

AN INVESTIGATION INTO EDUCATOR LEAVE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN ORDINARY PUBLIC SCHOOLING SYSTEM

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CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES	iv
LIST OF ACRONYMS	vi
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	viii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Brief for the study	3
1.3 The South African Education System	4
1.4 The Policy Framework	4
1.5 Working terminology in this study	7
1.6 Structure of the report	7
CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	9
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 Data sources	9
2.3 Data-collection instruments	13
2.4 Data-collection procedures	14
2.5 Data analysis	15
2.6 Limitations of the study	15
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW OF EDUCATOR LEAVE AND ABSENCE	16
3.1 Introduction	16
3.2 The extent of educator leave (and absence) in High and Low Income Countries	16
3.3 Reasons and patterns of absence	21
3.4. Effects of teacher absence	24
3.5. Strategies to reduce absence	25
3.6. Synthesis from literature and framework to study teacher leave	28
CHAPTER 4: POLICY, MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF LEAVE	29
4.1 Introduction	29
4.2 South African leave measures for institution based educators	30
4.3 Policy awareness and policy documents observed at the school level	33
4.4 Policy documents and policy awareness at offices of the provincial department of education	36
4.5 Communication of and compliance with leave policies	37
4.6. Leave procedures and practices	38
4.7. Management actions and strategies for reducing the impact of educator leave	46
4.8. Relief and substitution arrangements	48
4.9. Concluding comments	50
CHAPTER 5: THE EXTENT, PATTERNS AND RECORDING OF LEAVE TAKING	52
5.1 Introduction	52
5.2 Extent and trends of educator leave: National and provincial rates	53
5.3 Patterns of educator leave taking: individual, school and socio-environmental level	56
5.4 Timing of leave taking	66
5.5 Reliability of PERSAL data	70
5.6 Concluding comments	71
CHAPTER 6: REASONS FOR AND EFFECTS OF TAKING LEAVE	73
6.1 Introduction	73
6.2 Reasons for leave taking	74
6.3. Leave and absence from classrooms on official business	77
6.4 Perceptions about the extent of leave	78
6.5 The effects of leave taking and absence from school and classrooms	81

6.6. Concluding comments on reasons for leave and absence82

CHAPTER 7: KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....83

7.1 Key findings..... 83

7.2 Key recommendations 86

REFERENCES88

ANNEXURE 192

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLES

Table 3.1: Summary of rates of teacher absence by country	18
Table 3.2: Teacher and health worker absence rates by country	20
Table 3.3: Reasons, in percentages, for primary school teacher absence	22
Table 4.1: Health-related leave measures for institution-based educators	31
Table 4.2: Family-related leave measures	31
Table 4.3: Special leave measures	32
Table 5.1: Extent of PERSAL recorded leave days for state-paid educators	54
Table 5.2: Provincial rates of PERSAL recorded leave from 2004 to 2007	56
Table 5.3: Calendar representation of all instances of PERSAL leave, excluding maternity	68
Table 5.4: Calendar representation of one day instances of PERSAL leave	69
Table A1.1: Distribution of sample schools by province according to school size and school type	92
Table A1.2: Distribution of sample schools according to geo-type and poverty index	92
Table A1.3: Distribution of sample schools according to former education department	92

FIGURES

Figure 2.1: GPS-based distribution of sample schools.....	11
Figure 2.2: Distribution of sample schools by school size and school type.....	12
Figure 2.3: Distribution of sample schools by geographical location and poverty index	12
Figure 2.4: Distribution of sample schools according to former education departments	13
Figure 5.1: Extent of PERSAL recorded leave days, including maternity, from 2004 to 2007	54
Figure 5.2: Educator leave rates by province, for independent and public ordinary schools, and HDI	55
Figure 5.3: Pattern of leave takers by gender, from PERSAL data by instance.....	57
Figure 5.4: Frequency of PERSAL leave taking instances, by age.....	58
Figure 5.5: Patterns of PERSAL leave instances by rank level of educators, in 2005 from PERSAL	59
Figure 5.6: Frequency of school leave rates from 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools dataset	60
Figure 5.7: Mean PERSAL school leave rate by school size - Free State.....	61
Figure 5.8: Mean PERSAL school leave rate by school size - Western Cape	61
Figure 5.9: Educator leave rates, by type of school, from 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools	62
Figure 5.10: Educator absence rates, by school quintile ranking, from 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit in public ordinary schools.....	63
Figure 5.11: Rates of PERSAL recorded school leave, for Free State, by quintile rank.....	64
Figure 5.12: Rates of PERSAL recorded school leave, for Western Cape, by quintile rank	64
Figure 5.13: Rates of PERSAL recorded school leave, for KwaZulu-Natal, by quintile rank.....	64
Figure 5.14: PERSAL School leave rates by ex-department, for Free State, from 2004 to 2007	65
Figure 5.15: PERSAL School leave rates by ex-department, for Western Cape, from 2004 to 2007	65
Figure 5.16: PERSAL School leave rates by ex-department, for KwaZulu-Natal, from 2004 to 2007	66
Figure 5.17: Tracing school leave (and absence) records to PERSAL.....	71
Figure 6.1: Categories of leave taken, by instances and days	74
Figure 6.2: Proportion of leave instances and days of leave recorded	75

LIST OF ACRONYMS

APO	Area Projects Office (Area Project/s Official)
BCEA	Basic Conditions of Employment Act
CEM	Council of Education Ministers
DEMMIS	District-level Education Management and Monitoring Information System
DET	Department of Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
DPSA	Department of Public Service Administration
EAP	Employee Assistance Programme
EC	Eastern Cape Province
EDO	Education Development Officer / Official
ELRC	Education Labour Relations Council
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FS	Free State Province
GP	Gauteng Province
GSSC	Gauteng Shared Services Centre
HICs	High-income countries
HOA	House of Assembly
HOD	House of Delegates
HOR	House of Representatives
HR	Human Resources
HRA	Human Resources Administration
HRM	Health Risk Manager (service provider)
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IQMS	Integrated Quality Monitoring System
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal Province
LEA	Local Education Authority
LICs	Low-income countries
LP	Limpopo Province
LRA	Labour Relations Act
MP	Mpumalanga Province
NCS	National Curriculum Statements
PAM	Personnel Administration Measures
PILIR	Policy and procedure on incapacity leave and ill-health retirement
PERSAL	Personnel and Salary Management System
PSCBC	Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council
NC	Northern Cape Province
NW	North-West Province
QLP	Quality Learning Project
SACE	South African Council of Educators
SA-SAMS	South African School Administration and Management System
SGB	School governing body
SMT	School management team
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WBNAS	World Bank National Absence Surveys
WC	Western Cape Province
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

There is a commitment in South Africa to improve the quality of education. One way to achieved is to ensure that “teachers and children are in school and class”. This research was commissioned to investigate the (i) extent, (ii) patterns, (iii) reasons, (iv) recording and (v) administration and management of educator¹ leave² in South African ordinary public schools. To address these questions we reviewed the policy and literature related to educator leave; analysed PERSAL and the 2008 Department of Education commissioned 4% audit of ordinary schools data and visited 50 schools and supervising offices around the country to collect data.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ABOUT EDUCATOR LEAVE

- Studies on educator leave and absence can be placed into two categories: studies from high income countries and studies from low income countries. South Africa is a country of high income inequality – thus parts of the education system could be comparable to high income countries and parts comparable to low income countries.
- In high income countries, with good administrative systems the extent of teacher absence can be easily calculated. The teacher absence rates were calculated at between 3 to 6%³: in the USA the absence rate is around 5%; in Canada 6%; in Israel 5.8%; in Ireland around 5.5% in England sickness absence is 2.6% and in Australia discretionary leave⁴ is 3.1%. There are systems of substitute teachers to compensate for teacher absence and in the lower grades families would generally compensate for lost time.
- In low income countries, where the administrative data is incomplete and not trustworthy, teacher observation surveys (World Bank National Absence Surveys) with unannounced visits to schools, were undertaken to determine the extent of teacher absence. Absence rates in a number of countries averaged 19% with a range from 11 to 28%: Peru having an 11% absence rate, Ecuador 14%, Zambia 17%, India 25%, Uganda 27% and Kenya 28%. While the national rates are high there is variation depending on geographic location and the socio-economic conditions of schools. In low income countries, in general, there are no provisions for substitute teachers and it is unlikely that the home will be able to compensate of loss of learning time in the school. Thus the negative impact of educator leave on achievement is greater.

¹ The term educator is used in South Africa to refer to both teachers and management. In the international literature there is reference to teachers.

² The international literature refers to the times when a teacher is not at school, either for leave taken in accordance with the leave measures stipulated in the conditions of service, or for absence resulting from undertaking professional duties away from school. For the South African study we will refer to educator leave and will include: (i) times taken according to leave measures; (ii) when educators are on duty but away from school at professional development workshops; (iii) and participation in school activities like sports, excursions and festivals.

³ A cautionary note when comparing leave rates across countries, studies or contexts is that one must also interrogate the formula used to calculate the leave rate.

⁴ This is leave of one or two days and does not require the presentation of a medical certificate.

- South Africa has not undertaken dedicated studies to measure the extent of educator leave, and the administrative data from South African schools is incomplete. We estimated the extent of educator leave by using proxy measures from other studies.
- The main reason for educators taking leave is due to illness. In low income countries, an additional reason for teachers being away from school is to undertake official duties such as attending professional development workshops or undertaking school activities like excursions and school sports.
- In high and low income countries, the pattern of leave taking is that teachers are absent more frequently on Mondays and Fridays and a high proportion of absences are due to illness which occurs in blocks of time short enough that no medical certification is required.
- In high income countries where the living and school conditions are generally good, individual characteristics such as gender and age are factors influencing the extent of teacher absence, and in these countries incentives may be provided to encourage individuals to attend more regularly. In low income countries the school and socio-environmental conditions influence the extent of teacher absence, and strategies to reduce leave taking are dependent on improved school conditions like infrastructure, instilling a leadership ethos and school climate of non-tolerance of educator absence and the long term goal would be improved conditions in the community, so that the educational level and economic status of parents is increased.

POLICY INFORMING EDUCATOR LEAVE TAKING IN SOUTH AFRICA

- All employees are entitled to take leave. The general leave measures are set out in the *Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997* and the *Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995*. For institution based educators, these measures appear in the *Personnel Administrative Measures* (Government Gazette Vol. 404 No 19767). The leave measures relate to health, family and special leave categories
- There are times when an educator cannot perform her duties, and Chapter B of the PAM makes provision for the appointment of a substitute educator. The state pays for the substitute educator.
- Educators must account for 1800 working hours per year. These are made up of 1400 hours performing core duties during a formal school day and 400 hours spent on work done outside the formal school day, for example planning, preparation, evaluation, extra- and co-curricular activities, professional duties and professional development. Eighty (80) of the 400 hours may be used for ongoing professional development, allowing for professional development activities to take place outside the formal school day and during school holidays.

KEY FINDINGS

- Analysis of the 2008 – 4% audit of schools datasets and proxy calculations from other studies estimate that between 10-12% of educators are not at school on any day. Therefore our

conservative, optimistic estimate is that, on average between 20 - 24 days a year of regular instructional time being lost by each educator. The conservatively estimated leave rate of 10 - 12% in South Africa is higher than the rate in high income countries, but lower than the rate in many low income countries, calculated in the WBNAS.

- There are variations in the extent of educator leave rates between provinces. In addition there is a link between individual school leave rates and poverty and disadvantage levels of the community and schools. Leave rates are highest where socio-environmental condition, like poverty, is the highest.
- In this conservative, optimistic estimate, half the schools have a leave rate of less than 5%; 20% have a leave rate of between 5% and 10%; 18% have a leave rate between 10-20% and 12% have a leave rate of over 20%. The greatest concern is in the almost one third of schools with leave rates greater than 10%.
- Educators are away from schools when they take leave according to the categories of leave measures set out in the policy and when they are undertaking official business. Analysis from our school visits estimated that around 20-25% of the time when educators are away from school they are on official duties. We then estimate that 2% of leave is on official business and 8% is PERSAL recorded leave. The extent of educator leave on official duties is higher for principals who have to attend a number of meetings called by officials from the department of education. In small schools where there are fewer teachers who have to attend a number of workshops or meetings.
- The time away from school on official business, while essential, could have a negative impact of teaching and learning activities. This negative impact is higher in smaller and more under-resourced schools, thereby further disadvantaging the learners who most quality schooling to escape the poverty trap.
- Analysis of PERSAL data calculates the national recorded leave rate between 3 to 4%., which is less than the estimated leave. The under-recording on the PERSAL system may be due to educators not completing leave forms at school or leave forms are completed but not captured onto the electronic system. Comparing school leave records and PERSAL records, shows that around 25% of submitted leave records were not recorded on PERSAL. In addition, mis-capturing onto the PERSAL system leads to incorrect balances for individuals.
- Just over three quarters of all leave instances recorded on the PERSAL system are of one or two days in duration, that is, discretionary leave not requiring a medical certificate. Mondays and Fridays are the most popular discretionary leave days. In the discretionary leave, sick leave is most common reason for leave taking. But sick leave is a catch-all category for leave taking for private matters or family responsibility not catered for in the policy.
- In general we found the administration of the leave at school level was good. Most schools have copies of leave policies, educators are aware of these policies and there are systems within

schools for the recording of leave and movement of educators. Schools with a trained and committed administrator expedited the processing and recording of leave.

- The school principal is responsible for managing discretionary leave and potential misuses of leave taking on Mondays and Fridays. While schools have been compliant in adhering to the administrative requirements regarding leave taking, they have not engaged with the strategic management of leave taking in order to reduce the extent of leave. Schools need to reduce the time educators are away from schools and classroom and this will require strategic monitoring of leave and leave patterns and implementing measures to ensure that leave taking is reduced.
- Outside schools, within the provincial, regional, district, circuit offices and services centres there were variations in leave management support to schools. When the route of the PERSAL form from school to data capturing had many intermediate steps, then the extent of leave under-recording or mis-recording was increased.
- Schools are aware of the Educator Substitute Policy and apply it well. Educators indicated that the implementation of the substitute policy works well for maternity leave, but for illness where one has to go through the services rendered by a Health Risk Manager, the process is slow and inefficient. Rural schools in particular have difficulty in finding appropriate substitute specialists in mathematics and science in the secondary phase.
- We found the administrative systems in schools compliant and the general management of the school reasonable. Governance, management and administration systems seem to be in place. The next challenge for schools is to ensure teachers have the appropriate pedagogical content knowledge and effect high quality classroom interactions to achieve the desired learning outcomes, one part which contribute to this would be reducing the extent of time that educators are away from schools and classrooms.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE LEAVE TAKING

1. Time away from regular school and classroom activities can be reduced:

- Reduce the number of days that educators are away from school on professional development and other training workshops. This could be done by ensuring that the provincial directorates who request educators to attend meetings co-ordinate their requests and that activities are planned outside the formal school day. In addition, all schools and educators need to be aware of that 80 hours of professional development could occur outside the formal school hours.
- Cap the number of days that principals are away from school on official business. The principal is key to the leadership, culture and ethos of a school, and if the principal is away for a high number of days, it will affect the smooth functioning of the school.
- Schools must manage the high levels of discretionary leave, especially on Monday and Fridays. Schools should have systems to record leave and produce outputs which will show patterns of leave misuse, which can be managed by the principal.

- Incentivize the reduction of discretionary leave, because they are more disruptive to the running of the school and teaching and learning processes.
2. **Reduce the educator leave rates in schools where it is higher than 10%.** With the support of district officials, target the initial interventions in the 30% of schools whose leave rates are higher than 10%.
 3. **Improve working conditions to encourage educators and learners to attend to school.** Ensure that schools are pleasant, safe and comfortable places that will motivate both educators and learners to attend school more regularly.
 4. **Improve the systems to record leave onto PERSAL systems**
Reduce the number of steps between the time that the leave form is completed by the educator to the time it is captured onto the electronic system. This can be effected with an electronic leave administration system implemented at school level.
 5. **Improve leave administrative systems and support in schools**
All schools need to have an administrative clerk, who has computer skills and whose responsibilities should include ensuring completion of leave forms, keeping school records and monitoring leave trends. The roll-out systems like the South African School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS) could facilitate this recording. The role of the principal is to monitor the trends of individuals and to manage any excessive leave taking.
 6. **Record leave for official business on a central database**
Given the concerns about the high proportion of educators away from school on official business, we recommend that these categories are also included on the PERSAL recorded leave form. This will allow for monitoring and managing the loss of learning time.
 7. **Monitor the national leave rates**
We estimated the South African leave rates from a number of sources using different methodologies, and where the definitions and assumptions underlying the calculations were not always the same. South Africa needs to develop an instrument to calculate leave rate and provide a clear definition of the variables used in the formula. In the meantime, the integrity of the administrative data (PERSAL) must be improved to be trustworthy.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Education will be a key priority for the next five years. We want our teachers, learners and parents to work with government to turn our schools into thriving centres of excellence. We reiterate our non-negotiables. Teachers should be in school, in class, on time, teaching, with no neglect of duty and no abuse of pupils! The children should be in class, on time, learning, be respectful of their teachers and each other, and do their homework.

(President Jacob Zuma; State of the Nation address: 3 June 2009)

1.1 Introduction

In 2007 the Department of Education undertook a *Learner Absenteeism Study* (Weideman *et al*, 2007). When the report was presented at a Council of Education Ministers (CEM) meeting, the CEM requested a similar study to determine the extent of educator leave. UNICEF, on behalf of the Department of Education, requested the HSRC to conduct an investigation into the phenomenon of educator leave in South African schools. The aim of the study was to contribute to “the existing knowledge base on educator leave in South Africa by investigating the extent of educator leave and reasons thereof. Additionally, the study seeks to examine the systems that are in place to record, monitor, measure and reduce educator leave”. (Department of Education, Terms of Reference).

Governments and societies around the world recognise the importance of education for development and have invested in education in their countries. One of the key elements for the provision of a quality education is a committed and qualified teaching force. In addition to qualifications and commitments, educators need to be present in a classroom. Educators are important for the educational successes of learners; they provide expert knowledge inputs. The matter becomes especially important in low-income countries (LICs) where the classroom inputs cannot be compensated by inputs from home. Thus educator presence in a classroom is critical to produce the desired learning outcomes.

Educator absenteeism or absence⁵ is an issue of serious concern internationally, and as such, deserves much attention (UNESCO, 2005). The phenomenon leads to loss of instructional time, which in turn affects the learning gains of students. There are also financial costs related to educator absence through money spent on paying substitute teachers and the associated administrative costs.

There is a concern about quality education provision in South Africa. There are many reasons postulated for the low quality – one of which relates to time spent on teaching and learning activities, and in particular, to time on task and educator and learner attendance in school. Both President Zuma’s State of the Nation Address and the Development Bank of Southern Africa Road Map refer to the concerns relating to educators and learners being in school and in class. Concerns about education quality are also inextricably linked to broader accountability issues in terms of education management.

⁵ Terminology is discussed later.

An important perspective when investigating educator leave is to account for various constitutional rights and related legislation. Perhaps the most crucial of these for educator leave is balancing learners' right to education and educators' right to fair conditions of service. The Bill of Rights (in Section 29(1)(a)) from Chapter 2 of the *Constitution of South Africa* (Act 108 of 1996) guarantees the right to basic education. Section 36 of the Bill of Rights houses the limitations clause. According to the clause, "the limitation is reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom, taking into account all relevant factors, including... the nature of the right [and] the importance of the purpose of the limitation". The argument can be made that learners' right to education must be limited by or balanced with educators' labour rights and vice versa.

Labour rights are guaranteed under Section 23 of the *Constitution* (Act 108 of 1996), which stipulates the rights of the employee, employer and trade unions or employers' organisations. Section 23(1) guarantees employees the right to fair labour practices. Fair labour practices, including leave measures, are set out in the *Basic Conditions of Employment Act* (Act 75 of 1997) (BCEA) and the *Labour Relations Act* (Act 66 of 1995) (LRA), amongst others. Specific determinations of leave measures for institution-based educators are further derived from the foregoing acts. These specific educator measures are listed and discussed further in the report.

Informed by this policy framework, on one hand, the conditions of service of educators permit them to obtain leave from school for limited periods of time for reasons of illness, maternity, family responsibility etc. On the other hand, learners have a right to an education, and one of the pre-conditions for providing a quality education is that educators are in school, in class and teaching. Educator leave diminishes the amount of contact time that educators have with learners and can have negative effects on learner performance. The state has the responsibility of mediating the rights of educators to leave and the rights of learners to a quality education. There is a set of legislative policies, procedures and guidelines to manage and administer the leave of educators. To navigate through this complex terrain it is important to first examine the legislative framework that governs educator conditions of service (with specific reference to leave measures) and the learners' right to education.

Thus any investigation into the extent of educator leave taking could be controversial. The first query to such an investigation would be 'who wants to know and why?' Who wants to know about the phenomenon of educator leave will determine the perspective from which it is studied. If we want to study educator leave from the perspective of a quality education for learners we would focus on the instructional time and the time spent on teaching and learning tasks. We would look at the implications of a reduced teaching and learning time, on learning processes and on learning achievement outcomes. A study of educator leave from the perspective of educators would examine the well being of educators and by analysing the reasons for educators taking leave and the implications for their health. If we studied educator leave from the perspective of the state, we would locate the study within the framework of management, costs and accountability. This study will embrace all three perspectives in its analysis.

The starting point for an investigation of the phenomenon of educator leave in South Africa would be to determine the extent of leave taking. The Auditor-General in the review of the leave patterns of public servants expressed concern about the extent, management and administration of leave (Fakie, 2005). The Auditor General's report pointed to inadequate management information systems and incomplete data (from Personnel and Salary Administration System (PERSAL)) which made it impossible to determine the extent of sick leave and the cost thereof. Also, as average levels of sick leave were not monitored, management was not aware of increasing levels of sick leave. No formal measures for managers, such as return-to-work interviews in individual cases where excessive absence occurred, existed. Given the dearth of information regarding the extent and management of leave, this study is timely.

