical role in academic performance. Principals pointed out that learners from supportive homes tend to perform better, while those from challenging backgrounds may struggle. Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is a key factor that influences how learners engage with their studies.

Principals support this by saying the following:

Principal 1:

> *Social factors that affect learners' performance are like child-headed families, learners living with elderly people who can't read or write, and ignorant parents who are not actively involved in their children's education. These factors affect learners' performance as there is no motivation from home. There are also socio-economic factors which contribute much to learners' performance. Some learners are from a poor background, where there is limited food, and they depend much on the school feeding scheme. Such learners cannot do schoolwork on an empty stomach at home.*

Principal 2:

> *Learners often view that their home environment plays a vital role, noting that aspects like parental engagement, access to resources, and a conducive study atmosphere are influential.*

Principal 4*:*

> *I've noticed that what affects how learners perform in school is their family background, money situation, access to school resources, and how involved their parents are.*

Principal 7*:*

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I have seen that learners' school performance is affected by many things. These include their thinking skills, emotions, support from family and friends, and chances to do extra activities.

Principal 8:

Learners also do better when they have a good home life, with parents who expect them to do well, a quiet place to study, and learning materials at home. Motivation is key - learners who are self-motivated to learn and achieve do better than those who lack drive and commitment.

Principal 11:

The learners say the environment they learn in makes a big difference in how focused they can be and how well they manage their time. Being motivated is definitely key to doing well in school - learners who are really motivated show they can stick with things, handle challenges, and keep trying.

Principal 12:

I've seen that a learner's grades depend on many things. This includes their family's resources, how involved their parents are, and the quality of teaching. Learners often say that having a quiet place to study and good learning materials at home are key for staying focused and managing their time well. Learners who are highly motivated show more determination and willingness to overcome challenges.

Deputy Principal 3:

In my own view, Learners learn based on their own personalities and surroundings. This includes their natural environment, social and cultural background, school curriculum, available resources, teachers, mental health, and physical health. Having a supportive learning environment with access to school resources, counselling, and a caring

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home can really motivate and encourage learners. Getting guidance from experienced people has been very helpful for learners to reach their full potential.

DHs emphasise what principals and deputy principal stated, by pointing out the importance of home background and motivation to learner success. Six DHs say that:

DH1:

The factors that influence the academic performance of the learners are when top learners are motivated by awards, which also encourages other learners to study hard so that they can also be awarded. Learners are also encouraged by calling external motivators from the community to come and motivate learners to study hard. Home background plays a part in motivating learners' performance, some will work hard so that they can change their home background, while others relax because they are from a wealthy family.

DH3*:*

Parents being involved are very important for how well learners do in school. When parents help with their kids' education, it creates a good atmosphere that can improve learning. Motivation is key to how learners perform; motivated learners set higher goals and stay positive about their studies, which leads to better results.

DH4:

I think the factors that influence the academic performance of learners are to motivate learners in their schoolwork. Home environment plays a big role in learners' academic performance, as this factor can impact study habits, motivation, and concentration at school.

DH5:

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As a DH, the key factors that I have found to influence academic performance include access to supportive learning environments, effective mentorship, and internal motivation.

DH6*:*

I believe that several factors really influence the academic performance of learners, and one of the most significant ones is their socio-economic background. I think motivation plays an important role too - when learners are motivated, they're more likely to put in the effort and stay persistent.

DH11:

From my point of view, how much parents get involved in a learner's education is really important for how well the learner does. Parents who are positive about their child's schooling, the school itself, and the teachers can also really help. Learners who have a good attitude about their education, school, and teachers can influence their child's performance by making the child feel more capable and by helping the learner and teacher work better together. Learners often see a supportive home as one where their schoolwork is recognized and encouraged, and where they have a quiet place and time to study.

4.3.3.2 Subtheme 2: Quality of teaching and teacher support

The relationship between teacher effectiveness and learner academic performance is important. The principal emphasised the importance of teacher quality in influencing academic performance. Principals noted that effective teaching methods and ongoing support from the SMT are essential for improving learner performance. This highlights the need for well-trained teachers who can adapt their teaching strategies to meet diverse learning needs. This finding affirms Sari (2021), who posits that teacher job performance is a critical determinant in realizing broader educational objectives

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On the relationship between teacher effectiveness and learner academic performance, four principals and one deputy principal expressed the following:

Principal 2:

Various factors significantly influence the academic performance of learners, with teacher quality and parental involvement being crucial. Modern teaching methods, especially those involving interactive technology, can engage learners more effectively and positively impact their academic performance.

Principal 3:

As a school principal, learners' academic performance is affected by factors such as teacher quality, parental involvement, access to resources, and the overall school climate. It is important to realize that teaching methods impact the learner's learning, with personalized teaching and project-based learning leading to more positive learning experiences compared to traditional approaches.

Principal 5:

As a school principal, I can say that learners' school performance is greatly affected by things like good teachers, the curriculum, the school environment, and access to technology. I've noticed that personal teaching and hands-on learning often work better than one-size-fits-all methods.

Principal 8:

Teaching style matters too, with more hands-on, interactive approaches generally working better than just lecturing, especially for learners who have trouble staying engaged.

Deputy Principal 1:

In my experience, a person's school performance is influenced by many things. The way teachers teach is very important. Classes that are engaging and lively can help learners understand and remember better.

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While different teaching methods can work best for each learner, a learner's own inner motivation is important.

DHs also believe that teacher quality is important in enhancing learner performance. They understand that using different teaching methods is important as it covers all learners. To support that, four DHs verbalise that:

DH2:

Teacher quality plays a big role, as there are teachers who come from secondary and are working in primary school, they need support to perform. A support system that is effective in improving results is organising meetings with teachers where we talk about learners' performance.

DH6:

And regarding teaching methods, I've noticed that they sometimes impact learners differently, especially since individual learning styles can really make a difference in how well those methods work.

DH8:

Well, from my experience, many factors influence a learner's academic performance. First, the teaching methods used by educators play an important role; engaging and advanced methods always foster better understanding and retention of the subject matter. Teaching methods do play an important role; the most effective approach is likely one that combines various teaching strategies tailored to the unique needs and learning styles of individual learners.

DH12:

From my experience, a learner's school performance depends on many things. The way teachers teach, with interesting and energetic methods, helps learners understand and remember better. The best approach often combines different

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teaching strategies tailored to individual learning styles, and a learner's natural motivation and passion for learning are important.

4.3.3.3 Subtheme 3: Mentorship and peer support

The researcher interviewed participants on the impact of mentorship programs and peer assistance in enhancing learner performance. Most of the participants frequently mentioned the impact of mentorship on learner performance. Principals discussed how mentorship programs provide learners with guidance and support, helping them navigate academic challenges. This aligns with the idea that peer support can enhance learning and motivation among learners (Medallo & Constantino, 2020). Four principals and one deputy principal support the following statements:

Principal 1:

A Support system that is effective encourages learners to support each other and to have peer study groups. Mentorship to learners is important as learner performance changes after getting mentorship.

Principal 2:

Positive experiences, such as mentorship, can lead to substantial improvements, as seen when a learner improved significantly after receiving guidance on time management and study techniques.

Principal 3:

Mentorship programs have proven to be beneficial, providing learners with guidance, support, and encouragement to overcome academic challenges.

Principal 5*:*

I've seen cases where mentors from the community or past learners really changed a learner's outlook, giving them role models and real-world job ideas.

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Principal 9:

Mentors can really change a learner's academic performance by being role models and showing them real-world career paths.

