

**MANAGING DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH MULTI-GRADE CLASSES IN
MPUMALANGA PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

by

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DECLARATION

I, **Sipho Shadrack Ntombela** hereby certify that this work is authentically and entirely mine and has never been presented at any higher learning institution for a degree. The citations of other scholars included in this research study have been duly acknowledged through referencing.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Sipho Shadrack Ntombela', written in a cursive style.

Date: 29/09/2021

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my late parents, **Jabulani David Ntombela** and **Sibongile Evelyn Ntombela** for showing me love and support throughout my twelve years of basic education. You were always there for me, no matter how difficult things were. I know, it was always your dream to support me and finance my tertiary education. Unfortunately, you both did not live to fulfil your dream. Your words of encouragement are always ringing in my ears.

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ABSTRACT

The Department of Basic Education has a duty of ensuring that all children enjoy free and equal access to basic education despite their socio-economic status and backgrounds. The South African constitution also recognises universal access to quality primary education as a fundamental human right. This compels the Department of Basic Education to ensure that every child is provided with basic primary education at no cost, hence the expansion of no-fee schools and the National Schools Nutrition Programme. In an attempt to fulfil the Millennium Developmental Goal 2, which advocates for the provision of equal access to primary education, the multi-grade teaching practice was then introduced to ensure the provision of education to children in sparsely-populated and rural communities. However, this type of teaching practice comes with myriad difficulties which teachers face as they manage curriculum delivery. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the various difficulties that teachers face as they have to deal with multi-grade teaching and how they overcome those difficulties.

The literature revealed that multi-grade teaching is not limited to the South African situation alone, but a global phenomenon practised in both developing and developed countries. It also emanates from the literature that multi-grade teaching, if used correctly and effectively could yield positive results. The study adopted a qualitative research approach. This study follows a case study design. Following that the study adopted the qualitative research approach, data collection tools linked to the approach were used and included: Interviews, document review and observations. A principal, teacher and parent from three schools managing difficulties associated with multi-grade classes were purposively sampled. The research findings, based on the interviews, document review, observation and the literature reviewed revealed that the insufficient backing from the Department of Basic Education, heavy workload of teachers and general shortage of teaching staff are some of the difficulties that teachers in multi-graded schools have to grapple with. Based on the findings, the researcher concludes that the dearth of intervention from the Department of Basic Education hugely affects the effective curriculum delivery in multi-graded schools. To mitigate the identified difficulties, the researcher recommended that a different post-provisioning norm and funding model for the multi-graded schools be experimented with.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ECD	Early Childhood Development
HOD	Head of Department
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IPET	Initial Professional Education Training
MED	Mpumalanga Education Department
MDGs	Millennium Developmental Goals
MRTEQ	Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications
NEEDU	National Education Evaluation and Development Unit
NSF	Norms and Standards for Funding
NSNP	National Schools Nutrition Programme
POA	Programme of Assessment
PPN	Post-Provisioning Norm
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SASA	South African Schools Act
SA-SAMS	South African School Administration Management System
SMT	School Management Teams
UNESCO	United Nations, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VFHs	Voluntary Food Handlers
WGTP	Working Group on the Teaching Profession
WIL	Work Integrated Learning

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CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Not all researchers share the same view regarding the definition of multi-grade schooling. This notion is underscored by Brown (2008), who postulates that researchers differ in their interpretations of the phenomenon. Berry (2010) defines multi-grade schooling as teaching that takes place in a graded system of education when a single class contains two or more grade levels of learners. However, Pridmore (2007) regards multi-grade schooling as a condition where a single educator provides educational instruction to more than one grade in a classroom. Most researchers believe that multi-grade schooling exists in response to the lack of educators. However, the researcher is of the view that it is a host of factors that normally create multi-graded classes, and not only a shortage of teachers. Moreover, multi-grade schooling allows children who live in sparsely populated areas to access education where it is not practically feasible to provide one educator for each school grade (Little, 2006). The curriculum does, however, not incorporate multi-grade schooling but is largely skewed towards mono-grade teaching practices. Teachers are therefore compelled to use mono-grade teaching pedagogy and materials in multi-grade classes. Disturbingly, the two are fundamentally different (Joubert, 2010).

This study has sought to evaluate the difficulties that many teachers face in handling multi-grade classes. The literature reveals that teachers in multi-graded schools are struggling to cope with the difficulties that arise from multi-grade schooling. This claim is evidenced by Ngubane (2011) who posits that educational programmes around the globe are not designed for multi-grade schooling, which results in teachers struggling because assistance from the Department of Basic Education is minimal. The researcher, therefore, contends that the continued inability of teachers to handle multi-grade classes compromises the curriculum delivery in multi-graded schools. Kivunja and Sims (2015) mention that the inability of teachers to handle multi-grade classes is largely attributed to the fact that they were not trained on multi-grade classrooms. As a result of the lack of training and support, teachers have to rely on teacher-centered methods (Taole, 2020). Given the widespread existence of multi-graded schools around the globe, the researcher suggests that necessary measures need to be

initiated to ensure that learners in multi-grade schools also receive a quality education. Since the problem of incapacity of teachers to handle the difficulties associated with multi-grade schooling is evident in South Africa and globally, the researcher advocates that more effort has to be put in place to change the status quo, hence the need for this study. Brown (2010) argues that multi-grade teaching is one of the research areas that researchers seem to have neglected in South Africa, hence it is difficult to give an exact number of schools employing this practice. It was, therefore, for this reason, that the researcher undertook this study. The antithesis of multi-grade schooling is mono-grade schooling which predominates in South African schooling system. The implementation of multi-grade schooling could be an alternative to the merging of schools.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem which this study addresses relates to the insufficient knowledge and skills that primary school teachers demonstrate in managing difficulties associated with multi-grade teaching. The review of the literature confirms that, where teachers are struggling to manage difficulties associated with multi-grade schooling, instruction is likely to be heavily compromised. The continued inability of teachers to manage the difficulties, impacts negatively on curriculum delivery, and consequently learner performance. This notion is confirmed by Little (2001) who suggests that for children to learn effectively in a multi-grade environment, teachers need to be well-trained and supported, well-resourced and hold a positive attitude to multi-grade teaching. South African schooling is investing heavily in education, but the fact remains that the Department of Basic Education is still battling to achieve adequate improvement in curriculum delivery in multi-graded classes. Juvane (2010) argues that it is necessary to change the status quo for multi-grade teaching to be recognised as an alternative to mono-grade teaching pedagogy. Consequently, this study evaluates the difficulties that teachers experience in managing curriculum delivery in multi-graded Mpumalanga primary schools. Given that Mpumalanga province usually struggles in terms of matric results, the researcher reasons that exposing challenges faced by multi-grade primary schools in that province could lead to those schools being helped to perform better.

1.3 THE AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Every time a study is conducted, there would be an aim which the researcher intends achieving. In this context, the study evaluates the difficulties that teachers experience in managing curriculum delivery in multi-graded primary schools. To attain the specified aim, the researcher developed the following objectives which were:

- to identify difficulties that teachers have to overcome regarding curriculum delivery in multi-grade schools;
- to describe how teachers overcome the difficulties they face in curriculum planning and implementation, with regards to multi-grade schools; and
- to establish the impact that multi-grade schooling has on the academic achievement of learners in primary schools.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

On the basis of the problem statement, aim and objectives of this study, the researcher formulated the following questions in an attempt to address the research problem:

The research questions were classified as the main questions and the sub-questions.

The main question for the study was:

- How should the difficulties associated with multi-grade classes in Mpumalanga primary schools be managed?

The following sub-questions were asked in an attempt to answer the main question:

- What are the difficulties that teachers have to overcome regarding curriculum delivery in multi-grade schools?
- How do teachers overcome the difficulties they face in curriculum planning and implementation, with regards to multi-grade schools?
- What is the impact that multi-grade schooling has on the academic achievement of learners in primary schools?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is unimaginable for a study not to have significance. Significance of the study clarifies how the study might help in addressing the research problem. In the context of this study, Joubert (2010) posits that policy documents of the Department Basic of Education are silent about multi-graded schools, which implies that there is no policy on multi-grade schooling context in South Africa. This creates problems for teachers in coping with curriculum delivery in multi-graded schools. On the basis of that, the significance of this study could be expressed as follows:

- The study is likely to create awareness about systemic and pedagogical difficulties experienced by teachers when handling curriculum delivery in the multi-grade schooling context.
- It might help direct curriculum planners and developers to align their planning processes in such a way that may lead toward the inclusion of the multi-grade schooling context.
- The study could assist teachers in multi-graded schools to identify strategies that might enhance effective teaching and learning.
- It might assist the Department of Basic Education to identify difficulties under which multi-grade principals and teachers operate.
- The study is also more likely to contribute to existing knowledge and other studies associated with multi-grade schooling.

1.6 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Similar to other studies, this one also has multiple limitations. However, the researcher shall focus on only two. The first limitation is that of not making learners the research participants. This is the limitation in the sense that they are affected by multi-grade teaching, yet their voices are not represented in the study. The last limitation of the study relates to excluding former learners of the sampled multi-graded primary schools because they would give a different perspective of multi-grade schooling.

1.7 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The trend with many institutions of higher learning is to have Chapter One of research outlining the structure of all subsequent chapters in a particular study. This study comprises five chapters that are outlined below.

Chapter 1: This chapter is being referred to as the Orientation of the study. It introduces the research topic. It deals with the background of the study, the problem statement, the aim of the study, a description of the methods of the study, the significance of the study and the delimitations of the study.

Chapter 2: This chapter is the Literature review. It contains the literature on the origin and definition of multi-grade schooling, benefits of multi-grade schooling, teaching strategies that could help improve the curriculum delivery in multi-grade schools. The chapter focuses on the local, national and international literature relevant to this enquiry.

Chapter 3: This chapter describes the research design and methodology. It clarifies the methodology and design used in conducting the research study. It also highlights the reasons behind the choice of research methodology and design.

Chapter 4: This chapter contains the data presentation and analysis. This is the chapter that presents the data and proceeds to analyse that data. The chapter ends with sub-themes and themes through which an argument is developed regarding the analysed data.

Chapter 5: This chapter presents the summary, recommendations and conclusion. This is normally the last chapter of the study. The chapter summarises the main findings of the study, and includes the recommendations based on those findings and wind up with the conclusion.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter one started by providing an orientation to the study. That includes emphasising that the study evaluates the difficulties that teachers experience in managing instruction in multi-graded primary schools. Also, the chapter revealed the theoretical perspective underpinning the study, namely, Interpretivism. The chapter further disclosed that the research carried out is a qualitative case study concentrating on three multi-graded primary schools. It then concluded by stating that three data collection tools namely, interviews, document review and observation were utilised to collect data. Finally, the chapter listed the limitations of the study which centred around the exclusion of current primary school learners in multi-graded institutions, as well as the exclusion of former learners with the experience of multi-grade schooling.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter dealt with the orientation of the study. This chapter concentrates on the review of the literature on issues related to multi-grade teaching around the globe. This enabled the researcher to locate his study within the existing body of knowledge. The researcher carefully explored the different aspects of multi-grade teaching. In this chapter a comprehensive debate about the multi-grade teaching phenomenon is presented, so as to gain insight into practices and challenges of multi-grade teaching. This chapter is organised in the following manner: Firstly, the introduction of the chapter is presented. The definition and the origin of multi-grade schooling is discussed. The other sub-sections are arranged as follows: The rationale behind multi-grade schooling; the challenges and advantages of multi-grade schooling, the role of principals in multi-grade teaching context. Resources for multi-graded classes; teacher education, training and support and policy formulation and, instructional strategies in multi-grade schooling context are discussed in detail.

2.2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The preamble of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 expresses that the Department of Basic Education commits itself to provide an education of excellent quality to all learners, to contribute meaningfully in the economic development of the society and, consequently the elimination of poverty (RSA, 1996b). This is to say that, for the government to express its obligations of adhering to international commitments such as the Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs), it needs to put education ahead of all other priorities. By ensuring high-quality education, the government would be contributing to the eradication of poverty. The main assumption is that quality education can enhance the minimisation of poverty. Despite the effort by the Department of Basic Education to align its strategic plan to Medium Term Strategic Framework sub-outcomes, one of which is to improve the quality of teaching and learning, learning institutions in rural areas are still sidelined, under-resourced and often become multi-graded schools (Muthayan, 1999). Hence, multi-grade schooling has become one of the crucial topics of the Working Groups on the Teaching Profession (WGTP) agenda. Research reveals that various factors contribute to the

existence of multi-grade teaching experiences, one of which is that multi-grade teaching can promote the provision of basic education, thereby advancing the fulfilment of the Education for All goals and education-aligned Millennium Developmental Goals (Little, 2006).

Multi-grade teaching is not limited to South Africa, it also exists in other African countries like Zambia, Botswana, and Uganda, to name but a few (Brown, 2010). Mbele (2004) states that multi-grade schooling is one of the typical features of most rural schools. This practice is prevalent in areas where there are few learners, that is, where learner numbers do not justify a teacher per grade. It therefore, suggests that multi-grade schooling contributes significantly to the provision of access to education. However, decisive steps have to be taken to ensure that learners in multi-grade schools also receive a quality education.

Juvane and Joubert (2010) state that there is a need to change the current situation so that multi-grade teaching also enjoys recognition as a reality in the education context. Little (2001) suggests, that for multi-grade schooling to succeed, teachers need to be thoroughly trained and supported. Ngubane (2011) argues that teachers are finding it difficult to cope with multi-graded classes and the Department of Basic Education seems to have provided minimal support to mitigate the difficulties related to multi-grade teaching. Ramrathan and Ngubane (2013) argue that teachers receive no or little assistance from the education authorities. It is thus, evident that teachers in multi-graded schools are struggling to offer effective teaching and learning programmes.

2.3 DEFINING MULTI-GRADE SCHOOLING

The previous section concentrated on the origin of multi-grade schooling. This section focuses on the different definitions of multi-grade schooling. Researchers do not share the same view about the definition of multi-grade schooling. This notion is underscored by Brown (2008:4), who postulates that researchers differ in their interpretations of the phenomenon. For instance, Berry (2010) defines multi-grade schooling as being teaching that takes place within a graded system of education when a single class contains two or more grade levels of learners. However, Pridmore (2007) views multi-grade schooling as being a condition in which a single educator provides educational instruction to more than one grade in one classroom. In South African context, multi-

grade teaching can be regarded as a mode of teaching where one teacher teaches more than one grade in one classroom at the same time (Cornish, 2014). In some instances, multi-grade schooling was introduced in response to the shortage of teachers. Moreover, multi-grade schooling allows children who live in sparsely populated areas to access education where it is not practically feasible to provide one educator for each school grade (Little, 2006). The curriculum does, however, not incorporate multi-grade schooling, but is largely skewed towards mono-grade teaching practices. Teachers are consequently, compelled to use mono-grade teaching pedagogy and materials in multi-grade classes. Disturbingly, the two are fundamentally different (Joubert, 2010).

The definition which the researcher finds more compatible with this study is that of Pridmore (2007), who states that multi-grade schooling is a condition in which a single teacher provides educational instruction to more than one grade in one classroom. The definition is appropriate for this study because the researcher sampled schools where a single teacher is in charge of teaching learners of different grades in a single classroom with different curricula. The researcher is in agreement with the definitions of multi-grade schooling as offered by Mulryan-Kyne (2005) and Pridmore (2007) who declare that age variations should never be a descriptor of multi-grade classes as age variations may also occur in classes that are traditionally considered to be mono-graded. Furthermore, multi-grade schooling is considered to be the widespread practice especially in rural areas of developing countries, where population is low, to provide access to education for marginalised children. In this instance, multi-grade schooling exists as a result of necessity rather than choice.

On the other hand, Aksoy (2008) claims that, in developed countries such as Canada, Russia and the United States of America, etc., multi-grade schooling is not at all times a necessity but is viewed as one of the pedagogical preferences. In this case the multi-grade schooling is not characterised by lack of resources as Lubisi and Murphy (2002) assert that schools in remote areas, are sidelined, ill-equipped and often become multi-graded. Even if the multi-grade schooling occurs as a necessity, enough educational resources are available. Given the above scenario, demography should not be considered as being the descriptor for multi-grade schooling. It is therefore, for this reason that a careful comparison is made between multi-grade and mono-grade teaching, in terms of different contexts and countries. It is for this reason that the

researcher aligned his study with the definition of multi-grade schooling to the one offered by Pridmore (2007) who stresses that teaching takes place in one classroom by a single teacher, with different curricula, forms part and parcel of multi-grade classes.

2.4 THE RATIONALE BEHIND MULTI-GRADE SCHOOLING

An extensive examination of the literature reveals that multi-grade schooling is not a novel teaching experience. It has a history of many years around the world and in South Africa in particular. Little (1995) posits that multi-grade schooling is not exclusive to South Africa and is prevailing in both developed and developing countries. Little (2006) further reveals that in many African countries, multi-grade teaching is viewed as being a fundamental pedagogic tool that can help teachers in the context of teacher shortages and other challenging conditions. In essence, the reasons for the existence of multi-graded schools are varied, either by necessity or choice (Little, 1995). Berry (2001) ascribes the development of multi-grade schooling to high teacher absenteeism due to various reasons, to ensure learners are not left unattended. He further argues that this model of schooling is often as a result of dwindling learner enrolment in remote rural and thinly populated areas. In such areas the education authorities find it difficult to supply one teacher for a single grade. In response to the uneven enrolment in such areas, multi-grade schooling becomes a solution.

