



University of Venda

**THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM IN IMPROVING THE
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS IN MALAMULELE NORTH-
EAST CIRCUIT, SOUTH AFRICA**

by

FOSTER YINGWANE

11633941

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UNIVERSITY OF VENDA**

SUPERVISOR: DR. A.R.O BESSONG

CO-SUPERVISOR: PROF. N.F LITSHANI

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DECLARATION

I, Yingwane Foster, hereby declare that: “**THE ROLE OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS IN IMPROVING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS IN MALAMULELE NORTH-EAST CIRCUIT, SOUTH AFRICA**” is my own work in design and execution, and that it has never been submitted for any examination or degree at this or any other university, and that all the reference material obtained within this study has been duly acknowledged by means of complete references.

Yingwane Foster
Name

23 February 2025
Date

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, the late Hlengani Elias Yingwane. Thank you for bringing me into this world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Initially, I would like to vehemently give honour and gratitude to God my Creator, for the divine protection of my life, wisdom, guidance and good health that empowered me to conduct this study. Furthermore, it is by the All-Mighty God's grace that I managed to complete my study. Thank you, God for the preservation against all odds.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the role of School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Despite STMs' roles, articulated in various policies, on learner academic performance, there are challenges facing SMTs in improving the academic performance of learners. The study employed the interpretive research paradigm, which also informed the use of the qualitative research methodology. Exploratory research design was used as a blueprint of the study. The population of the study included principals, deputy principals, departmental heads and teachers. To achieve the objectives of the study, purposive sampling method, as a non-probability sampling, was used to choose ten (10) participants, four (04) principals, two (02) deputy principals, two (02) departmental heads and two (02) teachers who were teaching Grade 12 learners. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews and thematically analysed. The findings revealed that SMTs must lead and manage teaching and learning by monitoring lessons, providing teaching and learning resources, and ensuring stakeholder collaboration. The findings also revealed challenges for SMTs' roles, such as inadequate knowledge of roles, lack of resources, lack of stakeholder collaboration as well as teacher and learner ill-discipline. Strategies to overcome these challenges were proposed. The study recommended that the Department of Education should provide continuous professional development to SMTs and provide adequate resources to all schools. The findings would contribute to the body of knowledge on the role of SMTs in improving learners' academic performance.

Key words: Academic performance, Educator, Management, Principal, School Management Team

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ATP	-	Annual Teaching Plan
BEDMED	-	Bachelor of Education Masters in Educational Management
BELA	-	Basic Education Laws Amendment Acts No. 32 of 2024
CAPS	-	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
DHA	-	Departmental Head for School A
DHB	-	Departmental Head for School B
DOE	-	Department of Education
DPA	-	Deputy Principal for School A
DPB	-	Deputy Principal for School B
EEA	-	Employment of Educators Act NO. 76 of 1998
LTSM	-	Learning and Teaching Support Material
MNEC	-	Malamulele North-East Circuit
NDP	-	National Development Plan
NEPA	-	National Education Policy Act NO. 27 of 1996
NPWSE	-	National Policy on Whole School Evaluation
OBE	-	Outcome Based Education
PA	-	Principal for School A
PB	-	Principal for School B

PC	-	Principal for School C
PD	-	Principal for School D
QP	-	Qualified Progression
R & R	-	Rationalisation and Redeployment
SACE	-	South African Council of Educators Act No. 31 of 2000
SASA	-	South African Schools Act NO. 76 of 1996
SATs	-	School Administration Teams
SCTs	-	School Committee Teams
SGB	-	School Governing Body
SIP	-	School Improvement Plan
SLTs	-	School Leadership Teams
SMTs	-	School Management Teams
STEP	-	Systematic Training for Effective Parenting
TA	-	Teacher for School A
TB	-	Teacher for School B
UNESCO	-	United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VDoe	-	Vhembe District of Education

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The study focuses on the role of School Management Teams (SMTs) in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. In the independent State of Samoa, the Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture (2023:5) indicated that School Management Team is a school-based management structure, which consists of the school principal, deputy principal(s), heads of departments and senior educators. In America, a paper written by Aiyar and Ebeke (2020:2) stated that the days when the progress of the nations could be judged by their military powers, economic powers, or by the splendour of their capital cities and public buildings, are over. As a result, in the future, the progress of nations will be weighed and based on the provision of opportunities for their vulnerable and disadvantaged children, as well as the exposure to equal quality of education they will offer (Aiyar & Ebeke, 2020:2). A quantitative study conducted in New York by Chen, Dorn, Sarakatsannis, and Wiesinger (2021:59) found that loss of teaching and learning time due to safety-related problems is a challenge facing SMTs, while a qualitative research conducted in South Africa by Meier and West (2020:5) found that the challenge facing SMTs in improving academic performance of learners is political conflict associated with multi-unionisation.

The South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996) (herein after referred to as SASA) Section 16 Subsection 3 states that subject to this Act and any applicable provincial law, the professional management of a public school must be undertaken by the principal under the authority of the Head of Department. According to Qobilovna (2023:38), of the United States of America the professional competencies of educators, building a sense of unity of purpose and appraising educators that they can make a difference, should be facilitated by the SMTs. This has led to the establishment of the SMTs, comprising of the principal, deputy principal, and heads of departments in schools (Luhailima, 2021:1), as in the context of South Africa.

The primary duty of the SMTs is to manage the curriculum and ensure that the process of preparing, coordinating, directing, and managing the work of educators is carried out using available resources to accomplish organisational objectives (Mbane & Machaba, 2021:43). This is according to the findings of a qualitative research method conducted in Germiston schools, at Ekurhuleni South District, Gauteng Province, South Africa.

In Turkey, SMT stresses learners' achievement at school, creates a positive atmosphere, monitors learners in terms of ethical values, and develops new strategies in teaching (Pekkölçay, 2021:231). While SMT in America is called School Leadership Team and its role is to develop and monitor the implementation of curriculum, dealing with staffing, behaviour management, budgeting and policy enforcement (Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins, 2020:78). However, according to Caldwell and Spinks (2021:64) in Australia, the role of School Leadership Team is to build strong relationship with parents, plan curriculum, hire and develop staff members, ensure safe learning environments and account to authorities. Though in Angola the role of SMT is to maintain order in schools, ensure proper compliance with curriculum, evaluate performance of teachers and monitor learners' attendance and their academic progress (Bartlett, Mendes, Dahmash, Palmeirim, Peliganga, Lufunda, Direito, Ramirez, Mwinzi, and Lopes, 2023:126). Yet according to Sehrawat and Roy (2021:96) in India, the School Management Committee as it is called, plays the role of conducting teacher-parent meetings, plan and monitor budget usage and oversee curriculum implementation, student discipline and appraisal.

In addition, the SMTs are responsible for quality teaching and learning at school (Chigona & Tunjera, 2022:34). However, this can only happen when the SMT is trained and inducted in their roles and functions. A qualitative research conducted in public schools of Cape Town by Chigona and Tunjera (2022:49) further attests that the SMTs should be aware of departmental policies and acts to enable them to perform their duties well and confidently. According to the Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture (2023:6), the functions of SMTs are the continuous professional development of staff members and to co-opt senior educators into the management teams of large schools.

In the area under investigation, the researcher noticed that the academic performance of Grade 12 learners was fluctuating yearly, as the schools in the area were performing

badly. This is supported by the fact that schools' results went up and down, and in certain schools the results were so low that some were classified as dysfunctional. In addition, the researcher observed that there are schools that are notorious for producing very low performances and eventually parents sent their children to schools far from their residential areas. The situation of poor academic performance in schools does not only occur in the area under investigation but also in some rural areas of Turkey, where Aydin and Kaya (2020:24) found that academic success of students in rural areas, which constitute 8.7% of the total population of Turkey, is poor and that is reflected by the annual performances.

Considering the above, the researcher decided to investigate the role of SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. In order to get actual data, the researcher conducted the study in the area mentioned that is the Malamulele North-East circuit. Qualitative research method was used to give the researcher an opportunity to interview the SMTs of the schools under investigation. The findings of the study determined the recommendations made by the researcher regarding the problem.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study was conducted to investigate SMTs' challenges in implementing their roles to eventually probe the solutions that can be used by SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners at Malamulele North-East circuit. The table below presents the Malamulele North-East Circuit Grade 12 performance, in percentage, for the past five years from 2020 to 2024.

Table 1.1: Malamulele North-East Circuit Grade 12 performance.

Year	Pass percentage
2020	85.4%
2021	76.9%
2022	71.3%
2023	81.7%

2024	83.5%
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However, the target of Malamulele North-East circuit for academic performance has been set at 90%, to meet the Vhembe East District target. The circuit has not achieved the district's target and performance depicted on the table above has made it one of the lowest among the five circuits in Vhembe East District. The academic performance of Grade 12 learners depends on the SMTs' ability to implement appropriate roles, supported by all other stakeholders, including parents, teachers and community structures (Michael & Mhando, 2024:334)

The above problem leads to school's reputation damage, and all the good academic performances that a school had achieved in the past becomes ruined. Secondly, resources, such as staff in the form of teachers, and learners, become strained as much is expected of them. Thirdly, the morale of teachers' decreases when their efforts do not produce the expected results. Finally, the learners' academic performance suffers, and this is shown by the annual year-end outcomes of schools (Clemente, 2022:69). Poor academic performance also prevents learners from progressing in their educational journey and future careers. In addition, learners may drop out of school and become societal burdens (Mokoena & Van Breda, 2021:72).

There are certain goals in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2063 which this study will be addressing, such as eliminate poverty and erase hunger (goals no, 1 and 2). High academic performance by Grade 12 learners opens doors for learners in universities, to further their studies and get/create jobs to eliminate poverty and also eradicate hunger, as they would afford to buy necessities for themselves. Secondly, this study provides recommendations for SMTs on what they should do to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners and implement such recommendations to address goals no. 4 and 8 of SDG 2063 which are provision of quality education and creation of decent work and economic growth, as learners attain academic excellence. That implies that SMTs provide quality education, which eventually creates decent work for the country and finally grow the economy (Halkos & Gkampoura, 2021:95).

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This section presents the aim and objectives of the study.

1.3.1 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to investigate the role of the School Management Team in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Malamulele North-East Circuit, South Africa and to recommend the strategies that can be used by SMTs to enhance the academic performance of learners in secondary schools.

1.3.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To realise the aim of this study, the following objectives were used to benchmark the study:

- To examine the roles of School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.
- To determine the challenges facing School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.
- To explore the strategies that the School Management Teams can use to improve academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following are the research questions for this study:

- What are the roles of School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?
- What are the challenges facing the School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?
- What can the School Management Teams use to improve academic performance of Grade 12 learners?

1.5 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

The researcher's interest in this study was motivated by the undesirable year-end results in schools of Malamulele North-East Circuit, which contribute to Limpopo poor provincial academic performance of learners (Whytken, Modise, & Percy, 2022:177). The researcher had also realised that - as one of the SMT members of a school - the role of SMTs is required, to understand, prior to the improvement of the academic performance of grade 12 learners. This study will benefit society's schools, through recommendations, as solutions in dealing with the challenges facing SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. The policy will also benefit from this study through evidence-based identified problems and recommendations. Finally, the scholarship will benefit from critical thoughts and extensive knowledge, to expand its knowledge. **The gap between literature and this study is that most of the earlier studies are based on principals, and the researcher in this study has extended to the other members of SMT, such as the deputy principals, departmental heads and educators.**

1.6 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is about the review of the literature relevant to this research topic. The review of literature includes; the historical background of SMT in secondary schools, the role of SMTs in academic performance, challenges facing SMTs in enhancing academic performance in schools, strategies used by SMTs to improve academic performance in schools, policy and legislative framework on academic performance and empirical evidence of academic performance in Malamulele cluster.

1.6.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SMTs IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

In the new South Africa, many challenges are emerging regarding school management. These challenges raise questions about how the academic performance of learners is managed. For example, the sense of uniqueness between Black and White South Africans powerfully contributes to different academic performances. The roots of individual contribution to the implementation of managerial skills affects the academic performance of learners (Caldwell & Spinks, 2021:42). Huang, Hochbein, & Simons

(2020:311) attest that the sense of uniqueness of Black and minority groups in influencing the attitude and concentration of learners in learning and management within schools.

According to the Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture (2023:1), SMTs were firmly introduced in 1996, as stated in the South African Schools Act of 1996. Clemente (2022:56) supports the above statement by stating that the SMTs ushered in the Outcome Basic Education System (OBE), to give assistance in the teaching and learning situation for better academic performance of learners.

South African schools are currently managed by SMTs. However, this has not always been the case historically. Rather, the management of schools used to be under principals, and school principals experienced strong opposition from educators, especially when SMTs tried to manage schools (Nthinya, 2021:24). The introduction of SMTs made the academic performance of learners improve, although principals handled learners with an iron hand. The principals were doing that without the support of educators (Huang, Hochbein, & Simons, 2020:313). SMTs were initially introduced to lead teamwork in schools, resolve challenges of teachers, learners and the entire staff. Secondly, SMTs were meant to put managerial skills into action, such as planning, organizing, leading, controlling and supporting teachers and learners, as well as for the assurance of accountability; holding the staff to account of their duties and themselves accounting to their superiors (Chigona & Tunjera, 2022:17).

1.6.2 THE ROLE OF SMTs IN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS

The SMTs' underlying basis is on giving leadership guidance and direction with regard to proper teaching and learning that finally yields good academic performance (Benoliel, 2021:47). Participation in the performance of learners by both educators and parents is therefore a cornerstone of good SMTs. It requires that all means must be used to include all stakeholders in school committees, so that decision-making is balanced and inclusive (Heystek & Emekako, 2020:35). Quality results are achieved in a well-managed school. They strive for ongoing academic improvement, where SMTs ensure quality resources are provided to support teaching and learning (Schlebusch & Schlebusch, 2022:7). All staff meeting decisions taken and enforced must be done in a transparent manner and

follow rules and regulations. Furthermore, this means all information in schools must be freely available and accessible to parents, students, teachers, and all other stakeholders who are affected by the decisions made (Schlebusch, 2020:62).

School performance lies on the capacity of the SMT to devise the teaching and learning materials needed to ensure the attainment of desired performance (Maphalala, Govender & Khumalo, 2023:8). Effective school management requires that schools must respond to serve the teaching and learning needs of learners and educators in an efficient and effective manner (Heystek & Emekako, 2020:38). Effective school management is reflected in the level of consensus that is achieved amongst the decision makers in the school setting (Schlebusch & Schlebusch, 2022:9). Optimum use of human, financial and material resources is an important dimension of quality academic performance, meaning that needs of the school including all stakeholders must be met in ways that ensure the best use of resources available, both material and human (Schlebusch, 2020:66).

Accountability must also be practiced in all decisions taken and effectively implemented, especially in the management and use of all human, financial, and other resources, regardless of their sources. This should be done in a simple way, that everyone should account to their senior (Maphalala *et al*, 2023:9). Educators' quality of education and areas of specialisations should be carefully planned to ensure desired academic performance in a school (Benoliel, 2021:50).

1.6.3 CHALLENGES FACING SMTs IN ENHANCING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOLS.

Bush (2022:533) states that COVID 19 pandemic became a challenge for the SMTs because it produced many uninterested learners in studies. This is because they were locked up at homes and forgot about learning due to fear of the Covid-19 global pandemic. Therefore, SMTs had to deal with fear in learners and, at the same time, teaching learners for desired academic performance. Leaders in the SMTs find themselves unaware of their roles and what is expected of them. This lack of knowledge derails them from delivering what is required of them in schools (Grogan, 2023:2). Buthelezi (2019:14) added that if an educator often displays ill-discipline, when it comes to punctuality, educators will not

manage to discipline learners if they are found to be late.

According to Mulford (2003:3), lack of professional development of school leaders is a challenge for leaders in enhancing academic performance of learners. Moreover, SMTs require much development to run schools successfully and improve the academic performance of learners. Therefore, it is the responsibility of SMTs themselves and the employer to initiate development of school leaders.

Some learners live in families that make it difficult for them to become effective learners at school. Therefore, negative home environment shifts the focus of learners from proper schooling and start to be problem solvers of circumstances at their homes, to the extent that when such learners see leaders of a school, they see their peer or adult equal (Liu, Peng, and Luo, 2020:65). Eventually, the academic performance of such learners is highly affected.

