

**LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WITHIN A LEARNER
REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL (LRC) IN A RURAL
SECONDARY SCHOOL IN THE OSHANA REGION, NAMIBIA**

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Rolens Da Silva

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Abstract

The Namibian Education Act (Namibia. Education Act No. 16 of 2001) mandates state secondary school learners to be included in school leadership through a body of learners known as the Learner Representative Council (LRC). The few studies carried out on the LRC in schools reveal that very little has been achieved in terms of learner leadership development. This study explored and provided insight into possible reasons for this, and recommendations. The research questions driving the study were: *How is learner leadership currently understood and practised in the school? What are the enabling and constraining factors in the school as far as learner leadership development is concerned? And what can be done to promote learner leadership development?*

This study is an interpretive case study of learner leadership in the LRC in a Namibian state secondary school in the Oshana region. The conceptual framework used was distributed leadership. The Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) was used as an analytical tool. The research participants were the LRC members, school principal, Heads of Departments representing the school management members, the School Board Chairperson representing parents and the LRC liaison teacher and were all purposively selected. Data was collected through document analysis, open-ended questionnaires, interviews and non-participant observation. Data analysis took the form of inductively – identifying themes emerged from the data and deductively – using CHAT to surface the systemic contradictions within the learners' activity system.

The data revealed that learner leadership was mostly understood from a management perspective and equated with the formal authority of the LRC in the school. The data further revealed that the LRC performed more leadership roles stretched from inside the classroom, outside the classroom, on the School Board and outside the school. To capture this complexity, I developed a model which may prove useful for future studies of learner leadership. The data also indicated that much support was offered to the LRC members in the school; for example, support from the LRC liaison teacher, the School Management Team and generally from the school, through LRC leadership training. Using CHAT, the findings revealed that the historical context and cultural conventions contradicted the LRC leadership development in the school. In line with a distributed leadership theory, the study recommends that learner leadership should not be limited by position and authority but

should be exercised by all learners, through the development and establishment of learner leader clubs in the school. The study also recommends that schools should embark on change initiatives which challenge their traditionally held beliefs and attitudes.

Declaration

I, Rolens Da Silva, hereby declare that the work in this thesis is my own idea and where ideas from other writers were used, they were acknowledged in full using references according to the Rhodes University Education Guide to References. I further declare that the work in this thesis has not been submitted at any university for degree purposes.

Signature

Date

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my biological mother Salome Nelao Hangula for shaping me to be who I am today and for always encouraging me to work hard. Mother, you are my inspiration. Long may you live and may God keep you.

List of Acronyms

CHAT	- Cultural Historical Activity Theory
DLP	- Distributed Leadership Project
HoD	- Head of Department
LRC	- Learner Representative Council
MBESC	- Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture
MoEAC	- Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture
SB	- School Board
SGB	- School Governing Body
SMT	- School Management Team
UK	- United Kingdom
UNICEF	- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNCRO	- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the reader to the study and outline the thesis chapters. I present the background and rationale of my study. I also give a brief historical background of learner leadership in Namibian state secondary schools. This is followed by the research goals and questions. I also present a brief account of the methodology in this chapter.

1.2 Background and rationale

This study is about learner leadership development and focuses mainly on the Learner Representative Council in the school. The study intended to gain a deeper understanding of how LRC leadership was developed in the school, but my main interest was particularly to find out the challenges that confront learners in their participation in school leadership. My interest in conducting this study was motivated mainly by my personal interest and professional interest, as well as by the inadequate amount of studies on learner leadership in Namibia. Firstly, in my first year of teaching I was entrusted with the responsibility of being the LRC liaison teacher at the school. As a novice teacher, I had limited knowledge and understanding of learner leadership. Put more simply, I found it difficult to accord the necessary support to the LRC members. Secondly, when I moved on to my current school five years back, I was selected to be part of the School Management Team, representing teachers. My experience in the involvement of the School Management Team pointed out to me that justice was not done to the learners; particularly the LRC head-girl and head-boy who were members of the SMT. In fact, I noticed that these learners were not really given a chance to raise their voice during meetings and were deprived from attending certain meetings. Moreover, the LRC's decisions were sanctioned by the SMT. This implies that learners were overlooked as valuable resources in school leadership, as their participation was merely tokenistic and a form of window-dressing. Thirdly, the moment I registered for my MEd at Rhodes University, my supervisors exposed me to various articles on the

field of school leadership where I found out that in South Africa, several studies (Nongubo, 2004; Mncube, 2008; Carr, & Williams, 2009; Mabovula, 2009; Phaswana, 2010; Mncube, & Harber, 2013; Bessong, Mashau, & Mulaudzi, 2016; Knott-Craig, 2017; Strydom, 2017) reveal an absence of meaningful participation of learners in school leadership. Two recent Namibian studies (Shekupakela-Nelulu, 2008; Uushona, 2012) similarly found that that learners' participation in school leadership was generally ineffective and recommended more research in this area. Some findings (Fielding, 2001; Gunter, & Thomson, 2007; Mitra, & Gross, 2009; Grant, 2015; Grant & Nekondo, 2016) indicate that learners rarely feature in school leadership agendas and their voices are often ignored. Decisions affecting them are taken without their inputs, as teachers often speak on their behalf and often misunderstand their perspective (Fielding, 2001; Grant & Nekondo, 2016). This resonates with my personal and professional experience and triggered my interest to focus my own research on what is clearly a problematic phenomenon in schooling, in the hopes of adding to our growing understanding of the difficulties and possible solutions. With a clear understanding about the importance of learner leadership in schools, I believe that learner leadership can only flourish when the challenges and obstacles impeding learner leadership are fully understood in terms of historical foundation and formation, and that is what this study does. I hope that the findings of this study will be useful for policy makers and authorities, including the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, as they will get to know and understand how historical and cultural contexts, that impact school communities, hinder the development of learner leadership. This will help them to formulate good plans of action, and strategies on how to deal with and address these cultural and historical issues, in order to improve and strengthen learner leadership in schools. Furthermore, it is my hope that the school principals, School Board members, and School Management Team will find the findings of this study useful, and will start to recognise and embrace learner leadership by creating opportunities for learners to speak and have their voices heard. Importantly, the potential value of this study lies in strengthening teachers' understanding of distributing power and sharing leadership with learners. This would in turn help learners accept that they are also leaders and have the ability to lead. By so doing, this may extend democracy and social justice in schools. Finally, based on the outcomes of this study, suggestions for future research can be made on this topic.

In the next section, I give a brief historical background of learner leadership in Namibian secondary schools, so that the reader may get a clear picture of the existence of learner leadership in secondary schools.

1.3 The history of learner leadership in Namibian state secondary schools

Democracy and social justice have historically been denied to many people in Namibia. During the colonial period, the Namibian education system followed the South African Apartheid system of governance, which was characterised by non-participation and hierarchical, bureaucratic management approaches (Pomuti & Weber, 2012, p. 2). After independence in 1990, the new constitution established a sovereign, secular, democratic, and unitary state founded upon the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and social justice for all (Namibia. The Constitution of The Republic of Namibia, 1990, p. 2.) In 1992, the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture (MBEC) promulgated *Towards Education for All*, an education policy document promoting democratic education and active participation in decision-making (Namibia. MBEC, p. 30). In 1997, the government of the Republic of Namibia formulated *A Decentralisation Policy* from the Ministry of Education and Culture (MBEC) regulating that the government alone cannot decide what should be done in schools; it instructed that power and autonomy should be distributed to the stakeholders – chiefly teachers, parents, and learners – to enable them to make decisions for their schools. The Education Act (Namibia. Education Act No. 16 of 2001) stipulates the provision of accessible, equitable, quality, and democratic national education services. Chapter 60 of this Act (Namibia. Education Act No. 16 of 2001) mandates that every state secondary school needs to establish a body of learners to be known as the Learner Representative Council (LRC). In addition, Chapter 18 of the Act requires the presence of two learners on the School Board (School Governing Body). It is clear from these policies that learners are to be included in the decision-making and leadership functions of the school. In this regard, the Namibian policies on education embraced the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCROC) to participate in decision-making on matters that affect them. Next, I move on to give the main goal and research questions of the study.

1.4 Research goal and research questions

My study aims to gain insight into how learner leadership is currently understood and practiced in the school. This study also seeks to unearth the cultural-historical forces enabling or constraining learner leadership development. And lastly, the study seeks to explore possible solutions to how learner leadership can be developed and promoted in the school.

The main questions driving the study are:

1. What is the current understanding of learner leadership in the school?
2. How is learner leadership practiced and implemented by the LRC members in the school?
3. What are the conditions that promoted and/or constrained the Learner Representative Council's leadership development in the school?
4. What needs to be done to strengthen the promotion of the Learner Representative Council's leadership development in the school?

1.5 Research design and methodology

This study is located within the interpretive, qualitative orientation and takes the form of a case study. I decided to work within an interpretive, qualitative orientation based on its ontological and epistemological position. Interpretive studies generally focus on “describing a phenomenon in an in-depth, rich, robust, thick, empathetic, and subjective manner” (Bezuidenhout, 2014, p. 52). Furthermore, interpretive, qualitative orientation generally attempts to understand phenomenon within their natural occurring context (Creswell, 2012; Nieuwenhuis, 2012; Schwartz-Shea, & Yanow, 2012). Interpretive, qualitative orientation was therefore suitable for my research since my interest, in the first place, was to understand how the research participants viewed and experienced learner leadership. I was also interested in how they saw the obstacles opposing learner leadership, and how they see the future.

I regard this as a case study because I examined a phenomenon – one case of a wide spread occurrence – in considerable detail in its historical and lived context. Stake (2005) refers to a case study as a process of studying an event or a phenomenon in a bounded system (p. 444). In my study, the case was confined to the school. This was an *intrinsic* case study (Stake, 2005, p. 34)

since it does not claim to provide a blueprint or example for anyone to follow. Finally, a case study method was applicable to my study as I studied LRC leadership in a real-life school context where leadership was practiced, and this helped me to gain in-depth understanding of how LRC leadership had been developed in the school.

1.6 Research site and duration of study

The site for this study was a state secondary school in the Oshana Region, northern Namibia. I selected the school for convenience (Pascoe, 2014) because I conducted my MEd pre-course assignment there and I was already known there as a researcher. The school was also in the same area where I lived and worked. This means that I easily got access to the school and frequent visits were affordable. Even though I was already known at the school, I also faced some challenges which I will discuss later in Chapter Three. I spent two months at the case study school.

1.7 Research participants and sampling

A total number of 29 participants took part in this study. The participants included the 23 LRC members, the former LRC liaison teacher, the school principal, the School Board Chairperson, and members of the School Management Team who were the three Heads of Departments (HoDs) in the school. According to Pascoe (2014), with purposive sampling, we purposefully choose the elements that we wish to include in our sample, based on a set list of characteristics (p. 142). I purposely selected all the participants because of their similar characteristics of working closely with the LRC members in the school (Namibia. Education Act No. 16 of 2001).

In this study, I used document analysis, questionnaires with open-ended questions, semi-structured interviews, and observation as data gathering techniques. Open-ended questionnaires were administered to all members of the LRC. Interviews were done with six of the 23 learners on the RCL, the former LRC liaison teacher, principal, three Heads of Departments, and the Chairperson of the School Board. Observation was done when the LRC were executing their leadership roles, both inside and outside the school. I opted for several data gathering techniques to ensure that triangulation was possible, and this helped to strengthen the validity and trustworthiness of my findings (Yin, 1994; Stake, 1995). In addition, I tested my interview questions on my supervisor.

Questionnaires and intended observation activities were also verified before the main exercise. I also conducted a pilot study of the questionnaires and interview questions at the school where I currently teach, and tested how clear and how understandable the questions were; this helped me to adjust and restructure some questions.

Regarding data analysis, I used content analysis through thematic coding, where I read through all the data and identified key concepts and phrases which answered my research questions. I arranged these into different categories from which I generated the themes that I used to present and discuss the findings in this thesis. These were ultimately viewed through the lens of literature and particularly, distributed leadership as a conceptual framework for this study. Finally, I used Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to surface the systemic contradictions within the learner leadership activity system. I discuss all these methodological issues in Chapter Three of this thesis.

In the next section, I move on to give the outline of the thesis.

1.8 Thesis outline

This thesis consists of six chapters which are outlined below.

Chapter One gave an overview of the research. I provided the context and rationale of the study. The research goal and research questions were set out in this chapter. I also offered a brief summary on the methodologies of the study.

Chapter Two presents the literature review. Here I concentrated on literature related to leadership and management. I also review literature on leadership theories from traditional to a distributed leadership theory, which is currently in vogue and relevant to my study. Local and international learner leadership are reviewed. I conclude this chapter by presenting CHAT as an analytical tool for this study.

Chapter Three entails the research methodology and methods which I used to conduct the research. I give a full description of the approach and procedures of gathering data. The research site and research participants are also discussed in this chapter. Then, I provide the data gathering techniques which I used during the gathering of data, namely document analysis, questionnaires, interviews, and observation. The strengths and limitations of each data gathering technique is discussed. Data analysis methods as well as the issues of validity and trustworthiness are explained. To comply with the ethical aspects of doing research, I conclude this chapter with the research ethics consideration.

In **Chapter Four** I analyse, triangulate, and present the raw data I collected during document analysis, questionnaires, interviews, and observation, considering the research questions. Categories and themes are generated in this chapter.

Chapter Five is linked to Chapter Four. Here I discuss the themes as they emerged from the data analysis, in light of the literature review presented in Chapter Two and new literature. The surfaced contradictions are discussed using the CHAT framework.

In Chapter Six I conclude the thesis with the summary of the research findings considering the research goal and questions. I also present the new knowledge generated by the study. I suggest some recommendations for practice and future research. I also discuss the limitations of the study, before concluding the thesis.

In the next chapter (Chapter Two), I review literature relevant to my study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter consists of a review of literature related to the concept of learner leadership as it is theorised and practised in present day schools. The aim is to unpack information concerning learner leadership in schools. However, while I attempt to draw on learner leadership literature, Whitehead (2009) reveals that “many leadership studies focus primarily on adult interpersonal and organisational leadership development and pay little attention to developing the right type of qualities of leadership needed by young people” (p. 48). Similarly, Grant and Nekondo (2016) indicate that research in this niche area is limited, particularly in African countries such as Namibia.

This chapter begins by providing an understanding of leadership and management as distinct phenomena, exploring the relationship between the two. In probing the meanings of these concepts, “it is useful to distinguish between them while also acknowledging their interrelationships” (Christie, 2010, p. 695). An understanding of these concepts is critical to any discussion of learner leadership because learner leadership is one dimension of the practice of leadership. The chapter moves to trace the origins of educational leadership and management and from here, it examines the literature on traditional approaches of leadership to a more contemporary distributed leadership theory, which is receiving much attention and growing empirical support in schools (Gronn, 2000; Spillane, 2006). The remainder of the chapter focuses on assessing learner leadership which is the focus of this research. I look at what learner leadership is and the benefits of involving learners in school leadership as well as the factors which constrain learner leadership in schools.

I conclude this chapter with Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as a theoretical framework and an analytical tool for this research.

Schedlitzki and Edwards (2014) state that there is an ongoing debate of whether leadership is different from management (p. 12). Against this background, in the next section I discuss the notion of leadership and management.

2.2 Leadership and management

2.2.1 Origins of leadership and management

In their discussion of the origins of leadership and management, Schedlitzki and Edwards (2014, p. 14) note that:

The words ‘leadership’ and ‘management’ do appear to have a different origin (times referred to as etymological background). For example, the word ‘management comes from the Latin word manus and it has a meaning of handling things (objects, machinery and so on) the word management appears to have grown in stature during the industrial revolution when it had a link to handling of machinery. The word ‘leadership’ on the other hand, comes from the Anglo-Saxon word leader, which appears to have a meaning around ‘a road’ or a ‘path’ suggesting some form of direction given.

Moving from the understanding that leadership and management have different origins, I explore how various scholars define leadership and management. I first begin with leadership and subsequently, management follows.

2.2.2 The terrain of leadership

Foster (1989) suggests that before the term leadership can be utilised meaningfully, it is necessary to analyse the two different traditions which inform social scientific definitions of leadership. Drawing from Foster’s (1989) suggestion, I find it important to briefly deliberate on the two different traditions of leadership research, with the essence that this discussion may lay a foundation for a better understanding of leadership.

Foster identifies traditions of leadership research as:

- The political/historical model which is the study of leadership that includes “analysing the life story of events and actions, of ideas, and how individuals use power, politics and historical fact to transform their social context” (1989, p. 40).

- The bureaucratic-managerial model which is “an influential model which describes the way managers and scholars of management, refer to the concepts of leadership” (Foster, 1989, p. 43). Furthermore, this model contains several assumptions that leadership is a function of organisational positions; the leader is the person of superior rank in an organisation. The strong assumption here, is that leadership only occurs because of position (Foster, 1989).

Next, I discuss definitions of leadership.

2.2.2.1 Defining leadership

There is no universal definition of leadership because leadership is complex, and studied in different ways that require different definitions (Lussier & Achua, 2001, p. 4). Yet, almost everyone seems to agree that leadership involves an influence. For example, academics such as Lussier and Achua (2001), Bush and Middlewood (2005), Bush (2007), Northhouse (2007) and Christie (2010) define leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Besides influence, Whitehead (2009) defines leadership as “a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good” (p. 847).

In contrast to leadership definition, I will now discuss the definition of management.

2.2.3 Defining management

Maintenance is a key word in referring to management. For example, several authors, Bush (2007, p. 367), Young and Dulewicz (2008, p. 18) and Grant (2009, p. 46) refer to management as the “maintenance of the status quo of current organisational arrangements in an efficient and effective manner”. Authors such as Toor and Ofori (2008, p. 63), Lunenburg (2011, p. 2) and van der Westhuizen (2014, pp. 135-171) indicate that management involves planning, organising, leading and controlling an organisation’s operations to achieve a co-ordination of human and material resources essential in the effective and efficient attainment of objectives. Furthermore, management involves supervision and delegation. For example, van der Westhuizen (2014) posits that educational leaders can delegate responsibilities and ensure effective execution through supervision.

As I indicated earlier in the introduction, leadership and management are used interchangeably and often conflated with each other. The next section explores the reasons for the conflation of leadership and management terms.

2.2.4 Forces shaping arguments and contradictions between leadership and management

The process of leadership and management “constitute two sides of the same coin and hold each other in creative tension as they work together for effective functioning of an organisation” (Grant, 2012, p. 52). In addition, Kotter (1990), Bush (2007) and Northouse (2007) contend that the two concepts of management and leadership intertwine in a sense that both entail working with people and are concerned with effective goal accomplishment. Therefore, people often find it difficult to distinguish between leadership and management since the two concepts overlap (Muronga, 2011). Even if leadership and management overlap, Kotter (1999) emphasises that leadership and management are complementary systems of action, yet different from each other (p. 51).

Informed by Kotter (1999), I next explore the distinctions between leadership and management.

2.2.5 Distinction between leadership and management

Christie (2010) explains that management is an organisational concept relating to the structures and processes which organisations use to meet their goals and central purpose (p. 696). In contrast, leadership is not organisational and does not solely equate to concepts related to position or managerial effectiveness (Foster, 1989, p. 49). In addition, Grant (2012) points out that leadership and management differ because leadership “seeks adaptive and constructive change in an organisation while its complementary term management develops and sustains order, stability, preservation and organisational maintenance” (p. 52).

Leadership and management differ in terms of their primary functions as illustrated in the table below.

Table 2.1: The functions of management and leadership (Northouse, 2007, p. 10)

MANAGEMENT <u>Produces Order & Consistency</u>	LEADERSHIP <u>Produces Change & Motivation</u>
Planning and Budgeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing agendas • Set timetables • Allocate resources 	Establishing Direction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a vision • Clarify big picture • Set strategies
Organizing and Staffing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide structure • Make job placements • Establish rules and procedures 	Aligning People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate goals • Seek commitment • Build teams and coalitions
Controlling and Problem Solving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop incentives • Generate creative solutions • Take corrective action 	Motivating and Inspiring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspire and energise • Empower subordinates • Satisfy unmet needs

In the next part of this section, I provide an overview of the development of educational leadership and management and how it emerged over time. I believe that it is difficult to understand contemporary leadership without familiarity of its origins and development. By understanding the historical background of educational leadership and management, one gains more comprehensive knowledge of the forces which inform and influence leadership and management activities in schools.

2.3 Management and leadership evolution

2.3.1 A brief background of educational leadership and management

Educational leadership and management is a ‘borrowed field’ which began in in the United Kingdom and United States of America (van der Mescht, 2008, p. 19). The discourse of educational leadership and management are drawn from business and industry, where leadership is seen through the lens of a bureaucratic-managerial setting (Bush, 1999, p. 239). Moreover, the

bureaucratic-managerial model connects the leadership process to a hierarchical division of labour, managerial discourse and assumes that leadership and management is located within a single individual (Foster, 1989, p. 43). Furthermore, a bureaucratic and rational model of management contains minimum information related to the suitability of business models for schools (Christie, 2010, p. 698).

Christie (2010) argues that management and leadership discourse is drawn and transferred from business and industry to education, through the assertion that schools should operate more like businesses. Therefore, principals are framed as managers to whom leading business approaches such as “total quality management” and “strategic planning” are offered as “solutions to problems of performance” (p. 698).

Having given the background of educational leadership and management framed with a bureaucratic-managerial model, I now move on to outline the traditional approaches to leadership which are historically located, and layered on top of each other (Gunter, 2001, p. 68). Literally, I seek to inquire how these approaches align with each other, as leadership imperatives seem to come in waves (Gunter, 2001, p. 69).

2.3.2 Traditional approaches to leadership

In this section, I discuss the traditional approaches to leadership which take for granted a one-directional flow from the leader to the follower (Watkins, 1986, pp. 10-11).

2.3.2.1 The trait approach

The trait approach had its origins in classical scientific management. Frederick W. Taylor, considered the true “father” of scientific management believed in true science based on clearly defined principles and laws (Drake & Roe, 1980, p. 55; van der Westhuizen, 2014, p. 65). The traditional connotation toward leadership suggested that leaders were born. According to Northouse (2007) it is believed that some individuals were born with special qualities and characteristics (intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability) that made them great leaders and only certain people possessed these attributes (p. 15). In addition, the trait approach believed that leadership was of extreme importance and that “there is no substitute for it

and it cannot be created or promoted neither can be taught or learned” (Mullins, 2010, p. 377). Moreover, the trait approach focused exclusively on the leader, not on the follower or the situation (Northouse, 2007, p. 23).

The trait theory had several weaknesses. The trait approach was devoted only to the leader and failed to take situations into account. People who possessed certain traits that made them leaders in one situation, may have not had the same impact in a differing situation (Northouse, 2007).

Next, I discuss the situational approach that emerged from the trait approach. Situational leadership incorporated the impact of situations and followers on leadership.

2.3.2.2 The situational approach

According to van der Westhuizen (2014), the situational approach had its roots in a human relations/social science system that ushered in considerations for people and their social conditions, as an important ingredient in management and organisation. Mary Parker was one of the first proponents of human relations theories (Drake & Roe, 1980, p. 61). Situational leadership emphasised the behaviour and actions of a leader towards subordinates in various contexts (Northouse, 2007, p. 69). In addition, Drake and Roe (1980) point out that situational leadership included three components: (1) Leader-member relations – the degree to which group members support, respect and like the group leader; (2) task structure – the degree to which group tasks are spelled out; and (3) position power – the power vested by the organisation in the leader’s position or the degree to which the position enables the leader to get the group to accept his or her leadership (p. 129). Northouse (2007) adds that the situational approach was composed of two general kinds of behaviours: *the task behaviour* and *relationship behaviour*. Task behaviours facilitate goal accomplishment: they help group members to achieve their objectives. Relationship behaviours help subordinates feel comfortable with themselves, each other and the situation in which they find themselves (p. 69). It is important for leaders to adjust their style of leadership in concrete situations to better fit situational demands. In fact, not to do so, often leads to failure (Drake & Roe, 1980, p. 129).

Having looked at situational approaches which focused on what leaders did rather than who leaders are, I now explore transformational leadership which depends on a single leader bringing change and improvement in an organisation such as a school.

2.3.2.3 Transformational leadership

Gunter (2001, p. 69), Northouse (2007, p. 176) and Schedlitzki and Edwards (2014, p. 64) indicate that transformational leadership was first coined by Downton (1973); however, its emergence as an important approach to leadership began with a classic work by the political scientist James MacGregor Burns (1978). In his work, Burns attempted to establish leadership as a relationship based on an exchange between leaders and followers, known as transactional leadership. In contrast to transactional leadership, as its name implies, transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people. It is concerned with “emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals and includes assessing followers’ motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings” (Northouse, 2007, p. 175). In the same way, Marks and Printy (2003) posit that transformational leaders motivate followers by raising their consciousness about the importance of organisational goals and by inspiring them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organisation (p. 375).

The conception of transformation which has been most influential in education, includes leadership which is comprised of four dimensions (Gunter, 2001, p. 69; Woods, 2005, p. 20; Northouse, 2007, p. 67).

- Inspirational influence – motivating subordinates through charisma;
- Individual consideration – treating subordinates according to their individual needs;
- Intellectual stimulation – exercising influence on thinking and imagination of subordinates;
- Idealised influence – bring about subordinates’ identification with the leader’s vision.

In a school context, transformational leadership relies upon the single leadership of the principal who is viewed as the only leader and agent of change in the school (Hall, Gunter, & Bragg, 2013, p. 470). Similarly, Marks and Printy (2003) suggest that transformational leadership affirms the centrality of the principal’s reform role, particularly in introducing innovation and shaping organisational culture (p.375). Furthermore, Marks and Printy (2003) argue that as a

transformational leader, the principal seeks to elicit higher levels of commitment from all school personnel and to develop organisational capacity for school improvement (p. 377).

While transformational leaders play a pivotal role in precipitating change and improvement in schools, it seems that in many instances transformational leadership failed to make any significant improvement in schools. For instance, a study conducted by Hall et al. (2013) in schools in England, reveals that transformative school leaders “hero heads”, have failed to sustainably produce anticipated outcomes in schools, raising many questions about the efficacy of single leadership (p. 470). Likewise, in a study conducted by Koh, Steers and Terborg (1995) in schools in Singapore, the results also suggest that transformational leadership had little impact, particularly on student academic performance (p. 320).

Woods (2005) critiques transformational leadership as being too hierarchical and placing too much reliance on ‘heroic’ top leaders, which can encourage manipulation of followers and dependence on a dominant echelon of leaders (p. 21). Hall et al. (2013) also critique transformational leadership, as enabling and supporting existing power structures to be maintained and being a top-dog theory that meets the needs of management (p. 470).

The faith and hope of transforming schools through actions of individual leaders is now waning (Hartley, 2007, p. 141). Emerging as the new orthodoxy is a distributed leadership approach which changes the focus from powerful individuals, to a team of leaders, constituting a leadership system. Against this background, in the next section, I discuss distributed leadership as the leadership approach of the moment, particularly in schools. My focus is more on the pragmatic reasons for the emergence of distributed leadership. First and foremost, I begin by defining the concept of distributed leadership.

2.4 Notion of distributed leadership

2.4.1 Definition of distributed leadership

Before I define the concept of distributed leadership, I highlight ideas that are very closely related to the concept of distributed leadership. Drawing upon studies on distributed leadership (Bennett,

Wise, Woods, & Harvey, 2003; Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, & Hopkins, 2007; Harris, 2007; Hartley, 2007; Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016, Grant, 2017), concepts such as empowerment, democracy, autonomy, delegate, shared and collaborative leadership overlap with the concept of distributed leadership. Although the concept of distributed leadership could be viewed as overlapping with notions of shared, collaborative and democratic leadership, there is a distinctive perspective on leadership practice that it offers (Harris, 2006). It is however not my intention to make distinctions between the concepts related to distributed leadership, rather I define the concept of distributed leadership.

Gronn (2000) defines distributed leadership as an “emergent property of a group of people or network of interacting individuals who pool their initiative and expertise together” (p. 334). This implies that leadership is a form of concerted action which constitutes the additional dynamic that occurs when people work together or that is the product of conjoint agency (Bennet et al., 2003, p. 8). For Harris (2013), distributed leadership concentrates on engaging expertise where ever it exists within the organisation rather than seeking this through only formal positions or roles. Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004) suggest that distributed leadership is best understood as “leadership practice distributed over leaders, followers, and situation and incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals in the execution of leadership tasks” (p. 20). Spillane (2006) refers to distributed leadership as a leadership that is primarily concerned with the “co-performance and the reciprocal interdependences that shape leadership practice” (p. 56) as illustrated below in Spillane’s model of leadership practice from a distributed perspective.