Berry (2001) further contends that multi-grade schooling came into being due to either philosophical or administrative reasons. Berry (2001) asserts that multi-grade schooling affords learners the opportunity for interdependence and social learning. Philosophically, learners in multi-grade setting stand a good chance of benefitting from another. The deliberate and systematic mixing of learners affords the learner the opportunity for co-existence and interdependence, hence multi-grade schooling is academically and socially beneficial to learners. The most common reason for multi-grade schooling to exist in most countries is administrative in nature. Multi-grade teaching is predominantly found in primary schools throughout under-developed countries (Kivunja & Sims, 2015). The simple logic is that in rural areas learner numbers are so low that there are not sufficient learners to form a single grade because of the remoteness of the school. This is confirmed by Makoele and Malinda (2014) who attest that multi-grade teaching is a pedagogic strategy that is commonly applied in

rural areas. In some instances, teacher absenteeism due to ill-health has prompted the development of multi-grade schooling in some schools. Multi-grade schools are normally smaller and more cost-effective as compared mono-graded schools and can be a way of providing access to primary education to marginalised communities and hence significantly reduces illiteracy (UNESCO, 2005a). So, the existence of multi-graded schools is consistent with the Education for All agenda in advancing education of the children across the globe.

The multi-grade teaching strategy in education is an approach that is gaining recognition as an approach that can provide access to education for learners in remote rural communities. Juvane (2005) maintains that multi-grade classes have the capability of increasing the access to education, while Berry (2001) contends that multi-grade classes are mainly effective in advancing the reading skills of low achieving learners, simply because of the variations between mono-grade and multi-grade teaching approaches. Berry (2001) further contends that mono-graded classrooms are characterised by undifferentiated whole-class teaching. On the other hand, in multi-graded classes learners have enough chance to engage in small group work. Juvane (2005) and Brown (2010) reason, in unison, that multi-grade teaching can be considered to be one of the innovative ways to provide access to education in thinly populated and remote rural areas. However, the provision of quality education in remote areas is confronted with a number of difficulties including under-qualified teachers (Juvane, 2007). Brown (2010), in his extensive research about multi-grade schooling, found that teachers in multi-grade classes are not adequately trained and supported. He further asserts that the teacher-training programmes in South Africa do not accommodate the multi-grade teaching context, as much as they should (Thabakadimene, Modiba and Molotje, 2019). As a result, most teachers in multi-grade classrooms find multi-grade teaching quite challenging and difficult. Moreover, these teachers feel neglected and don not know exactly what is clearly expected from them to do (Taole, 2014).

2.5 CHALLENGES IN MULTI-GRADE SCHOOLING

Mulyran-Kyne (2007) reasons that multi-grade classes particularly in developing countries are not adequately resourced and attitudes of teachers and parents are often negative towards the system. It therefore, suggests that parents and teachers do not

regard multi-grade schooling as being a sustainable form of education. Thus, teachers, parents and policy-makers need to change their perception about multi-grade schooling, for it to succeed. Juvane (2005) emphasises that, for multi-grade schooling to be regarded as a valuable pedagogy that can provide quality education rather than an inferior alternative, parents, teachers and education officials need to develop a positive attitude towards multi-grade schooling. Many international studies have revealed that multi-grade training offered to teachers has the ability to influence the teachers' attitudes and confidence towards multi-grade teaching contexts (Vithanapathirana (2006). However, Joubert (2009) laments that the policy documents of the Department of Basic Education are silent about multi-grade schooling. This suggests that curriculum, instructional materials and teacher-training programmes are structured in favour of the mono-graded classes. Furthermore, Ngubane (2011) asserts that curricula around the world are structured towards mono-grade schooling context, which results in teachers struggling to manage the demands of the multi-grade classes. Teachers of multi-graded classes are not adequately supported by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). In addition, Brown (2009) asserts that teachers are struggling to switch from a single-class curriculum to a multi-grade teaching context. Ramrathan and Ngubane (2013) lament that the education system in South Africa does not incorporate multi-grade training programmes, which makes it difficult for multi-grade teachers to work effectively and competently.

Multi-graded schools in rural areas are mainly in existence due to necessity (Little, 1995). Such schools are predominantly under-resourced and placed under lower quintile school categories, and sited in thinly populated areas where poverty is rife (Brown, 2009). Nkambule and Mukeredzi (2017) remark that little has been done in terms of rural development and rural education since the advent of democracy in 1994 in South Africa. Therefore, schools in urban and semi-urban areas still enjoy preference, in terms of structural development and teacher provision than those in remote rural areas. Nkambule, Balfour, Pillay and Moletsane (2011) argue that multi-grade schools are normally located in areas that are under-developed or slowly developing. (Brown, 2009) mentions that another challenge facing multi-grade teachers in rural schools is that their initial training does not include multi-grade teaching contexts and training programmes are failing to address multi-grade

schooling issues. Consequently, the realisation of quality education is just a pipedream for many rural communities.

2.6 OTHER CHALLENGES TO MULTI-GRADE SCHOOLING

Jacobs, Vakalisa and Gawe (2011) argue that teachers have an enormous responsibility of ensuring that an enabling environment is created for effective curriculum delivery to take place, no matter where teaching occurs. To achieve this, teachers should possess a range of classroom management skills. Teachers in multi-grade schools face challenges in managing their classrooms. Little (2005) asserts that curriculum delivery in multi-grade setting tends to be arduous and challenging compared to teaching in mono-grade class. The complexity and demanding nature of multi-grade schooling is mainly ascribed to the heterogeneity of the multi-grade classroom in terms of the age, grade levels and capabilities of learners in one classroom (Mulkeen & Higgins, 2009). Consequently, the multi-grade schooling requires an extended effort in classroom management, planning and adaptive skills for instructions. This is also confirmed by Taole and Mncube (2012) who assert that the managing the classroom is the barrier to multi-grade teaching. This is so because while one group is busy with the given task, the teacher is busy teaching the other group.

Overcrowded multi-grade classes are also a big challenge for teachers. This claim is evidenced by the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2012) that the number of learners in a class influences the success of a multi-grade teaching approach. Multi-grade schooling can only be successful in a class of approximately twenty-five learners or less. In such classes, successful curriculum delivery can occur smoothly (DBE, 2012). Overcrowded multi-grade classes are therefore, difficult to manage and, effective teaching and learning cannot take place. This notion is supported by Mulryan-Kyne (2007), who reminds us that smaller class sizes enable the teacher to check learners' work, give timely feedback, and provide individual learner assistance more than in larger classes. Multi-grade teachers find it difficult to cope because they have to vary their instructional materials and activities to accommodate the needs of learners of different grades (Quail & Smyth, 2014). However, some scholars argue that even if teaching in multi-grade classes may be challenging, teachers can still derive good things from it. Teachers can capitalize on the learners' heterogeneity to enhance learning (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015).

Literature reveals that the education in South Africa fails to provide training and professional guidance for multi-grade teachers. This translates into a situation whereby teachers are ill-prepared for the challenges of multi-grade teaching (Lingam, 2007). Teachers in multi-grade schools are working with materials that are designed for mono-grade classes. This is confirmed by Little (2005), who postulates that multi-grade teachers are expected to meet all the curricular expectations as if the class was mono-grade. Teachers who work in small rural schools need to acquire new competencies to improve, for them to teach successfully in the multi-grade teaching contexts (Koulouris & Sotiriou, 2006). Joubert (2010) stresses the importance of the need for the provision of specialised teacher-training for multi-grade teachers for them to overcome the pedagogical challenges in their classrooms.

Multi-grade education is more prevalent in rural communities and is informed by peer support, group support and self-directed learning (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007). Multi-grade schooling does not emphasise on teacher-led kind of instruction. This kind of instruction is known for its tendency to impede effective teaching and learning in most countries. However, it must be acknowledged that multi-grade teaching has the capability of strengthening relationship patterns, self-esteem, and cognitive and social development among learners (Little, 2005). Multi-grade education may be of benefit to rural communities where there is low population. Taylor (2008) argues that South African teachers need to be applauded for ensuring that children in remote rural areas also access education, despite the challenging conditions. Multi-grade schooling is considered to be an alternative means of providing education in rural communities, not exclusive to South Africa, but also in other African countries. Beukes (2006) mentions that factors such as inconsistent learner attendance, lack of classroom management skills, chronic teacher absenteeism, mother tongue influences and lack of time management skills were discovered to impede learning in Namibian multi-grade schools. This assertion holds even for South African schools.

2.7 THE ADVANTAGES OF MULTI-GRADE SCHOOLING

The advantages of teaching in a multi-grade classroom are basically linked to the manner in which instruction is set up. Stone (1998) asserts that the upward cross-grade mixing of learners proves to be beneficial in terms of the cognitive and emotional development of learners. For effective multi-grade schooling to succeed, teachers

should take into account that learners in a class, are different in terms of development, regardless of the way they are grouped. Loeto (2010) asserts that, in a heterogeneous multi-graded classroom in terms of abilities and age, learners can be permitted to progress through the system in their own pace. Classroom settings informed by cooperative learning to instruction tend to have a positive effect on learner achievement. As a result, such learners become more socially confident and their self-esteem is thereby boosted (Johnson, Johnson & Holubee, 1993). In addition, cooperative learning fosters social interaction among learners through activities as designed by the teacher (Kegan, 1989). Johnson et al. (1993) further insist that, through working together, learners ensure that every member in the group has learnt and understood the same content, thereby maximising their own and each other's learning.

In a multi-age classroom context, the older learners are encouraged by younger ones, to stay ahead (Goto & Schneider, 2010). The multi-age teaching context, therefore affords learners the opportunity to work independently for a longer time than those in mono-grade classroom. The older learners are occasionally given responsibilities for helping the younger ones or less able learner, thereby increasing their confidence. Little (2006) asserts, that from the experiences in the multi-graded classes in Turks and Caicos Islands, it can be confirmed that some learners in multi-graded schools may perform better in reading than those in mono-graded classes. This notion is supported by Joubert (2007) who claims that multi-grade schooling can improve the quality of teaching. This is so because multi-grade schooling is characterised by differentiated teaching which promotes small group work (Berry, 2010). Berry (2010) further proposes that multi-grade teaching can be a possible solution in providing primary education in areas where small schools exist, due to low learner enrolments. The Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (2008) highlights that multi-grade teaching in small rural schools has proved to yield a number of benefits, which include the following:

- The small rural schools respond appropriately to the local needs and conditions due to their proximity to the local communities, unlike big schools sited away from the communities.
- Children do not have to travel long distances to school.

- Multi-grade schools in rural areas encourage co-operative work and social learning.
- These schools foster more holistic approaches for individual development.
- The multi-grade schools foster the reciprocal processes of social learning where the younger learners mix gently with the older ones.

2.8 THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN A MULTI-GRADE SCHOOLING CONTEXT

Mulryan-Kyne (2005) avers that the workloads of school principals in the multi-grade schooling contexts are difficult to handle and result in stress and frustration. In multi-graded schools, school principals are supposed to perform administrative, leadership and teaching duties. This makes it difficult for the school principal to handle all the duties in a successful way. Some of the duties will, therefore, be neglected, which poses a threat to effective teaching and learning. There is a close link between good management and effective teaching and learning. Thus, the absence of good management practices normally leads to the lack of effective teaching and learning. School principals in multi-graded schools are unable to perform their management duties successfully, which eventually makes the provision of quality education a pipedream. This notion is supported by Hargreaves (2001), who notes that multi-grade classrooms are normally not properly managed and tend to be chaotic. The absence of order and discipline is partly attributed to teachers' lack of training in handling multi-grade classes. Sometimes classes are left unattended as the principal is frequently absent from school, attending meetings. The school principal is also full-time class teacher in the school. This impacts negatively on the academic achievement of learners.

The Department of Basic Education's Post-Provisioning Norm (PPN) dictates that small rural schools may end up having one to three teachers per school where one of the teachers is also the principal. Consequently, such schools are compelled to combine grades at the expense of effective teaching and learning. Principals of multi-grade schools are struggling with time management. Taole and Mncube (2012) suggest that there is a need for teachers of multi-graded classes to be trained in time management. Given the complexity of the multi-grade school principals, their daily plans can often be easily interrupted (Lunenburg, 2010).The interruption of the

principals' daily plans is considerable. This notion is supported by Carr (2007) who claims that principals of multi-graded schools are struggling to cope with the level of disturbance when executing their multi-faceted duties. Principals of multi-grade schools are also expected to perform administrative duties as part of their job description, as highlighted earlier on. Hornby (2001) describes administration as being all the activities that one carries out to run a school successfully. Such activities include amongst others, planning and organising of school activities and programmes. The principal's administrative activities involve administering admissions, keeping school records, drawing up time-tables and controlling the different registers kept in a school. Given the cumbersome nature of the job description of multi-grade school principal, the principal often fails to carry out his/her duties with ease and success.

In line with the job description of a school principal in any institution, it is expected that the school principals supervise the work of other teachers. Small rural schools normally do not qualify to have Heads of Departments (HODs), or Deputy Principals due to the low enrolment, so all the management duties are performed by the principal who is also the full-time teacher. The multi-grade school principals find themselves juggling between both teaching and management roles which results in higher workloads than those of other teachers in the school. The principal, as the only one responsible for the school management, is compelled to supervise learners and teachers. This becomes a huge burden for the multi-grade school principals. The Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2003) requires that the school principal provides mentoring and does supervision of teachers in their teaching. It must be noted that the multi-grade school principal is also the subject teacher. He / she is expected to teach and fulfil all the assessment expectations (Little, 2005). Given the above scenario, it is difficult for the principal to do monitoring of teachers' files, assessments and record sheets, in a multi-grade school. This compromises the quality of teaching and learning in rural multi-grade schools.

The quality of teaching and learning in a school is determined by a number of factors, including, sound curriculum management strategies. In a multi-grade school, curriculum management is the responsibility of the school principal as there are no any other members to form a management team (SMT). Grant (2009) reminds that curriculum management entails leading, promoting and managing teaching and learning in classrooms. These actions are aimed to create an enabling environment for

effective teaching and learning to flourish. Principals of multi-grade schools fail to fulfil their leadership obligation of creating an enabling environment for the effective teaching and learning to take place, as advocated by Vincent (1999). Vincent (1999) further claims that school principals are responsible for giving the strategic direction, through strategic planning in a school. The curriculum management strategies implemented by multi-grade principals are ineffective as they are meant for mono-grade schooling contexts. However, Mestry (2017) argues that there is a strong belief that school principals can improve the teaching and learning in multi-grade classes by creating conditions conducive to curriculum management. This involves re-thinking the curriculum management practices, re-planning and re-organising for the elimination of the perceived educational weaknesses in multi-grade schooling.

Taole and Mncube (2012) maintain that teachers and principals of multi-grade schools are not trained in the strategies to be used in multi-grade classes which impact negatively on the provision of quality education. Principals of multi-grade schools normally lack the necessary skills to cope with the extremely high workloads. Principals are supposed to provide instructional leadership to teachers and to engage in class teaching on a full-time basis. This becomes a huge challenge for multi-grade schools' principals. In agreement with the above assertion Sririka (2001) posits that principals of multi-grade schools have to perform different roles such as teaching, classroom management, administration, and also the monitoring extra and co-curricular activities in the school. The heavy workloads of multi-grade principals translate into poor management practices, and ultimately poor learner performance.

2.9 RESOURCES FOR MULTI-GRADE CLASSES

Hornby (2001) identifies resources as materials that can be utilised by teachers and learners, from which they can draw information. Resources can be used to enhance teaching and learning (Jordaan, 2006). All learning situations are unique and therefore require resources that are in line with each environment. This notion is supported by Joubert (2010) who asserts that instructional resources and physical environment in a multi-grade class must be organised in such a way that they address the pedagogical demands of the multi-grade teaching context. Joubert (2007) emphasises that multi-grade teaching is characterised by independent and cooperative learning. Therefore, resources to be used for multi-grade classes should foster cooperative and

independent teaching. Research has revealed that teachers are struggling to use instructional materials that are meant to be used in conventional mono-grade classes.

Brown (2010) asserts that the scarcity of relevant instructional materials in South African multi-grade classes, is mainly attributed to the lack of knowledge about the kind of resources suitable for multi-grade schooling contexts. After a thorough research by Mulryan-Kyne (2007), it was discovered that the scarcity of relevant resources in multi-grade schools is a threat to effective teaching and learning. Drinkwater (2002) maintains that the use of educational resources has the ability to simplify teaching content in such a way that learners can make a meaning out of it. This implies that the correct use of relevant resources enhances learners' understanding. The use of a variety of educational resources is highly recommended. Other resources can facilitate learning even in the absence of the teacher. However, such resources do not replace the role of the teacher. Resources can be classified as auditory, visual, tactile or audio-visual. Jordaan (2006) contends that the use of different resources reinforces understanding and conceptualisation of matter, in diverse cognitive styles. Jordaan's assertion is in line with the Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, developed in 1983.

