The Scholar Transport Programme in the Eastern Cape: A case study of the beneficiaries at a secondary school in the Idutywa district

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Declaration of honesty

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work. Where secondary material has been used (either printed sources or the internet), this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria.

Signature ……………………………………………

Date ………………………………………………….

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Abstract

This study investigated the perceptions of the beneficiaries of a learner transport programme in the Idutywa District of the Eastern Cape. Learner transport in South Africa continues to be a challenge, especially for those in the rural areas. The Statistics South Africa General Household Survey (2016:14) reported that more than two thirds (69.8%) of learners walked to school and 83.6% of these learners needed 30 minutes or less to get to school. Many learners in the rural areas still walk long distances to access schools due to poor infrastructure and the limited number of easily accessible schools.

To understand the beneficiaries' perceptions, a qualitative case study of a secondary school in the rural Eastern Cape village was designed. Data was collected through 47 face-to-face interviews with learners, teachers, parents, a principal as well as through a telephone interview with a government official. Additionally, observations were undertaken to gather supplementary data focusing on the geography of the village as well as the arrival and departure times of the school transport. The study draws on a social policy framework to make sense of the study findings.

Through a thematic analysis of the data, themes such as spaces of operation, learners' travelling experiences, schooling barriers as well as unintended consequences of the learner transport programme were arrived at. Although the transport provided much needed relief, findings indicate that learners still walk to school if the transport does not pick them up as scheduled and they often do not have money for public transport. They also got to school late when they had to walk to school, there is a shortage in the number of vehicles assigned to transport them, learners also missed extra lessons due to the pick-up and departure times of the transport and there is occasional conflict amongst the learners using the learner transport. The study concludes that there needs to be an increased provision of the government learner transport, work needs to be done regarding the implementation of the Learner Transport Policy, as well as the management of the programme in rural villages such as the one that the study focused on in Eastern Cape.

Keywords: Learner transport, access, social policy, education policy, policy formulation and policy implementation.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AGSA:	Auditor General of South Africa
CAPS:	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE:	Department of Basic Education
DoT:	Department of Transport
ECDoE:	Eastern Cape Department of Education
ECDoT:	Eastern Cape Department of Transport
ICESCR:	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
KZN:	KwaZulu-Natal
NCOP:	National Council of Provinces
SASA:	South African Schools Act 84 of 1996
SIP:	Secondary Improvement Programme
StatsSA GHS:	Statistics South Africa General Household Survey
UDHR:	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UK:	United Kingdom
USA:	United States of America

List of Tables

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Learners

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Parents

Table 3: Demographic Profile of Teachers

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 - The Research Study

1.1. Introduction and background

This study is about learner transport and its importance in providing access to education for learners who live far from school. It focuses on the government learner transport programme that was introduced to assist learners, especially those residing in rural areas, with access to education. These disadvantaged learners have been walking long distances for decades in order to attain education. Due to the spatial segregation of rural areas created by the previous apartheid government's lack of infrastructure development, schools were built far from the villages and the lack of infrastructure such as roads magnifies the challenge of accessing schools. It is within this context that the democratic government introduced social policies that sought to address the inequalities of the past but it has not been efficient in implementing the policies.

The consulted literature on school transport has identified a shortage in research. Some of the published work in the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) within the field of learner transport includes focus on children's participation in transport policy (Baker, 2010), safer travel journeys (Ewing, Schroeer & Greene, 2004; Steiner, Bejleri, Wheelock, Boles, Cahill & Perez, 2008; McDonald, 2008; Broberg, Salminen & Kytta, 2013; Larsen, Buliung & Faulkner, 2013; Ermagun, Rashidi & Lari, 2015) and reduced travel time for learners in both rural and urban areas (Ewing et al., 2004). Focusing on access to education, research has also been conducted in the Sub-Saharan region in countries such as Ghana, Malawi and South Africa (Porter, Hampshire, Abane, Tanle, Munthali, Robson, Mashiri & Maponya, 2011; Porter, Hampshire, Abane, Munthali, Robson, Mashiri, Tanle, Maponya & Dube, 2012). In Tanzania and Kenya, research on the challenges pertaining to accessing education was also conducted by Sifuna (2007).

Within South Africa, most of the work is done through dissertations (Flugel, 2009; Rogan 2006; Mbatha, 2005; Rama, 1999; Machard, 2014; Mahlaba, 2014). Other studies include Behrens (2003); Behrens and Phillips (2004); Mashiri et al. (2009); Porter et al. (2011); Bell and McKay (2011); Porter et al. (2012); Kubayi, Toriola & Monyeki (2013) the Statistics South Africa National Household Travel Survey (2013); Rama (2014); de Kadt, Norris, Fleisch, Richter & Alvanides (2014) and the Statistics South Africa General Household Survey (2014).

The findings highlight that there is a great need for learner transport. This study, therefore, hopes to contribute to the literature on scholar transport in South Africa and possibly inform the government on their attempts to address the learner transport challenge in South Africa, especially in the rural areas.

1.2. Research problem

Everyday, learners from poor rural areas and disadvantaged communities across the country walk long distances to school under extreme conditions. Section 29 (1) (a) of the Constitution states that, "everyone has the right to basic education, and to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make, progressively available and accessible." Learner transport is one of the tools to facilitate access to that right (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). The Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) has documented many learners who walk long distances to and from school. In 2015, in Port Elizabeth alone, 95 000 pupils qualified for the learner transport subsidy, but only 67 000 received this service (Eastern Cape Department of Education Policy Guidelines for Scholar Transport, 2015:3). Learner transport has been noted to be an important factor in addressing the inequalities in education but according to Rama (2014); Porter et al. (2012); Behrens (2003) as well as Behrens and Phillips (2004), it has not received a lot of research attention both on the local and international sphere. The lack of attention can be due to the marginalised position of learners in the research conducted on transport as well as policy making processes (Flugel, 2009; Rama, 2014; Baker, 2010). In 2009, the South African government introduced a learner transport programme with the aim of transporting learners who walked long distances to school provided they met certain criteria mentioned in the guiding policy. This programme has been met with a lot of challenges. This study seeks to assess the perceptions of the beneficiaries of the government programme.

1.3. Rationale of the study

Notwithstanding the above mentioned work, there has not been a focus on the government's role in the provision of school transport and there has been no exploration of how beneficiaries perceive government intervention. Further, Mngaza, Dhlamini & van Zyl (2001) emphasise the need for research to obtain the necessary information needed on learner transport. Methodologically, most of the studies focusing on this phenomenon in South Africa do not include learners as participants in their investigation, although they use the same qualitative

research methods and tools that the researcher used to collect data. Therefore, the researcher is contributing to available literature on learner transport.

The learner transport topic was triggered by a number of factors such as the poor performance of matriculants in the Eastern Cape Province in relation to other provinces[1] as well as the high number of learners dropping out and others repeating a class numerous times (Sayed & Jansen, 2001:1). These factors can be related to a lack of learner transport in rural areas as secondary schools are few and far in-between. The study argues that access to government funded transport is important in accomplishing access to education in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape.

1.4. Research objective
The study objective is to assess whether an eight-year-old government learner transport programme in a rural and disadvantaged Eastern Cape area meets its intended goals of making basic education accessible to all.

1.5. Research question
What are learner, teacher and parents' perceptions about the government learner transport programme in terms of addressing the challenges of access to basic education for learners in a rural disadvantaged Eastern Cape area?

1.6. Overview of chapters
In Chapter 2, the researcher embarks on a review of existing literature in the international and local spheres. The scene is set with a brief discussion on access to education in South Africa. In this chapter, the main focus is on school transport in the Eastern Cape Province of South African. However, since there is one National Learner Transport Policy in the country, research in the other South African provinces is also consulted. Chapter 3 provides the conceptual framework used to make sense of perceptions about a learner transport programme by beneficiaries at a secondary school from a village in the Eastern Cape. This chapter defines and discusses the South African social policy, education policy as well as policy formulation and policy implementation as frameworks to assess whether a learner transport programme met its goals of providing access to education for all. Chapter 4 discusses the methodology processes

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[1] https://www.education.gov.za/Newsroom/Speeches/tabid/950/ctl/Details/mid/7006/ItemID/5526/Default.aspx

followed when gathering the data for the study. A qualitative case study design was used to investigate perceptions at a high school located in the Mbashe Municipality in rural Eastern Cape and one of its feeder villages, where the parent participants were identified. Chapter 5 deals with emerging themes from interviews and observations. It is an exploration of the spaces the learner transport operates in, the travel experiences and barriers to schooling experienced by the learner participants in the study, as well as the unintended consequences of the programme. The chapter discusses the service providers' pick-up points, the relations between learners travelling in one bus, the daily challenges they experience to and from school as well as the unintended consequences of the implementation of the learner transport policy in the rural village. Chapter 6 is a discussion and conclusion of identified themes drawing on the social policy framework as well as the formulation and implementation of social policy in the rural areas of South Africa. The chapter aims to stress the importance of making different environments conducive to the implementation of various policies that are needed by the identified beneficiaries. Furthermore, it gives an overall summary of the study, a reflection, limitations and recommendations for consideration to researchers, policy makers and officials involved in the operation and management of the learner transport programme.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the research work done in relation to learner transport in general and in relation to the government's eight-year-old programme. The reviewed literature encompasses different sources but mostly consists of postgraduate dissertations. It focuses on the work done in the Western Cape and Gauteng urban areas and the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. The review is divided into the following sections: Equal access to quality education, research done on learner transport internationally, nationally and in the Eastern Cape Province, as well as transport and road infrastructure in rural areas. Given that learner transport is identified as an important means to access education, the researcher argues that government needs to increase its provision and improve the management of the learner transport programme, as access to transport in rural areas plays a vital role in accessing education.

2.2. Access to education

It is important to locate learner transport within broader debates in terms of access to education. Many countries including South Africa, are signatories to; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Education for All, the recently expired Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals, which call for all children to receive free, basic education. In consideration of the aforementioned commitments, the right of access to education is the cornerstone of the post-1994 South African education system and it is enshrined in the South African Constitution, Section 29 (1) (Fleisch et al., 2012:529). The educational policy, advocates for full education access and complete attendance from Grades 1 to 9 as stated in the provisions of the South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 which introduced compulsory school attendance from the ages of seven to 15 (SASA, 1996).

However, considerable social problems still rob learners of equal opportunities to quality education and increased access. There is poor attendance, problems with progression through grades at appropriate ages and lack of provision of meaningful learning (Motala, Dieltiens & Sayed, 2009: 253 & Fleisch et al. 2012:530) and non-attendance of extra lessons (Balfanz, McPartland & Shaw, 2002:3; Kgosana 2017 & The Department of Education South Africa

Yearbook 2015/16:136). Extra lessons have become a very important supplementary tool that helps to aim for higher academic standards or a pass at the end of the year (Balfanz et al. 2002:3). The Gauteng Department of Education has launched a Winter School Supplementary Programme in Tshwane to help learners from the selected secondary schools to improve their marks in crucial subjects such as Mathematics, Natural sciences and English (Kgosana, 2017). In addition, in 2014, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) introduced the Secondary Improvement Programme (SIP) which focuses on the importance of extra lessons. The Department of Basic Education ensured that study notes and extra classes were aligned to the CAPS curriculum (The Department of Education South Africa Yearbook, 2015/16:136). The extra lessons initiative is not successful in the rural areas due to a number of challenges that the rural learners face such as chores and transport issues.

Fengu (2017) in an article titled; "The lot of our Children is Labour Not School" published by News24 states that there are a lot of chores that children engage in that prevent them from going to school every day. In some cases, the learners' living arrangements do not promote school attendance as most of the learners do not live with their parents which can result in a low school attendance rate. Poverty directly affects affordability and potential benefits of meaningful access to education (Motala et al., 2009: 253). Furthermore, according to Motala Dieltens, Carrim, Kgobe, Moyo & Rembe (2008:3) and Wright (2012), transport expenses are the biggest hindrance to accessing education for those living in poverty. Literature shows that South Africa has done well in edging towards achieving universal access but continues to have challenges of infrastructure, poverty and access to basic services, which make it difficult to achieve complete access to education, especially in the rural areas. It is within this context of a push to achieve universal access to basic education that this study is centred on.

2.3. Learner transport

Learner transport has been identified as an important tool in getting access to education in both the international and local spheres. The following paragraphs consider literature findings on the field of learner transport.

2.3.1. International sphere

Some of the international literature in the UK and the USA seems to promote active transportation such as walking and bicycling as transport modes to and from school. Amongst the consulted research, eight studies were identified on the topic of school travel (Ewing et al.,

2004; Ripplinger, 2005; Steiner et al., 2008; McDonald, 2008; Baker, 2010; Broberg et al., 2013; Larsen et al., 2013; Ermagun et al., 2015). Six of these studies (Ewing et al., 2004; Steiner et al., 2008; McDonald, 2008; Broberg et al., 2013; Larsen et al., 2013; Ermagun et al., 2015) discuss active transportation as an important strategy to increase physical activity and health levels especially since physical training has been removed from the school curriculum.

The six studies mentioned above look at multiple environments which form part of the children's route to school as they seek to identify factors and dangers that impede or promote the use of active modes of transportation. The factors vary from the location of the school, the amount of traffic on the route to school (Ripplinger, 2005; Ermagun et al., 2015), the distance travelled to get to school, the safety levels of the route (Ewing et al., 2004; Steiner et al., 2008; McDonald, 2008; Broberg et al., 2013; Larsen et al., 2013; Ermagun et al., 2015); the availability of sidewalks and crossing main roads (Ewing et al., 2004; Steiner et al., 2008), the density of the population and the number of strangers likely to use the route (Broberg et al., 2013; McDonald, 2008). Besides looking at safer routes to school programmes; consulting the children on the advantages and dangers of taking a bus, car sharing, cycle trains, walking and cycling can be seen as mechanisms that involve children in the process of making policies that directly affect them. These mechanisms that seek to involve children in policy making are considerations that seem to be missing in the South African context of policymaking. The initiatives mentioned above directly involve learners in their implementation and if the learners do not support them by participating, the result is immediate failure. The research methodologies used in these studies vary from surveys (Ewing et al., 2004 & Larsen et al., 2013), telephone interviews (Ewing et al., 2004), internet-based software GIS survey and questionnaires (Broberg et al., 2013), cross–sectional studies (Donald, 2008), case studies (Steiner et al., 2008), nested logic model and the random forest model (Ermagun et al., 2015) and they were all not conducted in rural areas.

The seventh study that was conducted in the UK by Baker (2010) discussed the involvement of children in travel decision making within their families and as political actors. The investigation included the identification of safer routes to school, finding out whether children are consulted or involved in which routes to use when travelling to school and which place should be the first stop when running errands. It also discusses the current transport policy in the UK which fails to treat children as political citizens. Baker (2010) mentions that the transport policy neglects to represent and respond to children's travel needs. The research was

done in five primary schools in different areas, including two towns within rural areas. Questionnaire surveys, disposable cameras and diaries were used to collect data.

The eighth study was conducted by Ripplinger (2005) in the United States of America and the study highlighted the issue of school transport from a different point of view as the author suggests that rural areas have different attributes of the routing problem. The study titled, "Rural School Vehicle Routing Problem" highlights a few issues related to the rural school vehicle transportation problem and these include route constraints; the scheduling of buses which are never full due to the spatial location of homes in rural areas and very few schools catering for them. Secondly, fleet composition was another identified problem which entails the mixing of learners from different routes due to the fact that buses do not get filled to their capacity, this, therefore, results in even longer trips to and from school. Thirdly, Ripplinger (2005) argues that the learners travelled for long periods due to the fact that the schools were far and few in most rural areas.

The international researchers seem to focus on school transport from the perspective of access to transport in general and therefore share similar views on the different modes of school transport. These studies encourage walking to school as the best mode of travel as they argue that it promotes a healthy lifestyle but they also note that the physical environment plays an important role when deciding on the mode of transport to use. Below is a research discussion on school transport that was done in the African continent.

2.3.2. Broader African continent

The research conducted in the broader African continent covers more issues relating to general youth mobility and also touches on the learner transport problem. Lewin's (2007) study focused on Sub-Sahara Africa and South Asia; Langevang and Gough's (2009) study was undertaken in Ghana; Porter et al. (2011) and Porter et al. (2012) focused on the rural areas of Ghana, Malawi and South Africa; in Tanzania and Kenya, the research was conducted by Sifuna (2007). The researchers used focus groups, in-depth interviews (Porter et al., 2011 & Porter et al., 2012), journal entries (Langevang & Gough, 2009; Porter et al., 2011 & Porter et al., 2012) to gather data from participants consisting of both adults and children. In some cases, children were used as researchers in the field. According to these studies, there are a number of challenges that the youth of Africa face in their daily movements whether they are going to school (Sifuna, 2007; Lewin, 2007; Langevang & Gough, 2009; Porter et al., 2011; Porter et

al., 2012), doing household chores, work/porterage or recreational activities (Porter et al., 2012). These challenges vary according to the spatial location as they are usually far from education institutions and the city, are also affected by gender and generational relations, socio-economic status of the learners/youth Langevang & Gough, 2009) as well as the lack of transport and safety issues when travelling to the different locations (Sifuna, 2007; Lewin, 2007; Langevang & Gough, 2009; Porter et al., 2011; Porter et al., 2012).

In the studies by Sifuna (2007); Lewin (2007); Langevang and Gough (2009); Porter et al. (2011) as well as by Porter et al. (2012), physical environment is also highlighted as they argue that many learners walk to school but unlike in the US or UK, they are without any other options. They are advised by their parents, as reported by Rama (2014) and Porter et al. (2011), to walk in groups when going to and from school. In both the international and local spheres, safety and traffic are considered in the decision making of the modes of travel. Amongst the research mentioned above, Porter et al. (2011) in the study titled "Young people's transport and mobility in Sub-Sahara Africa: The gendered journey to school" dwell more on the issue of lack of transport to school. This research will focus more on this study in the next section.