The phenomenon of educator leave taking has not been widely and systematically studied in South Africa⁶. We know very little about the extent, nature and patterns of leave taken by educators. In addition we know very little about how educator leave is managed in schools, more particularly whether learners are compensated for learning time while educators are on leave. This investigation of educator leave taking in the South African schooling system will examine the policies related to educator leave, the international and South African literature on educator leave and then analyse PERSAL and the 2008 – 4% audit of ordinary public schools data to report on the extent, nature and patterns of educator leave. The investigation will then, by in-depth qualitative research in schools, examine the management of leave and leave taking in South Africa.

1.2 Brief for the study

The Terms of Reference outlined the scope of the study:

1. What is the policy on educator leave in South Africa, at both national and provincial levels?
2. What is the extent of educator leave in the South African schooling system? How has this changed over time?
3. What are the patterns of educator leave in the South African schooling system, with respect to province, age, gender, race and former education departments? How have these changed over time?
4. What are the reasons for educators taking leave from school?
5. What systems are in place at the school, district, provincial and national levels to record, manage, monitor, measure and reduce the level of educator leave from schools?
6. What are the effects of educator leave on learner achievement?
7. What is the international context of educator leave, with respect to the extent of educator leave, the reasons for educator leave and systems to record, manage, monitor, measure and reduce educator leave.

⁶ A broad literature review suggests that this is also not studied in other sectors.

We undertook the study in two phases⁷. Phase 1 involved a review of national policy documents, national and international review of educator leave/ absence literature, and an analysis of PERSAL data to calculate educator leave rates and trends in South African schools. The analysis was based on PERSAL data for the months of February and August from each of the four years from 2004 to 2007. These analyses gave an exploratory analytical-descriptive account of the extent, patterns and trends of educator leave for the said period. Phase II of the study involved an in-depth, mostly qualitative, investigation into the underlying reasons for the extent of educator leave and the systems that were in place to administer and manage educator leave. This was achieved by visiting 50 schools in the country⁸.

1.3 The South African Education System

The South African public education system consists of 11 828 747 learners, 386 587 educators and 24 693 public ordinary schools (DoE, 2009)⁹. The national Department of Basic Education is responsible for formulating policy, setting norms and standards, and monitoring and evaluating all levels of education. The national department shares a concurrent role with the provincial departments of education for school education, and provincial departments of education are guided by national policy, within which they have to set their own priorities and implementation programmes. The role of the national department is to translate the education and training policies of government and the provisions of the Constitution into a national education policy and legislative framework.

1.4 The Policy Framework

This section examines the policy framework within which educator leave-taking and absence in ordinary public schools occurs and is managed.

1.4.1 South African leave policy and leave measures for institution-based educators

State-paid educators are government employees, whose conditions of employment are determined by the Minister for Public Service and Administration on the same general basis as those of all other employees in the public service. Fair labour practices, including leave measures, are set out in the *Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 (BCEA)* and the *Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995*

⁷ The first Terms of Reference by DoE proposed a methodology to visit 100 schools across the nine provinces, as well as interview provincial and district officials on systems that exist to record, manage, monitor, measure and reduce teacher absenteeism and to record teacher absence from schools during the visits to the 100 schools. Given that the 2008 – 4% audit data could be used to estimate educator leave rates, the ToR was modified to analyse PERSAL data, undertake secondary analysis of the 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit data and visit 54 schools (as an illuminative sample) around the country.

⁸ The detailed objectives of each of the studies are found in the two technical reports. Reddy, V., Prinsloo, C., Netshitangani, T., Moletsane, R., Juan, A., Janse van Rensburg, D., de Kadt, J., Mda, T., & Cosser, M. (2010). An investigation into Educator leave in the South African Schooling System: Phase II. Research commissioned by UNICEF for Department of Education. Pretoria: HSRC. Reddy, V., Janse van Rensburg, D., Juan, A., Prinsloo, C. & Netshitangani, T (2010). An Investigation into Extent of Educator Leave in the South African Schooling System: Phase I. Research commissioned by UNICEF for Department of Education. Pretoria: HSRC.

⁹ After the 2008 national elections, two separate national departments of education were created: The Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training. The study focuses on schools falling under the former.

(LRA), *inter alia*. Specifically, the BCEA sets out the basic conditions of service for all employees and employers except members of the National Defence Force, National Intelligence Agency, and South African Secret Service. Section 35 of the LRA establishes collective bargaining structures for the public sector such as the Public Servant Co-ordinating Bargaining Council. This bargaining council provides a platform for public servants and teacher unions and the employer (the state) to negotiate on transverse matters concerning public servants, including educators. In addition, the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) is a sectoral bargaining council and the bargaining council for educators (LRA, 1995). Of particular relevance to this study is that the leave measures that apply to educators were negotiated in the ELRC, resulting in ELRC resolution 7 of 2001. These measures appear in the *Personnel Administrative Measures* (Government Gazette Vol. 404 No 19767 dated 18 February 1999) (PAM).

According to the PAM, since 1 January 2002 all educators are considered as being on annual leave during institutional closure periods (school holidays). However, the PAM also stipulates that the measures regarding the workload, duties and responsibilities may require an educator to perform some of his or her normal duties during this period. The PAM sets out categories of leave for institution based educators. In this study, we have categorised the leave measures into health related, family related and special leave measures. The details of these leave measures appear in Chapter 4, Policy, Management and Administration of Leave.

1.4.2 Educator substitute policy

There are times when an educator cannot perform her duties, and Chapter B of the PAM makes provision for the appointment of a substitute educator. In this regard, Chapter B, section 2 of PAM stipulates that:

... The appointment of an educator can be in a permanent or temporary capacity. If the appointment is in a temporary capacity it is for a fixed period. Appointments in a temporary capacity can be to a substantive vacant post or as a substitute for another educator who is temporarily not occupying his or her post...

According to the PAM, the provincial department of education pays for the substitute educator when an educator is on leave for a predetermined period. Schools need not advertise for temporary or substitute posts. Instead, principals have access to a data base of teachers they can contact if they are looking for substitutes or temporary teachers, although all principals may not be aware of this. For School Governing Body (SGB) paid posts the process would be quicker as the substitute would be paid from the school funds. Different provincial departments of education seem to have different practices for the minimum number of days that they would pay for. For example the Western Cape department of education pays for a substitute when an educator is on sick or maternity leave for a period of 10 working days or longer, while the KwaZulu-Natal department of education pays for a substitute if the educator occupying the post will be on sick or maternity leave for 20 working days or longer. Medical certificates must accompany applications for substitute educators. Documentation to support the request for the appointment must be submitted within five days of the first day of illness of the employee.

1.4.3 Procedures and guidelines for taking leave and managing leave

According to the *Terms and Conditions of Employment of Educators* an attendance register should be kept in which educators should record his or her times of arrival and departure. If an educator suddenly becomes sick and as a result is unable to report to work, the educator must immediately notify her principal personally. A verbal message by a relative or friend is only acceptable if the illness prevents the educator from notifying the principal personally (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2008). A medical certificate from a registered medical practitioner is required when an educator applies for three or more days of continuous sick leave. The certificate must state the reason for and the duration of absence. A medical certificate may be required for less than three days of sick leave if a pattern of sick leave¹⁰ is established by the Department of Education or if an educator is absent on more than two occasions within 8 weeks¹¹ (BCEA).

The employee is required to ensure that leave forms are completed, required supporting documents attached and the form submitted within five days of the first day of leave if the form could not have been submitted prior to the leave being taken. In terms of managing the process, principals are expected to forward all application forms for all types of leave to the relevant district office for processing no later than 30 days from the date of the application for leave. This process could be audited through a random sampling done during an annual regulatory audit by the office of the Auditor-General. Non-compliance with this statutory requirement is a breach of the *Public Finance Management Act*, 1999.

1.4.4 . Educator workload

Educators take leave of full days length or for part of a day, Chapter A, Clause 3 of the PAM specifies the formal school day for educators will be seven hours. According to the PAM a formal school day consists of scheduled teaching time (contact time), as well as other core duties such as relief teaching, extra- and co-curricular activities, administration, planning, preparation, supervision and management. Educators must account for 1800 actual working hours per year – these would include 1400 hours (200 working days x 7 hours) performing core duties during a formal school day. 400 hours must be spent on work done outside the formal school day, for example planning, preparation, evaluation, extra- and co-curricular activities, professional duties and professional development. Eighty (80) of the 400 hours may be used for ongoing professional development. This is expected to take place during holidays and over weekends and not during school time. Workshops provided by the provincial department of education and other providers form part of an educator's workload (PAM, Chapter A (3.1)). The attendance at these workshops may be "required by the employer"; this suggests that it is mandatory for educators to attend these workshops. The provincial department of education must give at least one term's notice of programmes to be conducted during the school holidays. Educators do not need to apply for leave when attending DoE sanctioned workshops. This also applies to educators leaving school for school-related activities

¹⁰ Paragraph 8.4 of Chapter B of the PAM states that if the employer establishes a pattern or trend in an employee's use of sick leave, the employer must require the employee to submit a medical certificate for sick leave which is less than three days in length.

¹¹ A medical certificate may be required for less than 3 days of sick leave. An employee who has been absent from work on more than two occasions during an 8-week period, must submit a medical certificate to prove incapacity for the duration of leave. A medical certificate is required for the third or subsequent absence of any duration. If the required medical certificate is not submitted, such leave will be converted to unpaid leave. The Minister of Education gazetted the 8-week rule for educators.

such as sports events, cultural programmes, excursions and union activities. In these cases the school keeps a record of educator movements, but this is not recorded on the PERSAL systems.

It is within this framework that we sought to understand the phenomenon of educator leave-taking and absence in ordinary public schools in the country. In the section below we describe the South African education system as a context in which teaching and learning occur and in which teacher leave-taking and absence ought to be understood.

1.5. Working terminology in this study

Given the potentially controversial nature of the topic of this study, it is important to indicate the terminology used in this study. The international literature has evolved from the term ‘teacher absenteeism’ to ‘teacher absence’, as the former term is associated with an expression of an educator’s choice and is pejorative in nature, to refer to the times when a teacher is not at school.

Educators may be away from school and their regular classroom activities for different reasons: they may have applied for leave due to sickness or for personal business or they may be required to attend professional development courses and workshops, or accompany groups of students on field trips or sport activities. From the point of view of students, however, any absence from the classroom has the same effect in reducing instruction time (Bowers, 2001). From the point of view of educators there is a difference; some times of being away from school will be in accordance with the leave measures stipulated in the conditions of service and others may be part of an educators professional development activities and the educator is ‘on duty’ though away from the classroom.

For the purpose of this study we will use the following terms with the listed meanings:

Institution-based Educators (at ordinary public schools in this study) refers to any person who teaches, educates or trains other persons or who provides professional educational services.

Educator Leave is the overarching concept which refers to the times when an educator is not at school and this may be due to leave taken by institution-based educators in accordance with the leave measures stipulated in the conditions of service¹². This will also include times when educators are on duty but away from school at professional development workshops¹³ or participating in school activities like sports, excursions and festivals.¹⁴

PERSAL Recorded Educator leave refers to the days when an educator is unable to report to school and applies for leave in accordance with the PAM. This leave is authorised by the relevant authorities. Maternity and incapacity leave are included in this category. However, there (normally) is provision for a substitute educator and learning time is not compromised.

1.6. Structure of the report

¹² Personnel Administrative Measures (Government Gazette Vol. 404, No 19767. 18 February 1999)

¹³ Professional development workshops required by the employer form part of an educator’s workload (Chapter A of Personnel Administrative Measures, 1999)

¹⁴ School activities are activities that occur during school times, which do not constitute part of the school timetable, but are related to school affairs (Terms and Conditions of Employment of Educators Government Gazette No. 16814, 1995).

This report is constructed from the two technical reports relating to the study that has been presented to the client. The technical reports should be referred to for the details of the study. The report is organised according to the following chapters.

- Chapter 1 introduces the study. It provides the background, rationale and policy framework for the study. In addition it defines the key objectives and the terminology used in the study.
- Chapter 2 deals with the methodology and design of the study.
- Chapter 3 presents a review of the literature and suggests a conceptual framework for the analysis.
- Chapter 4 discusses the policy, management and administration related to leave.
- Chapter 5 presents the findings related to the extent and patterns of educator leave and the reliability of the systems for the recording of leave.
- Chapter 6 discusses the reasons for and impact of educator leave taking.
- Chapter 7 discusses the key findings and recommendations from the study.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

As stated in the previous chapter, educator leave is a complex issue and a study of this phenomenon requires clear and agreed upon (by all stakeholders) definitions of leave as well as complete and verifiable records. This study examined the extent of educator leave and national educator leave rates. The study did not collect primary data to calculate the leave rate, but interrogated existing studies and datasets to estimate the leave rate. In addition the study investigated the management and administration of leave through visit to schools, district and provincial offices.

2.2 Data sources

Two existing sources of data were used to estimate the extent and rates of leave nationally. The most recent and representative figures on educator leave (the report refers to educator absenteeism) came from the Department of Education (DoE) commissioned 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools. The year 2008 was the second in a three-year Data Quality Audit on the Education Management Information System (EMIS), commissioned by the Department of Education (DoE) and conducted by the Khulisa Consortium, made up of Khulisa Management Services (Khulisa) and its partners, Basic Blue Management Consultants and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). The field work took place during August and September 2008 (DoE, 2009b). In the subsequent parts of this report we will refer to this study as the 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools.

Because educator leave was not the core focus of that audit, the figures are not as comprehensive as one would have liked. Instead, its purpose was “to assess the quality of ordinary school data collected by two DoE yearly surveys, the Tenth Day of School Survey (SNAP) and the Annual School Survey (ASS)” (DoE, 2009, viii). The underlying rationale for the study related to the reduction of perverse incentives by “tying discretionary payments and personnel allocations to learner enrolment” (ibid.). As such, most of the emphasis was put on learner-related information. The study was constrained to an extent by the levels at which educator registers and absence records were available from the DoE’s ASS. In the end, of the 1 051 schools surveyed, fully comparable educator data could only be obtained for 776 schools. Analysis of educator leave data, collected by the Khulisa Consortium by means of their school survey instrument, could only be conducted for 798 schools with comparable data. In this analysis the consortium reported on educators not in school on 4 March 2008, the day data were collected for the Annual School Survey. In addition, on the day of the survey the educator registers were examined to determine the total number of educators in a school. Educators completed an educator information sheet and handed back to fieldworkers. In this study we use this information as a proxy estimation of educator leave rate.

The second data source on educator leave taking was the Personnel and Salary System or PERSAL system. PERSAL is the existing computerized Human Resources system for the South African

government. The PERSAL system interfaces with different financial systems that are in use in the South African government. These include the Basic Accounting System (BAS) and the financial institutions' pension funds and medical schemes. The PERSAL system is housed in the National Treasury.

In this study, we requested the National Department of Education to provide PERSAL records of leave for all state paid educators in South Africa¹⁵. Given the concerns expressed by the Auditor General of the under-recording of leave, we recognised that the PERSAL system of educator leave taken in South Africa would be incomplete. However we wanted to use this data as the starting point to calculate the extent of recorded leave and the patterns pertaining to that recorded leave.

We received the data for each of the provinces, for the requested months of February and August for the years 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007. The data were merged into nine provincial files. These files described each instance of leave taken in the aforementioned periods. The Limpopo data for 2005, 2006 and 2007 months appear incomplete, having included only three of ten PERSAL¹⁶ categories of leave (leave without pay, sick leave and vacation leave). The data was provided in an EXCEL spreadsheet and included a number of fields.

In theory this dataset should reflect up-to-date records of approved and captured leave. In practice backlogs and inaccuracies are prevalent. We selected parts of the data that would enable calculating notional leave trends, patterns and rates.

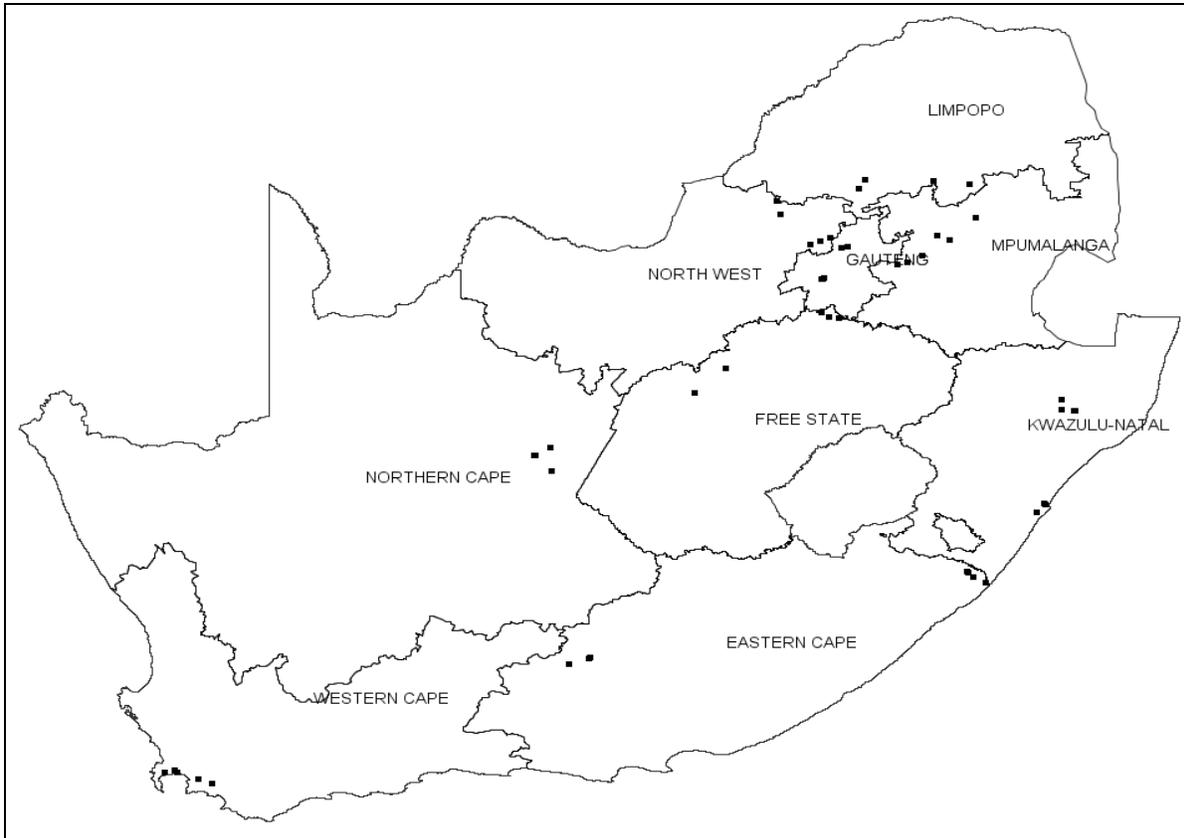
Finally, we undertook a qualitative study in 50 schools in the country. Schools were the institutional unit of analysis, and were selected purposively, based on the distribution of certain pre-selected features (school type, school size, geographical location, poverty index, former education department). In addition, specific individuals, identified by their roles and functions in these schools, officials in district and provincial offices with jurisdiction over these schools, and a few related other stakeholders, were targeted as respondents.

We selected schools from the nine provinces and in at least two districts in a province, to ensure variability, uniqueness and typicality of leave management conditions, leave rates and quality of leave management. District variation comprised the inclusion of schools from densely populated urban areas or cities, and from rural, remote or sparsely populated conditions. Schools had to portray, at an overall level, but not within each province, variation across poverty levels or socio-economic profiles, previous education department, geo-type (urban, rural, township), type of school (primary, combined, secondary, etc.) and school size. Sufficient data were collected from 50 schools. Figure 2.1 describes the distribution of schools across the country.

¹⁵ We accepted the extracted information as provided and did not check the systems from which it was generated. There may be a small percentage of educators from ELSen schools, FET colleges, ABET, departmental officials.

¹⁶ The ten categories are: Normal Sick Leave; Temporary Disability Leave; Permanent Disability Leave; Leave for Occupational Injuries & Diseases (Specify type of illness); Adoption Leave; Family Responsibility Leave (Provide Evidence); Special Leave (Specify); Leave for Union Office Bearers (provide Evidence); Unpaid Leave (Provide Motivation); Maternity Leave (attach medical certificate).

Figure 2.1: GPS-based distribution of sample schools



Figures 2.2 to 2.4 portray the sample realisation in terms of the ‘stratification’ variables. The numbers of schools per province for each of these variables are presented in Annexure 1. A realistic range of operational conditions at schools (and districts), compliance levels (with leave policy and procedures), leave rates, and other randomly distributed characteristics, would be represented in the sample, contributing strongly to “data saturation”. Data saturation here refers to the high expectation and likelihood that the selected sites widely reflect the dynamics and contextual influences related to educator leave management and administration.

Figure 2.2 represents the 50 schools in terms of school size and type. School size was determined by the number of educators at a school. Small schools comprised schools with 15 or fewer educators (or fewer than about 300 learners). Large schools had 40 or more educators (or above approximately 800) learners. Medium-sized schools had more than 15 but fewer than 40 educators (from 300 to 800 learners). In the following sets of graphs, the number refers to the frequency of that occurrence.

Figure 2.2: Distribution of sample schools by school size and school type

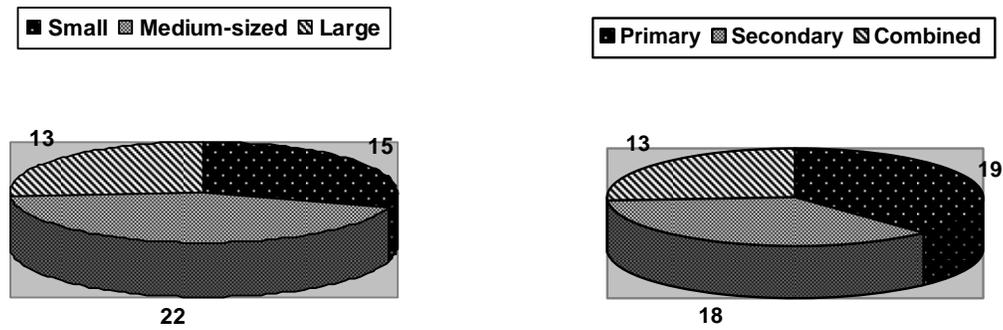


Figure 2.3 reflects school distribution by geo-type and poverty index. For the former, the same two broad categories that underpinned the selection of districts are reflected. The poverty index gives an indication of the prevailing socio-economic conditions in school communities. Quintile 1 schools come from the poorest communities. In terms of former administration authority (or ex-education department), broadly coinciding with population groups, the distribution of schools was as indicated in Figure 2.4. A predominance of black (ex-DET) schools was selected proportionate to current demographics in South Africa.