1.6.4 THE IMPLICATIONS OF POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOLS

The implications of poor academic performance **are** learners' lack of respect and discipline towards elders in society and ultimate failure. This is **because** their future would be corrupted (Ogbu & Simons, 2022:26). Ogbu and Simons (2022:27) further outlined the implications of poor academic performance in schools as follows: learners may become drop-outs, resort to drug abuse and crime, learners may become a burden at home by also becoming more dependent on their parents, dodge class periods, bully each other, and there may be high rate of unemployment and socio-economic problems would rise. Pascoe, Hetrick, and Parker (2020:108) mentioned that there may be high levels of teenage pregnancy; many learners may finally fail to speak the English language fluently and not further their studies into tertiary level.

From the implications above, eventually more young people would lose and forage knowledge and skills and that may result into lack of people with enough skills and knowledge to develop the country. According to Pascoe, Hetrick, and Parker (2020:110) schools may become uncontrollable and dysfunctional.

1.6.5 POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

The South African School Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996), gives power to the School Governing Body (SGB) of every school to develop the school code of conduct. The school code of conduct entails the school rules that specifically govern the learners within the school system. After the SGB has developed school code of conduct, it lies upon the SMTs to implement the code of conduct. The level in which the SMTs implement the code of conduct determines the academic performance of learners at the end of each year. The school code of conduct also constitutes the level of punishment that should be executed to any learner who defies the code of conduct. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, stipulates that the school code of conduct has been given to the SGBs which births school rules which should be obeyed by the school learners.

The South African Council for Educators Act, 2000 (Act No. 31 of 2000) provides educators with a code of professional ethics which safeguards and restores dignity into the teaching profession. Educators, as members of the South African Council for Educators (SACE), should restore the value of teaching and learning to the learners, for the exhibition of better academic performance of learners. SACE Act No. 31 Of 2000. It requires SMTs to watch over educators on the ground for its effectiveness. Educators should -in accordance with their registration with SACE- embrace the total moral and behaviour that would protect teaching profession in assisting learners, as their children, in a manner that would bring change to the academic performance of learners in South Africa. This should contribute to resolving challenges facing academic performance of learners in South Africa.

1.7 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY TO KNOWLEDGE

This study will add to the knowledge of education with enough information on the roles of SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners, as our Limpopo Province end-of-year results are poor. The SMTs will be equipped and not run out of options to better their individual schools' results. Schools might begin to produce desired results that may leave parents' attention divided as they might be in a dilemma of where

to take their children, as schools might be competing with results because of the knowledge that will be contributed by this study.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study findings will also benefit the Ministry of Education in dispatching more authority to the SMTs, to enhance the academic performance of the Grade 12 learners. Secondly, the districts and circuits will gain progressive strategies **about** empowering the SMT, specifically for better academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Thirdly, educators and learners will be energised by the effectiveness and enthusiasm of SMTs. Fourthly, parents and the community will regain trust in the SMT and therefore willingly release their children to school, knowing that they are sending their children to well-equipped educators. Finally, this study will benefit the body of knowledge for the Department of Education by increasing the literature.

1.9 DEFINITION OF TERMS

The researcher provides definitions for some of the concepts used in this study, for clarification. The concepts are arranged chronologically, and they are as follows:

1.9.1 ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

According to Singh (2021:3), academic performance is the outcome that indicates one's accomplishment specifically in a school environment. Academic performance is a net result of the cognitive and non-cognitive attributes of a learner (Liem, 2019:1). In this study, academic performance refers to an outcome that a learner receives after undergoing through lessons.

1.9.2 EDUCATOR

The South African School Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996) defines an educator or a teacher as a person who teaches and equips other persons in any schooling environment. Muna and Kalam (2021:1) define an educator as one who transforms learners with knowledge. The term educator, in this study, refers to a person who has gone through the process of

teaching profession acquiring skills to impart knowledge, skills, and abilities to others in the selected schools.

1.9.3 LEARNER

According to Gul (2022:12), a learner is someone who is taught something and trained a skill by an educator. Barthakur, Dawson and Kovanovic (2023:2) define a learner as one who goes through cognitive and behavioural changes. This study defines a learner as anyone in a position to receive information in the selected schools.

1.9.4 PRINCIPAL

The South African School Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996) defines a principal as an educator appointed or acting as a head of the school. Kadariah (2020:1) defines a principal as a strategist who plans, organizes, and controls school programs to improve the quality of education. In this study, the principal is the number one person in school management in responsibility and accountability at the selected schools.

1.9.5 SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM

According to Madimetsa and Mataboge (2021:19), School Management Teams are structures with the basic function of giving leadership guidance, direction, and assistance in the teaching and learning environment. School Management Teams (SMTs) refer to groups of leaders that guide and direct teaching and learning which finally yields good performance (Mathipa, 2016: 367). SMTs, in this study, refer to teams that monitor the curriculum between educators and learners in a school environment.

1.10 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

This research project is divided into five chapters, which are as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction and Background of the Study

This chapter presents the introduction and background of the study, problem statement, aim and objectives of the study, research questions, justification of the study, preliminary

literature review, contribution of the study to knowledge, significance of the study and definition of terms.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The chapter reviews the literature which was relevant to the roles of School Management Team in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter presents the research paradigm, design and method that the researcher used in conducting the study, and includes the following: population of the study, sampling method and procedure, data collection and data analysis and research ethics.

Chapter Four: Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

In this chapter, the researcher presented the information that was collected through interviews. The analysis of information collected through interviews are presented in a narrative form.

Chapter Five: Summary, Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher presented the summary and the findings of the study. The recommendations of the study and recommendations for future research studies are discussed, as well as the conclusion of the study.

1.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the study about the roles of SMTs in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Malamulele North-East Circuit, South Africa. Amongst other things, this chapter presented the introduction and background of the study, problem statement, aim and objectives of the study, research questions, justification of the study, preliminary literature review, contribution of the study to knowledge, significance of the study, delimitation of the study, limitation of the study and definition of terms. The next chapter deals with a review of the literature relevant to the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to investigate the role of School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. This chapter focusses on the overview of literature relevant to this study. In this chapter, the researcher details the contributions made by different authors concerning the role of School Management Teams (SMTs) in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners. The review includes the following: the role of SMTs in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners, the challenges facing SMTs in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners; the implications of poor academic performance in schools, and strategies to be used by SMTs in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners. This chapter also includes aspects such as the historical background of SMTs in secondary schools, effects of apartheid on SMTs, curriculum and learners' academic performance, and policy and legislative framework on academic performance.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Kivunja (2018:44) defines a theory as a set of interrelated concepts and definitions that present a systematic view of a fact. Similarly, Gabriel (2008:24) states that a theory is a generalised statement of ideas that explain and predict connections among several facts. This study used the Instructional Leadership Theory, developed by Hallinger & Murthy, (1986:1). This theory emerged with a focus on the principal as a head of the SMT in schools and aims to address leadership as a two-dimensional concept that deals with leadership function and leadership process. David (2019:3) supports instructional leadership by breaking it into two different concepts, which are narrow and broad. The narrow concept states that the theory deals directly with the process of teaching and learning in the classroom, while the broad concept deals indirectly with learning, such as culture and discipline of the school. The two concepts enable the SMTs to produce satisfactory results if thoroughly utilized. Sanchez and Watson (2021:60) also support instructional leadership theory; by articulating that, school principals should provide

supervision and evaluation of SMTs, educators and learners for better academic performance.

Instructional Leadership Theory is a process of guiding and encouraging educators along the path towards greater professional effectiveness (Kwan, 2020:340). The characteristics of instructional leadership theory are an instructional leader focusses on developing curriculum and staff, monitoring and supporting the subordinates and building teamwork for multifaceted activities that need cooperation of subordinates (Hallinger, Gümüş, & Bellibaş, 2020:162). Shaked (2024:577) states that, instructional leadership holds SMTs accountable for the academic performance of learners, hence principals as instructional leaders of SMTs should equip and empower members of SMTs with leadership skills.

2.2.1 THE RELEVANCE OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORY IN THE STUDY

The relevance of instructional leadership theory in this study is that the theory inspires SMTs to take ownership of the school's vision, share common goals and objectives of the school (Masoge & Mataboge, 2021:95). The theory is also relevant in this study because it dwells on efficient teaching and learning as well as on the conduct of educators in working with learners to enhance their academic performance.

2.2.2 DISCUSSION OF ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORY

The advantages of instructional leadership theory are as follows, firstly, it improves achievement of learners, in the sense that SMTs through departmental heads, it shares their subjects' performance targets with learners, and learners, in turn, become aware of what is expected from them and become more committed. Secondly, instructional leadership develops teachers and SMTs through the principal's guidance, thus, providing opportunities for SMTs to share their experiences of tested strategies and pedagogy in delivering quality curriculum content. Thirdly, instructional leadership collaborates teachers' ideas through SMTs into participative decision-making towards improving

academic performance of learners, this also boosts the morale of teachers to see their ideas put into action by SMTs (Kwan, 2020:19).

However, there are also disadvantages to the Instructional Leadership Theory in the school context. According to Kwan (2020:36) the word instructional on its own is disadvantageous to SMTs that were professionally trained to work as a team, as the theory laid its basis on giving instructions, bearing in mind that instructions are meant to be obeyed and not the other way round. In addition, an instructional leader is perceived as unquestionable and that further poses a challenge to SMTs because subordinates may work under pressure and that directly affects academic performance of learners.

2.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SMTs AND LEARNER PERFORMANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Apartheid is the racial segregation practiced by Whites on 'Blacks' in South Africa. Blacks or Africans received harsh treatment than the other races, one of the apartheid laws was the Bantu Education Act of 1953 (Hutchinson, 2021:63). According to this Act Education for Blacks was designed to teach Black men and women how to read and write, while children of the Whites received better education and advanced opportunities (Berg & Gustafsson, 2019:11). It was the deliberate policy of apartheid to provide the then school leaders and learners only with as much education as would enable them to be good and obedient workers, and nothing more (Adeniyi, Hamad, Adewusi & Unachuku, 2023:751).

This objective was almost impossible to achieve because literacy alone can open up a world of information and grounds for protest. Bantu Education posed serious problems for policy-makers and caused many complications **into** academic performance of learners (Muyambi, 2024:74). Bantu Education was offered to learners in the region here considered, under the 1953 Bantu Education Act (Muyambi, 2024:76).

In the new South Africa, many challenges are emerging regarding school management and these raise questions about how the academic performance of learners is managed. For example, the sense of uniqueness between Black and White South Africans is powerfully contributing to different academic performances. The roots of individual contribution to the implementation of managerial skills affect the academic performance

of learners, (Caldwell & Spinks, 2021:42). Huang, Hochbein and Simons (2020:311) attest that the sense of uniqueness of Black and minority groups strongly influences the attitude and concentration (as Blacks did not have adequate teaching and learning materials, while Whites were privileged) of learners to teaching and of leaders in management within schools.

According to the Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture (2023:1), SMTs were firmly introduced in 1996 as stated in the South African Schools Act of 1996. Caldwell and Spinks (2021:44) support the above statement by stating that the SMTs played a role in the implementation of the Outcome-Based Education System (OBE) to give assistance in the teaching and learning situation for better academic performance of learners. South African schools are currently managed by SMTs. However, this has not always been the case, historically (Adeniyi *et al*, 2023:753). In the past, the management of schools was the responsibility of principals, and school principals experienced a high level of opposition from educators, because of solo leadership, which excluded teachers at that time (Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture, 2023:3).

The introduction of SMTs led to improved academic performance of learners (Huang, Hochbein, and Simons, 2020:313). This may be because the SMTs mentored teachers on implementing learner-centred pedagogy. SMTs were initially introduced to lead teamwork in schools, resolve challenges of teachers, learners and the entire staff. Secondly, SMTs were meant to put managerial skills into action, such as planning, organizing, leading, controlling and supporting teachers and learners. In addition, the introduction of SMTs brought with it accountability: holding the staff to account for their duties and SMTs account to their superiors (Caldwell & Spinks, 2021:47).

According to a study conducted in United States (US) by Day, Sammons and Gorgen (2020:17) School Leadership Teams (SLTs) as they are called in United States has as main role the improvement of learner academic performance. SLTs also set the vision and goals for teachers and learners, allocate resources for teaching and learning, monitor curriculum, as well as analyse academic performance for informed development of School Improvement Plan (SIP).

In Ghana, SMTs are School Management Committees (SMCs) and they govern schools towards academic performance, implement policies in a manner that suits their school circumstances, manage resources for teachers and learners, engage community in the academic performance of learners and support staff members to improve academic performance (Shibuya, 2020:102).

2.4 EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

This section of the study deals with findings of previous studies relating to SMTs role in improving learner academic performance. The section covers aspects in line with the objectives of this study which are, to examine the role of SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners, to determine the challenges facing SMTs in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners and to explore the strategies used by SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

2.4.1 THE ROLE OF SMTs IN IMPROVING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS

SMTs perform different roles in improving academic performance of learners. Those discussed in this section **are** effective leadership and management, provision of resources and discipline and school culture and curriculum management and monitoring.

2.4.1.1 Effective leadership and management

The SMT's underlying basis is giving leadership guidance and direction about proper teaching and learning that finally yields good academic performance (Caldwell & Spinks, 2021:49). Participation in the performance of learners by both educators and parents is a cornerstone of effective SMTs. This requires that necessary measures are taken for stakeholder participation in decision-making for effective teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture, 2023:4). Quality results are achieved in a well-managed school where SMTs ensure quality resources are provided to support teaching and learning for desired academic performance (Zhou, Wu, Zhou & Li, 2020:505).

Effective leadership lies in clear directions and communication. SMTs ensure that decisions taken during school meetings are communicated to all stakeholders and make

efforts for transparency in implementing rules and regulations. This also means that all information in schools must be freely available and accessible to parents, students, teachers, and all other stakeholders who are affected by the decisions made (Mandasari & Aminatun, 2020:244). Desirable school performance lies in the capacity of the SMT to communicate the proper use of teaching and learning materials available to ensure the attainment of better school performance (Caldwell & Spinks, 2021:49). Good school management is reflected in the level of consensus that is achieved amongst the decision-makers in the school setting (Hofer, Nistor & Scheibenzuber, 2021:104).

2.4.1.2 Provision of resources

Good school management requires that schools must promptly respond to the teaching and learning needs (human, financial and material resources) of learners and educators (Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture, 2023:5). Optimum use of these resources is an important requisite for quality academic performance. The SMTs also ensure that those to use these resources are capacitated (Mkomi & Mzokwana, 2024:403). This enables the SMTs to allocate subject areas to educators according to their expertise or areas of specialisations. Thus, SMTs increase the possibility of satisfactory learner academic performance (Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture, 2023:8).

2.4.1.3 Discipline and school culture

As part of its role, SMTs develop and maintain the culture of a school, which reflects the society it serves. Aspects such as learner discipline, respect and trust emanate from a positive school culture (Yoosefi Lebni *et al*, 2020:36). In a school with high standards of discipline learners are likely to develop good study habits and positive competitive spirit in obtaining higher grades in their subjects. Similarly, educators may compete to produce high achievers in their subjects (Mkomi & Mzokwana, 2024:406).

2.4.1.4 Curriculum management and monitoring

SMTs ensure the monitoring of the curriculum. As a point of departure, SMTs ensure educators understand the use of curriculum related policy documents. For example, the Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) and Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS).

The ATPs tabulate content to be covered on weekly basis. Each subject has its ATP. Then Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) deals with expectation of learner activities per week (Hofer, Nistor & Scheibenzuber, 2021:106). SMTs come up with tools to monitor the curriculum coverage as per APT in line with its corresponding CAPS content. SMTs assess educators' curriculum coverage, perform class visits and provide guidance where educators are lacking. SMTs also furnish educators with monitoring reports (Mandasari & Aminatun, 2020:247). These reports assist educators in reflecting on their pace and the general performance in order to improve where necessary. If an educator is behind with curriculum coverage, then an SMT recommends and ensures the provision of a recovery plan that contains due dates of recovered content and monitoring (Zhou, Wu, Zhou & Li, 2020:506).