Fraser, Loubser and Van Rooy (1990) emphasise the importance of the skills and knowledge of selecting the most relevant resources for a specific environment. This implies that resources used for mono-grade schooling context can never be used in multi-grade classes. Through the use of appropriate resources, teachers are able to capture the learners' attention, thereby increasing their concentration spans. Ocak and Yildiz (2011) maintain that, in the absence of meaningful resources, effective curriculum delivery in multi-graded classes does not come to realisation. Little (2004) asserts that adequate supplies of resources that foster independent and cooperative learning lead to successful teaching strategies. In view of the above assertions, the researcher concurs with Taole and Mncube (2012) who claim that the appropriateness and relevancy of resources cannot be over-emphasised.

Based on a study conducted in Namibian schools, Beukes (2006) reasons that teachers need to be careful when using textbooks because most of the textbooks used are not meant for cooperative and independent lesson strategies. This implies that teachers in multi-graded classes are compelled to use textbooks that have been

designed for mono-grade classes. From the South African perspective, Msimanga (2019) discovered that teachers in multi-grade classes use the same textbooks as the ones used for mono-grade teaching context. This suggests that there is a need for multi-grade-specific textbooks to be developed or adapting the existing ones to multi-grade teaching strategies. In conclusion, Mathot (2001) argues that information and communication technology (ICT) or the internet can assist teachers in obtaining valuable information that may not be available in textbooks.

2.10 TEACHER TRAINING IN SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, teachers were initially trained at Colleges of Education. This was long before the introduction of the Initial Professional Education Training (IPET) where teachers were enrolling for a Teaching Certificate to qualify as a teacher. Subsequent to that, a three-year diploma was introduced. In all these instances, Teaching Practice was part of the training to expose student teachers to teaching while still studying (DHET, 2000). Initial Professional Education Training (IPET) was introduced in 2007 with the aim of transforming teacher education (DBE, 2007). The sole aim of introducing IPET was merely to professionalise teaching qualifications where teachers with degrees were required to enroll for a one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) to qualify as a fully-fledged teachers. The introduction of IPET was aimed at overcoming the teaching challenges experienced by new teachers during their initial year in the profession. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) was then introduced as one of the requirements for the Teacher Education Qualification (MRTEQ) policy. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) refers to the placement of student teachers in schools for a specified period of time (DHET, 2015).

As a result of rigorous curriculum reforms in South Africa, the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), which prescribes the same curriculum across all South African schools irrespective of the socio-economic conditions of the area in which it is located, was introduced (DBE,2011). Even though the MRTEQ regards the Work Integrated Learning an integral part of teacher training, there is still a challenge of inadequate preparation of student teachers for rural multi-grade classes because teacher education in South Africa is designed for the urban mono-grade schooling contexts. As a result, the effectiveness of the MRTEQ and CAPS is undermined by rural factors such as poverty, inadequate teacher training, acute lack of resources and

teacher absenteeism. Bertrams and Rusznyak (2015) argue that the South African teacher training programmes are failing to prepare student teachers for rural multi-grade schooling contexts. Avery (2013) maintains that rural schools are characterised by low learner enrolments and are sited far away from urban areas. Nkambule and Mukeredzi (2017) affirm that insufficient teacher training in multi-grade schooling has an impact on teaching and learning in rural schools.

2.11 STRATEGIES IN MULTI-GRADE SCHOOLING

Kalaoja and Pietarinen (2009) contend that multi-grade schooling does not only have challenges, it also has some benefits in teaching. In agreement with the argument of Kalaoja and Pietarinen, the researcher claims that multi-grade schooling has the potential to promote learner-centred learning and teaching processes and provides individualised learning which is desirable for good educational outcomes. However, multi-grade schooling has challenges because of the heterogeneity of learners, in terms of age and development in a multi-grade class. Fend (2006) suggests that there is a need to investigate teaching practices that may be beneficial in the multi-grade schooling contexts. In response to that, Kalaoja conducted a study in Finland that was aimed at studying both teaching in rural schools and relationships between schools and their immediate communities. Kalaoja (2006) and Cornish (2006) define multi-grade schooling in terms of the grouping of learners, the selection of the contents and preparation of activities and resources. Consequently, different teaching strategies that could assist in multi-grade teaching were identified. The teaching strategies are derived from the definitions of multi-grade schooling as suggested by Kalaoja (2006) and Cornish (2006). The research by Kalaoja in Finland revealed three categories of teaching practices for the multi-grade classes, and these are discussed below.

2.11.1 Learner group formation and subject organisation

Kalaoja (2006) and Cornish (2006) concede that grouping of learners, organising and selection of contents for different groups, and teaching activities are key in multi-grade teaching. Five sub-categories of group formation and subject organising are identified, which are reviewed below.

2.11.1.1 Parallel curriculum

The teacher is required to identify common themes in a subject from the different grades' syllabi. The teacher designs learning and assessment activities according to the subject demands in each grade level. This type of learner-grouping suggests that all the learners will share the same theme, but with different grade levels content. The shortcoming of this type of grouping is that teachers have to plan and prepare different learning materials for the different grades (Barber, 2015). Kalaoja and Pietarinen (2009) advise that the parallel curriculum makes planning difficult for teachers, thereby imposing huge a workload. Barber (2015) further maintains that this type of practice of parallel curriculum wastes time as learners are taught in terms. However, Hascher (2015) suggests that this practice can be implemented in Mathematics and Language teaching, where the other group of learners is given independent work.

2.11.1.2 Curriculum rotation

This suggests that all learners in the classroom, irrespective of grade level, are taught the same content for a year, and the content for the other grades in the subject is taught in the subsequent years. In case of two grades in a class, learners enjoy being taught both topics while in class, but in different order. Topics in Science and Social Sciences can be successfully rotated. In larger schools, the curriculum rotation is informed by curriculum mapping across the school. Curriculum mapping assists teachers in setting out what is taught, and when it is taught, and ensures that assessment is appropriate.

2.11.1.3 Curriculum alignment and spiral curriculum

The teacher identifies similar topics in a subject. The teacher identifies the same themes or topics, and those themes are then covered with all the learners in the class. The teacher will also be expected to design learning activities according to the curricular demands of each grade and age. The spiral curriculum is a teaching strategy that was developed by cognitive theorist Jerome Bruner, in 1960. The spiral approach to curriculum is informed by three key principles. The principles include: Cyclical, Increasing depth and Prior knowledge. The spiral approach to curriculum is cyclical in nature. This implies that learners should do the same topic repetitively throughout their schooling years. By increasing in depth, the researcher means that each time the

learner repeats a topic, it should be taught at a higher cognitive level. Lastly, the spiral approach to curriculum recognises learner's prior knowledge. This implies that learners learn from known to unknown.

2.11.1.4 Subject stagger

Joubert (2007) claims that classroom organisation is one of the crucial aspects of multi-grade classroom management. This requires teachers to have an in-depth knowledge of classroom management skills and a repertoire of classroom management skills for multi-grade teaching context. Subject staggering is one of the classroom organisation techniques that can be implemented in multi-grade classes. Subject staggering allows the teacher to teach different subjects at the same time. In this teaching technique, learners are taught different subjects in turns, at a specified time.

2.11.1.5 Whole-class teaching

Whole-class teaching suggests that all grades in the class are taught the same subject, at the same time. This technique does not allow the teacher to select learning materials according to the diverse needs of learners. Learners are expected to use common learning materials. Learners are treated as if they are in a mono-graded class. Miller (1991) argues that whole-class teaching should be designed in such a way that it accommodates the individual needs of learners.

2.11.2 Peer tutoring

Cornish (2006) mentions that peer tutoring is commonly used in multi-grade classrooms. Peer tutoring suggests that learners assist other learners, acting as teachers. In this strategy, learners explain concepts to their fellow learners, thereby promoting the sharing of knowledge among learners. Teachers are expected to facilitate and bring order during peer tutoring sessions. This kind of teaching strategy engenders leadership capabilities in learners. Peer tutoring may be either be spontaneous, where the learners undertake to assist other learners without being prompted to do so or guided. Guided peer tutoring normally occurs when the teacher requests upper-grade learners to assist the lower grade learners or gifted learners assist less gifted learners. The older learners are given the responsibility of standing by the younger ones and assisting them. The younger learners benefit from the

assistance of older learners. This teaching strategy tends to foster reciprocal processes of social learning (Wagener, 2014).

2.11.3 Differentiation

Research has revealed that teachers are struggling to accommodate the diverse needs of different learners in a class. Teachers have discovered that the differences between learners in their classes are so vast that individual differentiation is essential. Work plans are considered to be the most helpful teaching tool for differentiated learning in multi-grade classes. In this teaching strategy, teachers prepare plans that may include tasks in different subjects to be completed using different methods and materials. This strategy allows learners to choose the sequence in which they would like to do tasks. However, the bottom line is that the tasks must be completed within a specified period. Free work and station work are elements of work plans (Skiera, 2003). Free work is also the core element of Montessori pedagogy (Montessori, 1972). Montessori pedagogy is considered to be informed by self-directed and hands-on learning activities. This pedagogy requires the teacher to design activities that are age-appropriate for their learners. The main aim of Montessori pedagogy is to inculcate the sense of responsibility and self-regulation in learners. Teachers have the responsibility of choosing the most appropriate learning materials for their learners. During free work, teachers facilitate learning by advising learners on how to work out their tasks and assist learners in completing more complex tasks. A more differentiated approach is implemented where the teacher designs extra assignments for learners who are quicker than others. Hargreaves (2001) maintains that personal work plans may cultivate learners' responsibility for learning.

2.12 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ennis (1999:29) states that the main elements or variables that inform one's studies are identified through the use of an appropriate theoretical framework. The researcher acknowledges that there are various theoretical perspectives to use when conducting a study. This study, as it deals with the diverse learners in a single classroom, relates to the Scaffolding theory of Vygotsky. Scaffolding theory is pertinent to this study because it is best applied to the diverse learners, in terms of age or grades, as that of multi-grade classes (Smagorinsky, 2018). To promote collaboration and success in multi-grade classes, heterogeneity have to be acknowledged. In this study, teachers

who are engaged in multi-grade teaching shared their experiences and beliefs concerning the multi-grade teaching phenomenon. Of the existing research paradigms, the researcher found interpretivism to be the most appropriate one for the study. This is precisely because the study focuses on the evaluation of how primary school teachers managed difficulties associated with multi-grade schooling. In comparison with other the research paradigms, interpretivism enabled the researcher to solicit a lived experiences of teachers who on a daily basis are practitioners in multi-graded classes. The aim of using this approach was to provide an insight into the experiences of respondents. The interpretive theory seeks to find the fundamental interpretations of the phenomenon under study (De Villiers, Marietje, De Villiers & Kent, 2005).

The researcher found that interpretivism was the best fit for this study because it seeks to centre the entire study on educators' experiences, with no regard for preconceived ideas about the participants' experiences. Selecting participants who are involved in multi-grade teaching would ensure the credibility of the findings. Interpretivism is based on the premise that understanding knowledge related to human and social sciences differs from its usage in physical sciences. The researcher chose the interpretive paradigm because it fosters understanding through the process of interpretation. This interpretive study provided a broad description of the phenomenon through the experiences of the people who had witnessed it personally (Sotuku & Duku, 2012). Finally, the interpretive study sought to uncover the conditions under which multi-grade schools operate and the circumstances that have a bearing on the inability of multi-grade schools to handle the difficulties associated with the multi-grade schooling context.

2.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter focused on the literature that relates to the multi-grade schooling phenomenon. The literature generated by scholars about the different aspects of multi-grade teaching has been extensively explored. As a starting point, the researcher gave different versions of definitions of multi-grade teaching as suggested by different researchers. The literature on the different aspects of multi-grade schooling was discussed. The literature covered in this chapter included aspects such as the advantages of multi-grade schooling, teacher training in South African context and different strategies that could be implemented in multi-graded classes form part of the

discussion. The next chapter focuses on the research design and methodology of the study. This chapter explains the research design and methodology that the researcher deemed fit for the study. The choice of the design and methodology is then justified. The researcher explains in detail the crucial tenets of the selected design and methodology. Lastly, the researcher mentioned the research paradigm that underpins this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the review of pertinent literature on multi-grade teaching phenomenon. This next chapter is about research design and methodology. The methodology and design of the study was selected in line with the research problem to be addressed. This chapter explains how many participants will form part of the study and the technique used in sampling from the given population. Different data collection methods that the researcher deemed fit and pertinent for the study are mentioned and justified. A full account of steps which were followed in analysing the collected data is outlined. Furthermore, different procedures aimed at establishing authenticity and trustworthiness of the study are expounded. The chapter concludes with an account of how ethical issues were handled to protect participants.

3.2. RESEARCH APPROACH

McMillan and Schumacher (2001) maintain that methodology provides an outline of how the researcher will conduct a study, which includes the description of the site of enquiry, participants' selection methods, and data collection and analysis methods. This study was located within the qualitative research approach. Creswell and Creswell (2017) state that qualitative research is a type of research in which the researcher relies on the views of the participants; asks broad questions, collects data consisting largely of words from participants and analyses those words for themes. In simple terms, qualitative research puts more emphasis on words rather than numbers in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2012). Thus, the researcher employed face-to-face interviews, documents review and observations as information gathering methods. This helped the researcher to gain insight into teacher views, attitudes and experiences about teaching and learning in the multi-grade context.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

(Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011) comprehend research design as being the approach that a researcher follows to understand an issue. Also, Yin (2009) describes research design as a master plan that outlines the processes to be followed in

collecting, analysing and interpreting data. The choice of the relevant design was mainly informed by the research problem to be addressed (Yin, 2009). This was a case study located within the qualitative research approach. A case study is defined as a normal study to obtain issues intrinsic to the person, member or an event (Cannor, Cousins, Samaranayaka & Kypri, 2014). The case study design was the most suitable qualitative method that could be used in this study, because the aim was to evaluate the phenomenon of multi-grade teaching from the point of view of participants not a researcher, as suggested by Leedy and Ormrod (2001). This was the state of affairs because the study concentrated on three primary schools who happened to be cases in this context. The researcher studied the three cases intensively as regards the management of the difficulties associated with multi-grade teaching in the instances of these classrooms.

3.4 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

3.4.1 Population

Creswell (2013) defines a population as the aggregate of all the members that share a common set of characteristics. Descombe (2014) comprehends the population to be a larger population of human objects from which a sample is drawn. For the purpose of this study, population refers to the teachers employed by the Department of Basic Education in the Mpuluzi Circuit, who are practising multi-grade teaching. Out of 22 primary schools in the circuit, five are practising multi-grade teaching.

3.4.2. Sampling

Haber (2014) refers to a sample as being a segment of the population being studied that seems to represent the entire population. It is expected that a sample should have characteristics similar to those of the general population. (Bryman, 2012) maintains that sampling was necessary because it would have been time-consuming and costly to interview all multi-grade teachers in the Gert Sibande District. Sampling is the process of selecting things or objects when it is possible to have knowledge of a larger collection of these objects (De Vos, Strydom & Delport (2006). This study followed the convenient purposive sampling because this type of sampling enabled the researcher to identify and select individuals that are knowledgeable about, or experienced with, the phenomenon of interest. (Patton, 2002) defines purposive sampling as being a

technique commonly used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources. Furthermore, this type of sampling operates on the principle that the researcher can obtain the most relevant information from the few individuals selected based on their relevance to the study. Teachers from multi-graded schools were active participants in the study. The researcher viewed these teachers as being a valuable source of information about teaching and learning experience in the multi-grade schooling context. Three multi-grade schools were sampled as sites of the enquiry. The researcher selected the principal, a teacher and a parent as participants in the study.

3.5 DATA GATHERING

De Poy and Gilson (2008:108) maintain that researchers obtain data through direct interchange with an individual or a group that is known or expected to possess the knowledge they seek. Data was generated from three multi-graded schools in Gert Sibande District, Mpumalanga Province. For this study, a variety of data gathering strategies were used. The strategies included interviews; documents review and observations. The data collection methods were selected based on the assertion by Tracy (2013), who postulates that qualitative research is characterised by interviews, participant observations and document analysis as dominant data generating techniques. The use of the three data collection methods enabled the researcher to provide a confluence of evidence that ensures credibility.

3.5.1 Interviews

Interviewing is considered to be the predominant data collection strategy in qualitative research. This technique allowed the researcher to glean information through direct interchange with the participants who are considered to be knowledgeable about the phenomenon under study (De Poy & Gilson, 2008). Alternatively, the interview is a social relationship that is aimed at exchanging information between the researcher and the participant. However, Donalek (2005) warns that poor interviewing skills, poor phrasing of questions and inadequate knowledge of a participant's culture could render the use of interview as a data collection tool, ineffective and useless. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with principals, teachers and parents to find out their personal views about the teaching and learning in the context of multi-grade schooling.