2.3.3. Learner transport in South Africa

Available literature indicates that access to transport is a problem for many learners in South Africa. The 2014, Statistics South Africa General Household Survey (StatsSA GHS) reports that learners walk long distances to access the closest educational institutions. It revealed that there were 14 million learners in school in 2014, the biggest number (22.7 per cent) were found in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and Gauteng had 17.9%. The survey revealed that 72.2% of the learners walked to school and 85% needed 30 minutes or less to get to school. The StatsSA GHS also showed that there is a high percentage of 81.5% of school learners who attended no-fee schools and those that benefitted from the school nutrition programme constituted 89.5%. In both the no-fee schools and school nutrition programme, the Eastern Cape Province has the second highest percentage. These results allude to the economic status of the majority of the population in the province, as well as the assumption that these households cannot afford to pay for learner transport (The Statistics South Africa General Household Survey, 2014:22).

Bell and McKay (2011); Porter et al. (2012) and Kubayi et al. (2013), highlight the school transport issue within the research they did on youth mobility and the barriers to school sport participation. The influence of class apartheid in accessing secondary schools in an urban area in Gauteng is discussed by Bell and McKay (2011) and the child porterage and Africa's

transport gap was researched on by Porter et al. (2012). Rama (2014:94) suggests that the mobility of young people and their transport needs, challenges and experiences remain marginalised and under-examined within the field of sociology in general and the sociology of youth in particular. However, the way the youth maintain, sustain and expand their activity choices and action spaces has repercussions on their rights as citizens. The researcher can add their right to basic education as an important right towards full citizenship.

The following studies focus on learner transport or the lack thereof and argue that the general problem of transport availability greatly affects learners in the rural areas. The literature is mainly focused in Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN) and a few sources are in three other provinces. There are five studies in KZN and these are Rama (1999); Mbatha (2005); Rogan (2006); Flugel (2009) and Mahlaba (2014). Two studies are based in Gauteng, Machard (2014) and de Kadt et al. (2014), two studies in Cape Town (Behrens, 2003; Behrens & Phillips, 2004) and two in the Eastern Cape (Mashiri et al., 2009 & Porter et al., 2011).

Rama's (1999) study looks at the influence of transport on the life experiences and life chances of school goers in Pietermaritzburg. This study focused on both the private and public modes of transport. The author revealed that the role of transport where learners are concerned is linked to their daily activities; accessing school as well as recreational and educational facilities. The author found that walking was the main mode of travelling to school among black participants as an overall 84% used this mode of transport; the urban black were at 87%, rural black at 95% and farm black learners were at 76% (Rama 1999: 32). While travelling by a private car to school was prevalent among the white learners in urban areas (85%) only 19% of blacks in the urban areas used private cars (Rama, 1999:32). The low number of black rural learners who have access to a car is supported by Behrens (2004) as he argues that the choice of the mode of transport is determined by the socio-economic status of the individual. Rama's (1992) point emphasises the problem that this study attempts to address when looking at the locality (rural areas) and access to transport. In some areas, due to the lack of public transport, bakkies have been used to transport learners but the KZN DoT intended to phase them out (1999:13):

> Learner transport accidents in the province require urgent mitigation action by the Transport Department. Until learners have access to a safe alternative mode of transport, bakkies will remain the choice of transportation especially in rural and peri-urban areas (Keeka quoted in the Daily News, 2015).

The above quotation highlights that unroadworthy vehicles are still being used to transport learners although, in the study's research area there were no bakkies transporting learners. Mbatha (2005) is the second researcher that was consulted in this research area. The author conducted his study in Emmaus KZN. The researcher looked at the factors affecting caregivers' perceptions of the choice of mode of transport for school going children in rural areas and how they perceived the importance of transport for their children. He believed that programmes directed at improving access to schools for rural children could not be successful without their parents' participation. The study revealed that most learners walked to school and their parents relied on the older children to care for the younger ones during the journey.

Mbatha (2005) discovered that some parents who lived far from school believed that walking could influence their children's performance at school. They also expected the government to provide learner transport as they could not afford it as most of them were not employed. The researcher identified financial factors, lack of parents/caregivers consultation in the planning of rural transport, the fear of accidents and the belief that parents have used walking as a mode of transport for years and survived, as factors that influence the choices of the mode of transport for their children. Mbatha's (2005) approach to seeking the perceptions of the caregivers touched on one aspect of the approach that this researcher took in their research to find out about the government learner transport programme in a rural Eastern Cape community. This researcher was interested in engaging with the parents as participants. The researcher interviewed the teachers and learners at the identified school. Mbatha's (2005) study is a starting point for engaging parents on the subject of learner transport. The study further assisted by providing a foundation for this study as it identified factors that contribute to the involvement or lack thereof of parents on learner transport.

Rogan (2006) conducted an impact evaluation of existing school transport interventions in the peri-urban ILembe district of KwaZulu-Natal. He reported that the interventions were established by the community and consisted of an arrangement between a school in the district and a few local transport providers. The school officials negotiated a low taxi fare price for the learners and arranged with the local bus company to synchronise its schedule with the start and finish times of the school. The approach of the study was to identify appropriate solutions to existing dilemmas in learner transport in the district. The researcher evaluated this issue from a human rights approach and uncovered that, in specific cases, the lack of local government capacity, the lack of coordination amongst departments and an over-reliance on private

transport initiatives had compromised the rights of learners to obtain access to schools (Rogan, 2006:33). He concluded that if these initiatives were increased they would improve on the identified challenges faced by learners on a daily basis. Rogan's (2006) study was instructive for this study in terms of what to look at when analysing the operations of learner transport, as the interventions mentioned above have similar objectives as the Learner Transport Policy that informed the learner transport programme that is being investigated here. They both seek to reduce the learners travel times, reduce excessive walking, improve the safety of travel to school and tackle the high rates of absenteeism in the schools.

Flugel (2009) did a study titled, "The critical examination of public policy related to transport for learners". This study focused on policy text on transport and was carried out in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Province. The focus on policy text is the first similarity identified between Flugel's research and this study. It reveals how the state positions learners in public transport policy. A second similarity is that this study expanded on her second research objective, tackling the extent to which the public transport policies included learners in their formulation processes. The researcher argued that a set of transport policy texts have been developed since 1994 to 2009 when the Learner Transport Policy was first drafted, yet neither the Department of Basic Education (DBE) nor the DoT appeared to take leadership and responsibility for the administration of school learner transport. The researcher highlights the detachment within policy between government authorities that impacts on the delivery of government learner transport. Additionally, she also argues that the neoliberal policies adopted in South Africa have had a negative impact on learner interests as they sometimes have ambiguous state policy direction that promotes shifting focus from social policies resulting in decreased spending on learner transport as an urgent matter of investment (Flugel, 2009).

The limitations identified by Flugel (2009) link to the conditions stated in the draft Learner Transport Policy; that transport will be provided to learners who live more than 5km from school and limits transport to the nearest school (Legal Resources Centre, 2015). The extension of transport subsidies to the entire school system was beyond the government's financial capacity and it resulted in the withdrawal of the learner transport thus decreasing access of the poor to schooling (Flugel, 2009:1). The researcher also argues that the developed policies ignore the spatial legacies of apartheid, as well as the poor and the working class are still geographically far from accessing equitable education opportunities. With these issues still a challenge, she stated that equal opportunities to education can only be achieved within

reasonable reach; in terms of space and physical access of the masses if public transport resources are focused on this end (Flugel, 2009:2).

Flugel's (2009) method of research (critical discourse analysis), as well as the angle of study (the focus on policy text) and research area, differ from those of this study but they have helped in shaping it.

The last study was conducted in KZN by Mahlaba (2014). He studied the walking experiences of ten poor rural learners. Walking to school and back home was the only mode of transport available to them, unlike in this study where some of the learners had transport allocated to them. The main purpose of Mahlaba's study was to understand how walking long distances to school affected learners on a daily basis and how it related to them accessing education. The researcher used focus groups and purposive observation to gather data. The findings suggested that learners who walked long distances to school got there late and missed the first period. The researcher also noted changes in the attendance of school based on the season of the year. In summer when it rained, the learners experienced different challenges such as taking longer routes to school or taking off their school uniform when crossing rivers in order to get to school. In winter when it is very cold, the learners' hands froze and they had to sit in class until they were able to write. Sometimes the learners' encountered life-threatening risks such as snakes along the route. The researcher concluded that late coming and absenteeism are barriers to accessing education in this area.

In the Gauteng Province, Machard (2014) focused on the Johannesburg inner city, looking at the socio-economic and environmental impact of school commuting. She states that the dynamics of commuting in the inner Johannesburg are still affected by spatial apartheid, a similar point to (Flugel's 2009), which results in less sustainable social and transport systems. The study interviewed the parents or guardians of learners that travelled daily to get a better education. The parents stated that they enrolled their children at the identified schools to attain quality education as the schools nearby had low-performance results, were perceived to have poorly trained teachers and lacked discipline. As per Flugel's (2009) constructed hypothesis that travelling to school is financially and socially unsustainable; Machard (2014) concluded that travelling to school hinders the City of Johannesburg's progress to becoming a sustainable city.

de Kadt et al. (2014) also investigated the commuting of learners in Johannesburg. Data from a cohort study, from 1997 and 2003 was analysed for the purpose of the study. The data was supplemented by the 2001 South Africa National Census and the Gauteng Department of Education data. The researchers measured the distance travelled by learners using different methods, within the limits of available data in South Africa. The focus areas were; distance from home to school and whether children attended school in the same area they lived. This was an attempt to understand children's travel to school in the Johannesburg-Soweto areas and whether children attended their nearest grade-appropriate school (de Kadt et al., 2014:176). The study revealed that there was high mobility amongst the learners. Almost half the learners who were participants in the study attended a school that is close to their home but there were approximately a quarter of learners who travelled over six kilometres one-way. The conclusion was that the high mobility of learners was due to their parents choosing which schools to enrol their children in regardless of there being nearby schools. This finding is similar to Machard's (2014) finding regarding the main reasons learners travel to school in Johannesburg. These studies are relevant in that they discuss matters related to travelling learners and help compare the different issues faced by the learners in urban areas. They also highlight the opportunities available to the learners in the urban areas compared to those dwelling in the rural areas.

In Cape Town, Roger Behrens' research on transport and travelling touches on the topic of learner transport. Only two of his studies that discuss learner transport are highlighted here. In his paper titled, "In child and learner travel in Cape Town" (2003), he notes how the history of research and strategic planning for public transport in South Africa is closely linked to public sector officials. The researcher states that the perceptions of these engineers may have contributed to the high costs of engineered transport systems, therefore, resulting in the high costs of transport and continued marginalising of rural areas. In his engagement with travel survey data in the City of Cape Town on public transport, he highlights that 22% of daily travel is assigned to school transport. Behrens and Phillips (2004), also looked at the behaviour of learner travellers in Cape Town by reviewing the findings of learner travel surveys in parts of Cape Town. The paper demonstrates a clear relationship between household socio-economic groupings and learner mode use, with walking as the dominant mode amongst lower income learners and car travel the dominant mode amongst higher income learners. The most common travel difficulties identified by the surveyed learners include personal safety, travel time and road safety. These findings are similar to the findings reported in the international literature.

Eastern Cape has the least research done on learner transport. Existing information is mostly found in media reports, press releases, court cases and government reports (Daily Dispatch, 2015a; Lindiwe Mazibuko, Democratic Alliance vs. Department of Education, Eastern Cape Province and Department of Transport, Eastern Cape Province, 2011). The Eastern Cape Province has been noted amongst provinces with the most challenges in education, as it was placed under administration in March 2011 until now (Eastern Cape Department of Education 2016/17 Annual Report, 2016:26).

Porter et al. (2011) touched on school transport issues amongst the youth in rural areas as their research focused on the walking experiences of learners. Their study titled: "Young people's transport and mobility in sub-Sahara Africa: The gendered journey to school" included parents and learners as participants but no teachers were interviewed. Mashiri et al. (2009:68) explored children and young people's experiences and perceptions of mobility and transport constraints in accessing social services in remote rural, peri-urban and urban settings in the OR Tambo District in the Eastern Cape. They noted that there is a lack of qualitative research in the country that explores in-depth, the spatial mobility and travel experiences of children and the youth as transport stakeholders, which has resulted in policies and programmes that lack the innovation of these stakeholders. The findings of the study reveal that the children were faced with various risks when they walked; to school, to collect wood and water, when they delivered messages in and around the areas and when they used public transportation. The risks included sexual harassment and the fear of being raped, anxiety related to the possibility of being murdered, getting bumped by a car while walking, criminal attacks for gadgets such as cell phones, physical obstacles encountered on the way to school like rivers and ditches (Mashiri et al., 2009:69).

The studies mentioned above are mostly unpublished dissertations, except for Behrens (2003); Behrens & Phillips (2004); Mashiri et al. (2009) and Porter at el. (2011). The main themes identified in reviewed studies are that more initiatives to combat the challenge of lack of learner transport are needed as they will help decrease the travel time, lower the rate of absenteeism as well as increase the safety of learners when they travel to school. The researchers also note bad roads or lack of proper infrastructure as a further hindrance to accessing education. Behrens and Phillips (2004) note that high transport costs marginalise learners in the rural areas. In reference to the work done on the public policy text in South Africa, learners are further marginalised by being excluded from decision making and the detachment between

government authorities responsible for learner transport causes further problems which limit access to education in these rural areas.

This researcher's evaluation of the South African studies is that more research on learner transport is needed and there is a gap, especially in the Eastern Cape Province, to also include the voices of the beneficiaries of the existing learner transport programme. The work done in Gauteng, KZN and the Western Cape contributes greatly to the field covering areas such as; caregiver's perceptions on the mode of transport for learners, learner transport initiatives introduced by communities, youth mobility and opportunities in rural areas and has helped me sharpen my focus area. The consulted literature however, lacks information on the government learner transport programme. Findings from research done in the KZN province by Mbatha (2005) suggest a need for transport as parents stated that they expected the government to provide school transport as they could not afford it.

The literature also lacks data from learners' experiences of the school transport initiatives. Where the same research methodology and tools were used, the researchers did not involve parents, teachers and learners in one study. Drawing from the South African literature review, it can be concluded that learner transport is still lacking and has been identified as an important factor in fulfilling the right to access to quality education in South Africa.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter reviewed literature on learner transport and the different means learners use to travel to school both in the international and local sphere. It offered an in-depth discussion of learner transport in the country as well as the different modes of travel available to learners and the dangers faced by the learners when walking to school and back. The literature revealed that there is limited research on learner transport and that there is a great need for learner transport in rural areas. This chapter highlighted the need of learners' voices in learner transport research. The theoretical framework is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 - Social Policy Framework

3.1. Introduction

Access to transport plays a vital role in accessing education in rural Eastern Cape. This argument is supported by a broad view of transport in the rural areas that highlights the importance of transport to access places of work, education and basic services (Mbatha, 2005; Rogan, 2006; Porter et al., 2011; Lucas, 2011; Porter et al., 2012; StatsSA GHS, 2014; Rama, 2014). Social policy was selected for this current study as a lens to understand and unpack the perceptions of the beneficiaries of a learner transport programme. In particular, the researcher focuses on the distance between social policy formulation and implementation. First, I begin by defining social policy as used in the study.

3.2. Social policy

In understanding the perceptions of parents, learners and teachers on the implementation of the learner transport programme and its intention of addressing the challenges of access to school, a social policy framework seems more appropriate as a lens to utilise as it serves as government's tool in addressing social issues. Social policy refers to guiding principles and interventions for changing, maintaining or creating living conditions that are favourable to human welfare and usually cover issues of access to education, health, housing, water and sanitation, electricity, criminal justice, labour and inequality (Dye, 1972:2). It falls within the realm of public policy. Public policy refers to "whatever government chooses to do or not do. It usually affects groups of people who share a common social problem" (Dye, 1972:2). The learner transport programme falls within the realm of social policy as it covers the basic services that every citizen should have access to. However, social policy is a broad and multidisciplinary concept that has no standard definition (Marston & McDonald, 2006:2).

Firstly, Gil as cited in Lavalette and Pratt (2006:2) defines social policy as the analysis of access to resources that cultivate and sustain life. Lavalette and Pratt (2006:2) point out that the provision of social needs should not be left as the market's responsibility. Secondly, Titmuss as cited in Lavalette and Pratt (2006:2) is interested in the allocation of various limited resources to meet a range of social needs. Thirdly, Monyai (2011); Gil in Lavalette and Pratt (2006) as well as Marston and McDonald (2006) pay attention to social policy and its links to the economic, social and political realms. Lastly, Chambers (200:2) states that public policies are designed with the needs of a group of people who share a common social problem. The

author argues that social policies are intended to resolve social problems (Chambers, 2000:10). Based on this definition, in this study social policy is defined as government plans that address the citizens' social needs. This study's definition is in line with the study objective which is to assess whether a learner transport programme implemented in a rural school in the Eastern Cape meets its intended goal of providing access to education.

3.3. Social policy in South Africa

Social policy under the democratic government in South Africa aims to redress the inequalities created by colonial and apartheid policies. These vary from the provision of basic services such as safe drinking water, sanitation, housing, access to basic health services, education and reducing the country's poverty and high unemployment levels (Motala & Singh, 2001; Bloch, 2009; Jansen, 2001). Monyai (2011:42) notes that social policy implementation is still faced with a lot of challenges which make it difficult to eliminate social inequalities in South Africa. The author argues that the government undercuts the benefits of social citizenship regardless of the high political participation rates; the citizens still experience unequal access to economic and social resources. Monyai (2011:1) continues to state that the South African paradox is that the majority of the marginalised are the people who were discriminated against by the apartheid regime, even though the state intervention is said to be targeting them. This includes the beneficiaries of the learner transport programme, which is the focus of this study.

The country has a good social policy framework that is aimed at poverty alleviation and addressing historical inequalities. The Learner Transport Policy falls within the ambit of government policies seeking to address education inequality and access. The government has, however, failed to make learner transport available to all learners in the rural areas. The next paragraphs discuss social policy in relation to education in South Africa.

