

**TEACHER RESILIENCE: COPING STRATEGIES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL
TEACHERS WITH MULTI-GRADE CLASSES AT GLEN COWIE CIRCUIT, LIMPOPO
PROVINCE SOUTH AFRICA.**

by

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DISSERTATION

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Manchini Ishmael Tlaka, hereby solemnly declare that the dissertation titled: "TEACHER RESILIENCE: COPING STRATEGIES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS WITH MULTI-GRADE CLASSES AT GLEN COWIE CIRCUIT" hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo for the degree Master of Education in Curriculum Studies has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university, that is my own work in design and execution, and that all material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

Signature

Date

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the following people:

- ❖ My parents, Mamokhine Modipadi Tlaka and Motsibulugi Gosebo Tlaka, for their continual support, encouragement and support when I was busy with my studies. I know you are proud of my achievements.
- ❖ My sister, Nkomo Tlakale Thandi for her continual support and understanding during the writing of this dissertation.
- ❖ Lastly, to all my siblings Tabudi, Tabego and Lucky, who continued to support me throughout my study. You guys are forever appreciated.

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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the participants in this study. Your shared experiences made this study what it is today.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the coping strategies of primary school teachers in their multi-grade classes at Glen Cowie circuit. This exploratory case study addresses the coping strategies that rural primary school teachers use in curriculum delivery. Data was generated through semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis.

This study revealed various challenges teachers experience and the coping strategies that teachers employ in dealing with challenges. A qualitative research approach was adopted in the study with the intention of finding as much detail as possible using a case study. Participants in this study were teachers who teach multi-grade classes in their rural schools in the Glen Cowie circuit in Limpopo. The investigation revealed that teachers did not have the necessary skills and expertise to teach multi-grade classes. It was also revealed that teachers were not trained to teach in multi-grade classes and they had to use individual strategies to cope with the contradictory conditions they found themselves in.

The investigation concluded that the teachers in those multi-grade classes were qualified and had teaching experience, but they were not prepared to teach multi-grade classes in general. It proved that teachers remained resilient by applying varied strategies such as problem solving, goal setting, extra curriculum lessons and maintaining work-life balance to ensure that teaching and learning occurs.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

RRR - Relationship Resourced Resilience

DBE – Department of Basic Education

DoE – Department of Education

NCS – National Curriculum Statement

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

MMTTC – Malcom Moffat Teachers' Training College

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

There is a notable trend of teachers and learners moving from rural areas to teach and learn in urban areas respectively, leaving a handful of teachers in rural areas as well as low enrolment of learners in those areas. Some of the factors which results in low learner enrolment are the migration of parents from rural to urban areas, and preference learners and parents have towards urban schools than rural ones (Cross, Wentzel, Seager, Hoosen, Mafukidze & Van Zyl, 2009). In the case of South Africa, multi-grade teaching and learning is a result of low enrolment of learners in rural areas. As one of the coping strategies, some schools have introduced multi-grade teaching as a strategy for coping with the situation. Despite learner enrolment being a leading factor in the introduction of multi-grade teaching it is teachers who have to endure the challenges they encounter in making certain that the learning and teaching process proceeds uninterrupted. It takes resilience from these teachers to be able to teach in such circumstances. Literature is replete with issues related to teacher resilience.

In South Africa, multi-grade teaching dates back to the origins of formal education and it was in the 1800s that mono-grade teaching became prominent. Evidence from South African literature on multi-grade teaching suggests that multi-grade is not a new phenomenon and, due to urbanisation and the increased number of learners, a mono-grade teaching approach was established and was subsequently adopted as a norm. Since the formalization of education and the mono-grade teaching approach have become the norm, multi-grade schools have been forced to adopt an approach that is not consistent with their teaching approach. Regardless of the differences between these two approaches, mono-grade and multi-grade, teachers remained teaching in multi-grade classes and had to live with the experiences they encountered on a daily basis. Research findings show that the incompatibility of these two approaches presents teachers with challenges, particularly those teaching in multi-grade classes due to the fact that they are trained in mono-grade teaching but have to deliver lessons in their untrained multi-grade

classes. Taking this finding further, my interest in this study is to determine how teachers have been and are still coping with the reported challenges in their multi-grade classes.

All the education materials, policies and curriculum were established according to mono-grade teaching and this meant multi-grade teachers had to adopt mono-grade practices in their multi-grade teaching and these two approaches were not really compatible (Henn, 1989). To this day, education materials, policies, and curricula are still developed for single-grade teaching rather than multi-grade teaching. It means that teachers must navigate it to ensure that instruction takes place. It is this resilience that teachers display that this study drew interest on.

According to Little (2004), multi-grade teaching was implemented as a matter of necessity in rural areas where the enrolled number of students did not meet the required ratio to organize a single grade class. In South Africa, multi-grade teaching is seen as a key pedagogical tool to help teachers in situations where there is a low learner enrolment and limited resources. The Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2015) supported this by emphasising that multi-grade teaching is a viable option to provide access to education in disadvantaged areas where necessary infrastructure and resources are scarce and too few learners to form mono-grade classes.

Given the necessity of multi-grade teaching in areas where there are limited resources to provide effective teaching, teachers have to demonstrate resilience by adopting and coping with the setting they find themselves in. It is this coping mechanism that this study was investigating, looking at how they cope in their multi-grade classes.

This study embraces resilience both as a process and an outcome. It is a process when a person goes through adverse circumstance, that is, going through the challenges encountered in their multi-grade classes whereas an outcome is when a person has gone through the adverse circumstances and is still standing, meaning the teacher has adopted to the circumstances of multi-grade classes and pulled through.

Several studies have been conducted on teacher resilience. Studies by Razak (2016) in Malaysia, Cornelissen (2016) and Edwards (2016) in South Africa both focused on teacher resilience. However, no studies on teacher resilience appear to have been

conducted, focusing on how teachers cope with multi-grade teaching. This study focused on the coping strategies of multi-grade teachers in rural areas of the Glen Cowie circuit.

Raffo, Dyson, Gunter, Hall, Jones, and Kalambouka (2007) emphasise that multi-grade classes hold a unique place in the history of education. In several countries, multi-grade education has been introduced in schools that are mostly located in rural areas and farms where infrastructure is not well established, services are very inadequate, and poverty and unemployment are extreme. Teachers in such schools are confronted with the significant challenges of simultaneously teaching two or more grade groups and, in some cases, teaching even more than one curriculum subject in the same class. As much as it can be used as a tool to deal with, among others, the workload that proves to be too much, it has now become a challenge for teachers, since more is expected of them in terms of reflection and accountability in their instructional interactions with learners in the classroom. Against this background, the researcher found it essential to conduct a study on *"Teacher Resilience: Coping strategies of primary school teachers with multi-grade classes at Glen Cowie circuit, Limpopo Province, South Africa."*

There have not been studies that concentrated primarily on teacher resilience in multi-grade teaching, particularly on how teachers cope with multi-grade classes in a multi-grade context particularly in South Africa. This presents a knowledge gap particularly in developing countries like South Africa where multi-grade classes are still widely practiced, as supported by statistics from the department of education on schools practising multi-grade teaching. Drawing from this knowledge gap, this study has concentrated on teachers' coping strategies in multi-grade classes.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The teaching of multi-grade classes is observed to have several problems and challenges (Taole & Mncube, 2012). Teachers are in need of coping strategies to deal with the situation.

Several studies have been conducted on multi-grade teaching in South Africa. For instance, Mulaudzi (2016) researched the challenges faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms. Ramrathan & Mzimela (2013) came close but not enough as they researched the teaching of reading in a multi-grade classroom, looking at the adaptive skills of teachers and support in teaching grade R and grade 1s. There have been few but not enough studies that concentrated primarily on teacher resilience in multi-grade teaching, particularly on how teachers cope with multi-grade classes in a rural setting. Based on this knowledge gap, this study will concentrate on teachers' coping strategies in multi-grade classes.

The Task Team assigned by the minister of basic education, Angie Motshekga, in the evaluation of the Implementation stage of the National Curriculum Statement (DoE, 2011, pointed out some of the challenges associated with the curriculum, including those of multi-grade schools. The challenges include, among others, an absence of policy direction and precise training for teachers involved in multi-grade education. The importance of this study is, therefore, to explore the coping strategies employed by teachers in the teaching of multi-grade classes. That is looking at the coping strategies of teachers with multi-grade classes in the rural Glen Cowie Circuit based in the Sekhukhune District in Limpopo Province.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' coping strategies in teaching multi-grade classes. This study is aimed at investigating the resilience of teachers in their multi-grade classes, particularly in a rural setting.

The objectives of this study are to investigate the challenges that teachers experience in multi-grade classes, the coping strategies teachers use in their multi-grade classes and the kind of support teachers get in the teaching of multi-grade classes.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To achieve the purpose of this study, the following umbrella research question was asked: What are the experiences of primary school teachers who employ multi-grade teaching?

To unpack the research question, the following sub questions were generated:

SUB QUESTIONS

1. What are the challenges that teachers experience in multi-grade classes?
2. How are teachers coping with multi-grade teaching challenges that they experience?
3. What kind of support do teachers get in the teaching of multi-grade classes?

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this section of the research, I simply provide an overview of the research methodology. The research methodology section of this study will be explained in detail in chapter three.

Research methodology is commonly categorised into two forms, qualitative and quantitative. For the purpose of this research, I have used a qualitative research methodology, which relies heavily on human interaction, by soliciting the participants' opinions, beliefs, knowledge and experiences of the phenomenon under study. The qualitative methodology helped me to obtain multi-grade class teachers' experiences through direct interaction with participants. This study needed teachers to express their classroom experiences in teaching multi-grade classes.

1.5.1 Research Design

The study made use of a case study design. The design was used because of its potential to gather detailed data on multi-grade teaching. It helped me to explore how participating multi-grade teachers within rural areas of Glen Cowie Circuit cope with teaching multi-grade classes. Furthermore, it also helped to enable the participants to express their experiences in multi-grade classrooms and have a voice based on their context.

1.5.2 Sampling

A purposive sampling approach was adopted to purposefully select the participants in the study. Creswell (2009) explains that purposive sampling refers to the selection of participants that will be of help to the researcher in the generation of data. I selected teachers of multi-grade classes and principals for their management experience of multi-grade classes. This study focused on three rural schools situated in Glen Cowie Circuit in the Sekhukhune District, and all the teachers of multi-grade classes and the principals of those schools were participants. The inclusion criterion for the participants in the study was based on the following characteristics:

- ✓ Teachers (including principals) of schools practising multi-grade teaching.
- ✓ Teachers (including principals) of schools under Glen-Cowie Circuit.
- ✓ Teachers (including principals) of schools situated in rural areas.

1.5.3 Data collection

Data was generated by using different methods. The methods used are interviews, observations and document analysis. The use of more than one method helped to maximise the conformability and transferability of the study. It has also helped to enable teachers to express their views verbally. I observed their lessons and it also afforded me the space to analyse their documents (policy documents, lesson plans and preparations, individual time tables, etc.).

1.5.4 Data analysis

The data generated from this study was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. Clarke and Brown (2013) explain that the thematic data analysis method requires the researcher to familiarise, engage, organise and code the data collected and identify emerging themes.

Data I had generated through interviews, both individual and focus group, was transcribed and coded and responses were grouped according to the questions asked. Data obtained from documents and observations was also categorised.

1.5.5 Quality criteria

There are aspects that were looked at to guarantee quality in this study. Creswell (2009) advised that to achieve the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, one can use the following four strategies, which are credibility, transferability, dependability and Confirmability.

1.5.5.1 Credibility

Credibility is explained as the scope in which the data and data analysis are authentic and truthful. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) describe that credibility is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a credible conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants' original data. In this study, credibility was established through triangulation and member checking. With triangulation, several data collection methods were used to achieve this. Lesson observations were triangulated with focus group and individual interviews. As a researcher, I made use of participants' findings member check, that is, participants verified the findings drawn from the study to increase credibility (Creswell, 2009). I gave the participants the transcripts to read and verify their accuracy.

1.5.5.2 Transferability

The results of the research are transferable only if they fit into new contexts separate from the actual research context, which is the extent to which a person can extend the explanation of a certain situation to other people or periods than those directly researched (Creswell, 2009). This was achieved by thoroughly applying the research methodology outlined for this study. In the three different schools used, the results were similar and the methodology was applied thoroughly and consistently throughout the study.

1.5.5.3 Dependability

Creswell (2013) argues that the dependability of the data is the extent to which the same findings could be repeated. The same research instruments were simulated with similar respondents under similar conditions. As a result, a dependable study has to be accurate and consistent. Denzil and Lincoln (2013) state that dependability is achieved through a process of auditing and, therefore, researchers are responsible for ensuring that the process of research is logical, traceable, clearly documented and can be demonstrated

through an audit trail, where others can examine the researcher's documentation of data, methods, decisions and the end product.

1.5.5.4 Confirmability of the findings

Confirmability is the degree to which, as a researcher, I am aware of individual subjectivity (Creswell, 2009). Confirmability focuses on the characteristics of the data collected and the processes leading to its collection that yield findings that are objective, neutral, credible and consistent, as opposed to those that are based on the researcher's perceptions and preconceptions. In this study, as a researcher, I have avoided bias in order to retain the confirmability of the study. I did not temper the findings irrespective of my opinion of the information. Documents and recordings used to obtain data - focus group and individual interviews, observations as well as document analysis - were preserved.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study provided an insight into how teachers cope with challenges in their multi-grade classes. This study will be useful to the department of basic education in providing curriculum advisors with the necessary knowledge to ensure continued support for multi-grade teachers. It will also enlighten university managers about practical experience, particularly in education, that would better prepare future teachers to be able to ensure effective teaching in multi-grade classes. Moreover, it will provide curriculum developers with a clear view of how teachers practically cope with multi-grade teaching, and assist them to develop multi-grade policies tailored to a better teaching and learning process. Again, this study will benefit and assist teachers, including the principals, of schools with multi-grade classes for the better practice and management of their classes. Furthermore, this study will add value to the current body of knowledge on resilience in multi-grade classes. Finally, the study aims to sensitise readers to how teachers cope with multi-grade teaching.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are ethical considerations that the researcher has to adhere to while conducting this research. According to Wagner, Kawulich and Gardener (2012), every research study is guided by ethical rules. These are seeking permission, avoidance of harm, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality and voluntary participation.