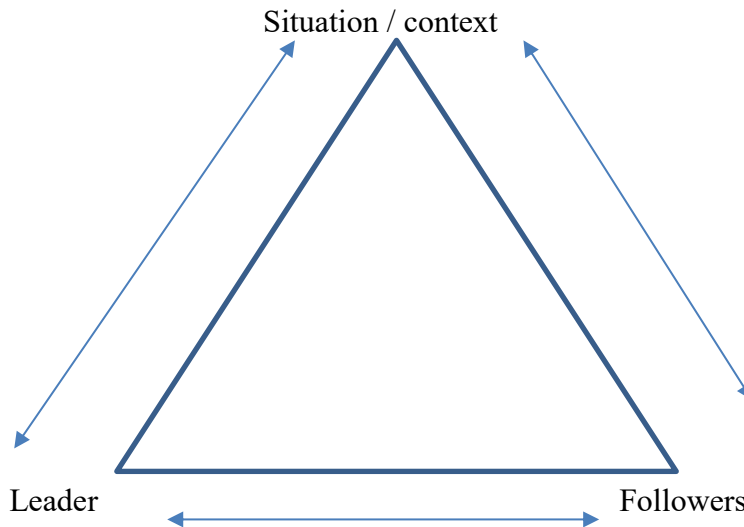


Figure 2.1: Spillane’s model of leadership practice from a distributed perspective

What is significant here is that leadership is a *relationship*, where the focus is on *social interaction*, in which a group of people depend on each other in performing their tasks. In this sense of distributed leadership, everyone can be a leader in his/her context (Harris, 2004). In a school context, naturally this flies in the face of traditional notions of school management, where the principal is the sole authority figure within a community of teachers and learners (James, Mann, & Creasey, 2007, p. 85); in contrast, distributed leadership suggests that leadership should not reside solely in the principal’s office; leadership should be stretched over all members of the school (Spillane, 2006, p. 12). In this sense, distributed leadership is “a form of collective agency which incorporate the activities of teachers and learners (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016, p. 144)

2.4.2 The emergence of distributed leadership in schools – why now?

Contemporary literature reveals that distributed leadership is increasingly used in discourse about school leadership and is currently receiving attention. Thus, distributed leadership is described as “the new kind on the block” (Gronn, 2000, p. 34), “in vogue” (Harris, 2004, p. 13), “the leadership idea of the moment” (Harris et al., 2007, p. 338) and “growing in popularity” (Harris & Spillane, 2008, p. 31). If distributed leadership is the idea of the moment, *why is this so and what makes it unique?* (Grant, 2017).

According to Hartley (2007) the emergence of distributed leadership is firstly the failure of the charismatic hero to transform schools (p. 206). Evidence suggests that distributed leadership is one potential contributor to positive change and transformation in school systems (Spillane, 2006; Harris et al., 2007). Secondly, the greater complexity of the tasks which a principal undertakes typically leaves insufficient time to complete the necessary heroic activities and cope with these more mundane responsibilities (Timperley, 2005, p. 395; Hartley, 2007, p. 206). A study conducted by Spillane, Harris, Jones and Mertz (2015) reveals that principals are overwhelmed with work and demands of their time from both internal and external stakeholders – parents, learners and teachers (p. 1076). Hence schools need many leaders at all levels and this can only be realised through distributed leadership (Hartley, 2007, p. 203).

Furthermore, the emergence of distributed leadership brings about empowerment and capacity-building. According to Timperley (2005) and Kelley and Dikkers (2016), distributed leadership has the potential to empower and build capacity within a school through the development of the intellectual and professional capital of teachers. For example, the Annenberg Distributed Leadership Project [DLP] that was conducted in the United States in 263 urban schools, highlighted the positive impact of distributed leadership on building the capacity for instructional improvement (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016, p. 143). This is in contrast with the heroic leader, where the primary leadership roles are carried out by the school principal without empowering teachers and when the principal moves on, leadership progress is not sustained (Timperley, 2005, p. 395). In addition, Hopkins and Jackson (2003) state that distributed leadership is based on the premise that all teachers have the potential and responsibility to contribute meaningfully towards leadership activities, hence contributing to distributed leadership receiving attention in schools (p.100). Similarly, Harris and Spillane (2008) argue that distributed leadership extends the boundaries of leadership by placing a greater emphasis upon teachers, support staff and students as leaders (p. 31). Thus, Harris (2004) argues that distributed leadership has the potential to capitalise and maximise the skills and abilities of all individuals in the school community (p. 14). For example, Spillane, Camburn and Pareja (2007) highlight that leadership tasks can be carried out by the principal and other formal leaders in the school (e.g. assistant principals, guidance counsellors, departments, or grade-level chairs), as well as individuals with no formal role, thus promoting

capacity building. The studies by Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) identified that when leadership activities are distributed to teachers, it has a positive influence on teacher effectiveness and student engagement, since teachers develop expertise and skills by working together.

King et al. and Griffin found that distributed leadership results in positive effects on pedagogy, school culture and educational quality (as cited in Harris, 2004, p. 21). Equally, some empirical studies (Gronn, 2000; Spillane, 2006; Hartley, 2007; Harris, 2011; Hall et al., 2011) of successful school leadership, revealed that distributed leadership has a greater influence on schools and student outcomes. Empirical evidence in a study conducted by Silins and Mulford in Australia on over 2,500 teachers and principals about distributed leadership and student outcomes, concluded that students' outcomes are more likely to improve when leadership sources are distributed throughout the school community and when teachers are empowered in their decided areas of importance (as cited in Harris et al., 2007, p. 342).

Furthermore, distributed leadership promotes democratic practices in schools whereby teachers have more freedom and autonomy and can participate in school decision-making (Hall et al., 2011, p. 33). A smaller scale study by Harris and Muijs in England (as cited in Harris et al., 2007, p. 342) found a positive relationship between distributed leadership and the degree of teachers' involvement in decision-making and student motivation and efficacy. The study further discovered that teacher and student morale improves when teachers feel more involved in school decision-making. By the same token, Williams (2011) indicates that using distributed leadership has epistemological implications for teachers; instead of being passive recipients and implementers of revealed knowledge as contained in official policies, they can become generators of new knowledge (p. 194). Writers like Harris et al. (2007, p. 340) and Williams (2011, p. 194), argue that distributed leadership promotes the development of collegial norms amongst teachers which contribute to school effectiveness. By allowing teachers to work as a collective it provides them with a legitimate source of authority.

2.4.3 Who is involved in the distribution of leadership in schools?

According to Harris and DeFlaminis (2016) distributed leadership is not a panacea; it depends on how it is shared, received and enacted (p. 143). Distributed leadership cannot take place without

the principal. “The principal is the gate-keeper to distributed leadership practice in the school and has a powerful and real relationship between him or herself and the other managers of the school, who take leadership roles as they emerge” (South Africa. Department of Education [DHET], 2008, p. 60). Harris (2011) also states that it is the critical role of formal leaders in schools to orchestrate and nurture the space for distributed leadership to occur. Similarly, Kelley and Dikkers (2016) also affirm that it is the role of the principal to develop, support and encourage distributed leadership (p. 393). Otherwise, without the support of the principal, distributed leadership is unlikely to flourish or be sustained (Harris, 2011, p. 10). However, taking a distributed perspective on leadership does not mean that the principal should delegate their role (Spillane, 2006, p. 13) but rather highlights the ways in which leadership is spread across individuals and groups of individuals throughout the schools (Kelley & Dikkers, 2016, p. 398). Equally, “the work of the principal is to hold the pieces of the organisation together in a productive relationship” (Harris & Muijs, 2005, p. 28). Furthermore, a report compiled by Bennett et al., (2003, p. 19) also provides confirmation that:

Distribution is created by one leader – the headteacher – through a process which progressively extends the degree to which individuals and groups within a school could take responsibility for aspects of its work. However, this does not remove the ultimate control function from the headteacher, whose accountability to the school governors and remains bounded within the constraints of the overall policy decisions of head and governors.

According to Harris et al. (2007), distributing leadership does not automatically result in organisational improvement. Much depends on how leadership is distributed and intended (p. 345). Harris et al. (2007) highlight two key conditions necessary for successful leadership distribution. First, leadership needs to be distributed to those who have, or can develop, the knowledge or expertise required to carry out the leadership tasks expected of them. Secondly, effective distributed leadership needs to be coordinated, preferably in some planned way (as cited in Harris et al., 2007, p. 343). Correspondingly, Kelley and Dikkers (2016) point out four things to consider when leadership is distributed (a) leadership should be distributed based on the distinct skills, experiences and the interests of the members of the leadership team; (b) the extra-ordinary initiative of individual members who have an interest in developing aspects that they feel responsible for or care deeply about; (c) the work of informal leaders to embrace, participate in, and lead change efforts locally in their peer group, department, grade broadly in the school; and

(d) leadership that emerges in the space between individuals working collaboratively together to advance school goals.

Having given the reasons for the emergence of distributed leadership in schools, I now move to highlight the factors inhibiting the spread and adaptation within schools.

2.4.4 Factors inhibiting the distribution of leadership in schools

According to Harris (2004) there are inevitable and inherent difficulties associated with the widespread adoption and adaptation within schools (p. 19). There is misunderstanding and misinterpretation of distributed leadership, because of a lack of clarity and often it is interpreted as delegation and used to justify certain leadership approaches over others in schools (James et al., 2007, p. 86; Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016, p. 143). Another strong limitation is the centralisation of power and control in schools. According to Grant (2017), “In many mainstream school communities, SMTs are positioned as ‘the rightful leadership titleholders’ who lay claim to central decision-making processes essentially because of the symbolic capital acquired through position” (p. 10). Thus, principals often think it is their legal responsibility to run their schools, therefore ensuring that they hold on to power and do not distribute leadership to other members of the school. Hence, if things go wrong or the school does not to reach its target, then it is the principal who should be blamed (Harris, 2013).

For example, an empirical study by Spillane et al. (2015) revealed that school principals believe that they are responsible for almost everything that happens in the school and this appears to constrain distributed leadership and instead encourages a heroic approach to school leadership (p. 1076). Further on the school principal as a deterring block to distributed leadership in schools, is the issue of trust. Several research evidences (Grant, 2012; Harris, 2013; Harris, Jones, & Baba, 2013) suggest that school principals do not trust fellow school members with leadership because those included in leadership use it for detrimental and damaging purposes. However, Harris (2013) argues that “successful distribution of leadership depends upon the firm establishment of mutual trust – this is the glue that make all highly effective organisations perform at the highest level” (p. 552).

Apart from the school principal being reluctant to relinquish power to others, literature shows that teachers often refuse to take up leadership opportunities availed to them. A study by Grant (2012) in KwaZulu Natal schools, revealed that there were teachers elected to leadership positions, yet they refused the leadership opportunities as they believed it was not their responsibility to lead and they did not desire additional work. In addition, teachers who do not hold leadership positions may be against fellow teachers with leadership roles within the school. According to Timperley (2005), teacher leaders are at risk and vulnerable to being openly disrespected and disregarded by other teachers, because they know that they do not carry formal authority (p. 412).

Like all other approaches to leadership, distributed leadership is not devoid of controversy or criticism (Harris, 2011; Williams, 2011). Next, I highlight some of the criticisms of distributed leadership as it emerged from the literature.

2.4.5 Critics of distributed leadership

While the idea of distributed leadership is popular, there are limitations worth highlighting. Several academics (Harris & Spillane, 2008, p. 31; Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016, p. 143) reveal that distributed leadership lacks conceptual clarity. The chameleon like quality of the term “distributed leadership” means different things to different people. This is a central weakness. One common misuse of the term is as a convenient “catch all” descriptor for any form of shared, collaborative or extended leadership (Harris & Spillane, 2008, p. 31; Harris, 2011, p. 11; Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016, p. 143). Despite the critique that distributed leadership lacks conceptual clarity, for Hartley (2007), what matters most is the fact that different authors appear to agree on the point that distributed leadership comprises of dynamic interactions between multiple leaders and followers (p. 398).

Another problem associated with distributed leadership is the issue of power. Lumby (2013) postulates that distributed leadership is silent on the issues of power, authority and control. For example, no mention is made of structural barriers such as age, gender and race, experience and background (pp. 583-589). Lumby (2013) further argues that organisations are fields of power and not politically neutral, so workers operate within the structure of power that create and constrain their opportunity to lead (p. 584). Despite criticism that distributed leadership does not

engage with issues of power, authority and control, Harris et al., (2013) argue that where leadership is distributed then inevitably the force of power, authority and control are also distributed (p. 929).

Another major problem with distributed leadership is the distribution of responsibilities. Harris and Muijs (2005, p. 34) assert that distributed leadership poses the major challenge of how to distribute development responsibility and more importantly who distributes responsibility. Several studies identify the principal as a source or impetus for generating distributed forms of leadership (e.g. Harris, 2011; Kelley & Dikkers, 2016). Similarly, Hopkins and Jackson (2003) state that, “It is the responsibility of the hierarchical leaders to facilitate this process by creating the requisite organisational conditions and climate and by providing the required support to unleash “the kinetic and potential energy of leadership” (p. 100). However, this raises the question of whether distributed leadership is top-down or bottom-up (Harris, 2004, p. 15). “It is possible that distributed leadership may be found in the shape of a “top-down” initiative from a strong or charismatic leader” (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2006, p. 15). An example is a warning that distributed leadership is simply “another, more attractive, mechanism for delivering ‘top down’ policies including standardised practice” (Hargreaves & Fink, as cited in Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016, p. 143). Thus, Lumby (2013) appears to critique that distributed leadership is littered with contradictions; it rejects previous heroic, hierarchical models of leadership, yet also acknowledges the persistence of such leadership, and even supports its necessity and value (p. 588).

Next, I discuss learner leadership which is relatively underdeveloped in schools. Hernez-Broome and Hughes posits that there is a growing body of literature addressing leadership development (as cited in Whitehead, 2009, p. 856) however, within the emergent field of school leadership, children are virtually absent (Gunter & Thomson, 2007, p. 23). Prompted by the need for learners to be involved in school leadership, the next section explores to what extent learners are engaged in school leadership.

Since learner leadership is the focal point for this discussion, I begin this section by defining the concept of learner leadership, as this definition serves as an important framework for the remainder of the discussion.

2.5 Learner leadership

2.5.1 Definition of learner leadership

Various concepts (student leaders, lead learners, student voice, adolescent voice, pupil participation, youth leadership) have been used by many researchers and academics (Angus, 2006; Fielding, 2006; Flutter, 2006; Mitra, 2006; Collinson, 2007; Mitra & Gross, 2009; Whitehead, 2009; Kennedy & Datnow, 2011; Sonn, Belgium & Belgium, 2011; Baroutsis, Mills, McGregor, Riele, & Hayes, 2016) when referring to learner leadership. However, because Namibia uses the term ‘learner’ to refer to school-going children, I am choosing to use the concept of learner leadership in the context of my discussion. Framing this discussion in this manner, I adopt Theron and Botha’s learner leadership definition, as a system of pupil leadership found in every school by means of which pupils take an active part in activities in a directive capacity (as cited in Uushona, 2012, p. 23).

Before I move on to sketch the benefits and different ways of including learners in school leadership, I wish to trace the traditional views on learner leadership. This enables us to understand how childhood has traditionally been conceptualised in a way that undermines learners’ contributions (Gunter, 2001, p. 124).

2.5.2 Traditional notion of learner leadership

Traditionally, children do not have rights and duties and are unable to be citizens and, consequently, their contribution to education is only to be educated and trained (Gunter, 2001, p. 125). Learners have been traditionally overlooked as valuable resources in the restructuring of schools (Kennedy & Datnow, 2011, p.1248). Furthermore, Baroutsis et al. (2016) posit that learners have been marginalised in mainstream schooling and are not regarded as experts in their own life and that they are told what to do (p. 446). In addition, the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire, put it that the traditional forms of education tend to adopt a “banking concept of knowledge” in which teachers’ voices are dominant whilst students are rendered silent (as cited in Collinson, 2007, p. 6). In line with Freire, Collinson (2007) argues that traditionally, learners were considered as an object of education. Moreover, Drake and Roe (2003, p. 58) give a convincing example of a historical divine right that adults had over the young and the schoolmaster had over the learners:

Children should be seen and not heard. Children shall obey the will of the master. Teacher knows best. The parents know best. That school administration and teachers must have absolute control over students in order not to lose control altogether is a perpetuation of long-standing folklore and a potential source of alienation of the students as well as their parents.

The traditionally teaching pedagogy gives hints that learners were not acknowledged, as teachers are assumed to be the active experts who deposit knowledge into passive students who simply receive, memorise and repeat the information. By treating students as unknowing empty receptacles, this pedagogy teaches learners to listen, accept and conform (Collinson, 2007, p. 7).

Having given a brief overview on the traditional notions of learner leadership, I next discuss the current ideas which include learners in school leadership. My intention is to have a more informed understanding of how learner leadership is currently perceived and what informs it.

2.5.3 The contemporary idea to involve learners in school leadership

The current disconcerting idea to involve learners in school leadership, is a form of a democratic theory of education. Davies argues that a democratic theory of education is concerned with the process of double democratisation, the simultaneous democratisation of both education and society (as cited in Mncube, 2008, p. 79). On the other hand, Fraser (2008) argues that democratic theory cannot be divorced from social theory, particularly when one deliberates on parity participation and representation, and that social justice theory overcomes injustices and dismantles institutionalised obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others, as full partners in social interaction (p. 16). In the same fashion, DeMatthews and Izquierdo (2016) argue that “the dimensions of social justice are related to the equitable distribution of resources, cultural justice and meaningful recognition, and full participation of marginalised groups in decisions that impact their lives” (p. 281). In addition, democratic theory of education and social justice theory refer to participation by all stakeholders in the governance of schooling, considering issues of power relations among the adult school governors and learner governors (Mncube, 2008, p. 79).

Sithole argues that a key principle of democratic school governance is that decisions are based on consultation, collaboration, cooperation, partnership, mutual trust and participation of all stakeholders in the school community (as cited in Mabovula, 2009, p. 220). These principles

include affording students opportunities to be heard and ensuring that students participate fully in the life of the school, including via an active role in decision-making (Baroutsis et al., 2016, p. 451). Similarly, Kennedy and Datnow (2011) assert that schools should move toward more collegial relationships between students and teachers to bolster student engagement, and serve the democratic purpose of education (p. 1248). These contemporary ideas about learner engagement fundamentally challenge traditional views about leadership (Collinson, 2007, p. 7).

Hence, the democratic principles and social justice theory advocate learners' participation and representation in a contemporary education system. In the following section, I look at what literature says about the benefits of involving learners in school leadership.

2.5.4 The benefits of involving learners in school leadership

The involvement of learners in school leadership is necessary for the fulfilment of distributed leadership (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009), since learners constitute a major stakeholder group in schools (Grant, 2015; Nekondo, 2016). Several authors (Fielding, 2001; Flutter, 2006; Mitra, 2006; Mitra & Gross, 2009; Angus, 2006; Grant, 2015; Grant & Nekondo, 2016) indicate that when learners are involved in school leadership it offers them great opportunities to speak and to be heard. Furthermore, when learners are offered a space to speak, teachers will better understand them, what their needs are and how best to respond (Kennedy & Datnow, 2011), as usually, teachers speak on their behalf and misunderstand their perspective (Fielding, 2001). Learners' participation in school leadership also helps them to develop a sense of belonging in the school community (Kennedy & Datnow, 2011) and this attachment to schools, creates a good relationship between learners and teachers; this then has the potential to improve academic outcomes (Collinson, 2007; Mitra & Gross 2009). For example, Collinson (2007) provides evidence that schools in the United Kingdom (UK) experienced positive results when they started to involve learners in school leadership. Apart from the benefits of positive learning outcomes, the involvement of learners in school leadership "make the formulation of school policies easier, clear, and can lead to a greater sense of accountability and ownership in learners" (Khanare & de Lange, 2017, p. 6). Additionally, learners' participation in school leadership serves as a positive catalyst for change in schools; for example, Flutter (2006) provides evidence that learners help create better school buildings and facilities, and that this improves the quality of the school environment. "This

reminds teachers that learners possess unique knowledge and perspective about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate” (Mitra, 2006, p. 135). Through this experience, learners “discover creative and life skills such as problem-solving, team working, communication, negotiation and citizenship, all of which engender self-belief and confidence” (Flutter, 2006, p. 188).

In the next section, I explore different ways of involving learners in school leadership, but before that I find it useful to look at Mitra and Gross’ (2009) pyramid of student voice, which is in some ways a practical example which helps us to understand ways of involving learners in school leadership.

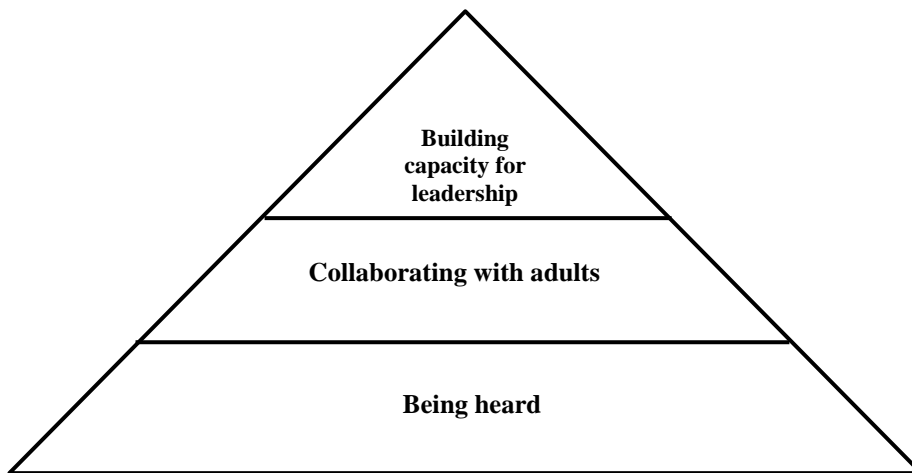


Figure 2.2 Pyramid of student voice (Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 523)

The pyramid begins at the bottom with the most common and basic form of student voice – ‘being heard.’ At this level, learners share their problems with school personnel. ‘Collaborating with adults’ is the next level. Here, learners work together with adult members of the school to address the problems in the broader school environment. The final (and smallest) level at the top of the pyramid, ‘Building capacity for leadership’, includes an explicit focus on enabling learners to share in the leadership of the student voice initiative (Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 523).

2.5.5 Different ways of involving learners in school leadership

The common way of involving learners in school leadership is through the legal body of the Learner Representative Council (LRC). Drawing on a Namibian context, secondary school learners are mandated by the Education Act (Namibia. Act No. 16 of 2001), to participate in school leadership through the LRC. Although, the Namibian Education Act (Namibia. Education Act No. 16 of 2001) makes provision for learners to be included in the school leadership, where they could participate in the decision-making process with other adults' members (teachers & parents), two recent Namibian learner leadership studies (Shekupakela-Nelulu, 2008; Uushona, 2012) reveal that learners are not afforded full opportunities to participate in decision-making by the adult members of the School Board – the highest decision-making body in schools.

Since the Namibian Education system is much like the South African education system, I was prompted to explore the South African learner leadership archives. Several studies conducted in South African schools (Nongubo, 2004; Mncube, 2008; Mabovula, 2009; Carr & Williams, 2009; Phaswana, 2010; Mncube & Harber, 2013; Bessong et al., 2016; Strydom, 2017) also reveal that secondary school learners are mandated to participate in school leadership through a body called the Representative Council for Learners (RCL) which is like the LRC in Namibia. According to Mncube (2008), the RCL is a body of learners democratically elected by their peers at a school, and this RCL in turn elects those learners who should represent them on the school governing body (p. 78). Even though learners are supposed to be involved as school leaders, the above studies indicate that learners' involvement through the RCL is still ineffective. The reasons for the ineffectiveness of LRC bodies in school leadership are discussed in the remainder of this section.

Learner leadership clubs are another way of including learners in school leadership. Grant (2015) warns that a leadership club as a structure, should not be confused with the legislated Representative Council of Learners (RCL) or Learner Representative Council (LRC) as indicated in the above section. Grant (2015) makes it clear that learner leadership clubs “are organised as an extramural activity and offer a space of leadership from which learners could ‘speak back’ concerning what they considered important about their learning” (p. 96). Unlike the LRC/RCL, learner leadership clubs are not limited to secondary schools, but can also be established in primary schools. For example, Grant (2015) indicates that various learner leadership clubs such as

HIV/AIDS, Environmental and English proficiency clubs were formed in both primary and secondary schools. In line with Flutter (2006), Grant (2015) argues that “the clubs provide the platform for authentic communication and debate amongst learners; they offer a generative and non-threatening space in which learners learnt to lead and they provided the catalyst for the emergence of learner-led school change initiatives” (p. 105).

Prompted by the fact that the LRC /RCL are ineffective in school leadership, specifically in the decision-making processes, in the next section, I explore the factors which constrain the effectiveness of the LRC in decision-making.

2.5.6 Factors which constrain the LRC participation in school decision-making

2.5.6.1 Age and experience

Learners are denied full participation in decisions made due to their age. A study conducted by Uushona (2012) revealed that LRC members are denied the right to full participation by adult members of the School Board (SB), who regard learners as too young and inexperienced to deal with crucial matters affecting the life of the school. Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) indicates that due to age, the LRC members were prohibited from attending certain meetings such as the appointing of teachers as it was sensitive and require a high level of confidentiality. Similarly, studies conducted in South Africa (Mncube, 2008; Mabovula, 2009; Phaswana, 2010) report that adult members of the School Governing Body (SGB) feel that learners are immature and thus unable to make sound decisions. For example, Phaswana (2010) mentions that learners were prohibited from discussing financial matters unless they were 21 years of age.

2.5.6.2 Manipulation of learners by teachers

Mabovula (2009) asserts that learners are being manipulated by teachers and used as a form of window dressing for SGB approval by government. Further to this, learners are being used as a kind of tokenism just to appease them (p. 220). Moreover, an example of how teachers manipulate learners during SGB meetings is indicated in Mncube’s (2008, p. 83) research:

It appeared that some learner governors found it difficult to regard themselves as fully legitimate members of the SGB and they still perceived themselves as ‘guests’ on the governing body. Learner governors seemed aware of a ‘we and they’ divide as was noted in the usage of the pronoun ‘they’, when learners referred to adult governors. A learner

governor said, when you [learner] attend the meetings of the SGB, they [adult governors] make you feel like you are one of them and you forget that you are a learner. This makes us feel that we are fully accepted as members of the SGB and not only there for window-dressing.

2.5.6.3 Policy not in favour of learners

“Policy and practice is constructed and conceptualised around the interests of elite adults, and children are virtually absent because their presence is that of objects that elite adults are meant to give reference to and impact upon” (Gunter & Thompson, 2007, p. 23). In addition, it is noted that the RCL members in the SGB may not be in office for more than one year, but parents and teachers are accorded a relatively longer term of office in the SGB (Mncube, 2008). However, putting learners in the SGB for only one year suggests that learners are not taken seriously as equal partners with other stakeholders (Phaswana, 2010).

2.5.6.4 School principal’s style of leadership

Mncube (2008) points out that participation of learner governors can also be inhibited by the leadership style of certain school principals, who tend to take over the role of school governing bodies, making decisions on their behalf, together with their SMT. Furthermore, very often, school principals, due to their position of power in schools, tend to manipulate the SGB to function in a way that suits them and as such, learner participation in SGBs is determined by what teachers and principals view as being appropriate (Mncube & Harber, 2013, p. 14).

2.5.6.5 Gender and power relations

Gender and power relations also limit learner participation. Mncube (2008) highlights that school governing bodies “exacerbate inequalities of power relations, race, gender and socioeconomic class” (p. 78). For example, female learner governors tended to be overshadowed by their male counterparts when it came to decision-making; they are more engaged in discussions than their male counterparts (Mncube, 2009, p. 84).

2.5.6.6 Cultural contradictions and power relations

Nyerere describes the traditional African democracy as a phenomenon in terms of which elders sit under the big tree and talk (as cited in Mncube & Harber, 2013, p. 8). This means that parents and

teachers see to the absence of representative elections, restrictions in participation and to the exclusion of learners from deliberations (Mncube & Harber, 2013, p. 9).