The above literature clearly shows that provision of effective leadership guidance, communication, collective decision-making, resource allocation and positive school culture are roles that contribute to effective teaching and learning for desired learner academic performance. The similarities between US, South Africa and Ghana's school management are that they allocate resources (human, material and finances), manage teaching and learning to improve academic performance. However, Ghana differs from US and SA in that, SMTs also provides instructional leadership. Furthermore, its SMCs also govern schools.

2.4.2 THE CHALLENGES FACING SMTs IN IMPROVING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS

SMTs encounter different challenges in performing their roles. The ones discussed in this section are as follows: lack of knowledge of SMTs' roles, ill-discipline, and lack of resources and poor stakeholder involvement.

2.4.2.1 Lack of knowledge of SMTs' roles

SMTs' roles are stipulated in policy documents such as the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) (Benoliel, 2021:423). The Department of Education endeavours to train SMTs to perform their roles effectively. This notwithstanding SMTs experience challenges in performing these roles. According to Grogan (2023:2) SMTs lack knowledge of their

roles and what is expected of them. This lack of knowledge derails them from delivering what is required of them in schools. According to Popova, Evans, Breeding, and Arancibia (2022:110), lack of professional development of school leaders is a challenge with regards to leaders enhancing academic performance of learners, moreover, SMTs require much development to run schools successfully and improve academic performance of learners. It is the responsibility of SMTs themselves and the employer to initiate development of school leaders.

2.4.2.2 Indiscipline

Bush (2022:533) states that unforeseen circumstances like the COVID 19 pandemic and others become a challenge **to SMTs** because they produce many uninterested learners, since such pandemics come up with harsh measures that make learners forget about learning due to fear. Consequences of such come upon SMTs to deal with and, at the same time teach learners for desired academic performance.

Vurayai and Muchuweni (2024:96) state that lack of discipline by teachers eventually affects the SMTs to improve the academic performance of learners, especially learners in Grade 12. Vurayai and Muchuweni (2024:96) explain that if a teacher is often ill-discipline (for instance, always late), **that educator** disturbs the SMTs role of proper management and such an educator cannot discipline learners because it is only easy to discipline a learner along a path that you as a teacher can also travel through. Buthelezi (2019:14) backs up the information above by stating that educator ill-discipline is a challenge to SMTs in performing leadership roles among SMTs.

Ill-discipline on the part of learners manifests in different ways. For example, the switch of learners' interest from academic work to sexual activities, eventually leads to learner absences. Most learners possess low levels of sexual knowledge or insufficient knowledge of sex education. Nonetheless, teenagers show much interest in sex, resulting in a high rate of teenage pregnancies in rural schools of South Africa (Barron, Subedar, Letsoko, Makua & Pillay, 2022:254). This becomes challenging to SMTs, as these learners eventually skip school days due to the pregnancy. The consequence is poor academic performance. Another possible cause for learner ill-discipline is **that** some

learners live in unstable families (such as child-headed families), that make it difficult for them to become effective learners at school (Yoosefi Lebni *et al*, 2020:39). Therefore, a negative home environment shifts the focus of learners from proper schooling to being problem solvers of circumstances at their homes. This happens, to an extent that when such learners see leaders of a school, they **consider their** peers or adults as equal to them, with high chances of such learners being disrespectful to school authority (Liu, Peng, & Luo, 2020:65).

Furthermore, urban schools have their own problems, such as high levels of violence, which becomes a challenge to the SMTs, as they **must** deal more with learner behaviour, than with managing curriculum implementation, for better academic performance (Ramasimu, 2023:51). SMTs find learners' attitude a challenge in improving academic performance. An attitude in the context of this study is a learner's point of view about a situation; it is a way of thinking and an inward feeling expressed by outward behaviour of a learner towards academic performance. A negative attitude has serious implications of low academic performance (Iqbal, Farida and Win, 2023:93). Attitudes are formed as a result of some kind of experiences that learners go through either at home or in the classroom (Mutya, Terana, Presbitero & Alcantara, 2023:461).

In addition to the above, Mutya *et al* (2023:465) have identified three groups of factors that play a vital role in influencing student attitudes, which consequently becomes a challenge to SMTs. Some factors are associated with the learners **themselves**, for example, low academic performance in learning areas, anxiety, self-concept, and lack of motivation. Factors associated with school experiences include shortage of learning materials, poor classroom management and attitudes towards specialised subjects. Factors associated with home environment and society include educational background of a community and parental expectations. SMTs face these factors as challenges that they should deal with, in order to improve the academic performance of learners with negative attitude.

2.4.2.3 Lack of resources

Lack of resources is a challenge for SMTs, and this can be attributed to **several** factors, including lower parental income. Parental contribution is needed to support SMTs in improving the academic performance of learners, as some parents in rural areas cannot afford to buy extra resources, such as study guides, for their children (Matlakala *et al*, 2024:7). Moreover, poorer school infrastructure, facilities and **poorly trained** human resources pose a serious challenge to SMTs (Mabena, Mokgosi, & Ramapela, 2021:23). Parents do not perceive SMTs to be warm, inviting, and open to diversity and welcoming of their heritage and culture. There is no positive development of resources in schools (Memela & Ramrathan, 2022:2). Variances between urban and rural schools are discernible. SMTs of rural schools have limited resources. Some learners **must** undertake longer and more difficult journeys to reach schools. Such learners have difficulties for the SMTs, in terms of being late to school, as residential areas are too far away from the schools (Matlakala *et al*, 2024:9). Teachers in rural schools experience uneasiness, expense, and separation from their families and eventually absent themselves from work. Consequently, SMTs find it hard to execute their roles as teachers are sometimes not available at work (Memela & Ramrathan, 2022:2).

2.4.2.4 Poor stakeholder involvement

Parents' educational level contributes to the extent to which they get involved in their children's schooling (Azorin & Ainscow, 2020:61). Low levels of education limit parents' participation in academic performance of their children. In addition, when parents perceive a school as not having solid curriculum management ethics and of no sound instruction, they are not likely to send their children to such a school (Mabena *et al*, 2021:94). If parents see a loophole of accountability in SMTs, they are likely not to trust such an SMT to produce effective academic performance of their children (Yang, Chen, Wang & Li :2023:26).

2.4.2.5 Legislative amendments

Legislative amendments also make a difference and can pose challenges to already grounded state of SMTs within education systems (Kohler, 2022:17). The change of

policies, such as, the Curriculum 2005 (intended to be effected in 2005) which became known as Outcomes-based Education (OBE) was introduced in 1998, then revised in 2000 and became National Curriculum Statement (NSC). The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) put in place in 2004, and Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS) introduced in 2012 can negatively affect the already established conduct and culture established by SMTs for academic performance of learners (Whittington, 2023:462).

The School Administrative Teams (SATs) in Turkey face challenges such as heavy workload and multitasking, the SATs have multiple tasks which include resolving learners' academic challenges, overseeing curriculum implementation and administrative tasks. All of the above are to be properly handled for SATs to deliver satisfactory academic performance of learners. SATs also face challenges of limited resources (human and material), especially in rural areas of Turkey and this constrains academic performance of learners. SATs face centralized decision-making as a challenge, because the majority of school decision approvals depend on high -level government officials (Tintore, Cunha, Cabral & Alves, 2022:539).

According to Ngwenya (2020:163), in Zimbabwe, the School Management Teams face challenges such as limited resources, especially in rural areas, specifically finances, infrastructure, teaching and learning materials. In addition, in Zimbabwe, overcrowded classrooms are a big challenge, and such demoralises teachers.

To sum up on challenges, the lack of leadership and management knowledge, negative school culture, poor performance and lack of social knowledge, and limited resources hinder SMTs' roles in improving academic performance of learners. This is concurred by qualitative literature findings from Turkey and Zimbabwe (Kohler, 2022:19). Rural areas of Turkey, South Africa and Zimbabwe face common challenge on scarcity of resources in improving academic performance of learners (Whittington, 2023:467). However, each of these countries has its own unique challenges. In Zimbabwe one of the most agitating challenges is classroom overcrowding, whereas in South Africa it is a negative school

culture, while in Turkey, centralised decision-making of SATs is one of the outstanding challenges.

2.4.3 THE IMPLICATIONS OF POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOLS

Poor academic performance may result in ill-discipline, bullying and lack of respect towards elders in society (Ogbu & Simons, 2022:26). Learners with poor academic performance would likely drop out of school, abuse drugs, and become pregnant (Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker 2020:108). Such learners may remain unemployed, depend on their families for support, and engage in crime and other socio-economic problems (Ogbu & Simons, 2022:27).

A negative school culture is an implication of SMTs' failure to implement their roles. Such may lead to extremely negative traits like violence and extortion within schools, particularly in countries like the United States of America (Whittington, 2023:466). One should not, however, think that South Africa is free of such things, as evidenced by South African Broadcasting Corporation's television series such as 'Tjovijo' and 'Yizo Yizo'. One of the worst things that can happen to a school is having a reputation as a place where drugs and weapons exist. This creates an atmosphere that frightens teachers, learners, and even SMTs themselves (Chigona & Tunjera, 2022:28). A negative school culture reduces the degree of support from parents and community stakeholders. As a result, teachers become discouraged and lose enthusiasm for their learners if SMTs fail to strengthen positive school culture (Mkomi & Mzokwana, 2024:408).

In a study of three schools conducted in Mkhuhlu, a part of Mpumalanga Province, a few kilometres from the ones being studied in the present study, Mabena, Mokgosi and Ramapela, (2021:69) found that poor implementation of SMT roles resulted in a blaming tendency among stakeholders (circuit managers, SMTs, teachers, parents and learners).

From the implications of poor SMT functionality above, schools may become uncontrollable and dysfunctional (Pascoe *et al.*, 2020:110). Many young people would fail to acquire knowledge and skills, culminating in human capital shortages to develop the country.

2.4.4 THE STRATEGIES BY SMTs IN IMPROVING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS

The academic performance of learners lies on SMTs. SMTs make use of different strategies to improve learner academic performance. This section presents strategies such as curriculum monitoring, provision of resources, stakeholder collaboration, teacher support, and school discipline.

2.4.4.1 Curriculum management and monitoring

SMTs also monitor the curriculum. As a point of departure, SMTs should ensure that educators understand the use of curriculum-related policy documents. For example, the ATPs and CAPS. SMTs should therefore come up with the tools to monitor curriculum coverage as per ATPs in line with its CAPS content. SMTs should assess educators' curriculum coverage, perform class visits and provide guidance where educators are lacking. SMTs should also furnish educators with monitoring reports. Such reports should assist educators to reflect on their pace and general performance to improve where necessary. If an educator is behind with curriculum coverage, then SMTs should recommend and provide a recovery plan that contains due dates of recovered content and monitoring (Maphalala *et al*, 2023:84).

In addition to monitoring the curriculum, SMTs provide resources and a conducive learning and teaching environment. The school principal, as an instructional leader should take responsibility for any failure of teaching and learning in his or her school. Thus, school principals should ensure a conducive, harmonious, and productive environment that allows teachers and learners to smoothly work towards academic performance. The above is attainable if SMTs resolve teachers' professional and learners' academic problems (Kwalipu & Isaacs, 2022:18). According to Maponya (2020:29) school environment that is not conducive to teaching and learning is likely to produce poor learner academic performance. SMCs in India improve school infrastructure to provide conducive teaching and learning environment toward the academic performance of the learners (Muralidharan & Singh, 2020:47). So SMTs should strive for a positive schooling environment to improve learners' academic performance. (Provision of appropriate teaching & learning environment) (Maphalala *et al*, 2023:86)

2.4.4.2 Provision of resources

Teachers should be given support by the SMTs, by providing adequate qualified teachers, as well as study guides that will assist them in the teaching process (Suttles, 2024:49). Teachers should also be supported through the provision of internal workshops within the school led by departmental heads as part of SMTs. In India, SMCs take their teachers through professional training and development specifically towards the academic performance of learners. In so doing, they put their School Improvement Plans (SIP) into action (Muralidharan & Singh, 2020:47). Internal workshops keep teachers abreast with the current pedagogy and methodologies of curriculum implementation. This empowers teachers with curriculum expectations leading to quality academic performance (Suttles, 2024:49). The School Leadership Teams (SLTs) in Australia improves the academic performance of learners by putting SIP into action as well as developing their teachers professionally. In addition, Australian SLTs ensure learner engagement during the lessons by making lessons learner-centred instead of teacher-centred (Hutchinson, 2021:71).

SMTs should ensure that only qualified and well-informed teachers can teach learners. (National Development Plan, 2024:7). By aligning teachers' tasks with their expertise, teachers would be creative and perform at their best. Moreover, SMTs should ensure that teachers identify under-performing learners, profile them, and assist in resolving problems regarding the poor academic performance of underachieving learners (Suttles, 2024:51). This may be realised by facilitating extra-hours or lessons for these learners (National Development Plan, 2024:7).

2.4.4.3 Discipline

SMTs should uphold school discipline by enforcing obedience and adherence to the code of conduct. In addition, SMTs should exercise fairness in correcting ill-disciplined learners. For example, in suspending ill-discipline learners who commit serious misconduct, such as bringing weapons to school (Broer, Wolhuter, Mampane & Mollo, 2023:3). SMTs should also guide learners in transferring their school experience of adhering to the school's code of conduct to living responsibly in the community (Tsotsi, 2024:45). Disciplined learners are conscious of the Rights, Responsibilities and Privileges of other learners

(Padayachee & Gcelu, 2022:45). Considering high levels of violence in schools, SMTs should reward positive conduct and behaviour in schools, these should not go unnoticed (Broer *et al*, 2023:5) as discipline contributes to easy classroom management and ensuring a conducive learning and teaching environment. A school's culture has a definite influence on the academic performance of learners. SMTs should be aware of the importance of the school's culture and should focus on improving it (Yang *et al.*, 2023:31). Thus, by rewarding discipline and hard work, SMTs promote a culture of academic excellence.

2.4.4.4 Stakeholder collaboration and involvement

Parents, SMTs, and teachers should jointly support learners towards improved academic performance (Kefallinou, 2020:64). Teachers should do their best to teach learners, supported by SMTs. The South African School Act of 1996, section 23(a), stipulates that there must be one more parent in a school's governing body than the combined total of other members with voting rights. Throughout the world, there have been efforts to involve parents in the education of their children as a means of improving learner academic performance (Ndwandwe, 2023:18). SMCs in India often engage parents in the education of their children (Muralidharan & Singh, 2020:47). School-family collaboration has a positive impact on learner academic performance irrespective of parent's social class (Day, Sammons & Gorgen, 2020:21). In the Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) project, it was found that the society has much to contribute to the academic performance of its children (Ndwandwe, 2023:19). Therefore, SMTs should open up for the community's contribution to the academic performance of learners. STEP helped to change the community's perception of its contribution towards the academic performance of its children. This project discovered that SMTs that used community contributions improved the academic performance of learners (Ndwandwe, 2023:21). SMTs should make learners' education relevant to the needs of the community. By so doing it becomes easier for a community to participate in the academic performance of learners (Department of Education, 1997:27).

The above data show that curriculum monitoring, teacher support, resource provision, discipline, and stakeholder collaboration are strategies that SMTs use to improve the

academic performance of learners. India, SA, and Australia have management strategies in common, which are SIP implementation and professional development of teachers. However, India has its unique strategies to improve academic performance different from those of Australia, which are infrastructure improvement and parental engagement. India's aspect of parental engagement is also found among South African SMTs. Australian SLTs emphasise a learner-centred approach to teaching to improve the academic performance of learners.

2.5 POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

This section of the study deals with policies and legislative frameworks related to SMTs and the academic performance of learners. Several related policies and legislative framework are dealt with here, such as SASA Act No. 84 of 1996, SACE Act No. 31 of 2000, Collective Agreement No. 08 of 2003, NEPA Act No. 27 of 1996, EEA Act No. 76 of 1998, PAIA Act No. 02 of 2000 and POPIA Act No. 04 of 2013 and BELA Act No. 32 of 2024.