Creswell et al., (2003) maintain that studies in which the researcher does not interact with the participants include observation of the participants. Given the extent and purpose of this study, the researcher used interviews as a data collection method. Koshy (2005) regards interviewing as being one of the most powerful ways to understand human behaviour. This data collection method enabled the researcher to collect valuable information regarding difficulties associated with multi-grade teaching. In the context of this study, interviews enabled the researcher to collect valuable information about difficulties associated with multi-graded classes. The choice of the data collection tools was guided by the nature of the research problem, aim and objectives.

3.5.2 Documents review

Document review entails examining documents that may be of assistance to the researcher in obtaining deeper meaning as revealed by their style and contents (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). For this study, only formal or non-personal documents such as attendance registers; promotion mark schedules; duty rosters and subject allocation lists were being examined. The researcher opted to use non-personal documents because they are considered to be formal and structured. The researcher acknowledged the confidentiality of some documents. Creswell (2008) maintains that document analysis saves time.

3.5.3 Observations

The researcher also used observation as another data collection method. The use of different data collection methods ensured the corroboration of data derived from other sources. Creswell (2013) defines observation as a process whereby the researcher records the behavioural patterns of participants without becoming involved in the process. This method allows the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being observed. This study sought to investigate the difficulties associated with multi-grade teaching. The researcher observed both the learners and teachers in the classroom and during break times. Through observation, the researcher could generate information about the experiences of multi-grade teachers. Maree (2016) warns that researchers must not rely much on what is said by participants during interviews. Furthermore, observation as a data collection method

foster a comprehensive and rich understanding of multi-grade teaching and the participants' behaviour.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Marshall and Rossman (1999) assert that, during data analysis, the researcher organises the collected data in a particular order and makes meaning out of it. This study adopted a thematic content analysis to analyse the collected data. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic content analysis as a process whereby the researcher identifies themes within a qualitative data. Javidi and Zarea (2016) acknowledge that there are different ways in which thematic analysis can be approached. This variety, therefore, presents some confusion about the exact nature of the analysis. However, in this study, the researcher followed the Braun and Clarke (2006) six-step framework. The six-step framework is considered to be the most influential approach towards doing thematic analysis because it is clear and usable. This approach aims at identifying themes or patterns in the data that are important in addressing the phenomenon under study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The six-step framework of content analysis includes: familiarisation of data; generating codes; searching for themes; reviewing of themes; defining of themes; and report writing. The researcher began by familiarising themselves with the data. During this step, the researcher thoroughly read the interview transcripts to find meanings and patterns from the data. This enabled the researcher to understand the presented data before going any further. Making notes formed the basis of this step. The researcher continued and generated codes by organising the data in a meaningful and systematic fashion. The researcher was then able to find meaningful data, as coding reduces lot of data into small chunks of meaning (Bree & Gallagher, 2016). Braun and Clarke (2006) maintain that there are no hard and fast rules about what constitutes a theme. The researcher examined all the codes, and made sense of them. Such codes were then fitted into a theme which was informed by the research question. Subsequently, the identified themes were then reviewed. During this step, the identified themes were then reviewed and modified. This culminated in preliminary themes being developed. The researcher established whether the themes worked in the context of the entire data set. After having reviewed the themes, the researcher defined the themes, which served as the final refinement of the themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) assert that this

step of defining themes aims to identify the essence of what each theme is about. Sub-themes were then carefully examined to establish how they fitted into the main theme. The final step entailed the writing of a report as derived from the data. The themes were ready to be interpreted and produced as the final report of the findings. Conclusions were then drawn from the data set.

Lastly, the researcher used the constant comparative method to analyse the data. Glasier and Strauss (2017) remind us that the constant comparative method is instrumental in the development of grounded theory from data. Comparing and contrasting data assisted the researcher in increasing the validity of the findings. The researcher carefully elicited different elements present in the data source used. The elements present in data sources, such as interviews and document analysis, were then compared to determine whether there were similarities (Glasier & Strauss, 2017).

3.7 QUALITY CRITERIA

Schurink, Schurink and Poggenpoel (1998) emphasise the truth-value of qualitative research and list several means of achieving the truth. Quality criteria are important in a study as they establish authenticity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define trustworthiness in terms of confirmability, credibility, dependability and transferability.

3.7.1 Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe transferability as being the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalised or transferred to other contexts or settings. In this study, the aspect of transferability was taken care of when findings about the phenomenon were generalised across all other multi-grade schools in the province. To ensure transferability in this study, the researcher provided a detailed, clear and in-depth description of the study.

3.7.2 Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define credibility as being the degree to which the research presents the actual meanings of the research participants or the “truth-value”. For this study, member checking was used as a strategy for strengthening the credibility of the study. Member checking is a technique in which data, interpretations, and conclusions

are shared with the participants to clarify what their intentions were to correct errors, and provide additional information if necessary.

3.7.3 Dependability

Streubert (2007) refers to dependability as being the consistency and reliability of the research findings and the degree to which research procedures are documented, allowing someone outside the research to follow, audit, and critique the research process. This study used the inquiry audit to ensure the dependability of the study. Hoepfl (1997) highlights that audit inquiry involves having a researcher not involved in the process of the research study.

3.7.4 Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define confirmability as being the extent to which findings are based on data derived from interviews and observations rather than the researcher's constructions. The researcher undertook to check and re-check the data throughout the study, to ensure that the findings were shaped by the respondents', not the researcher's bias, motivation or interest. The researcher performed audit trails to ensure that the findings could be confirmed by other researchers.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Babbie and Mouton (2001) emphasise the importance of ensuring that researchers subscribe to a set of code of ethics which will guide how to handle the collected data and how to treat respondents throughout the inquiry. The following ethical issues were being taken care of:

3.8.1 Confidentiality and anonymity

Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) posit that anonymity refers to keeping secret by not identifying the ethnic or cultural background of respondents, to refrain from referring to them by their names or divulging any other information about a participant. For anonymity, the researcher used pseudonyms instead of real names. The researcher ensured that the information collected was kept confidential.

3.8.2 Ethical clearance

The researcher applied for ethical clearance from the University of Limpopo's Ethics Committee. The researcher ensured that he commenced the study upon receipt of the Turfloop Research Ethical Clearance (TREC). Permission to conduct this study was also sought with the Mpumalanga Department of Provincial Education and all its subsidiaries like the District Office, Circuit Office and schools.

3.8.3 Informed consent and voluntary participation

Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) postulate that, while conducting research, it is possible to involve populations that are disadvantaged or vulnerable such as children, poor or sick people. He further argues that, if the research involves the vulnerable populations, the researcher must obtain due consent from their parents or guardians. Before the commencement of the study, the researcher met with the identified participants. Those participants were asked to sign the Limpopo University Ethics Committee's consent form. The researcher ensured that participants were informed that their participation was free and voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time.

3.8.4 Permission to conduct the study

du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2016) advise that researchers need to remain ethical at all times in the form of first securing the permission of the research participants in instances of the involvement of participants in their studies. In this study, since research participants were sourced from multi-grade schools, the researcher secured the permission of the governing bodies there. Furthermore, the permission of the school principal and affected circuit manager and the district manager was also secured. This was done as an ethical requirement and also as part of Ubuntu.

3.8.5 Protection of participants

It is an ethical requirement that researchers need not harm their data providers. In this context, data providers referred to are principals, teachers and parents. Protection includes respecting their dignity where the researcher revealed to them honestly the purpose of the study and everything around it. The researcher also ensured the protection of participants from unwarranted physical or mental discomfort.

3.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has clarified that the entire study adopted a qualitative research method to evaluate the difficulties that teachers experience in managing teaching and learning in multi-grade primary schools. In order for the study to achieve its intended goal, a case study design was used as a research design. The chapter went on to discuss population and sampling for the study. Different data collection methods were extensively discussed. The chapter explained how interviews were conducted and how many participants formed part of the study. Various documents for review were mentioned and examined. This chapter also outlined how the generated data was analysed. The researcher mentioned how ethical issues were handled in the study. The chapter further described how quality assurance was ensured. The next chapter sets out data presentation and a discussion of the data gathered through interviews, document review and observation.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter was about research design and methodology. This chapter concentrates on data presentation, analysis and interpretation. In chapter four, data presentation is based on the themes as they emerged from the interviews and observation. For the interviews, the researcher ensured that the voices of the research participants were heard, through the use of verbatim quotations, as advised by Gillett (2012). Analysis and interpretation are mostly drawn from the interviews conducted with teachers, principals and parents of multi-graded schools in Mpumalanga Province. Documents such as attendance registers, promotion mark schedules, duty rosters and subject allocation lists have been thoroughly examined and analysed to extract meaning and trends. The researcher conducted the study to evaluate the difficulties that teachers experience in managing teaching and learning in multi-graded classes. The first part in this chapter presents the profiling of research sites which is then followed by the brief outline of how the data collection tools would be administered. Profiling of the research sites is in line with Creswell and Plano Clark (2010) who regard profiling as a necessary and common practice in qualitative research. After the administration of data collection tools, a section on the analysis of data derived from document analysis and observation then follows. Analysis and interpretation of responses of research participants from the interviews precede the chapter summary which gives an overview of the whole chapter.

4.2 PROFILING OF RESEARCH SITES

4.2.1 School A

This was a public school in quintile one. The school accommodated learners from Grade R to 7. Most of the learners in the school were from poverty-stricken families with little educational background. A sizeable number of parents could read and write as a result of the *Kha ri Gude* Adult Literacy Programme. This is an integrated and multilingual mass adult literacy programme that is coordinated through the Department of Basic Education targeting every adult person with little or no formal education. Most parents in the area depended on the government's social grants to support their

families. The job opportunities in the area were very scarce. The school was well-fenced and a watchman was employed by the School Governing Body to control access and exit to the school premises during the day and night. The safety of learners and staff was, therefore, taken care of. The school had a beautiful flower garden which was maintained by one general assistant who was also responsible for the cleaning of the school buildings. The general assistant was employed and paid by the Mpumalanga Education Department (MED). As part of the support staff, the school had one state-paid administration clerk to assist with administrative duties within the institution.

The school did not have a large learner community as it accommodated a total of two hundred and thirteen learners, inclusive of Grade R learners. The school had been built because there was no school in the area, so learners had to travel long distances to and from another school which was far away from the area. As a result the school was built in 1984. There were seven educators in the school. Of the seven educators, one was the principal, and one Head of Department. There were two male and five female teachers. It was noted that the number of teachers in the school had increased significantly as at its inception there were only two teachers. All the teachers in the school were adequately qualified to teach in the primary school level. No teacher lived in the area, which meant that all the teachers were commuting to and from the school.

Classrooms were not enough to accommodate the different grades, hence a multi-grade teaching strategy was adopted. One classroom was used as the principal's office and as the office for the administrative clerk. The classroom was partitioned such that it could accommodate the principal, administrative clerk and other staff members. Furniture for learners was not adequate and also not in good condition. Teachers and learners shared the same type of furniture. The school had a borehole that supplied water to the school and the nearby community. Toilets were newly-built and were enough for both teachers and learners. The school was well-fenced and surrounded by trees. Both the netball and soccer grounds were outside the school yard. The condition of classrooms was fairly good as the school had been renovated in past three years. The administrative clerk used one laptop to perform school's administrative duties. The school principal also had a laptop to use for administration purposes. There was one photocopier which also served as a printer. Through the School Governing Body's fund-raising initiatives, the school had been able to build a kitchen where food

was prepared for learners. The school had also been able to build a small library and a guard-room for the day and night watchman.

4.2.2 School B

This was also a quintile one public primary school. The school was fully funded by the Mpumalanga Education Department as it was classified as a no-fee school (DBE, 2011). The school started from Grade R and the highest grade was Grade six. The school was located in a rural area where there were few households. Some of the parents worked in the nearby town which was twenty-five kilometres away. Another group of parents worked in the local tree plantations to make ends meet. The level of education in the area was relatively low. In general, the community was semi-literate and hard hit by abject poverty. About 85% of learners were using scholar transport as a means of transport to and from school. The school had an administrative clerk and a general assistant to assist with the maintenance and cleaning. The researcher found that some parents offered to help in the cleaning of the classrooms. There were two Voluntary Food Handlers (VFHs) assisting in the preparation and serving of food in the school.

The entire learner population in this school was two hundred and forty-eight. Most of the learners lived far away from the school. Scholar transport was available for those learners who had to travel more than six kilometres from the school as provided for in Department of Basic Education & Department of Transport 'National Learner Transport Policy' (2015). Learners in the school came from poverty-stricken families where both of their parents did not have formal employment. This was mainly attributed to the low literacy rate in the area. Some of the learners were from the child-headed families which impacted negatively on their education. All the learners in the school had the privilege of attending the Early Childhood Development (ECD) programme in the same school. Eight educators were contracted to the school where six of them constituted post level one segment of teacher ranking, a principal and one Head of Department (HOD). Of the eight educators, two were males and six females. Most of the teachers in the school did not live in the area. They either commuted or used their transport to and from their places of residences. This was due to the lack of better facilities like libraries and supermarkets in the area. The area was under-developed, with no proper roads, shops, clinics and transport.

The school did not have a proper fence surrounding it. The school fence had been damaged some years ago due to stray animals and vandalism in the area. There was no security guard to control the coming in and going out of visitors from the school. This exposed both the learners and the entire staff to huge security risks. The school could not afford to hire a security guard due to the lack of funds. School buildings were in a relatively good condition with recently replaced doors and windowpanes. Classrooms were enough for the learners and the teaching model used in the school. There was an acute shortage of furniture in the school. In school B, just as in school A, there was no administration block. As a result one classroom was used for administration. A makeshift kitchen had been constructed by the School Governing Body to prepare and store food for the learners. One of the classrooms was used to store books and served as the school library. The school had one big vegetable garden that was maintained by the school's general assistant. This vegetable garden was well-kept and produced vegetables to supplement the food supplied to the learners through the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP). The introduction of the nutrition programme in schools sought to increase the number of learners attending school, thereby breaking the poverty trap (DBE, 2014). There was a borehole providing water for cooking and watering the vegetable garden. There were two sporting grounds, one for netball and the other one for soccer. As a result of the donation from a good Samaritan, the school had 16 computers in one of the classrooms. Unfortunately, there was no fully qualified teacher to offer computer lessons to the school community, hence the computer centre was minimally utilised. The school used pit toilets which normally did not comply with health and safety protocols. For the facilitation of administration work, the school had two computers, a photocopier and two printers.

4.2.3 School C

School C was a public school and like the other two falls under quintile one category. The school was located in a thinly populated, semi-rural area. Most of the parents were young and could read and write. The majority of parents had attained secondary school education level. A very small proportion of the community had post-matric qualification. There were no job opportunities in the area. The most effective way of communicating with parents was through the use of cellphones and personal visits. Parents in the area derived their source of income mainly from the social grants and the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) which is the innovative offering from government to

provide a job safety net for unemployed people of working age. The school was easily accessible by public transport. The support staff comprised one administrative clerk and a general assistant who were fully paid by the Mpumalanga Education Department (MED). The school had three classrooms which were not in good condition. The principal of the school assisted in securing sponsorship for the school to keep it afloat. Some community members were very supportive of the principal's endeavours in making sure that learners were kept in safety at all times through donations. Learners' safety was a huge risk as there is no security guard to control access to the school.

The school had a total enrolment of sixty-two learners who lived nearby the school. Learners in the school travelled by foot to and from school. No learner who travelled more than six kilometres to the school as the homes of all the learners were not far from the school. This school was similar to the other two schools, in the sense that a huge number of learners came from families who lived in abject poverty due to high unemployment in the area. Most families in the area depended on subsistence farming as they maintained vegetable gardens in their backyards. A small percentage of family members were migrant workers in some of the major cities and towns around the country. Due to high levels of illiteracy in the area, other residents worked in the forest plantations which served as the major employment sector.

Four full-time educators were contracted to the school and were being paid by the state. Efforts were made by the School Governing Body to recruit two educators to assist the school as it was struggling with the shortage of teaching personnel. Out of the six teachers, inclusive of volunteer teachers, two were males. One of the volunteer teachers was presently registered for the National Professional Diploma in Education with the North-West University. All the four state-paid teachers had four-year teacher qualifications. The principal of the school was a Master's candidate at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, specialising in Public Management.

The school had a total of eight classrooms with a fully-fledged administration block. The school was well protected from intruders as it was surrounded by fence and the gate was always kept closed during the day. The sanitation facilities in the school were in good order and adequate for both learners and the entire staff. The school had clean running water for drinking and cooking. Four water tanks had been installed to assist in storing water for future use. The School Governing Body had erected a makeshift

structure to be used as the library as there was no proper building for that purpose. Parents of learners contributed fifty Rand each towards the School Development Fund to assist in fulfilling other school needs including paying the night watchman and library assistant. The school had two playgrounds, one for soccer and the other for netball.

There were two laptops used by both the administrative clerk and the principal to do their daily administration work. A photocopier and a printer were also available at the school to ensure that efficient and effective printing was done for the school. The school had managed to buy a fridge to store perishables used for school nutrition programme. The school kitchen was equipped with two gas stoves, cutlery, big cooking pots and a microwave. All the necessary cleaning equipment which include gardening tools, were available. Furniture for both staff and learners was adequate and in good condition.