3.4. Educational policy in South Africa

Educational policy centres around issues of equal quality education for all; increased access to schools, the freedom to choose which school to attend, bridging the gap between the former Model C schools and the historically black schools as well as building infrastructure and offering basic services to schools. The government has the responsibility to make policies and laws as well as to deliver services to its citizens. Tikly (2010:166) suggests that the South African education system is currently faced with a task of addressing all the historical imbalances. Motala and Pampallis (2001:2) argue that the current government is a site of

"social contestation" between conservative and radical social policies, as is the case in education reform policies. The latter refers to the introduction of social policies that are to assist the citizens (e.g. RDP) and at the same time adopting policies that need to assist with the growth of the economy (e.g.GEAR) which then take away from the provisions of the social policies. Both these policies have now been replaced by the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. To highlight the disconnection between policy formulation and implementation, the next section unpacks the National Learner Transport Policy processes from its proposal phase to adoption.

3.4.1. National Learner Transport Policy in South Africa

This section traces the development of Learner Transport Policy in South Africa. In particular, it explores the problems experienced from 2009– 2015 as well as the key tenets of the adopted policy. The National Learner Transport Policy was adopted in November 2015 after six years of its development in 2009. The Learner Transport Policy making process was filled with many challenges since the introduction of the learner transport programme in 2009. These challenges varied from province to province including lack of funds to provide this service, mismanagement of the programme and the use of unroadworthy vehicles. The Daily Dispatch (2015b) in an article titled, "Going to school is a risky ride" identified that overloaded, unroadworthy vehicles were used to transport learners. The Heraldlive (2017) reported on the ban on bakkie transport when the Eastern Cape traffic spokesperson was introducing Regulation 250 of the National Road Traffic Act 93 of 1996. The regulation states that, "No person is permitted to transport children in the goods compartment of a vehicle for profit".

The DBE was also taken to court by various parties (the Democratic Alliance and Equal Education) because of its failure to provide learner transport. The vision of the Learner Transport Policy is "to have a safe, reliable and integrated transport service that caters for the needs of learners. The policy's mission is to meet the mobility needs of learners through the provision of a safe, secure reliable and affordable learner transport service to support social development and enhance future economic growth" (Department of Transport National Learner Transport Policy, 2015:14). Moreover, the additional cost of transport to school would create an additional burden that cannot be met by these families.

The adopted policy mandates provinces to develop their own provincial policies informed by the national one for the operation and implementation of the policy (Department of Transport

National Learner Policy, 2015:11). The development of this Learner Transport Policy is a mandate of the DBE, with the assistance of the DoT. Even though the policy has taken six years to finalise, government transport provision continued in parts of the Eastern Cape. This study investigated one of the learner transport programmes that was implemented in the Eastern Cape.

3.4.2 Eastern Cape Provincial Learner Transport Policy

Contrary to the mandate of the national policy, the development of the Eastern Cape policy is the responsibility of the ECDoT with the assistance of the ECDoE and was adopted in November 2016. The policy aims to address challenges of accessibility and mobility for all the rural disadvantaged learners in the province and the affected stakeholders (Eastern Cape Department of Transport Provincial Learner Transport Policy, 2016:3). The provincial policy is developed in accordance with the national policy and seeks to serve as a monitoring tool. It seeks to "ensure that learners from disadvantaged communities and the province's deep rural areas have access to schools and become part of the active economy. It also seeks to alter new relations of economic power in the transport economy of the country and to provide a uniform approach for all districts in the province" (Eastern Cape Department of Transport Provincial Learner Transport Policy, 2016:3).

The policy regulates the learners and service providers' code of conduct. It states the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders involved, namely; the service providers are to be punctual, must provide safe transportation, always pick and drop learners off at identified zones; the principals are to ensure learners are transported daily and identify qualifying learners and the learners are to be punctual, be respectful to fellow learners and the driver (Eastern Cape Department of Transport Provincial Learner Transport Policy, 2016:14). It also mentions that the provincial DoT is responsible for the funding, implementing, monitoring and evaluating of the programme whilst the ECDoE is to identify beneficiaries, monitor the daily transportation of learners and develop the routes. This policy seeks to address the gaps identified in the National Learner Policy as well as, the problems identified in the operations of the programme as mentioned in the Auditor General of South Africa's (AGSA) 2016 report. It also seeks to standardise the remuneration of the service providers through a costing model included in the provincial policy (Eastern Cape Department of Transport Provincial Learner Transport Policy, 2016).

3.5 Policy formulation, infrastructure problems and policy implementation

The government has the responsibility to make policies and laws as well as to deliver services to its citizens. South Africa has three spheres of government; national, provincial and local which are autonomous and interdependent. These spheres of government operate according to the parliament's constitution, laws and policies (Gumede, 2008:11). Parliament consists of the National Assembly (NA) and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) and the power to approve laws and policies. The NCOP was established to ensure that the provincial and local governments are represented in parliament. The rural areas fall within the local sphere of government which is divided into local municipalities. Each municipality has a council that is responsible for approving policies and by-laws (Gumede, 2008:13).

The government and parliamentary structures as well as the different branches of government play vital roles in the policy making process (Gumede, 2008:10). The policy process is started by key conferences held by the ruling party in South Africa. Important issues and solutions are discussed and decided on. Thereafter the ruling party converts its policy into a government policy according to the procedures stipulated in the constitution. The executive branch of government develops the policies, parliament approves. The policy is finalised after consultation with relevant stakeholders by the relevant ministry and department and drafted into a White Paper. The White Paper forms the legislation basis; once it is adopted by parliament and approved by the cabinet it is called a Bill. Once the president signs the Bill, it is published as a policy. It is the provincial legislatures and local authorities' responsibility to implement the policy (Gumede, 2008:9).

The formulation of education policies in South Africa has been tailor made to address issues of historical inequality. Education policies support the decentralisation of education responsibilities that are founded on the assumption of representative and participatory modes of democracy (Soudien & Sayed, 2004 & Sayed & Soudien 2005). This implies decentralised ways of educational governance, under close supervision by the national government. This view is assumed to support the democratic regime of the country as well as allowing maximum participation into policy making through engaging the local level of government, with the concerned beneficiaries. The researcher identified the lack of consultation as a gap in the Learner Transport Policy making process. Carrim (2001) argues against decentralised educational governance and notes that it creates inequalities in the education sphere as the power given to school governing bodies to regulate policies on school fees, for example, for

those schools that do not fall under the no-fees category tend to charge high prices to keep access to the schools open to "their own" thereby closing – off those who cannot afford the fees.

Sayed (2010: 254) and Christie (2008) state that education policies in South Africa centre on access to educational opportunities (equality of opportunity) and search for conditions that facilitate access. Sayed (2010) argues that this view emphasises uniformity and standardisation in education but ignores historically situated and developed inequalities. Access to education might be expanded to the previously disadvantaged and made compulsory for those between the ages of seven and 15years, but without the resources to learn or means to get to school, that opportunity is null and void. In rural areas, poor infrastructure is a problem in the provision of education. The limited number of good well-resourced schools is a problem in both the rural and peri-urban areas. Learners travel from the townships to previous white-only schools (Model C's) as their parents believe that they offer better education as they have skilled teachers, higher matric pass rates and learning material compared to the ones in the townships (Behrens & Phillips, 2004; Behrens, 2003; Machard, 2014).

The assessment of beneficiaries' perceptions on the learner transport programme will assist in understanding their experiences. The schools in the Eastern Cape rural areas are still under resourced; they have no libraries, laboratories, learning material, some are still mud schools and the roads are still not efficiently developed (Letseka, 2014; Lemon, 2004). The inability to effectively implement the school infrastructure development programme has been noted as a challenge in the Eastern Cape Province, resulting in the returning of funds to the National Treasury although the province still has serious infrastructure backlogs (Legal Resources Centre, 2015).

The lack of infrastructure in rural Eastern Cape areas greatly affects their livelihood. Neves and Du Toit (2013:12-13) argue that rural livelihood is not independent of the urban sites. They indicate that informal economic activity is tangled with the formal sector. This is related to linkages of capital, inputs, production and employment. Formal employment has proven to be a requirement of informal employment. The skills gathered from formal employment in the urban areas are usually drawn to run informal enterprises in the rural areas. It is also noted that rural areas cannot solely survive on agriculture and small farming as diverse activities are implemented in order to survive. Neves and Du Toit's (2013) argument affirms what Maxwell

(2005) and Scoones and Wolmer (2003) highlight that there is a need for diversification out of agriculture as small-scale farming is not economically viable to eliminate poverty in rural areas. This emphasises that infrastructure development is vital not only for the learners to be able to be transported to school as the pick-up points would be moved closer to their homes but for the survival of rural dwellers.

Implementation is an important factor when looking at education reforms in the country. Motala and Singh (2001); Sayed (2001); Jansen (2001) as well as Motala and Pampallis (2001) examine the development and implementation of social policy in South Africa during the first years of the democratic government. Motala and Pampallis (2001:5) argue that the weakness in the country's policies lies with the implementation of the developed policies and that the capacity to implement policies is the government's missing piece of the puzzle. This entails a number of factors namely; bureaucracy's incompetence, the inability to participate in organised planning processes, scarcity of personnel and other resources (ibid). The separation of planning policies from the implementation process is seen to compromise the nature of the relationship between the two.

During the implementation phase, it is important that technology/any other medium used to implement policy fits its host's environmental setting. There are other challenges with the functioning and implementation of different government policies and initiatives introduced in rural areas with the aim of addressing inequality, poverty and education issues (Cloete & Coning, 2011:137). Haywood and Gunn cited in Koma (2014:99) state a few challenges in the policies implementation phase. Firstly, they note the involvement of various government agencies in the implementation of DBE and DoT as well as the fact that the Learner Transport Policy stems from a national mandate, developed at the provincial level and implemented at the local government level (ibid. p. 99). Campbell and Szablowski cited in Koma (2014:99) state that the efforts of coordinating implementation matters requires the establishment of specialised administrative agencies for the purpose of implementing policies (ibid. p. 96). Secondly, the nature of the target group can be a challenge; the absence of enough resources needed to implement the policy, defective communication and coordination between the implementers and resistance can also be problematic (ibid. p. 99). With reference to the Learner Transport Policy, the issue has been the lack of resources to provide for all the needy learners and the lack of communication and coordination between the two departments. Thus, the enquiry into the perceptions of the programme beneficiaries will assist in closing the latter gap.

Lastly, the change in social conditions can affect this phase, that is if the manner in which long term programmes are implemented, is developed to assist the poor and unemployed and the country undergoes an economic downturn, the effective implementation of that policy can be expected to change (Howlett & Ramesh cited in Koma 2014:98).

The learner transport programme has been met with challenges in the Eastern Cape. Some of these include: Payment backlogs to transport service providers; corruption, unroadworthy vehicles; lack of adequate infrastructure; the abrupt cancellation of the learner transport services at certain times due to lack of funds to facilitate it; and the mismanagement of public funds (Corruption Watch, 2013). Social policy as a government plan in addressing the citizens' social needs will be a useful lens to use in the analysis of the perceptions of the learner transport programme and policy.

3.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, social policy plays an important role in the attempt to address the inequalities of accessing education as it facilitates access to resources that address the needs of disadvantaged learners. Social policy, assists in the realisation of the study's main objective which is to assess whether the eight-year-old learner transport programme in a rural and disadvantaged Eastern Cape area meets its intended goals of making basic education accessible. Policy formulation requires the involvement of all the relevant stakeholders. They must be consulted and their inputs considered before the decision-making process is concluded. The implementation requires a conducive environment and the resources as well as the formulation and implementation processes need to be interlinked. The coordination of policy formulation and implementation is vital to the education reformation process.

Chapter 4 - Research Methodology

4.1. Qualitative research

This study explored the perceptions of beneficiaries of a government learner transport programme in a rural village in the Eastern Cape Province. A qualitative research approach was used as the purpose of the study was to gain insight into the participants' opinions and experiences. This approach is employed by people concerned with describing, explaining and understanding social events and its main advantage is reflexivity; openness and flexibility that allow the researcher to consider what happens in the context to be able to understand new discoveries and relationships as they arise in the research field (Flick, Metzler & Scott, 2014:12).

4.2. Case study design

A case study design was chosen as the purpose was not to generalise the findings but to better understand a specific phenomenon (Flick et al., 2014:12). The study was conducted in a village high school that serves as the main traditional authority of the surrounding villages and the high school caters for all surrounding villages in the area[2]. The case study design was specifically chosen because it offers a holistic, in-depth analysis of a situation and pays attention to the context and gives detail of the case being studied. It allowed for the direct observation of a situation and a complete understanding of the case that was being studied. It also offered the researcher the advantage of rethinking questions as the case developed, as there was a need to alter questions based on the responses given as well as adding follow up questions (Neuman, 1997:33). Moreover, the research question and the study objectives shaped the research design. An exploratory case study was used to study the perceptions about the learner transport programme. The objective of using exploratory research was to identify key issues and variables of the government learner transport programme. The case study design was useful due to the fact that not much was known about the perceptions of the learner transport in rural Eastern Cape.

Using a case study offered a multi-perspective analysis as it allowed for the views of multiple groups such as parents, teachers as well as government officials and the interaction between

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[2] There are thirteen surrounding villages recorded in this study that the learner participants came from (see table 1). Only one of the villages was identified as the research site, which I have given a pseudonym Nqawe. Nqawe village is divided into three smaller sections referred to as section A, B and C in the study. The school is located in a village 15 km away from Nqawe (referred to as village D throughout the study).

them (Maree, 2012:75). The disadvantage is that researchers cannot generalise from their findings, but this limitation is offset by a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Neuman, 1997: 33). In this study, the aim was to get a deeper understanding of the learner transport programme in a specific area.

4.3. Target population

The target population included high school learners, parents and teachers. The high school is located in Village D, one of the poverty-stricken villages in the municipality where there is not much farming or agricultural activity due to dry and barely fertile soil. The school is a no-fee school and has a nutrition programme. It is surrounded by many villages from as close as less than a kilometre to 30 kilometres away. Most of these villages do not have secondary schools and as a result, many of the learners go to the identified high school. The Integrated Development Plan reports that the Mbhashe Municipality has one of the highest numbers of illiteracy in the Eastern Cape Province. The population that is illiterate is 60%, 37% of the population attended formal schooling namely; Grade R, Grade 1- 12 including learners in special schools. Only 0.62% have university degrees. This results in increased pressure towards the government to engage this population in any form of informal economic activities (Mbhashe Local Municipality, 2016-2017:31).

The level of household income further explains the poverty level in Mbhashe. Mbhashe Local Municipality (2016-2017:26) states that only 47% of the population lives on an income equal to or less than R8 000 per month, 39% of households have a monthly income of R3 000 and 14% have no income. Thus, revealing that approximately 61% of the households live within the poverty level.

The parents who participated in the study were from a village located a few kilometres away from the school in the Amathole district within the Mbhashe Municipality. The municipality falls in Category B, meaning it shares its executive and legislative authority with a Category C Municipality. A Category C Municipality is located in an area that includes more than one municipality (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996:88). The village initially had a secondary school, but it was closed two years ago and the learners merged with those of the identified high school. The village is situated in the south-eastern part of the Eastern Cape Province. This municipality has a population of 254 909 which depends primarily on social

grants and there is minimal agricultural activity. The unemployment rate is estimated at 93%. (Mbhashe Local Municipality 2016-2017:34).

The challenges faced by learners in this area varied from walking long distances to school in bad weather conditions and walking late in the evening to attend extra classes. Most learners did not attend school and were at risk of repeating or dropping out as they often lagged behind their peers who had the benefit of attending extra classes. These are some of the reasons why the government learner transport programme needs to function efficiently so that learners in rural areas acquire the education needed for them to exit the poverty trap in which they find themselves.

4.4. Negotiated access

Permission for conducting the research in the identified school was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria, the ECDoE research unit and the school's governing body. As part of negotiating access, a meeting was held with the school principal before commencing with the research work. After meeting the school principal, where the aim of the research was clearly communicated, including why that particular area of study was chosen, how the research would be conducted, how the findings would be used, he referred me to the chief of the area and advised me to speak to him in his capacity as a leader as well as a parent. The researcher arrived at the chief's home to find that he had gone to attend to other matters but the wife was very helpful and by default became the key informant. She called her husband to obtain permission to go ahead with the research. The information was communicated in English and isiXhosa, the participants' home language as the researcher is from the same district in the Eastern Cape and is fluent in isiXhosa.

 The researcher's familiarity with the area was an advantage as she shared a similar background and norms: She is Xhosa and therefore spoke the same language as the participants. The researcher was also familiar with the area and social etiquette but had no relations with the teachers and learners of the identified school or the residents of the villages. There were no disadvantages associated with my familiarity with the area, in fact, it worked well as the participants were not reluctant to open up about their perceptions, experiences and thoughts about the topic.

4.5. Participant selection

In relation to the case study design, purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit participants. The snowball sampling technique was useful as the researcher was interested in an interconnected network of people, the learners who were using the learner transport as well as their parents. The vital feature of is that each person is connected to another through either a direct or indirect link but it does not necessarily mean that each learner or parent knew one another or interacted with or was influenced by the others in the network (Stead & Struwig, 2001:112). Purposive sampling was chosen to locate the learners who used the government provided learner transport and the relevant parents. The researcher knew one of the service providers servicing the identified school, as well as a driver who used to transport learners to the school. This, therefore, assisted in identifying the school as it met the requirement for the study selection. Moreover, purposive sampling and the snow ball sampling techniques helped facilitate direct and indirect linkages between the various participants (Neuman, 1997: 207).