1.7.1 Seeking permission

Wagner, Kawulich and Gardener (2012) indicate that, researchers need to seek permission from an organisation to conduct a research. The researcher asked for approval from the Department of Education Limpopo, Sekhukhune District, Glen Cowie Circuit office and the school principals where the study was conducted. Letters of approval were sought at all levels, from the District, Circuit and schools, respectively. Prior to the commencement of the study, ethical clearance was granted by the Turfloop Research and Ethics Committee.

1.7.2 Avoidance of harm

Caution was well exercised in the engagement between the researcher and the participants, which ensured that the participants did not experience a feeling of discomfort at any point during this study. Participants were informed that they were at liberty to withdraw their participation in this study at any time (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport, 2011).

1.7.3 Informed consent

The study aimed at engaging teachers and principals as participants. The participants were informed about the study and asked to partake in it as a voluntary activity, meaning that the school's permission was granted. Creswell (2009) and Wagner et al. (2012) remind researchers to remember that while conducting research, the researcher enters the private spaces of his or her participants. Informed consent in writing was received from all participants before proceeding with the interviews, observations and discussions.

1.7.4 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Wagner et al. (2012) state that the principle of confidentiality and anonymity entails that the identity of participants in a research study must be safeguarded. All the confidential information that was gathered or communicated to the researcher was protected. The identity of the participants was kept anonymous. This was accomplished by using pseudonym names or assigning identification letters, such as A or B, to participants to represent the names of schools or teachers (Polit and Beck, 2009).

1.7.5 Voluntary participation

Participants were informed in detail prior to the commencement of the research project that their participation in this study was voluntary and at no stage they were going to be compelled to take part in the study (De Vos et al. 2011). Also, they were informed that they met the sampling criteria for participants to participate voluntarily in this study.

1.8 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.8.1 Teacher resilience – for the context of this study Gu and Day (2013) emphasise that teacher resilience is not necessarily associated with the ability to come back from a traumatic experience but, rather, the ability to sustain balance for equal education to take place even in a multi-grade class, commitment to the cause of teaching multi-grade classes and agency in the world that teachers teach, which is an action or intervention producing a particular effect, in this regard, the ability of multi-grade teachers to take appropriate action or intervention strategy that produces a positive effect.

1.8.2 Multi-grade class - Brunswick and Valerien (2004)'s definition will be embraced for this study. In this study multi-grade class happens when one teacher has to teach all learners of different ages, grades (in some cases, phases) and content in the same class. In this study, learners of different grades and subject content taught in the same class.

1.8.3 Curriculum – Hoadley and Jansen (2009) define curriculum as the formal academic programme which is structured and has requirements with which provision is made for a certain targeted group. Curriculum in this study was used to refer to the intended content

for each grade in the multi-grade class and skills to the targeted learners, meaning every grade receiving grade appropriate skills.

1.8.4 Rural (schools) – the term rural in the context of this study refers to the schools that are far from city centres and towns. This refers to the schools located within the rural Glen Cowie Circuit (Gardiner, 2000; Wako, 2005).

1.8.5 Agency – McLaughlin and Dietz (2015) define agency as the capacity of individuals to act independently to make their own free choices. Further emphasising that agency helps to overcome the views of people as powerless victims as of change. It emphasise that humans are not just passive in the event of threats. Agency is clearly related to adaptive capacity which means the preconditions necessary to enable adaptation to take place, that is, to adopt and learn as settings change. For this study it means that teachers must adopt and learn so that they produce a positive effect in teaching their multi-grade classes.

1.9 DISSERTATION OUTLINE

The study is divided into five chapters. Namely:

Chapter one: This chapter is about the introduction and the background underlining this study. The chapter includes the background, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, research methodology, significance of the study, ethical considerations concerning the study, and the definition of the key concepts in the study.

Chapter two: This chapter details the review of literature on the principles and characteristics of teacher resilience and the experiences of multi-grade teachers both locally and internationally and the theoretical framework.

Chapter three: This chapter presents the research methodology in detail, including the research design, sampling and data collection methods and the reasons for the use of this particular methodology.

Chapter four: This chapter provides the results, the analysis and the interpretation of the data on the coping strategies teachers employ in teaching in multi-grade classes.

Chapter five: This chapter provides a summary of the study, which includes the findings of this study, the conclusions, and the recommendations for further studies. It is also the last chapter of the study.

1.10 CONCLUSION

This first chapter of the study presented the background, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, research methodology, significance of the study, ethical considerations concerning the study, definition of key concepts in the study and an outline of the dissertation. The chapter provides an introduction and a background to the study. This was done in order to introduce and sensitise the reader to what the study entails. The next chapter will focus on the literature review as well as the theoretical framework guiding the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The practice of multi-grade teaching has been on the rise, particularly in rural areas. Studies conducted point out the challenges teachers experience in multi-grade classes. This section is presented using themes that emerged during the literature review. Themes that emerged include an explanation of multi-grade teaching, teacher resilience, principles of resilience, characteristics of teacher resilience, factors that have been identified as important for teacher resilience, multi-grade teaching, teacher practice of multi-grade teaching, challenges of multi-grade teaching, multi-grade reforms and the theoretical framework of the study. The international and South African experience of multi-grade teaching is also included.

2.1 WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

To understand what a teacher's resilience means, it is important to understand what the concept of resilience is first. Initial meanings of resilience primarily concentrated on threat and defensive aspects that supported resilience and specific qualities that categorised resilient people. According to Reich, Zautra, & Hall (2010), the meaning of resilience is comprised not only of recovery from traumatic conditions, but of constant development as a result of a positive reaction to traumatic conditions. In addition, Ungar, (2012) argues that academics have recently begun to theorise from a social ecological viewpoint, in which resilience is described as a continual set of actions that mirrors the exchange between the individual and the environment, particularly the opportunities for development that can be accessed. Based on these meanings of different theorists, this study will adopt what these theories present as common, which is the ability to maintain equilibrium and constant development in the wake of the challenges that teachers encounter in their multi-grade teaching.

2.2 WHAT IS TEACHER RESILIENCE?

In the education field, resilience is theorised as a capacity, a process and an outcome. Teacher resilience includes the capacity of a teacher to couple individual and circumstantial means to circumnavigate encounters, an active process whereby features of individual teachers and of their individual and specialised settings interrelate over time as teachers use certain approaches, to allow the outcome of a teacher who experiences professional gratification, growth and development (Beltman, 2015).

Researchers like Gu et al. (2013) explain teacher resilience as not necessarily associated with the ability to come back from a traumatic experience but, rather, the ability to sustain balance for equal education to take place even in a multi-grade class, commitment to the cause of teaching multi-grade classes and agency in the world that teachers teach, which is an action or intervention producing a particular effect, in this regard, the ability of multi-grade teachers to take appropriate action or intervention strategy that produces a positive effect. Equally important, Toland et al. (2011) simply define teacher resilience as decent results regardless of serious threats to adaptation. Castro, Kelly, and Shih (2010), on the other hand, define them as "specific strategies that individuals employ when confronted with adversity." Tait (2008:72) argues that resilience is linked to "regulation of emotions and effective interaction in a social environment," adding that it "involves a mode of interacting with events in the environment that are activated and nurtured in times of stress" (Tait, 2008:58).

In this study, teacher resilience in a multi-grade class also refers to the ability to demonstrate adaptive capacity which is the preconditions necessary to enable adaptation in a multi-grade class to take place and self-efficacy which is the belief in one's own ability to teach a multi-grade class and to manage prospective situations that arise from their classes.

Regardless of the different theorisations, some important themes do surface. To begin, most researchers agree that resilience involves teachers' willingness to teach despite adverse circumstances in their classes. Secondly, it is also evident that teachers' willingness to achieve and factors posing as threads, that is, personal, is at the centre of the resilience process. Finally, the literature shows that resilient teachers have a strong personal will, as well as certain traits and abilities. With all of this explicitly stated, the

researcher sees teacher resilience as a process that takes centre stage when teachers are called upon to be extraordinary and persist in their multi-grade teaching practices in the face of adversity.

2.3 PRINCIPLES OF RESILIENCE

2.3.1 Decentrality

According to Ungar (2011) and Wyman (2003), they agree with each other that change in people is not the result of what they do or do not, but reasonably the result of what their settings make available. Decentrality differentiates resiliency from resilience. Resiliency focuses on the capabilities of a person, whereas resilience focuses on a process. However, we should not expect a resilient person to do well at all times, in all imaginable situations.

2.3.2 Cultural relativity

Cultural relativity stresses the importance of identifying the culture in which the teacher being studied lives (Ungar, 2011). Culture, in the description related to cultural relativity, refers to the morals, language, principles and duties common to a group of people. The more a teacher adjusts to the prospects of his or her situation, the more he or she will be regarded as being resilient (Ungar, 2011).

2.3.3 Atypicality

This refers to the behavior displayed by the teacher in order to manage in opposing conditions. Atypicality also emphasise the importance of the environment as it helps to protect the teacher in the absence of resources. Given the continuous change of the curriculum and the related demands, teachers are always engaged in the process of coping with those conditions. It is also argued that in the development of resilience, a favorable environmental transformation may add more to teachers' coping strategies (Ungar, 2011).

2.3.4 Complexity

This principle is based on the perception that a person's resilience is not persistent but adjusts over time. For example, if teachers transfer to a new school, they can improve on their previous challenges if the necessary assistance is provided. According to Mansfield, Beltman, Price & McConney (2012) and Ungar (2011), teacher resilience could be improved if they received necessary support from education stakeholders. Furthermore, they stated that teachers' resilience could be improved if they were able to get support from public spaces. This view reinforces the importance of the teacher's environment as a factor.

2.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHER RESILIENCE

According to Mansfield et al. (2012), there is a need to examine teacher resilience in order to understand its complexity and how different factors impact on its development. The four characteristics of teacher resilience, namely, motivational, professional, social, and emotional dimensions, are explicitly explained below.

2.4.1 Profession-associated characteristics of teacher resilience

Mansfield et al. (2012) imply that the profession-associated aspect comprises the characteristics of teaching practices, taking into account the organization of a teacher, preparedness and effective time management. The resilient teacher will show commitment towards his learners, will possess necessary education expertise, will adopt and display thoughtful abilities. Nevertheless, teachers may find this challenging when faced with the absence of assistance, excessive workloads and teaching challenges (being subjected to multi-grade teaching).

2.4.2 Emotional characteristics of teacher resilience

Teachers who find it challenging to compact emotional characteristics of their field are more vulnerable to exhaustion and trauma (Mansfield et al., 2012). Meanwhile, Clonan et al. (2004) describe resilience as associated with capabilities which help to guard the individual against trauma and stressful events. It is further stated that the elevation of these capabilities has an influence on the communal setting. The abilities and the

development of defensive mechanisms of an individual assist in the nurturing of resilience.

2.4.3 Motivation as characteristics of teacher resilience

A motivational characteristic of teacher resilience involves the focus on constant development, self-knowledge enrichment, and an optimistic attitude towards problems, remaining hopeful and self-efficacy (Mansfield et al. 2012). According to Gilligan (2000) and Sosa and Gomez (2012), self-efficacy plays an important part in teacher resilience and it impacts the engagement of teachers, including the determinations they make to influence transformations in the lives of their learners. It was also found that teachers with high self-efficiency were more trusted for their abilities than those with low self-efficiency, as they constantly doubted themselves.

2.4.4 Socially-associated characteristics of teacher resilience

The social characteristics of teachers' resilience entail the relations in the work setting. These comprise characteristics like the development of the support structure, seeking support, and asking for advice from others (Mansfield et al. 2012). Hong (2012) states that teachers appreciate the support they get from their co-workers and those close to them. He went on to say that factors like supportive colleagues and the school management, who responded positively and enthusiastically, contributed to the teachers' growth and self-efficacy.

2.5 Factors that have been identified as important for teacher resilience

2.5.1 Personal resources

Motivation or intrinsic motivation as a personal resource has been identified as being important for teacher resilience (Hong, 2012). Howard & Johnson (2004) emphasised the importance of efficacy, which can be enhanced as teachers encounter and overcome, with support, the challenges they face in their teaching. Initiative is also important for teachers in how they exercise a sense of agency and address challenges (Gu et.al, 2007).

2.5.2 Contextual resources

Contextual resources for teacher resilience demonstrate the importance of relationships both within and outside the working context. Citing Jordan's model of relational resilience, Le Cornu (2013) argued that strengthening relationships is critical for enhancing resilience. Relational resilience is formed through a web of strong and trusting relationships between teacher-leaders, Mansfield, teachers-teachers, and students-teachers, and emphasises the importance of mutual empowerment, growth and support at the centre of the resilience process (Day & Gu, 2014; Gu, 2014). Hong (2012) argued that such relationships are important for teacher efficacy, which in turn influences the outcomes of commitment, resilience and retention.

Ebersöhn (2012) used the term 'Relationship Resourced Resilience (RRR)' to emphasise that resilience occurs as a collective process whereby individuals 'flock' together to access, mobilise and share resources for positive adaptation to adverse conditions. Relationships are therefore important both for individual and collective resilience. School culture also plays a role in the resilience process (Peters & Pearce, 2012). Schools that promote resilience and wellbeing for staff have been characterised by supportive administration and colleagues, collaboration, opportunities for meaningful participation and contribution to the decision making process (Cameron & Lovett, 2014; Johnson et al., 2014).