4.3 DATA GATHERING TOOLS

4.3.1 Interviews

Aliyu, Bello, Kasim and Martin (2014) assert that interviews are considered to be consistent with the case study design as adopted in this study. The researcher used semi-structured interviews in which he prepared the questions beforehand (Stuckey, 2013). The interviews did not have a rigid structure; they were directed by the way the interviewees to the set questions (Stuckey, 2013). Face-to-face individual interviews allow a researcher the opportunity to collect more data (Opdenakker, 2006). Principals, teachers and parents multi-graded schools were the respondents. The researcher ensured that the principles of confidentiality and anonymity were adhered to. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants and research sites. The three research sites were identified as School A, School B and School C. Participants were identified according to their schools, for instance Teacher A from school A.

4.3.2 Documents review

Document study is one of the data collection tools used in qualitative research. Bowen (2009) defines document study as a type of qualitative research in which the researcher interprets various documents to give voice and meaning concerning a phenomenon under study. Bowen (2009) further purports that this kind of data

collection tool can be successfully used with interviews where themes will be searched from the data source. The document analysis was used with other tools to reduce the impact of potential bias. This is congruent with Bowen (2009), who avers that the use of a combination of data collection tools ensures a confluence of evidence, and thus the credibility of findings. The researcher used a variety of written documents such as mark schedules, educators' time book, policies, circulars, duty rosters, the leave register and minutes of meetings as suggested by O' Leary(2014). O'Leary (2014) warns about two issues to be considered before embarking on the document analysis. The first issue is the bias of both the author of the document and that of the researcher. This implies that the researcher should be wary of personal biases and the subjectivity of the author, which may to a large extent contaminate the findings of the study. The researcher thoroughly studied the documents and searched for the emerging themes from the data source. After having searched for the themes, the refinement of such themes then followed. Bowen (2009) advises that, for the researcher to identify meaningful information, the content analysis should be used.

4.3.3 Observations

The researcher used observations as the third data collection method. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argue that observation forms an integral part of data collection in qualitative research. The researcher chose to use observation because he wanted to verify data accessed from the interviews. This is in line with Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), who state that participants do not always do what they claim they do, during interviews. During the observation, the researcher was guided by the observation schedule prepared beforehand. The researcher immersed himself in the research sites where the research participants were. This was to allow the researcher the opportunity to have direct access to the multi-grade teaching experience. During the observations, cognisance was taken of the fact that the tool might be infiltrated with the researcher's bias, and thus impacting negatively on the primary data. Class observations assisted the researcher to see what was happening in class rather than what was said during the interviews. The combination of data collection procedures enabled the researcher to validate and cross-check the findings. This notion is congruent with the work of Patton (2002) who suggests that data sources are used in combination to compensate one another.

4.4 THEMES ASSOCIATED WITH INTERVIEWS

4.4.1 Theme 1: Teacher training and qualifications

4.4.1.1 *Teacher training on multi-grade teaching*

The common impression that I gained from the respondents is that none of the teachers interviewed indicated that multi-grade teaching had been part of their professional training. It emerged that they had all first come across multi-grade teaching when they were in the employ of the Department of Basic Education. Their training in colleges did not, by any chance, feature anything about multi-grade teaching pedagogy. Teachers had been taught teaching methodologies that favour mono-grade teaching context. Multi-grade teachers expressed their frustration as they were unable to apply the knowledge they gained during their teacher training. The reality is that the learning materials they used in colleges were designed in such a way that they only apply to mono-graded schools. Teacher training in colleges did not prepare teachers to teach in multi-grade schools. The curriculum developers did not recognise and appreciate the existence of multi-grade schools. It was as if the multi-grade schooling context was non-existent in the South African education system. One of the teachers indicated that he even tried to register a course in multi-grade teaching but unfortunately, he could not find an institution offering such a course. Multi-grade teaching was not considered to be one of the viable means of providing education to sparsely populated and rural parts of the country. Teachers who were fresh from colleges or universities found it difficult to adjust to the situation when they were employed in multi-grade schools. They felt helpless and lost interest in teaching as they were frustrated by the situation they found themselves in.

The abovementioned assertions were confirmed by the following responses from the multi-graded teachers. These quotes have largely been left unedited to preserve the tone and spirit of the views.

TEACHER A

During my college years, there was no course that talked about multi-grade teaching. It was my first time to come across this kind of class. I do not remember anything that talked about combining grades in one class in my studies as a teacher. Yes, of course, I knew that in rural areas

where learners were very few, classes were combined and taught by one teacher. I also remember when I was in Standard 1, my class was combined with Standard 2. But I did not understand how teachers then were coping and saw no problem as I was just a school kid. In college, we were not taught about this. I have had to figure it out myself how to deal with combined classes.

One young school principal responded by stating:

PRINCIPAL B

I read about multi-grade teaching when I was preparing for my interview for the principalship post in this school. When responding to a question about multi-grade teaching I just gave them the knowledge I gathered from documents and Google. I did not know what was happening in multi-grade classes. Even during my school days as a learner I never had the privilege of witnessing such a practice as I attended only 'normal' schools. At first, I thought those teachers who are from colleges were introduced to multi-grade teaching as I went to a university. To my surprise, no one from college could confirm that they had been taught about multi-grade teaching. For me, I think it was more difficult because I never attended such a school, I only came here with textbook knowledge that I gained myself. When I was doing my ACE in Mathematics, nothing was mentioned about multi-grade teaching. I had to rely on the knowledge from experienced teachers in the school. It was like enrolling for a first-year teaching course in multi-grade.

The above quotes indicate that teachers received no formal training in multi-grade teaching pedagogy in universities and colleges. The curriculum for teacher training did not include multi-grade teaching, it was designed to prepare students for mono-grade learning environments. Teachers who were teaching in multi-grade did not have specialised knowledge of teaching in these schools. Unlike teachers in Inclusive schools, they are required to have specialised skills in teaching learners with learning challenges. In view of the above responses from the participants, Joyce (2014) suggests that the Department of Basic Education should establish a well-coordinated

system from national level to district level to deal with the teachers' difficulties they face while teaching in multi-grade classes.

4.4.1.2 Support from the Department

It emerged from the interviews that inadequate support from the Department of Basic Education was one of the most troubling experiences that multi-grade teachers had to endure. Emanating from the teachers, they attended workshops which were mainly designed for mono-grade teaching contexts and were expected to adapt their strategies to suit their conditions. Teachers from multi-grade schools were not happy with the way the Department of Basic Education was planning with regards to the provision of curriculum support to multi-grade teachers. Curriculum support systems that were exclusively designed for multi-grade teaching contexts were extremely insufficient and they therefore, felt neglected. It was further revealed that multi-grade teachers were made to treat their classes as if they were mono-graded, of which the two were utterly incompatible. Due to the inadequate teacher training on multi-grade teaching, multi-grade teachers were ill-prepared to teach in multi-grade environments, which in turn affected the education of learners in multi-grade schools.

The following responses from teachers confirm that little effort was directed towards assisting them with curriculum delivery in multi-grade teaching context and further depicted a picture that showed that even the subject advisers were not well equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills for multi-grade classes.

TEACHER A

I last attended the workshop for the multi-grade schools last year in February. It did not cover all the required aspects as it was a one-day workshop. It was not enough to address all the challenges that we face daily in class. To keep on going, I normally rely on my way of doing things rather than well-informed guidance from the subject advisers. Some subject advisers do not have an understanding of what is happening in multi-grade classes. During workshops, the CI's behave as if the workshops are solely intended for mono-graded schools. I feel like I am on my own with no guidance from the department. It is frustrating.

Another teacher responded in this way:

TEACHER C

Yes, we sometimes attend workshops for multi-grade schools. I think it is once a year but this year we never attended such a workshop. Other workshops that we attend are mainly dominated by mono-grade schools. As a result no mention is made of multi-grade schools. It looks as if we do not exist as multi-grade schools. I think the department must do something about this. They forget about us from multi-grade schools because few schools practise multi-grade teaching in our circuit. I sometimes rely on other teachers from other circuits for help. I am not confident enough in what I am doing. I think the department must have someone like Subject Advisor who is responsible for multi-grade schools. I believe that will help a lot. Principals also need to be trained on multi-grade teaching so that they help other teachers who are new in multi-grade schools.

Principal of one of the schools stated that:

PRINCIPAL B

I was never trained in multi-grade teaching. Since my appointment as the principal at the school, no workshop was specifically organized for multi-graded schools. I came here with no idea of what is happening in a multi-grade school, it was my first experience. It is unfortunate that, as the principals of multi-grade schools, we cannot offer curriculum support to our teachers because we also do not have sound knowledge of multi-grade teaching. To be fair we are failing our teachers, and ultimately our learners. I am of the view that the situation would be better if the department could organise as many workshops as possible.

Based on the above responses from multi-grade practitioners, it was evident that the support from the Department of Basic Education was minimal. Teachers were left to fend for themselves in ensuring that curriculum delivery did take place in multi-grade schools. This state of affairs called for the Department of Basic Education to come to the party and contribute meaningfully to the development of teachers in multi-grade schools. The Department should desist from ignoring the existence of multi-grade

schooling in South African Education context. Teachers were trying hard on their part to ensure that effective curriculum delivery does flourish, but they needed support from the department. This confirmed by Ramrathan and Ngubane (2013) who aver that teachers in multi-grade classes largely depend on their professionalism on teaching rather than assistance from the Department of Basic Education.

4.4.2 Theme 2: Teacher workload

4.4.2.1 Teaching duties

It emerged from the interviews that teachers' workload in multi-grade schools is quite enormous and unbearable. Foundation phase teachers had to deal with planning for two or three grades. It was revealed that in some schools they had to combine three grades in one classroom. Some teachers indicated that they normally combined Grades One and Two where grade three was taught separately. Planning for and teaching more than one grade in one classroom was quite demanding for teachers. Given the shortage of teachers in multi-grade schools, the available teachers were assigned different roles apart from teaching, which included, amongst others, monitoring school nutrition programme, extra-curricular activities, and attending to individual learner problems. When a teacher was teaching two grades in the Foundation phase it meant that they were responsible for the curricular demands of eight subjects which was in practice, difficult to manage. It was evident from the interviews that teachers were struggling to cope as they were fulfilling different responsibilities as presented to them. This places teachers in a difficult position in ensuring that effective teaching and learning did flourish at all times. In the Intermediate phase, teachers had a huge burden of teaching three grades which translates into eighteen subjects. It was practically impossible to plan and teach eight subjects. The curriculum structure for the Intermediate phase consisted of six subjects in each grade.

The hefty workload of multi-grade teachers was confirmed by one of the respondents who stated:

TEACHER B

I must be frank with you. Teaching more than three subjects is frustrating and gives a lot of pressure. In my case, I'm teaching Grade One and Two which is eight subjects in total. It is difficult for me. I have also other duties

besides teaching. The principal assigned me to assist in monitoring school nutrition. I normally keep records of deliveries and check if the correct menu is prepared and served at all times. I am unable to complete the required content. We do not have an HOD in our school. Sometimes the principal delegates some of her duties to me when she is busy with something. I think it can be better if we get volunteer teachers. When I'm attending workshops, learners must go home. I do not have enough time to complete the task as I'm always busy.

Another teacher stated that:

TEACHER C

I'm presently teaching grade four and five Life Skills, Social Sciences, NS&TECH and Siswati Home Language. The other subjects are taught by the principal. This is very difficult for me. I can't cope. I think I'm not doing justice to these learners. I am always behind the ATP. And the Subject Advisers are expecting me to cover the content as those that are in normal schools. This is not fair for us. We are suffering in multi-grade schools. I normally struggle to complete the required tasks for each subject. It is very difficult at the beginning of the year as I have to attend all the workshops for the subjects I teach. I am also the secretary of the School Governing Body. I have to attend meetings and keep all the records of the SGB. The department is failing us. I think they can solve this problem by employing more teachers to assist us. We cannot produce good results under this condition. Yes, it's tough.

Based on the participants' responses, it was evident that multi-grade teachers were unable to handle the huge workload as a result of the shortage of teachers due to low learner enrolment. Teachers in multi-grade schools were expected to do more duties in addition to teaching. Teaching many subjects was always a challenge to multi-grade teachers. This showed that there was still much to be done in multi-grade schools to make the working conditions of teachers bearable. Ideally, in a normal school, teachers share responsibilities and do not have to teach many subjects. The huge workload of teachers in multi-grade schools might have resulted in loss of motivation, hence teacher burn-out, which was detrimental to the education of learners.

4.4.2.2 School Principal's responsibilities

The principals in all the three schools visited had to juggle between the role of a class teacher and that of the school manager. This was found to be a serious challenge to the principal who has to both teach and manage the school at the same time. Principals in multi-graded schools had multiple roles to play, which made it difficult for them to perform their duties effectively and efficiently. The Educators' Employment Act no.78 of 1998 stipulates that school principals are expected to perform management and administrative duties to ensure effective curriculum delivery. This promulgation also applies to the principals of multi-grade schools despite that they are also full-time class teachers. Based on the responses of principals of multi-grade schools, principals found it difficult to cope with the multiple roles they were required to fulfil. Principals of multi-grade schools were expected to monitor curriculum implementation, perform administrative duties and engage in class teaching at the same time. This was a huge burden for the principals of multi-graded schools.

The EEA, 78 OF 1998 stipulates that principals of public schools are expected to teach between 10% and 92% of their time. This promulgation depends on the post to which the principal is appointed. In most instances, principals of multi-grade schools are appointed to post levels one and two (PL 1 and PL 2). Principals appointed on PL 1 are ranked as a Head of Department (HOD) in a normal public school, while PL 2 principals are graded as Deputy Principals. In most cases, multi-grade schools did not have HODs and Deputy Principals as usually happened in bigger schools. This necessitated that the principal who was also a full-time subject teacher performed all the duties that were supposed to be assigned to the unavailable personnel. In a bigger school, the deputy principal champions curriculum management initiatives within the school while the HOD is the subject specialist who provides guidance and support to other teachers. Due to the unavailability of the HOD and the Deputy Principal in a multi-grade school, the principal was compelled to fill in the gaps.

The following responses of the multi-grade principals confirm the above assertions.

PRINCIPAL C

The workload is quite huge. As the principal of the school I have to manage curriculum in the school and teach at the same time. It is not easy. My duty

includes teaching Mathematics and Natural Sciences in the Intermediate phase, Grade Four and Five. Sometimes I do not attend my classes because I have to attend to parents who are coming to school. Teaching and managing school is not easy. I have only one HOD who also has many subjects to teach. I monitor curriculum in the Intermediate phase, while the HOD monitors it in the foundation phase. It is unfair because I monitor subjects which I do not understand. It is worse when I am required to attend principals' meetings and my learners are always behind. I normally do not finish the content. To cover for the time lost, I sometimes organise Saturday classes. Not all learners attend these Saturday classes. I am not always available for the Saturday classes. I suggest that the Department must not apply the current post provisioning norm for the multi-grade schools. We need extra teachers to reduce the workload.

It was therefore, evident that principals of multi-grade schools were struggling to cope with the multiple roles in the execution of their duties. The insufficient human resource in multi-grade schools made it difficult for the principals to perform their duties effectively and efficiently. This state of affairs compromised the provision of quality education to all learners in sparsely-populated areas where multi-grade teaching existed.

4.4.3 Theme 3: Learner achievement

The responses from the parents showed that there were divergent views about the way they perceive the learners' performance in multi-graded classes. One group of research participants held the view that multi-grade teaching had negative outcomes on the performance of learners. Given the myriad challenges that multi-grade schools faced, there was a great likelihood that curriculum delivery would be affected, hence low learner attainment. One of the challenges that multi-grade schools had to endure was the enormous workload of teachers. The massive workload that teachers had to bear resulted in them not being able to fulfil all the curricular demands of the subjects they were teaching, as stipulated in the policy documents. This resulted in either mediocre or poor performance of the learners. Learners were failing to perform to the best of their ability. Effective curriculum delivery can only thrive where the school is managed satisfactorily and following the educational legislation. Disturbingly, principals

of multi-grade schools who were also full-time subject teachers, did not have enough time to manage their schools and teach learners as required. This prevented learners from performing to their optimum level. The lack of appropriate instructional leadership in multi-grade classes, due to the shortage of management personnel also impacts on the academic achievement of learners (Kruger, 2003 and Juvane, 2005). Secondly, teachers did not have time to complete the prescribed work and resulted in underperformance of learners in such schools.

The following responses emanated from the interviews:

Teacher C

It is difficult to produce good results in these classes. We have a lot of work to do. We find it hard to complete all the subject content in the ATP. CI's are always complaining when they visit us, they say we are behind with the ATP. This gives us a lot of stress every day. The Subject Advisers must not treat us as normal schools. We also cannot complete the tasks in time. I can't do enough revision for my learners and when they write assessment tasks they do not get good marks. I think learners perform better when we thoroughly revise before giving them a task.

The principal of one other school stated that:

Principal A

The performance of learners in multi-grade tends to be poor. Learners do not perform as expected. In my school, I have noticed that learners in Grade One and Two where multi-grade teaching is practised they do not perform well as compared to those that are in mono-grade schools. According to my analysis, the poor performance is caused by the fact that the learners in multi-grade classes are taught half of what they are supposed to be taught in a day. Secondly, learners get confused as the teacher is teaching one grade while others are listening. Even if you can give the other grade an activity to do while teaching the others, those who are doing an activity get disturbed. Teachers are overworked and do not have enough time to mark the learners' work. Teachers also do not have

enough time to catch up for the time lost. This leads to the poor performance of learners.