Figure 2.3: Distribution of sample schools by geographical location and poverty index

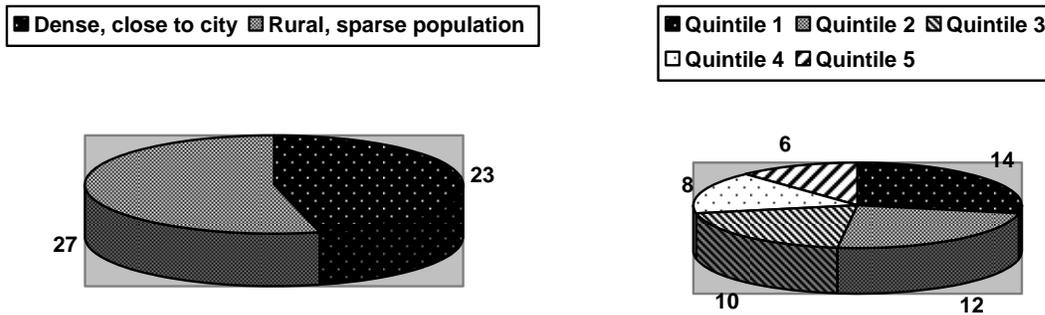
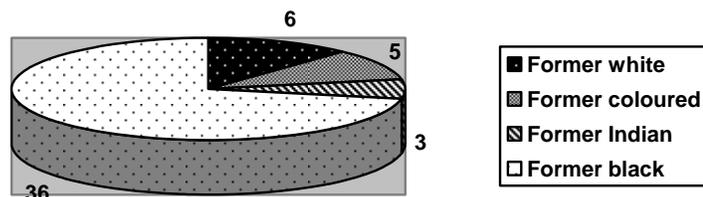


Figure 2.4: Distribution of sample schools according to former education departments



Individual participant numbers at schools and other sites were:

- All principals (or someone designated by the principal) participated in school-level interviews¹⁷.
- 129 teachers participated in the educator interviews or focus-group interviews.
- 30 parents were interviewed (from 20 schools in total). In at least a quarter of the cases these parent members also served on the SGBs.¹⁸
- At least 18 officials from offices of the national and provincial departments of education and districts were interviewed.

2.3 Data-collection instruments

Four types of instruments were used for data collection during the site visits. The first was a semi-structured interview schedule, which explored the seven key questions and was used (with appropriate adjustments) at all levels of data collection. The second instrument was the document review schedule, which was administered at school, district and provincial level. Various types of documents, from policy to system elements and records of leave transactions were covered in this category. The third instrument was an observation schedule which was used to record contextual detail pertaining to school sites. Finally, a site identification sheet was completed for each school site and recorded key demographic and other characteristics.

Instrument development was informed by the Terms of Reference for the study, and aligned to the key research questions, aims and objectives. The instrument was pilot-tested and reviewed by the Reference Committee¹⁹. In addition, there was regular interaction with the project management office of the DoE.

¹⁷ This number is less than the expected 50 because the principal, or an appropriate deputy-principal, was away in five schools on the day of the visit.

¹⁸ A request had gone out to schools in advance to arrange for the presence of parent / SGB members. It still proved difficult for many schools because of day-time employment of SGB members or their proximity to schools.

¹⁹ The Reference Committee was set up by the Department of Education (now Department of Basic Education) and consisted of representatives from academia, teacher unions and teacher professional bodies and associations, departmental officials.

2.4 Data-collection procedures

The study involved desk-top work and empirical data-collection. The desk-top work comprised literature and policy review, and ‘secondary’ analysis of existing data sets. Recent leave rates and patterns were analysed from PERSAL datasets and the 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools. The new empirical work entailed the development and administration of data collection instruments. A qualitative approach to data collection was followed, in which a strong reliance was put on the researcher constituting the actual ‘instrument’. The preparation for the empirical data collection included: compiling prototype instruments and procedures; developing a training manual; training data collectors to pilot the prototype instruments; undertaking a pilot study (at three sites); feedback and review sessions; producing a final implementation manual and instruments; recruiting and training the final research team; setting up the logistics of the fieldwork; getting ethical clearance for the study; and producing the appropriate information sheets and consent forms.

The comprehensive implementation manual provided relevant background to the study, provided the visit schedule and logistics, guided the structuring of the typical site visit and related protocol issues, gave checklists for issuing and retrieving research materials, set exact procedures for completing every instrument, gave overall notes on the qualitative research approach, and made arrangements for data retrieval, consolidation and first-level analysis of findings, and report writing.

Research teams comprised pairs of researchers for visiting each site. A senior researcher took the lead and was supported by a research intern or assistant. In addition, five staff members from the DoE participated in the data collection. These officials worked with HSRC colleagues to ensure the study’s independence. Quality assurance of the data collection was undertaken by the HSRC’s internal project management group. The team leaders, assisted by their research interns, contacted every school and arranged visit dates and other logistical aspects for the period from 9 to 23 October 2009.

At each school, data-collection involved: An hour-long (focus-group) interview with the principal and or two of his/her senior managers or administrators responsible for leave administration and management; an hour-long (focus-group) interview with three regular classroom teachers from different phases or learning areas; a 20- to 30-minute interview with approximately three parents, of whom some may be members of the school governing body; about one hour for reviewing documents; and about 30 minutes, spread over the day, to make site-based observations of context. At district and/or circuit level, as relevant in each province, the activities involved: An hour-long (focus-group) interview with (the) key official(s) responsible for leave management at schools; and about one hour for reviewing documents. Where occasion presented itself, this involved a demonstration and observation of any electronic (computer-based) or other systems in use for leave management or administration. For other stakeholders, only the (focus-group) interview(s) applied. Literature and policy review took place in the period from late-2008 to middle-2009. This partly coincided with accessing the PERSAL data and the analysis of leave rates and patterns.

2.5 Data analysis

PERSAL data were handled by merging them with information from EMIS, and converting these to MS Excel format to create the datasets for secondary analysis. This entailed identifying educator leave rates and patterns from the data covering days of leave taken and instances of leave per educator. Available demographic information enabled sub-group comparisons of trends and rates across variables such as day of the week, year, type of leave, province, length of leave, sex of educator, age, rank, school size, quintile ranking and ex-department of schools.

The 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools was processed in MS Excel. The nature of the datasets allowed for merging school-level demographic information to aggregated educator numbers and attendance figures, and analysing on-the-day leave figures by school size and type, geographic location, quintile and ex-department.

Once all site-visit information had been collected, analyses appropriate to the nature of the data (qualitative content analysis; and limited quantitative calculation and comparison of on-the-day leave and attendance rates) were conducted. Specific efforts were made to understand the perceptions and experiences of educators, parents and managers about: the functioning of leave systems and procedures; the extent of current leave rates; and the reasons behind leave taking. Two technical reports and an integrated report were developed on an iterative basis through a range of conversations and forums.

2.6 Limitations of the study

Given the potentially controversial nature of the topic of study, extensive discussions took place on the acceptable definition of 'leave' and we settled on a working definition of leave for this study. Comparisons of the extent of leave with other contexts must be made cautiously, and these should be informed by the definitions and categories of what constitutes leave (e.g. sickness, official leave etc).

The existing datasets presented limitations of what analyses could be undertaken. The 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools could not be disaggregated to educator level, which would allow for much more nuanced analysis of patterns between subgroups. The PERSAL datasets are not sufficiently reliable or updated, to present accurate educator leave rates. In addition for the purposes of analyses we found the datasets unwieldy, and as such, it was difficult to achieve integration between EMIS and PERSAL data, which would allow finer analysis.

In addition, the data collection at schools had to take place within extremely tight timelines and caused logistical difficulties. While schools in low income areas allowed researchers access to schools, some of the former House of Assembly schools (more resourced) refused to participate in the study, because they felt the research would disrupt the regular school activities.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW OF EDUCATOR LEAVE AND ABSENCE

3.1 Introduction

This chapter critically reviews the literature related to the extent, causes, effects of teacher²⁰ absence²¹ and the strategies used to discourage teacher absence. Studies on teacher leave and absence can be placed into two distinct categories: studies from high-income countries (HICs) and those from low-income countries (LICs). High-income countries tend to have good administrative systems; hence the extent of teacher absence can be calculated (with methodological caveats). The focus of teacher absence studies in HICs has been on reasons for leave taking; and thus on proposing strategies to inform policymakers on how to reduce the number of absence days so that the quality of the learning experience is enhanced, the costs of teacher salaries are justified and the use of substitute teachers (and costs) reduced. In low-income countries, where the administrative data tends to be generally incomplete and not trustworthy, teacher observation surveys have been undertaken to determine the extent of teacher absence. According to The World Development Report (World Bank, 2003) poor teacher attendance in LICs is a result of lack of accountability of teachers and schools to parents and local communities. It is within the accountability framework that the World Bank National Absence Surveys (WBNAS) have been conducted and the absence rates calculated. A few of these countries have analysed the survey data further to determine the underlying causes for teacher absence and suggest strategies for reduction of teacher absence.

South Africa is a country of high income inequality. For example, parts of the country and the education system could be comparable to HICs and parts comparable to LICs. There is a paucity of research documenting leave rates among South African educators. This paucity also extends to understanding the dynamics (reasons, effect on teaching time and learner performance) underpinning educator leave. There have been no systematic and dedicated studies on educator leave and absence, rather a number of studies referred to educator leave and absence as one dynamic in the study. We used these studies to weave a quilt of information to gain an understanding, in South Africa, of: The extent, rates and patterns of educator leave; the reasons for leave taking; the systems and procedures in place to record and manage leave taking in schools, and the actions and strategies employed by management to reduce the extent of (unnecessary) leave taking, and the effect that leave taking has on teaching and learning outcomes.

3.2 The extent of educator leave (and absence) in High and Low Income Countries

This section examines literature from selected HIC that focuses on educator leave and absence. We have to approach comparisons of the extent of leave with caution, because the contracts of total

²⁰ The literature reviewed refers to “teachers” and not “educators”, this chapter has adopted the term “teachers” which is used internationally.

²¹ The international literature uses the term “absence” to refer to the phenomenon when teachers are not in school – either because they are away from the school on official duties or they have taken leave according to the leave measures.

working days and conditions of leave measures may be different between countries²² and within countries. The literature does, however, provide ballpark figures of the extent of teacher absence in these countries. The general methodology used to measure teacher absence is to count the number of days teachers are expected to work that year; count the number of days each teacher took off because of reported sickness or other legitimate reasons and calculate the “lost” days as a percentage of the overall “available” days (Miller, 2008).

3.2.1. In High Income Countries (HICs)

As stated above, studies in high income countries such as the USA (Ehrenberg, 1991; Miller 2008), Canada (Statistics Canada, 2009), Israel (Rosenblatt, Shapira-Lishchinsky & Shirom, 2009), England (DCFS, 2009) and Australia (Bradley *et al*, 2007) provide information about the extent of teacher absence.²³ Generally, such high-income countries have not undertaken nationally representative surveys based on direct observation of teachers to calculate the extent of educator absence, because they rely on the administrative data. The calculated absence rate has a different significance at the macro level (useful for policymakers) than the local school level (useful for school management). A school absence rate must be disaggregated to ascertain whether it is, say one teacher being away for a term and a suitable substitute being found, or a high number of short term absences and suitable replacements not found. At a school level the number of instances of teacher absence may be a more meaningful calculation as a high number of short term leave may be more disruptive leading to a higher loss of instructional time than one long absence with a substitute teacher. In one study, ninety per cent of head-teachers thought that ‘short but often’ absences created more management problems than prolonged periods away from school (Bowers, 2001).

For the United States, we do not have data to calculate the absence rate for the country, rather we have data for parts of the State of New York. Ehrenberg *et al* (1991) study of teacher absence in 700 school districts in New York in 1986-87 academic years, found that in the 381 districts, on average, teachers used 8.9 leave days per teacher in that period, thus an absence rate of slightly less than 5%. This was corroborated by Miller (2008) who calculated the average teacher absence in one district²⁴ in the USA, from 2002 to 2005, to be 5.3% (both for sickness absence and absence from the school on official business like professional development duties). Discretionary absences such as short-term personal illness (one or two days) accounted for 41% of all absences, medium-term personal illnesses accounted for 18% of absences; this was followed by personal days (15% of all absences)²⁵.

In Canada, in 2008, elementary and secondary school teachers were absent on average for 10.1 days per year as a result of illness, disability, personal and family responsibilities. This is a leave rate of just over 5%. Illness or disability accounted for between 71% and 81% of the incidence of leave

²² For example: as the USA is a federal government, policies regarding teacher leave differ from state to state and in the case of teacher leave, from school district to school district. In England school closure periods are regarded as annual leave entitlements. In addition five days are granted for emergencies or compassionate leave, two days for relocating residences, two weeks for auxiliary military service, one day for a sick child and two days for religious observances.

²³ In the literature there has been a shift in terminology from absenteeism (considered to be a pejorative term) to absence.

²⁴ 5 189 teachers in 106 schools

²⁵ Discretionary absences are personal days and short-term illnesses that do not require a medical certificate and non-discretionary absences are long-term absences which are considered to be unavoidable.

from 1998 to 2008 (Statistics Canada, 2009). The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCFS) in England found that approximately 58% of the education workforce in 2008 took sickness absence days. Teachers took on average 5.1 days sickness absence per teacher (education workforce) during 2008 (DCFS, 2009). In Ireland the Auditor General’s special report on Sickness Absence in the Civil Service found an absence rate of 6.3% for post primary school teachers and 4.6% for primary school teachers. Israel reported an absence rate of 5.8% in 2002-2003 (Rosenblatt *et al*, 2009). In contrast to other countries, Israel where there is a system of incentives to reduce discretionary leave taking, 71% of teacher absences were reportedly due to certified sick leave and 11% to uncertified sick leave (Rosenblatt *et al.*, 2009). Bradley *et al.*, (2007) explored the phenomenon of abuse of discretionary absence amongst teachers in Queensland, Australia and reported a discretionary absence rate of 3.1% for primary school teachers and 2.9% for secondary school teachers. Overall 86.7% of teachers in Queensland had taken absence days during 2002.

Table 3.1: Summary of rates of teacher absence by country

Country	Scope of study	Author	Period	Total school days a year	Absence Rate
USA	State of New York	Ehrenberg <i>et al</i>	1986-1987	195	≈ 5 % (teacher leave plus professional development)
USA	1 district	Miller	2002-2005	195	5.3 % (teacher leave plus professional development)
England	National	DCFS	2008	195	2.6 % (sick absence only)
Canada	National	Statistics Canada	2007	200	6% (without professional development days)
Australia	Queensland	Bradley	2001-2002	200	3.1% discretionary leave days
Israel	Jewish sector (80% of teacher population)	Rosenblatt <i>et al.</i>	2001-2002	210	5.8% (sickness, family responsibility and personal days)
Ireland	National	Auditor General	2008	183 (primary) 167 (post-primary)	4.6% (primary teachers) 6.3% (post primary teacher)

When compared with other groups of public employees in England, recognizing methodological caveats for appropriate comparisons, the absence rates from large national samples for different occupations are: 3.2% for teachers, 5.2% for nurses, midwives and health workers, 5.2 % for field social workers, 3.9 % for social worker managers and administrative staff, 4.6% for central government employees and 3.1% for professions allied to medicine (Bowers and McIver, 2000). In general, teachers report for work more often than other public sector employees.

In countries with good administrative data one can easily access information to determine the extent of leave taking. The two main types of leave taking are for personal reasons (illness, disability, personal days, and family days) and for attendance of professional development courses. In these countries there is usually a system of substitute teachers to ensure that there is a teacher in class when the regular class teacher is unavailable.

3.2.2. In Low Income Countries (LICs)

Systematic studies to calculate the rate teacher absence have recently begun in low-income countries (LICs). Teacher absence is often cited as one of the reasons for poor performance in LICs; but given the lack of administrative data it is not possible to reach robust cause and effect conclusions. Within the perspective of teacher accountability, where the onus for attending is on the teachers, the World Bank have undertaken national absence surveys of teaching and health personnel in a number of low-income countries. In addition to the World Bank studies, other researchers (Alcazar and Andrade 2001; Glewwe, Kremer and Moulin 1999; Probe Team 1999; King, Orazem and Paterson 1999) have measured teacher absence in low-income countries, but these have not been nationally representative samples.

For example, the World Bank conducted surveys (by unannounced visits) to primary schools and health clinics in seven low incomes countries (Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Peru, Uganda and Zambia). These World Bank National Absence Surveys (WBNAS) focused on the physical presence of teachers and health workers at public primary schools and health centres, rather than attendance logbooks or interviews with heads of institutions. Enumerators in five countries (except India) made two visits (several months apart) to each of 10 randomly chosen health care centres and 10 randomly chosen public schools in each of 10 randomly chosen districts – thus visiting 100 schools and 100 health care centres in each country. In India, three unannounced visits were conducted in a representative sample of schools in each of 20 states. In the WBNAS a worker was counted as absent if, “at the time of a random visit during facility hours, he or she was not in the school or health centre. The list of employees used for checking attendance was created at the facility itself, based on staff lists and schedule information. Enumerators then checked the attendance only of those who were supposed to be on duty at the time of the visit” (Chaudhury *et al*, 2006).

Table 3.2 provides a summary of the teacher and health worker absence rates for a few LICs. The average absence rate of 19% for primary school teachers and 35% for health workers is high. The absence rate for primary school teachers ranges from 11% in Peru to 27% in Uganda.

Table 3.2: Teacher and health worker absence rates by country

Country	Primary schools	Primary health centres
Peru	11% 16% (poorest) & 21% (remotest)	25%
Ecuador	14% (15% urban & 8% rural)	
Bangladesh	16% 10.8% (urban); 13.5 % (peri-urban); 19% (rural)	35%
Indonesia	19%	40%
India	25% (states vary from 15 to 42%)	40%
Uganda	27%	37%
Unweighted average	19%	35%
Papua New Guinea	15%	
Zambia	17%	
Kenya (one area)	28%	
	Lower Secondary Schools	
Lao PDR	7% or 8%	
Cambodia	16%	
Mongolia	16% rural & 5% urban	

Source: Chaudhury *et al*, 2006; World Bank, 2004 (Papua New Guinea); Das *et al* 2007 (Zambia), Glewwe *et al*, 2003 (Kenya); World Bank 2008 (Lao and Cambodia); World Bank 2006 (Mongolia).

Absence may be due to authorized leave of absence due to sickness or family responsibility or it may be that the teacher is ‘present’ but not in the school because she may be undertaking official duties. There were cases where the principal (referred to as head teacher in the report) could not account for where a teacher was during the time of the enumerator visit. In LICs, substitutes rarely replace absent teachers and classes are left largely unattended. In addition the household is highly unlikely to substitute adequately for teaching inputs. The consequence of teachers being away from school, for whichever reason, is the loss of instructional time for the student, and diminished quality of education and learning gains.

In interpreting the high absence rates one must interrogate the methodology used and in this regard Bennell (2004) cautions on how we use the high absence rates provided by the WBNAS as other studies (Bennell, Hyde and Swainson, 2002) calculated the absence rates at representative, small samples of primary and secondary schools in Botswana, Malawi and Uganda at under 5% in 2000. One feature in the absence rates of LICs is that while the national absence rates are high; within countries there may be a high degree of variation among different states or groups. From a policy perspective, it is important to understand the conditions leading to the difference and hence the reasons for teacher absence from school.

3.2.3. South Africa

South Africa has not undertaken dedicated studies to measure the extent of leave taking, nor have we undertaken studies to better understand the phenomenon of leave taking. While the Education Management Information Systems are being improved, the administrative data from South African schools remains incomplete. In this study we had to estimate the extent of educator leave by extrapolating from other studies²⁶. First, the Gauteng Educator Attendance and Absence Study (Visser, 1999) calculated the educator absence rate as 6.4%. Second, the District Level Management and Monitoring Information System pilot study in 200 KwaZulu-Natal schools (Badcock-Walters, *et al.*, 2002) calculated a loss of 8.4% of classroom time for the year. Third, proxy calculations from the national Educator Health Study (Shisana *et al.*, 2005) yielded an absence figure of 10%. Fourth, the proxy calculation from 144 primary schools in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo suggested a leave rate of around 11% (Chisholm, 2005). Fifth, the 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools conducted in nationally representative sample of public schools and which used data from schools with good administrative systems and records (74% of the sample) calculated the educator leave rate of 8.5% on the day of an announced school visit (DoE, 2009b). This calculation does not include data from schools with poor administrative records, which generally would be schools with poor management and poor performance and where the leave rates would be higher. Therefore we conclude that the national educator leave rate is greater than 8.5%. From the above studies, we estimate that the national educator leave rate is within the range of 10-12%.

Johnson (2009) reports on absenteeism rates (term used in the report) in the South African private sector. Using *Absolv* absenteeism software, Corporate Absenteeism Management Solutions (CAMS) was able to generate statistics for approximately 70 South African companies (manufacturing, mining and financial companies) involving approximately 150 000 employees. Johnson calculated an absence rate of between 3.5 and 6% for each of the companies. Sickness absence accounted for between 1.5 and 4% of absences. The study found high variation in sickness absences between high and low income earners, with lower income earners exhibiting higher rates of absence. This trend was associated with the type of work (mainly manual labour) that lower income earners are involved in. In addition, lower income earners were generally found to be living in poor conditions, which could contribute to higher levels of sickness absence.