2.5.3 Strategies

Problem solving is also identified as important for teacher resilience (Johnson, et al., 2014) as well as help seeking, which can sometimes be challenging for teachers (Mansfield et al., 2012). Tait (2008) argued that teachers who were resilient actively took care of themselves as, for example, they could recognise their own stress levels and take steps to reduce this through physical activity or social networking. Professional learning also provides an important avenue for professional renewal and rejuvenation (Castro et al., 2010).

2.5.4 Outcomes

As well as being an important personal resource (seen as perhaps a sense of purpose), commitment is both a condition for teaching and an outcome of experience as a teacher (Day, 2008). Leadership practices in schools, especially where teachers feel valued, respected, and supported to develop their expertise and experience, are associated with commitment and job satisfaction. Keogh et al. (2012) argued that agency, efficacy and resilience work together in that agency assists teachers manage challenges, which in turn enhances self-efficacy and merges resilience.

2.6 WHAT IS MULTI-GRADE TEACHING?

Cornish (2010) argues that multi-grade teaching does not seem to have a mutual understanding between academics and educational experts. He also pointed out that this phenomenon was still argued, and it had yet to reach a mutual understanding of what it actually entails.

To fulfil the purpose of my research, Brunswick and Valerien (2004)'s definition will be embraced. They emphasise that multi-grade classes happen when one teacher has to teach all learners of different ages, grades (in some cases, phases) and content in the same class. The definition offered by Brunswick et al. (2004) suits the context of my research given that it focuses on multi-grade classes as the title of this study also does.

2.7 THE PRACTICE OF MULTI-GRADE TEACHING

This section discusses multi-grade teaching practices in both developed and developing countries. This closely studies the developments emerging in both these countries.

2.7.1 Multi-grade education in developed states

Within developed states, it is argued that multi-grade teaching arises largely through a choice rather than a necessity. Learners in multi-grade schools in these countries are grouped from a multi-age perspective. On one hand, Berry (2010) says, multi-age classes motivate learners' social development and inspire better classroom engagement and

participation. Little (2001) added that, despite the majority of rural schools in developed states like Canada, the USA, Finland, England, and New Zealand offering multi-grade education, one should not draw conclusions that their parents, communities, their teachers and schools are disadvantaged, academically and financially. It is said that rural schools in developed countries are as resourceful as their urban counterparts.

2.7.2 Multi-grade education in developing states

Within developing states, multi-grade teaching arises largely through necessity rather than a pedagogical choice. That is, there is a need to adopt this approach to teaching and learning. Learners in multi-grade schools in these countries are grouped from a multi-grade perspective. The grouping of learners is guided by their level of education and the content they have mastered in the education system, (Chau, Sibli, Montero, Thanh & Hargreaves, 2001).

Chau et al. (2001) studied multi-grade education in three developing states, namely Peru, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. They have contextualised multi-grade teaching in each of these states. Basic education in Peru is primarily provided through multi-grade education in areas where learners are dispersed throughout the rural areas. In Sri Lanka, multi-grade education is inclined to provide countryside areas where learners are from an unfortunate financial background. In Vietnam, the provision of primary education to those staying in far-reaching, remote and geographically disadvantaged areas is done through multi-grade teaching. Contextualisation of multi-grade teaching in these three countries is common. Multi-grade teaching was developed primarily to address educational challenges faced by rural schools (Abhayadeva, 1989).

2.7.3 Multi-grade teaching in South Africa

The introduction of multi-grade teaching in South Africa was motivated by necessity rather than choice. Brown (2010:193) puts it explicitly: The necessity for multi-grade teaching is mainly due to the declining number of school learners in rural areas, and limited resources. This approach was introduced in South Africa to meet the educational needs of the rural areas. It has been in existence for some time in South Africa, mostly in rural and farm schools. In their existence, primary school teachers have experienced

challenges in their multi-grade classrooms. This is evident in a recent study by Mulaudzi (2016), which focused on the challenges encountered in multi-grade classes in the process of teaching and learning. Therefore, this study will focus on how those multi-grade teachers cope with the said challenges, which are outlined in the following passages.

2.8 CHALLENGES OF MULTI-GRADE TEACHING

A study conducted in South Africa by Mulaudzi (2016) found the following explained challenges teachers encounter in multi-grade settings. This is espoused by McEwan (2008), emphasising that, despite the teaching and learning process taking place in multi-grade settings, challenges are present.

2.8.1 Curriculum Policy

The Department of Basic Education policy in South Africa makes no mention of multi-grade education, and learners and teachers in multi-grade settings are not given specific guidelines for how teaching and learning should be carried out (Joubert, 2010). The curriculum policy is completely designed for individual-grade levels, not for multiple combined grades. This is supported by the DoE (2011): the task team tasked by the minister of basic education to evaluate the implementation stage of the National Curriculum Statement produced the findings that the absence of policy assistance makes the implementation of the curriculum unsuccessful. Teachers also mentioned the challenge of delivering different content to different groups of learners within the same classroom.

2.8.2 Professional and Social isolation

Professional and social remoteness are some of the fundamental difficulties teachers encounter in multi-grade settings (Berry, 2001). He specifies that multi-grade education is primarily offered in rural schools, which are areas where there is difficulty in reaching them with less infrastructure development. Teachers face difficulties that are not limited to multi-grade teaching, but also to teaching and learning materials, irregular monitoring,

and deprived livelihood environments. There is an initiative of merging schools in South Africa but many schools remained unmerged yet.

2.8.3 Attitudes of parents regarding multi grade education

Brown (2013) emphasises that an additional challenge confronted by multi-grade teachers is parents' perception of multi-grade teaching. He further maintains that, despite parents being one of the valuable pillars of education, it appears that multi-grade schools and teachers do not constantly get support from the parents. Multi-grade education appears to be of little interest on a global scale, and South Africa is no exception. Multi-grade settings are naturally regarded as being below standard, which are regarded as schools that most parents do not recommend sending their children to (Jordaan & Joubert, 2008).

2.8.4 Teaching and learning materials

(Taole & Mncube, 2012) argues that teaching and learning resources also tend to be tailored specifically for the mono-grade classroom. As a result, the teaching and learning materials are designed as grade-level books rather than combined-grade-level books, and they are intended to be instructed by a teacher to the students. Brown (2013) further argues that these materials aimed at mono-grade classes do not produce desirable results in multi-grade settings.

2.8.5 Classroom management

Classroom management is one of the challenges encountered with regards to multi-grade settings. It was witnessed that, as the teacher is engaged with a certain set of learners, the other set is kept engaged with an activity to finish. This activity will then be finished deprived of the teachers' administration (Taole & Mncube, 2012). In some cases, learners may not even attempt a task given to them. Another area of concern is that the inadequate time provided in multi-grade classes contributes to their failure. This necessitates time

management workshops for teachers, particularly those in multi-grade schools (Taole et al. 2012).

The challenges teachers encounter in multi-grade education have been well-known for some time (Goddard & Foster, 2011) and it is evident in the above literature that teaching and learning in multi-grade classes still takes place despite the challenges presented by this approach to teaching and the concentration on the resilience of teachers, as in this study, is on how teachers cope with multi-grade teaching.

2.9 MULTI-GRADE REFORMS

2.9.1 Multi-grade Reform in Colombia, Guatemala and Chile

According to Schiefel (1991), Colombia's Escuela Nueva is the pioneering reform of multi-grade teaching, and is often cited as the best for rural schools (McEwan, 2008). According to Brown (2013), this reform started in the early 1970s, with the piloting of methodologies and strategies for multi-grade teaching.

The Escuela Nueva Program is usually run by two teachers per school, and formal and informal assessments, which are normally assigned to individual learners in a traditional single-grade school, are combined with group work. Learners work at their own pace, which suggests that, even if they drop-out of school for a time and later return to school, they can simply pick up where they left off (Brown, 2010).

(Brown, 2010) points out that the materials for multi-grade teaching, in the Escuela Nueva program are developed as self-instructional learning guides for both teachers and learners (Brown, 2010). Other components of this reform include curricula-based learning corners, a suggestion box for learners, a library, a systematically integrated curriculum, in-service training and follow-up for teachers, and community and administrative strategies connecting the school and the community. According to Brown (2010), teachers in in-service sessions, use detailed manuals that are similar to the learning guides used by learners. The training sessions take place throughout the year. The main

focus is on the continuing development of teachers, as well as on the implementation of the program and on ensuring that there are appropriate resources to support learning.

McEwan (2008) points out that several impact evaluations have been conducted on the Escuela Nueva multi-grade intervention, using multiple sources of data. Results from an evaluation conducted by the Ministry of Education in Colombia, on the achievement of learners, showed that the learners in the Escuela Nueva multi-grade reform performed better than learners in mono-grade classes (Little, 2001).

McEwan (cited in Little, 2001) replicated the school effects on achievement using a subsequent and more representative data set. Even though the Escuela Nueva Schools were particularly well endowed with textbooks and libraries, the school effects on achievement remained strong, even after controlling for the effects of textbooks and libraries. He concluded that the Escuela Nueva Program may be a good example of holistic, qualitative change, rather than the application of interchangeable and discrete physical inputs.

Results from different statistical analysis confirm the superior achievement of the children of Escuela Nueva, a significant reduction in drop-out and repetition rates, and an improvement in the learners' self-esteem and civic behavior. He further states that results from a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) test on the impact of the Escuela Nueva Program showed that children's self-esteem was higher than that of those learning in other settings.

In Guatemala, the Nueva Escuela Unitaria is a more recent innovation, borrowing ideas and personnel from the Colombian reform. In 1989, the Ministry of Education and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) started Project BEST to improve the quality of primary schooling. As one component, it implemented a multi-grade school intervention in 1993. The pilot program focused on 100 schools in several regions, expanding to another 100 in the next two years. (McEwan, 2008).

Chile implemented its own rural school intervention, MECE-Rural, as part of a nationwide primary school reform in the 1990s that emphasized the reduction of inequality. Until 1992, multi-grade primary schools and students received no special attention from the

Ministry of Education. Beginning in 1992, the Ministry provided training and materials to rural schools, reaching all multi-grade schools by 1996. By the end of the decade, MECE-Rural was fully incorporated into Ministry operations and was rechristened the Rural Basic Program (McEwan, 2008).

McEwan (2008) describes the general features of the Colombian, Guatemalan and Chilean reforms. According to McEwan, each reform has a lot in common, particularly the Colombian and Guatemalan versions. He describes the following:

- ✓ First, each reform highlighted in-service training for current rural teachers, rather than pre-service education. Teachers were educated with instructional techniques suitable for a multi-grade setting, including individual and cooperative learning, as well as the use of newly developed instructional materials.
- ✓ Second, each reform promoted the development and distribution of multi-grade instructional materials, including teacher guides and student textbooks that facilitated self-guide learning. The material proceeds in units that students can pursue at their own pace and without continual supervision.
- ✓ Third, the training and materials emphasized the application of active pedagogies. Students participate in individual and small group exercises that require the acquisition and application of new skills, rather than passive attendance in a large-group discourse.
- ✓ Fourth, learners were involved in the organization and management of the school, particularly in the Colombian and Guatemalan reforms.
- ✓ Fifth, the intervention in Colombia and Guatemala provides specific mechanisms for involving the community in the school.
- ✓ Sixth, in place of a traditional 'pass or fail' assessment at the year-end student evaluation occurs throughout the year, emphasizing mastery of each unit's skill, Colombian and Guatemalan sources describe 'flexible' promotion as a key strength of the intervention, giving higher rates of grade repetition.

2.9.2 The Zambian multi-grade Intervention Program

Multi-grade teaching was introduced to a number of Zambian primary schools in rural areas in the mid-1980s as part of a consciously formulated project supported by the Ministry of General Education. It was argued that multi-grade teaching would enable small rural schools with low enrolments in each grade to upgrade themselves to the grade seven level without putting up additional classrooms and teachers.

According to a Review of Research and Practice-Education (1994) and Lungwangwa (2000), in-service training courses in multi-grade teaching were established by the Malcom Moffat Teachers' Training College (MMTTC). The intervention program also consisted of books, follow-up seminars, inspection, evaluation and incorporation of multi-grade teaching as part of the regular pre-service teacher training program.

The review further indicates that approaches to curriculum and teaching appear to have promoted the MMTTC, including the following:

- ✓ The Common Timetable Alternative: where all children learn the same subject in a given timetable period, but each grade group follows its own work, according to its own work program and grade level.
- ✓ The Subject Stagger Alternative: subjects are staggered on the timetable so that grade groups learn different subjects during the same period. Subjects which require high teacher-pupil contact are matched with those requiring little contact.
- ✓ The Subject Grouping Alternative: subjects are presented to all grade groups together at the same time.

Lungwangwa (2000), through his evaluation, indicates that, despite the problems encountered in the implementation of the training programs, it was believed that multi-grade teaching could have some positive outcomes. It can enhance independent learning, encourage the teacher's revision of materials covered in earlier grades and increase pupil interaction. The multi-grade teaching was well received by teachers in the pilot schools. They perceived that it had learning benefits and were keen on receiving further training.

2.9.3 The South African multi-grade Intervention Program

In South Africa, the Western Cape is the only province to have implemented the multi-grade intervention program. According to Jordaan and Joubert (2008), the Western Cape Education Department implemented the Multi-Grade Rural Schools Intervention in 2002. Implementation took place by means of 10 cycles (9 months per cycle). More than 335 schools in the Western Cape, 876 teachers and about 25 437 learners were involved in this intervention. Because of the distance and isolation, teacher clusters (networks) formed the core of this intervention.

Jordaan and Joubert (2008) further state that the intervention was implemented by linking teachers in person, as well as through electronic means (e-mail and the World Wide Web) with other teachers and groups to explore and discuss topics of interest, share information and strategies, and identify and address common problems.