Deputy principal 1:

> *Mentors can also be super helpful, giving learners guidance and insights. But at the end of the day, a learner's own drive and passion for learning are the most important.*

Mentorship is important to learners, as struggling learners improve their results after they receive guidance from their mentor. Six DHs support what the principals already mentioned, they verbalise that:

DH1:

> *Mentorship positively influences learner academic performance; learners who are receiving mentorship from teachers work best so that they impress their mentors.*

DH3:

> *I have seen mentors also help learners improve. One learner I know got much better after working with a mentor who gave advice on time management and studying. Motivation is key to how learners perform; motivated learners set higher goals and stay positive about their studies, which leads to better results.*

DH4:

> *We once had a learner who was struggling with understanding the subject matter, and he was paired with a knowledgeable learner who gave one-on-one mentorship, and we saw improvement.*

DH6:

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Let me give you an example. I witnessed a high-achieving learner who, after getting mentorship, really took their academics to the next level. The mentor encouraged them to go into advanced topics and explore independent reading, which was transformative.

DH10:

I've seen learners get inspired by mentors, like alumni or professionals, to work hard and succeed. Motivation is key to doing well in school.

DH11:

I personally have seen how having an outside extra class can give learners valuable guidance and insights to help them feel confident about their academic and career choices.

The findings on factors impacting learners' academic achievement show that there are several interconnected elements involved: First of all, a supportive home environment is essential; learners from such homes tend to have higher academic achievement. For learners coming from difficult backgrounds, e.g. a child-headed household or a family with non-literate guardians, the struggle for performance is an unending hard battle. Many though ultimately not all acknowledge openly, intrinsic and extrinsic incentives combined drive learners forward, with learners' self-motivated nature giving them greater staying power when it comes to meeting challenges head-on. On top of this, external rewards also help to motivate individual efforts. Socio-economic barriers such as malnutrition due to poverty and associated factors such as lack of resources, tend to drive learners away from schoolwork. It is essential for school feeding programmes to address this problem. Proactive parental involvement creates the right environment for learning and positively impacts academic achievement. For instance, with quiet spaces free of distractions at home and readily accessible learning materials are essential.

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In the area of teaching quality, talented and well-qualified teachers who use various lively teaching methods have a major impact on learner performance. Innovational educational approaches (such as project-based learning) are more effective than traditional methods in that they match a variety of learning styles. That means facility learning and memory retention are enhanced. Continuous professional development and mentoring for teachers are prerequisites for improving the quality of teaching and, therefore, for lifting learner performance. Additionally, guidance and support from a mentor seriously raise academic results. The mentorship programs provide learners with direction as they negotiate the school's inherent difficulties, leading to significant improvement in their grades. Encouraging peer study groups promotes cooperation and motivation among learners; they derive benefit from each other's shared insights as well as encouragement. Mentors, locally recruited from the community and sometimes even alumni who enjoy influence over youth in schools, can serve as models for learning. In this way, they help youngsters to realise their educational aspirations and seek more chances for employment. Overall, by dealing with these factors together, improvements in educational performance multiply, and a climate of success begins to grow among all learners.

4.3.4 Mechanisms and Approaches that Successful SMTs Employ to Influence the Potential of their Teachers

The role of SMTs is important in shaping the potential of teachers and, consequently, enhancing learner performance. By implementing effective mechanisms and approaches, SMTs can foster a supportive environment that promotes professional development, encourages open communication, and recognizes the achievements of teachers. This overview explores the key strategies that successful SMTs employ to empower teachers, highlighting the significance of ongoing training, collaborative practices, and recognition systems in creating a positive and productive school culture. Three subthemes emerged from the theme as follows:

4.3.4.1 Subtheme 1: Professional development initiatives

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The training and professional growth opportunities are significant for teachers in enhancing academic performance. Principals consistently highlighted the importance of professional development for teachers. Principals emphasised that ongoing training opportunities enable teachers to improve their teaching practices and stay updated on educational trends, which ultimately benefits learners' learning. Eight principals emphasise the following:

Principal 1:

We have to encourage teamwork, organise professional development for teachers, and we must also encourage the use of ICT by our teachers, as they are old and have little knowledge of computers.

Principal 2:

I think successful SMTs can influence their teachers' potential through mentorship and coaching programs, which provide valuable support. Teachers often find that professional development opportunities, such as workshops and training sessions, are the most beneficial support or resources from their management team.

Principal 3:

As a school principal, I think the key things that can help teachers do their best work include giving clear guidance on teaching, helping them develop through training, and encouraging them to work together. Teachers really value getting support from the administration, access to resources, and chances to grow and lead.

Principal 4:

I have found that setting clear, realistic expectations, providing ongoing guidance, and creating a positive work environment are good ways to help teachers reach their potential. Teachers say having access to training, teaching materials, and admin support is crucial.

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Principal 5:

I find that providing support for each teacher, encouraging new ideas, and allowing teachers to take risks can really help teachers do their best. Teacher's value getting help from the administration, having the right tools, and having chances to advance in their careers.

Principal 7:

I think having clear expectations, resources, and ongoing help are important for helping teachers to be their best. A supportive management team makes teachers feel valued and motivates them to do great work. Teachers really need things like training, teaching materials, and support from the administration. For example, when the school leaders talked about how technology can help with teaching and then provided training, the teachers happily started using new digital tools.

Principal 9*:*

I see that creating a supportive school environment, giving teachers chances to learn and grow, and encouraging teacher leadership are effective ways to help teachers reach their full potential. In my opinion, an SMT that is always honest, open, and working to get better is more likely to create a positive and supportive environment that helps teachers grow.

Principal 10:

Based on my experience, mentorship programs, ongoing professional development, and collaborative projects are keyways to help teachers grow. Good training and professional development programs let us improve learner and school performance.

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In agreement with principals, DHs believed that providing ongoing training and allowing teachers to grow through mentorship and professional development is important to teachers. Four DHs said that:

DH4:

Mentorship is always the best way that successful SMT can use, not forgetting coaching programmes. Teachers find professional development opportunities, such as workshops and training from SMT, useful.

DH5:

Successful SMTs enhance teacher potential through strategies like professional development, mentorship, and open feedback. Teachers appreciate resources such as teaching materials and professional growth opportunities that enrich their experience.

DH8:

I think good SMTs can help teachers become even better. They can do this by giving them helpful feedback, setting clear goals and expectations, and offering training. Teachers find mentoring, coaching, and access to new teaching materials very useful from their management team. I remember a time when the SMT clearly and regularly told teachers about new curriculum changes, and that helped the teachers make those changes work in their classrooms.

DH11:

Successful SMTs can help teachers reach their full potential. They do this by providing targeted training, encouraging a growth mindset, and recognizing teacher expertise. The most helpful things the management team can do include having mentorship programs, providing coaching on teaching, and giving teachers access to new resources.

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4.3.4.2 Subtheme 2: Communication and collaboration

Open communication between SMT and teachers plays a role in fostering a positive school culture. Effective communication and collaboration between SMT and teachers were a recurring theme. Principals noted that clear communication about expectations and curriculum changes helps teachers align their practices with school goals. This collaboration fosters a sense of belonging and teamwork among staff.

Eight principals and two deputy principals said the following:

Principal 1:

> *Clear communication from SMT to teachers regarding the curriculum guidelines allows teachers to change or adjust their teaching practice. SMT should be transparent as it allows teachers to trust their leaders and as they say. Communication between SMT and teachers is important as it allows the school to run well and improves the academic performance of learners.*

Principal 2:

> *Effective communication from school management, especially regarding professional development and educational research, has been shown to positively affect teaching practices. Collaboration between teachers and the SMT is important, as it fosters a supportive work environment that greatly contributes to overall job satisfaction.*

Principal 3*:*

> *In my experience, when school leaders set a clear vision, give helpful feedback, and recognize good work, it really boosts teacher motivation and performance. It's key for teachers and the administration to work together, as that lets everyone have a say and feel invested in the school's success.*

Principal 4:

> *Good communication has had a big impact on teaching methods. For example, when the school told teachers to use more technology in*

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class, the teachers did it, and it got learners more engaged. The teamwork between teachers and school leaders is key to teacher satisfaction.