3.3 Reasons and patterns of absence

According to conditions of employment teachers, like all other workers, are entitled to take leave according to categories which have, generally, been negotiated between the employer and worker representatives. The general categories for leave taking relate to health, family and personal reasons. The analysis of reasons and patterns of leave taken becomes important when we look at strategies for decreasing the leave rate.

Analysis of reasons for teacher absence across different countries shows that the main reason for absence is illness. Teachers apply for sick leave for: (1) serious illnesses, (2) minor illnesses when

²⁶ The details of these studies are discussed in Chapter 4.

they have some discretion about whether to come to work in the absence of requirements for doctors' notes certifying short illnesses, and (3) additional paid leave when they actually have no health problems. In general short-term personal illness is the most common reason for absence, this was generally followed by medium-term illness, death in the family, maternity and critical family issues (Miller, 2008, Miller *et al.*, 2007, Statistics Canada, 2009).

The reasons for teacher absence are slightly different in LICs. In addition to absence due to health reasons there is a high absence rate from the school due to the principal and teachers being taken away from the classroom and school for official business. Table 3.3 provides the reasons as analysed from the WBNAS.

Table 3.3: Reasons, in percentages, for primary school teacher absence

Country	Gender	Sickness - self	Sickness - others	Official duty	Leave	Funeral	Was at school, but left	Unauthorised	No reason given
Bangladesh	All	10	Na	55	33	Na	2	2	0
Indonesia	All	13	Na	19	24	Na	13	3	25
Ecuador	All	13	Na	25	10	Na	10	2	41
Peru	All	9	Na	12	12	Na	5	10	42
Botswana	Female	42	18	15	0	18	Na	Na	8
	Male	35	14	15	0	14	Na	Na	20
Malawi	Female	42	20	2	0	31	Na	Na	4
	Male	38	11	5	0	47	Na	Na	0
Uganda	Female	29	10	29	0	24	Na	Na	5
	Male	33	0	42	0	17	Na	Na	8

Sources: Chaudhury(*et al.*, 2006), Das (*et al.*, 2007) and Bennell(*et al.*, 2002)

In Botswana, Malawi and Uganda, of the 5% absence, a high proportion of the absence is for illness (both of self and others). With the exception of Malawi, the countries also show a high level of teacher and principal participation in official business, thus not being at school. Often school principals attend official meetings and duties outside school; and this tends to be more so in remote schools.

While teacher absence is an individual matter, there are school (institutional) and structural (socio-environmental) factors that also impact on the extent of teacher absence. In HICs women are more likely to stay home to care for a sick child or dependent adults than are men (Scott & McClellan, 1990). Miller (2008) found that in the USA, on average, teachers with the least or most experience were absent less often, than teachers with intermediate levels of experience, other things being equal. An important driver of this pattern may be that teachers in the middle experience range are more likely to have young families. Also, once teachers gain permanent status, they may be more aggressive about exercising leave privileges. In LICs the pattern is different and the more powerful teachers are absent more often than lower ranking ones, men are absent more often than women, the head teachers are absent more often than regular teachers, and in many cases better educated teachers appear to be absent more (Chaudhury *et al.*, 2006). Characteristics of gender, age and marital status are not significant predictors of absence in LICs.

The distance of the commute from a teacher's residence to school is positively related to the absence rate. In HICs, teachers who commute long distances and are more susceptible to bad weather and other obstacles also tend to be absent more often than other teachers (Miller, 2008). In LICs, the distance teachers' travel may be related to difference in earning of teachers from the school community. Teachers would be in an earning bracket higher than those living in low income areas and therefore would not be living in the area where the school is located. Thus teachers have a higher attendance in schools that are close to a paved road (proxy for remote schools). In Peru, for teachers in remote schools; absence rates are two and a half times those of other teachers (Alcazar *et al* 2006). Teachers who were born in and still reside in the district of the school are more likely to show up for work, and are easier to monitor by the school management and the community.

The 'climate and leadership' ethos in a school has an impact on the levels of teacher absence. Where teachers are happy and appreciated there is less likely to be high levels of staff absence (Norton, 1998). Such arguments suggest that when job satisfaction is high, staff personnel tend to be motivated toward serving the organization and the goal of improved student achievement; which may lead to improved attendance. Reducing absence is also dependent on the set of beliefs and practices among school staff concerning what frequency and duration of absence is individually and organisationally acceptable. If a workplace tolerates high levels of absence; teachers are likely to maintain high levels of absence. The school principal is important in maintaining these norms; and the style of a supportive leader with little tolerance for those who cause extra work for colleagues is better to reduce absence (Dworkin *et al*, 1990).

Furthermore, the impact of poverty is a determinant of teacher absence in LICs. Poverty is linked to poor working conditions in school and children (and teachers) living in depressed environments. Higher absence rates are prevalent in poorer and more remote areas (Alcazar *et al*, 2006; Chaudhury *et al*; 2006). Absence is also higher in schools with poorer infrastructure as teachers feel demotivated to come to school when the physical environment has little comfort and few school resources. In India, cross-country and cross-state regressions showed that doubling of per capita income is associated with between 4.8 to 5.8 percentage point decline in absence (Chaudhury *et al*; 2006). Similarly teachers are less frequently absent in schools where parental literacy rates are higher (and thus household earnings would be higher). In this regard, each 10 percentage point increase in parental literacy rate reduces predicted absence by more than a percentage point. The state of the school's infrastructure is also correlated to teacher absence rates and moving from a school with the lowest to highest infrastructure index is associated with a 10 percentage point reduction in absence. The intersection of community poverty levels and working conditions in a school is a strong contributory factor to absence rates: absence is higher in communities that are poorer and more remote, and where schools have poorer infrastructure.

The national absence rates in LICs are high, but within countries there are high levels of variation. In India, for example, there are provincial differences in absence rates; while the national absence rate was 19%, the rate in the provinces ranged from 14.6% for Maharashtra state to 41.9% in Jharkhand state (Kremer *et al*, 2005). In Peru, Lima has an absence rate of 7% while teachers in remote areas average a 20% absence rate (Rogers & Vegas, 2009; Alcazar *et al*, 2006). In Ecuador, contrary to findings in many other countries, teachers at urban schools have a much higher absence

rate (15%) than at rural schools (7.8%) (Alcazar *et al*, 2006). Thus, in LICs, teacher absence appears to be driven primarily by features of the school, community and institutional environment, rather than individual characteristics. This suggests that it is not enough to hire the ‘right’ teachers and hope that they do their job. Policy should try to change matters at the school, community and institutional level (Rogers, *et al* 2004).

3.3.1 Patterns of absence

Patterns of absence have been studied in HICs. There is a silence in the literature regarding the patterns of absence in Low Income countries. From these studies, three patterns in the absence of teachers are significant: The days of absence; the proportion of discretionary versus non-discretionary absence and the timing of discretionary absence. Firstly, teachers are absent more frequently on Mondays and Fridays (Elliot, 1979; Miller, 2008; Miller *et al*, 2007). Secondly, discretionary absence (short duration and not requiring a medical certificate) rates are higher on days adjacent to non-instructional days (weekends, public holidays or just before vacation). Thirdly, a high proportion of absences are due to illness which occurs in blocks of time short enough that no medical certification is required. Thus a higher proportion of leave taking can be categorised as discretionary absences and requires management at a school level.

3.4. Effects of teacher absence

When a teacher is away (whether taking leave or undertaking official duties away from school) the inevitable consequence is the loss of teaching and learning time. In addition when teachers are away from school, learner absence also increases (Kremer *et al.*, 2005), although we are not able to say which is the cause and which is the effect.

In HICs teacher absence is accommodated by a system of substitute teachers. The system of substitute teachers however still raises a number of concerns for the educational system. Firstly, there is the financial implication linking to hiring of substitute teachers and one of the concerns about the extent of leave is the financial burden on the system. The second concern relates to finding suitably qualified teachers and ensuring minimum disruption to the teaching and learning processes (Miller *et al*, 2007; Miller, 2008). Countries have different standards for who could qualify to be a substitute teacher; in the majority of the states in the USA an individual does not need a bachelor’s degree to be registered as a substitute teacher as a high school diploma is sufficient. However, the standards are higher in Canada and Australia where individuals must have a licence to be a substitute teacher. Thirdly, although substitute teachers may be used as a means of coping with teacher absences; it is naive to believe that using a substitute or ‘supply’ teacher to cover classes means that all of an absent teacher’s work will be done. Marking, planning and record keeping all form part of most teachers’ job and these are not easily covered by a temporary teacher unfamiliar with the school and its pupils. Fourthly, learners may struggle to form meaningful relationships with substitute teachers due to the brevity of contact time and teachers unable to develop understandings of learners and their capabilities.

In contrast, LICs tend not to have systems or resources for substitute teachers, and when a teacher is absent most formal learning comes to a halt (Das *et al.*, 2005). In LICs when a teacher is away, the school makes arrangements to oversee the classes of the absent teacher.

Given then that teacher absence causes a disruption to the teaching and learning processes, one would expect that there would be a link between teacher absence and student learning achievements. While schools with high levels of student underachievement generally report high levels of teacher absence rates, this does not necessarily suggest causal relationships. Schools with high levels of underachievement are generally located in areas of low income. Pitkoff (1993) reports the highest predictor of teacher absenteeism rates are in schools where students' reading is below the expected level for their age and the second highest predictor is where students' are eligible for a free lunch. This suggests the impact of poverty and poor environmental conditions as a predictor of absence. Teacher absence has a higher negative impact in LICs where, when the teacher is absent there are no substitute teachers and the home is unable to substitute for loss of teaching inputs.

South Africa has undertaken a number of nationally representative achievement studies (TIMSS, PIRLS and nationally systemic studies). Given the poor achievement scores in the key areas of mathematics, languages and sciences a range of school and classroom dynamics, exacerbated by socio-environmental conditions and poverty have an impact on the achievement scores and it is difficult to establish a causal link between teacher absence and achievement.

3.5. Strategies to reduce absence

The reasons underlying educator leave taking is a new area of research and we do not, as yet, have robust data about the strategies which can be used to decrease absence. From the literature, in high income countries where the living and school conditions are generally good, there are individual characteristics that have an impact on teacher absence and in these conditions incentives are set up to encourage individuals to attend more regularly. In low income countries the school and socio-environmental conditions influence the extent of teacher absence and strategies may also depend on changing conditions at the workplace and the community.

3.5.1 Individual level strategies

Available literature suggests that HICs have employed two types of individual level strategies for reducing teacher absence. These are 1) rewards for good teacher attendance, and 2) inclusion of teacher absence information on learner report cards.

Reward for good teacher attendance

In HICs there are mixed views on whether incentive schemes should be used to encourage teachers to attend schools. Some public bodies are reluctant to set up systems which reward people for doing the job they have been paid to do; and are unwilling to provide an incentive for people who may be genuinely ill to come to work. In the USA, evidence for the success of incentive schemes is mixed. To illustrate, a number of districts instituted short and long-run incentives for teacher attendance and some schools decreased their absences slightly but not significantly (Keller, 2008).

Norton (1998) reported that one school district created a “pari-mutuel” pool (lottery) from which teachers could draw one share of the pool for being absent less than seven times in a year. The size of the share increases as the number of absences decrease. This incentive produced a significant one-year improvement from an average of 7.2 days of absence in one year dropping to an average of 5.3 days the following year. However, the teachers' union viewed the plan as creating an unhealthy climate of competition and collective negotiations on the matter resulted in an impasse and the district dropped the attendance incentive plan.

The Meritorious Attendance Recognition Program, that included administrators and teachers, combined recognition and competition based incentives. Perfect attendance was rewarded with a \$300 savings bond, two days or less received a \$200 bond, four days or less \$100 in bonds. That led to the average staff absence drop from 7.6 days per employee to 6.4 days in one year. Substitute teachers costs were reduced by \$156,000.

Teachers in the USA have specified sick leave entitlements. Teachers can, however, accumulate sick leave and may be able to add to it by achieving certain attendance targets. According to Bowers (2001), in the state of Ohio, for example, a 96% attendance earns a teacher an additional day's entitlement. In addition, unused sick leave can be accumulated on an unlimited basis. Ehrenberg (et al., 1991) found that the provision of the opportunity for teachers to be paid out for unused sick leave resulted in lower leave rates. Boyer's (cited in Bowers, 2001) study came to a different conclusion regarding the “buy back” option. He found that the option to buy back unused sick leave days did not lower leave rates in the state of Georgia. This may have been due to the low monetary amount attached to the unused days. It is not clear from the literature whether teachers are permitted to cash in their unused days at any point or at the end of their teaching careers.

In Israel, teachers are entitled to 30 paid sick leave days per year. Incentives have been set up to decrease discretionary leave. One incentive is that for each period of sick leave is certified by a medical practitioner and the teacher signs a form attesting to their sickness, the teacher is granted four additional days of sick leave per year. These additional days do not require a medical certificate. Israel also has policy of allowing teachers to accumulate unused short term sick leave throughout their teaching careers. If an educator has not used more than 35% of their sick leave days over the course of their teaching careers, he or she is entitled to be paid for up to one fifth of those unused days (Rosenblatt *et al*, 2009). This acts as an incentive for teachers not to take leave unnecessarily. Hubbell (2008) suggests that a policy of “unlimited sick leave accumulation” improves attendance because teachers do not have a “use it or lose it” mentality.

Inclusion of teacher absence information on learner report cards

Rhode Island, USA, includes a teacher attendance rate on its learners' report cards (Miller, 2008). In 2005 the state reported a 96% attendance rate among teachers. Providing a graphical profile of teacher absence in a school, perhaps adjusted for key characteristics of teachers and schools would give parents an opportunity to know the absence culture of a school (Miller, 2008). This strategy could help departmental officials better understand local obstacles to implementing school improvement strategies, and it could eventually lead to school accountability requirements around teacher absence. However, the fact that a teacher uses all their sick days should not be interpreted

to mean that they did anything wrong and should therefore not be held against the teacher (Hubbell, 2008).

3.5.2 School level strategies

Three key school level factors are important in reducing teacher absence: improved working conditions and infrastructure; school climate that does not tolerate absence; and a system where the head teacher (principal) is not called away often from the school on official duties. In addition frequent visits by district officials would contribute to systems of accountability and decrease of teachers taking leave (Alcazar *et al.*, 2006; Kremer *et al.*, 2004).).

Difficult working conditions are a contributing factor to excessive teacher leave (Bennell, 2004). Teachers prefer a school environment that has good quality infrastructure and facilities and thus attend school regularly. Infrastructure such as electricity, piped water and suitable school buildings are associated with lower absenteeism in Peru (Alcazar *et al.*, 2006). The WBNAS reported that across six countries, schools with the best infrastructure had teacher absence rates that were approximately half that of school with the worst infrastructure (Chaudhury *et al* 2006). Thus all attempts should be made to improve the school working conditions that teachers will want to attend.

Reducing absence is also dependent on the set of beliefs and practices among school staff concerning what frequency and duration of absence is individually and organisationally acceptable. If a workplace tolerates high levels of absence; they are likely to maintain high levels of absence. The school principal is important in maintaining these norms in schools; and the style of a supportive leader with little tolerance for those who cause extra work for colleagues is better to reduce absence (Dworkin *et al.* 1990).

Participation in official duties, meetings and workshops accounts for a large proportion of teacher absence among LICs. Head-teachers (principals) are frequently attending official meetings called by officials from the Ministry of Education (Bennell, 2004). In India educators are expected to undertake non-education related duties such as census enumeration and election mentoring. In order to decrease such absences, official duties should be conducted outside school times. Non-education related duties should also be minimised.

Chaudhury (et al, 2006) noted a reduction of absence on the second visit of the study. The authors argue that if the presence of survey enumerators had an impact on teacher absence, it is likely that formal inspections would have the same effect.

3.5.3 Socio-environmental strategies

Districts with high levels of community support tend to experience lower absence rates, those with low levels of community support tend to experience high rates of teacher absence. For example, Alcazar, *et al* (2006) confirmed that teachers born in the districts where their schools are located have much lower absence rate, typically some six percentage points lower and the effect is generally highly significant. This suggests that forging local ties and partnerships between schools and communities may restrain potentially opportunistic behaviour.

Parental or community monitoring can reduce teacher absence. This requires informed parents and community members who have the knowledge and power to discipline poorly performing teachers (Kremer *et al*, 2005). Countries in Latin America such as El Salvador, Mexico and Honduras have introduced policies that give authority over school management to the community. Such community-based management was found to increase accountability between teachers and communities and can result in less teacher absence (Rogers & Vegas, 2009).

Research on the relationship between contracts and leave taken shows that the more liberal the leave conditions in contracts the higher the amount of leave taken. This may be due to the belief among teachers that leave measures are an entitlement that must be used up before they expire (Winkler, 1980). Contract provisions that were found to lower absence among teachers included requiring a teacher to provide proof of illness for every absence and requiring teachers to report every absence directly to the principal.

3.6. Synthesis from literature and framework to study teacher leave

The literature reviewed in this chapter provides an estimate of the extent of leave taking and the conditions and factors that could reduce leave taking. The extent of teacher absence in HICs ranges from 3% to around 6%. Given that there are substitute teachers to compensate for teacher absence, and in the lower grades families would generally compensate for lost time with inputs, while teacher absence would have a financial implication, the disruption to learning is reduced. Absence data for LICs, gathered by the World Bank from unannounced visits to schools calculated the absence rate to range from 11% to 28 %. In addition to the absence rates being high, there is a high level of variation within countries due to geographic location (urban/ rural) and socio-economic conditions of schools. In LICs, in general, there are no systems of substitute teachers and it is highly unlikely that the home will be able to compensate for loss of learning time in the school, and thus the impact on achievement is greater. South Africa has not undertaken a national systematic study to determine the extent of leave taking. Rather, we had to estimate the extent of educator leave by extrapolating from other studies and analysis from these studies estimates that the educator leave rate for South Africa is around 10 -12%.

From the review of the literature we propose that a framework using individual factors, school (and institutional) factors and socio-environmental factors would be useful to explain the reasons for teacher absence. This would then provide a framework to propose strategies to reduce educator leave taking. In HICs strategies to combat teacher absence focus largely on individuals and setting up of incentives to encourage attendance. In LICs, the literature suggests that more focus must be placed on improved school infrastructure and on a culture of non-tolerance of absence from teachers, head-teachers (principals) not being called away from school on official duties and the community monitoring leave taking in a school.

CHAPTER 4

POLICY, MANAGEMENT and ADMINISTRATION OF LEAVE

4.1. Introduction

The academic literature relating to educator leave focuses largely on the extent and patterns of leave taking and not on the management and administration of leave. The management and administration of leave taking has been a subject of enquiry by government departments in South Africa, and in particular the Auditor-General. It is not possible to determine the extent of sick leave and the cost thereof from the 1996 performance audit undertaken by the Auditor General, hampered by inadequate management information systems and incomplete PERSAL data (Fakie, 2005). The Auditor-General found that average levels of sick leave were not monitored and management was not aware of increasing levels of sick leave; there were no formal guidelines for managers, such as return-to-work interviews, in cases where excessive absence occurred. Subsequent to a follow-up report in 2002 on sick-leave trends in the public service by the Public Service Commission to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the recommendations from the 1996 report were incorporated into the PERSAL system to provide such consolidated management information. Suggested corrective measures, based among other things on adherence to the *Public Service Act* (Act No. 103 of 1994), and the regulations issued in terms of it in 2001, regarding responsibility for the management of sick leave, included: (i) departments formulating and implementing sick-leave management policies and practices (such as quarterly printouts to line managers indicating trends per employee); (ii) regular controlling, monitoring and reporting on sick leave trends (including analysis of impact on service delivery, and corrective steps); (iii) inclusion of sick-leave management in the performance contracts of managers and supervisors; (iv) availability of PERSAL information to managers and supervisors, and the required PERSAL training; and (v) training provided to managers on the management of sick leave.

Recommendations towards improved monitoring of sick leave trends²⁷, on observing the extent to which employees took (and received approval for) for three or more consecutive days of sick leave without submitting a medical certificate²⁸ included monthly reports that would comprise:

- (i) data on the average sick leave taken per employee, highlighting any unusual patterns;
- (ii) monthly lists of absent staff, including length of absence and cause;
- (iii) lists of all temporary and permanent disability leave, with duration, status and action taken, and including summary of last contact and progress made in recovery;
- (iv) a list of staff for whom trends in sick leave have been established already; and
- (v) submissions from managers about potential absence concerns.

Regarding the submission, approval and capturing of sick leave application forms²⁹ on PERSAL, the following improvements were suggested:

²⁷ Sick leave days taken on Mondays amounted to 26%-36% of all sick leave taken across six departments analysed.

²⁸ At the Western Cape Education Department 545 instances occurred (2001 to 2002), amounting to R853 808. Also, 1 280 employees (3% of payroll) used more than 10 days' uncertified leave, and the total number of such days averaged 15 per person. At the Free State Education Department 623 such instances occurred, amounting to R155 701, and entailing a total of 3 066 uncertified sick leave days.

- (i) setting an acceptable period within which sick leave has to be captured (to avoid misuse);
- (ii) comparison of actual capturing periods against the norm (and including corrective steps);
- and
- (iii) expecting departments to ensure full and accurate recording and auditing of all sick leave data.

Concerning the approval of temporary disability leave³⁰, the following was suggested to avoid abuses:

- (i) temporary disability leave cases should be investigated to determine the extent of inability to perform normal duties within 30 days, with proper documentation on the leave file;
- (ii) departments should implement standard procedures within sick-leave policy, and
- (iii) the Department of Public Service and Administration should provide further guidance on the application of the temporary disability leave directive to ensure its efficient and effective application.

The Auditor-General's report concluded by elaborating on implementation issues related to employee assistance programmes, and further corrective steps implemented or envisaged by the DPSA. These included a Directive on *Policy and Procedure on Incapacity Leave and Ill-health Retirements for Public Service Employees (PILIR)*, and the so-called 8-week rule (requiring medical certificates after two absences recorded as sick leave during this period).

In this chapter we describe the leave policy measures and discuss educators' awareness of legislation, policy and policy documents³¹. We will then discuss how the leave policy is implemented in the public school system by looking at the management and administration of leave in schools and then the strategic management actions taken by officials (principals, school management teams and the relevant district and provincial staff) to ensure that all leave is recorded, monitored, and reduced, if necessary.