2.5.1 THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS ACT NO. 84 OF 1996

The South African School Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996), gives power to the School Governing Body (SGB) of every school to develop the school code of conduct. The school code of conduct entails the rules that specifically govern learners within the school system. After the SGB has developed school code of conduct, it relies upon the SMTs to implement the code of conduct. The level at which the SMTs implement the code of conduct determines the academic performance of learners at the end of each year. The school code of conduct also constitutes the level of corrective sanction that should be meted out to any learner who defies the code of conduct. Adherence to the school code of conduct promotes discipline and positive academic performance.

2.5.2 THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR EDUCATORS ACT NO. 31 OF 2000

The South African Council for Educators Act, 2000 (Act No. 31 of 2000) provides educators with a code of professional ethics which safeguards and restores dignity in the teaching profession. Educators as members of South African Council for Educators

(SACE) should restore the value of teaching and learning for better academic performance. SACE Act No. 31 of 2000, requires SMTs to watch over educators on the ground for its effectiveness. Educators should by their registration with SACE embrace the total morals and behaviour that would protect the teaching profession in assisting learners as their children, in a manner that would bring change to the academic performance of learners in South Africa. This should contribute to resolving challenges facing academic performance of learners in South Africa.

2.5.3 THE COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT NO. 08 OF 2003

Oosthuizen, *et al* (2009:57) state that the Collective Agreement no. 08 of 2003, promotes relationships between teachers led by SMTs, parents and learners. This relationship should strongly be maintained and overseen by SMTs. The learners' academic performance should be better through the commitment of the stakeholders above. SMTs benefit more from this Collective Agreement as it brings and supports the collaboration of teachers, parents and learners. The learners' performance depends on the three-legged pot, which consists of the stakeholders above. The relationship promoted by this agreement should be maintained for the academic performance of learners.

2.5.4 THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY ACT NO. 27 OF 1996

The National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act no. 27 of 1996) empowers the minister of national education to determine the national policy in terms of principles contained in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. Such national policies should be put and led into action by SMTs. This Act further provides an infrastructure that requires consultation with a wide variety of bodies in terms of its section 5. The bodies with which the minister should consult before policy is determined include as body representative of organised teaching profession (which contains SMTs), a national council of college rectors, a national council representative of students and a national council representative of parents. Principles should upgrade learner academic performance if the minister consults all the relevant bodies. Moreover, it should be easy for learners to obey policy principles towards better academic performance because their representatives are part of the bodies to be consulted in determining principles.

2.5.5 EMPLOYMENT OF EDUCATORS ACT NO. 76 OF 1998

The Employment of Educators Act number, 1998 (Act no. 76 of 1998) repealed the Employment of Education Act of 1994. In the current Act, special attention is given to aspects such as regulations regarding teachers' service conditions. Such conditions should be in consideration of learner academic performance. The service conditions of teachers should be attended to concerning teacher's appointment, promotion and transfer. When these conditions of service are as expected, it facilitates SMTs' role in providing and maintaining a conducive learning and teaching environment for better learner academic performance.

2.5.6 PROMOTION OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT NO. 2 OF 2000 AND PROTECTION OF PERSONAL INFORMATION ACT NO. 04 OF 2013

The Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000 (Act No. 2 of 2000) and Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013 (Act No. 04 of 2013) deal with protecting records held by public and private bodies. Public bodies refer to organs of state such as schools, education departments and governing bodies. Moreover, the records kept by such bodies are all documents, recordings and visual material, such as minutes of meetings, marks, answer sheets, disciplinary records, learners' reports and reports by educators. These Acts empower SMTs as managers of schools to keep and protect school information, documents and resources for effective academic performance of learners. Learner records assist SMTs in tracking and knowing how to assist learners toward improved academic performance.

2.5.7 CHILD CARE ACT NO. 74 OF 1983 AND THE CHILDREN'S ACT NO. 38 OF 2005

The Child Care Act, 1983 (Act No. 74 of 1983) and The Children's Act, 2005 (Act No. 38 of 2005) concentrates on the protection of children even against child abuse occurrences. This act further protects children's rights even within the school for improved academic performance of learners. It is the role of SMTs to protect learners' rights against any form of abuse during schooling hours. In section 42 of this Act, a school should have a nursing staff member, social worker or SMT educator who attends and examines any ill-treated

child or one who suffers from an injury that is deliberately inflicted. These Acts assist SMTs in their role of improving learner academic achievement by safeguarding learners' wellbeing.

2.5.8 NATIONAL POLICY ON WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION NO. 22512 OF 2001

The National Policy on Whole School Evaluation (No. 22512 of 2001) has nine focus areas. Such are the basic functionality of the school, leadership, management and communication, governance and relationships, quality of teaching and learning, and educator development, curriculum provision and resources, learner achievement, school safety, security and discipline, school infrastructure, and parents and community. All the above key areas are responsibilities led by the SMTs for quality assurance and effectiveness of daily smooth running of school processes for learners' academic performance.

2.5.9 BASIC EDUCATION LAWS AMENDMENT ACT NO. 32 OF 2024

The Basic Education Laws Amendment Act, 2024 (Act No. 32 of 2024) amends section 5, 6, 32 and 51 of the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 and section 1, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 11 of the Employment of Educators Act No. 76 of 1998, this Act contributes, directly and indirectly towards proper functionality of the SMTs, by tabulating key provisions, such as revising admission and language policies, addressing school disruptions, regulating home-schooling, strengthening governance and accountability. These provisions are meant to deal effectively with learners' academic performance.

2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The aim of this study was to investigate the role of SMTs in the academic performance of learners. The researcher presented the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Furthermore, the empirical literature discussed was discussed, based on the objectives of this study. The historical background of SMTs and learner academic performance laid the basis for the discussions of the empirical literature. The rest of the literature dealt with the role of SMTs in the academic performance of learners, the challenges faced by SMTs in improving the academic performance of learners, the implications of poor learner

academic performance the strategies used by SMTs in improving academic performance of learners and legislative frameworks relating to the attainment of better learner performance.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTIONS

This study sought to explore the role of school management teams in improving the academic performance of grade 12 learners: a case of selected secondary schools in Malamulele North-East Circuit. Having discussed extant literature relating to the role of school management teams in improving learner academic performance in the previous chapter, this chapter presents the research paradigm, design and methodologies that the researcher used during the process of conducting the study. Moreover, this chapter also presents the population of the study, sampling method and procedure, data collection, analysis, contribution of the study to the body of knowledge, significance of the study, research ethics, ethical considerations and chapter summary.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

According to Khatri (2020:1436), the research paradigm reflects the researcher's beliefs on an aspect in sectors of society. On the other hand, Turin, Raihan and Chowdhury (2024:15) view the research paradigm as a framework based on a basic belief system with different approaches, such as interpretivism, positivism and critical theory. The research study used interpretivism as its research paradigm.

Interpretivism refers to the fact that there are several realities that surround societal matters (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022:25). Moreover, interpretivism has been defined by Kouam (2024:21) as an interpretation that focuses on participants' point of view as they are the ones that carry a deeper and understandable meaning of the matter under investigation. The researcher chose the interpretivism approach because it assisted with an accumulation of multiple realities on the role of SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Interpretivism also helped the researcher with deep and diverse social context on the matter under investigation.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Khanday (2023:367) research design is a procedural plan adopted by a researcher to answer questions validly. While Thakur (2021:1) defines research design as an overall strategy in which the researcher chooses to integrate different components of the study logically. The researcher used an exploratory design in this study.

The exploratory design allows a researcher to collect attitudinal and behavioural data from participants (Asenahabi, 2019:32). Exploratory design is defined by Brink (2006:121) as research that is conducted to explore and dig out knowledge and experiences of the population selected, by questioning until adequate information is attained. The researcher chose the exploratory design because it lays the foundation of research and enables the researcher to understand the worthiness of the role of SMTs in improving the academic performance of learners.

3.4 RESEARCH METHOD

Research methodology refers to how a researcher plans a study to ensure valid and reliable results that address research objectives (Bhahati, 2021:1). Kumar (2011:11) defines research methodology as the procedure that must be followed to get answers to the research questions. While Adedoyin (2020:3) states that research methodology means the entire understanding of the process, its context, and its impact on the organisation and society. In this study the researcher adopted the qualitative method.

Qualitative research is defined by Anas (2022:3) as a focus on understanding a research query as an idealistic approach. Hameed (2022:4) articulates that qualitative research involves finding out how people think and feel, the information under qualitative research involves feelings and impressions rather than numbers. The researcher chose qualitative research because the information collected using qualitative research instruments has been dependable and reliable as it revealed the direct feelings and thoughts of participants, and qualitative research allows honest and unhandled responses of participants. The other reason thus by using the qualitative research method it allowed the researcher to gain in-depth information from SMT members on the role of the SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

However, qualitative research has been subject to more criticism by scholars, basing their concern on its appropriateness in yielding expected results (Mwita, 2022:618). Moreover, according to Taherdoost (2022:54) the condemnation is usually grounded on the subjective nature of the process, involving human interpretation, which may limit the generalisability of the conclusions. Furthermore, qualitative research is time consuming as collection and analysis of data takes more time (Allan, 2020:27). Taherdoost (2022:54) further supports his argument that qualitative research may be limited by stating that a small sample cannot be generalised over a larger population.

3.5 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

According to Shukla (2020:2) a population refers to a group of people to whom the findings of the research are to be applied. Casteel and Bridier (2021:344) define population as a group of participants the researcher may have access to that represents the nature of the group of interests. The population of this study is all secondary school principals, deputy principals, departmental heads, secondary school educators and all Grade 12 learners in Malamulele North-East circuit.

3.6 SAMPLING METHOD AND PROCEDURE

The sampling method is defined by Ellitan (2024:7) as a means to obtain the subset of population used by the researcher to investigate a matter with the aim of learning about the entire population. Similarly, Horler and Omar (2024:3) consider sampling as a procedure to select a sample from a large population group for research purposes. The researcher used non-probability sampling in this study to explore the role of school management teams in improving learner academic performance.

Non-probability sampling is defined by Shukla (2023:10) as a deviation from probability sampling principles, meaning that units are included with unknown probabilities. Kim (2024:2) states that non-probability is a subjective judgement and uses the selection of participant opinions. The researcher chose to use this method of sampling because the population was intentionally chosen being the most appropriate to respond to the research question satisfactorily. Purposive sampling methods were used to select the participants of the study.

The purposive sampling method as one of the types of non-probability methods is defined by Casteel and Bridier (2021:350) as an intentional selection of participants based on their characteristics and qualities. Ames, Glenton, and Lewis (2019:3) articulate that purposive sampling refers to selecting participants from a specific sector to provide unbiased opinions in the study. Purposive sampling method as a non-probability sampling is relevant to this study as it allowed the researcher to collect data from the participants who deal with the academic performance of learners daily. The reason for using the purposive sampling method is that it allowed the researcher to evaluate the most needed knowledge in the study from the population. The researcher already assumed that the participants deal with the situation of learners' academic performance in their daily activities. The sample group was purposefully selected from the four secondary schools in Malamulele North-East circuit. The sample size of this study was 10 participants, 04 secondary school principals, 02 secondary school deputy principals, 02 secondary school departmental heads and 02 educators who teach Grade 12 learners. The four principals were purposefully sampled as more information of the role of SMTs in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners was needed from principals as they are heads of the schools and SMTs. However, the researcher wanted to interview all categories of SMTs in Schools C and D, unfortunately, in Schools C and D, only principals agreed to participate in the study.

Table 3.1: Sampled Population

The table below shows the total population and sampled participants - the total population of the area under study is 188 and the sampled were 10 participants.

No.	Participants	Population	Sampled
1.	All secondary school Principals	07	$1 * 4 = 4$
2.	All secondary school Deputy Principals	09	$1 * 2 = 2$

3.	All secondary school Departmental Heads	28	$1 * 2 = 2$
4.	All Grade 12 secondary school Educators	144	$1 * 2 = 2$
TOTAL		188	10

Table 3.2: Participants' profiles

The table below presents the 10 participants' personal profiles, such as: gender, age, work experience, educational qualifications and race.

Information	Gender	Age	Work experience	Educational Qualification	Race
PA	Male	50	27 Years	Bed. Hons.	African
PB	Female	50	20 Years	Bed. Hons.	African
PC	Male	52	30 Years	BSC Ed.	African
PD	Male	47	23 Years	Hons. Mathematics	African
DPA	Female	51	23 Years	Hons. Public Admin.	African
DPB	Male	56	21 Years	SPTD (B. Teach.)	African
DHA	Female	58	30 Years	Bed. Hons.	African
DHB	Female	52	20 Years	STD	African
TA	Male	40	8 Years	Bed. FET	African
TB	Female	42	7 Years	PGCE	African

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

Taherdoost (2021:14) argues that data collection is a process where the researcher collects data to be used in a study after formulating a research problem, developing and selecting the design and sample of the study. Data collection is a systematic process of gathering information through methods like interviews, document analysis, journal writing and observations (Bhandari, 2023:8). This study used interviews to collect data.

An interview is a method of discussion aimed at extracting detailed information or acquiring a deep understanding of a concept or topic (Showkat & Parveen, 2017:4). Daruhadi and Sopiati (2024:24) define an interview as a verbal communication between

a researcher and participants of a study and they further elaborate that an interview is done to acquire information which leads the researcher into an understanding of the experiences of the participants. This study employed interviews where data was collected using face-to-face interviews. The researcher used interviews because it provided face-to-face interaction with participants and assisted in providing non-verbal clues for additional explanation.

Face-to-face interviews are a way of obtaining detailed information from participants characterised by open-ended questions in which the researcher is allowed to make follow-ups for clarity (Taherdoost, 2021:16). The researcher used face-to-face interviews because it allows participants to provide an open-ended response and opinion shared.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a process of organising, presenting, analysing and interpreting data (Lokey, 2024:14). Data was analysed through content analysis. Wavelet and Syed (2024:32) contend that content analysis is an analysis that gets collected data and analyses, reduces, and interrogates them into a summary form, and will be coded by the researcher. On the other hand, Lokey (2024:24) is of the view that content analysis is a way of making sense of the data collected. The information was presented in a narrative form:

Data collected through an interview was analysed through thematic analysis and presented in a narrative format. The researcher used the following (9) nine steps of analysing qualitative data according to Creswell (2005:334):

- **Step 1: Planning for recording data**

The researcher had a plan on how data should be recorded in a systematic manner before collecting it. Raw data was audio recorded, and some field notes written down during interviews conducted by the researcher with participants.

- **Step 2: Data collection and preliminary analysis**

In a qualitative inquiry, data analyses unfolded in two approaches. The first one involved analysing data at the research site or area, along with the process of

collecting data. This was experienced during this study because the researcher was already mentally categorising the information that was provided by participants. The second one involved analysing data away from the research site. The researcher delved collected data through interviews and wrote it down during the interview process.

- **Step 3: Managing (organising) data**

The researcher organised data into themes and sub-themes. Themes came from the research objectives. The researcher kept all the data compiled during collection for further knowledge and advice.

- **Step 4: Recording and writing memos**

Immediately after organising the data, the researcher immersed himself in the details of the collected data, to get a sense of the interviews before breaking the data into parts.

- **Step 5: Generating categories, themes, and patterns**

This step involved developing themes from the objectives of this study and sub-themes that emerged from participants' responses the researcher got through interview questions.

- **Step 6: Coding data**

In this stage, the researcher applied a coding scheme into categories of themes and sub-themes, by thoroughly marking spaces and passages in the data collected. Codes took several forms, for example, an abbreviation of keywords which the researcher chose, like PA – meaning Principal for school A, DPA - meaning Deputy Principal for school A, DHA – meaning Departmental Head for school A and TA – meaning Teacher for school A.

- **Step 7: Testing emergent understanding**

In this stage, the researcher began with the process of evaluating the possibility of his understanding and exploring it through data. Then the researcher tested if the collected data was relevant to the study. The data collected is indeed relevant.

- **Step 8: Searching for alternative explanations**

Here, the researcher discovered the patterns in the data and engaged critically with the patterns that seemed to be apparent. The researcher also had to search for other possible explanations of the information.

- **Step 9: Writing the report**

This is the final step, in which the researcher wrote a formal report and explained the information in detail and confirm that the data collected have been analysed and legally secured. The researcher also engaged in an interpretative act and gave meaning to raw data, and the information collected have been written in narrative form themes.