Principal 7:

I think having clear expectations, resources, and ongoing help are important for helping teachers to be their best. A supportive management team makes teachers feel valued and motivates them to do great work. The cooperation between teachers and the school leaders is key for job satisfaction because it allows everyone to make decisions together and work towards the school's goals.

Principal 9:

In my opinion, an SMT that is always honest, open, and working together better is more likely to create a positive and supportive environment that helps teachers grow. The cooperation between teachers and the school leadership team has a big impact on how satisfied teachers are, by encouraging them to work together on decisions and reinforcing their shared commitment to the school's goals.

Principal 11:

I have noticed that when teachers are given clear goals, enough resources, and ongoing support, they are more motivated to do their best and feel valued and supported. Effective leaders need to have a clear vision for the school, communicate that vision well, and encourage teachers to take charge of their role in making that vision a reality. Collaboration between teachers and the management team is crucial for overall job satisfaction because it leads to joint decision-making and a shared commitment to the school's goals.

Principal 12:

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Clear communication from the SMT about new plans or policy changes makes sure teachers are informed and ready to adapt their teaching to better meet learners' needs. Collaboration between teachers and the management team is important for overall job satisfaction, as it allows shared decision-making and a sense that everyone is invested in the school's success.

Deputy Principal 1:

Teachers can improve their teaching by getting clear communication. The key things that make a good management team are vision, hard work, and good communication. Working together is crucial for job satisfaction because it encourages new ideas and shared responsibility.

Deputy Principal 3:

Effective communication improves relationships. The qualities of an impactful SMT include communication, respect, and trust. Collaboration between teachers and the school management team helps make people more satisfied with their jobs because they feel like they are being heard.

DHs agreed with the principals, and they voiced out that a good SMT should set a clear goal and present it to fellow teachers. They also emphasise the collaboration between SMT and teachers as it is important in shaping overall job satisfaction. Five DHs pointed out the following:

DH3:

A good SMT should set clear goals for teacher development. Teachers and managers who work together and communicate openly have more job satisfaction. This also leads to better decision-making and problem-solving.

DH4:

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Transparent communication about learners' needs and performance from the school management enabled teachers to modify their teaching practices to address specific challenges. Collaboration between teachers and the SMT is important for shaping overall job satisfaction.

DH6*:*

Overall, when there's open communication and collaboration between teachers and management, it really enhances our job satisfaction and helps us navigate challenges together.

DH7:

There was a time when clear communication about new curriculum guidelines helped them adjust their teaching methods effectively. Overall, I think impactful SMTs are characterized by open communication and transparency. Collaboration with teachers is important; it fosters a sense of belonging and teamwork, leading to a more fulfilling work experience for everyone involved.

DH10:

I remember when the school leaders clearly told everyone the school's goals and expectations. This made teaching better because it got everyone working together. In my view, management teams that are open-minded, easy to talk to, and truly care about teachers are the most effective. Teachers and the management team working together is key to job satisfaction because it creates mutual respect and understanding.

4.3.4.3 Subtheme 3: Recognition and reward systems

The researcher also looked at how acknowledging teachers' efforts and achievements motivate teachers and improve learner performance. The need to recognise teachers' efforts was emphasised by a few principals. Principals stated that acknowledging teachers' achievements motivates them to perform better. This recognition not only

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boosts morale but also encourages a culture of excellence within the school. Two principals stated the following:

Principal 3:

> *In my experience, when school leaders set a clear vision, give helpful feedback, and recognize good work, it really boosts teacher motivation and performance.*

Principal 6:

> *Effective school leaders have a big impact on how motivated and successful teachers are. They make teachers feel valued and inspire them to do their best.*

Five DHs supported what the two principals said about how teachers feel valued when the management team recognises their effort in improving learner performance. They said the following:

DH1:

SMT should consider motivating teachers when they produce good results, which will also motivate other teachers to work hard.

DH4:

> *Mentorship is always the best way that successful SMT can use, not forgetting coaching programmes. This can positively influence our teachers to work best. Teachers who are motivated and supported by SMT positively work towards impressing their management.*

DH8:

> *From what I've seen, when school leaders are good at communicating, they show that they appreciate hard work, and create a supportive environment, it really boosts teacher motivation and performance.*

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DH13:

School leaders have a big impact on how motivated and successful teachers are by making a supportive and teamwork-focused school environment.

DH14:

The way the leaders inspire and support the teachers also makes the team more effective.

Based on the above discussions, there are ways in which successful SMTs can improve learners' results. The issue of professional development is given great emphasis, where principals repeatedly emphasised that ongoing training is an essential requirement for teachers. Mentorship and coaching are immensely important programs in that they offer teachers support and guidance to refine their teaching practices as well as staying ahead of educational trends. They agree that when teachers receive clear guidance, they have access to resources, get some backing with workplace issues from management, which is important for morale, and by so doing, they will work harder. This is reflected in their performance and the general atmosphere of learning at school.

Besides professional development, emphasis is put on the importance of communication and cooperation among teaching staff with those in their SMT. If everyone knows what to expect in terms of curriculum change, this much courage will breed a sense of belonging and teamwork among staff. That way, the teachers can adjust their teaching to better conform to school objectives. Not only does this cooperation increase job satisfaction among teachers, but it also allows them to take an active part in decision-making within the schools. Furthermore, the systems for recognising and rewarding teachers are discussed as essential elements of morale boosters that promote a culture of excellence. When teachers feel they are appreciated for their efforts, it leads them to strive for higher performance. This benefits not only their professional growth but also learner learning outcomes. Overall, to illustrate a supportive and communicative environment designed to give teachers

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recognition in various ways will surely be conducive to learners' eventual success in academic studies.

4.4 SUMMARY

The data gathered from participants in the twelve schools in the Dzondo Circuit was presented by the researcher in this chapter. The researcher interviewed participants in order to gather this data. Face-to-face interviews were carried out with the principals, deputy principals, and DHs of selected schools.

The final part of this chapter identifies four main themes that were drawn from materials gathered through semi-structured interviews with heads of departments, deputy principals, and principals. The first theme, “The role that teachers play in the School Management Team”, shows the importance of not only providing input from teachers for decision-making at the SMT level but also ensuring this work rests on an empirical basis. Through their experiences in the classroom, teachers provide experience-linked thoughts and stimuli with which to advance policy in schools or schooling in general. It is only when they are present at all stages that learners’ needs will be put first; consequently, an atmosphere of joint power is created, and the school is managed in a coordinated way. This theme emphasises the importance of continuing professional development; for example, a teacher needs throughout their life to update their knowledge constantly, especially in a field that is constantly developing, as is education. Teachers require continuous training if they are to adapt to changing educational demands and effectively support learners' learning.

The second theme, “The role of SMT in enhancing learner academic performance”, focuses on the need for SMTs to set clear academic goals and monitor learner progress in order to be held accountable. The results indicate that effective SMTs create a climate in which learners learn by providing the necessary resources and support for teaching. Further, SMTs work with the community to create an atmosphere of learners helping each other, which is important for good educational results. This community connection between schools and homes helps to lead to the holistic development of the whole learner.