Furthermore, Bessong et al. (2016) assert that learner participation in decision-making is hampered by adult traditional views on the place of children in society (p. 422). An example is in a study carried out by Mabovula (2009) which shows that, “Parents sometimes complain that they are children; they do not need to know everything and sometimes parents feel that learners are learners, they should study books” (p. 227). Similarly, many parents have not allowed their children to engage in discussions with them, thus exercising the traditional authoritarian approach maintained at home and find it difficult to allow learners to participate in debates during meetings (Mncube, 2008, p. 86). Furthermore, a recent study conducted by Strydom (2017) indicates that tradition and cultural norms see children just as children and it is not necessary for them to be in leadership spaces.

2.5.6.7 Lack of support and leadership training for the LRC/RLC

Lack of support and guidance in understanding the concept of leadership is limiting the participation of learners in school decision-making (Bessong et al., 2016, p. 422). For example, studies (Nongubo, 2004; Shekupakela, 2008; Uushona, 2012; Strydom, 2017) evidently show that there was no leadership training offered to the members of the LRC/RCL in schools. Unless the LRC are trained on leadership, they will lack skills on how to participate when involved in meetings with adults (Mncube & Harber, 2013).

To conclude this section, Grant and Nekondo (2016) emphasise that schools should show “concern with developing learners as fully functioning human beings capable of participating, contributing and finding fulfilment in the countless aspects of democratic life” (p. 15).

The above learner leadership literature indicates that learners’ age, principals, adult school members, teachers, policies, power relations and culture, can contradict the LRC leadership development. This suggested that CHAT could be a useful analytical tool for my research.

I now move on to discuss CHAT and the reasons for choosing CHAT as a theoretical framework for my research.

2.6 Theoretical and analytical framework

In this section, I discuss the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) upon which my research is based and the premises that I utilised to analyse my research findings. I begin with a brief description of what CHAT is. After that, I move on with a short historical background of CHAT. Then in the remainder of the section, I discuss the relevance of CHAT, specifically, second generation CHAT used in my study.

2.6.1 Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

Engeström and Miettinen (1999) describe CHAT as “a broad and multidisciplinary approach that takes a new perspective on and develops novel conceptual tools for tackling many of the theoretical and methodological questions that cut across the social science today” (p. 8). Lompscher (2006) points out that CHAT is multidisciplinary, hence it is used in many fields today as it appears in publications, congresses and conferences, workshops and unpublished discussion (p. 35). Grant (2017) describes CHAT “as a holistic theory of practice” (p. 14). The essence of CHAT is that human activity must be pictured in its genetically original form and analysed in its dynamics and transformations, in its evolution and historical change. Thus, the complex activity must be analysable as a contextual or ecological phenomenon. It is worthy to note that CHAT examines human activity to identify contradictions and tensions and has [the] potential to resolve those tensions that are disturbing the human activity (Engeström, 1987, p. 61). Contradictions applicable to this study are discussed in Section 2.6.4. Next, I give a brief historical overview of CHAT.

2.6.2 A brief historical overview of CHAT

Historically, CHAT has its roots in the Marxist social theory of Karl Marx, a German socialist philosopher (Engeström, 1999; Engeström & Miettinen, 1999; Lektorsky, 1999; Leont’ev, 2002; Sokolova, 2002; Lompscher, 2006; Roth & Lee, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010; Sannino, 2011; Schunk, 2012). Lompscher (2002) puts it that the Marxism social theory “focuses on object-related activity of real people, on practical and critical activity aimed at transforming the world with human beings determined by historical, political, ideological, cultural and social relationships

that are themselves rooted in the development of productive powers and relationships of production” (p. 80). Thus, Marx (1976) contends that “the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice” (Engeström, 1999, p.3). Equally, Leont’ev (1978) posits that the theory of Marxism put forward “practical activity in which people enter practical objects of the surrounding world, test their resistance, and act on them, acknowledge their objective properties” (p. 12). Also, Chilvers (2011) puts it that the foundation of CHAT is a Marxist idea that humans master nature through their activity and thereby become creators of the world rather than simply passive subjects shaped by the environment (p. 80). While discussing the origin of CHAT, it is worth mentioning that CHAT has evolved through three generations; the first generation, second generation and the third generation. However, I will focus more on the second generation which I adopt for my study. Next, I briefly discuss the pivotal theory for the first generation of CHAT so that it can pave the way for me to discuss the second generation, adopted in my study.

2.6.3 The first generation theory

The Marxism theory was brought into psychology by Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist when he developed a Cultural Historical Theory in the early 1920s, which Engeström termed “*the first generation*” of CHAT. (Engeström, 2001; Sannino, 2011). The Cultural Historical Theory was developed when Russian psychologists experienced challenges when not agreeing on appropriate methodologies for studying psychology as a science. Vygotsky was then entrusted by the government to reformulate psychology, where after he introduced a Cultural Historical Theory, together with Alexander Romanovich Luria and Alexey Nikolayevich Leont’ev (Tobach, 1999, pp. 136-137; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 15). The cultural-historical aspects of Vygotsky’s theory postulates that the development of human consciousness is determined by individual interaction with the environment (Schunk, 2012, p. 242). Vygotsky introduced mediated action as a concept to explain how human consciousness develops by interacting with the historical developing cultural tools in an environment and results in an individual finding new meanings in their world (Lektorsky, 1999, p. 109; Stetsenko, 1999, p. 233; Engeström, 2001, p.135; Lompscher, 2002, p. 80; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 13). Vygotsky’s theory posits that mediation occurs in the relationship between the subject (human agent) and objects by way of cultural means (tools and

sign) – mediating artefacts (as cited in Knott-Craig, 2017, p. 97). Figure 2.3 below illustrates Vygotsky’s concept of mediated actions.

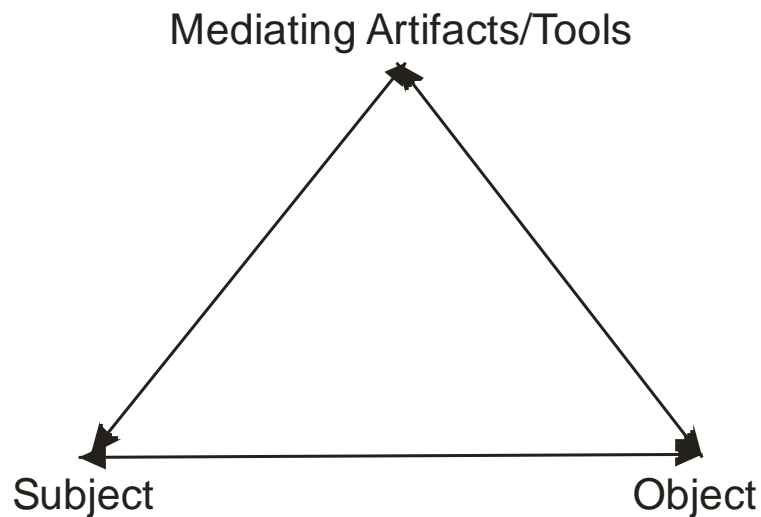


Figure 2.3: Vygotsky’s model of mediated action and (b) its common reformation (adapted from Engeström, 1987)

The above figure shows that Vygotsky shared Marx’s idea that the human essence lies in unity. Therefore, the Cultural Historical Theory illuminates that humans cannot be dissociated from their social environment hence society influences human cognition through its cultural tools evolving over time (Schunk, 2012). It is therefore against this background that Engeström (2001) argued that “the individual could no longer be understood without his or her cultural means; and the society could no longer be understood without the agency of individuals who use and produce artefacts” (p.134). Next, I discuss the second generation.

2.6.4 The perspectives of the second generation activity theory

The Vygotskian Cultural Historical Theory was found to have limitations. The limitations of the first generation was that the unit of analysis remained individually focused and lacked subjectivity (Engeström, 1987; Engeström & Miettinen, 1999; Lektorsky, 1999; Engeström, 2001; Rey, 2002; Sannino, 2011). Engeström and Miettinen (1999) point out that the unity of analysis in the Cultural

Historical theory was “object-oriented action mediated by cultural tools and signs” (p. 4). Mediation by other human beings and social relations was not theoretically integrated into the triangular model of action (*ibid.*, p. 4). Such integration was overcome by the second generation, largely inspired by Leont’ev’s work. The Vygotskian Cultural Historical Theory is equally too abstract; however, it should be taken as a hint for extensive investigation for a research work (Leont’ev, 1978).

Leont’ev (1978) emphasises the roles of the society in an activity system, arguing that human activity cannot be isolated from social relations. Leont’ev therefore integrated a few elements such as the object, subject, mediating artefacts (signs and tools) rules, community and division of labour to the activity theory’s second generation.

The unit of analysis expanded from individual action to collective activity (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999; Engeström 2001; Sannino, 2011). However, Leont'ev never graphically expanded Vygotsky's original model into a model of a collective activity system, but Engeström graphically represented it as illustrated it below in Figure 2.4 (Engeström, 1987).

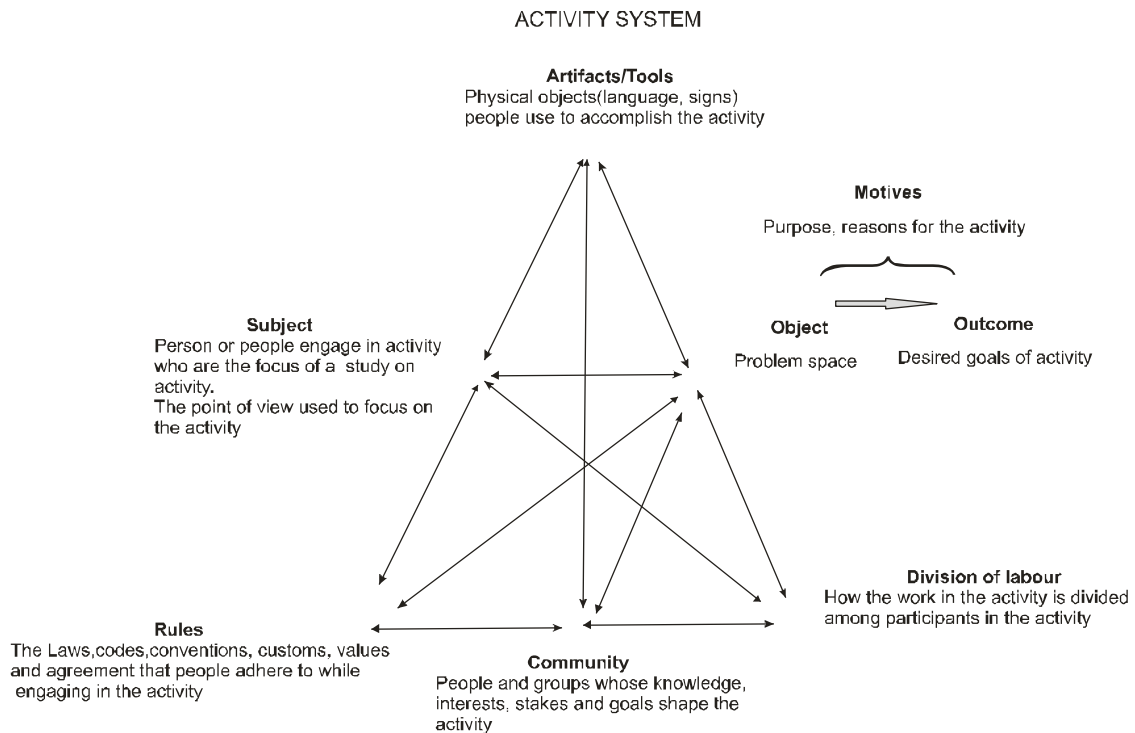


Figure 2.4: Second generation CHAT (Engeström, 1987)

2.6.5 The relevancy of CHAT to this study

In line with Engeström (2015) who argues that “CHAT accounts for the environment/context where the activity is taking place, the history or background of their cultures, the roles of the artefacts, motivation and the complexities of the real life [situation]” (p. 32), in this sense CHAT helped me to be mindful of the school as a social community with its own history, culture and rules, which have [the] potential value of shaping the LRC leadership development in the school. Engeström (1987) further argues that an activity is not a static phenomenon, but something that is socially, culturally and historically evolving. Hence, it was necessary for me to build a contextual profile of the school, showing its history. CHAT is also relevant to my study since it could help me to identify systemic contradictions and tensions within the learners’ activity system of leaders. Engeström (2015) posits that contradictions are not problems or conflicts, but tensions which have historically accumulated within an activity system. Since my study focused only on one activity system of learners, the focus is only on the primary and secondary contradictions. According to Engeström (2015), primary contradictions are within each element of the activity system, while secondary contradictions are between two or more elements of the activity system. In a CHAT interventionist study, as the contradictions surface and are later analysed, the study engages the research participants in formulating possible ways forward which strengthens the promotion and development of LRC leadership in the school. However, this study is purely interpretive, and it does not intend to pursue to the point of intervention. I believe a rich, interpretive account of the status quo, followed by an in-depth analysis using CHAT as a framework, will provide a strong foundation on which future interventions can be built. In short, this study seeks to understand the problems and explore possible ways forward, rather than intervene and implement changes.

The unit of analysis in my study is thus the collective activity of the LRC. Leont’ev (1978) emphasises the role of the society in an activity system, arguing that human activity cannot be isolated from social relations or from the life of society, and in this case, I look beyond the LRC to the wider community of the activity in the school, to see how the interactions of the LRC members with the wider school community influence and transform the LRC leadership. Hence, this study cannot be viewed as an investigation of a discrete phenomenon, in the same way as the Spillane et al. (2004) model of distributed leadership, does not view leadership as a discrete

articulating and theorising needs, emotions and feelings, we are hardly to arrive at more than a reductionist image of activity generally” (*ibid.*, p. 577). This implies that needs, emotions, and feelings need to be included in the triangular representation, so that one can get the whole picture of the activity system. Another critique is the fact that CHAT “fails to address the power dynamics within activity systems that may inhibit the questioning and sharing of information required to identify solutions to contradictions” (Chilvers, 2011, p. 83). In an interventionist study for example, within the context of a learner leadership study, children may not be free to speak and contribute fully in the presence of the school management/adult School Board members and teachers and this may inhibit learning and change. However, this critique did not apply to my study since I did not move to a point of resolving contradictions.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the review of literature related to the field of leadership and management and particularly with regards to learner leadership which is the focus for my research. I discussed the origins of the concept leadership and management which helped me to understand and distinguish these interrelated concepts. I went on to trace and present the historical background of educational leadership and management as a field, which gave me a better understanding of why schools function like businesses in the present day. I further present the traditional leadership approaches which placed faith and hope of transforming schools through actions of individual leaders. I then moved on to present a more contemporary distributed leadership approach which changes the focus from powerful individuals, to a team of leaders, constituting a leadership system. The focus of the research, learner leadership and the benefits of involving learners in school leadership, as well as the factors constraining their involvement in school leadership was presented. I concluded the chapter with a discussion of CHAT as the theoretical framework and analytical tool for this research.

In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology and methods I used to generate the data.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the methodological and design procedures I used to generate, interpret, and analyse data, which enabled me to answer my research questions. This chapter commences with a brief background of my research goal and questions, followed by an explanation of how I set up the research design. From here onwards, I discuss the research orientation in which this study is located, the approach, the selected research site, as well as the participants who took part in the study. I then provide a thorough description of all the data gathering tools I used and the motivations for using them. In the remainder of the chapter, I elaborate upon the data analysis methods, validity and trustworthiness of the findings, positionality, and research ethics.

3.2 Research goal and research questions

To remind the reader, my study aim was to gain an insight into how learner leadership was understood and practiced within the Learner Representative Council in the school. This study also unearthed the cultural-historical factors that enabled or constrained the Learner Representative Council's leadership development. And lastly, the study identified the possible ways on how LRC leadership could be improved and promoted in the school.

The study has been driven by the following research questions:

5. What is the current understanding of learner leadership in the school?
6. How is learner leadership practiced and implemented by the LRC members in the school?
7. What are the conditions that promoted and/or constrained the Learner Representative Council's leadership development in the school?
8. What needs to be done to strengthen the promotion of the Learner Representative Council's leadership development in the school?

3.3 Research orientation

Research orientation is defined as “a cluster of beliefs that guide action which influence what should be studied, how research should be done, and how results should be interpreted” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 183). This study was a qualitative, interpretive case study since I examined a phenomenon – one case amongst numerous widespread occurrences (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p. 59) – in considerable detail in its historical and lived context. Stake (2005) refers to a case study as a process of studying an event or a phenomenon in a bounded system (p. 444). In my study, the case was confined to the school and is therefore an *intrinsic* (*ibid.* p. 34) interpretative case study, since it does not claim to provide a blueprint or example for anyone to follow. A case study was applicable as I focused specifically on LRC leadership in a real-life school context to understand how participants view and experience learner leadership in the LRC. The case study further enabled me to utilise multiple tools of collecting data, allowing me to gain a deep understanding that led to a rich interpretation of how learner leadership was understood and practiced within the LRC (Yin, 1994; Stake, 2005).

In the following section, I briefly describe the research site.

3.3.1 Selection of the research site and duration of study

Besides understanding how the participants viewed and experienced learner leadership of the LRC in a rural school, my study also aimed at understanding the cultural and historical conditions which promoted and/or hindered learner leadership development within the LRC. In a rural school environment, the impact of traditional norms, beliefs and values are still strong and do influence learner leadership development (Uushona, 2012). I specifically selected the school for its convenience (Pascoe, 2014), because I conducted my MEd pre-course assignment there and I am therefore already known there as a researcher. The school was easily accessible to me, since I lived and worked in the same area and therefore understood the context in which the school exists. I spent a further two months at the school, and in the process gained a deep understanding of LRC leadership development at the school. Along with the aforementioned, I understood the social context of the school in terms of its own history, culture, and rules which have the potential of shaping LRC leadership development.

The following part gives a comprehensive description of the case study school.

3.3.2 Description of the case study school

The case study school was a non-payment government secondary school, located in a rural area of northern Namibia. The school was established 42 years back and ranges from Grade 8-12. It offers five different fields of study, namely; Natural Science, Social Science, Commerce, Home Economics and Languages.

At the time I conducted my research, the school had a male school principal, three Heads of Departments, 43 teachers, and 26 non-teaching staff members. At that stage, the school had 886 enrolled learners. It is worth mentioning that most of the school population (the school principal, heads of departments, teachers, learners, & the non-teaching staff members) belonged to the Owambo tribe, spoke the same language (Oshiwambo), and shared the same history and culture.

The school had a School Board/ School Governing Body which was the highest decision-making body in the school. The School Board was comprised of 12 members, which included the principal, hostel superintendent, and six parents of learners at the school. Two teachers at the school and two learners from the Learner Representative Council also constituted the School Board. In addition, the school had a School Management Team which consisted of the school principal, three Heads of Departments, two teachers, and a hostel superintendent. Furthermore, the school's Learner Representative Council was made up of 23 learners, from Grades 8-12, who represented other learners in learner leadership roles.

The building and infrastructure of the school consisted of an administration block which was comprised of the offices of the school principal, HoDs, school administrators, and the hostel superintendent. There was also a very big staffroom for the teachers. Moreover, the school had reasonable school facilities, ranging from the classrooms for its 886 learners, a large and functional library where learners went to study, and a computer laboratory for the learners that were learning typesetting and word processing. The school had a fully equipped Science Laboratory as well as a furnished Home-Ecology Class. While I describe the school facilities, I also want to indicate that the school had a hostel where most learners were accommodated, whereas only a few learners were day scholars. Accommodation was also provided to teachers and matrons who supervised the boarding establishment.

In term of its academic performance, the school has been well known for its notable academic excellence in the region and in the circuit. The school has, over the past years, scored above 90% in its pass rate in the Grade 10 national examination, and performs fairly well in the Grade 12 national examinations.

I now move on to discuss the participants involved in this study and my reasons for choosing them.

3.4 Participant sampling procedures

In this study, a sample of 29 participants were drawn to define the research population. My primary participants were the collective unit of 23 LRC members. After reading through The Education Act (Namibia. Education Act No. 16 of 2001) and the regulations made under The Education Act (Namibia. Education Act No. 16 of 2002) I discovered that the LRC liaison teacher, the School Management Team and School Board work directly with the LRC in schools and purposively selected them as my secondary participants. Pascoe (2014) explains purposive sampling, as “choosing the elements we wish to include in our sample, based on a set list of characteristics” (p. 142). I selected the school principal and three HoDs who were members of the School Management Team in the school and the School Board Chairperson as a representation of the parents who served on the School Board. The LRC liaison teacher was selected based on her position of guiding and mentoring the LRC in the school. She was not willing to participate in the study because of personal reasons. I then chose the former LRC liaison teacher based on his past experiences of guiding and mentoring the RLC. To make the study more authentic I wanted to hear the voice of the LRC members, and therefore decided to include snowball sampling. Creswell (2014) explains snowball sampling “as a form of purposeful sampling that typically proceeds after a study begins and occurs when the researcher asks participants to recommend other individuals to be samples” (p. 231). In this case, the two main leaders of the LRC (head-boy and head-girl) provided me with the names of other LRC members that I included in the interview.

In the next section, I discuss the four data gathering tools that I used to collect the data for my study.

3.5 Data gathering tools

I used document analysis, observation, open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. My choice to employ the mentioned data gathering tools was informed by Yin (1994) who posits that documentation, observation and interviews are good sources of case study evidence as they complement each other and serve as a means of triangulation of data (pp. 78-91). Regarding questionnaires, I was aware that it is more useful when conducting large scale surveys (Maree & Pietersen, 2012; Bertram & Christiansen, 2014) but I found it necessary to administer open-ended questionnaires based on its unique advantages (see Section 3.5.4). Moreover, though a questionnaire is not a source of case study evidence, it however strengthened the validity and trustworthiness of my findings (see Section 3.7).

Having explained data gathering tools, I now focus on document analysis as it was the first data gathering tool to be used. It gave me sufficient background information to obtain a clear picture of LRC leadership development in the school.

3.5.1 Document analysis

Document analysis is “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic material” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). For Nieuwenhuis (2007) document analysis as a data gathering technique focuses on analysing all types of written communications that may shed light on the phenomenon that is being investigated. In this study, I first analysed the regulations made under the Education Act (Namibia. Education Act No. 16 of 2001) from which I obtained clarity on the power and functions of the LRC. I compared it with the practical functions which the LRC were executing during the time of my research at the school. I further analysed the school internal policies, the LRC calendar of activities, the organogram structure of the LRC and the LRC minutes of meetings. In addition, I explored the LRC files, pictures of leadership training they attended, and the School Board files and memos concerning LRC leadership in the school. I agree with Bowen (2009) that document analysis provides a researcher with “a means of tracking change and development” (p. 30), since I wanted to find out how LRC leadership has been historically developed in the school. While engaging in document analysis I found it necessary to add to my interview questions. Bardarch (2009) mentions that “information contained in documents can help to generate new interview questions” (p. 69). Another reason for me to use

document analysis as a data gathering tool was based on the reason that, it strengthened the validity of my findings since I corroborated the findings from interviews, open-ended questionnaires and observation (Yin, 1994). However, Creswell (2014) warns that “documents may be incomplete, inauthentic, or inaccurate” (p. 245), which I experienced first-hand, since I had a critical situation whereby not all minutes from the School Board and LRC meetings were clear for me to interpret, since they were handwritten and hard to read. To obtain clarity on the above mentioned, I verified the minutes with open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and observation to obtain a clear interpretation.

Next, I explain the open-ended questionnaires.

3.5.2 Open-ended questionnaires

My study focused on a group of 23 LRC members in the school. This suggests that it was not possible for me to conduct individual or focus interviews with such a big group as it could have compromised the time I spent at the school, as well as with the time of the LRC members. As I wanted to get the lived experiences of the LRC regarding their leadership development in the school, I found that questionnaires would be the best option for me to get the views of all the LRC members. I administered open-ended questionnaires to all members of the LRC (see Appendix D for the administered open-ended questions). Irwin (2003) refers to a questionnaire as “a series of questions set out on paper, and to be answered on paper rather than verbally” (p. 6). Open-ended questions are questions which respondents may answer as they like – they are not given specific categories or other answers to choose from (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). I decided to employ open-ended questions based on the argument that open-ended questions allow respondents to write/answer freely in their own terms and are not forced to answer in any way (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Bryman, 2012). Questionnaires provided the LRC members with opportunities to share their empirical experiences on how they were prepared for leadership as the LRC in the school.

I was aware of the shortcomings of administering open-ended questionnaires. For example, their openness could lead to “irrelevant and redundant information and their openness may make the questionnaires appear long and discouraging” (Cohen et al., 2011). In this regard, I received a total

of 20 completed questionnaires that were completed, from 23 respondents. This affected the response rate and the findings of the study. Furthermore, some of the returned completed questionnaires were incomplete. Nevertheless, when I went through the responses in the questionnaires, I picked up responses which assisted me with possible probing and follow-up questions, which I used during the individual interview process with some participants.

In the following section, I discuss how interviews were used to gather data.

3.5.3 Interviews

An interview is “a two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks the participants questions to collect data and learn about the ideas, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviours of the participants” (Nieuwenhuis, 2012, p. 87). Additionally, “an interview is not merely the neutral exchange of asking questions and getting answers, but it is a collaborative effort where two or more people are involved in a discussion” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 690). It is against this background that I engaged myself in the discussions through a means of semi-structure interviews with the school principal, the School Board Chairperson, three Heads of Departments, former LRC liaison teacher and six LRC members which include two LRC members served in the School Board (see Appendix E for the interview schedule). The purpose here was to guarantee that the conclusions satisfactorily represented the entire population. I found an interview an appropriate data gathering tool since I could ask the participants to give more detail and examples to substantiate their responses, particularly on how leadership was practiced and implemented by the LRC members and also on the factors which enabled and constrained the LRC’s leadership development in the school. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews offered me an opportunity to ask for clarity about the information I obtained from the document analysis, chiefly the minutes of the School Board and LRC meetings.

Even though interviews helped me to obtain rich data which answered my research questions, I also experienced problems with interviews. For example, it was difficult for most of the interviewed participants to commit to a time for the interview and keep to the scheduled appointment. I was patient enough until I managed to interview all the targeted participants. The interviews were conducted in English, since all the participants interviewed were proficient in

English. I used a voice recorder during the interview process and I transcribed the data for analysis purposes.

In the next section, I discuss observation as the last data gathering tool used.

3.5.4 Observation

Observation is the “systematic process of looking and recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p. 84). I chose to use observation since I wanted to see the reality of how LRC leadership was practiced and implemented in the school and this was in line with Creswell, (2014) who argues that observation “allows a researcher to see and record the information as it occurs in a setting” (p. 235). Therefore, observation offered me an opportunity to gather the live data from the LRC as they practically executed their leadership roles. I attended most of the spaces where the LRC members enacted their leadership roles, such as morning devotions, monitoring and serving of food at the dining hall, and coordination of special events like the African Child Day and learners’ motivational programmes. Furthermore, I observed the supervision of study sessions for both afternoon and evening, by the LRC members. I also attended the Tuesday meetings that the LRC members had with the school principal. My observations did not only take place inside the school, but I also observed the LRC members executing their leadership roles outside the school. Observation was mainly done in relation with Mitra and Gross’ (2009) pyramid of learner voice and the regulation made under the Education Act (Namibia. Education Act No. 16 of 2001) which stipulate the power and functions of the LRC members. Additionally, I observed how the LRC members interacted and collaborated with other learners, teachers and the School Management Team in relation to the model of distributed leadership.

I experienced some challenges with observation. I was not granted permission to attend the School Board meetings, so this did not permit me to confirm the data I obtained from the document analysis and what I was told in the interviews and questionnaires about the participation of the two LRC members on the School Board. Another challenge I encountered was the fact that I found it difficult to enter the girls’ hostel dormitories to confirm how the LRC were enacting their

leadership roles as it strongly emerged from document analysis, interviews and questionnaires. To avoid bias in my findings, I decided not to conduct my observation at the boys' hostel dormitories.

During my observations, I kept a record of events and activities executed by the LRC members inside and outside the school. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to take photographs of my observations (see Chapter Four).

Having discussed the data gathering tools used, along with its challenges and the reasons for using them, I now move on to discuss how I analysed the data.

3.6 Data analysis

Data analysis is a process of making meaning and sense of the data collected regarding a phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 2014). In in this study, I analysed the data in two different phases. In the first phase I used inductive content analysis, while in the second phase I adopted Cultural History Activity Theory (CHAT) to surface the contradictions which culturally and historically accumulated in the LRC leadership activity system.

To begin with, I discuss phase one, the inductive content analysis.