The intervention was built on four key pillars, focusing on classroom management and instructional strategies, in-service training and ICT. It targeted six areas, which included the configuration of learning spaces and classroom organization, classroom routines and discipline, curriculum structuring and planning, teaching strategies, self-directed strategies, and peer tutoring. It, furthermore, focused on training teachers in these schools to use, develop and apply such learning programs optimally (Jordaan & Joubert 2008).

According to Jordaan and Joubert (2008), the inability of the newly appointed officials to manage funds in a sustainable manner harmed the project's long-term viability. As a result, the project leader left, which, in turn, left teachers without assistance and motivation. The intervention was terminated after three years by the Department of Education. No reason for the termination was given, nor was any scientific research conducted on the implications of the termination of the project. Jordaan and Joubert (2008) also stated that independent research proved that the intervention resulted in a significant improvement in literacy and numeracy skills.

From the multi-grade reforms established in the countries mentioned, it was in South Africa where the reform was interfered with and since then the multi-grade schools in South Africa, throughout the nine provinces, had to ensure that teaching and learning in

that setting occurs, supported or non-supported. The multi-grade reform which showed success was that of Colombia and its success was attributed to multi-grade appropriate materials, active community involvement with the school and in-service training of teachers for over a period of a year. This shows that for multi-grade to succeed, teachers and learners need to be supported. In South Africa, it is quite the opposite. The failure of multi-grade reform in a developed province like the Western Cape shows the absence of what makes this reform a success in other countries. Teachers have to navigate through teaching and learning on their own. It is this resilience that teachers display that motivated me to study the strategies they use to cope in such environments.

2.10 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.10.1 RELATIONSHIP RESOURCED RESILIENCE – PROCESS

To understand resilience in an educational setting, a theory that guides the study is required. It has emerged from the literature is that there are studies that espouse the theory of teacher resilience. Mansfield, Beltman, Broadley and Weatherby-Fell, (2016) are some of the authors that espouse the resilience theory. This study has used the Relationship Resourced Resilience theory (RRR) by (EbersÖhn, 2013) as a framework. The Relationship Resourced Resilience theory was developed from case studies involving low-resource schools facing multiple risk factors that have continued over time. Through the Relationship Resourced Resilience lens, resilience is viewed as a process that is ecologically embedded in interlinked systems.

From a resilience perspective, it is arguable that where there is a risk, there are protective resources. Supported by this notion is that, when the risk of inability to access education facilities for those in remote areas arises, multi-grade class is introduced to address such risk factors. Protective resources are systematically entrenched and assessed to sustain resilience. A lack of resources, as is common in rural areas, limits the options for intervening in situations to promote resilience. Balfour et al. (2008) explain that resources can be individual-centered (personal strengths), family-centered (employment), school-centered (set-up and knowledge) and community-based (services and policies). In this

study, the researcher has looked at resilience as both person- and school-based in order to fully investigate and understand teacher resilience in multi-grade settings.

This theory can be incorporated into plans to support learners in multi-grade classrooms. Intervention strategies can reshape arrangements to be able to provide necessary support and growth in access to proper basic education. Therefore, Relationship-Resourced Resilience does not necessitate removing risk, but rather meditating on the effects of risk as a way to build resilience (Ferreira & EbersÖhn, 2012). This study embraced this theoretical framework to study the resilience of teachers in the rural multi-grade schools of the Glen-Cowie Circuit.

Relationship Resourced Resilience (RRR), as the name implies, emphasised the occurrence of resilience as a collective process and the importance of relationships for both individual and collective resilience, particularly in low resource schools. I chose this theory because it is relevant to my study, which is centered on rural schools. This theory is used to describe, explain and guide the data which will emerge in answering my research questions.

2.11 CONCLUSION

This second chapter of the study presented the literature review and the theoretical framework adopted by this study in detail. It started with introducing what resilience is, moving to the principles and the characteristics of resilience and swiftly introducing what multi-grade is and the studies in relation to the dissertation topic. Finally, it considered multi-level reforms, both globally and locally. The next chapter will focus on the methodology that was adopted to guide the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' coping strategies in teaching multi-grade classes. The previous chapter illustrated the conditions which enable multi-grade teaching to take place and the challenges teachers experience in their multi-grade classrooms, followed by the features and principles of resilience teachers' display in those situations.

This chapter details the methodology and the research design used in this study to investigate the strategies teachers use in coping with the challenges experienced in their multi-grade classes. It includes a research approach, design, sampling strategy, data collection methods, analysis of data and ethical considerations.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is explained as an approach to investigation, which sequences from the fundamental rules to research design and data collection (Yin, 2014). Research methodology is commonly categorised into two forms, qualitative and quantitative, and the use of both qualitative and quantitative is called mixed methodology. For the purpose of this research, the researcher used a qualitative research methodology, which relies heavily on human interaction through the participants' opinions, beliefs, knowledge and experiences of the phenomenon under study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2016).

The use of qualitative research methodology helped the researcher to obtain multi-grade teachers' experiences through direct interaction with the participants. It also helped the researcher to explore the views of different participant teachers and teachers to help unpack these differing perspectives within a community. Because social capital is relational—it exists between people (Dudwick, Kuehnast, Jones & Woolcock, 2006). The primary strength of the qualitative approach is the ability to probe into the underlying

values, beliefs, and assumptions. To gain a full appreciation of a school setting, it is necessary to understand what is driving the teachers' behaviour (Yauch & Steudel, 2003). The other great benefit of a qualitative approach is that the inquiry is broad and open-ended, allowing the participants to raise issues that matter most to them (Yauch & Steudel, 2003).

The qualitative research methodology used in this study helped me to understand the teachers' experiences in their multi-grade classes. It provided a forum for teachers to express the challenges and coping strategies of their multi-grade classes. This also aided me in my role as a researcher in determining the answers to all of the questions raised by this study.

3.3 Research Design

The study used a case study design. This design helped me to have a detailed understanding of the phenomenon of multi-grade teaching. The research followed a case study design because it provided me with the opportunity to interrogate each aspect of the phenomena in depth. As Yin (2014) explains, it consents to profound, rich data collection and exploration, in a precise, circumscribed structure. In addition, McMillan and Schumacher (2016) describe case study design as an approach to trying to understand and describe how the participants experience a phenomenon. The researcher saw it as the most appropriate thing for this research.

Yin (2009) describes three main categories of case studies: explanatory, exploratory and descriptive. The Exploratory case study, as the name states, intends merely to explore the research questions and does not intend to offer final and conclusive solutions to existing problems. It is conducted in order to determine the nature of the problem. This type of research is not intended to provide conclusive evidence, but helps us to have a better understanding of the problem (Yin, 2009). It also helped to explore how participating multi-grade teachers within rural areas of Glen Cowie Circuit cope with multi-grade teaching. Furthermore, it also helped to enable the participants to express their experiences in multi-grade classrooms and a voice based on their context.

3.4 Sampling

Given that the purpose of this study was to investigate the teachers' coping strategies in teaching multi-grade classes. It was necessary to select a sample of teachers that had experienced this phenomenon, that is, teaching in multi-grade classes. Makhado (2002) emphasises the fact that it is important to select information-rich cases, as this helps the researcher to address the purpose of the research.

There are different types of sampling strategies that can be used in research. They can be classified as probability and non-probability sampling. In this study, the researcher used a non-probability sampling strategy referred to as purposive sampling. Polit and Beck (2009) and Creswell (2012) emphasise that a sample is a subgroup of the people carefully chosen to partake in the study.

McMillan and Schumacher (2012) recommended purposeful sampling because the samples that are chosen are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena under investigation. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to purposefully select the participants in the study. Creswell (2012) and Strydom & Venter, (2017) explain that purposive sampling refers to the selection of participants that will be of greatest help to the researcher in understanding the topic of this study. The researcher selected teachers of multi-grade classes and principals for their management experience at multi-grade schools.

This study focused on three rural schools situated in Glen Cowie Circuit in the Sekhukhune District. The inclusion criteria for the participants in the study were based on the following characteristics:

- ✓ Teachers (including principals) of schools that practice multi-grade teaching.
- ✓ Teachers (including principals) of schools under Glen-Cowie Circuit.
- ✓ Teachers (including principals) of schools situated in rural areas.

The study excluded teachers from semi-urban or urban schools because the researcher wanted to study the coping strategies of teachers who teach multi-grade classes in rural

schools. As Wenger et al. (2012) put it, the researcher will purposefully select participants who can best help to understand the phenomenon under study.

There were 10 participants in this study. Seven were teachers and three were principals. The purpose of both teachers and principals was that the principals in those schools also teach, and I wanted to learn about their experiences in the classroom as well as managing a multi-grade school in general.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

For the purpose of data collection, the study used face-to-face individual and focus interviews, document analysis, group interviews and observations as data collection methods. The use of more than one method helped to maximise the conformability and transferability of the study. It also helped to enable teachers to express their views verbally and afforded the researcher a space to analyse their documents as well as observe the lesson presentations.

I have interviewed the teachers as well as the principals of the three sampled schools in the Glen Cowie circuit for two weeks. This was a deviation from my initial plan where I intended to spend six weeks with the participants. The deviation was due to the Covid-19 pandemic challenges. Listed below are some of the difficulties encountered during the data collection period. The challenge was that the attendance of learners during the Covid-19 pandemic was rearranged to align with the Covid-19 protocols. Some of the challenges that the teachers faced, such as class disruptions and overcrowding, were, in my opinion, minimal. Again, schools were advised to strictly allow visitors at certain hours. I had to shorten my time at my research school and, in that time, I managed to gather all the necessary data I needed for this study.

3.5.1 Interviews

An interview is a shared dialogue in which the researcher will ask the participants questions as a method of gathering data as well as to learn about the experiences, opinions and activities of the participants (King, Horrocks, & Brooks, 2018). This research made use of individual semi-structured interviews for principals and focus-group interviews for teachers. A group discussion was adopted to understand the problem and the ideas or strategies that teachers used to cope in their multi-grade classes. Also, it helped me to obtain rich and quality data by building a social atmosphere where group members were enthused by one another's views and strategies. Individual interviews enabled teachers to freely express their opinions at their own pace.

3.5.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

In the semi-structured open-ended interview, the topics and issues to be covered were specified in advance. The researcher decided on the sequence and wording based on the interaction with the participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2008 and Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson & Kangasniemi, 2016). The use of this data collection method provided me with first-hand experience expressed by teachers in a one-on-one setting that made them feel at ease and engaged them in all of the study's questions.

I have interviewed three teachers face-to-face individually, because in their respective schools, you find that there is only one teacher and the principal is responsible for the whole school. I also interviewed principals at those multi-grade schools. Each interview lasted 30 to 60 minutes and was recorded on a cell phone with audio recording software.

3.5.1.2 Focus group discussions

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) emphasise that focus group interviews was used and enabled me to better understand the problem under study by forming a group setting in which the participant group members were encouraged by one another's views and

strategies. This enabled me, as a researcher, to expand the superiority and abundance of data through a more resourceful approach than through personal interviews. I conducted this form of an interview at one multi-grade school as it was the only school with more than three multi-grade teachers.

I interviewed the three multi-grade teachers at this particular school and the use of this focus group was to encourage teachers to speak out and share their lived experiences, and the response was excellent. Teachers were engaged in their teaching environment and, during that discussion, strategies were explained. Teachers empower each other with what they seem to be working on in their classrooms. The school principal also suggested that such a discussion be held on a regular basis so that teachers can voice their concerns and report on the effective ways they handle some or all of the challenges they face.

3.5.2 Document analysis

I analysed documents by incorporating coding content into themes, the same as how interview transcripts are analysed (Bowen, 2009). O'Leary (2014) explains that there are three primary types of documents, namely, physical evidence, personal documents and public records. I used all three kinds of documents. The researcher's choice of document analysis was an effective and efficient way of analysing what teachers do in lesson preparations (lesson plans), assessment techniques (assessment papers), management strategies (school policies and/or individual plans for the management of classrooms, including the time table), multi-grade teaching policies and reports by class teachers. Documents are stable, practical, manageable resources and non-reactive data sources, and this helped the researcher to read and review them several times and remain unchanged during the research process. I requested documents including lesson plans, time-tables, teacher reports, assessment plans and papers and the policies used to manage multi-grade schools. Two multi-grade teachers and two principals were used in this regard.

3.5.3 Lesson observation

Observation, as the name implies, is the process of observing the manifestation of events as they unfold without questioning them. Creswell (2009) eloquently indicates that through observation, the researcher gets real experience with the research participants and those uncommon aspects can be observed during observations.

According to Hammersley and Arkinson (2007), there are three main types of observer in research. Firstly, it is the complete participating observer who tries to blend into the studied environment and to appropriate the groups' lifestyles, customs, and even the way they perceive reality. Secondly, it is a partially participating observer who takes part in the interactions, but not in the type of activity that is specific to the studied environment. Thirdly, it is the non-participant observer who is without any involvement in human interaction in the field.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher chose to use partial participation as an observer, which allowed me to take part in the interactions, but with limitations not interfere with lessons as they unfold. This allowed me to observe the situation closely without interfering or questioning it as it unfolded. I made sure that aspects concerning the trustworthiness of this study guided me, not the other way round. It also gave me an opportunity to observe how teachers present their lessons in multi-grade classes, the challenges they encounter in their classrooms and the strategies they use for managing those challenges. Lesson observations were done in four multi-grade classrooms.

To avoid disrupting the lesson, especially by diverting the learners' attention away from their teacher and the lesson, I first explained who I was and what I was there for, that is, my purpose for being there. From there, the lesson unfolded smoothly as I was a complete observer during the entire lesson for the period of two periods, which took 30 minutes each.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

3.6.1 Thematic analysis of data

Thematic analysis of data was chosen as the most suitable method of analysis strategy for the study. Clarke & Brown (2013) and Maguire & Delahunt (2017) indicate data analysis, as a thematic method, that requires the researcher to familiarise, engage, organise and code the data collected and identify emerging themes. To achieve the purpose of this study, which is to explore teachers' coping strategies in teaching multi-grade classes, the data was analysed using a thematic analysis method.