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The third theme examines “The factors influencing learner academic performance” and shows that many connected elements link up to success in learners. Parents who nurture their children tend to do better in school; the warm home environment is the most important factor. Motivation both inside and outside also emerged as a significant factor. Learners who have been motivated show more engagement and perseverance with their studies than those who have not. Further, the quality of teaching and effectiveness of teaching strategies were said to be decision-making considerations strengthening academic performance. Teachers who use diversified methods to teach their material effectively are more likely to create lasting memories of school for their learners than those who do not.

The final theme, “Mechanisms and approaches that successful SMTs employ to influence the potential of their teachers”, outlines how effective SMTs put into practice strategies to improve teachers' potential and increase the successful completion rate of learners. Successful SMTs place a high premium on continuing education, which they organise schoolwide in many formats like workshops and seminars. An open flow of information between the SMTs and teachers is essential because it establishes teamwork. These simplified decision-making procedures also foster unity in achieving school goals. Finally, recognising the demands placed on teachers and rewarding them for their contributions can bolster spirits and establish a culture of eminent accomplishment within this community of learners.

The results and conclusions are summed up in the following chapter, along with ideas and recommendations for further study.

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CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The major purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of teachers in SMT to enhance learners' academic performance: a case of Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District. The results of the qualitative data collection, which followed the methods described in Chapter 3 and involved sampling principals, deputy principals, and DHs as research participants, were presented in Chapter 4. A thematic presentation and the data's discussion from the semi-structured interviews were done in the previous chapter. This final chapter provides an overview of the four earlier chapters, highlighting the relationships between the study's background, goal, research questions, theoretical framework, literature review, research design, and outcomes presentation. Subsequently, the results are summarised, with emphasis on the most significant findings, and suggestions for enhancing learner performance approaches are provided. The chapter ends with potential directions for further investigation based on the results, the boundaries of the investigation, and the ultimate conclusions.

The study's aim was supported by the following objectives:

- To explore and emphasise the pivotal role of teachers within the SMT.
- To investigate the role of SMT in enhancing learner academic performance.
- To identify factors that influence the academic performance of learners.
- To explore the specific mechanisms and approaches that successful SMTs employ to influence the potential of their teachers.

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5.2 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Busetto, Wick and Gumbinger (2020) are of the opinion that research is an ordered and systematic way of thinking. In this technique, special instruments, techniques, and processes are used to achieve an outcome unequally provided for by any other approach. The goal of the research process is to acquire entirely new knowledge or to deepen your understanding of a subject. This investigation was inspired by research issues that occurred in the end and were compiled. For achieving this investigation, the researcher strove to solve every research problem mentioned in Chapter 1. In addition to the study itself, this section summarises the major conclusions in both academic and empirical terms. Themes that were unearthed and dealt with during data analysis and presentation include:

- **Theme 1: The Role of Teachers in SMTs**

Teachers play a decisive role in decision-making processes and help to improve learners' academic performance, particularly in Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District, Limpopo, where this research is currently focused. This theme holds various points teachers have made about their role, including their involvement in collaboration and decision-making, classroom management and learner support, and the importance of ongoing professional development.

Teacher Collaboration and Decision-Making: Teachers in SMTs assist in steering the course of school policies and strategies far more than anyone else. The findings show that this is true: teachers who have experience in a classroom provide significant insights into SMTs, which influence their decisions. Principals, deputy principals and DHs pointed out that teachers play a pivotal role in identifying areas that need improvement and setting educational goals which cater for learners' needs (Hillary-Shikokoti, 2023). For example, several principals explained how teachers helped design educational programs, sharing data and ideas with the SMT in producing well-informed decisions. This kind of partnership approach not only improves the standard of decision-making but also fosters a synergistic environment where teachers feel more valued and invested in the school's overall success, leading to increased

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motivation and a proactive approach to problem-solving. Equally important, with every teacher involved as an active member of their schools' leadership teams, it gives them a sense of ownership over the learning environment itself. Pont (2020) also emphasises the significance of involving teachers in school management and decision-making. Hillary-Shikokoti (2023) notes that positive relationships between teachers and school principals enhance teacher participation in decision-making related to curriculum and administration. Tallman (2021) on the other hand, discusses how teacher involvement in decision-making fosters a collaborative and supportive school environment. Taiwo and Ogunlade (2020) underline the importance of teachers feeling valued and respected for their contributions, which leads to improved morale and commitment to school success. These authors collectively reinforce the idea that teachers' insights and active participation in SMTs are crucial for effective decision-making and improving the educational environment.

Classroom Management and Learner Support: The research findings suggest an out-of-the-ordinary role for teachers in classroom management and in providing learner support. Teachers are responsible for creating environments conducive to successful learning, which directly influences how well learners perform at school. They employ an array of methods to cope with classroom dynamics so that every learner makes progress, including the case of those who fall behind. For instance, some principals remarked that teachers conduct data analysis to identify pupils' needs for progress and then make special interventions in order to support such learners (Wetcho, Na-Songkhla & Wang, 2023). This kind of forward planning not only raises the performance of individual learners but also contributes to achieving a harmonious atmosphere in which learning is successful as a whole. The findings regarding teachers' roles in classroom management and learner support are echoed by several authors in the literature review: Aureada (2021) highlights that teachers create positive learning environments that significantly influence learner performance. Mensah and Baidoo-Anu (2022) emphasise the importance of teachers in managing classroom dynamics and providing targeted support to learners who struggle. Bernstein and Batchelor (2022) note that teachers often analyse data to identify learner needs and implement interventions that foster academic progress. These authors collectively

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affirm the critical role teachers play in both managing classrooms and supporting learners to enhance overall educational outcomes.

Professional Development and Capacity Building: The most outstanding point in this theme is that teachers' abilities get better all the time, owing to the value they place on continued professional development as an essential part of SMT work. The research points out that ongoing training and capacity building are essential for teaching staff to serve diverse learner needs better and upgrade their professional image (Komba & Mwakabenga, 2020). The importance of providing teachers with access to training and materials that will keep them up-to-date on educational trends and 'best practices' was stressed. There is a dedication to professional development that fills every SMT, and with it, teachers can improve their teaching strategies, setting new goals for themselves. In short, the research findings for Theme 1, The Role of Teachers in SMTS, emphasise the indispensable function teachers carry out in SMTs: they contribute significantly to team collaboration, classroom management, and lifelong learning. Teachers who are active as part of important decision-making processes, responsible for classroom dynamics, and participate in additional training far beyond what is normally expected of them. All make a major contribution to improving learners' academic performance in the Dzondo Circuit. This theme forces us again to see that teachers within SMTs have a basic role to play, setting today's educational foundations right. The findings on professional development and capacity building highlight the crucial role of ongoing training for teachers within SMTs. Authors like Acuña and Ancho (2022) and Medallo and Constantino (2020) emphasise that continuous professional development enhances teachers' instructional skills and empowers them to effectively meet diverse learner needs. Komba and Mwakabenga (2019) further stress the importance of providing access to training and resources that keep teachers updated on educational trends and best practices. Collectively, these insights underscore that dedicated professional development is essential for teachers to improve their effectiveness, contribute to team collaboration, and significantly enhance learners' academic performance.