3.6.1 Content analysis

Content analysis is used to “explore and identify overt and covert themes and patterns embedded in a text” (Pascoe, 2014, p. 234). I analysed the data considering the order in which data was generated. I began by analysing the documents. Thereafter, completed questionnaires, interview transcriptions and observation field notes were analysed. I read and reread through the data and as a read and reread, I assigned different codes by means of colour-coding, whereby I used different highlighters to highlight similar information which answered my different research questions. I then arranged the coded information into different categories according to their similarities and differences, from where I generated the main themes and sub-themes. I then discussed the emerged main themes and sub-themes, considering my research questions and the literature review (see Chapter Four and Five). The process of coding helped me to develop a deeper understanding about

the data, but it took me time as I read through the data several times and corroborated the data from different sources that I used (see Rule & John, 2011; Creswell, 2014).

The following part explains the second phase of data analysis in which I adopted the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as an analytical tool.

3.6.2 Cultural Historical Activity Theory - CHAT

As discussed earlier in Chapter Two, this study is framed by CHAT – following is a discussion on how CHAT was used as an analytical tool. I analysed all the data that I had collected from various sources (document analysis, questionnaires, interviews & observations) through the lens of CHAT, whereby I surfaced the contradictions which were within the LRC leadership activity system in relation with other interconnected elements such as rules, division of labour and the wider community which interacted with the LRC members (subjects). CHAT helped me to get a better understanding of how the ecological context of the school functions, in terms of its own culture and history, contradicted the LRC leadership in the school. Although this study did not move to the Change Laboratory stage where contradictions were supposed to be resolved, the study however managed to probe for possible ways to overcome the contradictions that were facing LRC leadership development in the school.

3.7 Validity and trustworthiness

The general understanding of validity is the extent to which instruments measure what they are supposed to measure (Cohen et al., 2011; Pietersen & Maree, 2007; Koonin, 2014). However, Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012) argue that the degree of measurement is essential to positivist research design but not in interpretive research, where the interest is on understanding research participants' meaning making in their own context, which is historically and culturally constituted (pp. 93- 94). In the context of my study, validity is the “degree to which results obtained from the analysis of data represent a phenomenon as being studied” (Nyakundi, 2012, p. 36). The trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is defined as “the ability of the inquiry’s findings to be credible, dependable and confirmable” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 92). Trustworthiness is how believable the researcher’s claims are, and to what extent the reader can trust the data and

the findings of the researcher (Koonin, 2014). I ensured validity and trustworthiness of my findings as described below.

3.7.1 Pilot study

Firstly, I conducted a pilot study with my supervisors. I gave my questionnaires to my supervisors to go through and check if they were clear and understandable. I also interviewed my supervisors. In addition, I provided my supervisors with my observation sheet to see if I was clear on what I wanted to observe. My intention of conducting a pilot study was mainly to see if my research tools and the research questions were clear and understandable (Koonin, 2014). Based on the feedback and information I got from the pilot study, I refined and modified the research questions which were not very clear and understandable to my supervisors (Yin, 1994). Furthermore, I also reworked the observation sheet and became more specific by adding all the activities regarding LRC leadership which I anticipated observing at the school. Secondly, I piloted the questionnaires and interview questions at the school where I was currently teaching, to test how clear and how understandable the questions were, and adjustments were also made.

3.7.2 Triangulation

Maxwell (1996) refers to triangulation “as a process whereby a researcher collects the data from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods” (p. 75). In this study, I ensured validity and trustworthiness of the findings by employing multiple sources of data, namely document analysis, questionnaires, individual interviews and observation. Through triangulation, I read across all different sets of data and gained a holistic picture of the LRC leadership development in the school together with the Education Act (Namibia. Education Act No. 16 of 2001) establishing it. In addition, triangulation enabled me to compare the multiple evidence that emerged from different participants (principal, School Board Chairperson, Heads of Departments, former LRC mentor teacher & LRC members).

3.7.3 Member-checking

Member-checking refers to the “practice of sending or bringing written material involving the people studied back to them” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 106). The intention of member-checking is to “help a researcher to rule out the potential possibility of misinterpretation of the

meaning of what the participants have said and the perspective they have on what is going on” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 94). I used member-checking by bringing back the transcribed interview records to the participants (the principal, HoDs, School Board Chairperson, LRC mentor teacher & LRC members) so that they could read through and verify whether the information had been transcribed correctly. The comments that they provided were incorporated into my data sets.

3.7.4 Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to “a researcher’s active consideration of and engagement with the ways in which his own sense-making and the circumstance that might have affected it” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 102). I kept a reflexive research journal where I recorded and critically reflected on all aspects that I encountered throughout the entire research process. This served as a sounding board for checking the reliability of the research gathering process. Having given a comprehensive account on how I ensured the validity and trustworthiness of my findings, in the next section, I describe my positionality in the case study school.

3.8 My positionality in the research

A researcher’s positionality is the acknowledgment of whether both the researcher and the participants are familiar with each other and if the researcher is familiar with the research site prior to research (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). According to Mercer (2007), insider researchers are “the members of specified groups and collectivities, or occupants of specified social status while outsider researchers are the nonmembers” (p. 3). Although I was not a staff member of the case study school, prior to my research, I had conducted my Master’s pre-course assignment there in January 2017. I was therefore quite familiar with some of the participants, especially the school principal, all the HoDs, the former LRC mentor teacher and the School Board Chairperson. I thus considered myself a visiting researcher at the place. I also anticipated that my status of being a teacher would not disappear and that my presence at the LRC meetings in which I would observe and record the members’ activities, may influence them during the individual interviews, no matter who the members were or their position at the school.

Prior to the data collection stage of this research, I had a meeting with all the participants to build a rapport and ensure smooth social interactions with them. I explained my purpose for being there

and encouraged the LRC members to be open and comfortable in our conversations, and never to feel intimidated. At least this helped the LRC members to interact and talk to me freely. I was careful during when observing and recording, since I wanted the participants to not feel pressured. I would pretend I was not looking by making myself look busy with my work, all the while concentrating on what was being said. In this way, I picked up every point and action that was made. With regards to the principal, HoDs, the School Board Chairperson and the LRC former teacher, I did not experience any power relations problems. The reason being that they were adults, mature and held managerial positions at the school.

In the next section, I focus on how research ethics were taken into consideration.

3.9 Research ethics

Research ethics are the principles and professional standards that are essential for practicing research in a responsible way (Louw, 2014). The chief goal of research ethics is to minimise the risk to participants; therefore, it is always the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that his/her research is ethically conducted (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Sithole, 2013, pp. 28-29).

For my study, I ensured the following research ethics.

3.9.1 Gaining access and permission to the case study school

Data gathering is almost always done on somebody's home ground. This means that a researcher needs to ensure that access is permitted to get into a research site (Stake, 2005). In line with Creswell (2014), many cases studies' access is guarded by the 'gatekeeper'— people who can control the researchers' access to those whom they really want to target (p. 255). In this research, my 'gatekeeper' was the school principal of the case study school. Prior to my data collection stage, I had to humbly request permission from the school principal so that I could gain access to the school and to the targeted participants sampled for the study (see Appendix B2). I gave the

principal a permission requisition letter that I wrote and the one written by my supervisors (see Appendix A). The letter explained the purpose and the duration of my study as well as all the protocols of the research. The principal was so helpful and happy to grant me permission to conduct my research at the school (see Appendix B4). I also submitted the same letter at the office of the Director of Education in the Oshana region and obtained permission (see Appendix B1 & B3).

3.9.2 Informed consent

Participants should know that they are taking part in a research study. They should be formally informed of this and should give their consent. They should clearly understand what will be required of them during their participation, whether and how their identities will be protected and how results will be used. (Louw, 2014, p. 264)

For this research, I designed a consent letter requesting permission from the participants to participate in this research (see Appendix C). In the consent letter, I explained the purpose of the study and the reasons why participants were sampled for the study. I indicated all the procedures and the duration of the study. Very importantly, I made it clear that participation was voluntarily, and that participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without being required to offer any explanation (Bless et al., 2013). Each participant signed his/her consent and I kept the signed consent letter in my research file. Since the LRC members were minor children, their parents had to sign on their behalf, as they were requested to discuss the consent letter with their children. This is in line with Stake (2005) who argues that children can only participate in research when legally written permission has been obtained from parents.

3.9.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

Although confidentiality and anonymity were included in the informed consent, I found it necessary to discuss how I have practically ensured it during the research process. As Bless et al., (2013) states, confidentiality and anonymity are essential ethical requirements in research. The first day I met with all the participants, I explained to them that the information was to be treated with a high degree of confidentiality, no names would be recorded or mentioned (pseudonyms were used) and that I would not disclose the information to anyone apart from my supervisors. I

really adhered to what I told the participants in line with the principle of fidelity, which implies faithfulness and keeping promises or agreements (Bless et al., 2013).

3.9.4 Harm and deception

I was mindful that a school is a complex organisation. I respected the culture of the participants and of the school, as well as religious and gender preferences among teachers and learners. This was to ensure that no one was emotionally or psychologically harmed. I treated the research site with respect, adhered to its cultural rules and guarded against disrupting the process of teaching and learning. Furthermore, I tried not to hide the nature of my study from the participants, so I honestly told them everything that I wanted to do with them in the school.

3.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter focused on the methodology adopted and sketched the steps and procedures that were followed in the research process. The various factors and elements were explained, which I believed have fostered an effective mechanism to research the leadership development within the Learner Representative Council in a secondary school.

In the next chapter, I display the raw data as collected from the use of document analysis, open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and observations.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION

4.1 Introduction

As I indicated in Chapter One, the purpose of this study was to gain an insight into how learner leadership was understood and practiced within the LRC in the school. This study also surfaced the cultural-historical forces which enabled and constrained LRC leadership development. And lastly, the study explored possible solutions to how LRC leadership can be strengthened and promoted in the school.

The data presented in this chapter were obtained from document analysis, open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and observation field notes. A total number of 12 participants were interviewed: the head-boy, the head-girl, one of the two LRC School Board members, three ordinary LRC members, the three HoDs, the school principal, School Board Chairperson and the former LRC liaison teacher in the school. I administered open-ended questionnaires with 23 LRC members but only 20 completed questionnaires were returned. All the data gathering instruments (document analysis, open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and observation) equally provided rich data needed for this study.

To comply with anonymity and confidentiality I used codes for all research participants (Bryman, 2012). The codes closely resembled the positions and roles of the participants in the school. Below I explain the codes and profiles of research participants.

4.2 Coding and profiles of research participants

4.2.1 The LRC members: (LRC1-LRC23)

The Learner Representative Council was made up of 23 LRC members, 12 boys and 11 girls. All the members were from Grade 10 -12 and were between the age of 15-18. The Grade 8 and 9 learners were too young to represent other learners in the school. These LRC members were elected

in 2016 by fellow learners, under the co-ordination of the LRC liaison teacher. Portfolios such as heady-boy, head-girl, deputy head-boy and head-girl, secretary, finance, sports and entertainment, disciplinary academic, hygiene and School Board were allocated to the members. All the LRC members were boarding in the school hostel.

4.2.2 The former LRC liaison teacher (LRCT1)

This teacher has been teaching at the school for the past 16 years. He has been the LRC liaison teacher since 2004 until 2014. He was tasked by the school principal to guide the LRC members and, so it was not a position he had applied for. He was still responsible for teaching Geography.

4.2.3 The school principal (P1)

The school principal of this school has been in the teaching profession for 21 years and was appointed as principal in 2005. However, he has been at the school for six years after he transferred from another school. He is also a former learner of the school. He took up the responsibility of meeting the LRC members every Tuesday morning.

4.2.4 The School Board Chairperson (SBC1)

The School Board chairperson works as a parastatal secretary. He has been serving as chairperson of the School Board for the last six years six since he was reappointed to serve for the second term. His daughter is a Grade 12 learner at the school.

4.2.5 Members of the School Management Team – HoDs (HoD1-HoD3)

4.2.5.1 HoD1

HoD1 has been a teacher at the school since 1982, responsible for the teaching of Biology and Life Science. In 1995, she was appointed as a Science Head of Department.

4.2.5.2 HoD2

HoD2 has been a teacher at the school since 1986. He teaches English as a Second Language. He was also appointed as a Head of Department for languages in 1995. He is a former learner of the school.

4.2.5.3 HoD3

HoD3 has been at the school for 11 years as a Head of Department for Social Science. However, he has been in the teaching profession since 1999. He teaches History.

4.2.6 Data presentation

The data are presented under the following sub-sections:

- 1) A conceptual understanding of learner leadership;
- 2) The roles of the LRC members in the school;
- 3) Enabling conditions for LRC leadership development;
- 4) The constraints of LRC leadership development;
- 5) Possible suggestions from the research participants on how to strengthen the promotion of LRC leadership development in the school.

After giving an overview of this chapter, I now explain through data presentation, how the participants understood the concept of learner leadership.

4.3 A conceptual understanding of learner leadership

Since the focus of my study was on learner leadership, I was interested to know how the participants understood the notion of learner leadership in their school. Drawing on the data from the interviews and questionnaires, it was evident that most of the participants and mainly the LRC members understood learner leadership by aligning it with learners who were in formal positions of leading and guiding other learners. The second dominant understanding of learner leadership was the concept of learner representation and voice and thirdly, the power to control other learners. A participant from the School Management Team, understood the concept of learner leadership as empowering learners. I present each of the four concepts under different headings and begin with learner leadership as leading and guiding other learners.

4.3.1 Leading and guiding other learners

Drawing on both questionnaires and interviews, most of the participants from the LRC (LRC2, LRC4, LRC5, LRC6, LRC7, LRC8, LRC9, LRC12, LRC15 & LRC19) expressed that learner leadership referred to the learners who were leading and guiding other learners in the school. In an interview, a participant (LRC4) exclaimed that learner leadership “*is when a learner is responsible for leading other learners from point A to point B which is a better place*”. Similarly, participant (LRC2) said “*learner leadership is all about learners who are in the school and act as leaders in the school*”. Some of the participants from the LRC (LRC1, LRC3, LRC4, LRC8, LRC10 & LRC17) saw themselves as ‘leaders’ of the fellow learners in the school; for instance, participant (LRC8) said: “*as an LRC member, learner leadership means I am a leader of others*”. Additionally, participants (LRCT1 & HoD1) also expressed that learner leadership was about learners who were leading and guiding other learners.

Next, I present learner leadership *as a representation and voice of learners in the school*.

4.3.2 Learner engagement and voice

Some of the participants understood learner leadership as ways of representing learners in decision-making in the school while for some participants, learner leadership generally meant to represent other learners in the school and for some participants, it meant learners’ inputs and voice.

A participant from the School Board (SBC1) understood that learner leadership “*is the learners who represent the whole school in decision-making*”. In the same line with a participant (SBC1), participants (LRC4 & LRC13) echoed the same thoughts. A participant from the School Management Team (HoD1) said they “*are learners who represent other learners in the School Board*”. Nearly half of the participants from the LRC (LRC1, LRC6, LR7, LRC9, LRC10, LRC12, LRC12, LRC15 & LRC20) expressed that learner leadership was a general representation of other learners in a school. One participant (LRC17) however specified that “*I represent them [learners] to the principal and to the staff members*”.

Apart from the concept of representation, learner leadership was also understood as the voice and input of the learners in the school. Many of the participants who understood learner leadership as

the voice of the learners were mostly from the LRC (LRC3, LRC5, LRC8, LRC9, LRC11 & LRC16). For example, a participant (LRC5) said the concept of learner leadership refers to the learners' voice during parents' meetings where they give their opinions. One participant (LRC9) said "*it means to be the voice of other learners and to represent other learners and express their feelings by taking them to the head*". A participant (LRC11) referred to themselves when stating that "*as a learner leader, I am there to be the voice of the learners and represent them*". It is worth mentioning that, it was not only the LRC members who understood learner leadership as a means of representation and learner voice; participants from the School Management Team (P1, HoD1 & HoD3) and the former LRC liaison teacher (LRCT1) mentioned that the concept of learner leadership was to do with learners' input to manage and run the school. For example, one participant (HoD1) said "*it means learners' input in terms of managing the school and assisting the School Board to manage the school*".

Having presented the participants' understanding of the concept learner leadership as *learner engagement and voice*, next I present learner leadership as *the power to control others*.

4.3.3 The power to control other learners.

Very few participants and only participants from the LRC (LRC3 & LRC5) demonstrated an understanding of learner leadership equating leadership with management. In an interview, a participant (LRC3) denoted that learner leadership was a way of controlling and ensuring that all learners adhered to the school rules. Similarly, from a questionnaire, another participant (LRC5) said learner leadership means "*to have the power to control the learners and make sure that the school activities are running smoothly*".

Although the concept of learner leadership was exclusively understood as *leading and guiding, representation and voice, as well as the power to control*, a participant from the School Management Team, however, had a different understanding of the concept of learner leadership as is presented below.

4.3.4 Capacity-building and empowerment

A participant (P1) stated that the concept of learner leadership means “*empowering the learners to be able to make informed decisions regarding the pedagogical programmes of the school so that they may become responsible citizens in the future*”. In addition, the participant (P1) indicated that the concept of learner leadership meant to inculcate leadership qualities in the learners.

Having presented the conceptual understanding of learner leadership, in the following section I present the *data on how learner leadership was practiced and implemented by the LRC members in the school*.

4.4 The roles of the LRC members in the school

In this section, I present the data which surfaced the roles of the LRC members in the school. In response to the question: ‘*How learner leadership was practiced and implemented by the LRC members?*’ the participants expressed that the LRC members had various roles of which some were distributed among the LRC members according to the portfolios. The participants further indicated that although the LRC roles were split according to portfolios, such as entertainment, disciplinary, academic, School Board, sports, finance, and secretary, there were mutual roles performed by all the members of the council. The participants pointed out that LRC members carry out too many roles. Having read across the data sets, it became clear that the LRC members performed many roles ranging from inside the classroom, to outside of the classroom and in the School Board body at the school. The LRC also performed some roles beyond the school premises. Specifically, the roles which dominated were the roles outside the classroom, the prevalent roles which I discuss below.

4.4.1 The roles of the LRC members outside the classroom

4.4.1.1 Coordinating the morning devotions

Most of the participants, both from the School Management Team (P1, HoD1, HoD2 & HoD3), the LRC (LRC2, LRC3, LRC4, LRC5, LRC6, LRC7, LRC9, LRC10, LRC11, LRC12, LRC13, LRC14 & LRC18) and the former LRC liaising teacher (LRCT1), expressed that the LRC members coordinated and directed the morning devotions and ensured that all learners came to the

assembly point in time. For example, a participant (LRC4) said “*We conduct assembly since it is the culture of the school; when we became LRC members we found the former LRC members doing that and it is also our responsibility to put up the sound system*”. In addition, another participant (LRC1) affirmed that their role was to take the sound system to the assembly point because the devotion was conducted with a sound system and the announcer needed to speak through it. On the same note, the observation field notes (12th June - 30th July 2017) report that on every Monday and Friday, the LRC members had to take the sound system to the assembly point and had to set it up and after the assembly they had to take it back to the storeroom.

During the morning devotion, the LRC members had to walk around the school and check behind the buildings and inside the classrooms, to ensure that all learners came to the assembly and queued according to their respective classes. This was acknowledged by participants (P1, LRC5, LRC7, LRC12, LRC13, LRC16, LRC17 & LRC19). My observation confirmed that the LRC members were coordinating and directing the morning devotion, as well as giving announcements regarding the activities which were taking place in the school such as cleaning campaigns, sports, and motivational programmes. Specifically, on the 12th June 2017, I noted that the LRC head-girl gave feedback on the LRC leadership training which they had attended, and she issued the certificates of attendance to the LRC members. Still, on the same day, one LRC member reported on a sports tournament which took place over the weekend at one of the schools in the region (field notes, 12th June 2017).

Seeing the LRC members coordinating the morning devotion and making announcements to their fellow learners and to the teachers, motivated me to probe more during my interviews with the participants from the School Management Team (P1, HoD1, HoD2 & HoD3), as well as with the former LRC liaison teacher (LRCT1), on what was the rationale behind the coordinating of the morning devotion by the LRC members. Some of the responses I got were that the LRC members were given the opportunity to conduct the morning devotion, with the idea that they are the future leaders and they needed to be prepared in terms of building their confidence. It was also indicated that the aim was not for the teachers to run away from their responsibilities, but the school viewed the LRC members as leaders in the school thus, the school wanted to mould the LRC members. Noteworthy is when the school principal (P1) said:

We are doing this because we want to empower the learners. These learners are the future leaders, through platforms such as morning assembly, we build confidence and courage so that they can feel that they own the system and they are part and parcel of the school. We are just importing the leadership qualities to these learners, you never know one will be a minister, a president or a traditional leader.



Figure 4.1: The LRC coordinating the morning devotion

4.3.1.2 Organising of fundraising events and shows in the school

The LRC coordinates events and shows to raise funds for the school. This was particularly evident across all data sets. According to the 2016-2017 LRC year plan, the LRC members proposed to host fundraising activities such as a games day and casual wear day, Miss Tournament, Miss Valentine, Miss Independence, talent shows and Miss and Mr. School competition. Other evidence was a letter dated 5th February 2016 by the LRC members, addressed to the office of the school principal requesting financial assistance (N\$ 1000.00) so that the LRC members could host Miss Valentine to raise funds for the school bus. Moreover, the LRC minutes dated 7th June 2016 discussed the hosting of Miss and Mr. School competition, while on the 15th January 2017, hosting of Miss and Mr. School was discussed.

Now, drawing on questionnaires and interviews, more than half of the participants from the LRC (LRC2, LRC3, LRC4, LRC5, LRC6, LRC10, LRC11, LRC12, LRC13, LRC17 & LRC19) mentioned that the LRC members were mostly hosting shows to raise money for the school. For example, a participant (LRC2) said “*as an LRC member, we mostly host and run events*”. Similarly, another participant (LRC5) said “*we organise shows, funny games, and tournaments*”. Finally, participant LRC13 said “*we host cinema, disco, Miss and Mr. Tournament, Miss and Mr. School and the main reason is to raise funds*”.

4.3.1.3 Cleaning campaigns in the school

The LRC members coordinated the cleaning campaigns in the school. This was widely and extensively evident across the data sets. The LRC minute’s book reports that the LRC members planned and coordinated the cleaning campaigns. For example, the LRC meetings dated 20th October 2015, 15th March 2016 and 2nd March 2016 discussed the cleaning campaigns. Similarly, the 2016-2017 LRC year plan revealed that a cleaning campaign was the first activity of all the planned activities. Now, drawing on the data from the questionnaires and interviews, most of the participants from the LRC (LRC2, LRC3, LRC4, LRC5, LRC6, LRC7, LRC11, LRC14, LRC15 & LRC19) indicated that the LRC members ensured that the school environment looked clean by organising and coordinating cleaning campaigns in the school. For example, one participant (LRC11) said “*we make sure that cleaning campaigns are going well just to make sure the school is clean*”.

In addition to the participants from the LRC, a participant from the SMT (P1) and the former LRC liaison teacher (LRCT1) expressed that the LRC members organised and coordinated the cleaning campaigns. Likewise, a participant (LRC6) said that the LRC members used to inform the fellow learners that there was going to be a cleaning campaign. On the 12th June 2017, at the assembly point, I observed the LRC head-boy informing fellow learners that there was going to be a cleaning campaign on the 15th June 2017; and on the 15th June 2017, I observed the LRC members coordinating a cleaning campaign (field notes, 12th & 15th June 2017).

4.3.1.4 Hostel and kitchen supervision and monitoring

The LRC minute's book reports that the LRC members had carried out hostel and kitchen supervision and monitoring roles. Drawing on the LRC minute's book and I quote "*LRC members should supervise at the hostel and at the dining hall*". By the same token, the 2016-2017 LRC year plan revealed that the LRC members together with the chief matron, hostel superintendent, LRC liaison teacher and the kitchen staff, were expected to visit the kitchen and inspect the hygiene conditions. Regarding the hostel supervision, drawing on interviews and questionnaires, most of the participants (SBC1, LRC1, LRC4, LRC6, LRC7, LRC8, LRC11, LRC14, LRC16, LRC19, LRC20 & HoD3) mentioned that LRC members supervised and monitored other learners at their respective hostel dormitories. A common example was given by the participants from the LRC (LRC1, LRC6, LRC4, LRC14, LRC19, & LRC20), when they indicated that LRC members kept the hostel keys and locked up and opened the hostel dormitories when learners went and came back from classes. Additionally, a participant (LRC4) pronounced that LRC members were not only locking and opening the hostel dormitories, but they were also patrolling the hostel to see if there were any learners who were perhaps feeling sick, so that they could report the matter to the hostel superintendent. Furthermore, the LRC members maintained cleanliness in the hostel, said some participants (LRC7, LRC8 & LRC11). A substantive evidence was reflected in one of the LRC minutes, when the LRC members held a meeting with the hostel superintendent on the 3rd November 2015. At that meeting, the hostel superintendent informed the LRC members that they "*should supervise at the hostel and in case there is a problem, inform the matron*".

Regarding the kitchen and dining hall, all representative research participants, the SMT (P1, HoD1, HoD2 & HoD3) and the former LRC liaison teacher (LRCT1) expressed that the LRC members served at the dining hall. This data was confirmed in both interviews and questionnaire responses from most of the participants from the LRC (LRC1, LRC2, LRC4, LRC6, LRC7, LRC8, LRC9, LRC, LRC11, LRC12, LRC14, LRC15, LRC12 & LRC20) who agreed that the LRC members served food at the dining hall.

I was curious to get a deeper understating about the roles of the LRC members at the kitchen and dining hall. Through probing, the following responses came to the fore from a participant from the SMT (HoD3):

Ever since I came to this school, the LRC members have been serving food to assist the chefs to save time, because if they sit and wait for the chefs and matrons to serve then it might take time which could be about 40 minutes; but with the assistance of the LRC members, it only takes 15-20 minutes.

During an interview with a participant (LRC3) the above was confirmed: *“It is a culture, last year when I joined the LRC, I found the former LRC members serving at the dining hall”*. In addition, a participant (P1) explained that the LRC members were not only serving food but they also had to monitor if learners were dressed properly, otherwise they were not allowed to enter the dining hall to get food. In confirmation, for the two months I spent at the case study school, I observed the LRC members together with the chefs, teachers and the hostel superintendent, serving food and at some point, the LRC members carried pots from the kitchen to the dining hall and back, as is evident in Figure 4.3 below (field notes, 12th June - 30th July 2017).



Figure 4.2: The LRC members carrying pots at the dining hall

4.3.1.5 Motivational programmes and other learner related events

Document analysis stated that motivational programmes featured on the agenda of the LRC members. In the interviews, some participants (LRCT1, LR2, LRC3, LRC4, LRC5, LRC7 & HOD3) held that the LRC members used to motivate their fellow learners and every so often invited people from outside the school to come and motivate the learners. For example, one participant (LRC2) stated that *“we usually motivate learners by coming up with motivational programmes, inviting different motivational speakers to come and motivate the learners”*. Similarly, a participant (LRC3) said *“we try to motivate the learners to study especially the Grade 10 and 12 learners. We try to invite the successful formers learners to come and motivate our fellow learners to study hard”*.

From the questionnaires it was clear that almost half of the participants from the LRC (LRC1, LRC5, LRC7, LRC8, LRC9, LRC14, LRC15, LRC17 & LRC19) mentioned that the LRC members were the forerunners of motivational programmes in the school.

On the afternoon of 12th June 2017, I observed the LRC members leading a motivational programme in the absence of teachers, where the former LRC head-boy who by then was studying at one of the institutions of higher learning in Namibia, came to give a speech (field notes). From observation fieldnote, on 23rd June 2017, I observed the LRC members coordinating the African Child Day programme with full participation from the teachers.

Still on the roles outside the classroom, I will now discuss enforcement of the school rules and discipline by the LRC members in the school.

4.3.1.6 Enforcement of school rules and discipline

The following data gathered from interviews and questionnaires will point to the roles of LRC members in enforcing school rules and maintaining discipline in the school. Most of the participants from the LRC (LRC1, LRC7, LRC8, LRC11, LRC13, LRC14, LRC16 & LRC18) indicated that the LRC members were responsible to reinforce discipline and ensure that learners adhered to the school rules. Participants (HoD2 & HoD3) echoed the participants from the LRC. On the same notion, a participant from the School Board (SBC1) explained that five years back,

in 2012, the school encountered disciplinary problems, whereby learners used to cut a school fence and sneak away from the school. The LRC members challenged the learners' wrong practices by introducing a rule, that whenever a learner was seen or found standing next to the school fence, they would have to buy 50 meters of net wire. By the same token, other participants (LRCT1 & HoD2) indicated that the school used to experience many cases of vandalism by the learners, but the LRC members helped to mitigate those cases. Still on discipline, more evidence was given by a participant from the LRC (LRC9) who specifically pointed out that *"the Grade 9 and 10 learners were the problems at this school, lots of them were misbehaving and we decided to talk to them and now they are behaving well"*. To conclude on the discipline role of the LRC, participants (LRC7, LRC8 & LRC11) indicated that the LRC members also ensured that the school uniform was worn properly and accordingly.