The above steps show all the steps that the researcher completed. They cover the entire process of data collection from the sampled group. The researcher ensured that those steps were followed in data analysis up to the final one of writing a formal report.

3.9 RESEARCH ETHICS.

Ezaro (2021:4) views research ethics in the research study as a disengagement in misconduct in the research process. UNESCO (2021:9) defines research ethics in research study as professional behaviour accompanied by moral principles in conducting research. There are ethical standards that were considered when the researcher intervened in the lives of people and harmful consequences to the participants were avoided. The following ethical considerations were followed in conducting this study:

3.9.1 PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE STUDY

The researcher requested permission from the University of Venda, Office of the Premier: Limpopo Provincial Government, Limpopo Department of Education, Malamulele North-East Circuit, and secondary schools, where the research was conducted. This enabled the researcher to collect data from participants.

3.9.2 INFORMED CONSENT

It is indicated by Siegle (2023:11) that informed consent is a process in which research participants are given relevant information about the study to make informed decision about participating. The participants were informed that the researcher is a registered

student doing a Master of Education in Educational Management at the University of Venda. The researcher provided the participants with contact details, in case they had concerns and like to communicate with the researcher and other authorities at any time. The researcher introduced himself, the research topic, and explained every aspect of the study, including the objectives and instructions on how interviews would be conducted. Finally, the participants were requested to sign the consent form if they agree to participate in the study.

3.9.3 ANONYMITY

According to Kang and Hwang (2023:1), anonymity is the principle that the identity of the participants should remain secret during and after the research project. Participants of a research study had the right to remain anonymous, and neither the names nor any identifiable background information of the participants were disclosed. Anonymity was ensured because the participants answered the prepared interview questions that were asked by the researcher individually. Anonymity was also maintained in terms of avoiding mentioning and documenting the names of participants and their schools. Furthermore, anonymity was maintained through coding the participants.

3.9.4 CONFIDENTIALITY

Siegle (2023:12) indicates that it is the duty of the researcher to safeguard the privacy of the participants, which includes keeping their responses confidential as a basic right. The researcher ensured not to share participants' personal information with anyone and that data collected would only be used for the specific purposes of the study.

3.9.5 VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Masunga and Tarimo (2024:8) indicate that participation in a study should be voluntary and the participants may refuse to reveal certain information and may also have the opportunity to withdraw from the research study at any time with no consequences. The researcher informed participants that participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw their participation at any time and all ethics would be adhered to as set by the University.

3.9.6 NO HARM TO PARTICIPANTS

According to Siegle (2023:12), researchers need to be aware of the impact that their research will have on participants so as not to expose them to any other unreasonable risks and harm to their emotional well-being. The researcher minimised the possibility of harm to the participants by explaining that the study would not be done to test or judge them.

3.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Silverman (2001:60) states that trustworthiness is totally concerned with the quality of the qualitative data of the study, so trustworthiness seeks to provide the quality of the research study, there are four steps that the researcher considered for the trustworthiness of qualitative data in this study, such steps are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, a discussion of such steps and how the researcher employed them is as follows:

3.10.1 CREDIBILITY

Credibility deals with how congruent the findings of the study are with reality, in other words the researcher's findings correlate with the happenings on the ground (Hussain, Melewar, Priporas. and Foroudi, 2020:552). In this study, the researcher ensured the credibility of this study by using the provisions such as the adoption of the research methods, familiarising himself with the culture of participating organisations or groups, which are schools, random sampling of participants, and interactive questioning in interviews.

3.10.2 TRANSFERABILITY

Transferability has to do with how far the findings of the study can be applicable theoretically, practically and in the future research, furthermore, findings of study should be real, possible and useful in practical life (Munthe-Kaas, Nokleby, Lewin and Glenton, 2020:21). The researcher ensured transferability in this study by making sure that the findings of this study have a meaning in and outside the study and even in a different situation. Finally, some of the following additional information was considered to further

ensure transferability: the data collection methods used, the number and length of the data collection sessions, the time over which the data was collected and the number of participants involved in the study.

3.10.3 DEPENDABILITY

Dependability deals with the consistency of the study and the research processes that report details of the study. In addition to that, dependability gives room for future researchers to do the work well so that they can achieve similar results (Kopetz & Steiner, 2022:160). The researcher made sure that dependability is achieved through keeping the influences on data collection, analysis and tracking of a detailed chronology of research design. Finally, dependability was achieved in this study because the researcher considered the following factors: research design, its implementation, and data gathering.

3.10.4 CONFIRMABILITY

Confirmability deals with the issue that the research findings must represent the situation under investigation and the direct opinions of the participants, and neither the beliefs of the researcher nor generalisations of the investigator (Chung, Biddix, and Park, 2020:3304). The researcher assured confirmability by making sure that the researcher's findings were the results of the experiences and perspectives of the participants, rather than the hypothesis and intentions of the researcher. The researcher also considered two approaches to further ensure the confirmability of the qualitative data of this study, which are the data-oriented approach and the audit trail approach.

3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter dealt with the research design and method used in this study. Qualitative research design was used as it focuses on descriptive analysis of data rather than statistics or numbers. Face-to-face interviews were used to collect data. Four schools were purposively and carefully selected from different locations.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on presenting, analysing and interpreting the opinions and understandings on **the roles of SMTs in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Malamulele North-East circuit, South Africa.** The information regarding the roles of SMTs in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners was collected through qualitative method. Based on the qualitative method, the researcher investigated participants through interviews to collect data. Responses to the interview questions are presented in a narrative form and followed by interpretation of findings.

The codes used at the end of each opinion or utterance articulated by participants are explained as follows: PA – means Principal for School A; PB – means Principal for School B; PC – means Principal for School C; PD – means Principal for School D; DPA – means Deputy Principal for School A; DPB – means Deputy Principal for School B; DHA – means Departmental Head for School A; DHB – means Departmental Head for School B; TA – means Teacher for School A; and TB – means Teacher for School B.

4.2 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA COLLECTED THROUGH INTERVIEWS

This section presents the data collected through interviews that were conducted between the researcher and the participants. The study was conducted by the researcher in order to answer the research objectives which are: to examine the role of School Management Teams in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners; to determine the challenges facing School Management Teams in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners; and to explore the strategies that can be used by School Management Teams to improve academic performance of Grade 12 learners. In this section, the data collected through interviews is presented in a narrative form and followed by the synthesis of information.

Table 4.1: Themes and Sub-themes on the role of SMTs in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Malamulele North-East Circuit, South Africa.

The table below tabulates three main themes, according to the three objectives of this study and five sub-themes which emerged from each objective.

Themes		Sub-Themes	
1.	The roles of School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.	1.1.	Provision of resources.
		1.2.	Provision of effective leadership.
		1.3.	Stakeholder involvement.
		1.4.	Provision of support and motivation.
		1.5.	Curriculum management.
2.	The challenges facing the School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.	2.1.	Inadequate knowledge of roles.
		2.2.	Lack of resources.
		2.3.	Lack of stakeholder involvement
		2.4.	Ill-discipline of both teachers and learners.
		2.5.	Systematic challenge.
3.	The strategies that can be used by the School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12	3.1.	Effective teaching and monitoring.
		3.2.	Provision of resources.
		3.3.	Provision of effective leadership and management.
		3.4.	Discipline.
		3.5.	Curriculum management.

4.2.1 THEME 1: THE ROLES OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS IN IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS.

This theme sought to find out the roles of School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. It is from this theme that the following sub-themes emerged: the provision of resources, provision of effective leadership, stakeholder involvement, provision of support and motivation and curriculum management. The participants interviewed identified many roles that SMTs play to improve academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Participants articulated the following on each of the following SMT roles:

4.2.1.1 Provision of resources.

The researcher found that it is the role of SMTs to provide resources to learners to improve the academic performance of grade 12 learners.

The first role is correct teachers' subject allocation, secondly, proper staff leadership, thirdly, parental involvement, fourthly, involvement of community stakeholders, and finally, learners profiling. [PA]

Set up a team which is qualified to teach subjects in Grade 12, encourage both teachers and learners, initiate extra lessons with learners, and outsource for sections in which teachers are not familiar. [PC]

Encouraging learners and teachers by inviting motivational speakers, profiling of learners, promoting healthy competition among learners, parental involvement, choosing capable teachers to teach Grade 12 learners, outsourcing of more experienced teachers in the subjects. [PD]

Provision of resources to teachers, such as Annual Teaching Plan, annual assessment plan, subject policy, Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for monitoring purpose, monitoring plan, and monitor teachers lesson plans and learners' activities on weekly

basis, and classroom lesson observation is conducted per plan.
[DHB]

As a teacher, I teach learners according to school timetable and also sacrifice my time on weekends to teach learners, I also ask the departmental head to provide study guides and further support the SMT's strategies to improve academic performance of Grade 12 learners, such as, complying to teach during Saturdays and on recess. [TA]

Based on the above statements, PA, PC, PD, DHB and TA hold similar views when it comes to the provision of resources in the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. PA, PC and PD specifically base their role on human resources, such as teachers. On the other hand, DHB and TA base their view on physical resources (teaching and learning materials), such as ATPs, CAPS documents and study guides. From the above information, it can be concluded that SMTs play a significant role in the provision of both human and physical resources for learners' academic performance.

4.2.1.2 Provision of effective leadership.

The provision of effective leadership is another finding that emanated from this study as a role to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Some participants explained:

The first role is correct teacher subject allocation, secondly, proper staff leadership, thirdly, parental involvement, fourthly, involvement of community stakeholders, and finally, learners profiling. [PA]

Setting a school performance target, profiling learners in all subjects for effective monitoring and intervention, supporting teachers and learners in areas of their concern, develop school action plan, regular communication with parents. [PB]

Set up a team which is qualified to teach subjects in Grade 12, encourage both teachers and learners, initiate extra lessons with

learners, and outsource for sections in which teachers are not familiar. [PC]

The SMT has a Deputy Principal who is the curriculum head and deals with curriculum matters, e.g. timetabling, and SMT also has a Departmental Head who manages the curriculum of subject(s) under him/her, e.g. monitoring the work of teachers within the subject led and Annual teaching plan coverage. [PA]

SMTs play a crucial role in improving academic performance, such as allocation of subjects to teachers, drawing a timetable, provision of Annual Teaching Plans to teachers, monitoring of educators' work, formal and informal tasks of learners, and motivating learners to strive towards high performance. [PB]

We share responsibilities as, SMT members, Departmental Heads guide and motivate teachers in their departments and solving subjects' challenges of learners. [PD]

Assisting the principal in a day-to-day management of school, playing a leadership and motivational roles to departmental heads, providing guidance to departmental heads and learners for high performance standard, record keeping and managing learners conduct according to departmental policy. [DPB]

Through departmental meetings, setting clear expectation of subject performance with teachers under my supervision, monitoring teachers work, consolidation of teachers' reports (feedback), taking professional instructions from deputy principal and principal. [DHA]

I profile my learners in the subject that I teach thoroughly looking at their performance and also advise SMT to implement and manage extra-classes. [TB]

The interesting part from the above statements is that PA, PB, PC, PA, PB, DPB and DHA are of the view that provision of effective leadership is a role of SMTs in improving academic performance of learners. PA and PB are of one view on provision of effective leadership through timetabling. On the other hand, PB and DHA are of the view of setting clear expectation of subject performance with educators as a provision of effective leadership. PA and TB concur on profiling of learners for academic performance of learners. PA alone also states that SMTs have Departmental Heads and their role is to manage the curriculum while a deputy principal heads and leads the curriculum for effective leadership. PB is of the view that SMTs plan and develop School Improvement Plan (SIP) as a provision of effective leadership for learner academic performance to improve. Furthermore, PC is of the view of planning and initiating extra-lessons. PD is of the view that SMTs share responsibilities as SMT members for effective leadership. The conclusion can be drawn from the data above that, SMT members provide effective leadership through several aspects as their role with a purpose of improving academic performance of learners.

4.2.1.3 Stakeholder involvement.

The involvement of stakeholders is one of the many SMTs roles that emerged from this study to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners as indicated by some participants.

The first role is correct teachers' subject allocation, secondly, proper staff leadership, thirdly, parental involvement, fourthly, involvement of community stakeholders, and finally, learners profiling. [PA]

Setting school performance target, profiling learners in all subjects for effective monitoring and intervention, supporting teachers and learners in areas of their concern, develop school action plan, regular communication with parents. [PB]

Encouraging learners and teachers by inviting motivational speakers, profiling of learners, promoting healthy competition among learners, parental involvement, choosing capable teachers

to teach Grade 12 learners, outsourcing of more experienced teachers in the subjects. [PD]

Based on the above statements, PA, PB and PD hold similar views when it comes to involvement of parents and community stakeholders in the academic performance of their children. PA states that involvement of community stakeholders is a role of SMTs to improve academic performance of learners. PB utters that regular communication with parents is the role of SMTs to improve academic performance of learners. On the other hand, PC concur when it comes to motivating teachers and learners. From the above information, it can be concluded that community stakeholders, such as parents are not left behind by the SMTs as they are a key stakeholder towards academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Finally, it is also evident that learners' progress is based on care of both SMTs and community stakeholders.

4.2.1.4 Provision of support and motivation.

The findings of this study also revealed that it is the SMTs' role to provide support, guidance and motivation to teachers and learners to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

Setting a school performance target, profiling learners in all subjects for effective monitoring and intervention, supporting teachers and learners in areas of their concern, developing a school action plan, regular communication with parents. [PB]

Setting up a team which is qualified to teach subjects in Grade 12, encourage both teachers and learners, initiating extra lessons with learners, and outsourcing for sections in which the school's own teachers are ill-equipped. [PC]

Encouraging learners and teachers by inviting motivational speakers, profiling of learners, promoting healthy competition among learners, parental involvement, choosing capable teachers

to teach Grade 12 learners, outsourcing of more experienced teachers in the subjects. [PD]

SMT play a crucial role in improving academic performance, such as allocation of subjects to teachers, draws a timetable, provision of Annual Teaching Plans to teachers, monitoring of educators' work, formal and informal tasks of learners, and motivating learners to strive towards high performance. [PB]

Departmental heads monitor the work done by teachers with learners, create conducive teaching and learning and support teachers and learners. [PC]

We share responsibilities as SMT members, Departmental Heads guide and motivate teachers in their departments and solving subjects' challenges of learners. [PD]

Assisting the principal in a day-to-day management of school, playing a leadership and motivational roles to departmental heads, providing guidance to departmental heads and learners for high performance standard, record keeping and managing learners conduct according to departmental policy. [DPB]

As a teacher I teach learners according to school timetable and also sacrifice my time on weekends to teach learners, I also ask the departmental head to provide study guides and further support the SMT's strategies to improve academic performance of Grade 12 learners, such as, complying to teach during Saturdays and on recess. [TA]

PB, PC, PD, PB, PC, PD, DPB and TA agree on the role of support and motivation of teachers, learners and also SMTs themselves to improve academic performance of learners. PB, PC and TA put forward the issue of supporting teachers' and learners' concerns to improve academic performance of learners. On the other hand, PC and PD

stated the issue of encouraging learners and teachers towards academic performance of learners. In addition, PB, PD and DHB stated that teachers and learners are motivated for academic performance of learners. From the data above, it can be concluded that SMTs support, encourage and motivate learners and teachers with a purpose of attaining better academic performance in schools.