The following steps were followed in the process of data analysis:

Step 1: Familiarising myself with the data collected

All the data collected from observations, individual and focus group interviews was transcribed into meaningful texts. Field note recordings of the processes by which the data was collected were transcribed into words and texts and included the verbal and non-verbal observations that emerged during the data collection process. In order to get a full view of the data, I read all the data numerous times so as to become engaged with and familiarise myself with the information (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

Step 2: Generating initial codes

In order to categorise and interpret the data meaningfully, I made use of coding in order to realise the emerging themes within the data. According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), data coding allows the researcher to reduce data into small manageable parts of meaning and label it to form descriptions and broader themes in the data. Data was coded to enable me to systematically categorise it into themes emerging from observations, individual and focus group interviews.

Step 3: Searching for themes

After codes have been generated and noted meaningfully, I then fit them together to form meaningful statements relevant to the research aim and question (Clarke and Braun, 2013). The use of themes allowed me to condense the data into meaningful statements that addressed the specific and important aspects of the research goal.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

After the data had been coded, categories developed and themes created, I reviewed the themes to ensure that they made sense and related meaningfully to the data set. The theme review required me to consider whether the themes made sense in relation to the codes and the entire data set, that is, whether they told a compelling story in relation to the study (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This also enabled me to make sense of the nature of individual themes and also identify the relationship between the themes.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

This is the final step of thematic data analysis where themes and the aims to identify the meaning and core of what each theme is about are refined (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This step, the naming and defining of themes, allowed me to describe the suitable meaning it brought to the data and determined the significance of the whole data collected (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

The themes were developed based on the literature and the answers participants gave when they were interviewed. The similarities in the responses given resulted in me being able to develop themes as I transcribed and coded the data. The various questions that participants were asked allowed me to categorise the various answers into themes.

3.7 QUALITY CRITERIA

There are aspects that were looked at to guarantee quality in this study. Creswell (2009) advised that to achieve the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, one can use the following four strategies, which are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility is explained as the scope in which the data and data analysis are authentic and truthful. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) describe that credibility is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a credible conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants' original data. In this study, credibility was established through

triangulation and member checking. With triangulation, several data collection methods were used to achieve this. Lesson observations were triangulated with focus group and individual interviews. As a researcher, I made use of participants' findings member check, that is, participants verified the findings drawn from the study to increase credibility (Creswell, 2009). I gave the participants the transcripts to read and verify their accuracy.

3.7.2 Transferability

The results of the research are transferable only if they fit into new contexts separate from the actual research context, which is the extent to which a person can extend the explanation of a certain situation to other people or periods than those directly researched (Creswell, 2009). This was achieved by thoroughly applying the research methodology outlined for this study. In the three different schools used, the results were similar and the methodology was applied thoroughly and consistently throughout the study.

3.7.3 Dependability

Creswell (2013) argues that the dependability of the data is the extent to which the same findings could be repeated. The same research instruments were simulated with similar respondents under similar conditions. As a result, a dependable study has to be accurate and consistent. Denzil and Lincoln (2013) state that dependability is achieved through a process of auditing and, therefore, researchers are responsible for ensuring that the process of research is logical, traceable, clearly documented and can be demonstrated through an audit trail, where others can examine the researcher's documentation of data, methods, decisions and the end product.

3.7.4 Confirmability of the findings

Conformability is the degree to which, as a researcher, I am aware of individual subjectivity (Creswell, 2009). Conformability focuses on the characteristics of the data collected and the processes leading to its collection that yield findings that are objective, neutral, credible and consistent, as opposed to those that are based on the researcher's perceptions and preconceptions. In this study, as a researcher, I have avoided bias in order to retain the conformability of the study. I did not temper the findings irrespective of

my opinion of the information. Documents and recordings used to obtain data - focus group and individual interviews, observations as well as document analysis - were preserved.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Wagner, Kawulich and Gardener (2012), every research study is guided by ethical rules. The researcher in this study adhered to ethical issues while conducting this research. Ethical issues include seeking permission, avoidance of harm, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality and voluntary participation.

3.8.1 Seeking permission

Wagner et al. (2012) state that researchers need to seek permission from an organisation to conduct a research. The researcher asked for approval from the Department of Education Limpopo, Sekhukhune District, Glen Cowie Circuit office and the school principals where the study was conducted. Letters of approval were sought at all levels, from the District, Circuit and schools, respectively. Before conducting the research, ethical clearance was obtained from the Turfloop Research and Ethics Committee.

3.8.2 Avoidance of harm

Caution was well exercised in the engagement between the researcher and the participants, which ensured that the participants did not experience a feeling of discomfort at any point during this study. Participants were informed that they were at liberty to withdraw their participation in this study at any time (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport, 2011).

3.8.3 Informed consent

The study's goal was to recruit teachers and principals as participants. The participants were informed about the study and asked to partake in it as a voluntary activity, meaning that the school's permission was granted. Creswell (2009) and Wagner et al. (2012) remind researchers to remember that while conducting research, the researcher enters

the private spaces of his or her participants. Informed consent in writing was received from all participants before proceeding with the interviews, observations and discussions. Consequently, participants were informed about their rights to either participate or withdraw from participation if they so wished.

3.8.4 Anonymity and Confidentiality

The principle of confidentiality and anonymity entails that the identity of participants in a research study must be safeguarded (Wagner et al., 2012). All the confidential information that was gathered or communicated to the researcher was protected. The identity of the participants was kept anonymous. This was done by using pseudonyms or assigning identification letters to the participants, such as A or B to represent the names of schools or teachers, Polit and Beck (2009).

3.8.5 Voluntary participation

Participants were informed in detail prior to the commencement of the research project that their participation in this study was voluntary and at no stage should they feel compelled to take part in the study (De Vos et al. 2011). Also, they were informed that they met the sampling criteria for participants to participate voluntarily in this study. They were also free to withdraw their participation in this study at any time.

3.9 CONCLUSION

The third chapter of the study detailed all the procedures I followed to collect and analyse the data in this study. It explained the methodology approach I have employed, the research design, data collection methods and the data analysis strategy, the participants I sampled relevant to this study, the procedure I have followed to ensure the trustworthiness of this study and the ethical considerations included. The next chapter of this study will focus on the analysis and interpretation of data.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the data analysis and interpretation of interviews, lesson observations, and document analysis as the techniques used to collect data. The research was undertaken to explore the coping strategies primary school teachers use in their multi-grade classes. To ensure anonymity, participants were assigned identification letters.

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

There were 10 participants in this study. Seven were teachers and three were principals. Four were interviewed in a focus group consisting of four participants. Three were interviewed individually. Three principals were also interviewed individually. Of the 7 teachers interviewed, 1 of them was a male and 6 were females. In these multi-grade schools, female teachers dominate. Because there have been no newly hired teachers in the schools, all of the teachers and principals are over the age of 45. The teachers and principals' work experience ranges from 10 to 30 years. It is evident that they have been in the teaching profession for some time and they possess the necessary knowledge and experience of the profession. Each of the three schools has a principal and a post-level one teacher (s). The smallest of the three schools has a principal and one teacher, while the largest has a principal and three teachers. None of the schools are eligible for the head of department position because the learner's admission rate is too low.

4.3 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS INTERVIEWS

Thematic analysis of data was chosen as the most suitable method of analysis strategy for the study. Clarke & Brown (2013) and Maguire & Delahunt (2017) indicate, data analysis, as a thematic method, that requires the researcher to familiarise, engage, organise and code the data collected and identify emerging themes. To achieve the purpose of this study, which is to explore teachers' coping strategies in teaching multi-

grade classes, the data was analysed using a thematic analysis method. The following steps were followed in the process of data analysis: Firstly, I familiarised myself with the data collected. Secondly, I generated the initial codes. Thirdly, I searched for themes. Fourthly, I reviewed the themes and, lastly, I defined and named the themes.

Based on the individual and focus group interviews with teachers and principals, the following themes surfaced:

Theme 1 : Teacher development in multi-grade teaching

Theme 2 : Challenges faced by teachers in their multi-grade classes

Sub-themes : Curriculum management and organisation

: Time constraints

: Learner performance/cognitive

: Excessive workload

: Limited resources coping

Theme 3 : Coping strategies of multi-grade teachers

Sub-themes : Strategies on curriculum management and organisation

: Strategies on time management

: Strategies on Learner performance/cognitive

: Strategies on excessive workload

: Strategies on limited resources

Theme 4 : Personal factors that promotes/enables teacher resilience

Theme 5 : What kind of support do teachers get in the teaching of multi-grade classes?

4.3.1 Theme 1: Teacher development in multi-grade teaching

4.3.1.1 Teacher development in multi-grade teaching

When responding to the question on teacher development, most of the participants stated that they had never attended workshops on multi-grade teaching. Only two of the participants stated that they had received training through a workshop. Participants also stated that the workshop was only one day and lasted for two hours. It was also revealed that they were given books on multi-grade classes but were not given instructions on how to use them. Participants responded as follows:

Participant A: *We have not been trained.*

Participant B: *No training has been received.*

Participant C: *We only received a workshop for few hours but it was not enough.*

Participant D: *I am used to teach grade 4 and 5 multi-graded and 6 and 7, I only received training where I used to work before but since I started working here I never got any training.*

Responses from the participants suggest that teachers are teaching in multi-grade classes without relevant knowledge and expertise to teach in those classes. The fact that they were just handed over books to read on their own and implement suggests that necessary support was not given to those teachers. Also, a one-time workshop suggests that teachers have to rely on their own teaching knowledge and experience to survive in those multi-grade classes. One can deduce that proper training in multi-grade is needed. Mulaudzi (2016) implies, in her study, that curriculum advisors are not giving multi-grade teachers the necessary support that they need. This is also supported by Little (2004), who argues that many policy makers, planners, professional support staff and the public at large, are unaware of the extent and nature of the needs of multi-grade classes.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Challenges faced by teachers in their multi-grade classes.

This study revealed that participants experienced various challenges in their multi-grade classes. This includes curriculum management and organisation, time constraints, learner performance/cognition, workload and limited resources.

4.3.2.1 Curriculum management and organisation

Participants stated that curriculum management and organization are two of the issues they face. They highlighted that they teach two or more grades in one class which have their own curriculum and pace setter to follow. Their exact response is as follows:

***Participant A:** The challenge is that when we teach one grade we must just teach the other grade with the same pace setter and as an educator your work will always be behind.*

***Participant B:** Language teaching especially first additional language, learners are incompetent. They become shy to speak as they think that the first grade is better than them e.g. Grade 4 versus Grade 5. Content coverage is also a problem.*

The views of participants suggest that curriculum management and organisation are a problem for multi-grade teachers. The fact that each grade has its own curriculum requirements to follow presents a problem for these teachers and, failing to teach each grade according to the specific curriculum guidelines, suggests that teaching and learning in multi-grade classes is not effective at all. Brown (2010) also noted the same challenge and argues that, generally, in a multi-grade arrangement, although learners of different grades comprise one class, learners have to pursue grade-appropriate curricula.

4.3.2.2 Time constraints

Participants argued that limited time is a great challenge that they experience in their multi-grade classes. They have mentioned that working in a multi-grade class presents more work which needs a lot of time and, since learners are taught in the same setting

but with different cognitive levels, time is a very scarce resource in their classrooms. This is what the participants had to say:

Participant C: *More time is required to deal with each grade.*

Participant D: *Multi-grade teaching is tough because you may find that at times learners of one grade are hard to understand, so it becomes difficult as in most cases you may find that your work is too much. So you lack time for revising.*

Participant E: *It is difficult when dealing with uncooperative learners and lack of time for extra activities.*

Participant F: *There is no enough time for all the grades in weekly basis.*

The responses suggest that there is not enough time for teachers in multi-grade classes to teach satisfactorily. The fact that teachers of multi-grade classes are given the same time as teachers of single grade classes shows that teaching and learning in multi-grade classes is compromised and, as the participants argue, it becomes difficult for them to do their work to the best of their abilities.

4.3.2.3 Learner performance/cognitive

Participants argued that the performance or cognitive level of learners is a huge challenge in their multi-grade classes. Teachers showed that teaching learners of different grades in the same class was not easy. One teacher argued that it is tough because, at times, learners of one grade are hard to understand, while another teacher stated that learners of a lower grade are often incompetent and reluctant to do activities as they constantly compare themselves with those of a higher grade. This is what the participants had to say:

Participant B: *Language teaching especially first additional language, learners are incompetent. They become shy to speak as they think that that the first grade is better than them e.g. Grade 4 versus Grade 5. Content coverage is also a problem.*

Participant D: Multi-grade teaching is tough because you may find that at times learners of one grade are hard to understand, so it becomes difficult as in most cases you may find that your work is too much. So you lack time for revising.

From the responses, it is clear that teachers do not actually see multi-grade classes as doing any good for the learners involved. The responses also suggest that it is difficult for teachers to teach in multi-grade classes. Teachers are finding it difficult to bridge the gap between the learners of different grades in both teaching and managing the curriculum simultaneously and learners are also finding it difficult to mentally get along with the fact that, despite belonging to different grades, those other learners are still their classmates. This is different to what other parts of the literature review suggest. A literature review suggests that, in other countries where multi-grade reforms have been introduced, for example, Zambia, it is believed that multi-grade teaching can have some positive outcomes. It is believed that it can enhance independent learning, increase pupil interaction and contribute to the country's goal of universalising basic education (Lungwangwa, 2000).

4.3.2.4 Excessive Workload

Participants argued that there is a lot of work for multi-grade teachers. They argue that having more than one grade in a single class requires a lot of preparation. One participant also highlighted the fact that she had fewer learners in her class, but they belonged to three grades, 1, 2 and 3 respectively. The work she has to put in is just too much, considering the fact that she has to teach all subjects belonging to all grades. They responded as follows:

Participant D: It is difficult to teach in multi-grade classes because the work is too much and I am not coping. I still have to work on SA-SAMS to capture day to day activities.