Table 1: Demographic profile of learners

Number	Age	Grade	Gender	Village	Kilometres/Walking time
1	15	10	Female	Mpozolo	14kms (2h45mins)
2	17	10	Female	LuDondolo	15 ½kms (3h7mins)
3	15	10	Female	Mpozolo	14kms (2h45mins)
4	18	10	Male	Mbelo	10kms (2hours)
5	17	10	Female	Mazwane	15kms (3hours)
6	17	10	Female	Ezithenjini	13kms (2h30mins)
7	17	11	Female	Mpozolo	14kms (2h45mins)
8	16	10	Male	Mbelo	10kms (2hours)
9	18	10	Male	LuDondolo	15 ½kms (3hours)
10	15	10	Female	Ngudwana (Ludondolo)	15kms (3hours)
11	19	12	Male	Mpozolo	14kms (2h45mins)
12	18	12	Male	Mthentu (Umtata district)	12kms (2h15mins)
13	20	12	Male	Mpozolo	14kms (2h45mins)
14	19	12	Male	Mbelo	10kms (2hours)
15	21	12	Female	Nkawukazi	7kms (1h30mins)

16	19	12	Female	Nqabane	15kms (3hours)
17	20	12	Male	Mpozolo	14kms (2h15mins)
18	21	12	Female	Mthentu	12kms (2h5mins)
19	21	12	Female	Mantshilibeni	5½kms (1h15mins)
20	21	11	Male	Ngwenyama	5kms (1hour)
21	20	11	Female	Nqabane	15kms (3hours)
22	19	11	Female	Mthentu	12kms (2h5mins)
23	21	11	Female	Ludondolo	15 ½kms (3h7mins)
24	18	11	Male	Munyu	10kms (2hours)
25	20	11	Male	Qokolweni	20kms (4h15mins)
26	17	11	Female	Qokolweni	20kms (4h15mins)
27	19	11	Female	Nqabane	15kms(3hours)
28	17	11	Female	Mpozolo	14kms (2h45mins)
29	19	11	Female	Nqabane	15kms (3hours)

From the learners' demographic profile, the following observations are noteworthy: The interviewed learners were from Grades ten, 11 and 12. They resided in different villages. The initial request was for five males and five females from each grade but other male learners were not keen to participate which resulted in more females in the sample. The youngest learners were 15 years and were in Grade ten and the oldest were 21 years of age in Grades 11 and 12. The connection between age and grade could be an indication of repeating or late enrolment as suggested by Mashiri et al. (2009:71). The authors' findings revealed that some parents allowed their children to start school at the age of ten years instead of seven years in order to ensure that they had the mental and physical stamina needed to deal with the responsibility of accessing school. The longest distance travelled was 20 kilometres and the same kilometres were travelled from school, which is an estimated four-hours and fifteen minutes' walk. The learners reported that they usually gave up on the transport and started walking at 07:45 am when the school started its first period. They arrived at school at 11:00 am, which was the time the school had its first break.

Table 2: Demographic profile of parents

Number	Gender	Employed	Age	Relationship
1	Female	No	56	Grandmother
2	Female	No	43	Mother
3	Female	No	42	Mother
4	Female	No	53	Grandmother
5	Male	No	45	Father
6	Male	No	59	Father
7	Female	No	52	SGB member/mother
8	Male	No	60	Father
9	Female	No	34	Sister
10	Male	Community representative	46	Father/ Prominent figure in the community

The sample of the parents consisted of four fathers, three mothers, one sister and two grandmothers from Nqawe village. Three of the parent participants were from single-parent households headed by the grandmothers and one headed by a mother, the rest seemed to have both parents. The parents of the learners indicated that they were unemployed, except for one father who was a prominent figure in the community. The rest depended on old age and child grants. All the learners participating in this study were from poor families that could not afford to pay for school transport.

Table 3: Demographic profile of teachers

Number	Gender	No. of grades you teach	No of years at the school
1	Female	2	1
2	Male	3	3
3	Female	3	3
4	Female	3	2
5	Male	principal (did not teach)	1 month
6	Male	deputy principal (did not teach)	2 months

The initial number of teachers to be interviewed was seven, excluding the principal. Most of the teachers were not keen on being interviewed; as a result, they had to be interviewed last their availability constantly checked on. Three female teachers and three male teachers (including the principal and deputy principal) were interviewed. Most of the interviewed staff were relatively new employees. They were not working at the school before the implementation of the learner transport programme, so most could not give an account of how things were before its introduction.

4.6. Face-to-face interviews

In this study face-to-face, interviews were used. A total of 47 face-to-face semi–structured interviews of varying length and one telephone interview with the ECDoT official were conducted. An interview schedule was used as a guideline during the interviews (see appendix 1). The planned duration of each interview was 30 minutes each and the time had to be shorted. The average length of the interviews was just over five minutes and the longest was 26 minutes. The reason for the shortened time with the learners was because the teachers were not as keen as the principal with the requested time to interview the learners. Therefore, the interviews had to be quicker than planned and straight to the questions that were going to provide the core information needed for the study. Most of the teachers were not interested in the interviews because they were busy, but the same strategy was applied with their interviews, the researcher had to jump straight to the important information. The short interviews with the parents were due to the absence of learner transport in the area, which therefore resulted in less information to share about the experiences of the government learner transport. The longest interviews were conducted with the principal, deputy principal, the ECDoT and ECDoE officials. Regardless of the outlined challenges, the number of participants interviewed provided useful information that could be analysed in themes. The fieldwork was concluded within a period of two weeks due to the researcher having to drastically cut the planned length of the interviews.

On the first day in the field, the researcher arrived at the high school and sat the whole day waiting to meet with the principal as he had a meeting with school inspectors which went on for the entire day and adjourned at 16:30 pm. The researcher quickly met with the principal and informed him of the reason for the visit, gave him the permission letters received from ECDoE as well as the University of Pretoria. The agreement was to begin the research early the next day after identifying potential participants, informing them of the research and handing out consent forms for the parents to sign and assent forms to the learner participants. The interviews commenced on day three with the parents of the identified learners in the village area.

Parents

Before the commencement of each interview, the parent was informed of the reason for the visit, the purpose of the research, was informed that participation was voluntary and confidential and that they could stop the interview at any time and they were then asked whether they would like to participate in the research. Upon agreement, they were given a consent form

to sign and an information letter. Interviews were conducted with ten parents/guardians of learners using the learner transport. Amongst the parents/guardians interviewed was a School Governing Body member, another School Governing Body member was not available for an interview during the researcher's time in the field as he was away doing plantation work in one of the neighbouring villages. The interviews were conducted in the homes of the parents/guardians, either outside the house in a shaded area as it was hot or inside the houses on the second day as it was raining. The parents tried their best to make the researcher feel welcome as they offered beverages. One parent went as far as sending one of her children to purchase a cold drink for us with the little that she had. When the interviews were finished, the parents were asked if they received consent forms from their children to sign in order for the researcher to be able to interview them about their own experiences of the learner transport programme.

Learners

On day three, the researcher met with the learners using the learner transport programme as they had been gathered by the principal. The same learners who were addressed the previous day and given consent and assent forms were again informed about the research and it was explained that participation was voluntary and that the information shared will be treated in a confidential manner. They were informed that they could decide to stop the interview at any time. Those who were interested were reminded of the signed assent and consent forms that were taken home for their parents to give permission for their participation before they could be interviewed. In the afternoon of day four, the interviews were conducted with the first group of identified learners. The initial target was 30 learner participants but 29 were interviewed over a three-day period.

The learners interviewed covered the three grades of the high school and the researcher was also conscious of the gender balance. The interviews with the learners were conducted in the researcher's car, except for the first 9 interviews which were conducted outside, at the back of the school behind a classroom as it seemed to be a private space where there was a couple of desks which could be used. The school did not have a school hall as anticipated and all the classes were used as there was also a shortage of classrooms.

Teachers

Six of the proposed seven teachers were interviewed together with the deputy principal and the principal. The number of chosen teachers was informed by the structure of most secondary schools in rural areas as each learning subject usually has one teacher teaching it in Grades ten, 11 and 12. The principal was interviewed because he was delegated to identify learners who need transport assistance, and to oversee the learner transport programme in the school (The Department of Transport National Learner Transport Policy, 2015:22). The deputy principal took over the interview as the principal had to rush to town to a meeting and also, due to the fact that he was still new and had completed a month there and was therefore not as informed about all the intricacies of learner transport in the school. Thus, he asked the deputy principal, who had been there for two months to continue with the interview. The interviews with the principal and deputy principal happened in the principal's office. The interviews with the teachers were conducted in the researcher's car. The teachers, the deputy principal and the principal were given consent forms to sign before the interviews began.

The purpose of the interviews was to collect information relating to the perceptions the beneficiaries had about the usefulness and nature of the learner transport programme. The interviews allowed the researcher to collect rich, detailed answers, with a bit of flexibility to the interviewee in responding to the questions asked and stopping and resuming the interview at different times (Bryman, 2012:470). The teacher responsible for learner transport in the school would come around regularly to check if the researcher needed any assistance or to check on the progress of the interviews. According to Opdenakker (2006:1), face-to-face interviews allow the researcher to take advantage of social cues namely; the voice, intonation, body language, behaviour, events, or noting physical characteristics in their natural setting. Face-to-face interviews also give the interviewer a chance to create a good interview atmosphere and at times lead to a new area of information.

With the permission of the participants, an audio recorder was used to record interviews. The use of an audio recorder had the advantage of recording information accurately than just writing notes. The disadvantage of audio recorders in research is that it sometimes causes the interviewee to be nervous; as a result, one teacher declined the use of the voice recorder during her interview.

4.7. Observation

The researcher used observation as a secondary method of gathering data. The observation method was useful for gathering information as it allowed the researcher to informally assess the conditions of the vehicles (mostly Iveco buses, Quantums and one or two big buses). The researcher observed the times the transport arrived to collect the learners to and from school, how the drivers managed their responsibility of transporting learners. Most drivers left their vehicles outside the school yard after dropping the learners off in the morning. They hitch-hiked or gave each other lifts to town, where they spent their day and went about their other business and came back in the afternoon to collect the learners. Furthermore, observations were used to read the body language of the participants when they were being interviewed and to ascertain that there was no possible contradictory information. Field notes were written in-between the interviews and at the end of each day.

4.8. Data analysis

The data gathered through the interviews and observation was descriptive in nature and presented in the form of themes. A thematic content analysis of the interviews and observation notes were used to draw meaning of what was said and noted (Kumar, 2011:279). The contents of the information gathered were analysed by first transcribing the field notes and interviews. The researcher read the transcripts repeatedly trying to identify the main themes and sub-themes. The themes were achieved by sorting the data and assigning a number to each participant in the three groups; learners, parents and teachers (including the principal, deputy principal and the two government officials interviewed). In each group, the researcher read the data collected with the aim of understanding the meaning of each answer and identifying repeated words or answers with the same meaning in order to categorise responses under one theme. The identified themes in each group were then crossed checked with the other groups to see if there were any similar themes. The themes in each group were coded using numbers. The same number was used for a theme that was in all three groups or in two of the three groups. After the identification of the same themes across the groups, the data was then looked at as one data input eliminating the groups. These themes were used in the write up of the report, with supporting quotations from the transcripts under each theme or sub-theme.

4.9. Ethics

In carrying out this research, there were ethical considerations the researcher had to be cognisant of as there were minors in the study. Participants were given all the information

concerning voluntary participation and informed that participation in the study was not compulsory. All the necessary information letters (see appendix 2), consent (see appendix 3) and assent form (see appendix 4) needed for the participants to sign were given to the relevant people before conducting any interviews. Participants were solicited for their consent and assent for the interviews to be recorded.

The participants were guaranteed the confidentiality of information by informing them that their names were not going to be used in the dissertation. They were informed of their voluntary participation in the study as well as that they were free to pull out at any time (Neuman, 1997:331). They were also informed that only the researcher and her university supervisor would have access to the detailed information gathered from the interviews which have no direct link to a specific individual, as numbering was used whilst gathering the information.

The learners were informed about the study purpose. The teacher in charge of learner transport, as well as the principal, helped with gathering learners who used the learner transport in the different grades. The principal called one learner to his office and asked her to gather learners, males and females, in her grade who used the learner transport to and from school. Once the learners availed themselves, there was an introduction session informing them about the reason for the visit. Once the researcher was in the car with a prospective participant, she then asked again if they wanted to participate in the research and reassured them of the confidentiality of the information shared during the interview. The oral and written assent was requested from the learners after permission had been attained from the institutional bodies; the ECDoE and the school[3], University of Pretoria[4] as well as their parents. The learners were continuously informed that they had a right to pull out of the research anytime, regardless of the consent given by their school or parents.

Close attention was given to the non-verbal signs and cues from the learners such as body language to judge their comfort levels and their interest in participating in the study. The learners did not reveal any information that was of great concern and would have caused the researcher to breach confidentiality, as they were never alone but were always in groups when they were transported. Further protection towards the learners' vulnerability as children was

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[3] As a measure to protect the identity of the participants and the school, permission letters from the ECDoE and the school are not attached to the dissertation.
4 A permission letter from the Humanities Ethics Committee has been attached.

mitigated by the researcher's reassurance that the information they shared would not be divulged to any other person and that it was an opportunity for them to share their views and thoughts on matters that concerned them, which reaffirmed their importance in society (Morrow & Richards, 1996:96). As most of the interviewed learners were between the ages of 16 and 21years, meeting the legal age of consent, they were capable of making decisions and informing the researcher whenever they felt uncomfortable or felt threatened.

4.10. Conclusion

This chapter mapped out the way the study was conducted. The processes undertaken by the researcher when gathering the data in the field for the study were explained. The choice of a qualitative method was discussed. The techniques used to collect the data were discussed, namely; interviews with the use of a voice recorder, observations and note taking. The researcher did not experience resistance from most of the participants as they shared their perceptions and experiences except the teachers who kept postponing meeting times. As it is typical of case studies, the data collected cannot be used to generalise on the overall functioning of the learner transport programme and the perceptions of the beneficiaries in South Africa broadly.

Chapter 5 - Spaces of Operation, Travel Experiences, Barriers to Access Schooling and Unintended Consequences

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter presented a detailed presentation of the methodological processes followed in conducting the research. This chapter discusses the findings after the analysis of the data. The data is drawn from interviews and observations conducted with the parents, learners, teachers and the Departments of Transport and Education officials. Drawing from the interviews, this chapter aims to reveal that although the learner transport programme has helped, there are still a lot of challenges with its implementation. It addresses the research question on the perceptions of learners, teachers and parents on the learner transport programme, in terms of addressing challenges of access to schooling for learners in a rural disadvantaged area in the Eastern Cape. For the most part, the findings discussed here are new to the area of learner transport as there is no literature on the government learner transport programme. Limited discussion on the topic takes place in government departments' portfolio committee meetings, which never materialise to any changes.

Equal Education is a social movement with a social media hashtag, "LongWalk" that is at the forefront of getting the government to provide learner transport (by implementing a conditional grant for learner transport) for all deserving learners (Equal Education, 2017). The reviewed African literature focused mostly on collecting data on children's experiences to and from school due to the lack of access they have to public transport. For example, Mashiri et al (2009) and Porter et al. (2011) focused on the voices of children and the youth regarding spatial mobility and travel experiences as stakeholders in transport policy. The focus here is given to the responses of the learners as the immediate beneficiaries because of the limited literature on children's voices on matters that concern them as well as the gap in research on the analysis of the government provided learner transport.

Addressed in this section are the demarcation of the area of operation, the perceptions of the learners on the usefulness of the learner transport, the travelling experiences of learners which are all themes that bring new insight into the learner transport research area. The barriers to schooling are also discussed in addition to what is already available in the literature. The chapter discusses unintended consequences of the programme, contributing new insights to existing literature. The chapter will show that the unintended consequences discussed here

could not have been foreseen as they became evident after the implementation of the learner transport programme roll-out. However, with continued monitoring and evaluation of the implementation process, they could have been addressed.

5.2. Demarcation of the area of operation

The road that off-ramps into the area of study from the N2 comes from Idutywa and continues to Mthatha. It has been developed and tarred as it is the same off-ramp that goes to Nelson Mandela's home village. The off-ramp is at 'The Bridge'. This off-ramp is the main hiking spot the villagers use in order to access public transport. The distance from the off-ramp to the first house is between 1.5 – 2 kilometres to approximately 10 kilometres away from the last village. This is the distance the learners without transport walk when they hitch-hike to school and when the transport leaves behind the late comers or does not show up. Below is a map showing the N2 national road and nearby areas.
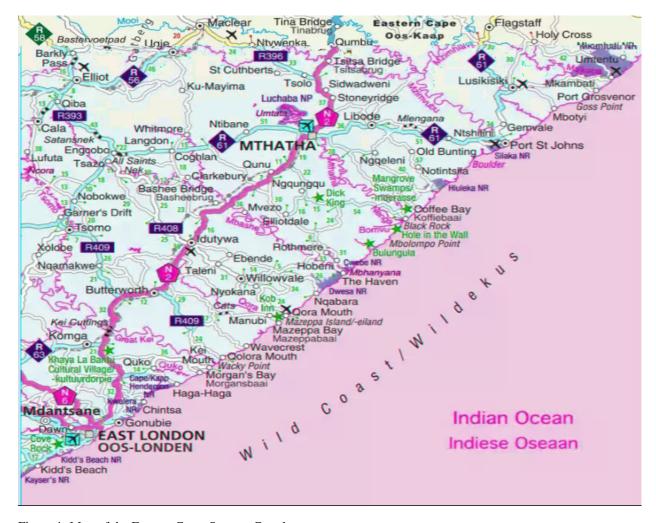

Figure 1: Map of the Eastern Cape. Source: Google maps

The distance between the villages where the learner participants reside and the school is mentioned in the previous chapter, under the participant selection section (Table 1). The identified research area where the parents were interviewed is 15 ½ kilometres away from the school. This village has three sub-villages within it, as mentioned in Chapter 4. There are currently two pick-up points in this area. The third pick-up point was recently merged into one of the remaining two pick-up points that now exist in the village.

5.2.1. Pick-up points

Access to transport is very important for learners in rural areas. The reality of the learners in the area of study was that they walked long distances before they arrived at the identified pick-up points. Findings of the USA study done by Ripplinger (2005) highlighted that the school transport had to travel long distances in the rural areas picking up learners from the different pick-up points because their homes are very far apart. In this study, the learners had to go to the buses, the transport did not go to them. Further, Ripplinger found that the buses that transport learners were never full. This finding is contrary to the problem identified in this study as the vehicles were overloaded and the distance between the houses was not identified as an issue but instead the distance between the homes and the pick-up points because the learners walked far to get to the closet pick-up points.