4.2.1.5 Curriculum management.

The findings of this study further showed that it is the SMTs' role to manage curriculum in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

The SMT has a Deputy Principal who is the curriculum head and deals with curriculum matters, e.g. timetabling; the SMT also has a Departmental Head who manages the curriculum of subject(s) under him/her, e.g. monitoring the work of teachers within the subject led and Annual teaching plan coverage. [PA]

The SMT plays a crucial role in improving academic performance, such as allocation of subjects to teachers, draws a timetable, provision of Annual Teaching Plans to teachers, monitoring of educators' work, formal and informal tasks of learners, and motivating learners to strive towards high performance. [PB]

Departmental heads monitor the work done by teachers with learners, create conducive teaching and learning and support teachers and learners. [PC]

By explaining the pass requirements to learners, tracking learners' school attendance throughout the year, awarding learners' high performance in prize giving ceremony, and monitoring departmental heads' work and also encourage them to monitor teachers' work. [DPA]

Through departmental meetings, setting clear expectation of subject performance with teachers under my supervision, monitoring teachers work, consolidation of teachers' reports (feedback), taking professional instructions from deputy principal and principal. [DHA]

Provision of resources to teachers, such as Annual Teaching Plan, annual assessment plan, subject policy, Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for monitoring purpose, monitoring plan, and monitor teachers lesson plans and learners' activities on weekly basis, and classroom lesson observation is conducted per plan. [DHB]

As a teacher I teach learners according to school timetable and also sacrifice my time on weekends to teach learners, I also ask the departmental head to provide study guides and further support the SMT's strategies to improve academic performance of Grade 12 learners, such as, complying to teach during Saturdays and on recess. [TA]

I profile my learners in the subject that I teach thoroughly, looking at their performance and advising the SMT on implementing and managing extra-classes. [TB]

PA, PB, PC, DPA, DHA, DHB, TA and TB are of similar view when it comes to curriculum management as a role of SMTs in improving academic performance of learners. PA, PC and PD agree on allocating best teachers in Grade 12. PA, PB, PC, DPA, DHA and DHB put forward monitoring of teachers' work and learners' activity books as an aspect of monitoring curriculum. TA and TB concur when it comes to effectively teaching learners and even going an extra mile on weekend to cover the curriculum with learners. From the above information, it can be concluded that SMTs monitor the curriculum content according to Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs), monitoring plan and tools. Teachers also do

their best to cover the expected curriculum scope for improved academic performance of learners.

The information above sheds light on what the participants in this study consider as their roles as SMTs in improving the academic performance of grade 12 learners. However, these roles are not performed seamlessly. Many challenges were indicated by the participants. These are presented in the next theme.

4.2.2 THE CHALLENGES FACING SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS IN IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS.

This theme sought to find out the challenges facing School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. From this theme the following sub-themes emerged: inadequate knowledge of roles, lack of resources, poor stakeholder involvement, ill-discipline of both teachers and learners and systematic challenges. The participants interviewed presented many challenges that are faced by SMTs to improve academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Participants stated the following:

4.2.2.1 Inadequate knowledge of roles.

The findings revealed that inadequate knowledge of roles is a challenge faced by SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. This was explained as follows:

There is a lack of management knowledge, competence and skills among SMT members, apart from that, some SMT members are lazy, they lack motivation. [PA]

Disunity among SMT members and each SMT member pushes their own purpose and goal on their individual departments and some SMT members are lazy. [TA]

Some departmental heads do not monitor written work, lack of subject committee meetings and there is no monthly performance report. [TB]

PA stated that some SMT members do not have management knowledge, competencies and skills and also lack motivation. TA is of a different view and stated that lack of unity is found among SMT members and each department pushes its own purpose and goal. While TB stated that some departmental heads do not monitor written work, they do not hold subject meetings and monthly performance reports are unavailable. It can be concluded from the above data that laziness and lack of motivation among and within SMT members is caused by inadequate management knowledge of roles, lack of competency and skills. The inadequate management knowledge of roles produces poor performance and attracts high departmental officials into schools, and consequently put pressure on SMTs. If SMTs lack management knowledge, better performance cannot be attained, consequently school enrolment drops. It can further be concluded that some departmental heads cause disunity within SMTs and do their own work in their subjects because they are not aware of the SMT roles and this poses a challenge in academic performance of learners. Dysfunctional schools are caused by lack of management knowledge among SMTs. Furthermore, lack of monitoring and unavailability of subject meeting is caused by lack of management knowledge of roles

4.2.2.2 Lack of resources

The findings also indicated that the lack of resources is another challenge faced by SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

There is lack of resources and support programs, such as workshops, and some educators do not honour their classroom periods. [PB]

Language barrier, lack of infrastructure and insufficient textbooks and electronic resources. [PC]

PB and PC have similar views when it comes to lack of resources as a challenge facing SMT in improving the academic performance of learners. PC breaks down the lack of resources by specifically articulating that there is a lack of infrastructure, textbooks, and electronic resources. It can be concluded from the information above that the lack of infrastructure, textbooks and electronic gadgets in schools is a form of social injustice on

learners. The Department of Education in this circumstance is violating learners' right to education and taunting SDG number 4 which articulates the provision of quality education to all learners.

4.2.2.3 Poor stakeholder involvement.

From the findings of this study, it was also discovered that poor involvement of stakeholders is another challenge facing SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. The following excerpts portray this.

Child-headed families, lack of support from some staff members, lack of parental involvement and ill-discipline learners. [PD]

Disunity among SMT members and each SMT member pushes their own purpose and goal on their individual departments and some SMT members are lazy. [TA]

Lack of parental support, absence of feedback from teachers to learners, the issue of progressed learners (QPs), and some educators do not submit learners' books for moderation. [DHB]

While PD and DHB singled out a lack of parental involvement, TA cited disunity among SMTs as a challenge facing SMTs in improving the academic performance of learners. These participants' responses imply that the TEAM player's slogan of "Together we achieve more," or the Ubuntu spirit of "I am because you are" does not exist in such schools.

4.2.2.4 Ill-discipline among teachers.

The findings also revealed that the lack of discipline among teachers is another challenge faced by SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

Lack of resources and support programs, such as workshops, and some educators do not honour their classroom periods. [PB]

Educators do not attend their classes regularly, lack of preparation on educators and learners bunk some classes to engage in drug abuse. [DPB]

Lack of parental support, absence of feedback from teachers to learners, the issue of progressed learners (QPs), and some educators do not submit learners' books for moderation. [DHB]

PB and DPB concurred that some teachers do not honour and attend classes regularly. On the other hand, PD was of the view that there is lack of support from some staff members for SMTs. Furthermore, DPB stated that there is lack of preparation from educators. DHA stated that some teachers do not give enough activities to learners. DHB argued that there is absence of feedback from teachers to learners. DHB further stated that some educators do not submit learners' books for moderation. From the above information, one may argue that teachers' ill-discipline centres on several aspects, such as irregular attendance of class periods and lack of preparation. Furthermore, lack of support from staff members to SMTs constitute ill-discipline of teachers. These participants lament the fact that it is unfortunate that teachers whose core business is to ensure that learners attain their full potential are instead contributing to circumstances that negatively impact learner academic performance.

4.2.2.5 Il-discipline among learners.

It also emerged from this study that the indiscipline of learners is a challenge facing SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

Child-headed families, lack of support from some staff members, lack of parental involvement and ill-discipline learners. [PD]

Language of teaching and learning is a barrier to learners, this is evident in examination, use of substance, such as, drugs and alcohol, teenage pregnancy and child headed families. [DPA]

Educators do not attend their classes regularly, lack of preparation on educators and learners bunk some classes to engage themselves in drug abuse. [DPB]

Some teachers give learners multiple of activities at the same time and that pressurises them and consequently stress them, other teachers do not give enough activities to learners, and peer pressure among learners gives birth to ill-discipline. [DHA]

DPA stated that teenage pregnancy and learners heading families as teen parents are a challenge in the academic performance of learners. Such learners' attention is divided between their academic work and family responsibilities. When that happened, the learners' academic work was likely to be neglected. DPB also mentioned learners bunking classes. DHA mentioned peer pressure among learners as a challenge in improving the academic performance of learners. The data above, may imply that, alcohol and drug abuse result in learners becoming ill-discipline and others becoming pregnant and missing lessons. This poses challenges to SMTs in their attempt to improve the academic performance of learners. Thus, apart from challenges emanating from the department and the school, learners themselves create circumstances that hinder SMTs' attempts to improve learner academic performance.

4.2.2.6 Systemic challenges.

The findings also revealed that systemic challenges are a significant drawback faced by SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

Language of teaching and learning is a barrier to learners, this is evident in examination, use of substance, such as, drugs and alcohol, teenage pregnancy and child headed families. [DPA]

Lack of parental support, absence of feedback from teachers to learners, the issue of progressed learners (QPs), and some educators do not submit learners' books for moderation. [DHB]

Parents begin to lack confidence on the school and eventually withdraw their children from this school, consequently, teachers undergo through rationalisation and redeployment, the SMT begin to experience enormous pressure from higher authorities (provincial and district education officials), and community stakeholders develop lack of morale on school leadership. [PA]

PB, DHB and PA held mixed views on systemic issues as a form of challenge facing SMTs in improving academic performance of learners. PB stated that the lack of support programs such as workshops is a challenge facing SMTs. While DHB is of the view that qualified progressed learners (QPs) are a huge challenge to SMTs in improving academic performance of learners. On the other hand, PA articulated that Rationalisation and Redeployment (R&R) is a challenge facing SMTs in schools. It can be concluded from the above data, that absence of support sessions from the employer (Department of Education) challenges SMTs to improve academic performance of learners. Furthermore, qualified progressed learners remain a challenge to SMTs in improving academic performance. This is because these learners will continue to under-perform in the higher grades they are pushed to because they have not mastered the previous grade's work on which to build the higher grade's work. Moreover, rationalisation and redeployment of teachers is an appalling systemic challenge facing SMTs because it destabilises the framework a school has already established for its teachers. Furthermore, the language of teaching and learning (English) poses a challenge as learners struggle to understand and interpret information in this language. This negatively affects their academic performance.

Having presented challenges faced by SMTs in improving the academic performance of grade 12 learners, I now present some strategies that participants put forward to ameliorate these challenges encountered by SMTs in improving the academic performance of grade 12 learners.

4.2.3 STRATEGIES USED BY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS IN IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS.

This theme sought to find out the strategies used by School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. A number of sub-themes

emerged from this theme, such as effective teaching and monitoring, provision of resources, provision of leadership and management, discipline and curriculum management. The participants interviewed expressed these strategies used by SMTs to improve academic performance of Grade 12 learners in different words. Participants stated the following on each of the strategies:

4.2.3.1 Effective teaching, monitoring and curriculum management

The findings showed that effective teaching, monitoring and management is the strategy used by SMTs to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

Effective teaching and learning must be the first element... furthermore, mentoring, supporting and coaching of teachers by departmental heads should be evident, analysis of results must be done by the SMTs, extra-classes must be extra-lessons not catch-up and finally, outsource experienced educators. [PA]

SMTs, through departmental heads must do item analysis in their subjects and also develop subject improvement plan (SIP), SMT should identify learners at failure risk develop support programs, monitor content coverage as per Annual Teaching Plan, and develop recovery plan, develop curriculum monitoring tools and monitor written work, guard learner attendance and period register, finally, learners at risk must be taken through learners' support sessions, focusing on; easy to pass questions, content that carry more marks, guidance on question paper structure, pre-trial and pre-exams. [PB]

Encourage and support teachers and learners, organize extra lessons, give more activities to learners and treat easier questions from standardized previous question papers. [PC]

Monitor the work of teachers and encourage them to give feedback to learners, address all types of questions during assessment, such

as, high order, middle order and low order, prioritise previous question papers to maintain examination standard, and invite motivational speakers to motivate teachers and learners separately.

[DPA]

Develop quality assessment tasks, informal assessment tasks should be based on previous question papers and should be accompanied by item analysis, mandatory pre-tests, marking, recording, and effective feedback to learners... [DPB]

Offer extra-classes, monitor learners' attendance, establish and monitor effective morning and afternoon studies and often provide motivational talk to learners. [DHA]

There should be continuous monitoring of written work by SMTs, outsource more experienced educators to assist learners along difficult aspects within subjects, and provide Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTMS). [TB]

PA and DHA are of similar views on effective teaching and learning, and DHA further stated that they offer extra-classes, and such extra-classes are extra-lessons and not catch-ups. PA, PB, DPA, DHA and TB concurred that SMTs monitor educators work, monitor learners' written work according to Annual Teaching Plan, monitor period register, monitor learners' attendance, morning, and afternoon studies. PC and DPA alluded to using previous question papers as activities along the lessons, and DPA extends by stating that focus should be on high, middle and low order questions. PC recommended towards final examination, treating easy to pass questions based on previous question papers was the best. PB stated that learners at risk should be identified and taught effectively. DPB stated that informal assessment tasks should be based on previous question papers followed by monitored item analysis. PB further stated that there should be a recovery plan on content lost and such a plan should be monitored. DPA was of the view that feedback should be given to learners towards the end of lessons. From the above information, it can be concluded that effective teaching and learning, as well as

extra-classes, are a strategy can improve the academic performance of learners. Furthermore, SMTs should monitor educators' work and learners' written work, according to ATPs, monitoring of the period register, learners' attendance, as well as morning and afternoon studies, are strategies that can improve the academic performance of learners. Moreover, the use of previous question papers as additional activities, along with extra lessons, are further strategies. Informal assessment should have questions that focus on high, middle and low order questions and should also be based on previous question papers to improve academic performance. Treating easy to pass questions towards examination time is another strategy to improve academic performance. Another strategy is to identify and effectively teach learners at high risk. Giving **feedback** to learners towards the end of lessons is another strategy. Development of a recovery plan on content lost and the use of item analysis after a series of activities are additional strategies for improving the academic performance of learners.

4.2.3.2 Provision of resources

It was found in this study that provision of resources is one of the SMT strategies used in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

...extra-classes must be extra-lessons not catch-up and finally, outsource experienced educators. [PA]

Encourage and support teachers and learners, organize extra lessons, give more activities to learners and treat easier questions from standardized previous question papers. [PC]

...SMTs should provide and mediate subject examination guidelines, study guides and question bank, learner support should focus on easy-to-get questions and content in previous grades that is examinable in subsequent grades. [DPB]

Supply Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) to teachers and make follow-ups. [DHB]

There should be continuous monitoring of written work by SMTs, outsource more experienced educators to assist learners along difficult aspects within subjects, and provide Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTMS). [TB]

PA and TB are of one view when it comes to outsourcing experienced teachers to help learners on difficult aspects within subjects. DHB and TB are of similar views on the provision of learning and teaching support materials. PC and DPB shared the views that teachers should also be supported by examination guidelines, study guides and question banks. Based on the data above, it can be concluded that outsourcing of more experienced educators is a strategy that can be used to improve the academic performance of learners. In addition, the supply of teaching and learning materials, supporting teachers with examination guidelines, study guides and building on question banks can improve learner academic performance.

4.2.3.3 Provision of effective leadership and management

The findings also revealed that provision of effective leadership and management is another strategy used by SMTs to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

...then Leadership and management are keys in improving academic performance, therefore, SMTs should have regular meetings with all stakeholders... [PA]

SMTs, through departmental heads must do item analysis in their subjects and also develop subject improvement plan (SIP), SMT should identify learners at failure risk develop support programs, monitor content coverage as per Annual Teaching Plan, and develop recovery plan, develop curriculum monitoring tools and monitor written work, guard learner attendance and period register, finally, learners at risk must be taken through learners' support sessions, focusing on; easy to pass questions, content that carry

more marks, guidance on question paper structure, pre-trial and pre-exams. [PB]

Profiling of learners, circuit manager's involvement, attending community meeting and address school challenges and involving parents of Grade 12 learners. [PD]

Develop quality assessment tasks, informal assessment tasks should be based on previous question papers and should be accompanied by item analysis, mandatory pre-tests, marking, recording, and effective feedback to learners, SMTs should provide and mediate subject examination guidelines, study guides and question bank, learner support should focus on easy-to-get questions and content in previous grades that is examinable in subsequent grades. [DPB]

SMTs should be united, be positive and focus on common purpose, be in a position to identify challenges facing Grade 12 learners and commonly resolve such challenges with all stakeholders' intervention. [TA]

PA alone is of the view that leadership and management are key elements of SMTs in improving the academic performance of learners. Leaders must unite those that are leading and share their vision. They must motivate and support those around them such that they all work towards a common goal. PA further states that SMTs should hold meetings with teachers as stakeholders within the school. PA adds that there should be evidence of analysis of results, supporting and coaching of teachers by departmental Heads. While PB was of the view that SMTs should develop School Improvement Plan (SIP), PD states that SMTs should profile learners and seek circuit manager's intervention. PD further stated that SMTs should show leadership by attending community meetings to address school challenges. DPB is of the view that SMTs should make pre-testing, marking and recording mandatory and also make follow up on such. TA articulated that SMTs should be united, focused on a common purpose (which in this case

is to improve grade 12 performance) and identify challenges facing Grade 12 learners. From the above data, it can be concluded that leadership and management are strategies for improving academic performance of learners. SMTs should hold meetings with teachers to improve the academic performance of learners. Evidence of analysis of results, support and coaching of teachers by departmental heads is also a strategy to improve learners' academic performance. The development of SIP, profiling of learners and involvement of circuit manager are other strategies. Another strategy is that SMTs should attend community meetings to address school challenges. In addition, SMT members should prioritise unity among themselves, focus on a common purpose (which in this case is to improve grade 12 performance) and resolve identified Grade 12 challenges. The implication here is that SMTs must employ a variety of leadership and management aspects that contribute to improving learner academic performance.