Participant E: Multi-grade is demanding and we have a lot of work to do. The confusion starts with preparation because having to teach learners of grade 1, 2

and 3 at the same time is not simple, those learners are far apart and there is no time to pay attention to each learner. To be truthful we are just not coping.

The participants' responses suggest that teachers are not coping in their multi-grade classrooms. The amount of work they have to do is simply too much for them. It was also revealed that teachers must handle school administrative work, as one teacher explained that she still has to update the SA-SAMS (tool used by the department of education to record all school activities) on a daily basis. This is due to the fact that these schools have such low enrolment that they do not qualify for a deputy principal or head of department, and they also do not have enough enrolment to warrant an administrative clerk, so all responsibilities and work in the school are in the hands of the teachers and the principal. According to Brown (2008:13), teachers prefer single-grades because multi-grade classes mean more planning, preparation, organisation and work.

4.3.2.5 Limited resources

Participants argued that in their schools, the lack of resources is a serious problem. Two principals highlighted that they lack the necessary resources and infrastructure to make teaching and learning in multi-grade schools more meaningful. This is what they said in relation to this:

Participant H: *We have limited resources in our school, we only have one block consisting on three classes which caters for learners from Grade R to 7. Teachers don't have a proper staffroom, the three classes are all we have and a tiny principal office.*

Participant I: *The problem with low roll schools is that we are allocated norms and standards according to the number of learners we have and our school has a little number of learners. We are barely coping; we are always running short of something.*

The responses suggest that multi-grade schools do not receive the necessary support. They are not classified as schools needing special support, but as normal schools. The fact that three classes have to occupy learners belonging to eight grades implies that

some of the learners belong to more than two grades and this is what teachers are subjected to. Also, the principal highlighted that the money they get is barely enough to keep the school going. One can deduce that the challenges are not only classroom based for those involved in multi-grade schools, but are school based as a whole.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Coping strategies of multi-grade teachers (Resilience)

The study revealed the challenges teachers experience in their multi-grade classrooms. This section examines the coping strategies used by teachers to deal with the aforementioned challenges. These coping strategies will address the identified challenges, which include curriculum management and organization, time constraints, learner performance/cognition, excessive workload, and limited resources.

4.3.3.1 Strategies on curriculum management and organisation

Participants responded that, despite having challenges with curriculum management and organisation, teaching and learning still occur to the best of their abilities. Participants had different views on this question and one participant said that she was not coping at all because multi-grade was just too challenging and demanding for her. This is what they said about this:

Participant C: You must teach the same topic to all the learners, meaning if for example in one grade the pace setter instructs you to teach about graphs and another grade that week they must focus on shapes, you must decide which topic to teach from the two and teach it. It means you sequence your topics to suit your classroom and not to forget that learners' levels are different.

Again, when you assess your learners some of the questions must be the same, meaning we don't stick to the blooms taxonomy most of the time because when you set high order questions mostly, learners of a higher grade will obviously understand better than those of a lower grade while your teaching was for both grades throughout. Low and middle order questions are what dominates.

Participant D: I am not coping at all it's just that because it is work that we have to do on daily basis.

The above responses imply that teachers are delivering lessons to the best of their abilities to ensure the curriculum management and organisation issues while others are simply teaching but finding it difficult to deal with the challenges head-on on daily basis. One can assume that teachers are not on the same page about this, and that assessment standards are sometimes compromised. Brown (2010) also noted the same challenge and argues that, generally, in a multi-grade arrangement, although learners of different grades comprise one class, learners have to pursue grade-appropriate curricula. Lingam (cited by Brown, 2010) further argued that it demands that the structure of the curricula, learning resources and assessment strategies employed in the multi-grade teaching and learning process should take a new shape from that of a single grade class.

4.3.3.2 Strategies on time constraints

From the responses, most teachers said that extra lessons, after school hours, provide them with time to address the challenges that are concerned with less time provision. Most teachers said that they depend on extra lessons to catch-up and assist learners even more, while some indicated that time remains a problem due to learners being at different cognitive levels due to different curriculum presented simultaneously in a single classroom, meaning learners' needs cannot be addressed individually because of time. This is what they said about this:

Participant A: *To cope with those challenges is very difficult because you cannot have time with other learners that are not gifted enough and the preparations will not be up to standard.*

Participant B: *I create more time, for example, having extra lessons to accommodate those learners who are not coping. I also encourage learners to be competent and responsible.*

Participant E: *I take a challenge as an opportunity, let the learners do their work during the breaks and before going home, these also helps me to know them better.*

All of the above responses suggest that teachers have to apply their own intuition to cope and manage the limited time they have with their learners. It would seem that some teachers are coping fairly well, while others are still battling to counter the challenges they experience. The responses also imply that the time allocation in multi-grade classes is not enough because all participants talked about the issue of having to teach beyond the normal teaching period. This is also a result of teachers and principals lacking the necessary skills needed for time-tabling and staggering teaching and learning of multi-grade classes.

4.3.3.3 Strategies on learner performance/cognitive

Participants also talked about learner performance/cognition as another challenging experience and how they manage to work around it. They argue that there is not enough time to teach learners to the best of their abilities and there is no time to address the needs of the learners individually, especially those who are not academically gifted enough. This is because of the inability to plan time-tables thoroughly and with precision by teachers which result in the mismanagement of time. The common coping strategy teachers seem to use is to use extra lessons for those learners who are academically struggling. Their exact responses are as followed:

Participant A: *To cope with those challenges is very difficult because you cannot have time with other learners that are not gifted enough and the preparations will not be up to standard.*

Participant B: *I create more time, for example, having extra lessons to accommodate those learners who are not coping. I also encourage learners to be competent and responsible.*

The participant responses suggest that multi-grade classes put learners who are not academically gifted at a much greater risk. In any classroom, learners are not academically gifted the same. This becomes even a complex issue in a multi-grade classroom because not only are teachers not thoroughly trained for multi-grade classes but they are also having numerous challenges to navigate through. Teachers seem to try to make time beyond the normal teaching time to improve the academic performance of

learners who are not gifted enough. One can deduce that learner performance in multi-grade classes seems to be an issue, especially for slow learners as they are having challenges academically already and a multi-grade class as dealing with learners of various grades and curricula also adds to the problem. Contrary to the teachers' responses to this question, the literature review suggests that, in other countries where multi-grade reforms have been introduced, for example, Zambia, it is believed that multi-grade teaching can have some positive outcomes. It is believed that it can enhance independent learning, increase learner interaction and contribute to the country's goal of universalising basic education (Lungwangwa, 2000).

4.3.3.4 Strategies on excessive workload

The participants talked about how they cope with excessive workload as a challenge in a multi-grade context. The amount of workload and the demand for a teacher's presence in their multi-grade classrooms drove teachers to work during lunch, after school and even at home. Their exact responses to the workload are as follows:

Participant D: *I do some of the work during lunch, we go on lunch for one hour and I eat lunch for 30 minutes and another 30 minutes I try to push my work, sometimes I even work on after school. Administrative work is a lot, at times SA-SAMS submission deadlines even demand me to work while at home.*

Participant E: *Three grades in one class is not simple to teach. I prepare lessons for those three grades separately. I grouped learners according to grades and I teach those groups individually. I focus on one grade at a time. A lot of preparation is needed because other groups have to be kept busy while I am busy with another group. It just demands a lot of time which I barely have really.*

From the above responses, teachers seem to be coping fairly well with the workload, but it was revealed that for teachers to manage their workload, much of their personal time has to be sacrificed for school work, such as shortening their lunch and home time. One can deduce that coping with a workload in a multi-grade setting requires more than just normal school hours, as one has to go an extra mile.

4.3.3.5 Strategies on limited resources

The school principals responded to how they cope with the challenges they experience in relation to the limited resources at their multi-grade schools. At some schools, they say the rotational system seems to be working to their advantage, while at other schools, the educational stakeholders, that is, parents, seem to be stepping up to ensure the smooth run of the school. This is what they said about this:

***Participant H:** We are just using the resources we have. We requested mobile classes from the department to help us in at least having two grades in one class but we were not successful. The three classes we have is everything we have and just try to worth with that. These days during the Covid-19 attendance arrangements, at least when learners rotate, that is, learners come to schools on different days, at least we are able to accommodate our learners as we wished to.*

***Participant I:** The parents of our learners helps our school in every way they can. At times we request them to provide with helping hands especially when we have some work that needs to be done and we can't hire someone. Again, parents are often asked to buy their children some of the thing our school budget can't cater for.*

From the above responses, schools are managing the resource limitations differently. The coping strategies seem to be working for them. At one school, the rotational system, even though praised at the moment, puts learners at the risk of covering very little content in an already time-constrained environment. Parents, as educational stakeholders, are also involved in ensuring the best educational outcomes for their children.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Personal factors that promotes/enables teacher resilience

The study revealed that teachers had to be extra ordinary in their teaching practices and the field of work for teaching and learning to take shape. This section focuses on the opinions of participants on what personal factors promote teacher resilience, particularly in a multi-grade setting. This is what the participants had to say:

Participant A: *I am dedicated to my work, hardworking to produce good results, responsible for my class, loving what I do and my learners, always being punctual and willing to take extra lessons.*

Participant B: *The fact that teachers are leaders, they have a spirit of developing these children to become better citizens, despite of the situation they are facing and children need education like others in good environment so it is my duty to fulfil their dreams.*

Participant C: *School infrastructure that is well equipped, dedication as a teacher is important. Even the school in the remote area, the attendance is good and both educators and learners manage time and according to the South Africa's bill of rights, every child has the right to education including schools in this environment.*

Participant E: *Dedication. I love the kids and I am willing to them and the community at large.*

From the above responses, participants suggest that dedication is the common factor that promotes teacher resilience in their individual experiences. The responses also imply that teachers must have the best interests of learners at heart to remain resilient in a multi-grade setting. Also, the infrastructure is just as important for enabling these teaching practices.

4.3.5 Theme 5: What kind of support do teachers get in the teaching of multi-grade classes?

The study revealed that teachers are not getting the same kind of support in their multi-grade classes. Participants gave varied responses based on their experiences. Teachers responded as follows when asked about the support systems in place in their schools:

Participant A: *We don't get any support from our curriculum advisors and we have never been to training about multi-grade classes before.*

Participant B: *In our school we are very lucky to have a community that understands the situation we are in. Parents offer help in any way they can, both financially and academically.*

Participant C: *As teachers at our schools we have decided to help each other with advices and strategies on tackling problems in our classes.*

The responses from the participants suggest that teachers are supported differently at their respective schools. In some, there is some kind of support structure to address the challenges they face and, in others, there is simply no support of any kind. One fact that is common in all schools is that there is no support from departmental curriculum advisors, particularly for multi-grade schools. Le Cornu (2013) argued that strengthening relationships is critical for enhancing resilience, especially among multi-grade teachers. Relational resilience is formed through a web of strong and trusting relationships between teacher-leaders, teachers-teachers, and students-teachers, and emphasises the importance of mutual empowerment, growth and support at the centre of the resilience process (Day & Gu, 2014).

4.4 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA COLLECTED THROUGH LESSON OBSERVATIONS

4.4.1 Class statistics

Table 4.4.1.1 Class statistics

	Grades combined	Number of learners per grade	Total number of learners per class
SCHOOL A			
1 st Class	Grade R	10	44
	Grade 1	11	
	Grade 2	13	
	Grade 3	12	

2 nd Class	Grade 4	17	30
	Grade 5	13	
3 rd Class	Grade 6	15	29
	Grade 7	14	
SCHOOL B			
1 st Class	Grade R	18	35
	Grade 1	17	
2 nd Class	Grade 2	14	29
	Grade 3	15	
3 rd Class	Grade 4	17	32
	Grade 5	15	
4 th Class	Grade 6	18	33
	Grade 7	15	
SCHOOL C			
1 st Class	Grade R	10	36
	Grade 1	7	
	Grade 2	11	
	Grade 3	8	
2 nd Class	Grade 4	8	33
	Grade 5	6	
	Grade 6	10	
	Grade 7	9	

Table 4.4.1.1 shows the class statistics of three multi-grade schools under study. The basic education department employs a learner-to-teacher ratio of 35:9 in its classrooms. This means that a teacher is responsible for 36 learners after the conversion. Based on the above table, some grades have learners far above 36 while others have learners below 36. This means that the workload is not properly distributed, which ends up placing more workload on some of the teachers. It also reveals that certain classes have more than two grades, going as far as having four grades in one class. This demonstrates that teachers

must deal with a varied curriculum needs simultaneously. The combinations of grades in the table above also show that schools are using this as a coping mechanism. Learners are combined according to phases despite having many grades in one class. The curriculum varies by grade, but there are many similarities within the same phase.

4.4.2 The overall nature of teacher and learner interaction.

In one class, learners are grouped according to their grades and in another, they are grouped according to their cognitive levels. That is, the best performers are grouped together, while the slow learners are grouped together. I have observed that teachers teach one group at the time while the other groups are given a task to complete. I have observed that teachers do not have enough time to focus on each group and monitor the other groups completing a task. This was also mentioned in the interviews. The teacher then collects the tasks completed and monitors them during lunch and after school. It was also observed that learners of a higher grade participate more compared to those of a lower grade. Learners of a higher grade participated more because most of what was taught they have been taught or familiarised with before, in the previous grade or years. This seemed to place learners of a smaller grade at a slower pace, some of the reasons being that some of the things are new to them.

4.4.3 Lesson planning versus lesson presentation

I have observed that some of the teachers do prepare their lessons while others do not. At a one-day multi-grade workshop that was conducted, as the teachers said during the interviews, the teachers were provided with books that contained lesson plans. Still, teachers do not follow the lesson plans. It was revealed that they keep lesson plans for formality and not for implementation, this was seen as an individual teacher problem which become a departmental problem as the objective to ensure quality education for everyone is put at risk. From this, one can deduce that lesson planning and lesson presentation are not linked in any way. I have also observed that teachers do teach even though they do not stick to their plans, but they do teach. One can assume that those teachers barely know their classroom realities but in some respect decide not to go an extra mile in dealing with those issues.