On the other hand, some of the research participants held the view that multi-grade teaching afforded learners the opportunity for individual attention as class sizes were smaller and more manageable. Teachers could identify the challenges that each learner faces and provided the necessary assistance. This was not possible in normal schools where learner numbers were normally high and unbearable. Furthermore, it was believed that multi-grade teaching encouraged the culture of independent learning which prepared learners to cope with the demands of secondary and tertiary education. It was further revealed that multi-grade teaching engendered the culture of sharing knowledge amongst learners, which seemed to be beneficial. One of the parents had this to say regarding the performance of learners in multi-grade schools.

Parent A

I think multi-grade classes bring best outcomes for the learners. According to me, the multi-grade teaching allows the learners to recap and revise the work of the previous grade in case they are still in the same class. Like a learner in Grade Two, will have a chance of recapping on the Grade One's subject content as the teacher is busy teaching Grade One in the same class. Another advantage is that the older learners can help the younger learners in lower grades. Learners in multi-grade classes can perform better than those in mono-grade classes. I do not see anything wrong with multi-grade classes. Some learners perform very well from this school and we also receive good news that they are also good learners in our high school.

4.4.4 Theme 4: Curriculum delivery and implementation

4.4.4.1 Seating arrangement

Everston and Weinstein (2006) advise that one of the greatest problems that teachers face in the classroom is linked to classroom management, which, when overlooked, may lead to undesirable outcomes such as teacher burnout and job dissatisfaction. The authors further state that the early exiting of teachers from the profession is mainly attributable to problems associated with classroom management. De Arment, Reed

and Wetzel (2013) argue that managing social dynamics in a diverse classroom tends to be a challenge for teachers. This notion holds for multi-grade classes, as learners in these classes are more heterogeneous in terms of grade levels and learning abilities. It was therefore, of greater importance for the teacher to choose the most appropriate way of organising learners in a class. Based on the findings of this study, learners were arranged separately in small groups of the same grade. It was revealed that the arrangement of learners in groups fostered cooperation and interdependence amongst learners. It was evident from the responses that the most preferred seating arrangement used in multi-grade classes was a formation of small groups. When the teacher was busy with one grade, the other learners were engaged in different learning activity. Teacher A responded by averring that:

In my class, learners are divided according to their grades. Learners who are doing Grade One sit together and Grade Two's separately. This makes it easier for me to quickly identify in which grade is each learner. In each grade they form small groups. I don't want them to sit in rows. Arranging learners in rows was for the old education system. In workshops, the subject advisers tell us to arrange learners in groups to encourage group work. When I'm busy with the Grade Two, the Grade Ones sometimes make a noise when they are in groups. But I prefer groups, it works for me. They are now used to working in their groups. It is a problem when they are writing formal tasks, they copy from others. When they are writing formal tasks. I allow them to sit in rows. Re-arranging desks takes a lot of time. So, I tell them not to copy from other when they are writing individual activities. They only sit in rows when they are writing a formal task.

4.4.4.2 Teaching strategies

In response to the questions based on the teaching strategies used by the teachers in multi-grade classes, it was revealed that teachers predominantly use both whole class teaching and small group teaching, depending on the subject being taught. Whole-class teaching implies that the teacher prepares for only one lesson for different groups of learners. This kind of teaching strategy is used in story-telling and reading lessons. It was further revealed that the whole-class teaching is also used when a teacher introduces a lesson where all the groups in the class work together with the teacher.

The teacher will then break the class into groups to complete the activities. Furthermore, teachers mentioned that whole-class teaching works best in physical education and music lessons. It was highlighted that the use of whole-class teaching assists teachers in keeping an eye on the learners and in maintaining good discipline. One of the shortcomings of whole-class teaching as mentioned by one of the respondents is that it promotes teacher dependency syndrome. Lessons that are informed by whole-class teaching strategy tend to be more teacher-centred. In some instances, teachers use individualised teaching where the teacher engages on a one-to-one basis with a learner. In conclusion, the review of literature reveals that multi-grade schools in South Africa are still using old-fashion teaching methods such as narration teaching methods, which have not become irrelevant. It is suggested that South Africa need to address this issue as a matter of urgency and align itself with other countries where this practice of teaching was long discontinued (Hargreaves, 2001)

When respondent C was asked how teaching takes place in her class, she responded as follows:

As I mentioned before that I arrange my learners according to their different grades. I have a group of Grade Ones and Grade Twos side by side. I usually teach them one subject content at the same time but when it comes to Grade One I do less difficult activities. If there is a need I give one group of learners an activity to do, say Grade Two and concentrate on grade two for further explanation. Again, if there is a learner who is struggling, I concentrate on that learner while others are busy with the activity. But time is not enough for me to attend to all the learners. But I need to prepare activities for the different grades before getting into the class.

All the teachers who were interviewed indicated that they use both whole-class teaching and individualised teaching, depending on the situation. Another teacher responded by saying:

It is difficult to teach two different grades in one classroom. It needs me to be more strategic and know my story. I cannot tell which strategy is best because I use different teaching strategies to suit the situation. If I'm

teaching two different things for the two grades, I do it in turns. I first give one grade a group activity to do and teach the other grade. When I finish teaching and give them an activity to do and attend to the other grade which was first given an activity. Sometimes the other group keeps on disturbing me while I'm teaching. It is not easy at all.

4.4.4.3 Lesson planning and preparation

It emerged from the interviews that lesson planning and preparation for the multi-grade classes was giving teachers sleepless nights. Planning for the multi-grade classes did not resemble the one that was used for mono-grades in the sense that it incorporated two or more grade levels to be taught at the same time. Teachers stated that the lack of or inadequate knowledge of multi-grade teaching pedagogy, they were tempted to design their lesson plans as if they were meant for the mono-grade classes. Some teachers indicated that they did not have lesson plans for all the subjects / or grades they were teaching. It was further revealed that formats for lesson plans were not duly followed. Teachers were unable to design functional lesson plans for the multi-grade teaching context. The majority of teachers conceded that the lesson plans in their files were for record-keeping purposes, and they were not actually implemented in class. They kept the lesson plans in their files so that they could produce them in case the subject advisers visited their school. Some teachers admitted that they did not have the requisite skills for designing relevant lesson plans for multi-grade teaching context. (Aksoy, 2008) acknowledges that planning and preparation for multi-grade classes is more complicated and quite challenging.

These are the responses from some of the research participants:

TEACHER A

To be honest with you sir, planning for the multi-grade classes is difficult for me. I am not sure of what I'm doing here. My lesson plans are the same as those for the mono-grade classes. I don't have an idea of lesson planning for the multi-grade classes. Some lesson plans are missing. Not all subjects and grades have lesson plans. It's too much for me. I just keep some of the lesson plans in my file in case they need them. I do not use them in class. I have been using some of the lesson plans since last year,

*I don't bother changing them. I sometimes forget to change dates for them.
I do not plan ahead, I must admit.*

Another respondent indicated that they were supplied with the multi-grade tool-kit which contained exemplar lesson plans and activities designed for multi-grade classes. She complained that she was unable to use them as she could not make sense of the lesson plans. She further stated that the multi-grade teachers were not properly trained on the implementation of the tool-kits, meant for multi-grade classes.

4.5 FINDINGS FROM THE DOCUMENTS REVIEW

4.5.1 Educators' time book

The educators' time book is an instrument that is used in schools to manage teacher attendance in schools. If teacher attendance is not closely monitored in schools, it often leads to teacher absenteeism which is one of the disruptive school-related behaviours. This notion is confirmed by Mthombeni (2010) who reminds us that uncontrolled teacher absenteeism leads to an extremely large amount of teaching time being lost. Information gathered from the educators' time-book together with the leave register revealed that teacher absenteeism is not a serious problem in the three schools. However, it was noted that the school principal was the one who was often absent from school. The document further revealed that the principal often departed early from school. In most instances the absenteeism and early departure was due to attendance of meetings and workshops. The inconsistent attendance at school by both teachers and principals was mainly at the beginning of a year. Based on the records, the common cause of non-attendance to school was mainly attributed to ill-health and to attending to private urgent issues.

4.5.2 Mark Schedules

The South African Schools Act no. 84 of 1996 provides for the National Protocol for Assessment Grades R to 12, which stipulates that the performance of every learner needs to be recorded for promotion purposes and reporting to parents. Mark schedules are school generated documents that illustrate how learners are performing in each grade. Mark schedules are compiled for each term in a year. The end-of-year mark schedules are generally referred to as promotion schedules as they indicate the promotion of learners from one grade to another. Data revealed that mark schedules

were compiled for separate grades, even though the learners are taught in one classroom. Each grade had its mark schedule indicating the level of achievement for each learner in a particular grade. Multi-grade schools also used mark schedules generated from the South African School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS) like any other school in the province. The teacher teaching the grades becomes the grade teacher for all the grades he/ she is managing.

4.5.3 Policies

A policy in the educational context refers to a document that spells out decisions of education authorities about how educational facilities should be managed. Education policies seek to govern the operation of education systems. The data revealed that in all the multi-grade schools visited, departmental policies were duly adhered to. Given the nature of multi-grade schools, there were minor deviations in the implementation of some policies. This was evident in the time allocation to subjects wherein most schools more time was allocated to Mathematics and Languages. Subjects such as Life Skills in both Foundation and Intermediate Phases, and Life Orientation and Creative Arts in the Senior Phase were not taught in line with the departmental policy directive. Very little time was spent on those subjects which contradicts the policy prescripts in terms of notional teaching time. However, it was discovered that multi-grade schools were trying hard to be in line with the dictates of the departmental policies and regulations. The data also revealed that in all schools visited, hours spent at school across all grades correlated with the departmental stipulations. It was further discovered that assessment requirements about the number of tasks and content assessed were duly followed as outlined in the respective subject Programme of Assessments (POAs) and Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs). However, the Content coverage in some subjects remained a challenge. The data revealed that subjects taught by the school principal most failed as the principal does not have enough time to spend with the learners.

4.5.4 Duty Rosters and Time Tables

Section 3(4) (l) of the National Policy Act no.27 of 1996 makes provision for the determination of national policy regarding core syllabuses and education programmes. In this policy, prescripts on the instructional time in all the phases in primary ordinary schools, are clearly outlined. For instance, in the Foundation Phase, the maximum time

allocated for Home Language in Grade 1 to 3 is eight hours. However, in multi-grade schools, these are not practically used for the subjects. Due to high teacher workload, the time spent on the Languages may not correspond with those that are prescribed. In every school where data was collected. Time-tables for both the Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase were available. They were drawn according to the prescripts of the national policy as notional time was strictly observed in both phases. However, it was revealed that the teachers were unable to follow the time-table as it was because of shortage of the staff.

4.5.5 Leave Register

The legislative framework within the education sector allows teachers to obtain leave from schools for a limited period, for reasons such as illness, maternity, family responsibilities et cetera. The Basic Conditions of Employment no. 75 of 1997 and the Labour Relations Act no.66 of 1995, are some of the pieces of legislation from which the specific determination of leave measures for school-based educators are derived. However, it must be noted that learners also have the right to education. It is, therefore imperative that a leave register for teachers is kept. A leave register is a document kept at school to record all absences of teachers and other support staff. In a school context, the leave register is normally maintained by the school principal. It was discovered that the principal's absenteeism was mostly ascribed to the attendance at meetings while the other teachers' absence from school is largely due to personal matters. Attendance at workshops and union meetings were had a huge adverse impact on teacher attendance as workshops were normally scheduled in the afternoons.

4.5.6 Circulars

A circular is referred to as an informational or instructional letter that is distributed to staff members to instruct the intended recipients about a particular course of action or disseminating information that relates to their scope of work. Some circulars were intended to invite staff members to a workshop or meeting. In all the visited schools, it was discovered that circulars were circulated among staff members to read and sign. Signing a circular is a way of acknowledging that the information contained in the circular has been duly received. The signed circulars were then filed for future reference. It was learnt that some events to which teachers were invited, fell on the

same day at the same time. In the context of the multi-grade schools, events that fall on the same day at the same time led to non-attendance of other events due to the lower number of teachers in a school. Clashing of departmental events in terms of dates and time suggests that little or no effort was put into catering for the multi-graded schools.

4.5.7 Minutes of meetings

Minutes of a meeting refers to the written records of events in a meeting. This includes, amongst others, the list of attendees, apologies tendered, issues discussed, corresponding responses, and major decisions taken in response to the issues raised. Minutes of meetings are kept for future reference. In all schools visited, it was discovered that staff and parents' meetings were held and minutes of meetings were recorded and duly kept for future reference. Through a thorough analysis of the minutes, it was noted that the following issues emerged as the over-arching challenges that all the visited schools faced:

4.5.7.1 High teacher workload

The huge workload of multi-grade teachers prevented them from performing their teaching obligations in their respective subjects. They were also unable to fulfil all the curricular demands of their subjects. The implication was that learners exposed to multi-grade teaching were missing out on some of the important elements of their curriculum, hence poor learner performance.

4.5.7.2 Shortage of teaching staff

The shortage of teaching staff in multi-graded schools necessitated that principals of schools engage in subject teaching on a full-time basis. This implied that, on top of the school management and administration duties, they had added duties which prevented them from having sufficient contact time for learners, nor enough time for performance of administrative duties. This created a situation where teachers were unable to cope with the difficulties associated with multi-grade teaching.

4.5.7.3 Insufficient funding

All public schools under the South African Department of Education are resourced under the Norms and Standards for Funding (NSF). This funding model prescribes that

schools are funded based on their learner enrolment. This suggests that the more learners a school have, the more funding it receives. This implies that the large schools are receiving more funding as opposed to the smaller schools which are mostly multi-graded. The implication is that the multi-graded schools were struggling to financially. This state of affairs affected effective curriculum delivery in multi-graded schools.

4.5.7.4 *Minimal support from the Department of Basic Education*

The literature revealed that there was little evidence that the Department of Basic Education was adequately giving support to multi-grade teachers as was the case in mono-grade schools. This created an impression that multi-grade teaching was of inferior importance as opposed to mono-grade teaching. There were no or little programmes designed to address the curricular and instructional demands of multi-grade teaching. This resulted in teachers being unprepared for the challenges of multi-grade teaching (Juvane, 2007 and Brown, 2010). The implication was that teachers who were not supported, tended to have low morale and teacher burnout.

4.6 FINDINGS FROM OBSERVATIONS

4.6.1 Teacher attendance

Teacher absenteeism was one of the problems that beset South African schools and impacting negatively on the provision of effective curriculum delivery. This assertion is supported by Mthombeni (2010), who warns that absenteeism does not necessarily mean that a teacher is completely absent from school. It implies that the teacher is at school, but he/she is not attending to his/her teaching duties as required. Absenteeism manifests itself in different forms, including arriving late at school; leaving the school early; feigned illnesses; extended toilet breaks, etc. (Labour Guide, 2016: Online). In all the schools visited, it was observed that there is no problem of teacher absenteeism. This was confirmed by the educators' attendance register. Teachers in the schools attend their learners without fail.

4.6.2 Learner attendance

The policy on learner attendance states that uncontrolled learner attendance has a disturbing effect on the effective teaching and learning processes in schools. It further suggests that a daily record of learner attendance needs to be developed and

maintained. This will enable the school to monitor and track records of learners' absence so that appropriate actions are taken to curb the practice (National Education Policy Act no. 27 of 1996). All the three schools showed a hundred per cent learner turnout during the day of the visit. Truancy and bunking of classes were observed to be non-existent in the three schools. In school B one learner was absent and was said to be looking after his sick grandmother at home.

4.6.3 School furniture

Collier (2005) laments that rural teachers are expected to work in conditions with poor resources and infrastructure, and have less control over the curriculum, which eventually lead to frustration. For the purpose of this study, poor infrastructure would include inadequate and poor school furniture. This notion is confirmed by Mabogoane and Pateli (2006) who claim that poor infrastructure in schools plays a negative role in attracting suitably qualified teachers. The foregoing assertions regarding poor infrastructure in schools, also hold for the multi-graded schools. School A did not have enough furniture for both learners and teachers. The available furniture was not in good condition. Teachers and learners shared the same type of furniture. In school B, there was an acute shortage of furniture for the learners.

4.6.4 Teaching and learning materials

The adequate supply of appropriate teaching and learning materials makes a vital contribution to the provision of quality education, as does the ability of teachers to use and manage the resources in the classroom. Teachers are urged to reinforce their teaching with the correct use of relevant teaching and learning materials. This can significantly improve effective curriculum delivery in schools. However, the NEEDU (2013) report reveals that there is active resistance of primary school teachers to using textbooks as they prefer using teacher produced notes. This report also holds for the multi-graded schools. Multi-graded schools need to be supplied with enough teaching and learning materials to improve teaching and learning. It was observed that none of the three schools had a problem relating to teaching and learning materials. There were no learners who share textbooks. The only challenge that was noted was the shortage of reading books in the library. In all the three schools, the libraries were under-resourced in terms of the availability of resources.