4.2.3.4 Stakeholder involvement

This study further found that stakeholder involvement is another key strategy used by SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

SMTs should have regular meetings with all stakeholders, furthermore, mentoring, supporting and coaching of teachers by departmental heads should be evident... [PA]

...invite motivational speakers to motivate teachers and learners separately. [DPA]

Offer extra-classes, monitor learners' attendance, establish and monitor effective morning and afternoon studies and often provide motivational talk to learners. [DHA]

SMTs should be united, be positive and focus on common purpose, be in a position to identify challenges facing Grade 12 learners and commonly resolve such challenges with all stakeholders' intervention. [TA]

DPA and DHA held similar views on involving motivational speakers as stakeholders to motivate teachers and learners separately. Whereas PA puts forward that SMTs should have regular meetings with stakeholders to improve the academic performance of learners. TA supports the view by adding that SMT should resolve Grade 12 learners' challenges with the intervention of all stakeholders. From the above information, it can be concluded that the involvement of all groups of persons who can contribute to improved learner performance is crucial. Motivational speakers, parents, learners, teachers, SMTs each can contribute to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. The diversity in age, work experience and gender representation align with the notion of harnessing contributions from every valuable source. The participants are seasoned educationists with extensive experience in working with learners.

4.3 DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

This section discusses the findings of the study, in line with the themes and sub-themes that emanated from the findings. These findings are also discussed, linking them with empirical literature and the theoretical framework (Instructional leadership theory), which underpins the study.

4.3.1 THEME 1: ROLE OF SMTs IN IMPROVING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

The findings of this study revealed that it is the role of SMTs to provide resources to improve the academic performance of grade 12 learners. These echo the stipulations by the Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture, (2023:5) that the SMTs must promptly respond to the teaching and learning needs of a school. The findings also concur with those of Mkomi and Mzokwana (2024:403) who explained that the duties of school boards include among others assigning resources and overseeing academic achievement programmes. An earlier study by Caldwell and Spinks (2021:49) also found that school boards are in charge of infrastructure, curriculum, and personnel support. The studies conducted by Mkomi and Mzokwana (2024:403) Stated the importance of resource provision to attain learner performance and this provision cannot be ignored. A characteristic of the instructional leadership theory is to ensure teaching and learning in the classroom, and this cannot be ensured in the absence of resources.

The provision of effective leadership is another finding that emanated from the study as a role to improve academic performance of Grade 12 learners. This supports Caldwell and Spinks (2021:49) who stated that the SMT's underlying basis is giving leadership guidance and direction about proper teaching and learning that finally yields good academic performance. The findings also concur with those of Mandasari and Aminatun, (2020:244) who explained **that** SMTs ensure that decisions taken during school meetings are communicated to all stakeholders and make efforts for transparency in implementing rules and regulations. Provision of effective leadership in the school is one of the instructional leadership traits and this cannot be visible in the absence of SMTs.

The involvement of stakeholders is one of the many SMTs roles that emerged from the study to improve academic performance of Grade 12 learners. This is backed by Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture (2023:4) articulating that participation in the performance of learners by both educators and parents is a cornerstone of effective SMTs. This requires that necessary measures are taken for stakeholder participation in decision-making for effective teaching and learning. Mandasari and Aminatun (2020:244) concur with stakeholder involvement by stating that SMTs ensure that decisions taken during school meetings are communicated to all stakeholders and make efforts for transparency in implementing rules and regulations. This also means that all information in schools must be freely available and accessible to parents, students, teachers, and all other stakeholders who are affected by the decisions made. Stakeholder involvement is another key attribute of instructional leadership **theory**, and this can be effectively played by the principal as a leader of SMT.

The findings of this study also revealed that it is the SMTs' role to provide support, guidance and motivation to teachers and learners to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. This finding supports Caldwell and Spinks (2021:49) statement that the SMT's underlying basis is giving guidance and direction about proper teaching and learning that finally yields good academic performance. Furthermore, Zhou *et al.*, (2020:505) articulate that quality results are achieved in a school where SMTs ensure quality resources are provided to support teaching and learning for desired academic

performance. A characteristic of the instructional leadership theory is to provide support, guidance and motivation and this cannot be ensured in the absence SMTs.

Efficient curriculum management falls within David's (2019:3) broad concept of the instructional leadership theory. The findings of this study revealed that it is the SMTs' role to manage curriculum in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. This finding echoes Hofer et al, (2021:106) who state that SMTs ensure educators understand the use of curriculum related policy documents. Moreover, the findings correlate with those of Mandasari and Aminatun (2020:247) who indicated that SMTs come up with the tools to monitor the curriculum coverage. My opinion in this study is **that** school leadership and management embedded in the roles of SMTs are pivotal to school functionality, learner performance and quality education for economic development.

4.3.2 THEME 2: CHALLENGES FACING SMTs IN IMPROVING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS

This discussion portrayed hindrances encountered by SMTs **while** performing their roles in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. The findings of revealed that inadequate knowledge of roles is a challenge faced by SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. This finding lends support to Grogan (2023:2), who stated that SMTs lack knowledge of their roles and what is expected of **them**, and lack of knowledge derails them from delivering what is required of them in schools. Moreover, the findings align with the report of Popova *et al*, (2022:110) that lack of professional development of school leaders is a challenge with regards to leaders enhancing academic performance of learners. However, the findings contrast expectations of the instructional leadership theory of school managers to deliver on their responsibility to develop their subordinates. One may not be wrong to say that the Department of Education is failing the SMTs by not giving them enough training to equip them in their roles.

The findings also revealed that lack of resources is another challenge faced by SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Similar findings were indicated by Matlakala *et al* (2024:7) stating that lack of resources is a challenge for SMTs

and this can be attributed to **several** factors, including lower parental income and their contribution is needed to support SMTs in improving academic performance of learners. Some parents in rural areas cannot afford to buy extra resources, such as study guides for their children. Mabena *et al.*, (2021:23) stated that poorer school infrastructure, facilities and **poorly trained** human resources pose a serious challenge to SMTs. Against these findings, the core characteristic of the instructional leadership theory is to ensure teaching and learning in the classroom, and this cannot be ensured in the absence of resources.

From the findings of this study, it was also discovered that poor involvement of stakeholders is another challenge facing SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Azorin and Ainscow (2020:61) stated that, parents' educational level contributes to the extent to which they get involved in their children's schooling, moreover, low levels of education limit parents' participation in the academic performance of their children. Ndwandwe (2023:18) concurs with earlier researchers and is articulated that throughout the world that, there is lack of effort to involve parents in the education of their children. The findings also indicated an absence of stakeholder involvement. Against stakeholder involvement challenge, it is the attribute of instructional leadership theory for SMTs to effectively involve stakeholders, such as parents into the academic performance of their children, especially the principal as a head of SMTs.

The findings also revealed that the ill-discipline among learners is another challenge faced by SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. This finding concurs with those of Mutya *et al.*, (2023:461) who stated that SMTs find learners' attitude a challenge in improving academic performance. Ogbu and Simons (2022:26) also reported that learners engage themselves in drug abuse, bullying and some lack respect towards their teachers and even elders in society. Earlier findings by (2023:51) also pointed out that learner absenteeism and high rate of teenage pregnancy in rural schools of South Africa are learners' indiscipline which becomes an SMT challenge to improve academic performance. One of the characteristics of instructional leadership theory is for school leaders to maintain order in the school.

It also emerged from this study that the indiscipline of teachers is a challenge facing SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. This finding reflects literature by Buthelezi (2019:14); Vurayai and Muchuweni (2024:96) who stated that lack of discipline by teachers eventually affects the SMTs to improve the academic performance of learners, especially learners in Grade 12. Moreover, Vurayai and Muchuweni (2024:96) explained that if a teacher is often indiscipline (for instance, always late), **that educator** disturbs the SMTs role of proper management and such an educator cannot discipline learners as SMTs require teachers' cooperation and effective involvement in the academic performance of learners (Buthelezi, 2019:14). It is the expectation of the instructional leadership theory's trait for school leaders to be behaviour models, to restore order and discipline within the school as an institution. It is common knowledge that children learn better from what they see than what they hear. Therefore, teacher indiscipline puts SMTs in a more challenging situation than learner indiscipline in their attempt to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

The findings also revealed that systemic challenges are a significant drawback faced by SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. This finding relates to the views of Kohler (2022:17) who postulated that legislative amendments make a difference and can pose challenges to already grounded state of SMTs within education systems. The findings report systemic challenges such as qualified progressed learners and language of teaching and learning as barriers to learners' performance. The National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act no. 27 of 1996) empowers the minister of national education to determine the national policy in terms of principles contained in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. Such national policies should be put and led into action by SMTs. The Instructional Leadership Theory advocates for unity within the school, but these systemic challenges act against this theory.

4.3.3 THEME 3: STRATEGIES USED BY SMTs IN IMPROVING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS

The findings revealed that effective teaching, monitoring and management is the strategy used by SMTs to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. The findings support Hutchinson's (2021:71) findings, which stated that Australian SLTs ensure

effective learner engagement during the lessons by making lessons learner-centred, instead of teacher-centred. This finding echoes the stipulations by Maphalala *et al* (2023:84) stating that SMTs should ensure that educators understand the use of curriculum-related policy documents. For instance, the ATPs and CAPS support that. The findings indicate the strategy of providing a conducive environment for teaching and learning. Kwalipu and Isaacs (2022:18) reported similar findings that school principals should provide a conducive and productive environment that allows teaching and learning to smoothly work towards academic performance. The South African Council for Educators Act, 2000 (Act No. 31 of 2000) states that educators as members of South African Council for Educators (SACE) should restore the value of teaching and learning for better academic performance. The instructional leadership theory advocates learner-centred pedagogy and creating safe environment for teaching and learning to take place and to monitor and supervise the work of subordinates.

It was found in in this study that provision of resources is one of the SMT strategies used in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners. This finding reflects literature on Suttles (2024:49) who states that teachers should be given support by the SMTs, providing them with resources such as study guides, question banks, and day-to-day resources that will assist them in the teaching process. The National Development Plan (2024:7) also expects SMTs to ensure that only qualified and well-informed teachers teach learners for academic performance. The strategy to provide support found in this study relates with Mkomi and Mzokwana (2024:403) findings stipulating that SMTs allocate subject to teachers according to their expertise in subject specialisations. The instructional leadership theory informs principals to ensure proper implementation of policies, plans and agreements.

The findings also revealed that provision of effective leadership and management is another strategy used by SMTs to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. In line with this findings, Tsotsi (2024:45) articulated that SMTs should provide leadership in guiding learners towards better academic performance. This finding also supports Broer *et al* (2023:5) who reported that SMTs should provide effective management of school culture which will enable teacher to exercise classroom

management. This study's findings also relate to those of Suttles, (2024:49) that SMTs should show effective management of internal workshops keep teachers abreast with the current pedagogy and methodologies of curriculum implementation. The instructional leadership theory is anchored on the principles of sound teaching and learning, expecting principals to provide effective leadership and management. To attain such teaching and learning.

This study further found that stakeholder involvement is another key strategy used by SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learner. This finding was also echoed in earlier studies such as the findings of Day, Sammons and Gorgen (2020:21) which found that School-family collaboration has a positive impact on learner academic performance irrespective of parent's social class findings by Ndwandwe (2023:19) that the society in which learners come from has much to contribute to the academic performance of its children. The South African School Act of 1996, section 23(a) also stipulates that there must be one more parent in a school's governing body than the combined total of other members for academic performance of learners. Instructional leadership theory is also characterised by the ability of school leaders to collaborate with school constituencies.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, data collected through qualitative research method was presented, analysed and interpreted in a narrative form on the roles of School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Malamulele North-East Circuit, South Africa. The findings revealed that there are several roles SMTs employ in improving the academic performance of grade 12 learners. These include the provision of resources, effective leadership, ensuring stakeholder involvement, providing support and motivation to learners and teachers and effective curriculum management. In performing these roles. The findings indicated challenges of inadequate knowledge of SMT role, lack of resources, poor stakeholder involvement, learner and teacher indiscipline as well as some systemic challenges. The findings also suggested some strategies that may be used to improve the academic performance of learners. These include effective teaching and monitoring, provision of resources, effective leadership and

curriculum management, and ensuring stakeholder involvement in school activities. The following chapter presents the summary of findings, delimitation and limitation of the study, recommendations and conclusion.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the summary of the findings, delimitation and limitations of the study, followed by the recommendations on measures that to be considered for improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Chapter one presented the introduction and background of the study, statement of the problem, aim and objectives of the study, research questions, justification of the study, preliminary literature review, contribution of the study, significance of the study, delimitation and limitations of the study, definitions of terms, organisation of the study and chapter summary. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of SMTs in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Chapter two discussed the introduction, theoretical framework, historical background of SMTs, and learner performance, empirical literature, policy and legislative framework and chapter summary. The empirical literature reviewed examined the roles of SMTs, determined the challenges facing SMTs and explored the strategies used by SMTs in improving academic performance of learners.

Chapter three presented an introduction, followed by the introduction, research paradigm, design and methodology, population of the study, sampling method and procedure, data collection, analysis, research ethics, and the chapter summary. The researcher used the qualitative method to collect and analyse the data. The researcher conducted interviews with principals, and deputy principals, departmental heads from four schools, as well as teachers from two schools of the four schools above. All participants assigned given codes to protect their identity and to maintain confidentiality. The researcher applied for ethical clearance from the University of Venda ethics committee and the Limpopo provincial research ethics committee. The researcher and participants signed consent forms for research information to be confidential and for information to be used for research purposes only. The research design answered the following research questions:

- What are the roles of the School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?

- What are the challenges facing the School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?
- What are the strategies that can be used by the School Management Teams to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?

The questions above played a significant role because they allowed the researcher to achieve the objectives of the study, which were the following:

- To examine the role of the School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.
- To determine the challenges facing the School Management Teams in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.
- To explore the strategies that can be used by School Management Teams to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

Chapter four dealt with data presentation, analysis, interpretation and discussions of the findings. In this chapter the sub-themes, which have emerged from the main themes are presented. The themes in this chapter were: (1) The role of SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners; (2) The challenges facing SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners; and (3) The strategies used by SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Special attention was paid on the role of SMTs. The researcher presents the summary of the findings, followed by strategies that the SMTs can use for improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. SMTs are expected to assume instructional leadership traits as roles, in order to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Qualitative research method was executed to obtain data from the participants through interviews as a data collection method. From the collected, interpreted and analysed data, the following themes were identified: (1) The role of SMTs in improving the

academic performance of Grade 12 learners; (2) The challenges facing SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners: and (3) **Strategies** used by SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners.

5.2.1 THE ROLE OF SMTs IN IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS

It was found that the provision of resources is one of the main roles of SMTs; that is human resources, such as teachers and physical resources, such as ATPs, CAPS documents and study guides. The provision of effective leadership and management, such as **as timetabling**, setting clear expectations of subject performance with educators, profiling of learners, leading and managing the curriculum, developing a School Improvement Plan (SIP), initiating extra-lessons and sharing responsibilities, as SMT members. The involvement of community stakeholders, through regular communication with parents, motivating teachers and learners. Another role is supporting and motivating the teachers, learners and the SMTs themselves, as well as resolving teachers' and learners' academic concerns. The role of curriculum management also emerged, such as – allocating highly capable teachers in Grade 12, monitoring of teachers' work and learners' activity books, effectively teaching learners and even going an extra mile in having weekend classes, to effectively complete the curriculum with learners. These are the roles of SMTs which emerged from the analysed data.