The last part of the data focusing on the extensive outside roles of the LRC, will focus on liaising and mediating with the teachers, School Management Team, hostel superintendent, chief matron and the LRC liaison teacher in the school.

4.3.1.7 Liaising and mediating

LRC members linked fellow learners with other activity systems in the school. All the data instruments I employed revealed that the LRC members carried out an outstanding role of bridging the learners with teachers, school management, hostel and kitchen staff in the school. Quoting from the 2016-2017 LRC year plan, *"the LRC members should connect the learners with teachers and the principal"*. Likewise, the data from the LRC minute's book, reports that the LRC members hold meetings with fellow learners to hear their concerns and complaints and channelled them to the relevant people. Practical evidence was several meetings held by the LRC members with the chief matron, in which they discussed the complaints and grievances of the learners with regards to the unhygienic conditions of the kitchen and dining hall. This notion was supported by the data from the questionnaire, whereby a participant (LRC5) said *"DH/kitchen there is poor hygiene, so we tried that when the cooks are serving food, they should wear gloves, because some of them don't even wash their hands before handling the food"*.

Still, on the notion of liaising and mediating by the LRC members, the LRC minute's book reveals that on 5th November 2017, the LRC members held a meeting with the hostel superintendent in

which DSTV and watching of the news by learners were contemplated. In confirmation, I have seen the learners watching the 8 o'clock news in the school hall. Additionally, I saw and noted the LRC members telling the principal that their fellow learners were not happy with the point that they were expected to pay NS 50. 00 for the school to operate effectively, as it was a no-paying school.

A further remarkable finding, from the LRC minute's book, was on the joint meetings being organised by the LRC members held with the learners, teachers and the principal. At one of these joint meetings, learners complained about teachers who were not serious about their teaching and that the Grade 12 learners were not given tests to see if they were mastering their subjects, to prepare them for examinations. In the same meeting, learners requested to be allowed to go to church on Sundays.

Equally, data from questionnaires and interviews revealed that the LRC members acted as mediators in the school, for example in an interview, a participant from the LRC (LRC1) said "*we act as mediators, whatever the fellow learners tell us to go and tell the principal, we take it straight to him*". Most of the participants from the LRC (LRC3, LRC4, LRC5, LRC7 LRC11, LRC9, LRC12, LRC14, LRC17, LRC18 & LRC20) pronounced that the LRC members always listened to the complaints of fellow learners and took them up with the teachers and the principal. For example, a participant (LRC7) said "*we took the learners' complaints to the teaching staff that teachers must finish the syllabus on time*". The interviews with participants from the SMT (P1 & HoD1), as well a participant from the School Board (SBC1) also expressed that the complaints from the learners were channelled through the LRC members.

Regardless of the LRC's extensive roles outside the classroom, they were also engaged in roles inside the classroom. This will be addressed in the following section.

4.3.2 The inside classroom roles

The LRC members had to make sure that classrooms were clean and in order. The LRC development year plan for the 2016-2017 academic year, outlined that the LRC members were to ensure that the classrooms were clean. The following quote from the LRC minute's book illustrated

the roles of the LRC member inside the classroom: *“The LRC members should check if learners are given enough activities because the core duty of a learner is to learn. When teachers are not attending the lessons, you have the right to go and call them”*.

In the interviews, it became clear that the LRC members had some roles inside the classroom. For example, some respondents (P1, SBC1, HoD1, HoD3, LRCT1, LRC1, LRC3, LRC4, LRC6 & LRC7) mentioned that some of the inside classroom roles included: classroom supervision that includes the afternoon and evening study sessions, class discipline and writing down the names of the teachers who did not attend their lessons. For example, in an interview with the School Board Chairperson (SBC1), it was clear that the LRC members are there *“to see to it that teachers are attending to their lesson, if they are coming on time and if they give work”*. Equally, a participant (HoD3) highlighted that the LRC members *“are located classrooms to control and report the teachers who did not attend their lessons and to keep their classrooms silent”*. Similarly, from the findings from questionnaires, the majority of the LRC members (LRC1, LRC2, LRC3, LRC4, LRC5, LRC7, LRC9, LRC11, LRC12, LRC13, LRC14, LRC15, LRC16, LRC17& LRC20) echoed that the LRC members maintained cleanliness and discipline in the classrooms. Additionally, participants (LRC2 & LRC4) said that teachers were entrusting LRC members to invigilate the tests and class activities on their behalf. Lastly, on the roles inside the classroom, I observed how the LRC members kept order and discipline in the classrooms, more especially during the afternoon and evening study sessions (fieldnote, 12th June - 30th July 2017).

Having presented the roles which the LRC members performed inside the classroom, now I move on to present the roles which the LRC members performed in other leadership bodies in the school.

4.4.2 On the School Board

Almost all the participants from the LRC (LRC1, LRC2, LRC3, LRC5, LRC6, LRC7, LRC8, LRC9, LRC10, LRC11, LRC12, LRC13, LRC14, LRC15, LRC16, LRC17, LRC19, & LRC20) expressed that among the LRC members, there were two LRC members who served on the School Board, which was the highest decision-making body at the school. During an interview with the two LRC School Board members, they confidently stated that they were part of the School Board

and used to sit together with other School Board members and deliberate on aspects and issues of whole school development. A participant (LRC5) proudly said:

As a School Board member, I always attend the School Board and parents' meetings. We usually sit together with fellow School Board members and they tell us to be free to give our points. If my fellow learners tell me what they want and what they feel should be done, I go and discuss it with the fellow School Board members and see what we can do as School Board members.

Relatedly, a participant from the SMT (HoD1) emphasised that “*the LRC members should participate in all the discussions which are being discussed by the School Board, their voices also need to be heard*”.

Regarding the participation of the LRC members on the School Board, a participant from the School Board (SBC1) said:

The LRC members work together with us as the School Board members. The only difference is age, but when it comes to contributing, they contribute equally but they mostly contribute on learner related issues and the school budgets. They always contribute to the issues that really touch them, for example, the school uniform, school discipline, teaching and learning and the hair, but they are not free to discuss teachers' disciplinary matters.

In an interview with a participant (P1) from the SMT, the above statement of the School Board (SBC1) member was confirmed – two LRC members represented learners on the School Board, so that their voices could be heard, and their interests could be considered. The principal remarked on some of the visible changes initiated by learners through learners who represented them on the School Board, such as the buying of the school sound system and LRC t-shirts.

Substantive evidence from the minutes of the School Board, showed that the LRC members were involved in the School Board. The names of the LRC members who served on the School Board appear on the minutes of the School Board dated 26th September 2016, 10th January 2017 and 29th June 2017, just to mention a few. When I read the School Board's minutes, I noted that the LRC members raised their issues during the meetings. For example, quoting from the minutes dated 10th January 2017, the LRC member “*informed the house that [other] learners used to report to them how learner x used to intimidate them, and she has a concern that if learner x happens to come back to school, it might disturb the academic life of the fellow learners*”. Unfortunately, I was not allowed to attend the School Board meetings where I could have observed the real-life experience

reference to the LRC members' participation. I had seen the two LRC School Board members giving feedback at the morning assembly, regarding the School Board meeting that had taken place. Nevertheless, I managed to attend a parents' meeting which was held on 15th July 2017. During the meeting, I noted the presence of the two LRC members. I noticed the school principal acknowledged the presence of the two LRC members in the meeting and requested them to stand up so that the parents could see them (fieldnote, 15th July 2017).

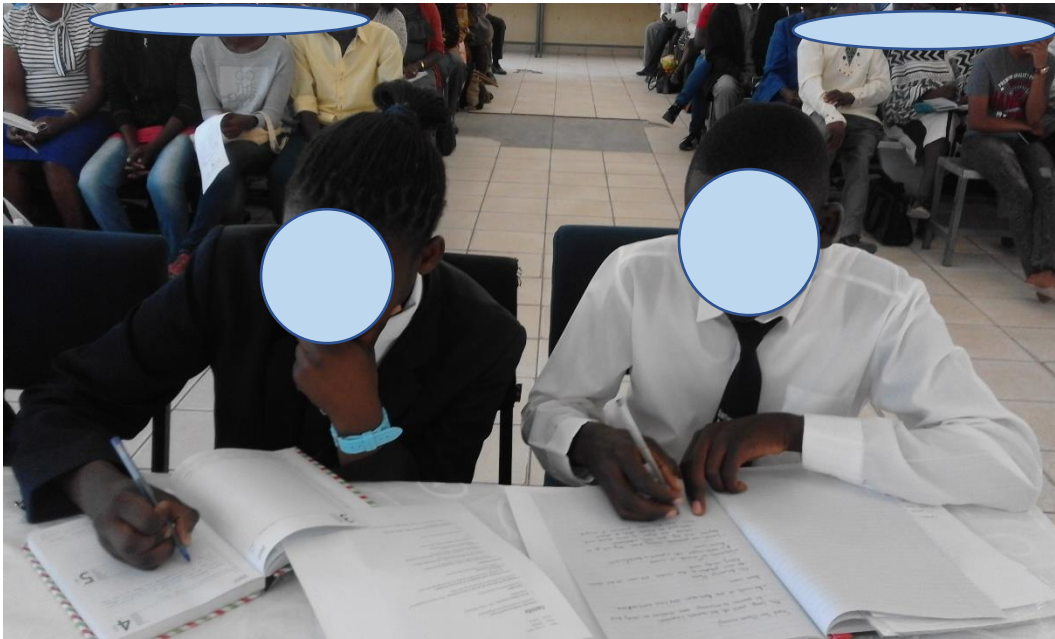


Figure 4.3: Two LRC School Board members attending the school parents' meeting

The following section will address the roles which the LRC members performed outside the school premises.

4.4.3 Outside the school premises

The LRC roles were not only bounded to inside the school, but went beyond the school boundaries. Documents reported that the LRC members visited a primary school to motivate the learners. The LRC year plan for 2016-2017 academic year, revealed that the LRC members planned to visit the media so that they could give motivational speeches to all learners' country-wide. In addition to the outside school roles, I also observed the LRC members attending a memorial service of a school patron. During the service, the LRC members directed people to take their seats and served them food and drinks. The LRC head-girl read a message of condolence on behalf of the fellow

learners. Since the funeral took place in Windhoek, the LRC members went to Windhoek, however, I did not manage to go with and observe them.

Having presented the wide-ranging roles of the LRC members, I will now move on to the next section, to present the enabling conditions for leadership development of LRC members in the school.

4.5 Enabling conditions for LRC leadership development

In this study, my interest was on learner leadership development, particularly within the LRC. Therefore, I felt it was important to inquire about the conditions which nurtured the leadership development of the LRC members.

The enabling conditions for LRC leadership development emerged from the data. The notion of leadership training emerged as a strong theme. The data further established that the School Management Team were vastly supportive of LRC leadership development and the school principal was most used as an example. The support from the LRC liaison teacher and networking of the LRC members with other schools, were reasonably expressed.

In the following section, I will address the leadership training programme for the LRC members.

4.5.1 Leadership training for the LRC members

The data from documents, interviews, and questionnaires showed that the LRC members were trained on leadership. The 2016-2017 LRC year plan revealed that leadership training was one of the planned activities to be implemented. The LRC file reported that two LRC leadership training courses were conducted outside the school. According to a report, on 27th February - 2nd March 2017, four LRC members (head boy, head-girl & their deputies) attended leadership training which was organised by the African Leadership Institute (ALI). The training covered aspects such as teamwork, own identity, roles of the LRC members and integrity and accountability.

The LRC minute's book revealed that on the 14th March 2017, the LRC members (head-boy, head-girl & their deputies) gave feedback to fellow LRC members on what they were trained on.

Relatedly, a second report revealed that the school collaborated with another school and organised a two-day leadership training that took place on 9th - 11th June 2017, at one of the local training centres. Likewise, in the questionnaires and interviews, most of the participants both from the SMT (P1, HoD1, HoD2 & HoD), School Board (SBC1), former LRC liaison teacher (LRCT1) and all the participants from the LRC (LRC1-LRC20) mentioned that LRC members were trained on leadership. In an interview, probing on what the LRC members learned from the leadership training, a participant (LRC1) responded that *“training is helpful because they are training us to become future leaders. I acquired different skills on how to work with people”*. Another participant (LRC4) said *“We were trained in different ways on how to work in a group, how to be in front of people, conduct speeches and how to work with different people and how to save time. Through this training we gained many qualities and experience when it comes to leading others”*. Regarding the joint leadership training with another school, a participant (LRC3) said *“we learnt a lot from each other”*.

I was keen to know the reasons why the school sent the LRC members for leadership training. During an interview with participants from the SMT (P1) it came to the fore that *“LRC leadership training is important since the LRC members get to be exposed and taken into leadership at an advanced level and when they come back to school, they bring new skills and experiences which are needed for the upliftment and development of the school”*. A participant from the School Board (SBC1) also said that *“when LRC members are elected, they are always trained about their roles and responsibilities otherwise what are they going to do when they are not trained”*.

To confirm the above, on the 12th June 2017, during the morning devotion, I observed the LRC head-girl giving feedback on the leadership training they attended on the 09th - 11th June 2017. On the same note, the LRC members were also awarded certificates (fieldnote, 12th June 2017).

To supplement the leadership training, the School Management Team were also supportive in enhancing the leadership development of the LRC members in the school.

In the next section I present the support of the School Management Team.

4.5.2 Support from the School Management Team

In the questionnaire, all the participants from the LRC (LRC1-LRC20) expressed that the LRC members were supported by the SMT. For example, a participant (LRC2) said “*the school principal and heads of departments call us for meetings and encourage us to co-operate with a committee*”. The LRC minute’s book confirmed that there were several meetings held between the SMT and the LRC members. To point out one of the meetings, on the 11th October 2016, the SMT encouraged the LRC members to be strong leaders in the school, to ignore bad words from their fellow learners and not to be afraid of the teachers. Additionally, a participant from the LRC (LRC4) said “*The School Management Team help us to achieve our objectives, e.g. the HoD helps us to use his USB when we are conducting morning devotion*”. Furthermore, one participant (LRC9) said “*The principal and heads of departments take our problems and whenever something cannot be done, they give us reasons*”. Similarly, a participant from the SMT (HoD1) indicated that whenever the LRC member wanted to do something they always shared it with the SMT for approval purposes. The minutes of the SMT, dated 20th October 2016, indicated that the SMT held a meeting to discuss the LRC development plan which was comprised of 31 items which duly needed approval of the SMT for implementation. According to the LRC minutes dated 22nd October 2016, a joint meeting was held between the LRC members and the SMT and the LRC members were given feedback about the activities they wanted to carry out. The 2016-2017 LRC year plan shows that all the 31 proposed activities were approved by the SMT.

Regarding the principal being specifically pointed out from the SMT, the data revealed that on Tuesdays, the LRC members had meetings with the principal. Drawing on interviews and questionnaires, most of the participants from the LRC (LRC1, LRC2, LRC5, LRC6, LRC7, LRC8, LRC10, LRC11, LRC12, LRC13, LRC 16, LRC17, LRC18, LRC19 & LRC20) indicated that, on Tuesdays, the LRC members attended the meetings in the office of the principal. In support of the principal’s meetings, a participant (LRC1) stated that “*without the principal, none of our tasks would have been carried out. We feel valued by the principal*”. Equally, one participant (LRC8) said “*Every Tuesday morning at 07H00 up to 07H30, we attend a meeting with the principal. He always tells things we are doing well and what we need to improve on*”. In addition, participants (LRC2, LRC3, LRC11, LRC12 & LRC13) mentioned that during Tuesday meetings, the LRC members discussed their problems with the principal.

In the interviews with the participants from the SMT (P1& HoD3) it was also stated that the principal used to have meetings with the LRC members every Tuesday. According to the principal, he initiated the Tuesday meetings five years back because that is what he used to do at his former school. The idea was just to engage the LRC members and to get advice from them on how to run the school. Regarding my observations, I also attended the Tuesday meetings and I observed that the principal was encouraging and motivating the LRC members to diligently carry out their roles. Most of the times, the principal asked the LRC members if they had something to share and if things were going well in the school. On the 27th June 2017, I noted the principal disclosing to the LRC members that the school was in a financial crisis since there was only N\$ 2000. 00 in the school account. One of the LRC members suggested that perhaps the learners could be asked to pay a certain amount of money (fieldnote, 12th June - 30th July 2017).

In the next section, I address the support offered to the LRC members by the LRC liaison teacher.

4.5.3 Support from the LRC liaison teacher

LRC members were supported by their liaison teacher. The data emerging from documents (LRC minutes), questionnaires and interviews, evidently showed that the school allocated a teacher to guide the LRC members to carry out their roles in the school. The LRC minutes revealed that the LRC liaison teacher held several meetings with the LRC members and reminded them of their roles. The minutes further reported that the LRC liaison teacher accompanied the LRC members for leadership training. In the questionnaires, relatively few participants from the LRC (LRC2, LRC3, LRC4, LRC8, LRC10, LRC11 & LRC18) mentioned that the LRC liaison teacher supported the LRC members. For example, a participant (LRC3) referred to the LRC liaison teacher as their *mother*. In appreciation, one participant (LRC4) said “*We thank our teacher coordinator because she is always there for us and when we discuss something, she considers it, for example, we gave her our ideas of the t-shirts and she helped and now we have our t-shirts*”. Regarding guidance, a participant (LRC10) said “*our teacher coordinator gives us guidelines and motivates us to do our work better*”.

From the interviews, very few participants from the LRC (LRC3, LRC4 & LRC7) affirmed that the LRC members received support from the LRC liaison teacher. Relatedly, in the interviews, participants from the SMT (HoD2 & HoD3) expressed the same thoughts. For example, a participant (HoD3) said “*the LRC teacher coordinates the activities of the LRC and draws up the rules for the LRC and takes the LRC members for orientation*”. It was evident from the pictures that the LRC liaison teacher accompanied the LRC members for leadership training. Moreover, the former LRC liaison teacher (LRCT1) indicated that his role was to meet with the LRC members once a month, to hear their problems and advise them – if they needed something, they would go to him first.



Figure 4.4: The LRC members in their t-shirts that they got with the assistance of their LRC liaison teacher

Still on the enabling conditions for LRC leadership development, I now move on to present how the LRC members benefited from a partnership they had with LRC members from other schools.

4.5.4 Networking with other secondary schools

The LRC members visited other schools to learn new leadership practices. The data from the questionnaires specifically participants (LRC2, LRC5, LRC6, LRC15, LRC18 & LRC19), indicated that the LRC members visited the performing schools. For example, one participant (LRC19) said “*the school organised trips for us to visit the performing schools*”. Additionally, in an interview, a participant from the LRC (LRC5) said “*we usually visit the performing schools to learn the techniques they use and how are their study sessions and we come back to give feedback to our fellow learners so that they can improve*”. Likewise, a participant from the SMT (HoD2) said that” when *visiting schools, they observe the lessons, dining hall and so forth, they come back and apply what they have seen*”. In confirmation, the 2016-2017-year planner reports that “*the purpose of visiting the performing schools is to investigate and learn the different practices*”. In a letter dated 4th February 2016, the LRC members requested permission to be allowed to visit one of the top performing schools in the region. The letter states that:

Your school has been ranked nationally and regionally as one of the top performing schools in the country. We, therefore would like to visit your school to share views on leadership and school management to improve our academic performance. We again request you to allow us to interact with the LRC members and learners in general. We would like also to attend classes that day.

I now move on to the section which presents the constraining conditions for LRC leadership development in the school.

4.6 The constraints of LRC leadership development

As I said earlier, the purpose of my study was to understand how learner leadership was developed particularly in the LRC. Through administered questionnaires, interviews and relative analysis of documents, I managed to combine the factors which hindered and constrained leadership development of LRC members in the school. Lack of discipline among the learners, emerged as the strongest theme. Equally, lack of respect and collaboration with teachers was another strong theme that emerged. The data further revealed that conflict and communication barriers among the LRC members partially constrained their leadership development. Furthermore, it emerged that

the LRC members were overloaded with work. It was also noted that there was a lack of proper facilities for the LRC members.

To begin with, I present the lack of discipline among the learners in the school.

4.6.1 Lack of respect among the learners

Drawing on the questionnaires and interviews, all the participants from the LRC (LRC1-LRC20) mentioned that fellow learners lacked respect for LRC members. The data revealed that learners did not like taking instructions from the LRC members and they used to shout, name-call and insult the LRC members. Equally, drawing from interviews, all the participants from the LRC (LRC1-LRC20) expressed that fellow learners lacked respect for the LRC members. In addition, the former LRC liaison teacher (LRCT1) echoed the same sentiment as all the participants from the LRC. For example, most participants (LRC1, LRC2, LRC4, LRC6, LRC7, LRC8, LRC10, RLC11, LRC12, LRC13, LRC14, LRC17, LRC19 & LRC20) expressed that learners did not follow the instructions of the LRC members, especially when they were called for morning devotion. A participant (LRC1) said *“fellow learners don’t obey what we tell them, and they don’t listen. They often ignore us and shout bad words”*. Similarly, another participant (LRC2) said *“when we call them for assembly, fellow learners end up insulting the LRC members and sometimes want to fight”*. A participant (LRC6) also noted that *“when you tell them to get to the assembly point, they will always misbehave. They will always say you are also not there and you want us to go there”*. Equally, a participant (LRC8) acknowledged that *“they throw out bad words like “who are you to tell us that? You are also a learner like us”*. Another participant (LRC20) also stated that *“when you tell your fellow learners to move to the assembly point, they insult you and tell you to go first then they will join you”*.

It was also stated that the learners insulted LRC members when they instructed them to tuck in their shirts. According to a participant (LRC6), *“Learners always insult you when you tell them to tuck in, they will always say you are not the one who brought them to school”*. Similarly, a participant (LRC8) agreed that *“when you tell a learner to tuck in he/she will tell you that they are not from your house and you are just a learner like us, so we cannot be led by you”*. On the same notion, another participant (LRC11) stated that *“telling a fellow learner to tuck in is very difficult*

because a person will look at you and be like, is that what your parents send you to come and do at school”?

A participant (LRC1) said that during the motivational meetings, learners do not like to listen, and the boys preferred to sit at the back and make a lot of noise and shout at the LRC members. Likewise, another participant (LRC9) indicated that learners did not listen to their motivational speeches and they thought it was useless. On the 12th June 2017, during a motivational speech programme, I observed how the learners were making a noise and did not want to listen. The LRC members kept on saying *“guys keep quiet and listen”*.

According to participants (LRC2, LRC7, LRC11, LRC13, LRC14 & LRC17), there was often conflict between learners and fights with other learners during evening events at the school. For example, a participant (LRC2) said *“We hosted a show where two learners fought, and one was stabbed with a knife and we had to call in the police officers”*. Another participant (LRC11) said *“our shows usually start from 18H00 to 19H00 but due to a lot of conflicts and fights among the learners, it was changed to 14H00”*. In the same vein, another participant (LRC13) indicated that learners *“liked to disrupt events and if you responded you can even be beaten up”*. Relatedly a participant (LRC7) indicated that learners wanted to fight with LRC members so that they could be removed from the LRC. Additionally, the 2016-2017 LRC year plan indicated that the police officers were needed to keep order during the LRC’s fundraising events at the school.

One of the reasons for learners’ disrespect of LRC members, was the age of the LRC members. Some of the participants (LRC2, LRC7, LRC14, & LRC17 & LRCT1) voiced that some learners disrespected LRC members as some of the LRC members were younger than some learners in the school. For example, a participant (LRC9) said *“Sometimes you are telling the learners to do something, but they will not do it because they think we are the same age and some are even older than us and they don’t want to be directed by people of their own age”*. Similarly, another participant (LRC14) said *“some learners don’t like to be told to obey the school rules by the LRC members just because we are of the same age”*. Additionally, the former LRC liaison teacher, participant (LRCT1) said *“some learners don’t want to listen to the LRC members because some of the LRC members are young, so the older learners don’t want to respect them”*.

Lastly, some participants (LRC5, LRC10, LRC11, LRC12, LRC 14 & LRC15) indicated that learners did not respect the LRC members because of the special treatment bestowed on them. For example, one participant (LRC9) stated that learners were not happy with the fact that the LRC members had T-shirts while they, the learners, did not have. A participant (LRC11) said *“learners are insulting us because they think we get special treatment”*. An example was given by a participant (LRC12) when he stated that *“some learners don’t respect us, and they throw out bad words such as wearing white shirts for nothing, which is discouraging sometimes”*. Lastly, a participant (LRC14) said *“some learners usually say when you become an LRC member, your job is just to eat a lot and travel to different places”*.

Next, I present how teachers constrained LRC leadership development in the school.

4.6.2 Lack of respect and collaboration by teachers

Data emerging from the participants on the LRC, SMT, and School Board members showed that teachers lacked respect and were apathetic about the activities of the LRC members in the school. Many of the participants from the LRC (LRC2-LRC7, LRC9, LRC11, LRC12, LRC15, LRC16, LRC19 & LRC20) mentioned that teachers used to insult and shout at LRC members. They also indicated that most of the teachers were not participating in LRC activities. For example, a participant (LRC19) said *“I was called bad words by a teacher and I really felt bad. I almost committed suicide”*. Another participant (LRC4) said *“some teachers look at us as if we are useless people in the school”*. Participants (LRC7& LRC8) also indicated that teachers were not valuing the LRC members as leaders. Similarly, a participant (LRC9) said *“some teachers are rude and if you go to them with a problem, they will turn you back or may say a bad word”*. Furthermore, another participant (LRC 4) said *“teachers think we are wasting our time for studying”*. A few participants (LRC1, LRC5, LRC12 & LRC16) expressed that teachers were not participating in different activities initiated by LRC members in the school. Agreeing, a participant (LRC20) stated that teachers were always against the ideas of the LRC members.

According to a participant from the SMT (P1) *“teachers are not cooperating well with the LRC members, yet they feel that the LRC members should not be valued and they think that I gossip with them during our Tuesday meetings”*. Correspondingly, a participant (LRC11) noted that

“teachers think we report them to the principal and when we are in class, they always throw bad words to us. If one of the LRC members fail a test, teachers always say that you are forever running with the LRC issues”. In contrast, a participant (LRC3) stated that *“during our Tuesday meetings, we discuss teachers who beat learners and insults learners”*. Additionally, a member of the SMT (SBC1) stated that *“some teachers think the LRC members are too much on them”*.

In the next section, I present the differences and tension among LRC members.

4.6.3 Differences and tension among LRC members

In the questionnaires, all the participants from the LRC (LRC1-LRC20) indicated that there were differences and tension among the LRC members. In the interviews, a few participants (LRC3 & LRC6) affirmed the same. For example, participants (LRC2, LRC6, LRC7, LRC8, LRC11, LRC13, LRC14, LRC15, LRC16, LRC17, LRC19 & LRC20) stated that during meetings, the LRC members used to have different opinions, thus, they sometimes did not agree with one another. For example, a participant (LRC20) said *“we don’t listen to each other, so it takes us a lot of time to make final decisions as a group, because everyone always has a different idea, therefore it is never easy to find a conclusion”*. Regarding the disagreements, a participant (LRC8) gave an example by stating that *“when we wanted to attend the memorial service of our school patron, it was difficult because not all the ladies wanted to put on skirts”*. I observed how the LRC members disagreed on what to wear when they attended the memorial service of the late school patron. Some LRC members wanted to wear a white shirt while some wanted to wear their LRC T-shirts (fieldnote, 16th June 2017).

Participants (LRC5 & LRC7) mentioned that some of the LRC members were not attending LRC meetings. For example, a participant (LRC7) said *“we usually experienced a quorum and we cannot make a decision when half of the committee members do not attend a meeting”*. Moreover, the LRC minute’s book reported that many LRC members were absent from meetings.

Additionally, a participant (LRC5) said *“we don’t like to work together, some may even run away and when you call them, they will even insult you”*. She further stated that some LRC members had personal issues and were not talking to each other. Correspondingly, participants (LRC3, LRC6

&11) expressed that during events, some of the LRC members pretended to be sick simply because they did not want to work.