4.2 South African leave measures for institution based educators

The following three tables outline the health-related, family-related and special leave measures applicable to school-based educators.

²⁹ Across departments, sick leave rarely got captured within a week in more than 10% of the cases, or within one to three weeks in more than an additional 20% of the cases, while the dominant outcome was that in close to an average of 70% of cases it got captured only after three weeks (21 days).

³⁰ Analyses across national and provincial departments revealed that in a majority of cases, often close to 90%, there were violations of the minimum period of 30 days for finalising applications, the requirement to submit a sick certificate or the required Z29 or other type of medical report, and the need for approval by the Head of Department or delegated authority. Cases were found where disability leave was authorised before sick leave had been exhausted. At the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department temporary educators got appointed for employees exceeding 30 days of disability leave, resulting in negative publicity around non-payment of temporary educators, and, in only one region, amounted to R1 531 777 worth of payment to such temporary educators, while the educators on temporary disability received R3 345 331.

³¹ 'Policy' refers to the one official leave policy, enacted by legislation, which is applicable to the whole country.

'Policy documents' refers to the existence of various printed versions and selections from national leave policy to serve a number of purposes to different recipients in a range of locations.

Table 4.1: Health-related leave measures for institution-based educators

Categories	Period	Key points
Sick leave	36 working days per 3 year leave cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical certificate is required when applying for 3 or more days of continuous sick leave
Temporary incapacity	Up to 30 consecutive working days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary incapacity is granted when sick leave credits are exhausted • During these 30 days an investigation can be conducted. The Head of Department may grant additional leave.
Permanent incapacity	30 working days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During these 30 days an investigation can be conducted into the nature of the incapacity. During the 30 days the employer must ascertain the feasibility of alternative employment or adapting the duties of the educator. Failing this, the educator must apply for termination of service, due to ill-health.
Occupational injuries and diseases	Indefinite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators who suffer occupational injuries and diseases are entitled to leave for the period they cannot work.

Source: PAM

When leave is granted for temporary or permanent incapacity, a maximum of 30 working days paid leave is granted. The *Policy and Procedure on Incapacity Leave Ill-health Retirement (PILIR)* stipulates that an educator may apply for temporary incapacity leave when their sick credits are exhausted using.

Table 4.2: Family-related leave measures

Categories	Period	Key points
Maternity (1)	4 months (calendar months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave must be taken at least 14 days prior to expected due date • Leave may be extended as a result of medical complication (recorded as sick leave) • Educator may use capped leave (if applicable) or unpaid leave
Maternity (2)	6 weeks (calendar weeks)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Miscarriage, still birth and termination of pregnancy after maternity leave has started
Adoption	45 working days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopted child must be younger than 2 years • If both spouses are employed in Public Service, their combined leave must not exceed 45 working days

Categories	Period	Key points
Family responsibility (1)	3 working days per annual leave cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spouse or life partner gives birth • Spouse, life partner or child is sick
Family responsibility (2)	5 working days per annual leave cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spouse or life partner dies • Death of immediate family member
Special leave for urgent private matters	The number of days taken for family responsibility and urgent private matters may not exceed 12 working days per year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family responsibility and special leave for urgent private matters fall under one category of leave.

Source: PAM

If an educator has exhausted all of their paid leave, the educator may be granted unpaid leave. Educators can take up to 184 calendar days of unpaid leave. Educators who are away from school due to arrest, imprisonment, appearance in court due to a criminal charge, or a criminal sentence must utilise unpaid leave.

Table 4.3: Special leave measures

Categories	Period	Key points
Special leave: Quarantine	Indefinite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave extends for the period that a medical practitioner deems necessary
Special leave: Professional / personal development / religious observances	3 working days per annual year leave cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development activities³² • Personal development activities • Religious observances
Special leave: Study	Determined by employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course and period of study must be approved • Employer may call for progress reports
Special leave: Examinations	2 working days per examination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 working day is granted for study • 1 working day is granted for writing the examination
Special leave: Sport / cultural activities	Determined by Head of Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose for which the application is made must be approved by employer • Educator acts in personal capacity, e.g. playing for the national netball team
Special leave: Extraordinary circumstances	Indefinite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer must determine reasonability of circumstance and period • Leave without pay unless the employer determines otherwise

Source: PAM

³² Special leave with full pay may be granted to an educator to engage in activities aimed at his or her professional and personal development (PAM Chapter J (16)). An educator can only take 3 working days (21 working hours) for these activities. This would not include mandatory DoE workshops.

Educators involved in recognised employee organisation (union) activities may take time off for official organisation duties. These duties include pre-arranged meetings which cannot be held outside school hours; voting during employee organisation elections; and voting in respect of industrial action.

Educators are allowed to take off eight school hours per year. This time off is granted with full pay (PAM, Chapter G). Educators who are office bearers or shop stewards of recognised employee organisations are entitled to twelve days paid leave per year for activities related to their union position.

4.3 Policy awareness and policy documents observed at the school level

First impressions at schools seem to suggest sufficient, if not abundant, access to policy. Not only were researchers shown a wide range of policy documents in files and elsewhere, but they also observed fair to good knowledge levels among principals and many administrative staff members about the contents of these documents. However, teachers and school management teams often found it difficult to keep track of the identity, location and contents of a plethora of documents. Most respondents knew most categories of leave and their related implementation procedures, including the maximum days allowed in each case. However, the content and nature of the many available documents may also have worked counter-productively, as it sometimes obscured knowledge about leave policy. Three factors were identified as having contributed to this situation. These are the authority (authenticity of the source), completeness (coverage of all leave measures), and recentness (date of issue) of any given document. Each of these factors is briefly illustrated further.

In the first instance, observed policy documents originated from or carried the ownership of any of the following sources: the national Department of Education, provincial departments of education (especially attached to district circulars); the South African Council of Educators (SACE); labour unions; the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC); central government (in the form of acts) and health risk managers (SOMA Initiative, for instance). Educators and school management team members seemed uncertain about assigning appropriate authority to one document relative to another. They could not easily distinguish between primary and official (legally binding) ‘decrees’, and a range of reminders, recommendations, suggestions and summaries about core issues. The result was a proliferation of detailed text to wade through without means to detect the hierarchy of central measures and derived regulations and procedures.

The second factor concerns the extent of coverage of leave policy content. Schools received many different documents each covering parts of leave policy. They rarely had an integrated and complete version. Instead, they relied on memory to retrieve and connect information on matters as they became relevant from time to time. At the opposite end of the continuum, where the ELRC file existed (see below), its ‘legalistic’ and bulky appearance made it inaccessible to busy teachers and the school management team. Some examples were selected from a much longer list to indicate the wide range of policy matters covered in documents distributed to and found at schools. These included:

- the occasional copy of complete acts (e.g., the *Public Service Act*, the *South African Schools Act*;
- the *Employment of Educators Act*³³, the *Further Education and Training Act*, and
- the *South African Council of Educators Act*);
- general guidelines on leave taking procedures in schools;
- the Education Labour Relations Council's policy file, called '*Policy Handbook for Educators*'³⁴;
- ELRC Resolution 7 of 2001 introducing 'new' leave measures for educators and emphasising provision for the remuneration of educators who perform child care duties during periods of leave;
- a letter from the national DoE office on the interruption of maternity leave;
- the *Determination on leave of absence in the public service* document; the *Policy and Procedures on Incapacity and Ill-health Retirement (PILIR)* document with the prescribed application forms covering short and long periods (with or without an additional training and user guide);
- a very wide range of provincial³⁵ and district³⁶ circulars; health risk managers' (such as the SOMA Initiative) training manuals;
- Juta's *Education law and policy handbook*; the diaries that some unions (SAOU, NAPTOSA and SADTU, for instance) in some provinces given to all educators at the beginning of a year and containing a complete summary of all leave types, limits, procedures, and other related information;
- the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) document on improvement of service conditions, including the arrangements for dealing with leave accruals and payouts before 1 July 2000, and comprising full descriptions of the leave types, cycles and maximums; and
- copies of district-visit or cluster-meeting training and presentation slideshows.

The Z1(a) leave form itself was often observed to serve as a short-hand reminder to school principals or management team members about leave procedures. It enabled them to identify possible categories of leave, and provided space for additional notes and the calculation of credits or remaining balances for each educator per category of leave.

³³ Separately stipulating leave provisions for office-based educators and institution-based educators.

³⁴ This file includes a range of relevant acts (*National Education Policy Act*, *South African Schools Act* (84 of 1996), *Employment of Educators Act* (76 of 1998), *FET Act* (98 of 1998), *South African Council of Educators Act* (31 of 2000), *Labour Relations Act*, and *Employment Equity Act*), National Curriculum Statements, and Education Convention Declaration.

³⁵ Addressing aspects such as the 'new' leave dispensation for institution-based educators, the change to calculations based on 'working days', managing the intermittent use of sick leave (the eight-week rule), health and retirement policy, leave for institution-based educators appointed under the *Employment of Educators Act* (76 of 1998), procedures for managing leave, medical certificate requirements (stipulating which bodies' certificates are accepted), the most recent version of the Z1(a) leave form, a manual for leave implementation, leave types (with attachment of ELRC Resolution 7/2001), nomination for leave gratuity, reducing alleged unauthorised leave, form for family responsibility leave (FRL), stipulations pertaining to full-time shop stewards of educator unions, time off during office hours, PILIR, procedure for applying for special leave for study purposes and attendance of classes during office/school hours, special leave for study purposes, incapacity leave, leave cycle and most recent leave form, appointment of temporary educators in substantive posts on fixed term employment, policy, procedures and repeal of the 'previous' Z1 and Z29 forms, monitoring of employee attendance, compliance with leave measures for educators, and strike action.

³⁶ Circulars originating in circuits or districts often had documents from higher up as attachments. A respondent from a provincial office was concerned that some such circulars contained problematic interpretation and factual errors.

The third factor concerns the recentness and date of issue of policy documents in respondents' possession. In some cases more recent releases were observed to carry higher authenticity among respondents, and in other cases, rather dated but complete documents were also taken as more authentic than recent ones covering specific leave issues. The date tags on the various acts and other documents observed at schools spanned almost 15 years, which would further illustrate respondents' dilemma. In short, respondents could not determine the authenticity of a policy document on the basis of its date of release, its comprehensiveness, or both. This happened because official policy content appeared under early or recent dates irrespective of whether smaller detail got covered or a complete edition was released. Examples in point would be to notice when and how: regulation of leave accruals and payouts before and after 1 July 2000 took place; full descriptions were given of leave types, cycles and maximums, either as calendar or as working days; and the PILIR document got issued. District circulars addressing many issues related to leave policy reflect high activity only from 2001 onwards, seeming to peak during 2004 and 2005.

On one hand, many educators admitted that they had received training and had attended workshops, had been taken through leave policy, and had been given manuals. School management teams committed time and effort in making sure teachers know the policy and procedures. The School Management Teams were mostly familiar with the policy documents and educator knowledge of leave policy was mediated through them. Many principals also seemed to have regular briefings early in the year for all educators on leave policy, amplified by regular weekly or daily morning briefings for covering issues as they arise at schools during the rest of the year. The school management teams knew about leave types, limits, procedures and related requirements pertaining to documents of proof. Part of this knowledge had clearly been imbued during recent training and awareness drives by districts and provinces. On the other hand, in spite of the above,, they still expressed uncertainties about the types and durations of leave they could take.

Notably, great variation was also clear in terms of access to and knowledge about policy. Some schools took complete responsibility for knowing policy, and managing, approving, recording and monitoring leave. They also reported to the district on all aspects, and made leave submissions as prescribed. Other schools did only the basics, and expected consolidated statements on leave balances and approval from districts. This situation points to different interpretations and outcomes about where policy places final accountability for implementing and managing leave. Within a province the level of engagement between districts and schools also varied significantly. So did the agreement reached between them about each party's roles and responsibilities for leave administration and management. Once schools and their districts had agreed on an arrangement, though, and everyone had been trained sufficiently, consistent procedures existed. Practices differed from district to district and province to province. Districts either played a large role and supported schools well, or thought that they did so amply, or did little else than passing policy and requirements from the provinces on to schools.

Schools would often not have a school policy, but used provincial guidelines, acts or other documents. Cases were found where a principal was not aware of any policy from district or national office. Schools were more likely to have copies of circulars on leave sent from the district office.

I am not aware of any policy. We were called to a meeting by the district to tell us about leave. Documents were only given to the heads of schools (Educator).

In a limited number of cases, school policies would typically prescribe requirements about practices such as phoning in, and not using SMSs, or bringing a medical certificate after only one day's absence, and not after three or more days. One school principal had no policy documents in her possession, but relied on information provided during district-office meetings. Both the principal and the educators at this school justified their limited knowledge of leave provisions by claiming never to take leave because of the limitations put on them by multi-grade teaching.

We only take leave if we don't have a choice. We don't just take leave. Multi-grade classes restrict us (Principal)

In another school, policy was misunderstood or misinterpreted to mean that leave forms were only required after absences of three or more days. The circuit-office personnel (and researchers) had to correct them about this. The implication is that educators had gone 'on leave' for one or two days without any recording of the leave. The only instance of leave recorded had been almost a year before the school visit when an educator had taken six weeks sick leave to undergo an operation. In this case no substitute had been appointed because the principal didn't know it could be done and how it had to be done.

I just didn't do it when my teacher went on six week leave; I don't know the procedure to arrange for substitute arrangements (Principal)

However, wide consensus existed about the fact that leave policy expects adherence to basic administrative procedures such as completing leave forms in advance (where possible), adhering to caps or leave-day limits, submitting the relevant evidence or documents of proof with applications approved by the principal to the district or relevant leave office for recording and capturing, and keeping leave records per educator on personal files and leave registers.

In summary, a number of documents have been provided to schools. These originate from various levels of the system, differed slightly between provinces, and had been introduced to schools in different ways. They arrive not only from the expected actors in provincial head offices, regional, district and circuit offices of the provincial department of education, but also from training service providers and non-departmental actors such as labour unions and health-management service providers. The end result is a diverse set of products and interactions that made it difficult for any individual incumbent to get a coherent sense of all leave measures and stipulations. This did not detract from the fact that most respondents seemed dedicated to give effect to learners' right to an education, as exercised within fair labour practices.

4.4. Policy documents and policy awareness at offices of the provincial department of education

Researchers sought to determine the role of the provincial department of education in the day-to-day implementation of educator leave policy, in particular with regard to adapting or summarising

national policy documents to assist schools to better manage leave taking. When r requested to provide the most recent and complete leave policy document, most schools in various provinces pointed to the '*Determination on leave of absence in the public service*' as issued on 1 July 2009 by the Minister for Public Service and Administration. Attached to it was Annexure A that referred specifically to ELRC Resolution 7/2001 as the document determining leave measures for institution-based educators. Other provinces referred to DPSA's (Department of Public Service and Administration) Leave Directive of July 2008 as the latest prescription.

Provincial officials generally provided such policy documents to the district (or other relevant) offices under their jurisdiction to distribute to all schools. District offices, in turn, kept and forwarded a number of national policy documents, circulars, memoranda, etc. related to educator leave. Circular 45/2008 (dated 1 July 2008) issued by the Gauteng Department of Education, serves as a good example. It is titled '*Leave for Institution-based Educators appointed under the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998*', and includes medical certificate requirements (stipulating which bodies' certificates are accepted), and the most recent Z1(a) leave form. A variety of similar circulars and documents existed across provinces.

The general impression remained that educator leave was perceived to be regulated by a range of circulars and other documents from a variety of sources and levels, through a range of dynamics, and covering selected and specific aspects of leave. A core guideline document from a single authority (provincial or district) never featured strongly.

4.5 Communication of and compliance with leave policies

The most common mode of conveying leave policy to schools was to attach sections or extracts from national policy to newsletters or circulars that covered specific aspects of educator leave. This transfer of information occurred from provincial to district level and from district level to schools. Policy was not communicated as a single document, but as relevant selections covering specific sub-aspects that departmental offices had been alerted to. Districts often provided schools with training files or copies of slideshows, generally after conducting annual 'road shows' or regular training events to school clusters.

Wide variation existed in terms of the levels at which officials in provinces, districts and schools engaged with each other on leave management. Patterns were not specific or consistent regarding the roles and responsibilities assumed at each level of the system for aspects of leave management and administration. District support and guidance to schools were concrete in some cases, but minimal in others. Some schools took full responsibility for managing and monitoring all aspects of leave, while others did only the minimum. A common requirement was for district offices to receive weekly submissions of leave applications. Fortnightly or monthly frequencies were forced by some circumstances (distances and costs, for instance).

There seems to be a silence in policy on determining who has to let applicants know about leave approvals. This factor may explain school-based respondents' dissatisfaction about not receiving official feedback, besides the not-trusted calculations for capped and sick leave on salary advices. As a result, silence was taken as approval until queries would indicate otherwise. Queries would

normally require corrections related to dates, signatures, evidence or exceeding leave limits. Various district offices did not think it was their responsibility to provide feedback and confirmations of approval to schools or educators. Again patterns were uneven within and between specific districts and schools. Provincial engagement at this level was largely absent, with the exception of the Western Cape where a different model existed. The management and administration of leave seems to happen in the interface between districts and schools.

The variety of policy and related documents in circulation at all levels of the schooling system, as well as the wide range of training, workshops, visits and other dynamics, from EAP and IQMS procedures to the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM), for instance, suggest that much has to be done on communicating policy and administrative documents more coherently to prevent knowledge gaps from jeopardising functionality.

4.6. Leave procedures and practices

On examination, mostly through document review, of the systems in place at the school, district, provincial and national level for recording, managing, monitoring, measuring and reducing the level of educator leave at schools, a clear aggregated picture emerged, which can be pursued as a ‘best-practice’ goal. In focusing on day-to-day leave implementation, the observed procedural instructions, forms, registers, records and other means in use for administering educator leave, are reported on. The practical and concrete nature of the various items justifies separate reporting on within- and outside-school dynamics. Special emphasis is placed on identifying and describing the systems and procedures employed at school, district, circuit, regional and head office for recording educator leave.

4.6.1 Within-school leave implementation

The discussion that follows integrates two related dimensions. The first concerns the mere existence of leave administration documents, while the second relates to the procedures and mechanisms of their use. With regard to school-level documentation, schools made use of daily attendance registers, leave registers, log³⁷ books and movement registers³⁸. They also kept copies of completed leave forms. By and large, especially in schools with good record-keeping practices, the attendance register was controlled early in the day by the principal, relevant deputy-principal, or a delegated manager or administrative clerk. Reasons for leave were usually recorded. Broadly speaking, everyone seemed to clearly understand the various mechanisms’ contribution to good leave management and practice, and did not express problems in complying with them. At some school sites leave administration was facilitated by using computerised systems.

Daily attendance register/ time book

This was found at all schools in the form of either a book or a file. Educators were expected to sign in and out on a daily basis, noting the times of arrival and departure. These registers were usually found at the entrance to the schools’ administrative building or near the staffroom. When educators were absent or arrived late, the space in the register for that day had to be struck off by the principal

³⁷ Also called incident books at some schools.

³⁸ Also called time-off books at some schools.

or his/her delegate. The reason for absence was also indicated in this register in some schools. Principals were able to control late arrivals and absences as long as good recording was maintained. Variations existed between schools. Some of them did not have this instrument or did not apply the procedures strictly.

Leave forms

Empty leave forms were readily available in all schools. They were mostly kept in the administrative clerk's office for easy access, but sometimes in the principal's office. In some schools forms were pre-assigned to individual educators by name and PERSAL number. Completed leave forms were mostly kept in educators' personal files together with the evidence submitted on application.

On application, either the educator or an administrative clerk completed the form in triplicate or duplicate, depending on the province. The type and period of leave applied for had to be indicated on the form against the signature of the applicant. The principal had to recommend or reject the application. Principals frequently clarified potentially problematic or controversial leave applications beforehand with their circuit office in support of their position towards the applicant and before submitting forms to the next office. On completion of the correct number of copies, the school's copies were filed either in a personal file or a dedicated leave register. The other copies were sent to the registry section of the school's relevant supervising office, mostly at the district or circuit office, with the exception of the Western Cape, where forms generally were sent directly to the head office. After this point, schools only learned about queries. Records of approval or credits were seldom sent back to schools on any consolidated basis, again with the exception of the Western Cape. Where educators had exhausted their sick leave entitlement, they had to apply for temporary incapacity by filling in a PILIR form. In the absence of consolidated or regular feedback on leave approvals, the school kept their own individual employee leave records.

Composite leave register

Composite leave registers reflect a summary of leave days and duration per month per educator by category of leave. All schools visited had some form of composite leave register, sometimes in file format per educator. Registers included copies of the leave forms completed. Some schools compiled monthly reports on absence/leave for the leave file. Isolated cases were found where such files were not up-to-date, with a 2006 date in one case being the most recent entry. The better-managed schools had leave registers for the three-year sick leave cycle as well. Some schools had annual leave registers. Registers were either organised chronologically or according to educator. The registers that were arranged per educator seemed to be more effective for managing leave as it made it relatively easy to calculate leave credits. On submission of leave forms, the person in charge of the administration of leave entered the instance of leave into the register, which usually recorded: the start and end dates of absence; the total number of leave days; whether leave forms had been issued to the educator, and returned from the relevant provincial department of education (if relevant); and the reason for absence (leave category).

Movement register / time-off book

This document was often kept in the principal's office. It usually had columns for educators' names, PERSAL number, reason for arriving late or leaving early, time, signature and date. It

recorded all staff movement during school hours, (e.g. visits to doctors, meetings, DoE workshops, union activities and all official business). One of its particular applications was for recording and managing 'casual leave'. This referred to short periods of time that was taken during the school day that overlapped with existing leave categories. In some schools the hours of casual leave were added together and when an educator had reached a total of seven hours (a standard school day) of casual leave, they were required to fill in a leave form for one day for either sick leave or urgent private matters. In a few cases where schools did not use this register, an attempt was made to record the necessary information in the daily attendance register. However, space did not allow for a coherent and useful record, and required many short-hand codes, rendering it useless as a basis for reliable monitoring or consolidation. The movement register was found in just more than half of the schools, with the exception of one province (KwaZulu-Natal) where schools were noted as a rule not to have it.