Figure 2: Rural set-up

The pictures above show the set-up of houses in the villages. Due to the lack of roads, the vehicles do not go inside the villages to pick-up the learners, therefore the learners walk to the identified pick-up points that are usually where the main (tarred) road is. Source: google picture

The pick-up points for the learners were far from their homes. One parent mentioned that the pick-up point for her child changed suddenly and she had to walk early in the morning, while it was still dark to get to her pick-up point in time to catch the transport. She was the only one walking from this village. Apparently, she was one of the very first learners to sign up for transport when it was introduced to the school; therefore, her name was the only one on the list for the Section A transport. She mentioned that the driver explained that he is not supposed to transport learners in Section B as he is contracted to transported learners from Section A:

> She uses the government provided transport. But the driver informed her that it is supposed to transport children from Section A, so he cannot just take her there and leave the other children that are going to school. So, she has to go the Section A pick-up point. It used to leave her before though until the driver explained to her that she must go to the other pick-up point because she put her name down for that transport. - *Parent 3*

> I am even going to show you the drop-off/ pick-up points when you leave. But the kids have to walk for a long distance to catch the bus. There is the first stop right here, and I have previously arranged that the pick-up stop is here. For example, you see the village above, there are kids from there that go to the same school and we have this bridge between us, bridge 2, that connects us and we have kinship there. Their kids walk long distances to that far away stop before they get to the closest pick-up point. Yes, it falls under the Mthatha district so we asked that at least it drops them here at this first stop. Look at the weather now, it is pouring and now they have to walk to the pick-up point and get off at that stop instead of getting off here. - *Parent 10: prominent figure in the community*

The feedback from the teachers also suggested that they were unhappy about the identified pick-up points. They mentioned that they do not know who identified and decided on the pick-up points. They also shared the same concerns as the parents on the dangers of walking a long distance very early in the morning. A few teachers further stated that it impacted on the performance and active engagement of the learners in the classroom as some of them would be tired regardless of the school transport initiative. Mahlaba's (2014) findings support the finding on learners being exhausted by the time they get to the classroom. This is a result of the learners waking up very early in the morning to catch the bus as well as, sleeping late at night as they

get home late most days due to the transport picking them up late, thus impacting on the time they do their chores and homework at home. Teachers had this to say:

> I will not say it is the service providers because I do not really like this "mahala" business to begin with because these children wake up very early in the morning to catch the buses and they get home late in the afternoon. If the government would just do as it has been promising daily and build hostels for the learners. Even their production levels are not good because they wake up very early and sleep late at night due to many things. Clearly, they wake up at 4 am in order for them to make the 6:30 am pick-up time – *Teacher 1*

> Another challenge is on the identified pick-up points. They are not fully accommodative because some kids walk for up to 10kms going to the pick-up points. I do not know the person who was tasked with identifying and deciding on the pick-up points. It was like that when I arrived here at the school. In some areas, you will find that there is a school close by and then that school is made to be the pick-up point, the same school that they are supposed to be actually attending at. So, some learners travel to that school in order to be picked up by the vehicles, and then most of those kids need to wake up very early to get there. – *Teacher 2 in charge of the learner programme at the school*

Feedback from the learner participants suggested that they had no problem with the pick-up points, although, two learners from the overall sample seemed unhappy. One learner mentioned that their driver made two trips to their village and used two pick-up points. The learner reported that the second load that was transported after school was not dropped off at the identified drop-off point but instead, they were made to disembark very far from home at the general hiking spot:

> Yes, I would say there are a few things sisi; the bus makes two trips right. And when it picks us up here, and the next pick-up point is there, so if you maybe cross the road and you are on the other side when it is approaching or arrives, it will leave you. He says he does not want to be late. Secondly, the second trip he drops off at the hiking spot and that is far. It makes us vulnerable to muggings and dangerous activities by the naughty boys around. – *Learner 8*

A second learner that seemed unhappy with the pick-up points also reported on it:

Well, there are different pick-up stops; Section A, Section B and Section C, today in the morning we heard that our stop, for the others who lived further up, has been cancelled we must join the Section A and apparently it has been like that for a while but we weren't told. So, when I asked why we weren't told, because we had just filled the transport request forms and our stop was called out and the kilometres and we registered under it we are supposed to know so that the driver does not have to tell us and we would have gone to wait at the correct pick-up point. But, we were told it was no more. Why it is like that? I do not know! – *Learner 23*

Although the data suggests that many of the learners were happy with their pick-up points, regardless of the walking distance there was a lack of accountability and monitoring of the operations of the learner transport service providers as it was evident that they could do as they pleased, and that adversely affected the learners. The latter impacts on the learners' access to education as the allocated transport is a tool that aims to assist with the attainment of the right to education enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

5.2.2 Departure and arrival times

It became evident that there is no set time for the vehicles to pick-up the learners from their various pick-up points. It was at each driver's discretion, as long as the learners were at school by seven in the morning. Eight learners and two teachers were not happy about the arrival and departure times of the vehicles for various reasons from the buses/Quantum arriving late in the morning to pick them up or changing pick-up times as they pleased:

They are very troublesome. They get to school late and say they were not picked up by the drivers. They get to school late and also reach their homes late because at times the vehicles do not show up or if they come to pick them up they come at their own sweet time. –*Teacher 1*

The learner transport sometimes, well actually most of the time it does not really have a specific time for picking us up that it adheres to. The pick-up time used to be 6:30 am but these days it is 6:40 am and when we get here at school we are running out of the bus because the principal or the deputy will be by the gate attending to late comers. - *Learner 23*

14 learners from the 29 that were interviewed reported that their transport was always early or on time and they were very happy. One learner reported that there was sometimes room for negotiating pick-up times between the drivers and the learners as one learner stated that they sometimes requested their driver to pick them up earlier than the usual time in the morning if the Grade twelves needed to be at school early:

> How it works? It helps us a lot because we attend morning classes. So, we are able to ask them to pick us up early in order for us to attend the morning classes-*Learner 17*

> Yes, the bus is always on time, it is never late-*Learner 5*

The extracts above suggest that there were few drivers who took pride in the work they did and were concerned about the learners 'school careers'. This theme is important as it links to the stipulations of the Eastern Cape Provincial Learner Transport Policy. The policy states that the service providers are to pick-up the learners thirty minutes before the school started and fetch them no later than thirty minutes after school ended (Eastern Cape Department of Transport Provincial Learner Transport Policy, 2016:18). Most drivers did not adhere to these times as some of them arrived either earlier or later because they lived far from the route they had been allocated and others had to transport more than one trip to the school. The lack of adherence to the policy times meant that learners arrived late at school and got home late as well. Thus, taking away from the very purpose of this policy of assisting rural learners with access to education by reducing the challenges they face on a daily basis.

5.3. Learner perceptions of the learner transport programme

As reported in the literature, children's voices are typically not heard on matters that concern them hence the marginalised position of learners in the research conducted on transport as well as the policy making processes (Flugel, 2009; Rama, 2014). Given that learner transport is identified as an important means to access education, this dissertation supports a finding in Mbatha's (2005) study that government needs to provide school transport for poor learners who live far from school. Hence, the researcher argues that it must improve the management of the learner transport programme, as access to transport in rural areas, plays a vital role in accessing education. The section below focuses on the responses of learners and tries to contribute to the limited voices of children in matters than concern them, as well as bridge the gap identified in the literature on school transport that is provided by the government. Highlighting learner voices emphasises the experiences of those who use the transport meaning that the research

offers information to those tasked with improving the learner transport programme as well as, the decisions taken in the policy making process.

5.3.1. Understanding the learner transport programme

This section reports on the level of understanding the learners have regarding the learner transport programme. This inquiry is important because as the beneficiaries of the programme, they must be aware of how it operates as well as its purpose. Three learners from the 29 learners had a good understanding of the learner transport programme, which department provided:

> I know that it is a government initiative and the school works together with government for the payment of the drivers- *Learner 27*

> It is from the Department of Transport to help the learners who live far so that they do not walk because they would have to wake up early to come to school and going home they arrived late. Also, they encounter dangers on the way because others walked in the fields where it is not safe. -*Learner 28*

> It is transport provided by the government to come help transport us to school and back home, especially when it is raining so we get to school dry. It is also to prevent us from the cold weather in winter and so forth. -*Learner 29*

Other learner participants in the study seemed to portray a reasonable understanding of the learner transport programme and the reasons for its existence:

> It is transport that brings us to school when you cannot afford to come on your own - *Learner 12*

> It is transport that is supposed to pick us up daily, to and from school but it does not happen like that now - *Learner 20*

> It is transport that takes learners at their pick-up points and brings them to school – *Learner 18*

Two learners reported that they had to register for the learner transport programme without proper understanding. They were just told to bring their identification documents in order to register for the free transport to school:

When schools re-opened it was announced that those that normally use the learner transport must come to school with their birth certificates because they wanted our ID numbers- *Learner 1*

We had just filled the transport request forms and our stop was called out and the kilometres and we registered under it. *-Learner 23*

One learner in Grade eleven reported that she did not know the reason or the purpose of the government learner transport programme as she was told by peers that there are free buses/Quantums that transport them to and from school every day:

I saw the bus, people said it was "mahala" and I just went in and came to school - *Learner 25*

The three previous quotes show that there is a lack of coordination in registering learners in need and administering the programme. Another learner said they have nothing to say when he was asked about his understanding of the learner transport programme:

No, I do not have anything to say- *Learner 4*

When the researcher continued to probe, he then said it is transport that takes them to school and has helped him to get to school because he lived far. The overall voice of the learners suggests that they know the purpose of the learner transport programme but are excluded from participating in its processes and decision making. Below is a section on factors that prevent learners from using the learner transport. The views and understanding of the government learner transport programme portrayed by the learners is important in this study because it directly feeds into the limited research on the voices of children in matters that directly affect them. It contributes to the argument raised by Rama (2014:94) on the marginalised and under-examined position of children in matters of transport within sociology.

5.3.2. Positive impact of access to learner transport

It can be deduced from the analysis of the data that most of the learners do not have chores or other responsibilities that prevent them from catching the school transport in the morning. They

reported that they only did chores in the afternoon, others mentioned that they were only responsible for their homework and washing their school uniform:

> No, I do not have anything preventing me from catching transport in the morning. I do them after school. I go fetch water in the afternoon, and clean Saturday. I do my homework in the evenings. I do not cook every day. *-Learner 6*

> No, I do not. I just do my homework *–Learner 3*

Five of the learners had chores in the morning that sometimes caused them to be late and miss the pick-up times. Three of the learners mentioned that they needed to feed livestock as part of their chores:

> I feed the livestock; pigs, hens and the rest and I also have siblings who are still in junior school that I need to assist to get ready in the morning. *- Learner 24*

> I must feed the chickens and pigs in the morning. I'm also an active person, so I'm a person who exercises, so I exercise in the morning and sometimes I leave my phone and then I realise that it is getting late I should be bathing now, and then I will run behind schedule with everything. So, when that happens I miss the transport and I go to the hiking spot. *-Learner 23*

> Yes, what makes me late is washing the dishes sometimes in the morning because my mom is not well, she cannot do stuff for herself so I need to leave the house clean before I come to school. *–Learner 22*

The number of learners with chores in the morning was surprisingly lower than expected as children in rural areas have chores to do in the morning. The latter is supported by research done on factors affecting school attendance for learners, especially in high school. The research reports that high school going learners (42%) are usually constrained by family care and other household duties, that include taking care of parents, grandparents and siblings (Fengu, 2017).

This finding is important because it reveals a shift in the way the parents in the rural areas think and from what has been assumed to be the norm in the rural areas. The parents value the importance of education and the hope it gives towards breaking the cycle of poverty in the rural areas.

The right of access to education is the cornerstone of the post-1994 South African education system. Access to education is important as it is based on the right to basic education enshrined in the South African Constitution, Section 29(1) (Fleisch, et al. 2012:529). It can be reasoned that the learners welcomed the learner transport programme regardless of its failures. They stated that it had been helpful in assisting them with getting to school. It had also helped them get to school early and in time for the morning classes that had been introduced to improve the pass rates for learners:

> The learner transport programme has helped us with transport to school because we stay far. It has helped us arrive early at school and be able to attend morning classes or have study time in the morning when we use the transport – *Learner 11*

> It has been especially helpful to me because home is very far, therefore, I would not be able to attend to my books when I get at home because school is over at 3:30 pm but I would probably get home at 7 pm and have no chance for my books. - *Learner 21*

> It has helped me a lot because I could not afford the renting fees that I was paying- *Learner 22*

> Mahala has made getting education easy. If it wasn't available and we had to walk I would get home tired and have no time to study and do my homework. You are also able to complete the homework you didn't get the chance to finish at home on the bus to school or get to school early and finish it. It has also helped to shield us from the heavy rains of summer and thunder. So, if we had to walk, and it is raining or has rained, on the way to school we pass other villages which have rivers, "ngxondoshas[5]" and now we do not cross those rivers/ dams because there is transport. - *Learner 23*

> It has helped me a lot because I don't have money for transport to come to school, even back at home there is no money. It has also helped because my school is far and now I can come to school and have a future. - *Learner 9*

The above interview extracts highlight the different ways the government learner transport programme has helped the learners. Crossing rivers and dams while going to school is another finding similar to Mahlaba's (2014) findings as he reported that learners sometimes lost their school uniforms when they took them off to cross rivers that were on their way to school.

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[5] Ngxondoshas are valleys.

Another male learner in Grade 12 said the transport had not helped him at all because he still comes to school every day like he used before the introduction of the learner transport programme.

> No, not really, whether it is there or not, I would come to school because it is not far. I can walk every day so it is the same. –*Learner 13*

This subsection on the positive outcomes of the learner transport is important in that it gives a glimpse of the good that is possible when things are done correctly and efficiently. It indicates the impact of the effort made by the government in trying to attain the promised right in Section 29 (1) of the Constitution. Further, it gives hope that these learners can have access to education as promised in the education legislation (SASA 84 of 1996) if the programme is provided and managed efficiently.

5.3.3. Negative outcomes of the learner transport programme

The learner transport programme has been in place at the school since February 2015. During that time, the learners had the opportunity to identify likes and dislikes about the way the school transport operated. 13 learners shared on the things they did not like about the transport and the rest of the sample said that there was nothing they did not like about it. Below are a few representations of the general dislikes about the learner transport programme:

> With the current transport, there are occasional fights with the routes that have two buses operating. If you used the Quantum in the morning you are then told to use it going back as well and not use the second bus. You are told to wait regardless of what time it will come back- *Learner 3*

> The one thing I do not like about them is because they are sometimes late, both in the morning and afternoon- *Learner 11*

> The buses get too full. A lot of people stand. They really get full-*Learner 12*

> The time issue and the fact that he leaves you behind when you are already there at the pick-up point is what I do not like. Also, after school, we sit here and wait for them. Sometimes it rains while we waiting. –*Learner 22*

> He does not come every day and he is used to it since last year we have had this problem and we reported it, but it has not gotten anywhere-*Learner 20*

One learner reported that she does not like it when the driver keeps changing the pick-up points without notice:

> No, he does not inform us about any changes to pick-up points and pick-up times. Also, for example, if we are waiting for him(at the Section A pick-up point) by that tank for example (there's a house that is close to our pick-up point that we stand next to) he will stop a distance further (maybe here by your car) and we come to where he is and he will shout at us about why we are standing where we were standing and then tomorrow we listen to him and we will wait where he picked us up yesterday and then tomorrow he will be parked elsewhere, and this is when he told us that there is no pick-up point there. He keeps doing it and moving around that time he never told us that there's no pick-up point there. - *Learner 23*

This highlights the lack of monitoring that is done by the department officials, which results in the drivers doing as they pleased and therefore get away with delivering a substandard service. An interesting report was that of a male learner in Grade 12 who mentioned that he did not like it when the driver played loud, current music hits as it was distracting for him and results in lack of concentration in class:

> I do not like it when they play the current like music like "gobisa iqolo". I like the songs but not when I'm coming to school. They make me lose my concentration because I dance as well and by the time I get to school I'm no longer in the mood for books. - *Learner 14.*

One male learner in Grade 11 reported that there was nothing he considered to be a serious dislike as he was grateful for just having transport to come to school. This was the same participant that was not pleased with the service providers as he mentioned that he thought the owners of the buses were problematic as they kept switching their transport and some days they travel in a Quantum that takes fifteen learners and they are a load of twenty learners:

> No nothing serious, it is better to have it than not to at all! But if it is possible to get more buses or a bigger bus that would help. – *Learner 24*

This theme serves as a new addition to the available literature on the modes of school transportation. The matters raised by the learners should be issues that are gathered by the implementation officials of the learner transport programme and considered in further decision-

making processes and informing policy in order for it to succeed in addressing the issue of access to education in the rural area.

5.4. Conditions of the vehicles

The provincial policy states that the ECDoT and the relevant stakeholders are responsible for ensuring the safety and security measures of vehicles in line with the National Roads Traffic Act 93 of 1996 that is applicable to the transportation of passengers and the National Land Transport Act 5 of 2009. It further states that at the beginning of each school quarter, the department will conduct roadworthy inspections of the vehicles that have been contracted to transport the learners (Eastern Cape Department of Transport Provincial Learner Transport Policy, 18:2016). The inspections have been reported to be conducted often on the vehicles.

Figure 4: The type of vehicles used to transport the learners to the school. Source: google pictures

The condition of the vehicles used by the service providers from my observation seemed good and was generally reported to be good by the participants. An official working in the Learner Transport division in the district office of the ECDoE mentioned that due to many problems they had previously with vehicles transporting learners, it has been made a priority that the vehicles that apply to transport learners meet the requirements issued by the ECDoT. The requirements include; an assessment or check on the road safety levels of the vehicles; the applicants must provide a service history of the vehicle; papers of ownership and so forth:

> The only vehicles allowed are the mini buses, buses or Quantums, and not Avanzas, ventures and guru-gurus[6]. So, they bid and their vehicles checked for road worthiness, other processes required and the vehicles are tested. The people must have registered business and need certain paper work and etc. but I'm sure people from transport will answer you better. This is why we are also given the registration numbers for the vehicles so that they use that very same car and not use a different old one. *- Learner transport official*

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6 Guru-guru refers to the old vans that are not roadworthy, used to transport people in rural areas.