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- **Theme 2: The Role of School Management Teams (SMTs) in Enhancing Learner Academic Performance**

Results found that SMTs play a critical role in enhancing learning performances in the Dzondo Circuit of Vhembe District, Limpopo. This theme includes a number of important components, such as the establishment of clear goals and accountability, support strategies for teachers, and participation from the community. Each of these, in its own way, contributes to an educational environment conducive to improvement in academic ability. This theme is also characterised by goal-setting and accountability. The research points out that SMTs set academic targets and supervise teacher and learner attainment of these goals. The principals and deputy principals emphasised the need for specific, quantifiable objectives that give direction to teaching in schools (Nicolaou & Anastasiou, 2023). Principals also observed that the curriculum needs only monitoring by SMTs. For example, the SMT ensures comprehensive course content and forces teachers to carry out in good faith what they've been told by superiors. This manner not only maintains elevated academic standards but also brings about a learner full of purpose and teachers equally anxious to excel. The findings regarding the critical role of SMTs in enhancing learning performance are supported by several authors in the literature. Bernstein and Batchelor (2022) emphasise the importance of setting clear academic goals and accountability measures, which guide teaching practices. Aureada (2021) highlights that effective SMTs foster an environment that encourages both teacher support and community participation, contributing to overall academic improvement. Moreover, Mensah and Baidoo-Anu (2022) stress the necessity of monitoring curriculum implementation to ensure that educational standards are upheld. Collectively, these authors affirm that SMTs' focus on goal-setting, accountability, and curriculum oversight is essential for cultivating a motivated learner body and dedicated teaching staff, ultimately leading to enhanced academic performance.

The study further found that regular observation and assessment of the academic situation is an essential practice. SMTs can use test results to pinpoint areas that need improvement and provide assistance to teachers as needed. Additionally, the study

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findings highlight that community engagement is essential for achieving greater academic success. SMTs play a pivotal role in liaising with parents and other residents of the township so as to provide an excellent learning environment for learners (Khan, 2023). Several principals, deputy principal and DHs pointed out that getting community leaders and parents involved in school affairs creates an environment conducive to achievement. As one remarked, it makes sense for a school without the threat of disruptive factors as justification for success with full cooperation from home and community. This cooperation does not merely cement the ties between a school and its local surroundings, but it also helps impress upon learners an awareness that efforts are a shared responsibility and therefore inspires them to do better academically. The findings regarding the importance of regular observation, assessment, and community engagement in enhancing academic success are supported by several authors in the literature. Pont (2020) emphasises that ongoing assessment allows SMTs to identify areas for improvement and provide necessary support to teachers. Aureada (2021) highlights the critical role of community involvement in creating a conducive learning environment, while Mensah and Baidoo-Anu (2022) stress that collaboration with parents and local leaders fosters a supportive atmosphere that encourages learner achievement. These authors collectively affirm that strong ties between schools and their communities significantly contribute to improved academic performance and learner motivation.

- **Theme 3: Factors Influencing Academic Performance of Learners**

The results reported that a number of connected factors had an additive effect on the academic performance of learners in the Dzondo Circuit Formation of the Vhembe West District, Limpopo Province. This theme has three main components: motivation and home environment, quality of education and teacher support, and mentoring and peer support, all of which together make up the Mold of learners' educational performances.

Motivation and home environment: With regard to this theme, a lack of motivation at home is found to have a serious effect on learners' academic performance. For instance, the research found that scholars from well-off backgrounds tend to

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outperform their peers who come from more difficult circumstances. A conducive study environment, such as that found in schools with large playgrounds and better buildings (Ober et al., 2023), adds to children's motivation. In the words of principals, deputy principals, and DHs, for example, if a family places high value on education and their children are expected to do likewise, then they will tend to perform well in school. By comparison, learners from backgrounds that are less supportive, including those living in child-headed households, because both parents have died or are elderly guardians with no literacy background, often face difficulties with their studies simply due to a lack of encouragement or resources. This finding underscores the important role of a supportive home environment in enhancing learner motivation and, therefore, academic performance. The findings on the impact of home environment and motivation on academic performance are supported by several authors in the literature. Brew et al. (2021) emphasise that a supportive home environment significantly influences learners' motivation and academic success. Uretsky and Henneberger (2020) highlight the challenges faced by learners from less supportive backgrounds, noting that those from disadvantaged circumstances often lack the encouragement and resources necessary for academic achievement. Additionally, Selvarajoo and Baharudin (2023) stress the importance of parental involvement, and the value placed on education as key factors in enhancing learner performance. Collectively, these authors affirm that a conducive home environment is crucial for fostering learner motivation and improving academic performance.

Quality of Teaching and Teacher Support: In this connection, the quality of teaching also stands out as a key factor influencing examination results. It is only natural that learners would improve when teachers use specific teaching methods (Greenberg, 2023). Most of the principals and DHs who responded thought that teachers who use diverse teaching methods produce tangible improvements in learning. As the findings show, personalised teaching techniques such as project-based learning and interactive methods have a better effect on meeting learners' varied learning desires. What is more, it is crucial for teachers to continue professional development in this field as well, otherwise, they will not be able to adjust their teaching styles to meet the needs more fully without sufficient tools. They are considered important contributing

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factors in producing much better academic results if diligently fostered by schools. This renewed emphasis on high-quality teaching underscores the need for teacher training and development to improve academic performance in schools. The findings regarding the quality of teaching and its influence on academic performance are supported by several authors in the literature. Acuña and Ancho (2022) emphasise that diverse teaching methods significantly enhance learner learning performances, particularly when personalised approaches like project-based and interactive learning are employed. Medallo and Constantino (2020) highlight the importance of ongoing professional development for teachers, asserting that continuous training equips teachers with the necessary tools to adapt their teaching styles to meet diverse learner needs. Additionally, Komba and Mwakabenga (2019) stress that fostering high-quality teaching practices is essential for improving academic results. Collectively, these authors affirm that effective teaching and continuous professional development are critical components in enhancing learner achievement.

Mentorship and Peer Support: In this connection, the theme of mentorship and peer support helps point to the importance of mentorship and peer support in improving learners' academic performance. The research also suggests that mentorship programmes and peer study groups give learners guidance and motivation, which are indispensable for scaling the walls of academic exclusivity (Medallo & Constantino, 2020). Mentors, note that the principals can be very helpful to learners and are often steering them towards more imaginative thinking or different ways of examining the same problem. Moreover, by promoting a peer support culture, learners help each other to study collectively. They exchange ideas and all push each other to progress. This sort of environment not only helps the progress of studies but also develops within the school a sense of community that appears set to contribute most fruitfully to learner success. The findings regarding mentorship and peer support in enhancing academic performance are corroborated by several authors in the literature. Pont (2020) emphasises the significance of mentorship programs in providing learners with guidance and motivation, which is essential for overcoming academic challenges. Aureada (2021) highlights that peer study groups foster a collaborative learning environment where learners can exchange ideas and support one another, promoting

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collective progress. Additionally, Mensah and Baidoo-Anu (2022) note that mentorship can encourage creative thinking and diverse problem-solving approaches among learners. Collectively, these authors affirm that a strong culture of mentorship and peer support is vital for developing a sense of community within schools, ultimately contributing to improved academic performance.

Finally, in Theme 3, research demonstrates how many factors affect learner academic performance at Dzondo Circuit. Quality of learning facilities, similar to the home, and their impact on motivation, mentoring under teachers who are excellent educators in their own right. In order to provide a caring and supportive educational environment that leads to achievement, these concerns are connected but not described separately. It is necessary to regard them as an organic whole. Schools should communicate with families and communities; encourage teacher development; promote mentoring, peer support. Thus, education in the future will be more effective.

- **Theme 4: Mechanisms and Approaches that Successful SMTs Employ to Influence the Potential of Their Teachers**

The study found that successful SMTs in Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District, Limpopo Province use a variety of measures and practices to improve the potential of their teachers. This would serve to boost learners' scholastic performance. This theme has three core sub-themes: professional education initiatives, Communication and Collaboration, and recognition and award systems.