5.2.2 THE CHALLENGES FACING SMTs IN IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS

It was found that SMT members do not have management knowledge, competencies and skills. They were also found to lack motivation. Furthermore, there was lack of unity among SMT members, which eventually led to each department pushing its own purpose and goals. Moreover, some departmental heads did not monitor learners' written work, absence of subject meetings and monthly performance reports. All these were caused by SMTs lack of management knowledge. There was also a challenge of lack of resources, such as infrastructure, textbooks, and electronic resources for science subjects. Lack of parental involvement and teacher and learners' ill-discipline were further challenges. For example, some teachers did not honour their classes regularly. Furthermore, there was

lack of support from some staff members for SMTs. In addition, there was lack of preparation from educators. As a result, some teachers did not give learners enough class activities to learners. Also, there was little feedback from teachers to learners and some educators did not submit learners' books for moderation. **Learners' ill-discipline** came across through teenage pregnancy, learners bunking classes, peer pressure among learners, negative attitudes towards schooling, disrespecting teachers and drug abuse. There were also systemic challenges, such as lack of support programs (workshops), qualified progressed learners (QPs) and Rationalisation and Redeployment (R&R). These were the challenges facing SMTs extrapolated from the data.

5.2.3 STRATEGIES USED BY SMTs IN IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS

Ensuring effective teaching **includes** monitoring and curriculum management. In other words, the SMTs monitor educators' work and learners' written work according to the Annual Teaching Plan. In addition, they monitor the period register, learners' attendance, as well the attendance of morning and afternoon studies. Further activities include the use of previous question papers as activities within lessons, as well as focusing on high, middle and low order questions. Moreover, towards the examination, teachers set questions based on previous question papers. In addition, the teachers identify learners who are at risk and re-teach effectively. Informal assessment tasks should be based on previous question papers, followed by monitored item analysis. A recovery plan should be available, to show the content lost and such a plan should be **monitored**, and feedback should be given to learners towards the end of lessons. Additionally, the school should provide resources, such as experienced teachers, to help teach difficult aspects within subjects, as well as a provision of teaching and learning support materials. Furthermore, teachers should be supported with examination guidelines, study guides and question banks. Moreover, there should be effective leadership and management, such as holding meetings with teachers, as stakeholders within the school; evidence of supporting and coaching of teachers by departmental heads and analyses of results. Furthermore, the school should develop a School Improvement Plan (SIP), profile learners and seek the circuit manager's intervention. SMTs should also attend community meetings, to address

school challenges. Furthermore, pre-tests, marking and recording, with follow ups should be mandatory. SMTs should also be united, focus on the common purpose and identify challenges facing grade 12 learners. In addition, there should be stakeholder involvement, such as involving motivational speakers to motivate teachers and learners, separately. Finally, SMTs should hold regular meetings with stakeholders and SMTs to resolve Grade 12 learners' challenges, with the intervention of all stakeholders.

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The main problem was that there was limited time to collect the data from participants, analyse the data and make the appropriate conclusions and recommendations. The participants were not easily available, which resulted in procrastination and extended the expected time the study. Although the researcher achieved the objective of the study, the sample size of ten participants does not permit generalisation of the study findings.

5.4 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The current study focused on the role of SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners, the study was carried out at selected secondary schools in Malamulele North-East circuit, which is one of the five circuits in Malamulele Cluster. The other four circuits are Malamulele East, Malamulele Central, Malamulele South, and Malamulele West, under Vhembe East District Municipality, in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

The reasons for delimiting this study to Malamulele North-East Circuit are that the researcher noticed that there are several factors there that hinder SMTs in improving academic performance of learners. This is because the researcher works at one of the schools in the area of the study. Moreover, conducting a study in this area was least expensive, considering the distance that the researcher would need travel to collect data for the other circuits.

5.5 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of the SMTs in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Malamulele North-East Circuit, South Africa. The study found that it is the role of SMTs to provide resources, leadership,

support, guidance and motivation, involve stakeholders, and manage curriculum to improve the academic performance of grade 12 learners. The researcher recommended that SMTs should involve community stakeholders, such as, parents in the education of their children by conducting stakeholders' meetings to help motivate learners. Furthermore, SMTs should monitor educators' work and learners' written work according to CAPS documents, ATPs and examination guidelines. Moreover, SMTs should provide learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) from the Department of Education through the provincial education department. In addition, SMTs should provide leadership and management in schools for the overall improvement of the quality of education for learners. Based on these conclusions, the researcher makes the recommendations below.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher has outlined recommendations of the study and recommendations on future studies as follows:

5.6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

This section presents recommendations of the study, which arose from the findings of the study. The researcher makes these recommendations for the Department of Education, SMTs and teachers. The recommendations are meant to improve the academic performance of learners. The researcher recommends that:

- The Department of Education should provide resources, such as infrastructure, textbooks, and electronic gadgets to facilitate learning.
- The Department of Education should conduct support programs (workshops) to continuously develop teachers.
- The Department of Education should dispose of the policy of qualified progressed learners (QPs) in schools, to enhance learner quality.
- The Department of Education should reconsider the policy of Rationalisation and Redeployment (R&R) of teachers, as it destabilises learners' academic performance and school cultures due to redeployment of teachers from one school to another.

- SMTs should involve community stakeholders, such as, parents in the education of their children to help motivate learners by conducting stakeholders' meetings.
- SMTs should involve the Department of Social Development in the academic performance of learners, to deal with learners' ill-discipline and issues of teenage pregnancy.
- SMTs should monitor educators' work and learners' written work according to CAPS documents, ATPs and examination guidelines.
- SMTs should provide learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) from the Department of Education through provincial education department.
- SMTs should provide leadership and management in schools.
- SMTs, together with teachers, should identify learners at risk and re-teach them separately and ensure that they are not left behind.
- Teachers should use previous question papers as activities within lessons, especially question papers which have high, middle and low order questions.

5.6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS ON FUTURE STUDIES

This study provides opportunities for other investigations to be conducted on the roles of School Management Teams in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners. The researcher recommends that, research similar to this one should be conducted in the Malamulele cluster to detect other roles and challenges facing SMTs in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners. It is further recommended that other studies may be conducted on the experiences of deputy principals as heads of curriculum and departmental heads as curriculum managers. There is still a need to undertake a study on curriculum implementation towards academic performance focussing on different school settings. More benefits can be found if future studies include circuits and several provincial districts for diverse and broad outcomes.

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ANNEXURE A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - TO PRINCIPALS

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT) IN IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS IN MALAMULELE NORTH-EAST CIRCUIT, SOUTH AFRICA

Instructions: This is an Open-ended interview. Please, answer by providing your perceptions of the role of the School Management Team (SMT) in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Malamulele North-East circuit, South Africa. Kindly note that there are no right or wrong answers.

SECTION A: PERSONAL DETAILS OF PARTICIPANT

Age:.....

Gender:.....

Educational qualification:.....

Work experience:.....

Secondary school:.....

SECTION B: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT) IN IMPROVING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS.

1. What are the roles that principal play in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?
2. What is the importance of SMT in enhancing learners' academic performance?
3. What are the barriers to implementing such roles to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?
4. What are the implications of poor academic performance for Grade 12 learners?

5. What are the strategies that can be used by the SMTs to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?

“THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS”

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - TO DEPUTY PRINCIPALS

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT) IN IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS IN MALAMULELE NORTH-EAST CIRCUIT, SOUTH AFRICA

Instructions: This is an Open-ended interview. Please, answer by providing your perceptions of the role of the School Management Team (SMT) in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Malamulele North-East circuit, South Africa. Kindly note that there is no right or wrong answer.

SECTION A: PERSONAL DETAILS OF PARTICIPANT

Age:.....

Gender:.....

Educational qualification:.....

Work experience:.....

Secondary school:.....

SECTION B: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT) IN IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS.

To Deputy Principal

1. How are you executing your roles to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?
2. What do you regard as obstacles in executing such roles to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?
3. What are the strategies that can be used by the SMTs to improve academic performance of Grade 12 learners?

“THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS”

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - TO DEPARTMENTAL HEADS

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT) IN IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS IN MALAMULELE NORTH-EAST CIRCUIT, SOUTH AFRICA.

Instructions: This is an Open-ended interview. Please, answer by providing your perceptions of the role of the School Management Team (SMT) in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Malamulele North-East circuit, South Africa. Kindly note that there is no right or wrong answer.

SECTION A: PERSONAL DETAILS OF PARTICIPANT

Age:.....

Gender:.....

Educational qualification:.....

Work experience:.....

Secondary school:.....

SECTION B: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT) IN IMPROVING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS.

To Departmental Heads

1. How are you performing your departmental head (HOD) roles to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?
2. What do you regard as stumbling blocks in performing such roles to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?
3. What are the measures that can be taken by the SMTs to improve the academic performance of Grade 12 learners?

“THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS”

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - TO EDUCATORS

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT) IN IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS IN MALAMULELE NORTH-EAST CIRCUIT, SOUTH AFRICA

Instructions: This is an Open-ended interview. Please, answer by providing your perceptions of the role of the School Management Team (SMT) in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Malamulele North-East circuit, South Africa. Kindly note that there is no right or wrong answer.

SECTION A: PERSONAL DETAILS OF PARTICIPANT

Age:.....

Gender:.....

Educational qualification:.....

Work experience:.....

Secondary school:.....

SECTION B: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT) IN IMPROVING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS.

To educators

1. How are you as educators assisting SMT members to improve academic performance of Grade 12 learners?
2. What do you regard as the weaknesses of SMT members in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners?
3. What do you think the SMT can do to improve academic performance of Grade 12 learners?

“THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS”

ANNEXURE B

University of Venda Ethical Clearance

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:
Mr F Yingwane

STUDENT NO:
11633941

PROJECT TITLE: The role of School Management Teams in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Malamulele Northeast Circuit.

ETHICAL CLEARANCE NO: **FHSSE/24/CSEM/19/1208**

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr ARO Bessong	UNIVEN, Educational Studies	Supervisor
Prof NF Libesani	UNIVEN, Educational Studies	Co-Supervisor
Mr F Yingwane	UNIVEN, Educational Studies	Investigator-Student

Type: **Masters Research**

Risk: **Minimal risk to humans, animals or environment (Category 2)**

Approval Period: **August 2024 – August 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 infringes 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. Should 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. Should there be deviation 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.
- It is 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: August 2024

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

Signature: 



ANNEXURE C

Limpopo Provincial Research Ethics 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: 15 NOVEMBER 2024

PROJECT NUMBER: LPREC/110/2024: PG

**SUBJECT: THE ROLE OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS IN IMPROVING ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS: A CASE OF SELECTED
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MALAMULELE NORTH EAST CIRCUIT.**

RESEARCHER: YINGWANE F

Chairperson: Prof I 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.

ANNEXURE D

Limpopo Department of Education Permission to Conduct the Study



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

Yingwane F

P O Box 1043

Saselamani

0928

fyingwane@outlook.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 role of school management teams in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners: A case of selected secondary schools in Malamulele North East Circuit."**
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.

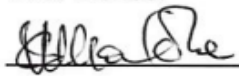
REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH : YINGWANE F Page 1

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

The heartland of Southern Africa-development is about people

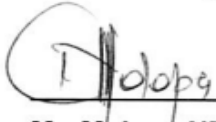
- 4 Furthermore, you are expected to produce this letter at Schools/ Offices where you intend conducting your research as an evidence that you are permitted to conduct the research.
- 5 The department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

Best wishes.



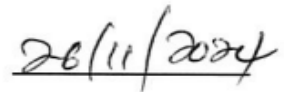
Makola MC (Ph.D)

Director: Integrated Planning, Research & Reporting

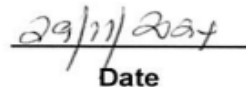


Mr. Molope NM

ACTING DDG: CORPORATE SERVICES



Date



Date

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH : YINGWANE F Page 2

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

The heartland of Southern Africa-development is about people

ANNEXURE E

Language Editing

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND EDUCATION

22 February 2025

Department of Educational Management
Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education
University of Venda
Thohoyandou
0950

Sir/madam

This serves to confirm that I have proofread Mr. F. Yingwane's dissertation, titled, "The Role of School Management Teams in Improving Academic Performance of Grade 12 Learners: A Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Malamulele North-East Circuit".

The proofreading entailed editing some parts from it; for example, to avoid wordiness, redundancy; sub-dividing sentences, and so on, to make the document more understandable. However, I have not tampered with the content of the document, except where this constituted repetition or made the document confusing.

After effecting the suggested editorials, the mini-dissertation will be ready for examination.

Sincerely



.....
V.T. Bvuma

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

PRIVATE BAG X5050, THOHOYANDOU, 0950 LIMPOPO PROVINCE SOUTH AFRICA
TELEPHONE (015) 962 8172 FAX (015) 962 8416

ANNEXURE F

Turnitin Report

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS IN IMPROVING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS: A CASE OF SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MALAMULELE NORTH EAST CIRCUIT

ORIGINALITY REPORT

17 %

SIMILARITY INDEX

9 %

INTERNET SOURCES

6 %

PUBLICATIONS

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Internet Source

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4

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ANNEXURE G

Informed Consent

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

UNIVEN Informed Consent

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study : (The role of School Management Teams in improving academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Malamulele North-East Circuit.)

Principal Investigator/s/ researcher : (*Yingwane Foster, Masters in Educational Management*)

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s : (*Dr. ARO Bessong, Doctor of Education*)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: The study will focus on the Role of School Management Teams (SMTs) in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners: A Case of selected secondary schools in Malamulele North-East Circuit. The aim of this study is to investigate the role of the School Management Team in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Malamulele North-East Circuit and to recommend the strategies that can be used by SMTs to enhance the academic performance of learners in secondary schools.

Outline of the Procedures : (Data will be collected through interviews, interviews will be conducted to the sampled participants of the study in order to gather information related to the application of ethics in the study and on the role of School Management Teams (SMTs) in improving the academic performance of Grade 12 learners in Malamulele North-East Circuit. Participants in this study will be responsible of providing appropriate answers relevant to the study based on the questions asked by the researcher.)

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: (participants in the study will not be exposed to any physical threats during the process of the study and will also not be exposed to any harmful situations where their wellbeing would be affected or compromised. There are no risks involved in this study.)

Benefits: (Participants will advance their knowledge on the role of SMTs.)

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study: (If the participants are not willing to provide the information voluntarily, it should be noted that they can withdraw at any time without any consequence.)

Remuneration: (Participants will not receive any monetary or any other type of remuneration.)

Costs of the Study: (Participants will not be expected to cover any costs towards the study.)

Confidentiality: (All interviews will be conducted with confidentiality and anonymity.)
be maintained and how will this be maintained)

Research-related Injury: (There are no risks involved in the study, therefore no compensation will be offered.)

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

Please contact the researcher (tel. no. 071 8285 097), my supervisor (tel. no. 082 6831 305) 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

UNIVEN INFORMED CONSENT

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, (**Yingwane Foster**), about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: FHSSE/24/CSEM/19/1208.
- 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,			

I (**YINGWANE FOSTER**) herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Researcher: **Yingwane Foster**

Date: **02 – 07 - 2024**

Signature:



Full Name of Witness (If applicable)..... Date

Signature.....

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)..... Date.....

Signature.....

Please note the following:

Research details must be provided in a clear, simple and culturally appropriate manner and prospective participants should be helped to arrive at an informed decision by use of appropriate language (grade 10 level- use Flesch Reading Ease Scores on Microsoft Word), selecting of a non-threatening environment for interaction and the availability of peer counseling (Department of Health, 2004)

If the potential participant is unable to read/illiterate, then a right thumbprint is required and an impartial witness, who is literate and knows the participant e.g. parent, sibling, friend, pastor, etc. should verify in writing, duly signed that informed verbal consent was obtained (Department of Health, 2004).

If anyone makes a mistake completing this document e.g. a wrong date or spelling mistake, a new document has to be completed. The incomplete original document has to be kept in the participant's file and not thrown away, and copies thereof must be issued to the participant.

References:

Department of Health: 2004. *Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Structures and Processes*

<http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/factsheets/guidelines/ethnics/>

Department of Health. 2006. *South African Good Clinical Practice Guidelines*. 2nd Ed. Available at:

http://www.nhrec.org.za/?page_id=14