Figure 5: Guru-gurus previously used to transport learners. Source: google pictures

The above quote supports the observations made by the researcher as well as, the reports of the participants on the notion of the efforts made by the ECDoT to make sure that the vehicles that transport the learners were roadworthy. A teacher commented to say that the vehicles were in good condition but he reported the concern of the kind of roads the buses/Quantum travel in as there is a lack of road infrastructure. This, therefore, impacts on the wear and tear as well as the frequency of the break-downs the vehicles have:

> They are in good condition. But the issue is the route they travel. Those who aren't fortunate with the route are the ones that break down, but the owners take care of them and most of them leave their vehicles here at school. –*Teacher 2*

Although the majority of the participants report that the vehicles are roadworthy, three learners and two teachers mentioned that vehicles have broken down before while transporting the learners to school:

> What are we supposed to do when the vehicles break down? There was one driver whose car had broken down. Yes, they help each other and organise other drivers to get the learners. But that affects time because one has planned his routes and times for him to get the learners early and on time and they end up being late. –*Teacher 1*

> Sometimes others have technical problems; you would see one with smoke or notice that it is sideways and not even going straight as it drives. –*Teacher 3*

The learners report that the vehicles used by the service providers to transport them to school were in good condition. Three learners mentioned that the vehicles had broken down before

and even in those instances, two learners said it had happened twice at most since they started operating at the school:

> No, ours is in good condition. One we used to travel with (because our driver sometimes switches the buses) the red one once got stuck on our way to school, in the morning and he bought another white one, but it does not transport us only but because it also belongs to the same owner he sometimes uses it. - *Learner 2*

> It has broken down twice already, and the chairs are not secure. When the bus turns they move and you feel like you will fall any second. - *Learner 22*

The above quotations support what has been reported on in the media as illustrated by the two newspapers (the Daily Dispatch, 2015b; Heraldlive, 2017) in the literature review section on bakkies and the old, unroadworthy vehicles used to transport learners. The significance of this theme is that it emphasises that although there has been a lot of reports in the media about vehicles that are not roadworthy, the government has made strides in addressing the problem of unsafe vehicles in this rural area.

5.5. The parents and teacher's views on learner travelling experiences

The overall travel experiences of the learners were not pleasant as they were confronted with a lot of challenges. These include challenges with using the government provided learner transport as well as those that still walk to school.

The parents' reports on the daily experiences revealed that their children still struggled with accessing education in the identified research area as the government provided learner transport that had been problematic since its inception. One parent from the ten parents interviewed mentioned that her daughter had school transport taking her to school daily since the year started. Even with access to the school transport, she further stated that the transport would leave her on some days until recently when the driver informed her that his pick-up point had changed as discussed in the earlier section on pick-up points. The rest of the sampled parents spoke in one voice on the failure of the government to provide transport for their children as they were still eager and showed interest in getting an education. The parents commented that in Section A there had not been transport allocated to pick-up their children. The transport they used last year was one contracted to transport learners to and from a nearby school, which was

closed[7]. The learners and teachers were transferred to the identified school used in the study, but the government failed to provide transport for those students and others travelling from Section B:

> No, he does not have it. It was difficult now for him to go to school. - *Parent 4*

> It only transports the children from the village below and in this one there is no learner transport. We tried getting one. We asked one of the young lads with cars here to help us. We also went to school as well and they said they will try assisting us. - *Parent 8*

The learners wake up early to go and hitch-hike at the local hiking spot or beg for free lifts from the cars that pass by. On some days when the previous service provider, who resides in the same village, felt sorry for the learners when he saw them in the mornings he gave them lifts to school:

> There is a bus around that transports learners from Section A. It gets very full. I do not want to lie to you (andifuni kuthetha isikizi)! Some of them even stand in it while travelling to school. So, our children go to hitch-hike by the bridge, even on days whereby they do not have money, they still go to hitch-hike and beg each car that passes by for a lift. They say they get there and even kneel down until someone stops out of pity and gives them a lift to school. On days where they have no luck and do not get a lift, they come back home and do not go to school. – *Parent 2*

On days when they are unlucky and do not get a lift from a good samaritan, others turn back while those who are hungry for education proceed to make their way to school on foot. The parents worry daily about the dangers faced by their children as they walk the long distance to school and back. They mentioned the fear that if this situation did not change soon, some of the children might lose heart and drop out of school as it was too far to walk (over 15kms) and their financial status did not allow them to permanently fund the travelling costs for their children.

One of the parents reported that since the beginning of 2017, the learner transport from Section A did not allow their children in, she had to run around the village borrowing money for taxi

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[7] The school in this village was closed due to fewer numbers of learners attending the school. The learners and teachers were moved to the school where the research was conducted.

fare that she knew she will have no means of paying back. The money she borrowed was not just for her child, but for other children as well. In February, they tried to arrange and request that one of the buses that picks up children in Section C makes a second trip and transport their children to school as well. This request was not successful as they had to find alternative transport for their children from the beginning of March 2017. This transport was a small Avanza car from the village that they hired for R300 per learner a month to transport a total of twelve learners every day to school and back:

> We went to ask another father here to transport them to school. We want our children to study and it is a struggle to walk from here to school. If the government would have a way to assist, make a plan for us. We are now out of our depth. - *Parent 6*

> They use the Macirheni[8] car. It first takes them as the first load. They have to pay R300 per month and there are other learners who are transported by government travel for free. -*Parent 1*

The teachers reported the daily operations of the learner transport as one that was very problematic. They were not happy about the learner transport initiative due to its many challenges and most importantly the fact that they had certain days that they just did not show up to pick-up the learners. Two of the five teachers preferred that the learners get boarding houses close to school, especially Grade 12 learners who were to attend extra lessons in the afternoons and on weekends:

> I do not really like this mahala business, to begin with, these children wake up very early in the morning to catch the buses and they get home late in the afternoon. If the government would just do as it has been promising daily and build hostels for the learners. – *Teacher 2*

The teachers seemed to be waiting for the building of the hostels for the learners as they believed it would be cheaper, safer and the learners would be able to attend extra lessons. Both the teachers and parents have not participated in the learner transport programme discussions, therefore, this subsection offers new information on the topic. Seeking the parents and teachers' opinions on the learners' travelling journey is important to include in this paper so that it gives a well-rounded view of the programme. It also helps to establish the extent of their involvement

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[8] Macirheni is the clan name of the family that owns the car that the parents have arranged for their children.

on the learners' school career, as well as with the implementation of the provisions of the SASA (1996) on the inclusive education system in South Africa.

5.5.1. Learners and parents' views on bus trips

Transport is an important tool to access education but the experiences in the vehicles are not always pleasant. Unfortunately, the researcher did not have the opportunity of travelling on the Iveco buses, mini buses and Quantums that transport the learners, but the parents seemed to share one sentiment on the conflict between the learners on the buses. Three parents from those interviewed in the study mentioned that the children who had school transport from the neighbouring Section A did not want to travel with the other learners. They either made them stand or chase them telling them that it was not their transport unless the driver intervened and allowed them to travel with on some days. Further, one of the parents alluded to an incident that involved two learners using the same bus who were fighting over the driver of the bus, as it seemed that both of them were in a romantic relationship with him:

> He did use the transport earlier this year, but it stopped transporting them. But then again, they were only using it because the driver wanted to. But the learners using the transport did not want them to use it. So that would be a problem. They do not want them using the bus. If they use it is not in a peaceful manner. They tell them it is their transport and remove them from the sits if they find them sitting down - *Parent 8*

Contradictory to the report by the parents, the majority of the learners reported pleasant trips to school and back. This contradiction might be due to the fact that through the engagements with the parents as well as observations done, the parents seemed to take the issues of transport more seriously than the learners. The parents were the ones who were constantly pressuring the school principal and ECDoT officials on the issues as they were concerned about the safety and education of their children. The learners, on the other hand, seemed to have accepted the challenges as those that come with the learner transport programme. 22 from 29 learners reported that the trips to and from school were pleasant, with no conflict:

> We actually get along well. When I arrive on the bus, we are an overload; maybe two people have to stand. I just stand; I do not get there and argue with someone else to stand instead. –*Learner 23*

It is pleasant. If there are people quarrelling/arguing the driver calls us to try and resolve it. If he hears that we fought he then chases the people involved out of the bus and tells us that he will punish us if we do not fix things. *-Learner 26*

There are two learners who specifically reported that their experience on the transport is not always pleasant as they were not free on the bus/Quantum because they were scared of the drivers as they always reprimand them:

No, we do not ask him why he is late or keeps changing pick-up times and he does not say. We are scared to ask him because he is evil. *-Learner 21*

This section on the spaces of operation and travelling experiences of the learners is information that needs to be gathered and considered when the current policy is reviewed. It is important information that will assist in the improvement of the learner transport programme. Disregarding such information would impact negatively on the successful attainment of the goals of the Learner Transport Policy and the overall intention to increase access to education for rural learners. Below is a discussion on the barriers identified to schooling in the research area.

5.6. Barriers to schooling: Absenteeism and late coming, natural dangers and criminality

The barriers that have been identified in this study support the literature currently available on challenges learners have in attaining education. Mbatha (2005), Rogan (2006), Flugel (2009), Behrens (2003) and Mahlaba (2014) all mention that there are challenges associated with schooling for learners in the rural areas. These vary from bad weather conditions, attacks by strangers, lack of infrastructure and roads, arriving late at school as well as fatigue. The Eastern Cape Learner Transport Policy was developed with the aim to address challenges of accessibility and mobility of all the disadvantaged learners in the province, especially of those residing in deep rural areas and affected stakeholders (Eastern Cape Department of Transport Provincial Learner Transport Policy, 2016:3). These barriers still exist in the research area.

5.6.1. Absenteeism and late coming

The feedback gathered from the participants suggests that the level of absenteeism is still high at the school due to inconsistent operations of the learner transport. Mahlaba (2014) argued that absenteeism and late coming due to bad weather conditions were barriers to education. The parents in this study reported that due to the lack of learner transport, public transport in the

rural areas and money to hitch-hike, their children did not make it to school as often as two days in one week. The enrolment numbers at the school have been reported to have increased. The teachers inferred that although absenteeism has decreased in the school since the introduction of "mahala", the learners are still absent more often than should be the case as the service providers fail to pick them up every day:

> Yes, some days they are absent, but not all of them because some decide to walk to school but then arrive late. For instance, yesterday the bus never picked them up, but they came to school and also walked back home. –*Teacher 4*

The parents also report on absenteeism as a hindrance to the children attaining education:

> Last week they didn't go to school. They were already by the pick-up point and had to turn back. Do you realise that now they will not study and miss a lot of material that is being taught at school? They turned back. - *Parent 1*

16 learner participants mentioned that the service providers did not pick them up every day. Three of the 16 reported that when their allocated bus/Quantum does not come to pick them up they organise alternative transport but the rest either hitch-hike, walk or turn back, especially when they do not get a free lift to school:

> I walk to school when there is no transport –*Learner 28*

> No, I never walk if there is no transport. I always hitch-hike, home is about 20kms away-*Learner 25*

When this learner does not have money to catch public transport, which is very likely to be the usual case due to the poverty levels in the area, he does not make it to school:

> No, I am not able to walk when there is no transport because it is very far. It would probably take me three hours - *Learner 27*

14 learners report that the school transport only leaves those that are not at the pick-up point when the bus/Quantum arrives. Those either get a free lift to school or walk and in fewer cases hitch-hike to school. The others who said they did not have school transport allocated to them were the ones most likely to attend school three times a week at most. The inconsistency of the service providers with picking up the learners every day for school as well as, the learners that still did not have school transport resulted in high levels of absenteeism at the identified school.

The learner transport programme is to assist learners with physical access to the schools as well as for the learners to get to school early in order to get the full experience of education. The learners arrived early on most days when the school transport picked them up. The researcher's observation was that most of the service providers were at school by 7am. The learners mentioned that in cases where the buses had to do two trips due to the lack of service providers contracted by the government, they arrived at school late and also got home late. Other times the double trips by the buses were due to fellow bus drivers seeking assistance from each other when one could not make it to pick-up the learners. This directly impacted on learners' access to attaining education. When the buses were late, the learners missed the morning classes and also missed the afternoon extra classes as they run to catch the bus/Quantum after school. The late coming was also a result of walking to school. On days when the bus responsible for a certain area did not pick-up learners on a certain morning, some learners turned back but there were those who were determined to get their education at all cost. The feedback from the learners also revealed that some drivers did not adhere to the agreed time and sometimes pick them up late to school and in the afternoon:

> The one thing I do not like about them is because they are sometimes late, both in the morning and afternoon. –*Learner 11*

> I do not like the time issue and the fact that he leaves you behind when you are already there at the pick-up point. Also, after school, we sit here and wait for them. Sometimes it rains while we are waiting. –*Learner 22*

The teachers supported the accounts by the learners as they also reported that some of the buses got the learners to school late and they also did not pick-up the learners on a daily basis which resulted in them walking and arriving at school late. These findings highlight why late coming has been identified as a barrier to attain education in this study.

This subsection has highlighted the on-going problem of absenteeism and late coming by learners. This directly impedes increased access to schooling that the government is trying to achieve. This theme is amongst the key reasons for the introduction of the transport initiative. However, it seems as if the issue is just as persistent as before regardless of the government learner transport programme.

5.6.2. Natural dangers and criminality

Research done in the field of school transport or the lack thereof by Rama (1999), Behrens (2003), Behrens Phillips (2004), Mbatha (2005), Rogan (2006), Mashiri et al. (2009), Flugel (2009), Porter et al. (2012), Machard (2014), Mahlaba (2014) and the StatsSA GHS (2014) has revealed that learners face many dangers when they walk to school. This study also found that there are dangers the learners faced when they walked to and from school.

Figure 6: Learners crossing a river on their way to school picture sourced: The Sowetan newspaper 26 July 2017.

The natural dangers mentioned by the participants include; heavy summer rains, storms, crossing rivers, walking through forests and railway lines, walking through mountainous areas and alongside the N2 roads to get to school and back home:

> It will help save them from the dangers of walking and bad weather conditions like thunder and heavy rains as well as us from worrying about them because we do not know if they have arrived at school or not. We worry when we see the others arriving back from school and our kids have not arrived yet. So, we are not happy on most days because of the many unknowns. – *Parent 9*

> It is far, but we do come. It is on top of the mountain. We force ourselves to come. We walk in our village, then pass a school, in the fields and cross the first river, then go passed another village called Nonkawuza (there is transportation for this village as well) and cross the second river and a railway and then we arrive here by school. – *Learner 21*

In terms of criminality, there is limited evidence of criminal activity as a barrier to accessing education gathered from the participants. The researcher has deduced from the data gathered

in this study that not much criminal activity has been experienced by the learners. Mashiri et al (2009: 69) give a detailed report of the encounters the learners had when they walked to school including sexual harassment, muggings, being chased by dogs and the anxiety associated with the possibility of being murdered. What seems prevalent amongst the participants in this study is the fear of being a victim of criminal activity as there is only one learner who reported an incident:

> It makes us vulnerable to criminals when we walk because we can get mugged and prone to other dangerous activities by the naughty boys around- *Learner 8*

> Yes, there are because we walk in the fields when we coming to school (last year there was one learner who got chased while coming to school but ran and therefore escaped). – *Learner 19*

No other cases of criminal activity were reported by the other learners. There were a few reports on the conflict between the youth of the different villages which created another danger factor in their walking experiences. Some learners fought, preventing the learners from walking through certain villages. This was reported by a leader in the community as just naughty youthful conflict arising from romantic relationships and other youthful matters between the learners.

5.7 Unintended consequences of the learner transport programme

The implementation of the Learner Transport Policy has resulted in unintended consequences that hinder the realisation of its goal of making education accessible to learners in the rural areas. The findings of this study have revealed challenges encountered by the beneficiaries of the learner transport. Most of these findings reveal new information within the area of learner transport research.

5.7.1. Exhaustion

One of the aims of the Learner Transport Policy is to increase access to education by providing transport to school so that the learners do not get to school tired from walking and therefore are not able to participate in class and get educated. Research work done on exhaustion experienced by learners (Rama 1999; Behrens 2003; Behrens & Phillips 2004; Mbatha 2005; Rogan 2006; Mashiri et al. 2009; Flugel 2009; Mahlaba 2014) is related to walking to school

because learners do not have access to transport and it is not that they get tired of walking long distances to get to the transport assigned to take them to school or when it does not show up.

Two teachers reported that due to the location of the pick-up points, the learners walked long distances or travelled to where they got their school transport. This meant that they had to wake up as early as 4 am in order to make 6:30 am or 6:00 am which are the times the buses/Quantum seemed to pick-up the learners for them to be at school by 7 am. The learners also arrived home late in the afternoon because some of the drivers pick them up late. This is because they left their buses parked outside the school and spent the day in town and came back late to pick-up the learners. The learners, therefore, arrived late at home and they still had to do their chores as well as, homework and end up sleeping very late. This resulted in the learners feeling exhausted and lacking focus in class. The learners, principal and parents reports supported the teachers on the matter:

> The driver is supposed to tell us what time he is picking us up, so we are ready on time at the pick-up points and secondly, the driver is supposed to be waiting for us when the school is over. But he never does that. –*Learner 20*

> When the driver does not show up, we walk, and I sleep very late because I do not sleep before I finish my homework –*Learner 28*

> Other places have no route, in a certain village the learners walk approximately five kilometres to get to the pick-up point and therefore get to school tired- *Principal*

The supporting reports from the teachers included the extracts from Teacher 1 and 2 used in the early section on pick-up points as well as the one below:

> In other villages, the identified pick-up point will be a school in the area regardless of where it is situated exactly in the village so, some learners travel to that school in order to be picked up by the vehicles, and then most of those kids need to wake up very early to get there. – *Teacher 2*

The researcher observed that the drivers did sometimes pick-up the learners late after school. During the fieldwork period, the researcher would sometimes wait until the very last load of learners was picked up and observe the learners waiting for the drivers to arrive after school as they were not there when the school adjourned.

5.7.2. No access to extra lessons

The phenomenon of extra lessons has become part and parcel of the education system in South Africa and other countries. Many schools have made it compulsory to attend extra lessons for high school learners. Extra lessons help aim for higher academic standards (Balfanz et al. 2002:3). Recently the Gauteng Department of Education launched a Winter School Supplementary Programme in Tshwane to help learners from the selected secondary schools to improve their marks in crucial subjects like Mathematics, Natural sciences and English (Kgosana, 2017). This initiative is something that learners from the rural areas cannot part-take in due to transport issues. In 2014, the CAPS introduced the Secondary Improvement Programme (SIP) which pushed extra lessons to the forefront. The DBE ensured that study notes and extra classes were aligned to the CAPS curriculum (South Africa Yearbook, 2015/16:136).