Professional Educational Initiatives: One important conclusion from this topic is the emphasis on successful SMTs place on continual professional education for their teachers, because this is a major means to heighten their work effectiveness. The study points out that successful SMTs are inclined to offer regular training and mentorship programs (Acuña & Ancho, 2022). Deputy principals argue that professional development sessions were necessary for teachers to keep abreast of the latest practices in education and new strategies for learning. For instance, numerous principals stressed the importance of training in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) so that teachers might incorporate moderns' tools

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into their teaching The result is not only to develop teachers' personal potential but also keep up a corporate atmosphere which at the very least in the long run ought to be of benefit to the learner. The findings on the importance of professional educational initiatives for teachers are supported by several authors in the literature. Acuña and Ancho (2022) emphasise that ongoing professional development is crucial for enhancing teachers' effectiveness and keeping them updated with the latest educational practices. Medallo and Constantino (2020) highlight the necessity of regular training sessions, including those focused on Information and Communications Technology (ICT), to enable teachers to integrate modern tools into their instruction. Additionally, Komba and Mwakabenga (2019) stress that such professional development not only enhances teachers' personal growth but also fosters a collaborative environment that ultimately benefits learners. Collectively, these authors affirm that successful SMTs prioritise continuous professional education to improve teaching quality and learner performance.

Communication and Collaboration: Among other things, these findings emphasise the importance of effective correspondence and cooperation between SMTs and teachers. Clear communication in that respect is a prerequisite to orienting teachers 'practices to the larger educational objectives of the school, expectations, curriculum changes, and school goals (Nicolaou & Anastasiou, 2023). Principals maintained that good communications give people a sense of belonging and teamwork, which fosters job satisfaction in teachers. For example, when SMTs provide regular feedback to teachers and bring them into decision-making processes, they encourage an attitude where both teachers are valued, and people are motivated to contribute towards the growth of their school. Such a collaborative pathway not only improves the quality of teaching but also ripples over into creating a better overall school culture and environment, which facilitates greater academic performance on behalf of the learners. The findings regarding the significance of communication and collaboration between SMTs and teachers are supported by several authors in the literature. Pont (2020) emphasises that clear communication is essential for aligning teachers' practices with the school's educational objectives and fostering a sense of belonging. Aureada (2021) highlights that effective communication enhances job satisfaction among

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teachers by making them feel valued and involved in decision-making processes. Additionally, Mensah and Baidoo-Anu (2022) assert that collaboration and regular feedback from SMTs lead to improved teaching quality and a positive school culture. Collectively, these authors affirm that strong communication and collaboration contribute significantly to enhancing academic performance by creating a supportive educational environment.

Recognition and Reward Systems: Lastly, the research findings underline the importance of recognition and reward systems to incite teachers and encourage them to reach their best performance level. Successful SMTs have in place approaches that acknowledge and celebrate teachers' labour and achievements, raising spirits and causing excellence to become the norm (Syafaruddi, Nahar & Imran, 2021). Principals observed that if teachers are made to feel appreciated for their hard work and their contributions are recognised, this forms a good environment for everyone who wants to do even better. For instance, some principals brought up how their formal recognition programs and informal gestures of thanks (such as congratulating people at staff meetings) reinforced teachers 'commitment to their work. This recognition not only heightens teachers' job satisfaction but also transforms their relationships with learners, therefore improving learners' academic performance. The findings on the significance of recognition and reward systems for teachers are supported by several authors in the literature. Acuña and Ancho (2022) emphasise that recognition of teachers' efforts and achievements fosters a positive work environment, motivating teachers to strive for excellence. Medallo and Constantino (2020) highlight that formal recognition programs and informal gestures of appreciation can significantly enhance teachers' job satisfaction and commitment to their roles. Additionally, Komba and Mwakabenga (2019) assert that acknowledging teachers' contributions not only improves their morale but also positively impacts their relationships with learners, ultimately leading to better academic performance. Collectively, these authors affirm that effective recognition and reward systems are crucial for promoting a culture of excellence within schools.

Based on the above analysis, successful SMTs employ various mechanisms and methods to enhance the potential of their teachers. Teacher training is prioritized, and

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the atmosphere fostered by SMT centers around effective communication and collaboration. When teachers receive recognition, they form a critical mass that elevates the entire staff to a new professional level.

5.3 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research was intended to demonstrate with some emphasis that teachers play an important part in SMT and thereby enhance learner academic achievements in the Dzondo Circuit of Vhembe District. The recommendations put forward are intended to promote the involvement of teachers in SMTs, expand channels for professional development, and mobilise society, as well as teachers together with learners themselves. In employing these strategies, schools may create an inclusive and mutually supportive learning community that gives top priority to the learner, supporting continuous improvement in teaching methods.

However, it must nonetheless be pointed out that this study has its limitations, including the relatively small sample size and reliance upon qualitative data, which may affect the generalisability of the findings. In addition, the lack of longitudinal data and the failure to study exterior factors in depth indicate there is a need for further research to better explain the dynamics that affect academic performance. Future studies ought to bring in various schools and varied data-collection methods, consequently widening the findings and giving a more subtle picture of teachers' contributions within an SMT.

On the whole, the study not only provides important insights into how teachers function within SMTs; it also illustrates the complexity of factors affecting academic achievement. It will be important for major actors in the field of education to address the proposals and recognize the limitations-especially as they strive towards creating educational environments where learners achieve good results. By enhancing SMT participation, seminars for teachers, and links with the local area, the education on this circuit can be improved markedly. This will, in turn, benefit learners' results.

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5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings presented in Chapter 4 regarding the impact of teachers in SMTs on enhancing learners' academic performance, there are several recommendations. First, schools should make a conscious effort to involve teachers in SMTs, consequently making the best use of their experiences and insights gained from the classroom. Fostering an inclusive environment where teachers have a say in decision-making ensures that policies and strategies are based on the realities of learner's needs. In addition, ongoing professional development is vital for equipping teachers with the skills needed to handle different kinds of learners. Schools should set up structured in-house training programs on innovative teaching methods, classroom management, and learner support strategies suited to the particular problems faced by teachers in the Dzondo Circuit.

Furthermore, it is crucial that schools form strong partnerships with parents and community leaders in order to create an environment that is supportive of learning. Schools need to develop initiatives for involving the community in their activities, nurturing a culture of collaboration between home and school, which is truly conducive for learners. This could encompass community workshops and mentorship programs, as well as regular communication between schools and families to help motivate the learners and improve performance. SMTs should also formulate clear academic targets and means of accountability to effectively supervise progress. This involves regular assessments of curriculum coverage and learner performance, for making timely interventions as necessary and using data-driven methods to pinpoint where improvements may be made while also highlighting success stories.

Promoting practices of teacher collaboration will bring uniform services and best practices in teaching together to improve learners' test scores. Schools should set up opportunities for regular meetings and collaborative planning among teachers where they can share their problems, pool resources, and develop unified approaches to teaching and learning. Also, recognition and reward for teachers' contributions are

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fundamental if the morale and motivation of teaching staff is to be maintained. Schools should introduce recognition and reward systems that recognise the efforts of teachers helping learners succeed, as well as to improve schools. These could involve prizes, public recognition during school ceremonies or even working opportunities as incentives for excellence.