Log book / incident book

A log book is also referred to as an incident book, school journal or permission book. It recorded incidents that occurred at school related to the School Management Team, teachers and learners. In the sample schools these incidents included: principals' activities; meetings of principals with individual educators; warnings given to educators; visits to schools by departmental officials and by other people; unusual incidents; violent incidents; and robberies at schools. One school used a separate incident book for serious incidents, complete with copies of formal reports, and a different log book, which recorded everyday events.

Relief register for absent educators

In a few schools the development of a relief register, sometimes called a supervision register, was noted. It was normally created manually along with the timetables for learners and teachers. The principal used it for arranging which educators had to supervise the classes of colleagues who were absent, as determined every morning before the school started. SA-SAMS (also see below) automated this task as part of the electronic system's capacity to develop timetables. In one school the relief register was adapted to serve also as record of such events, reflecting the name of the educator who was absent, the reason for absence, the periods and subjects he/she was supposed to teach, the name of the educator who supervised the learners, and the signatures of the educator supervising those learners. This was done to make sure that the educator who had been charged with the responsibility to supervise actually did so.

Weekly reports

A variety of formats existed at schools across provinces for regular summaries or reports. These normally reflected the number of educators who had been absent during each week. The reports recorded the PERSAL number of each educator and showed the number of days on which they had been absent. The report was usually submitted to the circuit or district office every Friday. Schools had been advised to employ administrators to manage the weekly reporting. Schools without administrators had given this responsibility to their deputy-principals or a head of department.

In summary, the conventional mechanisms of composite leave registers, daily attendance registers, personal files, and movement / time-off registers were known and formally in place. They were also used rather effectively. This included making weekly / monthly submissions to the district

with formal leave and other calculations and sometimes also broader absence rates (the latter mostly monthly or quarterly). Such consolidations often covered only formal leave, and very rarely broader staff movements and the loss of teaching time, including for official non-teaching reasons such as workshops.

Human Capital Leave Management System (HC-LMS)

The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) has implemented HC-LMS at most of its schools. This is an online, electronic system that captures educator attendance. All schools on the system must file their report before 10:00 every day. Educators and schools have to confirm these 'digital' records as soon as possible by routing documentary evidence to the head office. These documents go via the district if needed. The system allows educators to check on the leave they have taken as well as the number of days that they can still take via the Internet or their cellular phones. Full online leave application will come with a second phase of roll-out. A few logistical conditions have delayed implementation of the HC-LMS in Western Cape in a minority of schools. These conditions mainly pertained to unavailable or inconsistent Internet connectivity, unavailable or intermittent electricity supply, and the availability of safe and secure premises at schools, such as burglar-proof, lockable administrative offices or computer rooms. Impediments roll-out implementation at some schools also included unsuccessful recruitment and retention of appropriately skilled administrators, a lack of training and training opportunities for them, and the inability to provide and maintain the appropriate hardware and software required.

South African School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS)

SA-SAMS can be used for leave administration and management with automatic handling of public and school holidays. The system provides on-tap knowledge about credits per individual and per type of leave. Immediate reports can be generated (within 30 seconds) by selecting the desired fields (e.g. calendar period, type of leave, staff member name, staff category, etc.). This system can generate monthly and quarterly consolidated leave reports and rates, develop timetables and relief registers, and much more.

Four provinces (Gauteng, Free State, Northern Cape, and North West Province) have started introducing the system to manage leave. The existence and implementation of SA-SAMS varied in schools, with only a small minority of schools achieving optimal functionality. Its leave-administration and management applications are part of a much larger capacity in maintaining complete learner, parent, SGB and educator databases, document templates, correspondence, mark sheets, and so on. SA-SAMS were used optimally and with great benefit in schools where there had been good training; the system and computers were always functional and the operator was competent.

One drawback is that this system is not linked to online transfer of data or files, although it automates production of hard-copy records or reports that have to go to the district, or kept at school in a correct format. Leave administration, monitoring, management, reporting and a range of other functions can be aligned and facilitated extremely well if used optimally. The greatest benefits are that all information is immediately available and the policy requirements, caps, cycles, etc. are built in automatically into SA-SAMS.

Other related systems for recording leave

It was commendable to find that schools were using other types of records for recording leave in addition to the usual records discussed above (including weekly reports). A few schools used Excel spreadsheets to monitor leave and to create composite leave tables / records for each educator. The records viewed were the following: monthly leave registers; monthly and quarterly leave summaries which were submitted to either the circuit or district offices; leave form submission register compiled by the clerk; and “leave roster file” which records leave statistics for educators.

Composite documents for leave status of educators

A number of composite documents existed and showed the status of educators’ leave per leave category, as identified during document review at schools. These documents were generally up to date, and included:

- Three-year leave-cycle document. The clerk does her own calculation each time that there is a need for it.
- ‘Leave record book,’ which summarises leave and movements per educator for the year, by type of leave, dates and number of days. These records were mostly up to date at the time of the visit.
- Periodic summaries from/of the leave register. In a few schools it was not systematically and comprehensively done, and large periods of time were not covered.
- PERSAL-generated leave-credit statements requested from circuit or district offices on a regular basis.
- Composite book which at the end of each leave cycle sums up leave of less than one day, that is, hours to less than full days of leave.
- Print-outs from SA-SAMS.
- One-off printout provided to schools annually. If needed before the end of a year, schools have to enquire from the districts.
- ‘Leave measurement record’. Records per educator for the year cycle per type of leave, with credit balances of days.

Schools appeared to be serious about strategies for eliminating the problem of inappropriate leave or absence among educators. The existence and development of unique instruments or formats for recording leave at schools clearly testify to that. This is a positive sign and it is not surprising why, in general, many of the schools seemed not to have a serious problem of absence and abuse of leave days.

4.6.2 Outside-school management of procedures, mechanisms and forms at provincial offices

There was consensus between the officials in provincial, district and circuit offices and school management about the broad expectations pertaining to schools’ compliance with procedural requirements for leave processing, including the completion and submission of leave application forms (as far as possible in advance), attaching supporting documentation, leave maximums, recording leave, submission and leave registers, etc.

Very little was done at district level or higher to integrate school records that had been generated through electronic systems such as SA-SAMS through online procedures with capturing activity and records in district offices. All records existing electronically at school/s had to be produced in hard copy, and duplicated for and submitted to the district, with the corresponding records at school of such action. Any subsequent responses from or actions at district level had to follow the same manual mechanisms, including return communications to school. Districts therefore kept a second set of complete records. Any dealings with additional offices higher up in the hierarchy suffered the same additional recording burdens.

The path of the leave form from school to PERSAL

Given the concerns raised by the Auditor –General in his audits about possible under-recording on the PERSAL datasets, we wanted to establish the ***path of the leave form*** from the time that an educator applied for leave at a school to the time that the leave instance appeared on the PERSAL records. The following picture emerges from our analysis of trends in various provinces:

Once the school process have been completed, which include producing and filing the correct number of copies of a leave application form in the schools' records, the journey of the form starts. Schools normally submit leave application forms, with any required supporting documentation, on a weekly basis to the local provincial department of education office with jurisdiction over that school. In most cases this is the district office. Receipt of leave applications at that office is signed off in the school's leave submission register for tracing the application's progress and to serve as proof of submission in the case of queries. The district has to record, capture and confirm each application for it to be considered approved. The weekly submission requirement changes to fortnightly or monthly if dictated by long travel distances, high mail or travel costs, etc. District or other offices seldom confirm to schools that any leave applications have been approved (and/or certified as "captured"). Schools nevertheless have a register in which the receipt of such confirmation is noted, and file the correspondence that they receive in this way either in a common leave register or in personal educator files.

Only isolated cases were mentioned to interviewers where queries led to the adjustment of leave into another category, or conversion to unpaid leave. For example, district offices would act mainly in two types of instances. They would convert a sick-leave application without the correct supporting documents in evidence, to unpaid leave or applications for categories of leave where the maximum days had been exceeded, were converted on discovery to another category where days were still available, for example, sick-leave to special leave (family responsibility or urgent private matters).

From the perspective of the district, the commonly accepted next sequence of steps entail:

- keeping strict control, through a receipt register, of all applications from schools, and an exact record of any subsequent progress point of an application in the processing line;
- recording it as 'application received' in the register for a start;
- verifying it for correctness (also the completeness and correctness of any accompanying evidence);
- comparing it against leave credits available to the individual on record in the system;

- routing it via the head office (or any other relevant arrangement, such as the Finance Section) for an audit (mostly of correctness of captured information) and for their ‘approval’;
- endorsing (authorising, approving) the leave in the final instance again at the district level (normally at least two signatures or points of control were the case at the district);
- making any follow-ups to the school and /or corrections against salary, if the status of correctness and/or approval had not been reached;
- enabling the record as final record for the leave instance now approved (this may also be the role of someone in the head office in some cases) on a daily basis by someone who works through the so-called ‘suspense’ file that allows endorsement of the data as correct or not, duly authorised and cleared, after queries had been solved, etc., at which point these are sent to PERSAL (which automatically blocks a record if exceeding the limit, and expects the district to clarify the situation with schools). (This task, for instance, was done by Gauteng Shared Services Centre);
- keeping all hard copies of leave documents on a personal file held for all educators at the district in their Registry section; and
- (much more rarely) making management information printouts or consolidations on the records or otherwise that would reflect on district-wide trends and figures.

The tasks pertaining to leave application processing at the district office usually belong to a leave section, which is located in the Human Resources division.

No records or forms are normally sent to or kept by head offices. The Western Cape constitutes an exception in this regard with its unique HC-LMS system. In addition to online processing capacity, educators complete leave forms before they go on leave, or, where not possible, afterwards, and schools submit two copies to the WCED provincial office registry in Cape Town. At the provincial office the forms are captured onto PERSAL. The forms are signed by the capturer and a supervisor. One copy is placed in the educator’s file and the other form is posted back to the school. A large part of leave administration and management is prescribed as part of the directives related to this system.

In general, provinces perceived their function of monitoring and control (of the quality and correctness of leave management and administration) to be the monitoring and auditing the correctness of leave capturing. The head office would handle incapacity applications as well as enquiries referred to it by districts. Provincial head offices perceived the responsibility to keep leave-balance information and data as that of districts.³⁹ Districts and provinces agreed that capturing backlogs (as witnessed by research teams in at least one or two cases) occurred, and were the result of capacity problems (in terms of both staff and equipment).

Unique provincial structures and arrangements determined slight deviations in the typical routing path. In most provinces schools completed three forms. One form was filed on the educator’s

³⁹ Recent thrusts towards centralisation were seen only to satisfy control and auditing purposes, and may not be cost-effective from the perspective of schools and educators, who may be very far from the departmental offices. However, current bottlenecks caused by district capacity limitations made it difficult for districts to keep up with the weekly receipt of SA-SAMS batch files, or hard-copy records. A main driving force was to avoid Auditor-General queries.

personnel file and remained at the school (in some cases after being stamped by the circuit office or APO); one was retained by the circuit office; and one was forwarded to the district office (or regional office in the case of Limpopo), where leave was captured on the PERSAL system. The principal or his / her deputy often physically took the three (or two) copies of an application to the circuit office, again at variable frequency (e.g., once a fortnight in Mpumalanga, Gauteng and Free State, and once a month in North-West Province and Limpopo). A common understanding was that the principal (or deputy-principal or another delegate) recommended leave, while the circuit office⁴⁰ approved it. In all cases there was very little or no feedback from the higher (circuit) office unless there was a problem.

In the Eastern Cape, the usual single copy was kept at the school (usually in a 'leave file') while the other one⁴¹ was sent / taken to an Education Development Officer (EDO), who handed it over to the District Office Registry (the office that collected all correspondence). From the registry office the forms were taken to the Human Resource Administration (HRA) department. Here the forms were captured onto the PERSAL system. If there was a problem with the forms, they were returned to the school with requests to either submit a PILIR form or provide documentation such as a medical certificate. If there was no problem with the forms, they got filed in each educator's file at the district office. No forms were returned to the school.

In the case of KwaZulu-Natal, the forms were sent by schools to the circuit office, where one of the forms was put into the respective educator's file. The district office received the forms from the circuit office. The circuit office merely conveyed the forms to the Shared Services Centre, where the capturing of forms took place onto PERSAL. The captured forms were signed by the capturer and his/her supervisor. These forms were then placed in the educator's file. No forms were returned to the schools.

From the visits to district and provincial offices at least three different institutional scenarios shaping leave administration and management became clear. In the Western Cape educator attendance information and leave applications were recorded daily on a digital online system. Schools had to follow up this first record by submitting supporting documentation to the head office, although this was routed via the district office for practical reasons in some cases. This centralised arrangement ensured that information and records were recent and correct. However, it required high levels of efficiency and resourcing, aspects which many schools and districts across the country do not yet have.

A second (and in some senses an opposite) scenario applied in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. There leave capturing was the responsibility of the so-called shared service centres. This, however, lengthened the route along which application forms and information had to travel. In KwaZulu-Natal the chain was quite long, from school to circuit to district to service centre (and back). This

⁴⁰ Or relevant office, such as the district, APO or regional office.

⁴¹ In a separate Eastern-Cape region / area, the two school copies were both brought by the EDO to the district. One of these copies got signed at this stage and returned to the school, while the remaining one was processed further as described. This means that while the forms were with the EDO, the school had no record of these leave applications, which was likely to mean that schools would not notice if some forms got lost/disappeared at the EDO level. The EDO indicated that EDOs were supposed to check each school for appropriate record keeping around leave (time book, leave register and log book) on a quarterly basis, but that this was not always possible.

increased backlogs, poor recording, mistakes and poor communication, and led to poor management of leave and leave taking by educators.

A third scenario applied elsewhere. Leave applications were routed more or less directly to the district office. The latter had the obligation of capturing and recording the data. This arrangement did not necessarily lead to optimal and efficient leave administration and management. Potential reasons explaining this could be associated with staff capacity, the frequency of submitting document batches, travel distances, infrastructure limitations, etc. The result seemed to be one of “going through the motions” and attending to leave processing tasks as there was time.

4.7. Management actions and strategies for reducing the impact of educator leave

The discussion now shifts towards the strategic management actions (that can be) taken by officials to ensure that all leave is recorded, monitored, and reduced where necessary. The recommendations made by the Auditor –General’s office will be used as the basis of comparison.

4.7.1. School-level perspective

Principals and school management teams already employed a number of strategies to run schools efficiently when educators took leave. A policy that was found in all schools was that educators (for unplanned leave) had to inform the school that they would not be at school. This could be done telephonically, via SMS, or by sending a message with a family member. This should happen before school started to allow the principal to arrange for someone who would supervise the class. A good administrative clerk would note the need for completion of the required forms and submission of related supporting evidence, and prepare accordingly. Such actions mainly entailed leaving the required empty forms in the educator’s pigeonhole (mail box), or awaiting the educator on return with the request and documentation for recording the preceding absence.

When an educator applied for leave in advance, the individual had to negotiate with the principal first. If requirements of teaching, time of year and ability to implement relief arrangements could be effected, leave was recommended by the principal. In these cases, educators were expected to prepare work for their classes. In the case of a substitute educator being appointed, the educator who had applied for leave had to prepare a learning programme (and lesson plans, if relevant) to guide the substitute.

Evidence from this study and available literature suggests that the school climate and leadership ethos may be the most important factor in all leave administration and management. Where schools functioned as a well-run, transparent team, focused on teaching and learning and attempted never to sacrifice contact time, appropriate systems and outcomes were easier to put in place and maintain. In cases where this approach included collegial and professional relations among staff, even including parents and the broader community, the leave taking culture was even better. In addition, having a well-trained, dedicated administrative clerk or administrative manager improved leave the administration and management of leave taking in a school. In schools where this was the case, this person was responsible for the day-to-day execution of leave actions, including all related recording, monitoring (tools), and routing of documents, with her principal or management team,

and between the school and district. Processing leave applications, completing all forms, records and documentation, both in advance and on return for someone who could not predict an absence, were all essential components of effective and efficient leave administration and management.

Most schools monitored and calculated leave trends and credits by generating weekly or monthly leave reports. Some provinces or districts required the formal submission of such reports. These reports aided leave managers in identifying patterns of leave and abuse of leave among educators. Such reports could easily be generated on the SA-SAMS or HC-LMS systems.

Overall, schools had instituted good management and administrative systems to ensure that leave was recorded, and educators in schools were aware of the processes and complied with these processes. However, most schools did not track the overall leave taking of educators or at the school to monitor the total loss of learning time or the patterns of leave taking.

4.7.2. District-level perspective

The monitoring of leave by district offices seemed varied. Some had a record of every educator that took or exceeded their 36 days of sick leave in the ending three-year cycle, and kept an eye on them. In most districts, these cases were referred to their health risk manager for further decisions, mainly concerning awarding incapacity leave, and providing substitute educators. However, the financial implications of these, and having to pay for two people in the same post, as a result, effectively implied that frequent budget excesses occur. A number of districts appeared to take responsibility for drawing up weekly or monthly reports from PERSAL. In these reports the HRA can pick up patterns of leave taking as well as any indications of abuse. District offices also conducted periodic audits of leave in all schools under its jurisdiction. Some district offices arranged periodic meetings with principals to inform them about all types of leave, and any related procedures and requirements.

Leave management in districts within the same province (for example, the Eastern Cape), was observed to be substantially better in one district compared to the other, although even then some problems were identified. The reasons for the generally good recording in a particular well-functioning district seemed to be related to:

- significant supervision and support from circuit/district level;
- the relatively short path which paperwork took before entering PERSAL; and
- generally high quality of leadership and administration within the school.

Two districts, which would share a common organisational structure (i.e., as determined at the same provincial level), could therefore be perceived as functioning at quite different levels. In the one case, the district office provided schools and principals with substantially more oversight (even if not always quite enough) than was available in the case of the second district. This had an effect in particular on the levels of organisation and professionalism with which leave issues were being addressed in such districts.

The above analysis suggests that district offices could play a critical role in monitoring and managing the extent of leave, and thus in strategies aimed at reducing the extent of educator leave taking.

4.7.3 Province-level perspective

No regular forums seemed to exist at provincial level in many provinces to deal with extent, monitoring and strategies related to reduce leave taking. There were some ad-hoc involvements, like provinces could make inputs into national processes, for instance for annual strategic planning meetings and year plans. One national initiative that was mentioned was a recent version of a national performance plan. It had a section on "leave advocacy", which outlined a programme whereby provinces had to raise awareness among their districts and schools about the need for and how to better achieve sound leave implementation. However this had to be shelved at national level due to budget shortages.

The prevailing perceptions among head office officials was that the extent of leave was underestimated and leave management grossly neglected. Many provinces seem not to have a direct role in monitoring educator absence. It is important that head office puts the topic of leave taking on its agenda and statistics regularly collated from districts at the provincial level.

4.8. Relief and substitution arrangements

This section deals with relief and substitution measures in schools (e.g. sending learners to other teachers or arranging replacement teachers). Findings from this study suggest that most schools, with a few exceptions in small and rural schools, implemented educator relief and substitution arrangements when teachers were on leave. The length of time warranting such arrangements varied. Such school management practices that sought to minimise the loss of learning time resulting from educator leave fell into three broad categories: supervision by a non-educator, supervision by another educator, and substitute educator.

4.8.1 Supervision by non-educators

When educators were away for a day or two and especially in primary schools, schools reported that they would call on a parent or SGB member to supervise the absent educator's class. In some primary schools, a non-educator was only used for Foundation Phase learners (Grades 1-3). This was done because it was felt that it was easier for a non-educator to control the younger learners. In such cases, because parents were not qualified educators, they at best told stories and gave learners singing activities that could keep them busy constructively. This was mostly observed in well-resourced city schools, but not limited to them. Curriculum delivery was suspended until the educator returned from the leave of absence incidence. These parents or SGB members were sometimes paid a nominal fee for their time. These arrangements would be useful in keeping children occupied for a while and would serve the role of a teacher aide.

4.8.2 Supervision by an educator

Most schools that were visited had a relief timetable. This timetable noted which educators had periods designated for administrative duties on any given school day. If an educator was absent, the educators with administrative periods were expected to sit with the class without an educator. Learners were given revision work or were expected to carry on with their own work. The better-organised schools insisted on educators drafting worksheets that had to be done by their learners in their absence.

In many schools educators teaching different groups in the same grade would distribute learners without an educator amongst themselves. Such a system assumed that the curriculum was being delivered at the same rate to all classes in that grade. Often schools ensured that it happened through joint planning and synchronisation, to facilitate relief arrangements. If this was not the case, the delivery of the curriculum was disrupted. Such distribution could also be applied in smaller rural schools, but of necessity meant placing learners with other grades, owing to the fact that there would often only be one class per grade level.

Some primary schools employed a co-teaching system where an educator would teach two separate classes, in two separate classrooms, during the same period. The educator moved back and forth between his/her class and the absent educator's class teaching both classes 'simultaneously'. This was difficult to manage, but it ensured that the curriculum delivery was not halted. For the most part, however, arrangements for short-term educator absences appeared to be *ad hoc*.

4.8.3 Substitute educators

Provincial departments of education regulate the basis on which they pay for a substitute teacher at a school when a state-paid teacher is on leave for a predetermined minimum period (normally about 10 consecutive working days or longer, as in the Western Cape, or 20 days or more as in KwaZulu-Natal). In well-managed schools, educators always left a learning programme for the substitute indicating the work that had to be covered at the time. In the case of planned and expected absences, some negotiation as to the most appropriate time of year may alleviate any more serious impact on curriculum delivery.

Once the relevant departmental office has authorised a school to appoint a substitute, it becomes the responsibility of the school to find a suitable educator. Most schools had difficulty in finding suitably qualified educators especially in Mathematics and Physical Science. When schools were far from cities or bigger towns, this problem was aggravated further. One city school was noted to use unemployed qualified educators, accessed through the formal records kept of recently qualified teachers who have not yet found employment (in Gauteng, through Tshwane University of Technology and the University of Pretoria, to be precise) as substitutes. It was common practice in some schools for educators, who were going on leave, to find substitutes for their classes themselves.