4.6.5 Classroom management and Learner discipline

De Wet (2006) regards discipline problem as any action by a learner that brings distraction to other learners during teaching and learning in class. Most researchers agree that disciplinary problems have a detrimental effect on effective curriculum delivery (Bechuke & Debeila, 2012). Tiwani (2010) warns that the misbehaviour of learners infringes on other learners' fundamental right to feel safe and to learn. Teacher factors such as classroom management and the teacher's characters are some of the determinants of learner discipline. This is supported by Woolfolk (2006) who asserts that classroom management aims to maintain a positive learning climate. The researcher discovered that teachers had difficulty in managing their classes as there were different grades in one classroom. When the teacher was busy with one group, the other groups of learner were playing, not doing what they were instructed to do. It was evident that learners in the Foundation phase were less disruptive than those in the Intermediate phase. The foundation phase learners showed a high level of discipline than those in higher grades.

4.6.6 Punctuality

Tinab (2014) avers that both absenteeism and lateness in schools are indicative of poor school management and leadership which may result in inconsistent teaching and learning practices. Tinab (2014) further states that the two practices are mainly attributed to the lack of or inadequate supervision by school managers which impacts on the curriculum delivery. The best way to minimise such practices is to constantly monitor the attendance of both teachers and learners. After observing the punctuality of both teachers and learners, the researcher established that teachers arrive at school in time and prepared for the day. It was further observed that teachers attended to their duties diligently and in time. In one of the schools, the principal arrived late as he had to collect some documents from the circuit office. A few learners arrived late as they had been playing on their way to school.

4.6.7 Teaching timetable

Enenche (2019) describes a school timetable as a schedule of activities that assists in giving a clear picture to teachers, learners, parents and officials, of what is exactly taking place in the classroom at any given time. Timetables ensure that learners are

receiving sufficient material in each subject. This is an essential document for every school as it fosters smooth and orderly working of a school. Teachers in the three schools visited, were shown to be struggling to adhere to the time tables for the different grades. Subjects such as Life Skills in both Foundation and Intermediate phases were not taught according to the dictates of the policy. More time was spent on Mathematics and Languages.

4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the findings as derived from the various data collection methods and the review of the literature. Some findings were gleaned from the documents that were reviewed, observations and responses of research participants from the interviews. These findings were then analysed and interpreted for meaning. Furthermore, the chapter presented various themes and sub-themes that emerged from the collected data. This chapter has sought to address the aim of the study through the responses from the interviews, analysis of documents and observations. The next chapter will present a summary of the research findings and conclusions drawn from the findings. Thereafter, recommendations are then made as an attempt to address the research problem.

CHAPTER FIVE

STUDY SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on data presentation, analysis and interpretation. This next chapter concentrates on summary, recommendations and conclusion. The preceding chapter provided data and discussions of the data gathered through interviews, document review and observations. This chapter provides a summary of the findings that emerged from the presented data. The first section of this chapter summarises the key findings, in the form of themes as emerged from the data. The chapter also provides recommendations to be taken into consideration when managing difficulties associated with multi-grade teaching in primary schools. The last part of the chapter presents the conclusion which wraps up the entire study.

5.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The overarching aim of this study was to evaluate the difficulties that teachers experience in managing teaching and learning in multi-graded primary schools. An attempt to solicit information that would shed light on the manifestations of the difficulties associated with multi-grade teaching, was made through the use of interviews, document review and observation. Furthermore, the study sought to describe how teachers overcome the difficulties they face in curriculum planning and implementation. In pursuit of the attainment of the desired aim of the study, data was collected, findings were made and conclusions were drawn. As the findings were made from the collected and analysed data, several themes emerged. The summary of themes, as emerged from the data, is presented hereunder.

5.2.1 Teacher training and qualifications

The study revealed that teachers who are participating in multi-grade teaching in their classes are professionally qualified. Most of the teachers have attained the Relative Education Qualification Value 14 (REQV 14) status which is above the current minimum requirement for employment as a teacher in South Africa. The current minimum requirement for employment in South Africa is a three-year teaching diploma, classified as REQV 13. This means that teachers in multi-graded classes were well-

qualified. It was, however, noted that none of the teachers had received intensive formal training in multi-grade teaching. It was also discovered that their teacher-training courses did not include the multi-grade teaching component. The curriculum for teacher-training in South African universities is, to a larger extent, skewed towards mono-grade teaching (Juvane, 2007). This is one of the disturbing realities that multi-grade teachers have to grapple with.

The researcher realised that teachers had received no or insufficient in-service training in multi-grade teaching. This resulted in teachers being inadequately prepared to teach in multi-graded classes. Given the inadequate training in multi-grade teaching pedagogy, multi-grade teachers were not confident enough in executing their teaching duties. Workshops that were arranged did not address the plight of the multi-grade teachers and are normally conducted by officials who also do not have an understanding of multi-grade classes. The most disturbing truth is that, according to the literature reviewed, the South African tertiary institutions do not have adequate programmes on multi-grade teaching pedagogy. There are few formal programmes offered by Higher Education Institutions or training institutions that prepare teachers adequately for teaching in a multi-grade situation (DBE, 2015). Teachers decried the lack of commitment by the Department of Basic Education to give multi-grade teaching the recognition it deserves. This finding is confirmed by Ramrathan and Ngubane (2013) who lament that the South African education system does not cater for multi-grade training programmes which makes it difficult for multi-grade teachers to be sufficiently competent.

5.2.2 Teacher workload

The study revealed that multi-graded schools were inundated with several challenges that negatively affected effective curriculum delivery. The responses from the research participants were indicative of the fact that the challenges in those schools manifest themselves in various forms and degrees. It was therefore, evident that, if such challenges were not promptly attended to, the conducive culture of teaching and learning in multi-graded schools will remain a pipedream. This finding is consistent with Juvane and Joubert (2010) who posit that there is a need to change the current situation so that multi-grade teaching also enjoys recognition as a reality in the

education context. Given the responses of the research participants, the study was able to identify several challenges, together with their manifestations.

Firstly, it was discovered that the majority of multi-grade schools had an acute shortage of teaching personnel which resulted in high teacher workload (Luschei & Chudgar, 2017). This state of affairs is prevalent in all those schools. There is a direct link between the shortage of teaching staff and the high workload. According to the current Post-Provisioning Norm (PPN), the number of teaching posts allocated to a public school is determined by the number of learners it can register. Multi-grade schools have low learner enrolment, and as a result, few teachers are allocated. Most multi-graded schools have fewer than five teachers inclusive of the school principal. This leads to the situation whereby a single teacher would be responsible for more subjects. This situation creates a heavy burden on teachers. They find it hard to prepare, plan and teach subjects competently. The principal of the school who is also the full-time subject teacher, is expected to perform administrative and managerial duties. The study revealed that teachers were unable to cope with the multiple challenges of multi-grade schools.

The study has also revealed that multi-grade schools were operating under an acute scarcity of resources such as insufficient funds. As stated in the policy of the Department of Basic Education, funds allocated to public schools are dependent on the number of learners registered in those schools. The lower the number of learners registered in a school, the fewer the funds which are allocated to that school. Multi-grade schools have a very low learner enrolment, hence they struggle with funds to run the school successfully. These schools are struggling to provide sufficient resources to support the curriculum. The multi-grade teachers decried the shortage of teaching and learning resources in the classes. This undermines the provision of quality education to all learners apart from their socio-economic conditions. Teachers in multi-graded schools are compelled to use teaching and learning resources that are meant for mono-grade teaching context. There are no teaching resources that seek to address the demands of multi-grade education. This means that the textbooks used are not meant to be in multi-graded schools. Taole and Mncube (2012) advise that there is a need to develop resources that are geared specifically for multi-graded classes.

Teachers in multi-graded schools are complaining that they feel neglected as they do not receive adequate support from the Department of Basic Education. They revealed that there were no education authorities who seem to understand their plight including teacher-unions. The lack of support in any form discourages teachers who teach under those conditions. This has resulted in a situation whereby teachers contemplate leaving the teaching profession prematurely. As a result, the education of learners in sparsely populated areas has been disrupted. The required support includes curriculum support to enhance effective curriculum delivery. Beihammer and Hascher (2015) state that, multi-grade teaching can effectively support learners if teachers are supported, through training, in order to improve their professional ability awareness that is necessary to obtain a quality learning process in multi-grade teaching. The study also revealed that the Department of Basic Education does not provide multi-graded schools with subject advisers who are well conversant with the concept of multi-grade teaching. The lack of support in those schools has negatively affected the curriculum delivery and implementation, and consequently learner attainment in schools with multi-graded classes.

5.2.3 Learner achievement

Given the wide range of challenges prevalent in multi-graded schools, teaching and learning in those schools was adversely affected. Firstly, it was established that teachers in multi-graded schools did not have the requisite skills to handle the challenges associated with the multi-grade classes. The inability of teachers to manage multi-graded classes had a bearing on learner performance. Classes that suffered under poor classroom management were prone to disruption of effective curriculum delivery. The absence of effective curriculum delivery often led to poor learner performance. Juvane (2005) argues that the appropriate instructional leadership and classroom management skills have a positive impact on the academic achievement of learners in multi-grade classes. Another element that this study revealed, was the huge workload of teachers which hindered them from performing their duties effectively. The high workload of teachers prevented them from completing the curriculum as prescribed. Learners were not taught all the content they were supposed to be taught in a grade or phase. As result, learners from multi-graded schools suffered content-backlog which in turn, diminished their chances of achieving to the best of their abilities. Generally, many factors contribute to either mediocre or

poor learner performance in multi-graded schools. Insufficient and irrelevant teaching and learning resources also contributed to the poor performance by learners.

5.2.4 Curriculum delivery and implementation

The study revealed that teachers were in the main struggling to cope with the demands of multi-graded teaching context. The problem of curriculum delivery starts with the lesson planning which is the crucial aspect in the teaching process. Teachers in multi-graded classes found it more challenging to plan lessons for the combined grades. Teachers in those classes tended to plan their lessons as if they were going to teach mono-graded classes. It was made clear that the two systems were completely not compatible. Some teachers were trying hard to plan for their lessons, but such lesson plans were barely implemented. It was discovered that lesson plans were sometimes available in teachers' files, but only for record-keeping not for implementation purposes. It was further established that some teachers had multi-grade tool-kits with exemplar lesson plans, but they were unable to make sense of them as no training was effectively provided to them. It was a disheartening experience to learn that some teachers did not have some lesson plans for the grades and subjects which they were teaching.

Another issue that emerged was that teachers in multi-graded classes were constantly failing to use the most appropriate teaching strategies for their lessons. Teachers were aware of the various teaching strategies, but lacked the knowledge of how and when to implement them. Teachers tended to use the strategies inappropriately and that could have led to the unintended outcomes. Lingam (2007) emphasises the importance of using a range appropriate organisational strategies in the classroom, for effective curriculum delivery to occur, in multi-grade classes. It was further revealed that the traditional lecture method was over-used even in situations that required a different teaching strategy. Furthermore, it was discovered that the whole-class teaching was rarely used. It was also learnt with utter dismay that small group teaching was predominantly used, but was somewhat misdirected. Another strategy that teachers employed for those classes was individualised teaching, although most of them complained that it was time-consuming.

The study found that teachers in multi-grade classes were failing to manage the curriculum as expected. They were struggling to complete the prescribed curriculum

for each grade. This was mainly ascribed to the huge workload the multi-grade teachers had to endure. It was revealed that subject advisers were constantly complaining about the content coverage and adherence to the prescripts of the assessment plan. Teachers in those classes were expected to be in line with the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) and fulfil the assessment requirements as if they were in a mono-grade teaching situation. It was also discovered that teachers were unable to cover all the aspects of the curriculum for any given grade or subject. The subject content-deficit manifested itself when learners from multi-grade primary schools were in secondary schools where mono-grade teaching was not practised.

Another issue that emerged from the study was the lack of proper curriculum management practices in multi-graded schools. This finding is in disagreement with Bush and Glover (2016) who warn that instructional leadership and management of curriculum implementation are essential elements in curriculum delivery. It was discovered that curriculum monitoring was not done as it should. That was largely attributed to the unavailability of other personnel such as the HODs and Deputy Principals. The Principal was the one who performed the duties of the unavailable personnel where the deputy principal was supposed to oversee the curriculum and HODs had to give support and guidance to other teachers. Since a principal is also a full-time subject teacher, he/she could not fulfil the other roles effectively. So, teachers in multi-grade schools lacked the curriculum support from the department. Consequently, challenges and curriculum gaps could not be detected and duly addressed. This was a very unfortunate situation that the curriculum in multi-graded schools had to suffer. Curriculum monitoring in multi-graded schools was therefore, compromised.

This study revealed that multi-grade teachers were failing to maintain discipline in their classes. This was so because when the teacher was busy teaching one grade, the other grade was supposed to be engaged in the given task. However, it was not always the case. One would find learners not concentrating on the given activity, but causing noise in the class, thereby disturbing the teacher and the other group of learners. Classroom management remains one of the common challenges in multi-graded classes. Teachers lacked skills to manage those classes successfully which led to ineffective curriculum delivery. The other issue that was observed was that principals in those classes had to do administrative duties as well. During that time, learners were

left unattended and classes were disrupted. The lack of discipline amongst learners was largely caused by poor classroom management practices. Inadequate classroom management often led to a lack of discipline and ultimately to poor learner performance.

Timetabling in multi-grade classes seemed to be a very serious challenge as well, as one teacher was responsible for several subjects. It was practically impossible to draw up a workable timetable. Some subjects were not taught according to the dictates of the policy about notional time for each subject in a particular phase. Teachers in multi-graded classes found it hard to follow the timetable strictly. It was discovered that teachers concentrated on mathematics and languages while less time was spent on other subjects. This unfortunate state of affairs was based on the premise that teachers in multi-grade classes were struggling to adjust the mono-grade curriculum to multi-grade teaching context (Brown, 2009). This led to a situation whereby learners had a huge content-gap when compared with learners in mono-grade schools. In addition, the study discovered that parents had mixed feelings concerning the skills that learners acquired in both teaching scenarios. Proponents of multi-grade teaching argued that multi-grade teaching engendered cooperation among learners and fostered independent learning skills. Besides, learners in mono-grade classes were prone to dependency syndrome which limited their chances of success in higher grades. On the contrary, those who supported mono-grade teaching, argued that their children did not acquire those adequate skills they were supposed to have for a particular grade or phase. They could not compare to their counterparts in mono-grade schools.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE FINDINGS

Based on the responses from the face-to-face interviews with the respondents, review of documents and observation, and the literature reviewed, the following recommendations are now made.

5.3.1 Recommendation 1

The first finding relates to inadequate teacher training for multi-grade teaching. This study established that teachers in primary school received little or no training in managing difficulties associated with multi-graded classes. This has been the state of affairs in multi-grade primary schools for some time. Lack of or inadequate teacher

training on multi-grade teaching pedagogy has resulted in effective teaching and learning, being compromised. This study, therefore, recommends that the Department of Basic Education needs to establish a directorate that would specifically look into issues that relate to multi-grade teaching pedagogy and practices. That directorate needs to be headed by officials who are well conversant with multi-grade teaching methodology and practices. If there is a shortage of officials with adequate knowledge and skills regarding multi-grade teaching, the Department of Basic Education could train more officials who would assist. Ngubane (2011) states that the curriculum that teachers generally implement, even in multi-grade classes, is intended for mono-grade classes. The Department needs to also allocate funds towards the training of teachers who are currently teaching in multi-grade schools. This will enable those teachers to be better equipped for the challenges of multi-grade classes. As it was stated earlier on that there is a tendency of teachers exiting the system prematurely, equipping those teachers with skills and knowledge about handling multi-grade classes, could reduce this undesirable tendency of teacher resignations. It is also recommended that teacher workshops need to be conducted regularly and by officials with a keen interest in multi-grade teaching. This could boost the teacher morale which seems to be diminishing in the handling of the multi-graded classes.

Since multi-grade teaching is a reality in South African education system, it is further recommended that teacher-training programmes incorporate multi-grade teaching pedagogy in their curriculum, as a viable means of providing quality education to sparsely populated areas, or where learner enrolment does not allow the provision of one teacher in a grade. This could help every teacher from any teacher training institution to gain insight into the multi-grade teaching practices. Such teachers are not likely to struggle in handling multi-grade classes when exposed to them. Besides, institutions of higher learning need to provide multi-grade teaching courses to up-skill or re-skill those teachers who are already in the employ of the education department. The articulated recommendations are confirmed by Naidoo and Petersen (2015) when asserting that the Department of Basic has the obligation to offer support to multi-grade schools in the form of comprehensive and well-designed instructional development programmes, aimed at capacitating teachers in multi-graded schools, to cope with their teaching responsibilities there.