4.6.4 Overload of tasks on LRC members

All sets of data, document analysis, questionnaires, interviews and observation, revealed that the LRC members carried out too many roles and resulted in the LRC members being overloaded and overwhelmed with tasks. A 2016-2017 LRC year plan showed that there were 31 items to be implemented by the LRC members. Drawing on the questionnaires, a few participants (LRC3, LRC5, LRC14, LRC17, LRC18, LRC20) complained that the LRC members were overloaded with many tasks which consumed much of their study time. For example, a participant (LRC5) said “*we are always busy with the LRCs activities and we don’t get time to study*”. Another participant (LRC14) confirmed this by saying “*We have lots of responsibilities and we don’t get enough time to study and this affects our performance and our parents always complain when we fail*”. In an interview, a participant from the LRC (LRC6) said “*even if I want to relax, I just don’t get time*”. A few participants from the SMT (P1 & HoD2) echoed that the LRC members had a lot of tasks which curtailed their study time. For example, a participant (P1) said “*The LRC members don’t get time to concentrate on their studies because sometimes they are in the meetings while other learners are studying, and you find that during weekends they are given activities to organise*”. Similarly, a participant from the School Board (SBC1) said that “*the LRC members don’t attend to their school work 100% because of many roles and responsibilities and meetings. Parents did not send their children to school to become LRC members, they send them to come and study*”. From the fieldnote (16th June 2017) I observed the LRC members complaining when they were told to go and serve at the memorial service of the late school patron.

4.6.5 Lack of facilities for LRC members

The data from questionnaires, interviews, and observations revealed that the LRC members had no room where they could meet and discuss their issues. Drawing on the questionnaires, participants (LRC2, LRC8, LRC10, LRC11, LRC12, LRC14, LRC15 & LR17) mentioned that there was no designated room for LRC members. For example, a participant (LRC2) said “*we don’t have a LRC room/building where we can meet and share our opinions*”. Another participant (LRC 8) stated that “*we need our own LRC office*”. Similarly, during an interview, a participant

from the SMT (P1) said “*sometimes you want to give some privileges to these LRC members, for example, giving them a room, but we find it very difficult because they are just learners*”. In addition, the LRC 2016-2017 year plan reported that the LRC members wanted an office. My observations also confirmed that there was not a room specifically for LRC members. I only saw them meeting in the office of the principal on Tuesdays (Fieldnote, 12th June - 30 July 2017). In the following section, I present the possible suggestions from the research participants.

4.7 Possible suggestions on how to strengthen the promotion of LRC leadership development in the school

4.7.1 Collaboration and respect from teachers

The LRC members wanted to work together with the teachers. Drawing on the questionnaires and interviews, most of the participants from the LRC (LRC1, LRC2, LRC3, LRC4, LRC5, LRC6, LRC7, LRC8, LRC9, LRC11, LRC12, LRC16, LRC17 & LRC20) suggested that the teachers should show interest in the activities of the LRC members by working together with them and show them a sense of value and respect. For example, a participant (LRC2) said “*we need to work together with teachers because leadership is all about interacting and respecting each other*”. Participants (LRC7, LRC8, LRC12 & LRC16) suggested that teachers should consider the LRC members as leaders and must try to help them. Finally, a participant (LRC19) said “*teachers should stop insulting LRC members*”.

4.7.2 Educate the learners on the importance of LRC members

Learners needed an understanding of the roles and importance of LRC members in the school. In the questionnaires and interviews, most of the participants from the LRC (LRC2, LRC3, LR5, LRC7, LRC8, LRC9, LRC11, LRC12, LRC14, LR6, LRC17 & LRC20) suggested that there was a need for the learners to be well-informed about the roles of LRC members in the school. For example, a participant (LRC2) said “*the first thing to be done is to inform the learners about the roles of the LRC members in the school*”. Another participant (LRC5) said “*learners should be told about the importance of the LRC members in the school*”. Similarly, a participant (LRC11) said “*the principal and teachers should make learners understand that the LRC members are the voice of the learners*”.

4.7.3 Leadership and communication skills training

There was a need for more leadership and communication training for LRC members. More than half of the participants from the LRC (LRC3, LRC4, LRC5, LRC6, LRC7, LRC9, LRC10, LRC14, LRC18 & LRC20) suggested that more leadership and communication training was required, so that the LRC members could learn leadership skills and learn how to talk and respect the opinions of others. For example, a participant (LRC3) said *“leadership training should be arranged for us so that we get to be educated on how to communicate with one another”*. Likewise, a participant (LRC11) said *“we need more leadership training just to improve our leadership skills”*.

4.7.4 Code of conduct for LRC members

A few LRC participants (LRC4, LRC7, LRC15, LRC17 & LRC18) indicated in the questionnaires that there was a need for a LRC code of conduct. They suggested that clear rules and regulations needed to be developed. For example, a participant (LRC7) said *“we need to put up order and regulations in the council”*. Furthermore, participants (LRC14, LRC15 & LRC18) suggested that a rigid time-table and timing of the LRC meetings needed to be developed, so that the LRC activities did not prevent the LRC members from studying.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented how learner leadership was understood by the participants in the case study school. I also presented what the LRC members were doing in and beyond the school. I further presented the conditions which enabled and constrained LRC leadership development. Finally, I presented the possible suggestions which could strengthen the promotion of LRC leadership development in the school. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings in light with the literature and theory.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I attempt to make sense of the data which I presented in Chapter Four. I now discuss the main findings in line with my research goals and questions, and the literature.

To remind the reader, the aim of my study was to gain insight into how learner leadership was understood and practiced in the school, particularly within the Learner Representative Council. This study was not studied in isolation from its context: it therefore unearthed the retrospective cultural-historical forces enabling or constraining LRC leadership development. And lastly, the study surfaced the possible ways on how LRC leadership could be strengthened and promoted in the school.

The study has been driven by the following research questions:

1. What is the current understanding of learner leadership in the school?
2. How is learner leadership practiced and implemented by the LRC members in the school?
3. What are the conditions that promoted and/or constrained the Learner Representative Council's leadership development in the school?
4. What needs to be done to strengthen the promotion of the Learner Representative Council's leadership development in the school?

In this chapter, the themes emerged from the data are discussed in the following order: A conceptual understanding of learner leadership, the practice of LRC leadership in terms of zones as emerged and framed from the data, the enabling conditions for LRC leadership, the surfaced systemic contradictions (secondary) and challenges faced by LRC members and lastly, what are the possible ways that LRC leadership can be enhanced in the school as suggested by the research participants. I now move on to the discussion.

5.2 A conceptual understanding of learner leadership in the school

5.2.1 Learner leadership as formal leadership positions

As presented in the previous chapter (see Section 4.1.1) the data revealed that the concept of learner leadership was associated with formal leadership positions, particularly for the learners who served on the Learner Representative Council in the school. The participants' understanding is in line with Harris and Lambert (2003) who argue that "leadership in schools still tends to equate with position, or authority, you have to be a recognised leader within the organisation" (p. 3). The LRC members saw themselves as leaders because of their formal position of leading and guiding other learners in the school. In terms of leadership theories, this implies that the concept of learner leadership was understood from a traditional perspective which puts faith and pride in the person in a leadership position. Most of the literature on leadership (Spillane et al., 2004; Woods, 2005; Spillane, 2006; Gronn, 2008; Harris & Townsend, 2007; Hall et al., 2013) indicates that traditional forms of leadership attach leadership chiefly to those in formal leadership positions, where leadership is only believed to be practiced and exercised by a single individual, whom Timperley (2005) and Gronn (2008) refer to as *heroic leaders*. While the concept of learner leadership was understood from a formal leadership point of view, Woods (2005) however argues that formal leadership positions are too hierarchical and put too much dependence and reliance on a dominant leader. In this study, this suggested that the LRC members were the only learners with the potential to lead and guide other learners in the school and this is what Gronn (2000) describes as "leader-follower and leadership-followership" (p. 318).

In contrast to traditional views of leadership which sees leadership practiced solely within formal leadership positions, *distributed leadership theory* however argues that leadership practice is more than an individual's position. This literally means that leadership does not have ownership, it does not reside within any individual (Spillane, 2006). Harris (2004) argues that distributed leadership "concentrates on engaging expertise wherever it exists within the organisation rather than seeking this only through formal position or role" (p. 13). This is in line with Gronn (2000) who best puts it that "leadership is not something that can be done to others, but is rather an emergent property" (p. 324). A distributed perspective sees leadership as a social relation which involves the "interaction of leaders, followers and their situation in the execution of tasks" (Spillane et al., 2004,

p. 10). To contextualise this notion of distributed leadership to my research findings, my respondents did not appear to have any understanding of distributed leadership and this naturally meant that there was no reciprocal interdependencies between LRC members and their fellow learners whom they led and guided in the school. If the participants understood a notion of distributed leadership, they would not have defined the concept of learner leadership from a hierarchical leadership perspective. They would have incorporated the elements of distributed leadership in their definitions. According to Spillane (2006), leadership is a system of interactions whereby a leader influences and in turn is influenced by the followers. This suggests that the LRC members can influence and be influenced by fellow learners in the school. Through interaction, the LRC members and the learners would share skills and knowledge, because everyone would apply useful and/or different skills and knowledge to situations (Spillane et al., 2004). This is what Harris and Lambert (2003) term a “reciprocal and dynamic relationship” (p. xvii).

Additionally, the findings suggest that learner leadership was perceived to exist only in the LRC, the legal leadership body for the learners in the school. However, literature argues that learner leadership is more than the Learner Representative Council. Whitehead (2009) and Grant (2015) argue that learner leadership can also be expanded in the school through the establishment of learner leadership clubs, which can form part of the extra-curricular activities in the school. Grant (2015) reviewed two larger research projects conducted by the Bachelor of Education Honours (ELM) students, whereby they explored learner leadership in schools in South Africa and Namibia. The findings revealed that learner leadership clubs have a potential to develop leadership among all the learners across the school. In conclusion, this would mean that learner leadership can not only be equated or resonate with LRC members who hold informal positions of leading other learners in the school; learner leadership can also mean other forms of leadership in the school. I however acknowledge the understanding of the participants, because that it is how learner leadership was experienced and practiced in the school.

5.2.2 Learner leadership: the voice of learners in the school

Referring to Section 4.2.3 in Chapter Four, it was evident that the concept of learner leadership was understood in a more democratic way. Learner leadership was perceived as learner participation and voice in the decision-making process, chiefly by the LRC members who were in positions of serving on the School Board and accorded the opportunity to attend and participate in parents' school meetings. The findings revealed that the LRC members spoke on behalf of other learners, and this could mean that this was the only existing opportunity for the learners' voice to be heard in the school. According to learner leadership literature, learner participation "encompass all the aspects of school and decision-making where learners contribute, informally through individual negotiation and formally through purposely created structures and mechanism" (Bessong et al., 2016, p. 416). For Phaswana (2010), learner participation refers to "adults working with learners to develop ways of ensuring their views are heard and valued" (p. 106). Learner voice entails many ways in which learners actively participate in the school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers (Fielding, 2001; Mitra & Gross, 2009).

In terms of these views, learner participation and voice were not broadly present in the school since it was only confined to the LRC. Nevertheless, Flutter (2006) and Mitra and Gross (2009) suggest that there are many opportunities/conditions where learners can participate and make their voice heard in the school. These opportunities may include the initiation of learner leadership clubs such as HIV/AIDS, environmental awareness and English proficiency clubs. Through learner leadership clubs and other initiative reforms, learners are able to develop their voice as well as their leadership (see for example Fielding, 2006; Flutter, 2006; Mitra, 2006; Mitra & Gross, 2009; Grant, 2015; Grant & Nekondo, 2016). Furthermore, it is noted that when learners are given opportunity to participate, they tend to be "creative and develop life skills such as problem solving, team working, communication, negotiation and citizenship, all of which engender self-belief and confidence" (Flutter, 2006, p. 188).

While the Learner Representative Council was viewed as the only channel for learner voice in the school, it is noteworthy that the learners were at least given an opportunity to participate in a democratic schooling system (Shuttle, 2007; Weger & Nowak, 2012). Ideally, learner participation and voice are practiced in a truly democratic school where learners can make informed decisions

and actively participate in the decision-making. Thus, opportunities for learners to participate and speak is “ethical in nature and its purpose is to promote the core value of social justice” (Grant, 2015, p. 95), which Fraser (2008) terms “parity of participation” which means the participation of all on a par with others (p. 3). To contextualise this, the LRC members could sit together and collaborate with their elders (teachers and parents) when decisions are made related to the issues that are important to the school and to the learners. This contemporary idea of including learners in the decision-making process, fundamentally challenges the traditional views about learner leadership which overlooks and marginalises learners as valuable resources in the school structure (see for example Smyth, 2006; Thomson & Gunter, 2006; Mabovula, 2009; Kennedy & Datnow, 2011; Sonn et al., 2011). This is just the tip of the iceberg of learner participation and voice; more robust evidence of voice is yet to come in the remainder of this chapter.

Next, I discuss how leadership was equated with management, through the definition of learner leadership.

5.2.3 Conflating leadership and management

According to the data presented in Chapter Four (see Section 4.1.3), leadership was equated with management. The findings showed that learner leadership was understood as an instance of power and control, whereby the LRC members possessed the power to control other learners in the school. According to Gronn (2000) power means, “the exercise of structural authority” (p. 322). Gronn (2000) further states that power is exercised in the military, where a general takes charge. This simply means, if the notion of learner leadership is about the power to control other learners, generally, a school can be compared to a military camp. Comparably, a study conducted by Nongubo (2004) revealed that it is surprising that a concept of power which relates to warfare is being used in schools. In short, the respondents did not distinguish between leadership and management. This is because leadership and management constitute two sides of the same coin and are often used interchangeably (Grant, 2012). However, literature on Educational Leadership and Management indicates that the differences between the two referred concepts have been made. For example, Earley and Weindling (2004), Spillane et al. (2004), Bush and Middlewood (2005), Bush (2007), Northouse (2007), Christie (2010) and Nikodemus (2014) put it that leadership is an instance of influencing others’ actions in achieving desirable ends. Management on the other hand

is about maintaining efficiently and effectively current organisational arrangements. Fitz (1999), Northouse (2007) and van der Westhuizen (2014) posit that control is a management task aimed at ensuring that all the planned goals and objectives are attained. Van der Westhuizen (2014) further argues that control “originates because there is an authority-respect relationship between a leader as a person in authority and the subordinate person” (p. 232). From this I deduced that the LRC members were in authority and were seen to be superior to other learners. Reasoning from a managerial perspective, “leaders are superior to followers, followers depend on leaders” (Gronn, 2000, p. 320), and this could be one of the reasons why the concept of learner leadership was conflated with management.

Additionally, literature on school leadership (Harris & Lambert, 2003; Spillane et al., 2004; Hatcher, 2005) argue that schools have a typical structure of authority which is underpinned or informed by policy. This suggests that school leadership is locked predominantly into management structures which necessitate responsible control. Thus, I argue that the reason for the participants conflating leadership and management resulted from the leadership orientation of the school which I tend to believe was more managerial. The logic of my argument does not mean that management is not important, but my point is that leadership cannot be imposed on others. This is in line with Harris and Lambert (2003, p. xvii) and Hatcher (2005, p. 255) who contend that leadership should be “bestowed, denoted wilfully by those who are to be led”. On the other hand, there is a need for schools to shift away from a leadership paradigm based on power and control (Hatcher, 2005) and the only solution is distributed leadership which is about flexibility and metabolisms and not structures (Harris & Lambert, 2003).

5.2.4 Building leadership capacity

The concept of learner leadership was also understood as building leadership capacity, particularly on pedagogy. Generally, capacity building refers to “creating the experiences and opportunities for people to learn how to do certain things” (Harris & Lambert, 2003). In the context of learner leadership, building leadership capacity could mean the creation of space and opportunities for learner leadership in schools. In line with the participants understanding, learner participation in instruction is one of the spaces and opportunities for learner leadership development. This notion of engaging learners in pedagogy is supported by many writers (e.g. Shor, 1996; Flutter, 2006;

Fielding, 2006; Mitra & Gross, 2009; Zyngier, 2012) who explain that when learners are involved in pedagogy, teachers can listen to the voice of the learners on how they learn and what they need. In fact, this challenges the traditional teaching and learning pedagogy where the best teacher captures it all while learners listen and conform (Collinson, 2007). Additionally, Baroutsis et al., (2016) argue that “if learning is a core activity of schooling, then being able to make informed choices about learning activities is an important aspect of learner voice” (p. 449). The practical involvement of the learners in the process of teaching and learning is unpacked further in Section 5.2.

Even though the findings indicated that the concept of learner leadership was about capacity building, the data did not make it clear who was responsible for learner leadership capacity building and what the most propitious conditions for learner participation were. Harris and Lambert (2003) posit that capacity building cannot take place in hierarchical structures designed for stability and efficiency. Thus, distributed leadership which involves the ability to empower and influence others is at the core of capacity building (Harris, 2004; Timperley, 2005; Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Camburn, & Pareja, 2007). If building leadership capacity requires distributing leadership, then it is the role of the principal to make sure that learner leadership is embraced in the school. Spillane, (2006), Harris (2011), Kelley and Dikkers, (2016) indicate that without the support of the principal, distributed leadership is unlikely to flourish in a school. Therefore, learner leadership capacity building can only be achieved when the school principal provides a wide range of leadership opportunities where learners can participate and take the lead. Additionally, though sounding contradictory, Harris and Lambert (2003) state that “teachers must take the major responsibility for building leadership capacity in schools since they represent the largest and most stable group of adults, however the role of the principal is more important than ever” (p. 36). Furthermore, Uushona (2012) argues that building learner leadership capacity requires skillful involvement; this suggests that it is again the role of the principal to make sure that there are skillful learner leaders who understand the full scope of learner leadership development opportunities in the school. To conclude this section, Harris and Lambert (2003) argue that a school is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm, including the learners.

Having discussed the conceptual understanding of learner leadership, I discuss how leadership was practised and implemented by the LRC members in the school in the next section.

5.3 The practice and implementation of LRC leadership in the school

As presented earlier in Chapter Four, the raw data indicated that the LRC members executed countless leadership roles and perhaps management roles in the school, though this will be discussed later in this section. After assessing the findings on the roles of the LRC members in Chapter Four, I generally positioned it in an analytical framework, relating it to Mitra and Gross' (2009) pyramid of student voice, as illustrated in Section 2.5.4 of Chapter Two. A learner leadership model is thus illustrated below.

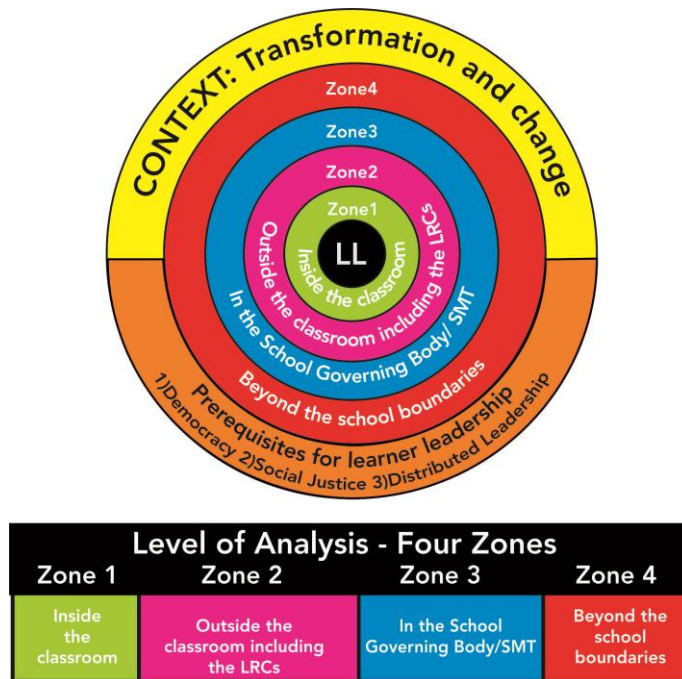


Figure 5.1: A new learner leadership model (adapted from Grant's teacher leadership model, 2006)

5.3.1 Zone one: The LRC leadership practice inside the classroom

It was a surprise that the LRC members were involved in roles inside the classroom which I believe should have been executed by the class monitors. As discussed in Section 5.1.3, learner leadership

was referred to as the power to control other learners in the school. This section discusses how the LRC members exercised control inside the classroom and how they policed teachers. Mention has already been made of the fact (in Section 5.1.3) that control constitutes a management task aimed at making sure that the planned and organised activities are achieved (Northouse, 2007; van der Westhuizen, 2014). The findings highlighted that the LRC members were involved in management tasks such as control and supervision. The LRC members maintained order and discipline in the classrooms when teachers did not turn up for lessons. The findings further indicated that the LRC members were allocated different classrooms to control and supervise learners during the study sessions. Lastly, the data established that the LRC members controlled and monitored the cleaning of classrooms. All the above tasks reflect the roles of a manager rather than of a leader. Regarding this notion of control and supervision, the two studies conducted by Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) and Uushona (2012) reveal the same. Here I am not saying that the exercise of control by the LRC members is a negative action; on the contrary. It is only not a sign of leadership. According to Christie (2010), those who are in structural positions are bound by the goal and primary task of the organisation. In this case, the LRC members were in the structure of the school and they were accountable for the outcome of learning in the school. Thus, they took responsible control of other learners. This is what Bell terms “relay devices that link government mentalities and policies” (Angus, 2006, p. 377).

The notion of a *relay device* is interesting and worth pursuing. The regulations made under the Education Act (Namibia. Education Act No. 16 of 2001) instructs the LRC members to have power and authority over other learners and to maintain order and discipline in the school, including inside the classroom (Harris & Lambert, 2003; Spillane et al., 2004; Hatcher, 2005). Another line of reasoning draws from the evolution of educational leadership and management. It is argued that the discourse of educational leadership and management has been drawn and transferred from business and industry and directly influences schools to operate like businesses (Bush, 1999; Fitz, 1999; Christie, 2010). However, leadership is the key fact underpinning school success (Earley & Weindling, 2004). On the other hand, Strydom (2017) argues that the LRC members may execute managerial tasks thinking that they are leadership tasks. Therefore, I tend to believe that these LRC members were not aware that control and supervision was not primarily a leadership task.

Besides control and supervision, the LRC members were also policing teachers. The findings indicated that the LRC members were tasked with the responsibility of writing down the names of the teachers who failed to attend their lessons and to make sure that teachers were coming to class on time and giving out enough activities. This helped to involve learners in their learning and is closely related to a discussion in Section 5.1.4, that the concept of learner leadership was understood as the involvement of learners in pedagogy. However, this is quite different. The impetus of involving learners in pedagogy means teaching and learning together. According to Freire, as cited in Collinson (2007), the “teacher is no longer merely the-one-who teaches, but one who is taught in dialogue with learners, who in their turn while being taught also teach” (p. 4). This simply means a collaboration of teachers with learners, whereby teachers ask for learners’ opinions on how they feel about their learning, how they learn and about their needs and then take it on in their practice. These findings simply highlighted that the LRC members were used to reporting wrongdoings rather than correcting them and developing leadership capacity. The practice of using the LRC members to police teachers as if to support the personalisation of learning, can bring about tension between teachers and learners (Forest, Lawnton, Adams, & Swain, 2007).

Inside the classrooms, the LRC members, and perhaps class monitors, are supposed to focus more on pedagogy, whereby they can engage in dialogues with fellow learners to solicit information about how they are experiencing learning and then provide teachers with feedback (Fielding, 2006; Flutter, 2006). For example, a study conducted by Mitra (2006) showed that learners were experts on their classroom experiences and provided teachers with feedback on pedagogy. Similarly, Strydom (2017) reported that the LRC members listened to the complaints from their classmates about the inept way in which they were being taught but the sad part was, they were not asked to give their opinions on what was best for them. Instead, the school governing body decided for them.

Next, I discuss the roles played by the LRC members outside the classroom (zone two). The zone two discussion is entirely based on Section 4.2.1 of Chapter Four.

5.3.2 Zone two: Outside the classroom

In this zone, the LRC members were more actively involved in genuine leadership and collaborated with teachers and the school community at large. However, this does not mean that they did not execute managerial tasks; it is just that managerial tasks were minimal. What is interesting is that the voice of the learners and of the LRC members were heard in this zone.

To begin with, there are the leadership roles carried out by the LRC members. The findings revealed that the LRC members carried out leadership roles such as leading and making announcements during the school devotions, coordinating and motivating fellow learners, leading in dialogue with fellow learners and the school community to find possible solutions to the problems experienced by the learners, and lastly, coordinating of social events to raise money for the school development.

5.2.2.1 Leading and reporting during devotions

The data established that the LRC members took the lead in the morning school devotion. Conducting of school devotions is part of the public space where learners can take the lead and convey information (Fielding, 2006). According to the findings, the LRC members used the morning devotion platform to address other learners and teachers on events such as sports, which took place in the school and in the region. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the LRC members serving on the School Board used the morning devotion space to report back to the learners regarding some of the issues discussed in the School Board meetings. According to Nongubo (2004), it is of paramount important for LRC members to report back to other learners because some issues affect them in one way or the other. This was extraordinary, since many studies on LRC leadership (Nongubo, 2004; Shekupakela-Nelulu, 2008; Mncube, 2008; Phaswana, 2010; Uushona, 2012; Strydom, 2017) show that LRC members were not given opportunities to lead and speak. A study by Uushona (2012) indicated that the LRC members used to sing a regional inspirational song during devotions, simply doing their set duties instead of leading. Interestingly also, was that the teachers did not speak on behalf of the LRC members, challenging Fielding (2001) and Grant (2015), who argue that schools tend to teach learners to be passive participators in democracy, rather than leaders; often teachers speak on behalf of learners.

The findings provided clear evidence that the LRC members were not only given opportunities to lead but also a space for their voice to be heard. I argue that this was also a good opportunity to develop leadership capacity for the LRC members in the school. Hence, the LRC members proved that learners can also lead, while teachers follow. The findings suggested that distributed leadership was promoted because the LRC members acted as leaders, while teachers often followed when the learners led the devotions. The findings also implied that there was good collaboration between the teachers and the LRC members regarding the coordination of the school devotions, since both groups were involved and reciprocated.

5.2.2.2 Coordinating motivational programmes that matter to learners

The LRC members planned and coordinated the motivational programmes for other learners in the school. The findings highlighted that the LRC members used to invite influential and successful people to come and motivate learners. The findings further indicated that there were some instances where the LRC members motivated fellow learners. This is in line with Khanare and de Lange (2017), who argue that learners are active human beings and should be given fair chances to plan and coordinate programmes. However, it is unusual for learners to motivate and inspire other learners (see for example, Uushona 2012; Strydom, 2017). While it is evident that the LRC members were at the forefront of the motivational programmes in the school, I argue that these LRC members were passionate and had the compassion to serve other learners by creating enabling conditions which helped other learners to reach their full potential. In support, Nikodemus (2014) argues that we need leaders who sincerely care about the plight of others and who can make a difference in the lives of people in their surroundings.

Furthermore, the findings highlighted that the LRC members coordinated other programmes related to the interests of the learners. For example, the data revealed that a commemoration of An African Child Day was coordinated by the LRC members. This suggested that the LRC members were offered a space to develop their leadership skills, more especially on how to interact with other learners. By so doing, the LRC members learnt how to communicate and work with fellow learners (Strydom, 2017). Additionally, the findings suggested that there was a healthy relationship between the LRC members and fellow learners. In support, Grant (2015) argues that relationships matter most in schools because if relationships are working, programmes can be implemented

successfully. The findings suggested that the school had confidence and a high level of trust in the learners and this is clearly evident as the LRC members pioneered all learner related programmes in the school. This is a good sign of leadership capacity building, since the LRC members were fully in charge and not driven by teachers on what to do.

5.2.2.3 The LRC members as powerful instruments for mediation and negotiation

The findings revealed that the LRC members led the dialogue between fellow learners and other members (teachers, hostel superintendent & cooks/kitchen staff). The findings mainly indicated that the LRC members used to hold meetings with other learners to solicit the complaints experienced in the school. The LRC members then engaged in dialogue with the concerned group in an attempt to find possible solutions. For example, the data indicated that some of the complaints gathered and solved via the LRC members in the school, included lack of hygiene in the kitchen and dining hall and the need for learners to watch the news. The findings showed a significant feature of democratic schooling where learners are given opportunities to speak and be heard (see Shuttle, 2007), unlike Carr and Williams (2009), who report that the LRC members “were not accountable to the learners whom they were supposed to be representing” (p. 74). Another example is when Nongubo (2004) reports that learners were not offered chances to voice their grievances and this ended in violence and lead to the involvement of police. This is a manifestation of Fielding’s (2001) warning that it is dangerous to ignore the voice of learners, because they will be frustrated and tend to be violent. However, for this study, findings were quite convincing that efforts had been made to listen to the complaints of the learners and that their demands were acted upon.