Schools were more positive, though, about the successes they had in securing substitute educators in the case of maternity leave. This situation was facilitated by knowing long in advance what the

requirement would be. Unfortunately, other types of leave such as sick, family and other leave are often unplanned and are often short in duration. Schools employ various substitution strategies, outside the state paid substitutes, for shorter term (1 – 3 days) of leave which do not qualify for a substitute. In the more affluent schools, an SGB-paid substitute is often hired. Some schools, not necessarily those with resourced SGBs and extra SGB posts, have a fund that can pay such stand-ins anything from R50 to R150 a day. Otherwise, respondents in this study reported on instances where teachers paid for incidental costs (e.g. transport costs) from their own pockets to enable their absence to be without ramifications for learners.

Data analysis in this study suggests that the substitute policy would work better when the application is made well in advance of the leave taking (e.g. maternity leave). For unplanned and unexpected leave taking this system would not be able to respond with expediency to a request for a substitute.

4.8.4. Reducing loss of teaching and learning time and the effects thereof

The extent of intervention to minimise or compensate for lost learning time varied across schools. Some educators were expected to make up time by setting up extra classes on their return from leave, especially for Grade 12 learners. This was done on weekends or during school holidays. More poorly organised schools declared, with varying degrees of desperation, that learning time was irredeemably lost. An educator at a primary school alerted researchers to the bigger issue of educator competence and commitment that also has to receive attention, as would be evident when someone's absence would actually make no difference to the little teaching and learning that had in any case occurred beforehand.

4.9. Concluding comments

The management and administration of educator leave has been highlighted and there is a plethora of legislation, policies and guidelines relating to the administration of leave. Overall, principals and educators knew the central features of policy related to educator leave. There might be some confusion and uncertainty about policy details and this may be due to the many documents that schools and educators receive. Provincial and district officials appear to have made some, though not sufficient, attempt to communicate policy coherently to schools.

Most of the completion of essential forms, submissions, procedures and practices at school level operated well. Where computerised leave administration systems existed at schools, and sufficient staff capacity, good training and the provision and maintenance of hardware and software were not compromised, things went well. There is room for improvement in this regard, however, in terms of securing online connections with the PERSAL system, and rolling out computerised leave processing out much more widely.

One area of weakness in the system is that when the route, which leave forms had to take, became too distant and long, losses occurred. Not all leave forms reached the data capturer and therefore not all leave forms were captured. In addition, district offices did not provide feedback to schools and educators on the status of leave submissions and the balance of leave days.

The Auditor-General in recent times made important recommendations about management responsibility, monitoring, leave approval and capturing processes, and incapacity leave implementation. An important sequence of sub-systems, underlies the way in which leave management should ideally operate. This chain can be depicted as the following circular process: availability of good information and data (e.g., EMIS, DEMMIS and PERSAL) → monitoring of trends, patterns and losses of time and money to the system → management strategies to counter any such negative effects → interventions and support derived from this strategic position → (increasingly better) recording of leave and absence → information and data availability (starting the circle again). From the Auditor-General's recommendations already flowed subsequent interventions such as the introduction of PILIR and the eight-week rule, which have both been widely integrated into procedures of sick-leave management. While schools use PILIR as the basis for temporary incapacity, the 8-week rule is not part of the awareness of educators and schools.

This study found evidence to support the pivotal role played by school climate, ethos, discipline and general levels of school functioning and the nature of leave administration and the extent of leave taking in schools. Add to this the distant role of head offices and limited guidance and support provided by them about leave and leave monitoring, and it is clear that much more can still be done to improve systemic elements of day-to-day operational.

While schools have been compliant in adhering to the administrative requirements regarding leave taking, they have not engaged with the strategic management of leave taking in order to reduce the extent of leave. Schools need to reduce the time educators are away from schools and classroom and this will require strategic monitoring of leave and leave patterns and implementing measures to ensure that leave taking is reduced.

CHAPTER 5

THE EXTENT, PATTERNS AND RECORDING OF LEAVE TAKING

5.1 Introduction

A number of South African studies relating to education quality refer to educator leave and absence as one dynamic in their study, but there have not been any dedicated national studies to calculate the extent of educator leave. We used these studies to weave together a quilt of information to provide an **estimation** of the extent of educator leave in South African ordinary public schools.

The only empirical findings on educator (and learner) attendance and absence rates at public ordinary schools, albeit becoming dated, is the 1999 Attendance Survey commissioned by the Gauteng Department of Education (Visser, 1999)⁴². The study reported that the overall educator absence rate was 6.4% and the learner absence rate was 5%. Calculations covered the complete school year and were based on the ratio of person days missed across all staff as a portion of the teaching or school days available across all staff. The leave rates by ex-departments were: 7.9% for ex-Department of Education and Training educators; 7.1% for ex- House of Representatives; 6.3% for ex-House of Delegates; and 5.2% for ex-Transvaal Education Department. A pattern of absence increased from the first to third quarter (5.4% in the first, 6.6% in the second, and 7.3% in the third) and then dropped again (to 6.8%) in the fourth quarter.

Two studies, undertaken by the HSRC, involving school visits documented the number of educators in school on the day of the visit and provides a proxy calculation of rate of educator leave. In the first study, Shisana, Peltzer, Zungu-Dirwayi & Louw⁴³ (2005) undertook a national study on the health of educators with a sample of 24 200 educators. The researchers were unable to contact 2 380 of the teachers on the first visit to the school and used this information to estimate educator leave rate at 10%. The second study, commissioned by the Nelson Mandela Foundation to study rural South African schools (Chisholm, 2005) undertook a survey of 144 primary schools in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. On the day of the research team's visit to the schools, 13% of women and 8% of men teachers were not in school. From this we estimate an educator leave rate of 11%.

The Auditor-General's office attempted to calculate the educator leave rates from a performance audit undertaken on the management of sick leave benefits in selected national and provincial government departments. However, that audit found that the PERSAL data were incomplete and pointed to the under-recording of leave and a possible under-reporting of leave (Fakie, 2005). The estimate from the audit was that sick leave cost the country about 1.5% of the total basic salary bill during the 2001-2003 period. The audit found that two years into the three year leave cycle, some employees⁴⁴ had already exhausted their 36 sick leave days. From the incomplete PERSAL datasets the audit calculated that in the Western Cape Education Department, an average of 5.38

⁴² In this study the realised sample was 61.3% i.e. 1 168 of the relevant schools in Gauteng responded.

⁴³ Study commissioned and funded by the Education Labour Relations Council.

⁴⁴ In the Western Cape, with a higher quality PERSAL dataset than other provinces, 8% of education department employees had exhausted their regular leave provision. In the remaining provinces this was below 2% to 3% (the low numbers could be due to under-recording of leave).

leave days was taken at a cost of R1 595 per employee per year; in KwaZulu-Natal (for all departments, owing to the information not being available per department), an average of 3.90 days was taken as leave at a cost of R966 per employee per year and in the Free State Education Department an average of 2.97 leave days was taken at a cost of R877 per employee per year.

The 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit, in public and independent⁴⁵ ordinary South African schools, calculated an educator leave rate of 8.5% for three-quarters of the nationally sampled schools who were able to provide all requested data. The leave rate was calculated by examining the educator register on the day the Annual School Survey were completed (4 March) and recording the total number of educators listed and educators absent. The leave rate for a quarter of schools with poor administrative records and data would probably be schools with poorer working conditions and infrastructure and where the school climate and leadership would be weak therefore suggesting higher leave rates. The second calculation of educator leave rate, derived from the 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of schools audit of ordinary schools data, used the full sample of schools. The total number of educator forms received on the day of the announced school visit was used to calculate the leave rate. On the day of the **announced** visit, and thus **may be an optimistic estimate**, 11.5% of educator forms were not received by the fieldworkers. Thus we estimate the educator leave rate at 11.5%, from this data. From the Shisana *et al* (2005) study (10%) and the 2008 - 4% audit announced visits (11.5%); our conservative estimate of the educator leave range is 10–12% (this includes leave according to leave measures and some leave away from school on official duties). This means that on average every educator is away, from school or the classroom, for between 20 to 24 days a year.

In the sections below we will provide further analysis of the extent and trends of educator leave taking in South Africa using the 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of schools and PERSAL datasets. We will analyse the patterns of leave taking (using PERSAL, 2008 - 4% audit of schools data and HSRC fieldwork data): (i) at individual level (age, gender, rank); (ii) at school level (school type and location, school size); (iii) within the socio-environmental context of the school (ex-department, quintile rank, school funding model) and (iv) timing of leave. Given the under- recording of PERSAL leave, we will report on the fieldwork investigation into the reliability of leave reporting in schools and leave recording in PERSAL systems.

5.2 Extent and trends of educator leave: National and provincial rates

To examine the extent and trends of educator leave in South Africa and the provinces we further analysed the PERSAL and 2008 - 4% audit data of schools. PERSAL leave records of educators were extracted from the PERSAL system for eight snapshot months (February and August, from 2004 to 2007) and was analysed to describe recorded educator leave in the system. Although there is under-recording of PERSAL data, the analysis could still provide insights into the patterns of leave taking and estimate the extent of under-recording.

Table 5.1 and Figure 5.1 describe the **national** extent and trend of PERSAL reported and recorded leave. Instances of leave records were extracted from the PERSAL dataset and for each leave

⁴⁵ 18 independent schools, involving 396 educators were in the sample. Since this is not representative of independent schools we cannot analyse this set further.

instance the number of leave days calculated. This was aggregated to calculate the total number of leave days for each of the snapshot months. Table 5.1 includes the total number of state-paid educators (from PERSAL data provided by DoE⁴⁶) for this period. The data were disaggregated to provide statistics which included and excluded maternity leave. Maternity leave is a category that allows for a substitute teacher, and schools have been successful in appointing substitutes. The statistics with and without maternity leave provides an indication of the extent of educator leave and the extent of loss of instructional time for learners.

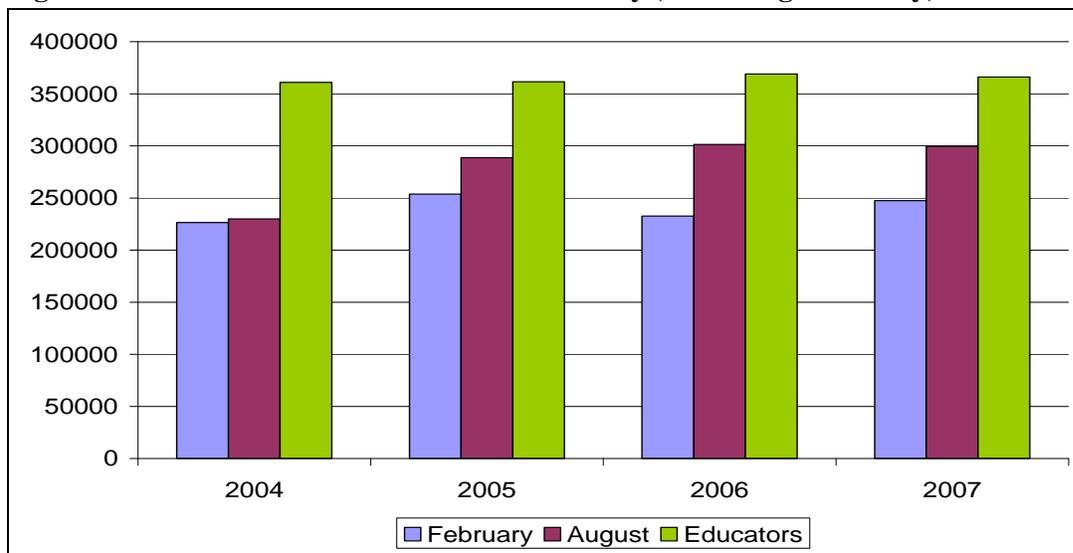
Table 5.1: Extent of PERSAL recorded leave days for state-paid educators

Year		February*	August*	Total number of educators
2004	Without maternity	191 240	211 083	360 946
	With maternity	226 474	229 913	
2005**	Without maternity	218 158	245 793	361 651
	With maternity	253 788	288 736	
2006**	Without maternity	200 492	255 626	369 119
	With maternity	232 570	301 400	
2007**	Without maternity	216 566	257 552	366 153
	With maternity	247 527	299 629	

* The total number of school days for February is 20 and for August is 2, except for 2006 which is 22.

** Limpopo data is incomplete for 2005, 2006, 2007.

Figure 5.1: Extent of PERSAL recorded leave days, including maternity, from 2004 to 2007



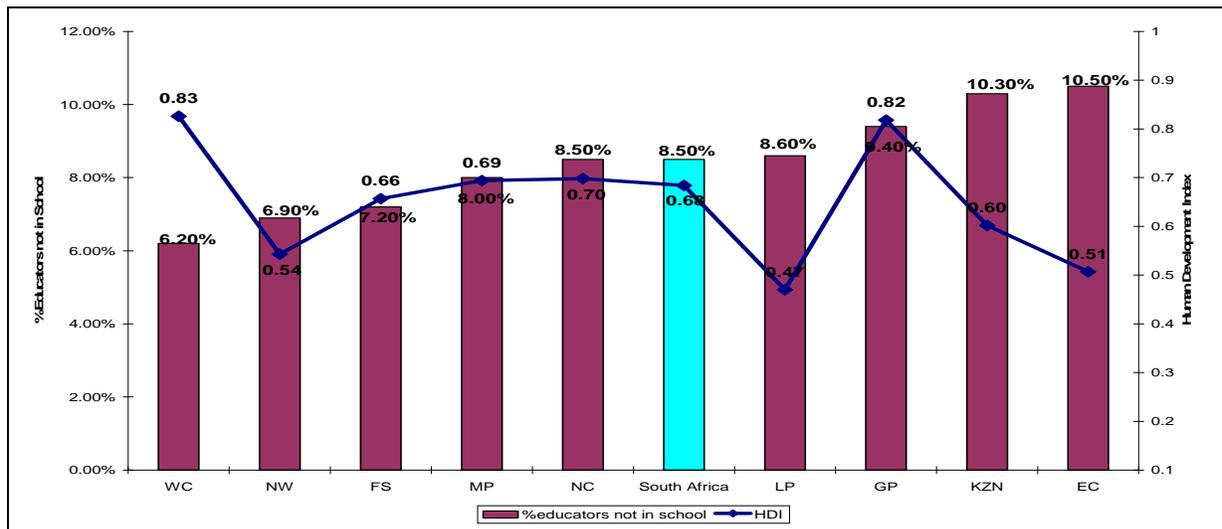
⁴⁶ The total number of educators from Statistics at a Glance (from the SNAP survey) is slightly different.

Table 5.1 and Figure 5.1 show that at the national level: (i) there were a higher number of leave days recorded in August than in February; (ii) the total number of recorded leave days seems to be increasing from 2004 to 2007 and (iii) the number of educators in the system, over these years, seems to be fairly stable. The increase in the number of leave days recorded could be due to either increased leave taking over this time period or improved reporting and recording of leave.

From the PERSAL dataset, we calculated the number of leave days recorded for maternity leave for a month. This ranged from approximately 30 000 to 45 000 days (an exception of 18 000 recorded days for August 2004) per month. Given that schools would employ a substitute educator for the period of maternity leave, the PERSAL recording of this form of leave would closely match the leave taken. Thus we estimate the number of educators taking maternity leave on any day as possibly ranging from 1 500 to 2 050 or, approximately 0.5 % of the educator labour force.

The educator leave dataset from the 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools and the PERSAL datasets were disaggregated to calculate the provincial leave rates. The 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools calculated the leave rate for 75% of the sample (those with good administrative records) to be 8.5% nationally and the provincial leave rates ranged from 6.2% for Western Cape to 10.5% for Eastern Cape.

Figure 5.2: Educator leave rates by province, for independent and public ordinary schools, and HDI



Source: 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of schools, based on 75% of complete data received.

We explored the relationship between the provincial leave rates and the Human Development Index (HDI). The Human Development Index which is calculated using the GDP per capita, literacy rate (adult literacy rate and combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment rates) and life expectancy at birth provides an indication of socio-economic conditions in a country. It would seem, in general, that the lower HDIs suggest a higher rate of absence (correlation co-efficient of -0.3340). The data used in the graph above would seem to exclude the data of schools with poor administrative systems and these schools would generally be in low income areas.

PERSAL datasets were also disaggregated to calculate the provincial leave rates for the four-year time period.

Table 5.2: Provincial rates of PERSAL recorded leave from 2004 to 2007

	2004	2005	2006	2007
Eastern Cape	1.89	2.99	3.30	3.63
Free State	5.03	5.33	4.81	5.70
Gauteng	3.69	3.90	3.97	4.28
KwaZulu-Natal	3.15	3.77	3.70	3.43
Limpopo	1.69	1.28	1.34	1.50
Mpumalanga	3.69	4.01	2.99	3.21
North-West Province	3.21	5.15	3.00	2.99
Northern Cape	4.06	4.80	4.97	4.49
Western Cape	5.02	5.54	5.75	6.64
South Africa	3.08	3.63	3.44	3.61

The PERSAL recorded leave rates for South Africa increased from 3.08 in 2004 to 3.61 in 2007. This increase in the recorded leave rate could be either because leave taking increased or the systems of leave recording have improved. Given the under-recording in the PERSAL systems, it is more likely that leave reporting and recording increased.

The provincial rates of recorded leave, for 2007, ranges from 1.50 for Limpopo (where data is incomplete) to 6.64 for Western Cape. Again the interpretation of the figures is either the provinces have vastly different rates of leave taking or the leave taking is not fully reported and recorded. It is more likely that leave taking is not fully reported and recorded. The higher provincial leave rate is a reflection of more efficient provincial reporting and recording systems.

5.3. Patterns of educator leave taking: individual, school and socio-environmental level

This section discusses the patterns of leave taking using the PERSAL and 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary public schools datasets. The literature review established that a useful framework for understanding educator leave includes individual factors, school factors and socio-environmental factors. In this section we discuss the patterns of leave taking at the individual, school and socio-environmental level.

5.3.1 Individual-level analysis: gender, age and rank

The PERSAL datasets include leave records and individual characteristic variables (gender, age and rank levels). The analysis will provide the patterns of leave takers. The analysis will not be able to comment on the patterns in relation to the educator population, having only access to PERSAL records of leave takers.

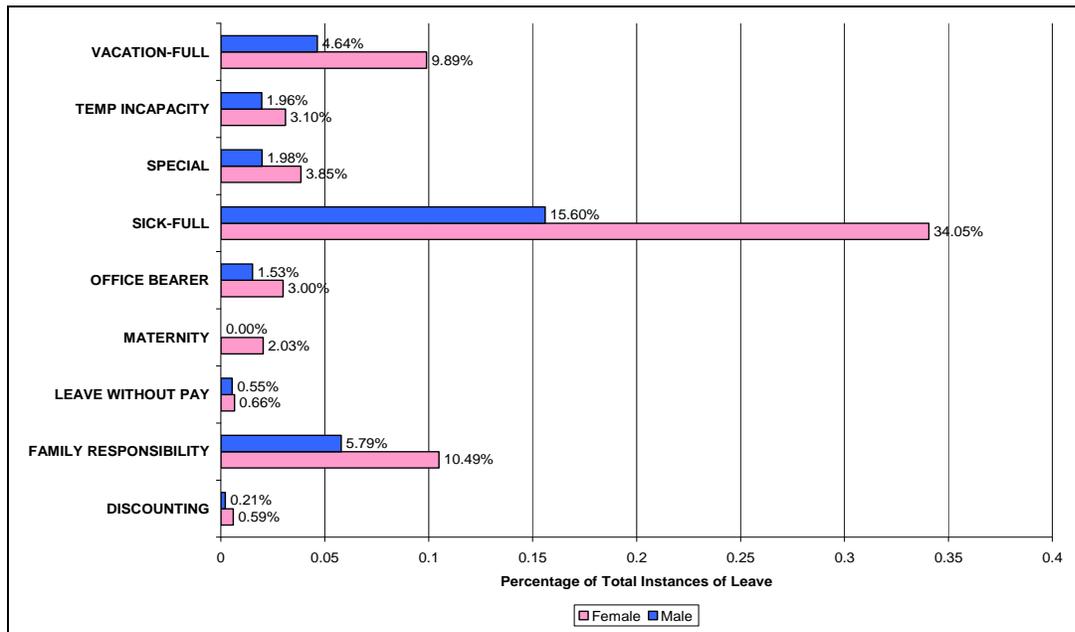
By gender

The literature review established that in high income countries women are more likely to stay at home to care for a sick child or dependent adults than men (Scott and McClellan, 1990). In contrast,

in low income countries men are absent more often than women (Chaudhury *et al*, 2006). The analysis of all recorded leave instances, by gender, shows that females contributed to 69% of all leave and males to 31% of all leave instances. In 2005, the gender profile of South African educator labour force was recorded by PERSAL as 34% male and 66% female (Arends, 2007). Thus the extent of leave taking, which shows no significant difference by gender, mirrors the demographics of the educator labour force in the country.

Figure 5.3 disaggregated the extent of leave taking by the leave categories (excluding permanent incapacity, occupational injuries and adoption because they constituted a very small percentage of leave taken) and analysed the patterns by gender.