The learner transport programme is an initiative introduced to assist learners from rural areas in getting access to education. Extra lessons are one of the initiatives introduced by high schools to help learners pass their secondary school level, with a specific focus on the Grade twelves. The school in this study introduced morning classes, a study period immediately when school is out in the afternoon as well as extra lessons after the study period and on Saturdays. It has been deduced that the learners did not attend extra lessons unless they were boarding close to the school. The problem is due to the operating times of the school transport as the drivers' pick-up learners after the study period and therefore resulting in them missing the extra lessons and not attending on Saturday as "mahala" is contracted for a five-day week:

> It is worse with extra classes! It is a huge disadvantage because it is the kids that stay far, for example, if you cannot have late classes. No, it is the study period that comes out at 3:30 pm when the school adjourns. The extra classes then start at 3:30 pm until 5 pm but there are no learners because they ran for mahala. –*Teacher 2*

> No, I do not have one using the transport my child is boarding due to late extra classes -*Parent 10: Prominent figure in the community*

Therefore, the learners who were enrolled for Grade twelve in the school were instructed to find a boarding house close to school so that they would be able to attend extra lessons that will assist them with passing the grade at the end of the year. Three from the nine Grade 12 learners who were interviewed reported that they only use "mahala" on Fridays and Mondays

when they were travelling home for the weekend. One learner actually mentioned that the parents could not afford the boarding fees therefore she stopped and is fully dependent on the learner transport:

> No, I do not use it every day, only Friday and Monday's because I am boarding. No, it is a private person, not the school's property and its R80 because there is no electricity. We study here at school and we go there to sleep-*Learner 16*

5.7.3. Conflict amongst the learners

Information gathered from the parents of the learners reveals that there is occasional conflict between the learners who have school transport and those from Section B who have not yet been assigned a bus/Quantum as transport. The learners from Section A fight with the other learners in order to keep them from travelling with them in the bus they believe is assigned to only learners from Section A. This is very worrying as the learners were travelling to the same school and in most cases, were registered for the same subjects, making them classmates. On some days, they allow them to come with, on other days the drivers gave them permission to ride on the bus, therefore, increasing the number of learners who stand in the buses. The driver also refused to transport learners as an overload on a daily basis as it became a risk he would be called to account for should he get into an accident with an overload and also because he was not paid to transport the extra learners. This challenge is supported by an extract from Parent 8 quoted earlier in the section on bus trips and another one below:

> Yes, but we have not seen it here but there is a bus servicing Section A, but it only takes a certain number of the children. Our kids are told to get off and the driver of the vehicle says so. –*Parent 1*

One of the authors consulted on conflict amongst the youth suggests that at times conflict can be due to inter-male competition, men trying to outdo each other on a specific conflict issue for example, initiation into a criminal gang, where one has to either beat-up a person in order to prove himself worthy of being a member of the gang (Barker & Ricardo, 2005:33). The conflict that seems to be prevalent among the male youth in the area of study might link to conflict caused by inter-male competition as the male learner participants in the study were fighting with other young males from neighbouring villages for reasons that were not known to the parents as there were no reports of historical conflict between the villages.

5.7.4. Multiple loads by service providers

It has become evident based on observations done by the researcher as well as the responses from the participants that the number of learners who need transport is still very high. According to the Annual Performance Plan for the 2017/18 financial year, the budget for the learner transport programme has increased annually from R374 973 million in 2014, R462 076 million in 2015, R463 573 in 2016 million and R491 741 million in 2017 (Eastern Cape Department of Transport, 2017). Most of the vehicles transporting learners in the identified high school were overloaded as all the Grade 10 learners were not catered for in the current year's budget due to the misaligned financial year of the DoT and calendar year of the school. Some of the Grade 11 learners were not catered for because the numbers of learners who are still in need of learner transport in the school have not been updated for a while by the ECDoT. In 2017, they were using numbers from 2010, whereas the number of learners in need of transport was 98 312 in 2015 and 65 237 learners were approved for transport in the province. The number increased to 111 406 in 2016 and only 67 191 were approved for transport and 70 000 were approved in 2017 as reported by the district transport official.

Some of the drivers were making two trips to one area in order to transport all the learners who registered for school transport or need transport. Another reason for the multiple loads that the drivers made was due to the lack of monitoring assigned to the Department of Education. The drivers sometimes did not pitch to transport the learners but instead asked their fellow drivers to do so on their behalf, while they were off attending to special requested trips or operating in the ranks during school hours or if their vehicles had broken down. As already mentioned, other service providers just did not pitch and did not make arrangements for the learners to be transported to school by their fellow drivers. Therefore, this still set walking to school as a norm in this area regardless of the learner transport programme.

These are problems the department is trying to combat as they were in the process of issuing stickers to vehicles assigned to transporting learners in order to be able to identify those who try to take chances. The department introduced a Proof of Delivery (PoD) document to be signed weekly by the service providers in the principal's office, which is submitted together with a 30-day invoice to the ECDoT by the service providers. This was introduced to try and monitor the daily trips made by the service providers.

5.7.5. Financial burden

As mentioned in the literature review, poverty directly affects affordability and potential benefits of meaningful access to education (Motala et al. 2009: 253). Furthermore, according to Motala et al. (2008:3) and Wright (2012) transport expenses are the biggest hindrance to accessing education for those living in poverty. Mbashe is earmarked as the poorest population in the province, which is reported in the 2011 Statistics South Africa Census that identifies the unemployment rate as 93% in the area. This is due to the high level of illiteracy as only 5% of the population are engaged in the formal sector and 1% in informal and private households (Mbhashe Local Municipality, 2016-2017:34). The research area has high levels of poverty and paying for transport to school is an extra burden that they cannot afford.

Based on observations and the feedback from the participants, it can be concluded that the learners came from poor homes and did not afford to pay for transport to school on a daily basis. The data collected reveals that the parents of the learners did not work but depend solely on the social grants (e.g. old age and child grants):

> Yoh! It has helped me because I really would not be able to come to school. I stay very far for me to walk. So, I would not have the money to come to school daily. - *Learner 14*

> It has helped with getting me home and to school. If it wasn't there it would really be difficult to get an education. I would not come daily to school because the parent will not have the cash to fund that. So, I would have to sit out some days. –*Learner 18*

> No, the learners were not coming to school late, but I can say it has helped with assisting the parents that do not have money for the taxis, so it has helped economically in those homes that cannot afford but then again almost everyone in South Africa can barely afford. –*Teacher 1*

The data further revealed that the parents whose children did not have a specific vehicle assigned to them had organised alternative transport for their children to get to school as it was 15kms away from the village. They have asked someone from the village (coincidentally the same person who used to transport their children in the previous year and stopped because he was not getting paid for his services) to transport their children to school while they wait for "mahala" to start transporting them. They have agreed to pay R300 per child per month:

I do not work! I will pay using the child's grant money. I will go get the cash from town on grant day and come back to pay for the transport. – *Parent 2*

The quote above highlights the fact that the different aspects of service delivery are connected and should be delivered as a whole to alleviate poverty. The rural residents should receive the social grants as well as have proper road infrastructure, access health services, clean water and so forth. When there are no learner transport services, the money the families receive in as child grants which is intended to feed the children is used to pay for alternative transport. Thus, the lack of service delivery as a whole, results in the poor being trapped in the circle of poverty.

5.8. Conclusion

This chapter discussed the kind of spaces the learner transport operates in. It shared the views of the learners, operations and unintended consequences of the learner transport programme, the travel experiences as well as the barriers preventing the learners from attending school daily. The major issues stated by the participants include the lack of learner transport in some villages as the buses are overloaded or have to make two trips and there is absence of school transport in Section B. Also, the vehicles seemed to operate as they pleased as the findings suggest that the drivers did not transport the learners on a daily basis and were sometimes late when delivering the learners.

Nonetheless, the beneficiaries report that the transport has been helpful in giving them an opportunity to get educated. In relation to the research question on the learner, teacher and parents' perceptions about the learner transport programme it can be concluded that the programme has not yet fully attained its goal in assisting the learners with access to education as there are a lot of challenges. The unintended consequences and challenges of the implementation of the policy all arise from the failure to consult with the community members, the teachers and the learners using the transport during the policy formulation stage.

Chapter 6 - Discussion and Conclusion

6.1. Discussion of findings

This study sought to shed light on the beneficiaries' experiences of a learner transport programme in a village in the Eastern Cape. Parents visited the school principal to register their complaints about the transport programme. The parents shared complaints about the shortage of school transport, the fact that their children were not being transported and therefore had to walk to school unless they made alternative plans for them. This study explored the challenges faced by the beneficiaries.

The findings reveal that some of the hindrances to the successful implementation of the learner programme could have been foreseen and addressed during the planning and formulation phase of the Learner Transport Policy. The uninformed pick-up and drop-off points that are very far from the homes of the learners as well the lack of road infrastructure in the rural areas are factors that were meant to be addressed in the formulation phase of the policy.

The perceptions of the interviewed learners highlighted that the government learner transport programme has helped them in various ways including; getting them to school on time, giving them an opportunity to learn, saving them from bad weather conditions and lifting a financial burden that comes with hitch-hiking to school. They also reported that they were bothered by the fact that the drivers did not transport them to school every day as the service providers sometimes did not show up and they had to walk, sometimes for two consecutive days in one week. The learners have attempted to report it to the teachers but nothing changed.

Almost half of the learner participants mentioned that they did not like it when the vehicles did not adhere to the agreed pick-up times, when they were late for school, when the vehicles were overloaded and when they failed to pitch-up to transport them to school. Contrary to the general perception about children in the rural areas, it was found that most of the learners in this study had no household responsibilities preventing them from using the school transport in the mornings and going to school. Those learners that had chores in the morning made sure that they woke up early to attend to them so that they did not miss the school transport.

The parents' perceptions regarding the travelling experiences of their children were generally not good as they worried about the challenges faced by the learners. The findings from the parents' interviews revealed that most of the learners did not have school transport and sometimes got lifts from neighbouring villages. The findings further revealed that the learners did not only fight in the buses but also when they were walking to school.

With the exception of two teachers, most hold the view that the government learner transport programme has helped a little as the learners came more regularly to school, were neater, livelier in class and were able to concentrate without the worry of walking home after school. Two teachers differed from this view as they believed that the learners still walked far to get to pick-up points and still got to school tired. They believed the service providers had no measures to hold them to account. They believe that it would be best if the learners stayed in boarding houses closer to school in order for them to attend extra classes. Nonetheless, the learners seemed grateful to have free transport taking them to school regardless of the identified dislikes and challenges with its operation.

The condition of the vehicles transporting the learners was reported to be very good as most were new Quantums, Iveko buses and small buses that had undergone an intense selection and road worthy examination process. These reports were supported by the observations made by the researcher.

The barriers that were reported by the participants were mostly concerns related to the safety of their girl children as they faced physical threats in the form of kidnaping, rape and criminal activity. They also worried about the boys as they were also vulnerable to criminal activity and the natural dangers faced by both sexes as they walked on the N2 to school, crossed rivers and walked through forests and valleys in order for them to get to school. As the families were poor, the children often did not have money to travel to school when the transport did not pick them up. These findings suggest that there is still a great need for school transport in that rural area. The identified barriers to schooling are consistent with research done by others (Sifuna 2007; Lewin 2007; Langevang & Gough 2009; Mashiri et al. 2009; Porter et al. 2011; Porter et al. 2012) on learners walking experiences in South Africa and other countries. Having identified problems with walking experiences of the learners, it is important to note that a five kilometre walk in the rural areas is very different from a five kilometre walk in an urban area. The learners in rural areas are more vulnerable to dangers faced when going to school such as

dangerous animals, rivers, insecurity because they walked through forests and dense vegetation and on gravel roads. The findings also revealed that the parents of the learners were concerned about the education experience of their children even though they had minimal or no form of education at all.

Some of the hindrances to the successful implementation of the programme were unforeseen and only became evident with the implementation of the programme. These challenges included the conflict between the learners in the buses as they refused to ride with the other learners who did not have transport allocated to them. Secondly, the collected data revealed that many learners, mostly those in Grade ten, still did not have transport. This is due to the rejection of requests submitted to the ECDoT for new routes and new learners as well as the mismatch of the budget's financial year and the school year. This indicates a lack of transparency and coordination between the two departments involved. An ECDoE district official did not have answers when asked about the approval process of new routes and learners. The ECDoT official that was meant to expand on this observation was not available for further questions.

Thirdly, there is a failure of the extra lessons project implemented by the school as the provincial policy states that the drivers are to pick and drop-off the learners no later than 30 minutes before and after school (Eastern Cape Department of Transport Provincial Learner Transport Policy, 2016:18). This finding appears to be a big challenge that cannot be ignored as the absence of extra lessons is counterproductive to the very purpose of the learner transport programme. The non-attendance of extra lessons works against the purpose of the adopted education policies in South Africa as they are to enable conditions that facilitate access to education and access to educational opportunities (Sayed, 2010 & Christie, 2008). When learners cannot attend extra lessons it directly impacts on their chances to pass the current grade. Only a few learners in the lower grades and teachers seemed concerned about this challenge though. Most of the learners seemed to think that extra lessons were only important for those in Grade 12 and did not worry about missing them.

Another finding is the challenge of multiple loads done by the service providers. The numerous loads are due to the failure of service providers to transport learners every day to school. When the drivers did not pitch, the learners' hitch-hiked or walked to school and as a result got to school very late. The absence of the drivers was contradictory to the vision of the policy as it

states that it aims "to have a safe, reliable and integrated transport service that caters for the needs of learners. The policy's mission is to meet the mobility needs of learners through the provision of a safe, secure reliable and affordable learner transport service to support social development and enhance future economic growth" (Eastern Cape National Learner Transport Policy, 2015:14). This challenge therefore also revealed the lack of monitoring that posed danger to the safety of the learners as they continued to walk to school as well as when they were overloaded by the service providers. It should not be the sole responsibility of the principal to monitor the implementation of the programme at the school. There needs to be a government official either from ECDoE or ECDoT that does regular site visits to areas where they have implemented the programme.

Another reason for the multiple loads was the shortage of learner transport which resulted in overloaded vehicles. As an alternative, the drivers opted to do two or more trips. This seemed to impact on the time the learners got to school and home. Haywood and Gunn cited in Koma (2014:99) argue that the efforts of coordinating implementation matters require the establishment of another layer of specialised administrative agencies for the specific purpose of implementing policies. This is included as a recommendation in this study as most of the challenges identified stem from this issue.

The principal or the deputy principal are supposed to monitor the daily transportation of learners. In the researcher's two weeks at the school, no service provider came in the school to sign or hand in a signed PoD form that should be signed daily by the service providers as mentioned by the ECDoT and ECDoE officials. This means that there was little monitoring from the principal. He failed to hold the service providers accountable when they did not show up or dropped off the learners late. Instead, the learners were punished for being late by him or the deputy principals as reported by the learner participants who took part in the study. The ECDoE official mentioned that the principals are usually called once a year to a briefing meeting where they hand in application forms for learners who need transport in their schools and that is as far as they are involved as there is no other consultation with them regarding the learner transport programme.

Motala and Singh (2001); Sayed (2001); Jansen (2001) as well as Motala and Pampallis (2001) examine the development and implementation of social policy in South Africa during the first years of the democratic government. They argue that the real weakness in the policies of the

country lies with the implementation of the developed policies. This entails a number of factors namely; bureaucracy incompetence, the inability to participate in an organised planning process, scarcity of personnel and other resources. Participation in an organised planning process was found to be missing in the case of this policy due to the reported lack of consultation and involvement of the school personnel and parents when the policy was being developed. The planning process and the lack of monitoring the implementation process is seen to compromise the important nature of the relationship between the two.

The adopted policy mandates provinces to develop their own provincial policies informed by the national one or implementation strategies/guidelines for the operation and implementation of the policy (Department of Transport National Learner Policy, 2015:11). The development of this Learner Transport Policy is a DBE mandate, with the assistance of the DoT in addressing challenges of accessibility and mobility. The provincial policy further states that the ECDoT has the responsibility to monitor and evaluate the learner transport operation, while ECDoE has the responsibility to monitor the transportation of the learners on a daily basis (Eastern Cape Department of Transport Provincial Learner Transport Policy, 2016:14). The absence of the implementation guidelines is partly the cause of the challenges experienced in implementing this programme. This has resulted in some parents hiring alternative transport to take their children to school and paying R300 a month. This R300 is usually taken from the little that they have in order to survive as it is equivalent to the amount of one child's grant. An obvious solution is the provision of more vehicles to transport learners and the prompt approval of newly submitted names and routes by the ECDoT in order to achieve the successful implementation of this programme. The latter solution might become a reality as the National Treasury and the Committee on learner transport have been in discussions about a learner transport conditional grant (Equal Education, 2017:2).

Lastly, as a social policy under the democratic government in South Africa, the Learner Transport Policy aims to help redress the inequalities created by the previous apartheid regime as well as those that persist in the current democratic government. The inequalities in South Africa vary from the provision of basic services like safe drinking water and sanitation, shelter, access to basic health services, education, poverty and high unemployment levels in the country (Motala & Singh, 2001; Bloch, 2009; Jansen, 2001). As cited in the consulted literature, Sayed (2010: 254) and Christie (2008) further state that education policies in South Africa centre on access to educational opportunities (equality of opportunity) and search for conditions that

facilitate access. Sayed (2010) argues that this view emphasises uniformity and standardisation in education but ignores historically situated and developed inequalities. Access to education might be expanded to the previously disadvantaged and made compulsory for those between the ages of seven and 15years, but without the resources to learn or means to get to school, that opportunity is null and void. Neves and Du Toit's (2013:12) agree as they argue that, the lack of infrastructure to offer basic services in the rural Eastern Cape drastically affects their livelihood. The contracted vehicles cannot make their way into the villages because there are no roads for them to use or the present gravel roads are not accessible when it rains. This all links to the proper implementation of the necessary services and infrastructure.