5.3.2 Recommendation 2

The second finding relates to teacher-workload in multi-graded primary schools. This study revealed that multi-graded primary schools are commonly characterised by high teacher-workload. This situation in multi-graded schools is mainly attributed to the current Post-Provisioning model which applies to all public schools. Based on the expressed finding, the researcher recommends that the Department of Basic Education needs to change the status quo by ensuring that more teaching posts are created for the multi-grade schools. The creation of extra teaching posts could alleviate the burden that teachers in those schools have are facing. The current policy on the provision of teaching posts is dependent on the number of learners which schools have. This means that schools with fewer learners, as is the case in multi-graded schools, would be eligible for fewer teaching posts. Based on that, it is therefore recommended that multi-grade schools need to be treated differently, so that more teaching posts are specifically created to reduce the overload of teachers in those schools. The provision of teaching posts to multi-graded schools needs to be primarily based on the reduction of teaching workload of teachers, rather than learner enrolment. The creation of more teaching posts in those schools could enable their teachers to have enough time for planning, preparation and teaching. This could inevitably improve the teaching conditions of teachers, and hence create high learner performance. This recommendation is in line with the literature warning that quality teaching and learning can only be realised in conditions of adequate resources inclusive of teaching personnel (Thaba-Nkadimene, Modiba & Malotje, 2019).

5.3.3 Recommendation 3

The third finding relates to learners' achievement in multi-graded primary schools. The study revealed that parents of learners from multi-graded schools have divergent views about the way they perceive the performance of learners in those schools. One of the dominant views was that learners from multi-graded classes do not perform to the best of their ability, as compared to their counterparts in mono-graded schools. The multi-graded classes are mostly characterised by either poor or mediocre learner achievement. The low learner achievement in those schools is attributed to the plethora of challenges that multi-grade teachers have had to grapple with. One of the challenges was the massive workload of teachers which hindered them from fulfilling

the curricular and assessment demands of the subjects they were teaching. In addition, challenges such as poor curriculum planning and management, and insufficient teachers' pedagogical knowledge about multi-graded classes often led to poor curriculum delivery, consequently low learner achievement. In response to the perceived poor or mediocre learner achievement by learners in multi-graded classes, the researcher recommends that the Department of Basic Education needs to consider re-organising and improving curriculum in multi-graded classes such that it suits the material conditions in such schools. This implies that the Department of Basic Education needs to design didactic plans such as Annual Assessment Plans and Assessment Plans that are relevant to the specific needs of multi-grade teaching context (DBE, 2015). This could ensure that the curriculum offered in multi-grade schools is relevant to the needs of both teachers and learners in multi-grade classes.

5.3.4 Recommendation 4

The fourth finding relates to the shortage of management personnel in multi-grade primary schools. These schools normally have one or two teachers, inclusive of the principal, in their School Management Teams. The study revealed that the unavailability of other personnel like the Heads of Department (HODs) and Deputy Principals in multi-graded schools was a serious cause for concern. This necessitated that the principal, who was also a full-time subject teacher, would be the only one performing the duties of the unavailable personnel. This means that the principal was expected to oversee the curriculum delivery in the school all by himself or herself. The unavailability of an HOD, who was supposed to be giving support and guidance to teachers, impacted negatively on the curriculum management and delivery of the school. As a result, the principal failed to fulfil some of his or her roles as he or she was overworked. Given the above scenario, the important aspects of curriculum management and delivery were overlooked. In response to these challenges, the researcher recommends that principals need to be relieved of the teaching duties and that other teaching posts be created for that purpose. This implies that no principal should be engaged in subject teaching in multi-graded schools. Principals of multi-graded schools need to be strictly responsible for the management and administrative roles only. The implementation of this recommendation could effectively improve the efficiency of principals at multi-graded schools. This recommendation is supported by Singh (2011), who reasons that instructional leaders in multi-grade teaching institutions

require a set of skills and competencies for the achievement of the identified learning and teaching outcomes.

5.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY

The tendency among teachers of viewing multi-grade teaching as a burden rather than a remedy where mono-grade teaching practice is not viable, should be changed, in the South African schooling context. This is necessary because multi-grade teaching practice has the potential of providing primary basic education in sparsely-populated, rural communities. Although teachers managing multi-grade classes are still grappling with myriad challenges, viable solutions are there to salvage the status quo. To be precise, the Department of Basic Education is obliged to ensure that multi-grade teaching enjoys the same recognition as mono-grade teaching. This will ensure that the right of every child to basic primary education, is upheld with no exception. Research findings have revealed that the situation in multi-grade schools is such that effective curriculum delivery is not flourishing. For the survival of the multi-graded schools, teachers of those institutions need to be supported in the form of comprehensive instructional development programmes, aimed at capacitating them in handling the difficulties associated with multi-graded classes. This suggests that, for learners in multi-graded classes to acquire quality basic education, such centres of learning need to be supported by providing adequate human and physical resources so that they can compete on an equal basis with their counterparts namely, the mono-graded schools.

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APPENDIX A - LETTER TO THE MPUMALANGA EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

P.O. Box 2451

Elukwatini

1192

Cell: 073 401 1527

Email: shakes.ntombela5@gmail.com

The Head of Department
Mpumalanga Education Department
Private Bag x11341
NELSPRUIT

Dear Sir

RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS BASED IN GERT SIBANDE DISTRICT

I hereby request your office to grant me permission to conduct research in schools based in Gert Sibande District. I am registered for Master of Education (Curriculum Studies) with the University of Limpopo under the supervision of Prof Modiba NS. The title of my research is:

Managing difficulties associated with multi-grade classes in Mpumalanga primary schools

The study aims to evaluate the difficulties that teachers experience in managing teaching and learning in multi-graded primary schools. The research will be in the form of face-to-face interviews with the principals, teachers and parents of the sampled schools. The interviews will be conducted after school hours to avoid disturbances.

I undertake to ensure that the information from the interviews is kept confidential. The identities of the research participants will also be kept anonymous.

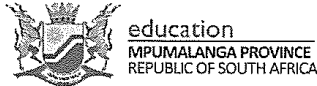
Thanking you in advance

Yours faithfully

Mr Ntombela S.S.

Date _____

APPENDIX B: APPROVAL FROM THE MPUMALANGA EDUCATION DEPARTMENT



Ikhamaŋga Building, Government Boulevard, Riverside Park, Mpumalanga Province
Private Bag X11341, Mbombela, 1200.
Tel: 013 766 5552/5115, Toll Free Line: 0800 203 116

Litika le Temfundvo, Umnyango we Fundo

Departement van Onderwys

Ndzawulo ya Dyondzo

Mr. SS NTOMBELA
PO BOX 2451
ELUKWATINI
1192

RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: MR. SS NTOMBELA
(shakes.ntombela5@gmail.com) 079 053 4951

Your application to conduct research study was received and is therefore acknowledged. The title of your study reads thus: **"Managing difficulties associated with multi-graded classes in Mpumalanga primary schools."** We trust that the aims and the objectives of the study may benefit the department, in particular, the inclusive division of our curriculum branch. Your request is approved subject to you observing the provisions of the departmental research policy which is available in the departmental website and available on request. You are also requested to adhere to your University's research ethics as spelt out in your research ethics document.

In terms of the research policy, data or any research activity can only be conducted after school hours as per appointment with affected participants. You are also requested to share your findings with the relevant sections of the department so that we may consider implementing your findings if that will be in the best interest of the department. To this effect, your final approved research report (both soft and hard copy) should be submitted to the department as soon as you complete your research project. You may be required to prepare a presentation and present at the department's annual research dialogue.

For more information kindly liaise with the department's research unit @ 013 766 5476 or a.baloyi@education.mpu.gov.za.

The department wishes you well in this important project and pledges to give you the necessary support you may need.

MR. J.R. NKOSI
ACTING HEAD: EDUCATION

13 / 02 / 2020
DATE



APPENDIX C - LETTER TO THE MPULUZI CIRCUIT MANAGER

P.O. Box 2451

Elukwatini

1192

Cell: 0734011527

Email:shakes.ntombela5@gmail.com

The Acting Circuit Manager

P.O. Box 397

MPULUZI

2335

Dear Sir

RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS BASED IN MPULUZI CIRCUIT

I hereby request your office to grant me permission to conduct research in schools based in Mpuluzi Circuit. I am registered for Master of Education (Curriculum Studies) with the University of Limpopo under the supervision of Prof Modiba NS. The title of my research is:

Managing difficulties associated with multi-grade classes in Mpumalanga primary schools

The study aims to evaluate the difficulties that teachers experience in managing teaching and learning in multi-graded primary schools. The research will be in the form of face-to-face interviews with the principals, teachers and parents of the sampled schools. The interviews will be conducted after school hours to avoid disturbances.

I undertake to ensure that the information from the interviews is kept confidential. The identities of the research participants will also be kept anonymous.

Thanking you in advance

Yours faithfully

Mr Ntombela S.S.

_____ Date _____

APPENDIX D: APPROVAL FROM THE CIRCUIT MANAGER



education
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

MPULUZI CIRCUIT OFFICE

P.O. BOX 397

MPULUZI, 2335

No.1 Ndonga Trust

MAYFLOWER, 2335

Telephone no. 017 881 9908/9/10

Fax no. 017 881 9911

IsiZulu leTengfundo Umnyango weFundo Departement van Onderwys

Ndzawulo Ya Dyondzo

Enquiries: MBULI BW

E-mail: mpuluzicircuit@gmail.com

**TO : SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
AND SGB**

**FROM : MR MBULI BW
(A)CIRCUIT MANAGER**

DATE : 13 JULY 2020

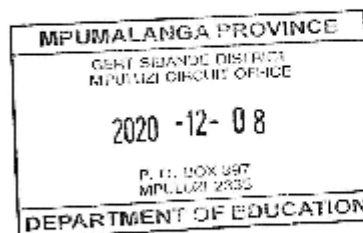
**SUBJECT : PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN MULTIGRADE
SCHOOLS IN THE CIRCUIT BY MR NTOMBELA S.S.
(80862276)**

Mr Ntombela Siphon Shadrack has applied for permission to conduct research in multigrade schools of the Mpumalanga Department of Education in Mpuluzi Circuit which has been granted. It is believed that information gathered from his research will benefit the Department and the focus schools.

You are therefore kindly requested to cooperate and assist him during this noble project.

Your support shall be appreciated.


**(A)CIRCUIT MANAGER
BW MBULI**



08/12/2020
DATE

APPENDIX E - LETTER TO THE SCHOOL MANAGERS

P.O. Box 2451

Elukwatini

1192

Cell: 073 401 1527

Email:shakes.ntombela5@gmail.com

The Principal

.....
.....
.....
.....

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL

I hereby request your office to grant me permission to conduct research in your school. I am registered for Master of Education (Curriculum Studies) with the University of Limpopo under the supervision of Prof Modiba N.S. The title of my research is:

Managing difficulties associated with multi-grade classes in Mpumalanga primary schools

The study aims to evaluate the difficulties that teachers experience in managing teaching and learning in multi-graded primary schools. The research will be in the form of face-to-face interviews with the principals, teachers and parents of the sampled schools. The interviews will be conducted after school hours to avoid disturbances.

I undertake to ensure that the information from the interviews is kept confidential. The identities of the research participants will also be kept anonymous.

Thanking you in advance

Yours faithfully

Mr Ntombela S.S.

Date _____

APPENDIX F – ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



University of Limpopo
Department of Research Administration and Development
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 3935, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email: anastasia.ngobe@ul.ac.za

TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

MEETING: 05 November 2019

PROJECT NUMBER: TREC/469/2019: PG

PROJECT:

Title: Managing Difficulties Associated with Multi-Grade Classes in Mpumalanga Primary Schools

Researcher: SS Ntombela

Supervisor: Prof NS Modiba

Co-Supervisor/s: N/A

School: Education

Degree: Master of Education in Curriculum Studies

P.P. Masoko

PROF P MASOKO
CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: REC-0310111-031

Note:

- i) This Ethics Clearance Certificate will be valid for one (1) year, as from the abovementioned date. Application for annual renewal (or annual review) need to be received by TREC one month before lapse of this period.
- ii) Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee, together with the Application for Amendment form.
- iii) PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.

Finding solutions for Africa

APPENDIX G - INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

1. Can you share with me how long you have you been experiencing multi-grade teaching? Explain
2. Can you share with me the difficulties you face in managing the multi-grade school? Explain
3. What kind of support do you receive from the Department? Explain
4. Have you ever received any training on managing multi-grade classes? Explain
5. What do you think are the reasons for introducing multi-grade teaching in your school? Explain
6. How do you manage the teaching and management of the multi-grade school? Explain
7. What difficulties do you face as the principal? Explain
8. What form of support do you offer your staff with regard to multi-grade teaching? Explain
9. How do you ensure effective curriculum delivery in your school? Explain
10. What do you think can be improved to turn the situation around? Explain

APPENDIX H - INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS

1. What is your experience in multi-grade teaching? Explain
2. How does teaching and learning take place in your class? Explain
3. Can you share with me the difficulties you face in teaching multi-grade classes? Explain
4. How are your learners arranged during lessons? Explain
5. How do you plan your lessons for the multi-grade class? Explain
6. Which teaching methods work best for you? Explain
7. What kind of support do you receive from the Department regarding multi-grade teaching? Explain
8. Have you ever received any training on managing multi-grade classes? Explain
9. How do you view multi-grade teaching? Explain
10. What do you think can be improved to ensure effective teaching and learning in the multi-grade context? Explain

APPENDIX I - INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS

1. How are your children coping in multi-grade classes? Explain
2. In your opinion, what are the advantages of multi-grade teaching? Explain
3. How would you compare your children with those in mono-grade classes? Explain
4. Would you recommend multi-grade teaching to other parents, for their children? Explain
5. Do you think that multi-grade teaching affects your children in their school work? Explain
6. Do you think that the teachers have adequate knowledge of multi-grade teaching? Explain
7. Can you share with me the interesting experiences you have had with multi-grade teaching? Explain
8. What do you think are the major difficulties that multi-grade schools face? Explain
9. Are you happy with multi-grade teaching? Explain
10. What do you think can be improved in the school? Explain

APPENDIX J - OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

1. Observing the attendance of teachers in multi-grade schools.
2. Observing the attendance of learners in multi-grade schools.
3. Observing the workload of multi-grade teachers.
4. Observing how multi-grade teachers cope with multi-grade classes.
5. Observing the use of the teaching time-table in multi-grade schools.
6. Observing how multi-grade teachers use teaching resources.
7. Observing how the principals of multi-grade schools cope in managing their school.
8. Observing classroom arrangement in multi-grade schools.
9. Observing learner discipline in multi-grade schools.
10. Observing punctuality of learners and teachers in multi-grade schools.

APPENDIX K - CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

BERNICE BRADE EDITING Member of the Professional Editors' Guild

FREELANCE WRITER, PROOFREADER AND EDITOR
WEB RESEARCHER AND RESEARCH STRATEGIST
ENGLISH SPECIALIST
ESTABLISHED 1987

Tel. and Fax +27 11 465 4038
Cell 072 287 9859
Email edit@iafrica.com
15 January 2021

P O Box 940
LONEHILL 2062
South Africa

To whom it may concern: Certificate of Editing

This letter serves to confirm that in **January 2021** did the proofreading and the language editing for the dissertation of **SIPHO SHADRACK NTOMBELA Student Number 201834624**
Titled: MANAGING DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH MULTI-GRADE CLASSES IN MPUMALANGA PRIMARY SCHOOLS

This work is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
MASTER OF EDUCATION in CURRICULUM STUDIES
At the Faculty of Humanities of the School of Education
Of the **UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO**

I have proofread and edited the entire work including the Front Pages, the Main text, the List of References but have not been required to edit the Appendix. This editing principally involves proofreading, language, style and grammar editing; as well as checking the text for clarity of meaning, sequence of thought and expression and tenses. I have also noted any inconsistencies in thought, style or logic, and any ambiguities or repetitions of words and phrases, and have corrected those errors which creep into all writing. I have written the corrections on the hard copy and have returned the document to the author, who is responsible for inserting these. Please note that this confirmation refers only to editing of work done up to the date of this letter and does not include any changes which the author or the supervisor may make later.



Bernice McNeil BA Hons NSTD



If editors respect the academic purpose of thesis writing and the priority of the supervisor, we can help students (and ourselves). As one member told us: "We are a valuable resource for students as long as we edit these papers in an ethical way—a way in which ... the work that students submit is indeed their own, only more polished." Guidelines for Editing Theses - The Editors' Association of Canada/l'Association canadienne des réviseurs

Material for editing or proofreading should ideally be submitted in hard copy. In electronic copy, it is too easy for the student to accept editorial suggestions without thinking about their implications Queensland University of Technology Higher Degree Research Guidelines

Proprietor: Bernice McNeil BA Hons, NSTD
Member of the Classical Association of South Africa
Member of the English Academy of Southern Africa

The tracking function also gives the student the option of accepting changes wholesale, without considering them. The question arises whether this is the most appropriate and meaningful way of editing dissertations and theses, considering that the editorial process has the potential to form an integral part of the student's learning process, instead of merely being an amendment of the product of the student's learning process that does not involve the student. These problems are more than simply practical ones—they have significant ethical implications. Haidee Kruger & Ayesha Bevan-Dye (2010) Guidelines for the editing of dissertations and theses: A survey of editors' perceptions, Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, 28:2, 153-169, DOI: 10.2989/16073614.2010.519110