Additionally, the findings revealed that the LRC members used to organise joint meetings for all the school stakeholders to come together and talk face-to-face with the learners. From this we get a good picture of healthy communication between learners and other stakeholders in the school, since they could all come together and discuss issues concerning learners. In support, Fielding (2006) argues that “when young people lead dialogue with peers and with staff, this helps the school members to live well together” (p. 312). This reflects what Mabovula (2009) calls a good “web of social relations” (p. 223).

To sum up, the findings showed that learners possessed the negotiation skills and ability to collaborate with adults to resolve the problems amicably. In terms of leadership theories, the findings strongly suggested distributed leadership, as the evidence highlighted the interactions of multiple leaders working together to hear and solve problems faced by the learners in the school.

5.2.2.4 Coordinating social activities to raise funds for school improvement

The LRC members capitalised on social activities to raise funds for school improvement. The findings revealed that the LRC members hosted sports activities and various social events with the purpose of collecting funds to buy a school bus. Sports and social activities are one of the functions of the LRC members in schools (see the regulations made under the Education Act No. 16 of 2001). Furthermore, while Harris and Lambert (2003) argue that learners are neglected in school improvement, the findings of this study provided emerging evidence that learners have huge potential to contribute to school improvement. In line with the findings, Carr and Williams (2009) in their studies of representatives of learners in Western Cape schools report that the LRC members were involved in fundraising activities and organised various recreational activities in support to beautify the school buildings and grounds. Similarly, Flutter (2006) also reports that learners in some schools in UK were architectures of change by seeing a need for school buildings to be redesigned and improved. Flutter (2006) further reports on the successful outcome on a project of improving school buildings by learners (see also, Grant & Nekondo, 2016). In like manner, the LRC members were also concerned about the school not having a school bus thus, they made use of social and sports activities to raise money to contribute to the development and improvement of the school. This process not only benefitted the school but as Flutter (2006) argues “learners discover creative and life skills such as problem-solving, teamworking, communication, negotiation and citizenship, all which engender self-belief and confidence” (p. 188).

Having discussed the leadership tasks which, the LRC members executed outside the classroom, I now move on to discuss the management tasks carried out by the LRC members outside the classroom.

The management tasks executed by the LRC members outside the classroom included maintaining of discipline, hostel and kitchen supervision, as well as organising of cleaning campaigns. Following is a discussion on the above.

5.2.2.5 The LRC members as tools for maintaining order and discipline in the school

As inside the classroom (see Section 5.2.1) the LRC members controlled other learners outside the classroom. According to the findings in Section 4.2.1, the LRC members ensured that learners strictly adhered to the set of school rules. The findings highlighted that the correct wearing of the school uniform was the aspect being mostly controlled. It seems like the notion of the LRC members controlling other learners is a common managerial task in schools, because even Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008), Uushona (2012) and Strydom (2017) report the same findings.

5.2.2.6 Hostel and dining hall supervision

As discussed in Section 5.2.1, the LRC members supervised other learners during study sessions, at hostel dormitories and at the dining hall. According to the findings, (see Section 4.2.1) the LRC members were tasked to keep the hostel keys and ensure that they open and lock up the hostel. The findings also revealed that the LRC members patrolled the hostel to see if there were any learners who was feeling sick and then report it to the hostel superintendent. In contrast to hostel supervision by the LRC members, *The Hostel Administrative Guide for Government School Hostels* (Namibia. MBESC, 2004) stipulates that hostel supervision should be carried out by the appointed teachers and matrons. To come back to the findings, it seemed as if teachers and the matron gave away their formal responsibility to LRC members or perhaps they delegated as stipulated in the policy. The regulations made under the Education Act (Namibia. Education Act No. 16 of 2001) highlight that the LRC members can perform any other reasonable tasks assigned by the principal. So, with this in mind, I argue that there may be an element of management coercion in the allocation of hostel supervision to the LRC (see Van der Westhuizen, 2014).

Moreover, the findings indicated that the LRC members supervised at the dining hall by checking if other learners were wearing suitable and acceptable clothes and shoes for the dining hall. Furthermore, the findings also highlighted that the LRC members served food since there were not enough cooks to serve.

Relating the above findings to distributed leadership as a conceptual framework for this study, there is a mismatch between the two, since distributed leadership does not promote delegation of tasks (Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2011). Instead, distributed leadership encourages equal execution of

tasks by all involved individuals. In this case, the formal appointed hostel and kitchen cooks could equally collaborate with the LRC members, rather than delegating.

5.2.2.7 Cleaning campaigns to protect the health and welfare of learners

School cleaning campaigns were organised and coordinated by the LRC members as mandated by the policy (see the regulations made under the Education Act No. 16 of 2001). The findings indicated that the purpose of the cleaning campaigns was to ensure that the school environment was clean and conducive for the health and wellbeing of the learners in the school. In fact, the LRC members were just implementing the educational policy.

Having discussed the leadership and management roles carried out by LRC members outside the classroom, in the next section, I discuss the roles which the LRC members carried out in zone three: in the School Board and School Management Team. First, I discuss the role played by the LRC members in the School Management Team. Thereafter, I will focus on the School Board.

5.3.3 Zone three: In the School Management Team and the School Board

5.3.3.1 In School Management Team meetings

According to the data presented in Section 4.2.3, the LRC members were not compelled to attend the School Management Team meetings as there was no any legal policy which entitled them to. However, for some schools, internal arrangements are made for the LRC members to attend the SMT meetings. Here I am not arguing that the LRC members should be part of the SMT, since each school has autonomy to make their own arrangements. Even so, the findings revealed a positive relationship between the LRC members and the SMT. The findings indicated that whenever the LRC members planned to initiate any activities, they were always in consultation with the SMT; for example, when the findings revealed that the two bodies (the LRC & SMT) used to come together to discuss the proposed activities for the LRC members. The findings painted a good picture by revealing that all the 31 proposed activities for the 2016-2017 year plan, were approved by the SMT. In contrast, Steinmann (2013) reports that the SMT in his two case study schools used to turn down the proposals of the LRC members. What is outstanding from the findings is the reciprocal interdependence that shaped the leadership practice of the LRC members (see Spillane, 2006). The findings offered an impressive record that LRC programmes should reach

and be discussed by both the LRC members and the SMT. Unlike in Nongubo's study (2004), where the LRC programmes were kept under wraps and caught the SMT off-guard.

5.3.3.2 On the School Board

In this zone, the LRC members were fully engaged in leadership and collaborated with adults who served on the School Board. According to the findings (see Section 4.2.3) two learners from the LRC represented other learners in the School Board. Interestingly, the findings revealed that the two learners were not only attending the School Board meetings, but equally contributing their views and opinions just like any other members. This is exactly in line with the guide *Effective School Board Establishment and Maintaining* (Namibia. MoEAC, 2016) which states that "each member has the right to speak at the meeting and be listened to with respect" (p. 13). The findings also indicated that the learners were not only listened to, but their inputs were considered and implemented. For example, the data revealed that the learners proposed the idea that the school should buy a sound system, a change in the school uniform and that the LRC members should have t-shirts; all these ideas were implemented. This echoes with Cockburn (2006) who found that learners' voices are effective when they attend meetings, but are even more effective when they actively take part in shaping the agenda of the meetings concerned. Based on the above evidence, I argue that these learners were not a "stamp of approval" (Mabovula, 2009).

One of the significant features of the findings is the fact that the learners equally attended all the meetings and were not asked to excuse themselves from some of the meetings, such as disciplinary hearings of the teachers. This designates that learners were treated equally as partners as it was expressed that "*the only difference is age, but they equally contribute*" (see Section 4.2.3). This is however different from some learner leadership studies conducted in Namibian and in South African schools (see for example, Nongubo, 2004; Shekupakela-Nelulu, 2008; Mncube 2008; Carr & Williams, 2009; Mabovula, 2009; Phaswana, 2010; Uushona, 2012; Mncube & Harber, 2013; Steinmann, 2013; Bessong et al., 2016; Strydom, 2017) which highlight that learners were not represented in the School Governing Body or School Board and if represented, they were not seen as equal partners since they were asked to leave the meetings if there was a sensitive topic to be discussed. However, in this study, the findings indicated that learners were encouraged to participate as evident in this phrase: "*They tell us to be free and give our opinions*" (see Section

4.2.3). Even though the learners were encouraged to be free, the findings however revealed that they were a bit reluctant to contribute to the topic that discussed the disciplining of teachers as “*perhaps they felt insecure due to age or power relations*” (see Section 4.3.2). This will be unpacked in the constraints section. Still, it is worth mentioning that the LRC members were fully given the opportunity to deliberate and make decisions on the issues that affected their lives and the school. I believe through this participation, learners learnt to discuss issues with different people with varying perspectives.

To conclude this zone, the findings challenged the traditional views of leadership. Adults were not convinced that learners could participate in decision-making and adults were not ready to share the school space as equal decision-making partners with the LRC members. The findings also supported the views of distributed leadership which suggest that leadership does not only reside in the office of the principal, but is stretched over the teachers, parents and learners (Spillane, 2006). The findings credibly showed multiple groups of individuals in the execution of leadership tasks (Spillane et al., 2004). According to Mitra (2006), “by adding students to the ‘who’ of school decision-making, the concept broadens the scope of distributed leadership” (p. 315). Finally, the findings remind us that learners possess unique knowledge about their school that the teachers and parents cannot replicate, without this partnership (Mitra & Gross, 2009).

In the following section, I discuss the roles executed by the LRC members in the last zone (four).

5.3.4 Zone four: Beyond the school boundaries

The LRC members did not only execute the leadership roles within the school, but they also crossed the school boundaries. The findings (see Section 4.2.4) made known that the LRC members visited primary schools and motivated the learners. The findings also indicated that the LRC members planned to visit the media and motivate a wide range of learners in the country. As I mentioned earlier in zone one, these LRC members were very ambitious and selfless. This is in line with Rhodes and Brundrett (2009) who argue that leadership is a moral activity, so through the findings one can see the morals of these learners in reaching out to other learners and influencing them. In line with this, the studies by Mitra (2006), Carr and Williams (2009) and Strydom (2017) report that learners were involved in community outreach programmes. For

example, Strydom (2017) reports that the LRC members were involved in community projects where they raised funds for cat and dog food and they also gave flowers to the elderly at the old age home. In support of activities beyond the school, Fielding (2006), Thomson and Gunter (2006) argue that learners should be encouraged to make a difference in the school, neighbourhood and in the community.

Lastly, the LRC members were not only involved in motivational programmes outside the school; the findings stated that they used to deliver speeches at some events such as memorial services or funerals. This sounds emotionally taxing, but in the process learners learnt to communicate to a multitude of people in different situations.

The next section discusses the conditions which enabled LRC leadership in the school. The conditions were: leadership training, support from the School Management Team, support from the LRC liaison teacher and networking with other schools. I begin with leadership training for the LRC members.

5.4 The enabling conditions for the LRC leadership in the school

5.4.1 Leadership training for the LRC members

The findings revealed that (see Section 4.3.1) leadership training was the most important factor which supported LRC leadership development. The findings further stated that, the LRC members were trained on leadership at both regional and school level. According to van der Westhuizen (2014), “pupil leaders cannot simply be appointed and then left to their own device” (p. 364). This simply means that when the LRC members are trained they get the necessary leadership skills needed to execute their leadership roles in school functions and the community (Harris, 2002; Bessong et al., 2016). Similarly, it is noted that when the LRC members undergo leadership training, it helps them to develop their leadership skills which they can also use after leaving school and which they could also pass on to other aspiring learners (Mncube & Harber, 2013). While it was essential for the school to send its LRC members for leadership training, it is not always the case that LRC members are sent for leadership training. For example, studies by Nongubo (2004), Uushona (2012), Mncube and Harber (2013) indicate that there were no LRC leadership training

or workshops arranged. Relating positively, Shekupakela-Nelulu's (2008) findings report that one school among his three case study schools, sent the LRC members for leadership training. For Strydom (2017), only the LRC liaison teacher received training on behalf of the LRC members. As such, I argue that the school took a positive step to ensure that the LRC members were trained and capacitated on leadership.

The following section focuses on support from the School Management Team.

5.4.2 Support from the School Management Team

As discussed earlier (see Section 5.2.3) the LRC members had a good relationship and communication with the LRC members. The fact that the SMT used to discuss and approve most if not all the activities of the LRC members, shows that they were interested in promoting and supporting the LRC leadership in the school. In addition to the support, the findings highlighted that the SMT used encouraged and motivated the LRC members to diligently carry out their roles in and beyond the school. The other mark of support was the fact that on Tuesdays, the LRC members used to meet with the school principal to discuss issues concerning their leadership and the school in general. This was evident when the LRC members said that *“without the principal none of the tasks would have been carried out”* (see Section 4.4.2). In support, principals are viewed as important figures who have the responsibility of promoting maximum learner leadership development in schools (see Harris & Lambert, 2003; Mncube & Harber, 2013). The findings from other LRC leadership studies (Nongubo, 2004; Carr & Williams, 2009; Uushona, 2013; Strydom, 2017) indicate a negative level of support by the SMT. For example, Strydom (2017) reports that the LRC members could not openly talk to the principal. In contrast, the findings from my study showed that the LRC members were free and open to talk to the SMT which included the principal. While Phaswana (2010) indicates that the SMT in his study played delaying tactics when approving the proposals of the LRC members, the above discussion reflects that the SMT embraced the notion of LRC leadership in the case study school.

5.4.3 Support from the LRC liaison teacher

Findings (see Section 4.3.3) indicate that there was a teacher devoted to the LRC members. The findings positively established that the liaison teacher supported the LRC members in various ways

such as giving them clear guidance about their roles, motivating them and accompanying them to leadership training. A key evidence of support was when the LRC members expressed themselves by referring to the liaison teacher in this way: “*She is our mother*” (see Section 4.3.3) and the fact that she helped the LRC members to get their LRC t-shirts. The findings indeed reflected that the liaison teacher supported the LRC members and this also implied a good relationship. As Carr and Williams (2009) state that “a good relationship between the LRC liaison teacher and the LRC members is crucial if the LRC is to work effectively (p. 74). I believe it was a good exercise for the liaison teacher to orientate the LRC members on their roles and functions, as they may not be aware or have the knowledge and skills required for their roles (Baroutsis et al., 2016). Regarding this notion of support by the LRC liaison teacher, the literatures indicates that this was the case at most of the schools (see for example, Nongubo, 2004; Carr & Williams, 2009; Mabovula, 2009; Strydom, 2017).

5.4.4 Support from networking with LRC members of other schools

The data presented in Chapter Four, Section 4.4.4 indicates that the LRC members used to visit other secondary schools, mostly the performing ones, to learn and share LRC leadership practices. According to Harris (2002), “networking with other schools provide important opportunities to learn from each other “(p. 60). In line with Harris (2002) I conclude by expressing that it was a good initiative for the LRC members to partner with other schools and I believe this was a wonderful opportunity for them to learn various initiatives and effective leadership practices from other LRC members.

In the next section, I discuss the contradictions.

5.5 The surfaced systemic contradictions

As discussed in Chapter Two, I used CHAT to surface and analyse challenges faced by the LRC, by describing them as contradictions. The use of CHAT exposes the complexity of challenges as they all involve people who have histories and cultural norms, and since they are about relationships, tensions are always complex and therefore solutions will be complex. However, this study did not go the extent of resolving the surfaced systemic contradictions as per the principles

of CHAT. Nevertheless, the study managed to surface the possible suggestions on how LRC leadership could be strengthened and promoted in the school.

To remind the reader, in terms of CHAT, contradictions indicate tensions between or among different elements of the activity system. I wish to highlight that the study only managed to surface secondary contradictions, so no primary contradictions are going to be discussed in this section. The next diagram, Figure 5.2, shows the relationships within elements as applicable to this study, after which I discuss the secondary contradictions.

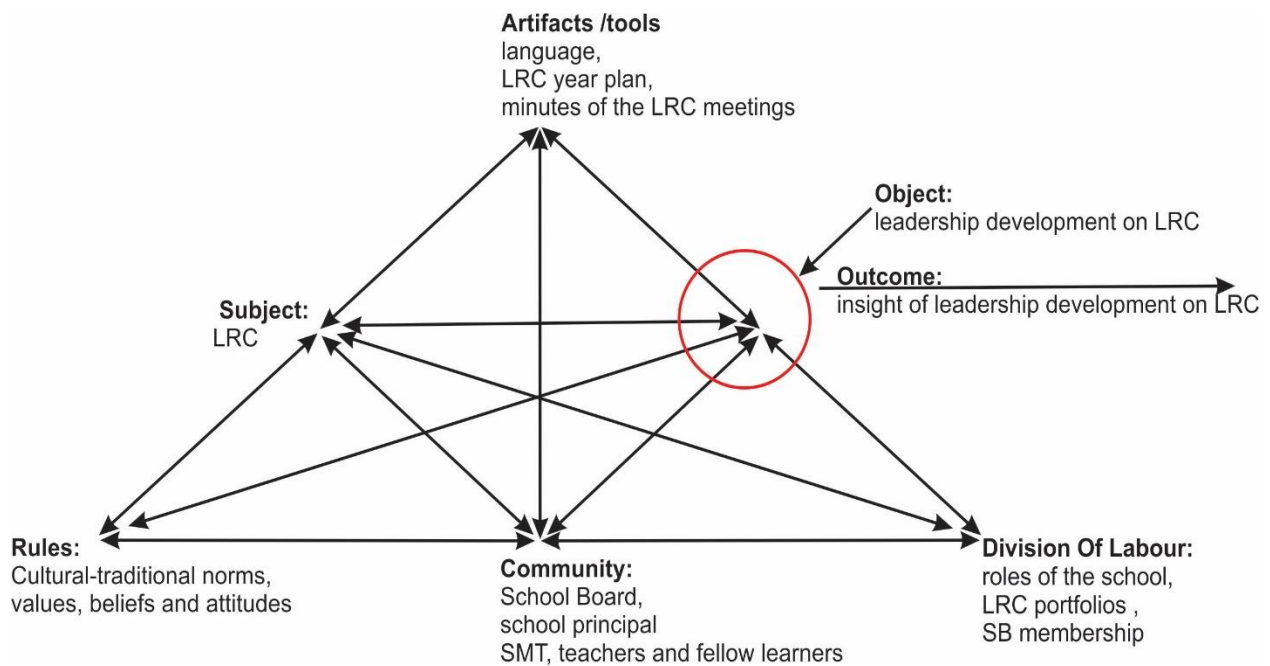


Figure 5.2: Activity system: Relationship within the elements (Adapted from Engeström, 1987)

5.5.1 Contradictions between the subject and community

There was a tension between the subjects (the LRC members) and learners as part of the community and it hindered the leadership development of the LRC members (object). The data presented in Chapter Four, Section 4.4.1, indicated that the other learners used to disrespect the LRC members by not obeying their instructions, as well as shouting and making a noise during the motivational programmes. Lack of respect from the learners was evident in their expressions such as “*Who are you to tell us that?*” and “*You are just a learner like us*” (see Section 4.4.1). The

findings also highlighted that learners felt that they were older than some of the LRC members, so they undermined their leadership capabilities. In line with CHAT, respect is deeply rooted in culture. Culturally, children are brought up to respect and obey the instructions of their elders, be it at home or in the wider community (Dawes & Donald, 1994; Mncube & Harber, 2013). Here I want to recognise the ecological background of the learners and context of the school. Since the case study school was a rural school and most of the learners were from the villages, those living in these rural areas still strongly respect their cultural norms and values. This suggests that learners' behaviour towards the LRC members was influenced by their cultural norms and values, because they have only been exposed to according respect to the senior members of the community, such as the traditional leaders and parents at homes (Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2010; Steinmann, 2013; Idang, 2015). This could also suggest that learners were not used to being given orders and instructions by other learners because traditionally, instructions should be given by the elders and not by children. According to van der Mescht (2008) "schools are open systems and it is in their very openness that social forces shape the cultures and structure of their organisational being" (p. 17). This simply means that learners brought their cultural norms and values to school, thus it was difficult for them to respect the instructions of their fellow learners (the LRC members) because it conflicted with their culture (see Bronfenbrenner, 1979). On this account, it was evident that the conservative traditions and environment affected the functioning of the LRC (see also, Carr & Williams, 2009).

The other potential cause of disrespect is the notion of traditional teacher-centered teaching methods. Traditionally, teachers used to tell learners what to do and learners were not allowed to say anything unless asked to repeat what had been said by the teacher (see the Learner Centered Education Policy, Namibia. MBEC, 1999). I argue that the traditional teaching methods have negatively influenced the learners' attitudes by only teaching them to listen and follow the instructions of the teachers, instead of developing in them the ability to speak up and listen to one another. I suggest that learners do not want to be instructed by fellow learners (the LRC members) because they expect the teachers to be a unilateral authority as is the cultural norm (Shor, 1996). It is for this reason that learners refused and retaliated by saying "*You are just learners like us*". If the same instruction was given by a teacher – such remarks would not be made.

Furthermore, the history of school leadership plays a part as traditionally, school leadership has been equated with the principal and learners have been absent from school leadership (Spillane, 2006). Thus, these learners were only exposed to the leadership of the school principal and to the instructions of the teachers in the classrooms. The current leadership practice (distributed leadership) which includes the learners in school leadership, is a relatively new ideology and it is for this reason that learners find it difficult to accept the instructions and orders from their fellow learners and as a result, this is viewed as disrespect. Here, what is apparent, is the fact that the lack of respect towards other learners (the LRC members) was due to the traditional belief which locates leadership within a single individual and therefore not necessarily the personal peculiarities of the learners.

The following section will focus on the contradictions between the subject and community (teachers).

5.5.2 Contradictions between the subject and the community

Another major tension was between the subjects and teachers who were part of the community. Teachers belittled and underestimated the worth of the LRC members in the school. The findings revealed that teachers did not value the LRC members as was expressed: “*Teachers viewed us as useless people*” (see Section 4.5.2). The data also revealed that teachers were apathetic about the activities of the LRC members as was evident in the following statement: “*Teachers are not cooperating with the LRC members and they feel that the LRC members should not be valued*” (see Section 4.5.2). The findings simply indicated that teachers did not accept the inclusion of LRC leadership, hence learners have been traditionally overlooked as valuable resources (Kennedy & Datnow, 2011). In fact, the real issue here was the power relations. According to Shor (1996), power problems are socially and historically constructed. In line with this, Mncube and Harber (2013) describe the African traditions as a phenomenon, where children do not engage in discussions and dialogue and only elders sit under a big tree and talk and agree. Here, I argue that the perception of the LRC members by teachers, was perpetuated by the cultural beliefs of the teachers, that children are just children, therefore they do not have the power to say anything in the school (Strydom, 2017). Furthermore, the new ideology of devolution of power to LRC members, could be a threat to teachers’ own power and authority, hence teachers have dominated

learners in schools (Fielding, 2001; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2016). Regarding the issue of feeling threatened, the findings revealed that teachers were not happy with the fact that the LRC members used to hold meetings with the school principal. In line with this, (Luke, Donohue, & Smith, 2006) argue that the emancipation and empowering of learners can cause conflict between teachers and learners, because the learners have the potential to upset the traditional status within schools such as not embracing learner voice (see also, Mitra & Gross, 2009; McMahon & Portelli, 2012; Smyth, 2012).

Equally important, is the issue of democracy. Historically, undemocratic relations dominated education and traditional schooling (see Pomuti, 2012; Smyth, 2012). According to Smyth (2012) learners were treated in “detached and hierarchical ways that distance them from relational intimacy and were viewed as defective categories in need of technical remediation” (p. 79). This generally meant that learners were not valued and had no power in schools. This issue of not respecting and valuing learners by teachers, is rooted in traditional undemocratic pedagogy which placed power and authority in the teachers (see Shor, 1996; Collinson, 2007). While it is self-evident that teachers have dominated by being the holders of power, it is important to note that schools are now turning into democratic institutions which promote democratic leadership and social justice that involves learner leadership. Therefore, the new practices of democracy and social justice challenged the teachers to distribute power and authority to the learners, particularly the LRC members in the case study school. However, teachers may consider this new democracy practice as a form of disempowerment and they may want to maintain the traditional status quo. This is line with Knott-Craig (2017) who argues that many teachers are products of authoritarian homes, as well as authoritarian schools. I thus argue that such traditional mentality has influenced teachers from taking part in the activities initiated by the LRC members. In support of this, Bessong et al. (2012) argue that learners are finding it difficult to challenge the traditional institutionalised procedures and power relations and as such, there is a lack of LRC support and recognition by teachers (see also, Uushona, 2012; Strydom, 2017). However, Shuttle (2007) emphasises that “a good interpersonal relationship between teachers and learners can dissolve barriers of authority, hierarchy or separateness and help forge truly collaborative partnerships” (p. 44). This suggests that teachers need to work together with the learners and support them. However, it may take time

to build a climate in which both teachers and learners feel comfortable working together (Harris, 2002) because true democracy is a slow process (Baroutsis et al., 2016).

The following section will focus on the contradictions between the object and community.

5.5.3 Contradictions between the object and the community

There was a tension between the object and the community. The findings revealed that the LRC members were overloaded with tasks and yet they were still expected to study (see Section 4.5.4). This implied there was tension between the work the LRC members carried out in that role, and their studies as learners at the school. This was clearly evident as it was expressed that *“the LRC members don’t 100% attend to their school work because of too many roles and responsibilities and meetings, and parents did not send their children to come and become LRC members, but to study”*. This suggested that there was poor time-management and no well thought out timetable with regards to their LRC roles and meetings that were held (see Uushona, 2012; Steinmann, 2013). I do not really intend to discuss the study habits of the LRC members, but want to discuss why there was a tension between the object and community. According to the findings discussed in zone two, it was the culture and practice of the school for the LRC members to serve at the dining hall: *“When I joined the LRC last year, I found the former LRC members serving at the dining hall”*. As discussed earlier in zone two, the LRC members were doing double work; they performed their own roles as stipulated in the policy and at the same time performed the role of the cook, as well as the matron as they also supervised at the hostel. This also suggested that the school somehow lacked knowledge about what the real roles of the LRC members were, or perhaps it was caused by the culture where children should obey the instructions of their parents without any objections. I also acknowledge that traditionally, children are born to assist their parents or elders with their work, but this does not mean that children should be slaves. Irrespective, I argue that the practice of serving at the dining hall and hostel supervision was contrary with the roles of the LRC members, as per the regulations made under the Education Act (Namibia. Education Act No. 16 of 2001).

Next, I focus on the contradiction between the subject and community.

5.5.4 Contradiction between the subject and the community

There was a contradiction between the subject and the community. The findings revealed that the LRC members were operating without a room in which they could meet for their LRC meetings (see Section 4.5.5). It was clearly evident that the LRC members were not offered a room by the school because they were just children: “*Sometimes you want to give these LRCs a room, but it is very difficult because they are just children*” (see Section 4.5.5). This reflected the image of culture where children are not respected, therefore they were denied the privilege of being given a room where they could discuss the issues concerning their leadership. I am not surprised that all the LRC files and minute’s book (artefacts) were kept by the LRC liaison teacher, because there was no LRC room where they could store these items. This gave the impression that the LRC members held their meetings in an open space. Unfortunately, during my observations, I never saw the LRC meeting on their own, apart from the Tuesday meetings with the principal.

5.5.5 Lack of teamwork in the LRC

Lack of team work among the LRC members cannot be a systemic contradiction, but a challenge. The findings revealed that the LRC members used to disagree and could hardly reach conclusions during their meetings due to their differing opinions (see Section 4.5.3). It is normal for people to have different opinions since everyone is different and come from different environments with different experiences (Strydom, 2017). However, the disagreements and differences which existed between the LRC members are worth mentioning because they might have hindered the LRC members in performing their roles effectively and efficiently.

The findings revealed that some of the LRC members were not attending the meetings and it was difficult for decisions to be taken since they did not reach a quorum (see the regulations made under the Education Act No. 16 of 2001). The findings further revealed that the LRC members were not co-operating as it was expressed: “*We don’t like to work together*” (see Section 4.5.3) and some of the members would not even talk to each other. It is clear from the findings that there was no team-work among the LRC members and I acknowledge that without unity they would not be able to reach their goal which was to execute leadership in the school. Regardless, Angus (2006) argues that leadership is “always difficult and always involves tensions and contradictions” (p. 372).