4.4.4 Observed challenges during the lesson

I observed the following challenges during the lesson: Teachers seem challenged by different levels of learner cognition. Some learners do reasonably well, while others are shockingly far behind. The teachers do not appear to be able to bridge the gap between the two, and there is very little that can be done in their normal teaching and learning time due to time constraints. Another challenge I have observed is the issue of learner disruptions (classroom management), especially a group of learners attempting to complete a task while the teacher is busy teaching the other group. Time allocation seemed to be another challenge.

4.4.5 Observed strategies used by the teachers during the lesson

Teachers provide extra lessons in an attempt to help slow learners perform better. It was revealed during interviews that this seemed to be working. Again, learners who were disrupting the teacher during the lesson were given responsibility for managing other learners and maintaining order in the classroom and, interestingly, this problem solving technique adopted by the teacher seemed to work. The problem of teachers being unable to complete their work appears to be worsening as other work responsibilities outside of the classroom compete for teachers' time and attention. Extra lessons, as well as taking some of their personal time to do schoolwork, appeared to be extremely beneficial to them.

4.4.5 Observed factors contributing towards teacher resilience

The patience factor was the first thing I noticed during the lesson. The teaching profession as a whole requires one to be patient in their field of work and the multi-grade teaching context seems to demand more patience as teachers must handle learners of different cognitive levels, ages and grades. Another factor I've noticed among teachers is their dedication and commitment to their jobs. It is said as well as observed that teachers are stressed in their working environment, but the commitment and dedication to their work keeps them going.

4.5 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA COLLECTED THROUGH DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

This section concentrated on the information gleaned from document analysis. The document analysis was done by focusing on lesson preparations (lesson plans), assessment techniques (assessment papers), classroom management strategies (time tables) and documented reports (reports by class teachers).

4.5.1 Lesson planning

The lesson preparation documents for the teachers were requested and I went through them after the lessons were presented. This is because I did not want teachers to feel compelled to present their lessons according to their planning. I wanted teachers to do their normal class presentation routines. Some teachers created lesson planning documents, while others did not. What I have observed from lesson preparation or planning is that teachers do not seem to present their lessons entirely based on what they have prepared. This was tied to the lesson observations and the two data collection methods have revealed the same things in this research.

4.5.2 Assessment paper

Teachers follow different assessment procedures. One teacher during the interviews revealed that she assesses the learners on the same content because she teaches her multi-grade class the same, not according to grades and she sets her question papers not entirely following the bloom taxonomy as required and this was evident by the assessment paper I obtained from her. Two different grades are assessed for the same things with little to no difference, despite the fact that subject phase content is similar but differentiates in depth. Like other teachers who group learners according to grades or cognitive levels in their classrooms, their assessment papers were done according to each grade's requirements. The standard of the question papers was set accordingly based on what they had taught their learners. This reveals that teachers cope differently with assessment in their multi-grade classes.

4.5.3 Time tables

Prior to the lesson observation, I requested teachers their personal time tables and school time table where necessary to identify the time that I was going be able to visit their classrooms. When I went for an observation, the schedule stated that it was a math period, but when I arrived, I discovered that the teacher intended to teach English. I made that observation and asked the teacher at the end of the lesson for the subject change and the teacher revealed that sometimes she works around the time table setup and not strictly followed it as she knows which subject she is behind with and this, according to her, was another strategy she uses to work on the content coverage. The majority of teachers appear to do this. One would deduce that teachers use any means necessary to enable teaching and learning to take place in their multi-grade classrooms.

4.5.4 Report by class teachers

Teachers' reports included both meeting minutes and reports to parents about reaching out for assistance from their parents. The meeting minutes of one particular meeting revealed that questions were raised about how teachers manage their classrooms in an attempt to help others in distress. The minutes revealed things already uncovered during the interviews and lesson observations, which included reworking the time table and managing the grouped learners. The report to parents was a call to action for parents to assist students at home so that no one was left behind. With the little time teachers and learners have, parents are often called to school to be informed to assist their children at home.

4.5.5 School policies on multi-grade

Of the three schools under study, two of them managed to produce policies tailored for their multi-grade schools. The policy detailed the reasons for introducing multi-grade classes, which was due to low enrolment and a lack of infrastructure. Again, policies entail the purpose, ways to go about multi-grade teaching and learning and the suggested pedagogical practices as well as the intended objectives for teaching and learning in a multi-grade context.

4.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have analysed as well as interpreted the participants' responses according to the themes that emerged from the interview questions on the coping strategies of primary school teachers with multi-grade classes at Glen Cowie Circuit within the Sekhukhune District. Data collected through both lesson observations and document analysis was analysed and interpreted and triangulated with the participants' responses from the interviews. During the analysis and interpretation, it was revealed that there are challenges teachers experience and coping strategies they employ in dealing with those challenges. The last chapter details the findings, recommendations as well as the conclusions.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aforementioned chapter detailed the analysis and the interpretation of data collected through focus group and individual interviews, lesson observations and document analysis. This last chapter of the study aims at providing a summary of the literature review, a summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study, as well as those for future study.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

This section of the research study focuses on the research findings according to the themes developed from the research questions that guided the study. The discussion focused on the qualitative data collected through focus group interviews, individual interviews, lesson observations and document analysis.

Theme 1: Teacher development in multi-grade teaching

The study revealed that most multi-grade teachers were developed for multi-grade teaching, even though some teachers elucidated that it was not enough. Two teachers mentioned that they had been developed for multi-grade teaching and it was only for that day. Teachers in multi-grade schools also do not teach based on subject knowledge; instead, they teach all of the subjects that the grades offer. The findings on teachers' lack of development are in line with the findings by Mulaudzi (2016), who found that curriculum advisors are not giving multi-grade teachers the necessary support that they need. This is the same finding as Little (2004), who argues that many policy makers, planners, professional support staff and the public at large, are unaware of the extent and nature of the needs of multi-grade classes.

Theme 2: Challenges faced by teachers in their multi-grade classes

The findings of this study also discovered that multi-grade class teachers experience various challenges in their teaching and learning process. The study by Mulaudzi (2016)

arrived at similar findings. The study revealed that some of the challenges teachers experience are: curriculum management and organisation, time constraints, learner performance/cognition, workload and limited resources.

Theme 3: Coping strategies of multi-grade teachers

The study revealed that, despite the challenges multi-grade teachers experience in their day-to-day teaching and learning practices, teachers are proving to be resilient by using certain coping techniques that enable them to offer better teaching and learning to their learners. Le Cornu (2009) emphasised the importance of self-efficacy for teachers with multi-grade classes to enhance their encounters and overcome, with support, the challenges they face in their teaching. This study made it clear that teachers somehow have a negative self-efficacy in teaching in multi-grade classes. Resilience heavily rely on individual teacher's perceived self-efficacy, that, they believe they have the capabilities to produce effects.

Theme 4: Personal factors that promotes/enables teacher resilience

The study revealed that teaching in a multi-grade classroom is not an easy task. Teachers have to endure certain challenges in their teaching practices. Participants revealed their personal opinions on this matter. They elaborated on the personal factors that they think promote teacher resilience, particularly when looking at a multi-grade setting. Hong (2012) argues that intrinsic motivation, "inner drive" is important in the process of teacher resilience. In addition, Le Cornu (2009) emphasised the importance of self-efficacy and teacher development to enhance teachers' encounters and overcome, with support, the challenges they face in their teaching.

Theme 5: Available support structures

The study discovered through the participants' responses that for some schools there are support structures in place, while in some other schools, the support structures are absent. The support from the department of basic education through their curriculum advisors is simply minimum as all participants similarly responded that they only had training once and never again have they received support of any kind again. Hong (2012)

argued that supportive relationships are important for teacher efficacy, which in turn influences the outcomes of commitment, resilience and retention.

5.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS (OBJECTIVES)

5.3.1 To identify the challenges experienced in multi-grade teaching.

5.3.1.1 Curriculum management and organisation

Curriculum management and organisation is a problem for multi-grade teachers as research has revealed that it is relatively difficult to manage two or more grades in a single class with each grade focusing on its curriculum. Brown (2010) argues that despite learners being in one class, they have to pursue grade appropriate curriculum and that arrangement presents challenges to single grade trained teachers.

5.3.1.2 Time constraints

The study revealed that teachers of multi-grade classes are allocated the same time as those of single grade classes. This presents a challenge for multi-grade teachers, taking into account that learners have to pursue different curriculums with the limited time a teacher has to satisfy the curriculum needs of every grade. The study revealed that time is the greatest resource these teachers need as they sacrifice personal time to advance the interests of the learners through curriculum coverage needs.

5.3.1.3 Learner performance/cognitive

Learner cognition/performance is also a challenge for multi-grade teachers. The study revealed that learners in multi-grade classes are far apart in performance and cognitive development. Learners who are academically struggling are often left behind, whereas learners of lower grades in multi-grade classes are obviously less cognitively developed compared to those of a higher grade. This presents teachers with the challenge of addressing the learners' needs both individually and academically. This is different to

what other parts of the literature review suggest. A literature review suggests that, in other countries where multi-grade reforms have been introduced, for example, Zambia, it is believed that multi-grade teaching can have some positive outcomes. It is believed that it can enhance independent learning, increase pupil interaction and contribute to the country's goal of universalising basic education (Lungwangwa, 2000).

5.3.1.4 Excessive workload

The study revealed that teachers are overloaded with work. Not only do they have to prepare and manage their demanding multi-grade classes, but due to low school enrolment, which leads to low school personnel, teachers are also expected to execute some of the administrative duties of the school.

5.3.1.5 Limited resources

According to the findings of the study, teachers face a significant challenge due to a lack of resources in their schools. It was revealed that schools have enough means to buy necessary teaching and learning support resources and the school buildings can only accommodate a few and there is little to nothing teachers can do about it. This shows that multi-grade schools are getting little support from the department of education.

5.3.2 To determine how teachers cope with multi-grade teaching challenges.

5.3.2.1 Curriculum management and organisation

The study revealed that teachers teach despite the challenges they experience. When it comes to curriculum management and organization, some teachers adopt the environment, including the realities of what their environment requires, despite making compromises to the curriculum at some points, while others simply do not get used to the environment at all. Mansfield et al. (2012) emphasise that a resilient teacher will show commitment towards his learners, will possess necessary education expertise, and will adopt and display thoughtful abilities. While other teachers may find this challenging when faced with teaching challenges (being subjected to multi-grade teaching).

5.3.2.2 Time constraints

The study revealed that teachers take some of their personal time to do school work. This includes shortening their lunch breaks and taking some of the work home. Furthermore, teachers are compelled to go above and beyond the standard teaching and learning time allocation and use after-school lessons as reinforcement lessons. This shows that teachers are motivated, committed and dedicated to succeeding in their multi-grade schools. This is evident by the emotional and motivational characteristics of teacher resilience, which entails that teacher resilience involves an optimistic attitude towards problems, and remaining hopeful (Mansfield et al. 2012).

5.3.2.3 Learner performance/cognitive

The study also brought to light that teachers of multi-grade classes have introduced after school lessons as a norm to try and address the issue of learner performance, especially given the fact that the academically disadvantaged and learners of lower grades' needs are not satisfactorily addressed in normal teaching and learning time and space. This demonstrates the teacher's resilience and their willingness and eagerness to see the learners thrive despite the challenges. This, according to Sharplin (2011), shows teachers' goal setting for their classes in both the short and the long term.

5.3.2.4 Excessive workload

The study revealed that teachers have to put up with excessive workload in both teaching and doing administrative work due to short staff in their multi-grade schools. Teachers minimize their personal time to see this work covered. Self-efficacy and determination, according to Gilligan (2000) and Sosa and Gomez (2012), play an important role in teacher resilience and impact teacher engagement, including the determinations they make to influence transformation in the lives of their learners.

5.3.2.5 Limited resources

It is a well-known fact that many schools in South Africa are running short of resources and the study revealed that it is even worse in multi-grade schools. However, teachers are improvising to make teaching and learning proceed without or with minimal resource

interruptions. This exercise of teachers being resourceful is embedded in characteristics like the development of the support structure, seeking support, and asking for advice from others (Mansfield et al. 2012). Hong (2012) states that teachers appreciate the support they get from their co-workers and other stakeholders, in this case, the parents of the learners. He went on to say that factors like supportive colleagues and a school administration who responded positively and enthusiastically contributed to the teachers' growth and self-efficacy.

5.3.3 What kind of support do teachers get in the teaching of multi-grade classes?

5.3.3.1 Community support

In one school, they mentioned that members of the community help in the best way they can in one specific way is helping when teachers have to be absent, they help in giving learners exercises and monitoring them, again with the administrative duties of the school and this helps to reinforce the teacher's reliance on them. Hong (2012) argued that supportive relationships are important for teacher efficacy, which in turn influences the outcomes of commitment, resilience and retention. In her research in South African schools, Ebersöhn (2012), used the term 'Relationship Resourced Resilience (RRR)' to emphasise that resilience occurs as a collective process whereby individuals, both within and outside the school, 'flock' together to access, mobilise and share resources for positive adaptation in adverse conditions. Relationships are therefore important both for individual and collective resilience.

5.3.3.2 Teacher Development Workshops (Curriculum advisors)

Few teachers mentioned that they have been trained by the departmental curriculum advisors for the duration of just a few hours, which, to the best of their memory, happened only once and, ever since, it has just been business as usual as they do not receive constant support but are treated the same as those in single-grade classes. Despite this being the reality that teachers face, Day and Gu (2014) have cogently argued that: "efforts to increase the quality of teaching and raise standards of learning and achievement for

all learners must focus on efforts to build, sustain and renew teacher resilience, and that these efforts must take place in teacher training workshops."