The challenges mentioned above suggest that the Learner Transport Policy was not made in consultation with all relevant stakeholders. The policy is to assist with redress within the field of education and help learners in the rural areas access schools in order to attain education. The issue of access to education still remains a great challenge for the country.

6.2. Key argument

In this dissertation, the researcher emphasised the process of considering the ability to benefit from services (defined in this study as access) as an important factor to consider in addressing inequality in education. The argument is that the increased provision of the government learner transport and improved management of the programme is needed in the area of study to achieve access to education. The researcher looked at the implementation of a learner transport programme through the beneficiaries' perspectives.

While a lot has been written on rural transport and learner's mode of transportation to school, no study had investigated the impact of the learner transport programme in the study area. This analysis highlights the role of the government provided learner transport in giving rural children access to education for a chance at a better future. Findings that were similar to existing research had to do with the barriers learners faced in accessing schooling. These included the natural and criminal dangers faced when they walked to school, the financial burden faced by the learners and their parents when they did not have the access to the government provided transport, as well as exhaustion, absenteeism and the lack of infrastructure in the identified rural area.

The key themes identified from the analysis of the findings from the participants revealed that the programme had assisted in increasing enrolment and attendance at the identified school, but absenteeism continued to be a problem as the service providers did not transport the learners every day. This meant learners either walked to school or turned back from the pick-up points as 26 from the 29 interviewed learners lived 10 kilometres and above from school. The second most important finding is the limited number of vehicles assigned to transport the learners from the identified school.

As discussed in the dissertation, one of the reasons for this is the lack of accountability and transparency between the two departments tasked with this responsibility as well as the misaligned financial year and school year that begins in January and ends in December and the financial year that starts in April and ends in March of the following year. This results in new learners being excluded in the approved budget for the current year but included for the following year. The consequence is that vehicles are overloaded, and the drivers have to take multiple loads to try to address the limited transport available to the learners. The multiple loads also resulted in the late departure and arrival times of learners to school and at home. The vehicles used to transport the learners were generally in good condition. This finding is a step in the right direction as one of the most important challenges identified in rural areas is the use of old vans, that are not roadworthy as public transport as well as to transport learners to school.

Another key finding is that the learners missed the extra lessons that were implemented to improve their performance at school. This challenge needs to be addressed soon as learners missing extra lessons seemed to be counterproductive to the purpose of the learner transport programme. The last new finding made in this study was the conflict amongst the learners using the learner transport. The learners that had a bus/Quantum officially assigned to their village did not want to share their transport with those that did not have transport and it resulted in many fights on the bus.

Based on these findings, the researcher's key argument is that there is a lot that still needs to be done regarding this programme. The government needs to increase its budget for the provision of school transport in the study area. The government officials tasked with the responsibility of the programme need to improve the management of this programme in order to effectively and efficiently implement the Learner Transport Policy. Although the findings of this study cannot be generalised as it was a qualitative case study, it can be said that the lack of school transport is a problem that does not only affect the rural Eastern Cape. It is a challenge faced by many learners and students in South Africa.

6.3. Conclusion, limitations and recommendations
6.3.1. Conclusion

The study set out to assess whether the learner transport programme in a rural and disadvantaged Eastern Cape area met its intended goals of making basic education accessible to all. The programme serves as a tool to help execute the rights enshrined in Section 29 (1) (a) of the constitution that states that, "everyone has the right to basic education" (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). A case study, employing qualitative data methods; face-to-face interviews and observation was conducted. The data was analysed through identifying themes prevalent in the responses. Social policy, focusing on formulation and implementation, was used as a lens through which the research question was better answered. Social policy plays an important role in the attempt to address the inequalities of accessing education in South Africa. It facilitates access to resources that address the needs of the disadvantaged learners.

During the study's fieldwork, it was observed that the school is still very poorly resourced as it had been extended by containers and one wendy house that was utilised as a kitchen where the learners were served food sponsored by the government nutrition programme. It was further observed that the situation of the school is desperate as the principal shared his very tiny office with the deputy principal, sharing one desk, with them sitting on opposite ends of it. There was no computer or stationery that could be seen as there were limited pens to write with. The school owned one laptop that was in the clerk's possession but available to all the school officials to use as and when they needed to. The officials used the laptop to type class registers, official letters, school reports and other documents.

It can be concluded that the findings gathered in this study reveal that there should be an increased provision and improved management of the government learner transport. There was a lack of consultation with the relevant stakeholders in the planning phase and poor monitoring and evaluation of the operations. Thus, these findings can be used to contribute towards the gap identified in literature that includes learners within the learner transport field in South Africa. Also, to emphasize that access to the government funded school transport is vital in accomplishing access to education in the rural area. Below are the limitations that were identified while analysing the gathered data.

6.3.2. Limitations of the study

Firstly, during the analysis of the data, it became evident that there were questions that the researcher could have probed further during the interviews. The first one pertains to the conflict between learners that was mentioned by the parents. Probing further could have revealed the issues at play as the learners reported pleasant trips to school. Secondly, not purposefully finding teachers who had been working at the school before the implementation of the learner transport programme was another limitation. This could have given a holistic picture of the situation at the school. Thirdly, the school's routine complicated the process as the learners were given very little time for the interviews as it was seen as disturbing their learning time, whether in class or during the study periods in the morning and afternoon. As a result, the interview times were drastically shortened and were kept to the key themes needed to answer the research questions that were included in the interview schedule. This was done in order to avoid keeping the participants for long as well as for the researcher to be able to gather all the needed information to complete the study. A more comprehensive study of the impact and experiences of the learner transport programme beneficiaries is required.

6.3.3. Recommendations

The analysis of the gathered data leads to a few identified recommendations that can be considered by the ECDoE and the ECDoT in their joint responsibility to identify and provide learners who meet the criteria and those in need of learner transport. The recommendations are as follows:

For a successful policy planning and formulation process

➤ The policy should clearly state the department that is responsible for funding the programme as it currently states that the programme will be funded from the provincial fiscus;

➤ There should be increased intergovernmental engagement in the planning phase of the policy;

➤ Consultation with the relevant stakeholders before the decision - making process is essential.

For a successful implementation of the Learner Transport Policy

➤ The national policy needs to clearly identify the implementing agent between the Departments of Basic Education and Transport as the responsibility currently lies with either or both departments in the 9 provinces;

➤ The identified pick-up and drop-off points should be closer to the homes of learners. This means that there must be a development of roads and infrastructure that will assist with closer pick-up points and the preserving of the vehicles used to transport learners;

➤ The Departments of Transport and Education in provinces need to identify officials in the districts that physically go to the villages to identify pick-up points as per the responsibilities mentioned in the policy;

➤ The implementation of the Code of Conduct of both learner transport operators and learners in each district must be enforced;

➤ Funds must be ring-fenced for the learner transport programme by introducing the Learner Transport Conditional Grant as suggested by the Equal Education organisation (Equal Education, 2017:2);

➤ The government must efficiently align the implementation of the Learner Transport Policy to the provisions made in 'The Guidelines Relating to Planning for Public School Infrastructure'.

For a successful policy monitoring and evaluation process

➤ Implementation of consultation sessions with the parents of the learners in the form of a parents and learner transport committee that will assist in monitoring the operations of the programme as well as increasing the accountability of service providers;

➤ Engage the learners in a review process and decision-making process of the learner transport programme in order to determine the success and failures of the programme and identify areas of improvement;

- Continuous monitoring and regular review of the Provincial Learner Transport Policy and its local programmes due to the manner of the service being offered. Therefore, a yearly review of the policy is recommended for the next 5 years;

- Lastly, it is recommended that a wider study on this topic be conducted by the Department of Education in order to continue to improve access to education and by the DoT with the aim of developing more effective rural transport policies.

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Interview Schedule: For the learners

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my research on the learner transport programme. I want to find out about the effectiveness of the learner transport programme in

the area. This research is conducted as part of my degree and will assist me with the requirements needed to graduate. The interview should not take more than 30 minutes and I will write down all your answers and record them as well. Are you still happy to proceed with the interview?

A. Purpose and scope of interview/research explained:

- Time /what will be done with the responses of the interviewees
- The voice recording of the interview

B. Demographic questions

1. Grade

2. Age

3. Gender

4. Where do you live?

5. How many school going children are you at home?

6. Subject stream

C. Implementation of the transport programme

1. Do you use the learner transport to travel to and from school every day?

2. What is the distance that you travel to get to and from school on a daily basis?

3. What factors prevent you from accessing the learner transport provided?

4. How has the transport helped you towards attaining education?

5. How has your travel experience been while using the transport?

6. What is your perception about the vehicles used to transport the children/learners?

7. What would you say has been a positive effect of this initiative?

8. What would you say has been a negative effect of this initiative?

9. Is there anything you would like to add that you feel is relevant and has not been addressed by the previous questions?

Interview Schedule: For the parents

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my research about the learner transport programme. I want to find out about the effectiveness of the learner transport programme in the area. This research is conducted as part of my degree and will assist me with the requirements needed to graduate. The interview should not take more than 30 minutes and I will write down all your answers and record them as well. Are you still happy to proceed with the interview?

A. Purpose and scope of interview/research explained:

- Time /what will be done with the responses of the interviewees
- The voice recording of the interview

B. Demographic questions

1. Age

2. Gender

3. Level of education

4. Employment

5. Number of people in the household

6. Number of children at school

7. Number of children using learner transport

C. Knowledge of the learner transport programme

1. What do you know about the learner transport programme?

2. What would you say has been a positive effect that came with this initiative in your home?

3. What would you say has been a negative effect that came with this initiative in your home?

4. Do the children arrive home at a reasonable time?

5. How do you feel about the vehicles used to transport the children?

6. Is there anything you would like to add that you feel is relevant and has not been addressed by the previous questions?

<u>Interview Schedule:</u> For the teachers

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my research about the learner transport programme. I want to find out about the effectiveness of the learner transport programme in the area. This research is conducted as part of my degree and will assist me with the requirements needed to graduate. The interview should not take more than 30 minutes and I will write down all your answers and record them as well. Are you still happy to proceed with the interview?

A. Purpose and scope of interview/research explained:

- Time /what will be done with the responses of the interviewees
- The voice recording of the interview

B. Demographic questions

1. Age

2. Gender

3. Qualification(s)

4. Number of years teaching at the school?

5. Number of grades you teach?

C. Implementation of the learner transport programme

1. What do you know about the learner transport programme?

2. Do you have learners using the government subsidised transport in your class?

3. What would you say has been a positive effect that came with this government initiative in your class?

4. What would you say has been a negative effect that came with this government initiative in your class?

5. Have you noticed a difference with the concentration/general performance levels of the learners since the implementation of this initiative at the school?

6. What is your perception about the vehicles used to transport the children/learners?

7. Is there anything you would like to add that you feel is relevant and has not been addressed by the previous questions?

<u>Interview Schedule:</u> For the principal

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my research about the learner transport programme. I want to find out about the effectiveness of the learner transport programme in the area. This research is conducted as part of my degree and will assist me with the requirements needed to graduate. The interview should not take more than 30 minutes and I will write down all your answers and record them as well. Are you still happy to proceed with the interview?

A. Purpose and scope of interview/research explained:

- Time /what will be done with the responses of the interviewees
- The voice recording of the interview

B. Demographic questions

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Qualification(s)
4. Number of years teaching at the school?
5. What are your responsibilities at the school?

C. Implementation of the learner transport programme

1. What do you know about the learner transport programme?
2. How many learners use the government subsidised transport in the school?
3. What is the longest distance travelled by the learners to and from school?
4. What would you say has been a positive effect that came with this government initiative?
5. What would you say has been a negative effect that came with this government initiative?
6. What challenges have you faced in implementing the programme at your school?
7. Is there anything you would like to add that you feel is relevant and has not been addressed by the previous questions?

Letter requesting permission to conduct a research study: School principal and school governing body

APPLICATION REQUESTING PERMISSION FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH FOR A MASTERS DEGREE

I, Lisanda Mgushelo, have written this letter to request permission to undertake fieldwork at your secondary school in the Idutywa District for a Master's dissertation titled: The Scholar Transport Programme in the Eastern Cape: A case study of the beneficiaries at a secondary school in the Idutywa district. I am registered with the University of Pretoria's Department of Sociology, under the supervision of Ms Vangile Bingma.

The objective of the research is to assess whether a seven-year-old learner transport programme in a rural and disadvantaged Eastern Cape area meets its intended goals of making basic education accessible to all. Approval with the Eastern Cape Department of Education and the University of Pretoria Ethics Committee has been obtained[9].

The field work is planned to start on the 01 September 2016 and conclude on the 30 September 2016. Thirty (30) minute interviews will be conducted with 30 learners (before school, during breaks, after school and weekends). Ten parents will be interviewed, 7 teachers and the principal of the school will also be interviewed.

Confidentiality of information and anonymity in the writing up of the dissertation as outlined in the guidelines for conducting research in the DoBE form will be observed. All gathered data, will be stored safely in the Department of Sociology for a period of 15 years for the following purposes: archival research, publications (scientific articles, lay articles) and conference papers. Only I and my supervisor will have access to the stored data. There is no direct benefit for participants. However, by giving voice to those who benefit from learner transport, it is hoped that the research can possibly influence government in their attempts to address the challenge of learner transportation in South Africa and in rural areas specifically.

Further, this research forms part of the requirements needed to successfully complete a master's degree at the University of Pretoria.

I look forward to hearing from you and I am willing to discuss further queries or concerns.

Yours Sincerely

Miss L. Mgushelo

073 090 5869

lisandam@gmail.com

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[9] Approval letters were provided to the school.

Adult participants

Consent

<u>Title: The Scholar Transport Programme in the Eastern Cape: A case study of the beneficiaries at a secondary school in the Idutywa district.</u>

I, (Full name of participant) _____ have read and understood the accompanying research information document. The nature and extent of the research described in the research information document has been explained to me. My questions have been addressed satisfactorily. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any stage of the research process. I have been informed that my real name will not be used in the study, and that the researcher will take requisite steps to protect confidentiality of the information I give. I know that the research data will be stored in the research archive of the Department of Sociology for a period of fifteen years and that the information may be shared in conference papers, academic publications, and in newspaper and other media reports.

I grant my consent to an interview.

Signature (participant) _____   Date_____

Signature (researcher) _____

Participant's Agreement: Interview recording

I agree that the interview be recorded. I understand the intent and purpose of the recording is for quality control and transcription purposes. If, for any reason, at any time, I wish to stop the recording, I may do so without having to give an explanation.

Signature (participant) _____ Date _____

Signature (researcher) _____

10 parents of the 30 learners

Consent

<u>Title</u> <u>The Scholar Transport Programme in the Eastern Cape: A case study of the beneficiaries at a secondary school in the Idutywa district</u>

I, (Full name of parent) _____have read and understood the accompanying research information document. The nature and extent of the research described in the research information document has been explained to me. I grant my consent for my child to participate in a 30-minute interview. My questions have been addressed satisfactorily. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that he/she can withdraw at any stage of the research process.

I grant my consent for my child to give an interview.

Signature (parent) _____   Date_____

Signature (researcher) _____

Parent's Agreement: Interview recording

I agree that the interview be recorded. I understand the intent and purpose of the recording for quality control and transcription purposes. If, for any reason, at any time, my child wishes to stop the recording, he or she may do so without having to give an explanation.

Signature (parent) _____   Date _____

Signature (researcher) _____

30 learners

Assent

<u>Title: The Scholar Transport Programme in the Eastern Cape: A case study of the beneficiaries at a secondary school in the Idutywa district</u>

This research is looking to understand your perceptions as a learner using the government provided school transport to and from school. You are requested to take part in the study because your views are considered to be important in understanding your experience of travelling to and from school and the impact the transport has on your schooling experience since you started using it. Approvals to undertake the research were obtained from the Eastern Cape Department of Education and the University of Pretoria's Research Ethics Committee.

The study is interested in understanding your opinions. It will also help the Department of Basic Education to understand the successes and areas of improvement within this programme in your area.

If you join the research the researcher will conduct a 30-minute interview with you, where you will be asked questions about your experience of using the school transport and the difference it has made (if any) on accessing education. You can change your mind and stop the interview at any time. All you have to do is tell the interviewer. You will not be expected to answer any question that you do not want to answer.

The information you give to the researcher will be kept safe and no one will link your name to what you told the researcher. When the researcher writes the report, she will not use your real name. Your parents will have to give permission for you to take part in the study, but the researcher will not tell your parents or your teachers what you have said to her during your interview. Your interview will be digitally recorded, but your name will not be recorded during the interview.

You do not have to take part in the study if you do not want to. Nothing will happen to you if you decide not to participate. If you decide to be in the study, please write your name below.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Yes, I will be in this research study.

No, I don't want to do this ☐

Learner's name   Signature of the learner   Date

_____   _____   _____

Person obtaining Assent   Signature of the researcher   Date

_____   _____   _____

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Research Ethics Committee

20 March 2017

Dear Prof Bonnin

Project: **The Scholar Transport Programme in the Eastern Cape: A case study of the beneficiaries at a secondary school in the Idutywa district**
Researcher: **L Mgushelo**
Supervisor: **Ms V Bingma**
Department: Sociology
Reference number: 27295291(GW20161112HS)

Thank you for the response to the Committee's correspondence of 14 December 2016.

I have pleasure in informing you that the Research Ethics Committee formally **approved** the above study at an *ad hoc* meeting held on 20 March 2017. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

The Committee requests you to convey this approval to the researcher.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

Prof Maxi Schoeman
Deputy Dean: Postgraduate Studies and Ethics
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail:tracey.andrew@up.ac.za
Kindly note that your original signed approval certificate will be sent to your supervisor via the Head of Department. Please liaise with your supervisor.

Research Ethics Committee Members: Prof MME Schoeman (Deputy Dean); Prof K Harris; Dr L Blokland; Dr R Fasselt; Ms KT Govinder; Dr E Johnson; Dr C Panebianco; Dr C Puttergill; Dr D Hayoum; Prof GM Spies; Prof E Taljard; Ms B Tsebe; Dr E van der Klashorst; Mr V Sithole