Having established a picture of the tensions among the LRC members, I want to discuss the possible root cause of the challenges being experienced. Having rigorously analysed the data, it was evident that the LRC members were operating without a documented code of conduct (artefact), as a guideline containing values to represent and prescribed good conduct for the LRC members (Steinmann, 2013). This tells us that the leadership of learners has been neglected, since there should not have been a functioning body (the LRC) without the code of conduct that regulates the behaviour of the members or stakeholders. Here I again refer to the Education Act (Namibia. Act No. 16 of 2001), as it makes provision for including learners in the school leadership structure and outlines the functions and powers of the LRC members –yet, it does not make provision for a code of conduct for the LRC. This in turn can give birth to unethical behaviour among LRC members. However, if there was a code of conduct, then the LRC members would possibly not have experienced such challenges, as they would have been held accountable.

Apart from policy neglecting the leadership function of the LRC, the school has itself been in existence for over 40 years and yet has never considered coming up with its own internal code of conduct for the LRC. This gave the impression that the school has actually been without LRC members for those years. It can further be acknowledged that perhaps the LRC members found it difficult to cooperate with one another, as it is practically impossible for people to work together and carry out their roles effectively, without a code of conduct to regulate them. Thus, I agree with Uushona (2012) that the Ministry of Education should provide the national LRC a code of conduct. Finally, the findings implied that training on communication or a special talk was needed so that the LRC members could be taught how to work together and how to deal with conflict (see Carr & Williams, 2009; Steinmann, 2013; Strydom, 2017).

Having discussed the surfaced systemic secondary contradictions on the LRC activity system and challenges experienced by the LRC members, I will now discuss the surfaced suggestions on how to strengthen and promote LRC leadership development in the school.

5.6 Suggestions from research participants

There was a need for the LRC members to collaborate with the teachers. The findings discussed in Chapter Four, Section 5.6.1, suggested that teachers should take an interest in the activities of

the LRC members and that they should work together with them (see Mitra & Gross, 2009). The findings furthermore suggested that teachers should value the LRC members as leaders in the school.

The findings also suggested that there was a need for the learners to be taught on the importance of the LRC members as learner leaders in the school (see Section 5.4.1). While it was suggested that the teachers should collaborate with the LRC members, and learners needed to be taught about the LRC members in the school, I argue that these suggestions need to be taken beyond the empirical experiences. There needs to be deep excavation and uprooting of cultural norms and historical background which contributes to hindering LRC leadership development, so that a meaningful change and understanding can take place.

In addition, the findings suggested that there was a need for a code of conduct to guide and regulate the LRC members during their meetings and a rigid timetable and schedule for LRC activities (see Steinmann, 2013, see also Section 5.4.3). Relatedly, the findings suggested that there was a need for more leadership training, particularly on communication skills, so that the LRC members could learn how to listen to each other. In line with this, van der Westhuizen (2014) argues that training programmes for pupil leaders should always be evaluated and the deficiencies be incorporated into future training programmes.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the findings from the data. It emerged that the notion of learner leadership was understood more from a managerial perspective, as control and position dominated the definitions. The discussion indicated that the LRC members executed more leadership roles in zone two, three and four, while in zone one, they only executed the managerial roles of controlling other learners and policing the teachers.

It transpired that the school supported LRC leadership development by means of allowing full participation in all the meetings of the School Board and well as the fact that the School Management Team and the LRC liaison teacher helped the LRC members. The leadership training offered to the LRC members, painted a good picture of embracing LRC leadership in the school.

However, there were also some constraints such as a lack of support from the teachers, lack of respect from learners, poor communication between LRC members and an overload of tasks given them by the school, which included the serving of food at the dining hall and hostel supervision. Using CHAT as an analytical tool, I discussed the secondary contradictions which I surfaced during the data collection process.

In the next final chapter, I summarise the main findings of the study and make recommendations for practice and future research. Limitations of this research are also pointed out, after which the thesis concludes.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the main findings of the study. These are the main findings that emerged from the raw data that are presented in Chapter Four and discussed in Chapter Five of the thesis. This chapter also presents the new knowledge generated by the study, recommendations for practice and for future research. Limitations for this study are also presented. Finally, there is the conclusion which includes a brief self-reflection. In the next section, I move on to an overview of the study.

6.2 Overview of the study

This study aimed to gain insight into how learner leadership was currently understood and practised in the school. This study also unearthed the cultural-historical forces enabling and constraining learner leadership development. Lastly, the study explored possible suggestions as to how learner leadership could be developed and promoted in the school. To achieve these goals, the following research questions were formulated and posed:

1. What is the current understanding of learner leadership in the school?
2. How is learner leadership practiced and implemented by the LRC members in the school?
3. What are the conditions that promoted and/or constrained the Learner Representative Council's leadership development in the school?
4. What needs to be done to strengthen the promotion of the Learner Representative Council's leadership development in the school?

6.3 Summary of research findings

This section highlights and summarises the key findings to have emerged from the presentation and discussion in Chapter Four and Five. The findings in respect of research questions one, two, three and four are presented in that order.

6.3.1 Findings related to research question one

“What is the current understanding of learner leadership in the school?” The findings for research question one indicated that learner leadership in the case study school was understood mostly from a traditional point of view which equated leadership with formal positions. For example, most of the participants understood learner leadership in terms of the legal or legitimate Learner Representative Council, the LRC which comprises of individual learners who represent other learners in leadership roles and decision-making processes in the school. Another understanding that emerged was that the LRC possessed power to control other learners and make sure that they adhered to the school rules. These findings align with the regulation made under the Education Act (Namibia. Act No. 16 of 2001), which gives power to the LRC members to control other learners in the school. Naturally, this falls under management instead of leadership. Though learner leadership was mostly understood from a traditional view, it also emerged that learner leadership was partly understood as capacity building and empowerment of learners to develop leadership skills as they are groomed to become future leaders.

6.3.2 Findings related to question two

“How learner leadership is practiced and implemented by the LRC members in the school?” The findings for research question two indicated that the LRC members executed both leadership and managerial roles in the classroom, outside the classroom, on the School Board and beyond the school boundaries. Inside the classroom, the LRC members were mainly involved in managerial roles of controlling other learners and policing teachers who did not make it to their lessons. It was also noted that the LRC members oversaw study supervision. This practice still promoted management rather than leadership, as supervision is usually associated with management. In this sense the learners were an extension of the teachers’ role of supervising and monitoring the behaviour of other learners.

Outside the classroom, the LRC members executed numerous leadership roles and minimal managerial roles. The findings indicated that the LRC members coordinated and led the school morning devotions. It also emerged that the LRC members used to hold meetings with fellow learners in the school. The purpose of the meetings was to gather information from the learners on issues which they were not happy with, and needed and wanted to be improved. In this regard, the LRC members served as a powerful channel of communication between learners, teachers, the School Management Team and the hostel superintendent. The findings further indicated that the LRC members spearheaded the common meetings for teachers, the School Management Team and learners, to discuss and find solutions to issues affecting learners in the school. These practices of leadership by the LRC members was in line with distributed leadership theory. Furthermore, the findings indicated that the LRC members were involved in the coordination of learners' extra-curricular activities and social events, such as hosting of shows and sports games at the school. According to the findings, the LRC members took advantage of the extra-curricular activities to raise funds for the development of the school, such as the buying of a school bus. In addition, the findings indicated that programmes that mattered most to the learners, such as learner motivation and the African Child Day event, were coordinated by the LRC members in the school. The above leadership spaces were means of capacity building which can only be seen through the looking glass of distributed leadership (Harris & Spillane, 2008).

Apart from the leadership roles executed by the LRC members outside the classroom, the findings revealed that the LRC members executed managerial roles, such as hostel and dining hall supervision. It emerged that the LRC members served at the dining hall. Notwithstanding the fact that the LRC members assisted with serving food, the findings however brought some health-related concerns. It was not evident if the LRC members underwent a medical examination, as this was not really part of the study. All people who handle food should get a medical check-up for contagious diseases (see *The Hostel Administrative Guide for Government School Hostels* (Namibia. MBESC, 2004). Finally, on managerial roles, the LRC members as per the mandate of the Education Act (Namibia. Education Act No. 16 of 2001), ensured that the school environment was clean by organising cleaning campaigns.

It also emerged from the study that the LRC members were involved in the school's decisioning processes. The findings indicated that two members of the LRC were members of the School Board, which was the highest decision-making body of the school. According to the findings, the two learners served on the School Board and attended all the meetings. They participated fully and their ideas were equally valued as the other adult members and actioned (parents, principal and teachers). The value of considering learners in decision-making processes, promote a democratic and socially just schooling system where learner voice can be heard (Mitra & Gross, 2009). The above is a true reflection of distributed leadership, which advocates the interaction and interdependence of leaders (Spillane, 2006).

The LRC members also executed leadership roles outside the school. The findings indicated that the LRC members visited primary schools to motivate other learners. Also, the findings indicated that the LRC members wanted to go to the media, for example the radio service station, to again motivate other learners countrywide. This really showed that the LRC members were not only concerned with the affairs and well-being of their fellow learners within their school, but also made a great impact in the lives of other learners in the country. Moreover, the findings pointed out that the LRC members were given opportunities to go and deliver speeches at events which concerned the school. As a result of the findings, I developed a learner leadership model. At this point it is worth mentioning that the emerged learner leadership model contributes to new knowledge in the field of Educational Leadership and Management and chiefly to learner leadership studies. The model is illustrated below:

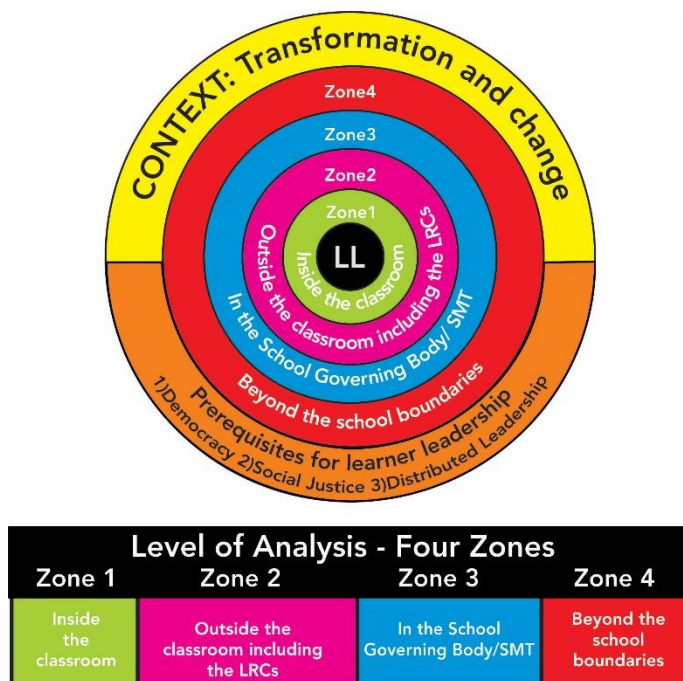


Figure 6.1: A learner leadership model (adapted from Grant’s teacher leadership model, 2006).

6.3.3 Findings related to research question three

“What are the conditions that promoted and/or constrained the Learner Representative Council’s leadership development in the school?” The findings responding to research question three, indicated that numerous conditions promoted the leadership development of the LRC in the school. For example, the data indicated that the LRC members were sent for leadership training to acquire leadership skills to be able to carry out their leadership roles effectively and efficiently in the school and outside the school. The findings also revealed that the School Management Team and the LRC liaison teacher played a huge part in supporting the LRC members to fulfil most of their activities, as per the LRC year plan. For example, the findings indicated that all 31 proposed LRC activities for 2016-2017, were approved by the school management. The LRC members also managed to obtain their LRC t-shirts with the assistance and support of their teacher. The last condition that promoted the LRC leadership development was networking of the LRC members with other LRC members of other schools, where they learnt new leadership practices.

On the other hand, the findings also indicated that there were some conditions which constrained the leadership development of the LRC in the school. Constrained conditions that emerged were tensions within the council, lack of respect from other learners, teachers attitude of being unwilling to support the LRC leadership in the school, among others. It also emerged from the findings that there was no designated office/room for the LRC where they could come together to discuss their issues. Finally, on the constraining conditions, the findings indicated that the LRC members were overloaded with too many roles and responsibilities, some of which included hostel and dining hall supervision, and that this conflicted with their study time.

6.3.4 Findings related to research question four

“What needs to be done to strengthen the promotion of the Learner Representative Council’s leadership development in the school?” Finally, suggestions from the findings indicated that the LRC leadership in the school could be strengthened if learners were taught about the roles and importance of the LRC in the school. Also, it was suggested that there was a need for more leadership training on communication for the LRC members. Other suggestions that emerged were that teachers needed to change their attitude and start supporting LRC leadership in the school. The findings suggested that there was a need for the LRC to have their own room/office, where the LRC members could come together to discuss issues concerning their council. Lastly, the findings suggested that a code of conduct to regulate the LRC needed to be formulated.

6.4 Possible underlying historical/cultural reasons for the status quo

The analysis of systemic contradictions found that learners in the school refused to be led and be given instructions by fellow learners because they were just learners like them. Some learners felt that they were older than some of the LRC members. CHAT ploughed deeper and revealed that the ecological context of the school influenced learners’ perceptions of leadership. Culturally and historically, children are not allowed or encouraged to take up leadership roles, particularly in the African context. Traditionally, leadership is the property of traditional leaders in the community and the parents at home.

CHAT further revealed that teachers’ negative attitudes towards the LRC members were historically and culturally rooted. Most of the teachers went through an undemocratic education

system, where power and authority were fully vested in the teachers and principal. It was unusual for teachers to share power and authority with the learners, because learners were supposed to listen to the teachers. Additionally, most of the teachers were from a black community and culturally, in a black community, children cannot lead, but can only be led by their elders.

CHAT was useful in this study as it allowed me to look deeper into the system to reveal the causes of contradictions which historically and culturally accumulated in the activity system of learner leadership in the school. Furthermore, CHAT helped to understand how peoples' culture and history have the potential to affect the goal of an activity such as learner leadership development, especially as an activity system involves relationships and interactions between groups of people. In the next section I make some recommendations for practice because of my study.

6.5 Recommendation for practice

From the research findings it emerged that the learner leadership scope was totally confined to the LRC and that this limited learner leadership development in the school. For learner leadership to be fully developed in the case study school, this study recommends that the scope of learner leadership should be extended to other learners in the school for example, through the establishment of various learner leader clubs. By doing so, all learners will have the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and have a voice in the school.

The study also recommends that the LRC members should collaborate with other learners to execute leadership activities. For example, inside the classroom, the LRC members should work together with the class monitors not to only control other learners, but to engage in dialogue with other learners regarding their learning experiences, which they can then communicate to the teachers and School Management Team.

In line with what has been suggested by the research participants, this study also echoed that teachers should support the LRC members in executing their leadership roles. However, through the lens of CHAT, the study recommends compulsory short courses on learner leadership, as this would help teachers to appreciate, support and collaborate with learners when performing leadership activities.

It was evident in the findings that some learners refused to be led by fellow learners. This study recommends that learners in the case study school should be taught about the importance of the LRC members in the school, as this would assist them in embracing learner leadership. The minds of the learners also need to be decolonised from the traditional view of leadership which believes that children cannot lead. The study recommends more leadership training for the LRC members, specifically on teamwork and communication skills, as this would help to reduce tensions in the council. The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture should design a national code of conduct for the LRC in schools. The case study school is also advised to design their own code of conduct to help the LRC members to develop self-control.

Finally, it emerged that the LRC members were unable to focus on their studies due to the workload and times that the meetings were held. This study recommends a proper time-table and a schedule of School Board meetings, as this would help with any conflicting arrangements and allow the LRC valuable time to concentrate on their school work. It is important for the LRC members to only execute the roles which are within their scope and not be delegated to perform other people's formal paid work, such as hostel and dining supervision, as this will also help to reduce the workload of the LRC members.

In the next section, I move on to focus on the limitations of this research and recommendations for future research.

6.6 Limitations of the study

It is a fact that every situation has a limit. This study has limitations too. The first limitation of this study is the research orientation. This study is a qualitative, interpretive case study. This study was limited to a single intrinsic case study of learner leadership in one secondary school in rural northern Namibia. This implies that the findings lack generalisation and transferability (Stake, 1995). However, the readers of this study may naturally generalise and transfer the findings to their own context, based on their own experiences (Stake, 1995).

The second limitation of this study is the subjective nature of the research. The quality of the study is limited by the honesty and different lived experiences of the participants. However, this was minimised by triangulation of data. Furthermore, the population size was relatively small and homogeneous. The study only sampled people (School Management Team, School Board members and the LRC liaison teacher) who worked closely with the LRC members as per the Education Act (Namibia. Education Act No. 16 of 2001). Learners and teachers were excluded from the study. These limitations were necessary for the scope of the study. Next, I discuss recommendations for future research and the conclusion.

6.7 Recommendations for future research

Learner leadership is under researched in Namibia, therefore more studies need to be conducted on the topic. The two recent studies carried out that I came across, are small scales studies as is mine, therefore I recommend that more large scale [comparable] studies need to be carried out. The above-mentioned studies as well as mine, explored learner leadership in rural secondary schools. Thus, I recommend that similar studies need to be carried out in urban secondary schools. I also recommend that future research should focus on primary schools which offer a different context from secondary schools. Learner leadership studies were conducted in state schools, therefore learner leadership in private schools need to be explored as their experience might be different from state schools. I would also recommend that future research should use CHAT, as it has the ability to surface contradictions and can move the study beyond description to an intervention, where contradictions and meaningful improvement of the practice is likely to take place. Finally, I recommend future researchers on the topic of learner leadership development, consider using the emerged learner leadership model, as it would help to capture a good if not a complete picture of learner leadership development in schools. I now conclude the study with some final thoughts.

6.8 Conclusion

This qualitative, interpretive case study attempted to gain an insight into learner leadership development within a Learner Representative Council in a Namibian state secondary school in the Oshana Region. The study has addressed the stated goals and answered the research questions. The

revelation from this study was that the use of CHAT helped me to discover, that learner leadership was hindered by peoples' history and culture. I personally learnt a lot during this study, from the historical overview and growth of educational leadership and management, the traditional leadership theories and the current distributed leadership theory. Through this study, I got to understand why schools operate the way they are operating. Being a LRC liaison teacher myself, through learner leadership literature, I obtained a better understanding of what learner leadership entails and this will now help me to improve learner leadership practices at my school, circuit and in the entire region, as this would promote learner voice in schools.

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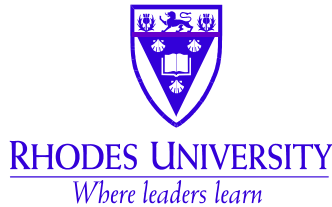
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter from my supervisor



EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Tel: +27 (0) 46 603 8383
Fax: +27 (0) 46 622 8028
PO Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140

23 May 2017

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that Rolens da Silva (student number 17R4923) is a registered Master's student at Rhodes University, currently pursuing research in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Master of Education, Educational Leadership and Management*. Mr Da Silva has made excellent progress in the course so far, and has successfully submitted a research proposal to the Higher Degrees Committee. He has now reached the stage where data collection is necessary, which necessitates spending a period of about two months at the school of his choice. The purpose of this letter is to obtain your permission to allow the student to conduct research in your region, circuit or school, and to assist the student as much as possible to gain entry to institutions and access to people and documents.

Mr Da Silva's research involves learner leadership at a school, and to conduct the study the student needs to interview staff, learners and in some cases parents. The student will also need to do observation, administer questionnaires, and study relevant documents. The university has a strict ethical code which applies to research in education. The code includes guarantees of confidentiality, anonymity, and respect for the context of the study. As such, the student may not in any way interfere with the smooth running of the school, and needs to consider the culture and norms of the institution. The student will obtain permission from all participants in writing, and where learners are involved, permission will be sought from their parents.

Research is a difficult and challenging enterprise, and we would therefore really appreciate anything you can do to make the student's data gathering as smooth and effective as possible.

Your cooperation is highly appreciated. The student's research is likely to constitute a valuable contribution to the small body of literature on this important phenomenon in education, and thus serve a broader purpose of uplifting educational standards in Namibia.

Should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hennie van der Mescht', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

(Prof) Hennie van der Mescht (h.vandermescht@ru.ac.za) (supervisor)

Appendix B: Seeking permission from the Regional Director

Rolens da Silva
Private bag 2014
Ondangwa
24 May 2017

The Director of Education
Private Bag 5518
Oshakati
Oshana Region

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY AT A CASE STUDY SCHOOL IN YOUR REGION

I am Rolens da Silva (student number 17R4923) a registered Master's student at Rhodes. I now reached the stage where data collection is necessary, which necessitates spending a period of about two months at a secondary school in your region. The purpose of this letter is to obtain your permission to allow me to conduct research in your region, and to assist me as much as possible to gain entry to the school.

My research involves learner leadership at a school, and to conduct a research I needs to interview the school principal HoDs, LRC teacher, LRC members and School Board chairperson. I will also need to do observation, administer questionnaires with the LRC, and study relevant documents as well as to take pictures of the participants which will serve as data in my thesis. Ethics are essential elements in education research. I undertake to uphold the autonomy, confidentiality, and respect for the context of the study. As such, I guarantee not in any way to interfere with the normal school programmes and I will adhere to the culture and norms of the institution. I will obtain permission from all participants in writing, and regarding the learners (LRC members), permission will be sought from their parents.

Should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me on 081 3461 755/ email; rolensd@gmail.com

Regards,
D. Rolens

Appendix C: Seeking permission from the school gate keeper

Rolens da Silva
Private bag 2014
Ondangwa
24 May 2017

The Director of Education
Private Bag 5518
Oshakati
Oshana Region

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY AT YOUR RESPECTIVE SHOOOL

I am Rolens da Silva (student number 17R4923) a registered Master's student at Rhodes. I now reached the stage where data collection is necessary, which necessitates spending a period of about two months at your school. The purpose of this letter is to obtain your permission to allow me to conduct research in school.

My research involves learner leadership at a school, and to conduct a research I needs to interview the school principal, HoDs, LRC members, LRC teacher, and School Board chairperson. I will also need to do observation, administer questionnaires with the LRC, and study relevant documents as well as to take pictures of the participants which will serve as data in my thesis. Ethics are essential elements in education research. I undertake to uphold the autonomy, confidentiality, and respect for the context of the study. As such, I guarantee not in any way to interfere with the normal school programmes and I will adhere to the culture and norms of the institution. I will obtain permission from all participants in writing, and regarding the learners (LRC members), permission will be sought from their parents.

Should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me on 081 3461 755/ email; rolensd@gmail.com

Regards,

D. Rolens

Appendix D: Permission letter from the Regional Director



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



OSHANA REGIONAL COUNCIL
DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE
Aspiring to excellence in Education for All

Tel: 065 229800
Fax: 065 229833
Enquiries: Levi Vries
E-mail: levi.vries@gmail.com
Ref no: 11/1/1

906 Sam Nujoma Road
Private Bag 5518
Oshakati, Namibia

ROLENS DA SILVA
PRIVATE BAG 2014
ONDANGWA

Dear Rolens da Silva

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN OSHANA REGION

Your letter on the subject has been received.

Permission to conduct research on "Learner Leadership at schools" for your Master's degree in schools in Oshana Region is granted. You are kindly reminded to conduct your research after school hours and to observe all research ethics. You are further advised to seek permission from parents when dealing with minors.

Kindly present this letter of approval to the principals of schools you wish to interview. We further wish you all the best in your research.

Yours Sincerely,


HILENI M. AMUKANA
REGIONAL DIRECTOR



Appendix E: Permission letter from the school principal

Att: Rolens Da-Silva
Ondangwa
Namibia

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY

This letter serves to respond to your request for the permission to conduct research study on **LRC leadership development** at our school.

Permission is hereby granted to you, with effect from **01 June – 30 July 2017** on condition that during your study contacts should not interfere with learners' studies (teaching and learning) sessions.

I am sure you will find the learning environment inviting, fascinating and friendly. wishing you a worthy study!

Thank you,

Appendix F: Letter of consent

Rolens da Silva
Private Bag 20124
Ondangwa
01June 2017

Dear parents, principal, HoDs, former LRC teacher and the School Board chairperson

Letter of invitation to participant in my research project

I am currently a registered Master's student at Rhodes (student number 17R4923). I now reached the stage where I must conduct a research, which necessitates spending a period of about two months at your school. The purpose of this letter is to obtain your permission to participate in my research. **My research seeks to get insights of learner leadership, particularly the LRC leadership in the school.** As such, I would very much like to closely work with you. To conduct a research, I will need to do observation, administer questionnaires, and interview you. I also want you to allow me to take pictures which I will use as part of the data in my thesis.

Ethics are essential elements in educational research. I undertake to uphold your autonomy, confidentiality, and respect you as a participant. As such, I guarantee not in any way to disclose your name neither the information you will be sharing with me regard LRC leadership in the school, apart from my supervisors who will read my work. Take note that participation is voluntarily, and you are free to withdraw from this research at any time without any negative consequences. If you agree to participate in this research, you are kindly asked to complete a consent form provide below.

Should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me on 081 3461 755/ email; rolensd@gmail.com or any of my following supervisors.

Yours sincerely

.....

D. Rolens

Appendix G: Consent form

Consent form

I (Full names of a participant/parents or guardian on behalf of the child) hereby confirm that I understand the content of this letter and the nature of this research project. I am willing/ I allows my child.....to participate in this research. I understand that I/my child reserve the right to withdraw from this research at any time with any harm.

.....

Signature

.....

date

.....

contact details

Appendix H: Questionnaires administered to LRC members

Instructions for questionnaire

- Use a black or blue ink pen. please do not use a pencil.
- In the interest of confidentiality and anonymity, don't write your name on the questionnaire.
- Answer all the questions as possible as you can.

1. As a member the LRC, what does LRC leadership mean to you?

2. In your own view, do you think LRC members are needed as leaders in the school? Give reasons for your answer.

3. What roles and responsibilities do you play as LRC member in the school? Discuss in detail.-

4. Are there any initiatives and/or visible changes that the LRC members have proposed or implemented in the school? If yes, what are those initiatives and/or changes? Also discuss what ways they were successful and what challenges were faced. If none, why do you think this is the case?

5. (a) Discuss the relationships:

(i) Among the LRC members in the school

(ii) Between the LRC members and fellow learners in the school

(iii) Between the LRC members and the teachers in school

(iv) Between the LRC members and the School Management Team (principal & Heads of Departments)

(v) Between the LRC members and the School Board

5. (b) Suggest how the following relationships can be improved:

(i) Among the RLC members

(ii) Between the LRC members and fellow learners

(iii) Between the LRC members and the teachers

(iv) Between the School Management Team (principal & Heads of Departments)

(v) Between the LRC members and the School Board members?

6. Does the school support and develop you as leaders? Please explain your answer.

7. (a) What are some of the challenges that you are facing as LRC members in carrying out your roles and responsibilities in the school?

(b) What would be your suggestions to overcome the challenges you have mentioned above?

8. Is there anything else that you would like to share with regards to the LRC leadership development in the school? if so, do so discuss.

The end.

Appendix I: Interview schedule

For the LRC members, former LRC teacher, principal, HoDs, School Board Chairperson

1. How do you understand the notion of learner leadership in the school?
2. In your own view, do you think the leadership of the LRC is needed in the school?
Why do you say so?
3. What leadership roles do the current LRC members play in the school? How do the current LRC roles differ from the roles of the previous LRC members?
4. (i) Describe the relationship between the LRC and the following:
 1. LRC-LRC
 2. fellow learners
 3. teachers
 4. school management (principal and HoDs)
 5. School Board
 - *Follow-up*
- (ii) In what ways do these relationships work?
- (iii) How can these relationships be improved?
5. Does the school support and promote the leadership development of the LRC? If so, in what ways? If no, why not?
6. Are there any initiatives and/or visible changes that the LRC members have proposed or implemented in the school? *follow-up*: If yes, tell me about them. Tell me in what ways they were successful and what challenges were faced. If none, why do you think this is the case?
7. What are some of the challenges facing the LRC members to carry out their leadership roles in the school?
8. What would be your suggestions to overcome the challenges you have mentioned?
9. Is there anything that you would like to share with regards to the LRC leadership development in the school?