Finally, schools should create data-driven decision-making processes to guide SMT strategies and interventions. By scrutinising learner performance data, SMTs can spot emerging trends, appraise how well their teaching procedures work, and make decisions that will directly affect learners' test results confidently. When these recommendations are followed, the position of teachers within SMTs will be greatly enhanced, as well as learners' academic performance in the Dzondo Circuit. By encouraging collaboration, providing professional development, and involving the community, schools can create a powerful, supportive environment for learning that caters for all children's diverse needs.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although this study has brought important insights into the impact of teachers in SMTs on enhancing learners' academic performance within the Dzondo Circuit, a number of limitations must be remembered. Firstly, this study was small in terms of participants, with only 30 participants from the 12 schools. This may not fully reflect the divergent views and experiences of all teachers and administrators in their district. Consequently, the conclusion that these findings can be validly transferred over anywhere else (Context transferability) is made doubtful. In addition, the use of semi-structured interviews may lead to bias because participants will give replies that are pleasing to themselves or their colleagues' feelings. Furthermore, this study is based to a great extent on qualitative data, which, because of its descriptive nature, may not be as all-inclusive in portraying the quantitative aspects of learner performance levels in detail. And the fact that the research doesn't look at all into the future means we cannot say what effect long-term participation of teachers in SMTs might have on learner results. Last of all, external factors such as family support, economic circumstances, and available school resources, any of these could play colossal roles

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in bringing learners' results down and were only touched upon within this report. This is, however, not enough to bring the facts out completely. The limitations above demonstrate that it would be useful for future research to probe deeply into the complex webs of relationships between enhancing learner academic productivity through effective SMTs, bringing in a wider range of schools, and fresh methodology.

5.6 AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

In future research, the emphasis should shift to broaden studies to cover a wider, more diverse range of schools and teachers. This more comprehensive approach enables one to better understand the relations between teachers within SMTs and learners' academic performance. Long-term studies of teachers' involvement in SMTs and their impact on learner performance will particularly reveal more insight. Investigating the links between external factors such as socio-economic status and community support can yield informative results about the sources of learner academic performance. Moreover, an assessment of the value of certain professional training programmes or collaborative practices among the SMTs might lead to valuable data on what is best practice in improving the level of teaching as well as raising learner achievements. Finally, qualitative research that takes in the perceptions of a broader range of stakeholders, including learners and parents, would deepen understanding about the educational environment and how it affects academic performance.

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPAL, DEPUTY PRINCIPAL AND DEPARTMENTAL HEAD

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

School name:…….

Name of Participant (optional):……...

Post held(e.g. teacher):……..

Student Name: Netshisumbewa T

Student No: 11584324

Title of the project: THE IMPACT OF TEACHERS IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM TO ENHANCE LEARNERS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF DZONDO CIRCUIT, VHEMBE DISTRICT

Questions :

1. Which role do teachers play in School Management Team?
    a. How do teachers contribute to decision-making processes within the School Management Team?
    b. What specific strategies or initiatives do teachers implement to support and enhance students' academic performance within the School Management Team?

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c. How do teachers collaborate with other members of the School Management Team to create a positive and supportive learning environment for students?
d. In what ways do teachers utilize data and assessment results to inform their decision-making and improve academic outcomes for students within the School Management Team?
e. What challenges do teachers face in their role within the School Management Team and how do they work to overcome them to support students' academic success?

2. What is the role of the School Management Team in enhancing learner academic performance?
   a. How does the School Management Team support academic performance improvement?
   b. What specific strategies do they employ to enhance learner achievement?
   c. Can you provide examples of successful interventions implemented by the School Management Team?
   d. In what ways do members of the School Management Team collaborate with teachers and learners to improve academic outcomes?
   e. How do external factors, such as community involvement or resources, influence the ability of the School Management Team to impact learner academic performance?

3. Which factors influence the academic performance of learners?
   a. What support systems have you found to be effective in improving academic performance?
   b. How do learners perceive the impact of home environment on their academic performance?
   c. Can you describe any experiences where mentorship has positively influenced a learner's academic performance?
   d. In your opinion, what role does motivation play in determining a learner's academic performance?
   e. Have you observed any differences in the influence of teaching methods on learners' academic performance?

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4. Which specific mechanisms and approaches can be employed by successful School Management Teams to influence the potential of their teachers?
    a. How do you believe the school leadership impacts teacher motivation and performance?
    b. What kind of support or resources do teachers find most useful from their management team?
    c. Can you describe a time when effective communication from the school management positively affected teaching practices?
    d. In your opinion, what attributes make for an impactful and supportive school management team in relation to teacher development?
    e. How important is collaboration between teachers and the school management team in shaping overall job satisfaction?

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ANNEXURE B: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, (*NETSHISUMBEWA TSAKARIA*), about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: _,
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (*Participant Letter of Information*) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerized system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

Full Name of Participant Date Time Signature

I, …… …… …… ……..

(*NETSHISUMBEWA TSAKARIA*) herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully

Informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Full Name of Researcher

…… Date…… Signature……

Full Name of Witness (If applicable)

…… Date …… Signature……..

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)

…… Date…… Signature……

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ANNEXURE C: LETTER OF INFORMATION

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study : The Impact Of Teachers In School Management Team To Enhance Learners' Academic Performance: A Case Of Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District

Principal Investigator/s/ researcher : (*Netshisumbewa Tsakaria, Bed. Hons Education Management*)

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s : (Prof T.S *Mashau and Dr M.G Muremela, qualifications*)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:

Teachers and school management teams (SMTs) both play essential roles in an effective education system. While teachers are responsible for imparting knowledge and shaping the academic performance of students, SMTs carry out administrative tasks to ensure a conducive learning environment. SMTs help create an atmosphere that supports teachers and enables them to perform their duties effectively. However, when teachers do not receive adequate support and resources, their ability to carry out their role effectively is compromised. This can negatively impact student academic performance, as well as overall educational outcomes. Therefore, SMTs must work closely with teachers to ensure that they have the necessary resources to perform their tasks effectively. Teachers are also an integral part of the SMT and contribute to school management and governance. They provide valuable input in decision-making processes, curriculum development, and learner welfare initiatives. Collaboration between teachers and SMTs can result in the implementation of innovative teaching methodologies and interventions tailored to address the diverse learning needs of students.
This study seeks to explore the extent to which the involvement of teachers in the School Management Team influences the academic performance of learners. By analyzing the current literature on this topic and conducting interviews with teachers and SMTs, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the role of teachers in school management and its effect on learner's performance.

Outline of the Procedures:

The participant will be required to answer semi-structured interview questions. The interview will be conducted at school premise where participants work. The participant will be asked to review participant information sheet and give consent at the beginning of the survey. If the participant wishes to not proceed with interview then they can easily stop participating. The questionnaire will comprise of twenty questions and should take about 5-10 minutes to complete. The first section will contain general questions such as their position in the school leadership.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant:

There are no possible disadvantages or risks to taking part in this research with the exception that you may become bored or experience some amount of fatigue. Should this occur, a rest break can be provided. It should also be noted that agreement to participate in the study does not affect participant's legal rights.

Benefits:
There will not be any direct benefits for participants. However the information captured will be used solely for academic / educational purposes. The findings of this study will be beneficial for various stakeholders, including teachers, school administrators, policymakers, and researchers. The study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing a

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comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between teachers and School Management Teams in enhancing Learner Academic Performance.

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study:
Participants can withdraw anytime during the interview without providing any reason. Data will not be used if participant withdraws from interview. Participants do not have to answer any questions they do not wish to.

Remuneration:
There will be no any sort of remuneration when participants take part in the study.

Costs of the Study:
Participants are not responsible for any cost towards this study.

Confidentiality:
I will keep all information confidential and undertake this through an agreement that I will sign with the participants and their organizations. Even the recordings that I will make during the interview will remain confidential

Research-related Injury:
No compensation will be given to participants should there be an adverse reaction, as this research has no risks to participants.

Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

(Prof T.S Mashau/ Dr G.M Muremela) Please contact the researcher (071 4565 484), my supervisor (tel no 015 962 9108.) or the University Research Ethics Committee Secretariat on 015 962 9058. Complaints can be reported to the Director: Research and Innovation, Prof GE Ekosse on 015 962 8313 or Georges Ivo.Ekosse@univen.ac.za

General:
Potential participants must be assured that participation is voluntary and the approximate number of participants to be included should be disclosed. A copy of the information letter should be issued to participants. The information letter and consent form must be translated and provided in the primary spoken language of the research population

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ANNEXURE D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:
Mr T Netshisumbewa

STUDENT NO:
11584324

PROJECT TITLE: The impact of teachers in school management team to enhance learner academic performance: case study of Dzondo circuit Vhembe District.