5.3.3.2 Colleague support structure

The study found that teacher-teacher relationships exist in some schools, allowing teachers to share their classroom experiences and strategies with colleagues, especially when it comes to controlling and managing multi-grade classes. Hong (2012) argued that supportive relationships are important for teacher efficacy, which in turn influences the outcomes of commitment, resilience and retention. This support structure keeps teachers motivated and committed to teaching in their multi-grade classes.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The study was primarily undertaken to investigate the coping strategies of primary school teachers with multi-grade classes and provide recommendations on what could be done to make teaching and learning more effective in the multi-grade context. Conclusions were made based on the findings of this study.

Teachers play an important role in the implementation of the curriculum and this study revealed that, despite the challenges that teachers experience, they remain committed to teaching. The teachers' positive attitude and commitment in multi-grade classes contribute positively towards curriculum implementation.

The study also revealed that, despite the coping strategies teachers employ to deal with the challenges they experience, more needs to be done, such as hiring more teachers, development of infrastructure, conducting workshops and providing continued support to multi-grade schools, to make teaching and learning in a multi-grade context more effective and boost teacher morale to remain content in a multi-grade context.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations were made based on the research findings. These recommendations are made to address the coping strategies of teachers of multi-grade classes in order to better improve their multi-grade class teaching.

One of the recommendations is that the Department of Basic Education can implement regular development workshops specifically for multi-grade schools, which will equip teachers with better and more suitable skills for their multi-grade classes. This will strengthen teacher resilience. Another recommendation is that teacher resilience must be recognised and the teachers' practical coping strategies must be evaluated and shared for the benefit of those teachers in similar situations.

The department of basic education can provide professional development for curriculum advisors so that they can carry out their duties, including those of developing teachers of multi-grade classes, for the benefit of everyone and to advocate for effective teaching and learning. Another recommendation is that the Department of Basic Education, through its curriculum advisors and relevant management support structures, can provide continued support structures for multi-grade teachers and their schools. Lastly, the institutions of higher education can educate teachers about teacher resilience and multi-grade teaching.

Lastly I recommend that teachers are developed towards positive self-efficacy so that they produce the positive results and see multi-grade classrooms as any other classroom needing self-belief to succeed.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The study on teacher resilience in multi-grade schools could also be investigated further. I recommend the following studies on teacher resilience in multi-grade schools:

1. Teacher resilience in a multi-grade context does not necessarily translate into effective teaching. The next study could critique the effectiveness and appropriateness of the coping mechanisms teachers employ to cope with their multi-grade classes.

2. Teaching and learning takes place in multi-grade schools, despite the challenges that teachers' experience. Teachers remain resilient and apply certain coping strategies to overcome these challenges and deliver subject content across different grades. To question the effectiveness of these coping strategies, the next study could focus on the performance of lower grade learners in a multi-grade class.
3. Self-efficacy for teachers' resilience is important especially with multi-grade classes to enhance their encounters and overcome, with support, the challenges they face in their teaching. Further studies can focus on factors that can improve or lead to positive self-efficacy of teachers in believing in their capabilities to produce positive effect in their multi-grade classes.

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APPENDIX A

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

1. Gender:
2. Age in years:
3. Teaching experience:
4. Grades offered:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE COPING STRATEGIES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS WITH MULTI-GRADE CLASSES

1. What do you understand by the concept teacher resilience in a multi-grade context?
2. What motivated your school to practice multi-grade teaching?
3. Have you received any training on coping strategies particularly in multi-grade teaching?
4. Do you have any prior experience of a multi-grade class?
5. What are your years of experience in teaching in a multi-grade context?
6. What motivates you as a teacher to remain teaching in a multi-grade school?
7. What are the challenges you experience in the multi-grade teaching context?
8. How do you cope with those challenges that you experience in multi-grade teaching?
9. What support do you get regarding multi-grade teaching?
10. What makes you resilient in multi-grade teaching?
11. In your opinion, what are the factors that promote teacher resilience in multi-grade teaching?

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

5. Gender:

- 6. Age in years:
- 7. Teaching experience:
- 8. Grades offered:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE COPING STRATEGIES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS WITH MULTI-GRADE CLASSES

- 1. What do you understand by the concept teacher resilience in a multi-grade context?
- 2. What motivated your school to practice multi-grade teaching?
- 3. Have you received any training on coping strategies particularly in multi-grade teaching?
- 4. Do you have any prior experience of a multi-grade class?
- 5. What are your years of experience in teaching in a multi-grade context?
- 6. What motivates you as a teacher to remain teaching in a multi-grade school?
- 7. What are the challenges you experience in the multi-grade teaching context?
- 8. How do you cope with those challenges that you experience in multi-grade teaching?
- 9. What support do you get regarding multi-grade teaching?
- 10. What makes you resilient in multi-grade teaching?
- 11. In your opinion, what are the factors that promote teacher resilience in multi-grade teaching?

APPENDIX C

PRINCIPAL’S INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

- 9. Gender:
- 10. Age in years:

- 11. Teaching experience:
- 12. Grades offered:
- 13. Number of teachers:
- 14. School enrolment:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE COPING STRATEGIES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS WITH MULTI-GRADE CLASSES

- 1. What do you understand by the concept teacher resilience in a multi-grade context?
- 2. What motivated your school to practice multi-grade teaching?
- 3. Have you received any training on management strategies particularly in multi-grade teaching?
- 4. Do you have any prior experience of a multi-grade class?
- 5. For how many years have you been managing a multi-grade school?
- 6. What motivates you as a principal to remain in a multi-grade school?
- 7. What are the challenges you experience in a multi-grade school?
- 8. How do you cope with those challenges that you experience in multi-grade school?
- 9. What support do you get regarding multi-grade teaching?
- 10. What makes you resilient in multi-grade teaching?
- 11. In your opinion, what are the factors that promote teacher resilience in multi-grade teaching?

APPENDIX D

LESSON OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1. Date:

- 1.2. Subject:
- 1.3. Duration of lesson:
- 1.4. Grades combined:
- 1.5. Number of learners per grade:

2. TEACHING AND LEARNING INTERACTION

2.1. The overall nature of teacher and learner interaction.

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2.2. Lesson planning vs. lesson presentation (tied to document analysis)

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2.3. What are the challenges observed during the lesson?

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2.4. What are the observed strategies used by the teacher to cope with the identified challenges??

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2.5. Observed factors contributing towards teacher resilience.

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APPENDIX E: DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

I _____ hereby give permission to willingly partake on this research study with the following understanding:

Nature of the research

- I am Tlaka M.I from the University of Limpopo conducting the research.
- The research forms part of the requirements for my Masters in Education Degree in Curriculum Studies.
- The research topic of my study is: ***Teacher resilience: Coping strategies of primary school teachers with multi-grade classes at Glen Cowie Circuit, Limpopo Province South Africa.***
- Information will be gathered by means of individual interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis and observations.
- No payments or costs are associated with participating in this study.

My rights as the participant

- I cannot be forced to partake in this research.
- The discussion may be tape recorded if I accept it to be so.
- I have the right to withdraw from the research for any reason at any given time.
- I have the right to decline to answer any question(s) that I find uncomfortable.
- I will remain anonymous throughout the research and my name identity will be kept from public knowledge.
- Any information I reveal during the process of this research shall remain confidential, shall only be used for the purpose of this research and for publication in Mr Tlaka M.I. dissertation, and relevant publications.
- I grand permission for any information I reveal during the research process, with the understanding that the data collected will remain in possession of the interviewer Mr Tlaka M.I. and his supervisor.

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX F

COMMUNICATION ASKING FOR APPROVAL TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH: DISTRICT SENIOR MANAGER

Cell No: 076 581 5835

P.O BOX 487

Email: Ishmaeltlaka@gmail.com

Tsimanyane

0453

.....

The District Senior Manager

Sekhukhune District

Private Bag X

Lebowakgomo

0737

Dear Sir/Madam

**ASKING FOR APPROVAL TO CONDUCT M. ED RESEARCH IN GLEN COWIE
CIRCUIT SCHOOLS**

TITLE: Teacher resilience: Coping strategies of primary school teachers with multi-grade classes at Glen Cowie Circuit, Limpopo Province South Africa.

The above matter bears reference:

I, Tlaka Manchini Ishmael, am studying towards my M.Ed. degree with the University of Limpopo under the supervision of Professor Mabasa L.T in the Department of Curriculum Studies. I hereby ask for your approval to conduct a research titled, 'Teacher Resilience: How primary school teachers cope with multi-grade teaching at Glen Cowie Circuit, Limpopo Province South Africa.'

This study will deal with interviewing of teachers as well as the principals of multi-grade schools located within the Glen Cowie circuit. The interviews will be an hour in length. Lessons will also be observed to get a much clearer picture of the realities teachers face in their classrooms. Documents such as policy documents, lesson plans as well as lesson preparations will be analysed. The collection of data is expected to take about 4 to 6 weeks.

I also guarantee that my participant teachers and schools will remain anonymous throughout the entire study and the data collected will be viewed by the relevant people

only. Also, my participants will be informed that they are allowed to discontinue with this study should they feel a need not to.

I am hoping to hear from you soon.

Yours Faithfully

Tlaka M.I

APPENDIX G

COMMUNICATION ASKING FOR APPROVAL TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH: CIRCUIT MANAGER

Cell No: 076 581 5835

Email: Ishmaeltlaka@gmail.com

P.O BOX 487

Tsimanyane

The Circuit Manager

Glen Cowie Circuit

Private Bag X122

Nebo

1059

Dear Sir

**ASKING FOR APPROVAL TO CONDUCT M. ED RESEARCH IN GLEN COWIE
CIRCUIT SCHOOLS**

TITLE: Teacher resilience: Coping strategies of primary school teachers with multi-grade classes at Glen Cowie Circuit, Limpopo Province South Africa.

The above matter bears reference:

I, Tlaka Manchini Ishmael, am studying towards my M.Ed. degree with the University of Limpopo under the supervision of Professor Mabasa L.T in the Department of Curriculum Studies. I hereby ask for your approval to conduct a research titled, 'Teacher Resilience: How primary school teachers cope with multi-grade teaching at Glen Cowie Circuit, Limpopo Province South Africa.'

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I also guarantee that my participant teachers and schools will remain anonymous throughout the entire study and the data collected will be viewed by the relevant people

only. Also, my participants will be informed that they are allowed to discontinue with this study should they feel a need not to.

I am hoping to hear from you soon.

Yours Faithfully

Tlaka M.I

APPENDIX H

COMMUNICATION ASKING FOR APPROVAL TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH: SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Cell No: 076 581 5835

Email: lshmaeltlaka@gmail.com

P.O BOX 487

Tsimanyane

0453

The School Principal

Dear Sir

**ASKING FOR APPROVAL TO CONDUCT M. ED RESEARCH IN GLEN COWIE
CIRCUIT SCHOOLS**

TITLE: Teacher resilience: Coping strategies of primary school teachers with multi-grade classes at Glen Cowie Circuit, Limpopo Province South Africa.

The above matter bears reference:

I, Tlaka Manchini Ishmael, am studying towards my M.Ed. degree with the University of Limpopo under the supervision of Professor Mabasa L.T in the Department of Curriculum Studies. I hereby ask for your approval to conduct a research titled, 'Teacher Resilience: How primary school teachers cope with multi-grade teaching at Glen Cowie Circuit, Limpopo Province South Africa.'

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I also guarantee that my participant teachers and schools will remain anonymous throughout the entire study and the data collected will be viewed by the relevant people only. Also, my participants will be informed that they are allowed to discontinue with this study should they feel a need not to.

I am hoping to hear from you soon.

Yours Faithfully

Tlaka M.I

APPENDIX I

A LETTER INVITING TEACHERS TO PARTAKE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Cell No: 076 581 5835

Email: lshmaeltlaka@gmail.com

P.O BOX 487

Tsimanyane

0453

Dear Teacher

INVITATION TO PARTAKE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: Teacher resilience: Coping strategies of primary school teachers with multi-grade classes at Glen Cowie Circuit, Limpopo Province South Africa.

I, Tlaka Manchini Ishmael, am studying towards my M.Ed. degree with the University of Limpopo under the supervision of Professor Mabasa L.T in the Department of Curriculum Studies. I hereby invite you to partake in my research study, titled: 'Teacher Resilience: How primary school teachers cope with multi-grade teaching at Glen Cowie Circuit, Limpopo Province South Africa.'

This study will deal with interviewing of teachers as well as the principals of multi-grade schools located within the Glen Cowie circuit. The interviews will be an hour in length. Lessons will also be observed to get a much clearer picture of the realities teachers face in their classrooms. Documents such as policy documents, lesson plans as well as lesson preparations will be analysed. The collection of data is expected to take about 4 to 6 weeks.

I also guarantee that your name identity will remain anonymous throughout the entire study and the data gathered will be viewed by the relevant people only. Also, you are allowed to discontinue with this study should they feel a need not to.

I am hoping to hear from you soon.

Yours Faithfully

Tlaka M.I

APPENDIX J

INVITATION TO PARTAKE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT: THE PRINCIPAL

Cell No: 076 581 5835

P.O BOX 487

Email: Ishmaeltlaka@gmail.com

Tsimanyane

0453

To The School Principal

Dear Sir/Madam

INVITATION TO PARTAKE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: Teacher resilience: Coping strategies of primary school teachers with multi-grade classes at Glen Cowie Circuit, Limpopo Province South Africa.

I, Tlaka Manchini Ishmael, am studying towards my M.Ed. degree with the University of Limpopo under the supervision of Professor Mabasa L.T in the Department of Curriculum Studies. I hereby request your permission to conduct a research titled, 'Teacher Resilience: How primary school teachers cope with multi-grade teaching at Glen Cowie Circuit, Limpopo Province South Africa.'

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I am hoping to hear from you soon.

Yours Faithfully

Tlaka M.I