ETHICAL CLEARANCE NO: FHSSE/24/ES/02/1206

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Prof TS Mashau	UNIVEN, Educational Studies	Supervisor
Dr MG Muremela	UNIVEN, Educational Studies	Co-Supervisors
Mr T Netshisumbewa	UNIVEN, Educational Studies	Investigator – Student

Type: Masters Research
Risk: *Minimal risk to humans, animals, or environment (Category 2)*
Approval Period: June 2024 – June 2025

The Research Ethics Social Sciences Committee (RESSC) hereby approves your project as indicated above.

General Conditions
While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following.

- The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the REC:
  - Annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project.
  - Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
  - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the REC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date; a new application must be made to the REC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the REC retains the right to:
  - Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project,
  - To ask further questions; Seek additional information; Require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.
  - withdraw or postpone approval if:
  - Any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected.
  - It becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the REC or that information has been false or misrepresented.
  - The required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,
  - New institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions A it necessary

ISSUED BY:
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Date Considered: June 2024

Name of the RESSC Chairperson of the Committee: Prof M. Mwale-Manjoro

Signature.....

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ANNEXURE E: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

CONFIDENTIAL

Ref: 2/2/2 Enq: Makola MC Tel No: 015 290 9448 E-mail:MakolaMC@edu.limpopo.gov.za

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THOHOYANDOU
0950
netshisumbewas@gmail.com

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

1. The above bears reference.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct research has been approved. Topic of the research proposal: **"The Impact Of Teachers In School Management Team To Enhance Learners' Academic Performance: A Case Of Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District."**

3.The following conditions should be considered:

3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.

3.2 Arrangements should be made with the District or Circuit Office and the School concerned.

3.3 The conduct of research should not in anyhow disrupt the academic programs at the schools.

3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially the fourth term.

3.5 During the study, applicable research ethics should be adhered to; in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected).

3.6 Upon completion of research study, the researcher shall share the final product of the research with the Department.

Cnr 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X 9489, Polokwane, 0700
Tel:015 290 7600/ 7702 Fax 086 218 0560

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4 Furthermore, you are expected to produce this letter at Schools/ Offices where you intend conducting your research as an evidence that you are permitted to conduct the research.

5 The department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

Best wishes.

14/08/2024

Makola MC (Ph.D) **Date**

Director: Integrated Planning, Research & Reporting

14/08/2024

Mr. Molope NM **Date**

ACTING DDG: CORPORATE SERVICES

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ANNEXURE F: LIMPOPO PROVINCIAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

CONFIDENTIAL

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE PREMIER

Office of the Premier

Research and Development Directorate

Private Bag X9483, Polokwane, 0700, South Africa

Tel: (015) 230 9910, Email: mokobij@premier.limpopo.gov.za

LIMPOPO PROVINCIAL RESEARCH ETHICS

COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Review Date: 07 August 2024

Project Number: LPREC/46/2024: PG

Subject: The Impact Of Teachers In School Management Team To Enhance Learners' Academic Performance: A Case Of Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe West District

Researcher: Netshisumbewa T

Chairperson: Prof I Swarts

Swarts

Chairperson: Limpopo Provincial Research Ethics Committee

The Limpopo Provincial Research Ethics Committee (LPREC) is registered with National Health Research Council (NHREC) Registration Number **REC-111513-038.**

Note:

i. **This study is categorized as a Low Risk Level in accordance with risk level descriptors as enshrined in LPREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)**

ii. **Should there be any amendment to the approved research proposal; the researcher(s) must re-submit the proposal to the ethics committee for review prior data collection.**

iii. **The researcher(s) must provide annual reporting to the committee as well as the relevant department and also provide the department with the final report/thesis.**

iv. **The researchers will be required to make presentations of the study findings and recommendations at the Provincial Research Conference/Departmental Research Day.**

v. **The ethical clearance certificate is valid for 12 months. Should the need to extend the period for data collection arise then the researcher should renew the certificate through LPREC secretariat. PLEASE QUOTE THE PROJECT NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.**

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ANNEXURE G: PROPOSAL APPROVAL

CONFIDENTIAL

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE PREMIER

TO: Ms. MABOGO MG

FROM: PROF I SWARTS

CHAIRPERSON: LIMPOPO PROVINCIAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (LPREC)

REVIEW DATE: 07 AUGUST 2024

SUBJECT: THE IMPACT OF TEACHERS IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM TO ENHANCE LEARNERS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF DZONDO CIRCUIT, VHEMBE WEST DISTRICT

RESEARCHER: NETSHISUMBEWA T

Dear Colleague

The above researcher's research proposal served at the Limpopo Provincial Research Ethics Committee (LPREC). The committee is satisfied with the methodological and ethical soundness of the proposed study.

Decision: The proposal is granted full approval.

Regards

Chairperson: Prof I Swarts

Swarts

Secretariat: Ms. J Mokobi

Date: 12/08/2024

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ANNEXURE H: CIRCUIT PERMISSION

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
VHEMBE DISTRICT

DZONDO CIRCUIT
Confidential

30/08/2024

TO HOM IT MAY CONCERN

SUBJECT: CONFIRMATION OF YOUR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN DZONDO SCHOOLS IN RESPECT OF NETSHISUMBEWA T

This letter serves as a confirmation of your authorisation to conduct research project entitled " The impact of teachers in school management team to enhance learners' academic performance : A case of Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District".

You are kindly advised to observe the following stipulations:

-Your research should not temper with contact time.

-Observation of ethical considerations should be prioritized

We wish you all the best in your studies.

Regards

Date: 30/08/2024

Dzondo Circuit Manager (Dr LC Makhuvha)

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ANNEXURE I: CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

Ramaleba Editing Services
Editing for a better future

REG NO: 2022/872140/07

Date: 19 June 2025

CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

This letter confirms that I have rendered copy-editing and proofreading services to Mr T Netshisumbewa 's dissertation titled "The impact of teachers in School Management Team to enhance learners' academic performance: a case of Dzondo Circuit, Vhembe District".

I have edited and proofread mechanical errors such as spelling, punctuation, grammar and consistency. The copy-editing also includes ensuring the logical flow of text, clarity of expression, and reducing ambiguities and wordiness.

I am a member of the Professional Editors Guild and hereby confirm that I have upheld the editing and professional practice standards.

The content of the work edited remains that of the author.

Note : I am not accountable for any changes made to this document by the author or any other party subsequent to my edit.

Sincerely,

Professional EDITORS Guild 30+ Est 1993
Promoting excellence in editing

Mashudu Ramaleba
Full Member

Membership number: RAM004
Membership year: March 2025 to February 2026

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ANNEXURE J: TURNITIN REPORT

THE IMPACT OF TEACHERS IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM TO ENHANCE LEARNERS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE OF DZONDO CIRCUIT, VHEMBE DISTRICT

ORIGINALITY REPORT

12%	8%	5%	6%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to Liberty University Student Paper	<1%
2	Submitted to University of Pretoria Student Paper	<1%
3	mmcalumni.ca Internet Source	<1%
4	Submitted to University of South Africa (UNISA) Student Paper	<1%
5	Submitted to University of East London Student Paper	<1%
6	Nhat Truong Tran Minh. "chapter 11 Teacher Professional Development in Education 5.0", IGI Global, 2024 Publication	<1%
7	www.coursehero.com Internet Source	<1%

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