Figure 5.3: Pattern of leave takers by gender, from PERSAL data by instance

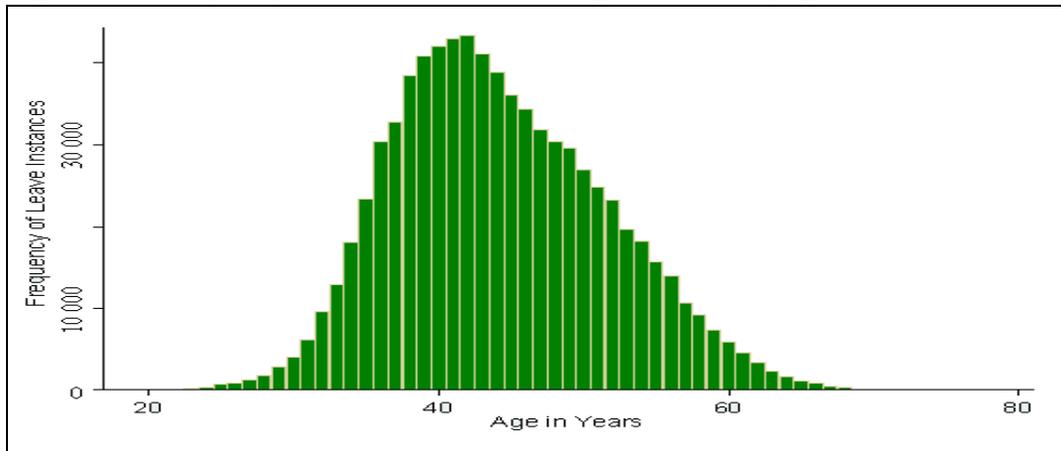


Again in each of the leave categories, with the obvious exception of maternity, the proportion of leave taken by males and females mirrors the gender profile of the educator labour force. In South Africa there is no gender difference in the pattern of leave taking and gender is not a determinant of leave taking.

By age

In high income countries teachers with the least or most experience were absent less often, on average, than teachers with intermediate levels of experience – thus younger and older teachers were away the least. The analysis of the frequency of leave taking instances in South Africa, by age, is represented in the histogram in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4: Frequency of PERSAL leave taking instances, by age

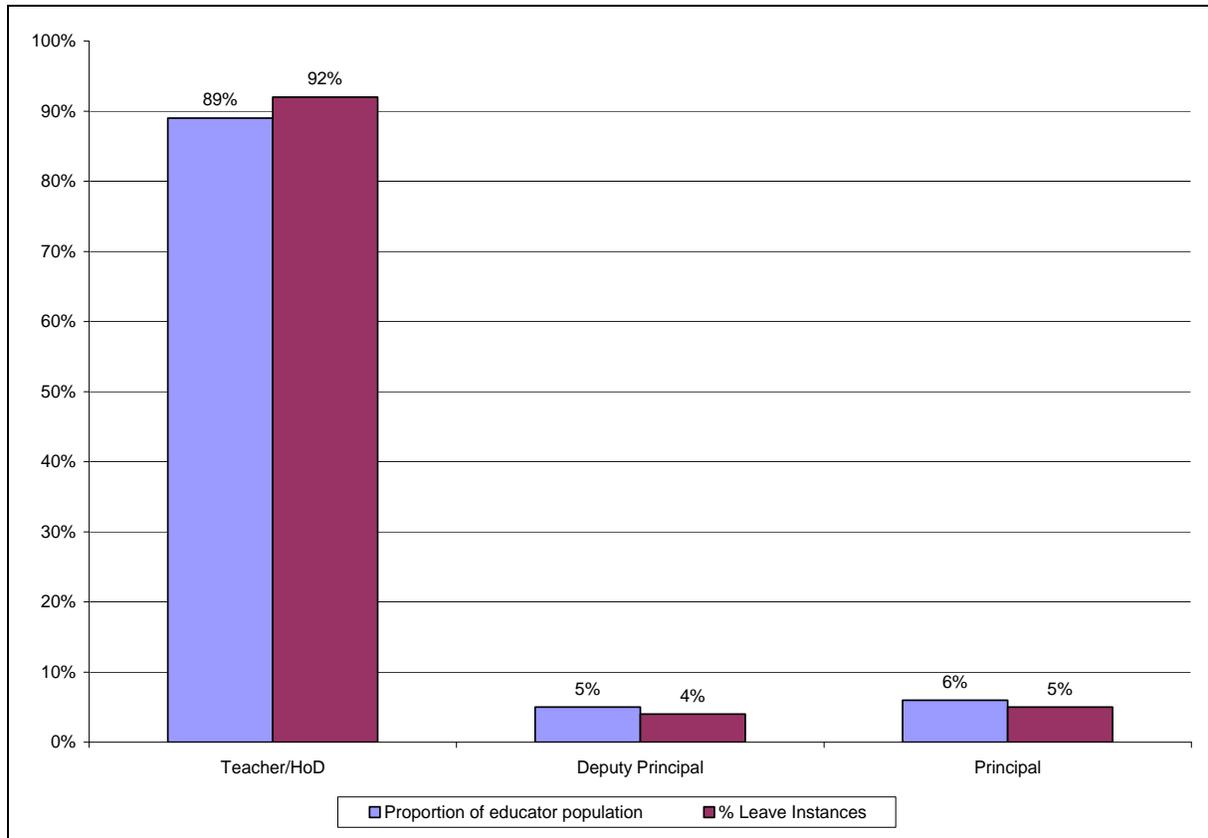


The highest frequency of leave taking is from educators between the ages of 35 to 50 years. Arends (2007) calculated the age profile of South African educators and found that 80% of educators are between the ages of 31 to 50 years; 5.5% of educators less than 30 years and 15% of educators are older than 51 years. The frequency of leave taking, by age, closely mirrors the distribution of age of the population of educators. Thus age does not seem to be a determinant of leave taking.

By rank

In high income countries teachers with the least or most experience were absent less often, on average, than teachers with intermediate levels of experience. In low income countries, the more powerful teachers are absent more often than lower ranking teachers. This study analysed the extent of leave taking, by instances and days, for the ranks identified in the PERSAL dataset, namely teacher, deputy-principal and principal. Figure 5.5 describes the pattern of instances of leave taking in 2005, by rank of levels of educators in 2005.

Figure 5.5: Patterns of PERSAL leave instances by rank level of educators, in 2005 from PERSAL



In 2005, 77% of the educators in public ordinary schools were categorised as teachers, 12% were Heads of Department, 5% were deputy-principals and 6% were principals (Arends, 2007). Thus 89% of teachers and heads of department constituted 92% of all leave instances; 5% of deputy principals constituted 4% of leave instances and 6% of principals constituted 5% of leave instances. The extent of leave taking mirrors the proportion of educators at the different rank levels. The pattern of educator leave taking in South Africa is different from the pattern in low income countries where it was found those in power positions have a higher absence rate.

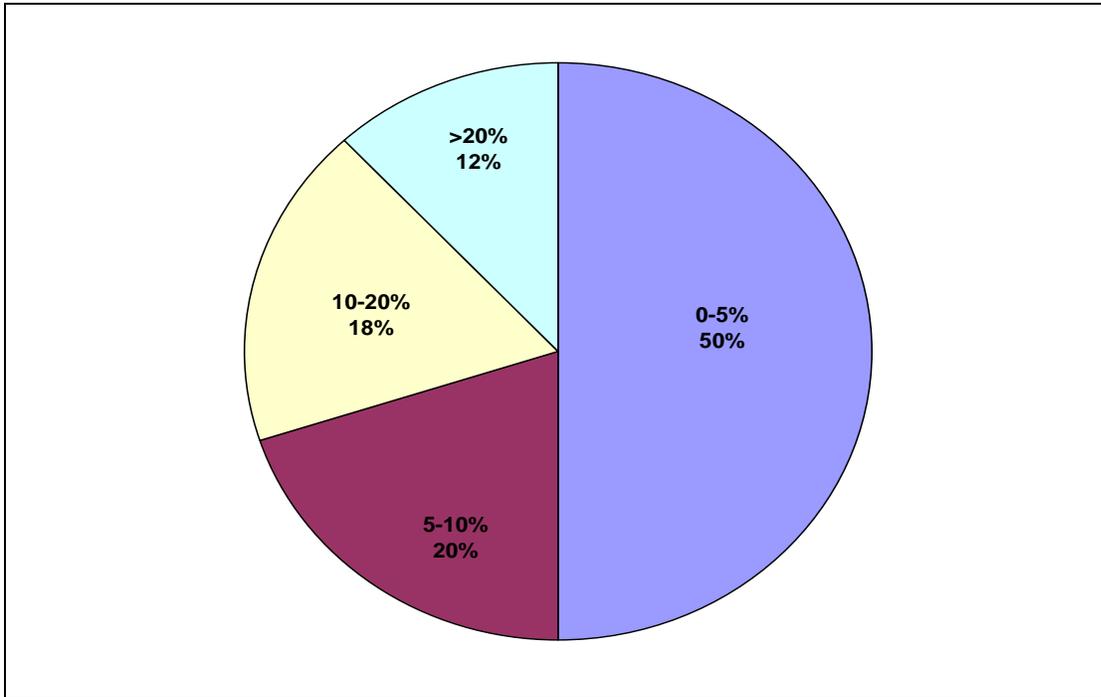
5.3.2 School level analysis: school leave rates, school size and phase level of school

The PERSAL and 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools datasets were analysed to provide school level analyses.

School leave rates

The 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools dataset was analysed to calculate the school leave rates. Given that all schools did not keep reliable administrative records, the leave rates reported could at best be called a conservative estimate. The approximate overall conservative profile of educator leave rate in the country is that half the schools have a leave rate of less than 5%; 20% have a leave rate of between 5% and 10%; 18% have a leave rate between 10-20% and 12% have a leave rate of over 20%.

Figure 5.6: Frequency of school leave rates from 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools dataset



Thus, our conservative estimate is that for 70% of schools the leave rate of the day of the data collection was less than 10%. The concern is in the 30% of schools which have a leave rate of over 10%. A greater concern is the 12% of the schools, where over 20% of educators were not in school on the day of the survey.

By school size

The rate of PERSAL recorded leave for each school was calculated and this was linked to the school size. We were successful in establishing complete datasets for Western Cape and Free State, and given that they have more reliable system of PERSAL recorded leave, were able to examine the relationship between leave rates and school size. It is a limitation that we did not have complete datasets for the nine provinces, but the analysis for Free State and Western Cape provinces points to the national patterns. We present a series of graphs (Figures 5.7 to 5.8) plotting the mean school sizes and the school leave rates for two provinces.

Figure 5.7: Mean PERSAL school leave rate by school size - Free State

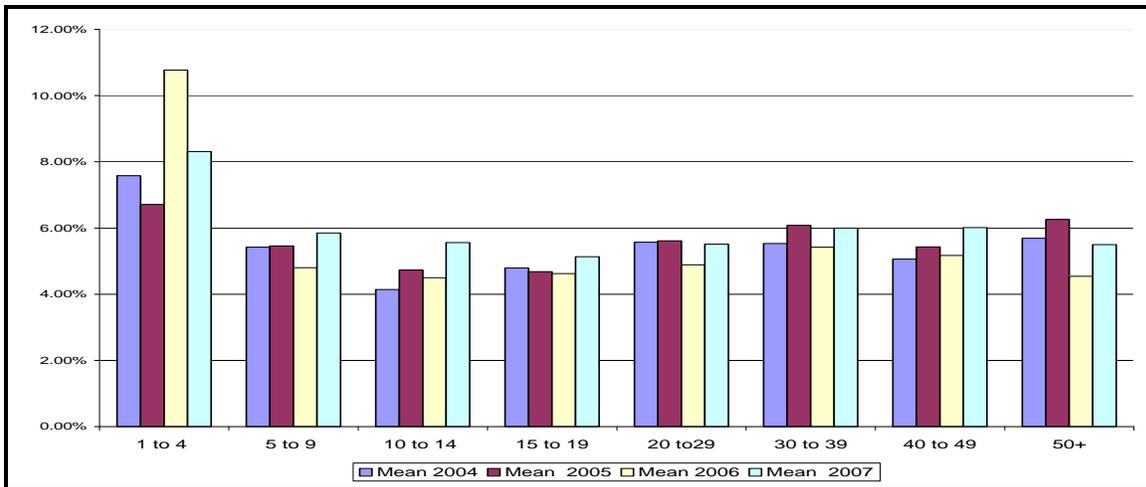
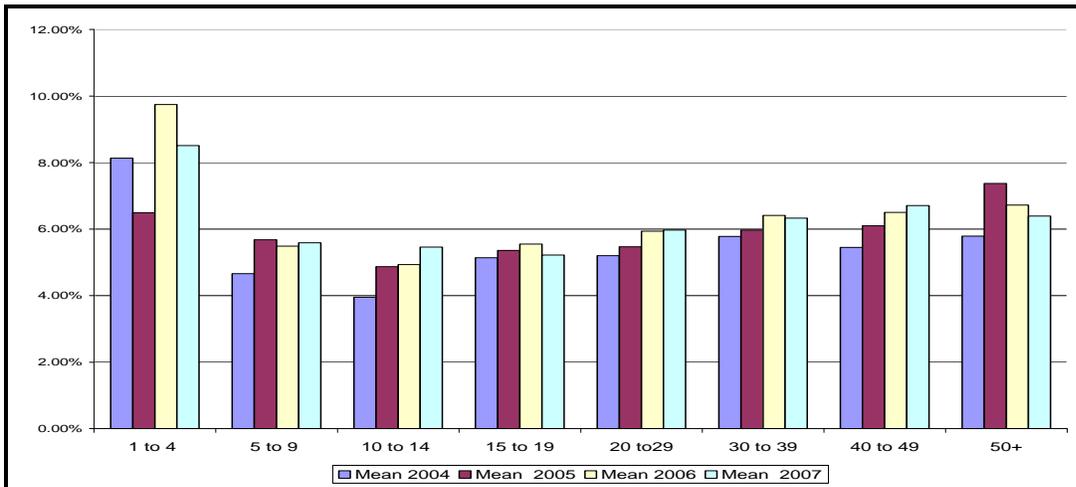


Figure 5.8 : Mean PERSAL school leave rate by school size - Western Cape

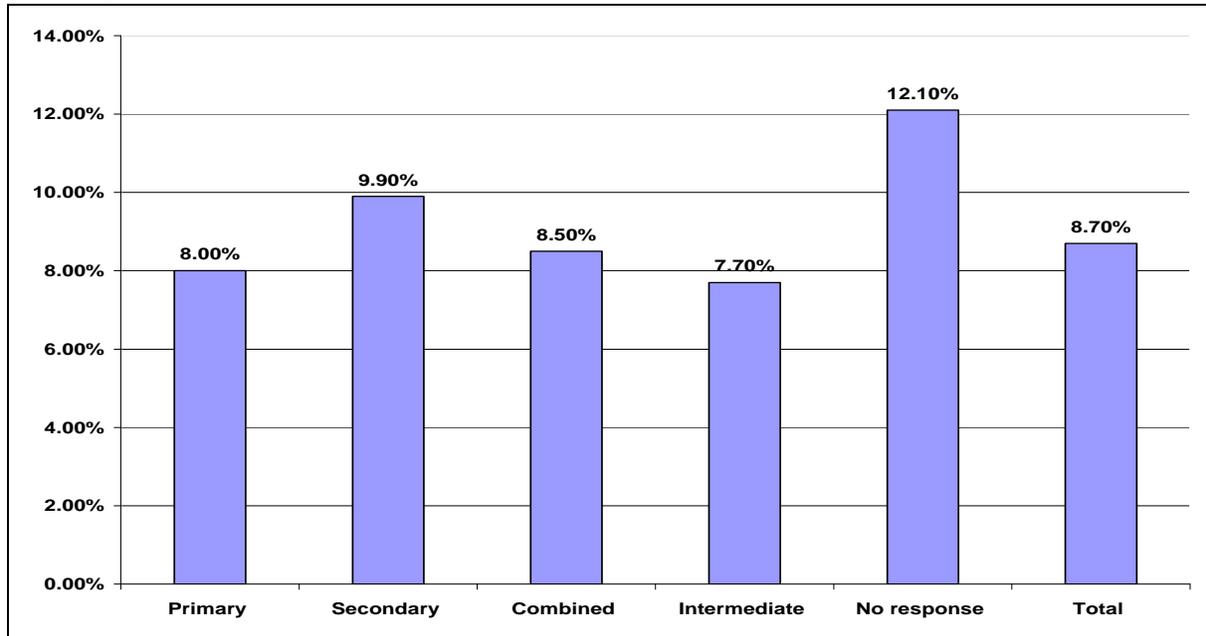


The mean school leave rates do not show high variations across the years. In general, school leave rates are highest for very small schools (1 to 4 educators); lower for schools with 5 to 19 educators and increasing slightly for schools with more than 20 educators. In the very small schools, a single educator being away from school has a major impact of loss of instructional time for learners. In bigger schools (more than 20 educators) it would seem that the culture of school allows for higher levels of leave taking and in bigger schools there needs to be higher levels of monitoring to reduce leave taking.

By phase level of school

In the 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools, schools categorized themselves as primary, secondary, intermediate or combined schools. The leave rates were calculated for each of the school types, from the data of who was present on the day of the field visit.

Figure 5.9: Educator leave rates, by type of school, from 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools



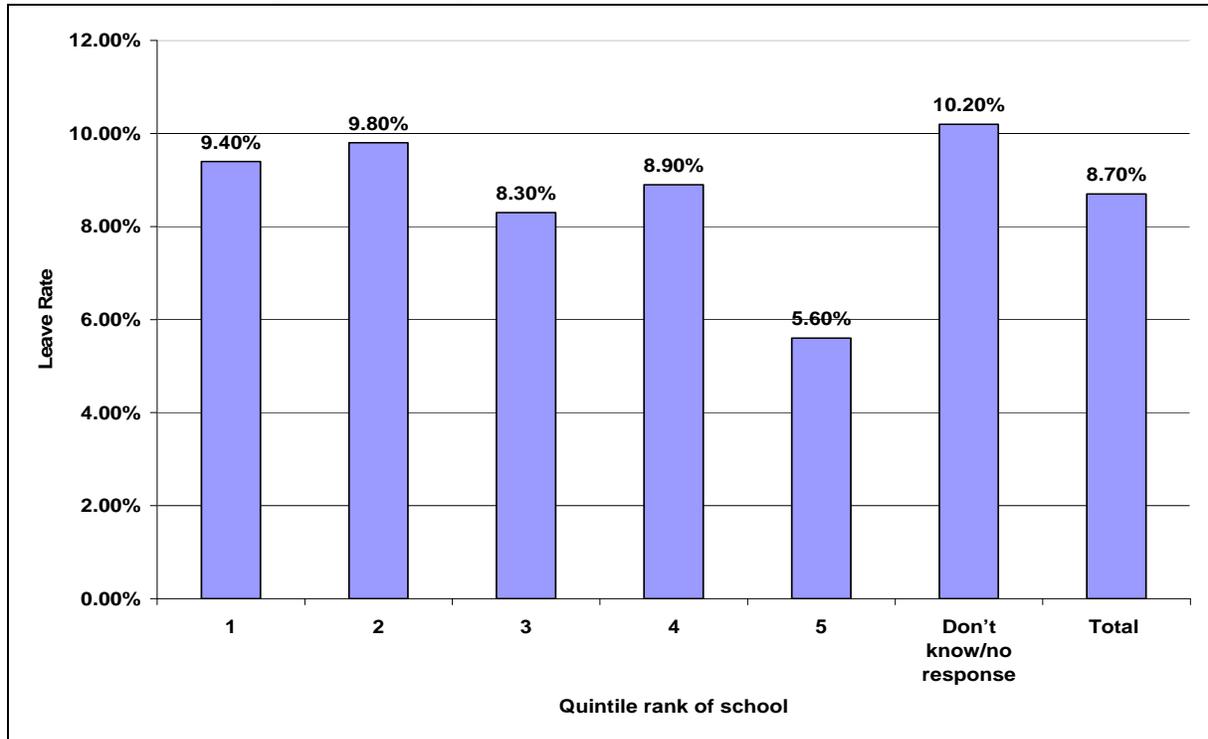
Secondary schools seem to have higher leave rates than primary schools, followed by combined schools, as shown in Figure 5.9. The international set of studies provides figures for primary schools and thus we are unable to compare these figures against the international trends. However, instruction in secondary schools is more specialised, requires expert knowledge and is not easy to be compensated for by the home. Therefore the higher leave rates at secondary schools will have a higher negative impact on instructional time and learning outcomes for learners.

5.3.3 Socio-environmental contexts

The literature review pointed to the impact of poverty as a determinant of teacher absence in LICs. Poverty is linked to poor working conditions in school and children (and teachers) living in low income households and poor home conditions. This section will examine the effect of poverty through an analysis of the quintile rank of the school and the categorisation of the school by its ex-racial department. The poverty score of a school, or quintile rank, is based on the poverty level of the community in which it is located. This score is calculated using national census data, weighted household data on income dependency ratio (or unemployment rate), and the level of education of the community. (Chutgar & Kanjee, 2009). In South Africa, schools designated as House of Delegates and House of Assembly schools received a higher of resources from the state during the apartheid era and were generally located in higher income communities. Schools designated Department of Education and Training received the lowest resources from the state and were found in communities with very low household incomes.

The 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools dataset was disaggregated by the quintile ranking of school (Figure 5.10) and the leave rate for educators (based on those present on the day of the field visit) for the school was calculated.

Figure 5.10: Educator absence rates, by school quintile ranking, from 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit in public ordinary schools



Schools in the poorest areas have higher absence rates than schools in the most affluent areas. Potential reasons for this pattern could be the larger travel distances required from educators, insufficiency of transport arrangements, larger dissatisfaction with working conditions, poorer discipline and levels of functioning and control in schools. This finding corroborates the international literature that in areas of low income and poor school working conditions the rate of educator absence is higher. This result is also corroborated by the analysis of educator leave on the day of our field visit to schools (Reddy *et al.*, 2010). Analysis of the 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools dataset categorised as either no-fee (most under-resourced schools) or charging fees, corroborates the link between poverty levels and educator absence. Schools in low household-income areas (no-fee schools), have an absence rate of 9.3%, compared to the 8.3% for schools who charge fees. This finding largely corroborates the previous one indicating higher absence rates for educators from Quintile 1 and 2 schools, again illustrating the impact of poverty levels and school working conditions.

We also examined the relationship between the average PERSAL school leave rates and the quintile rank of the school for the three provinces (Free State and Western Cape who recorded the highest leave rates and KwaZulu-Natal which recorded a low rate of leave). Figures 5.11 to 5.13 reflect the patterns.

Figure 5.11: Rates of PERSAL recorded school leave, for Free State, by quintile rank

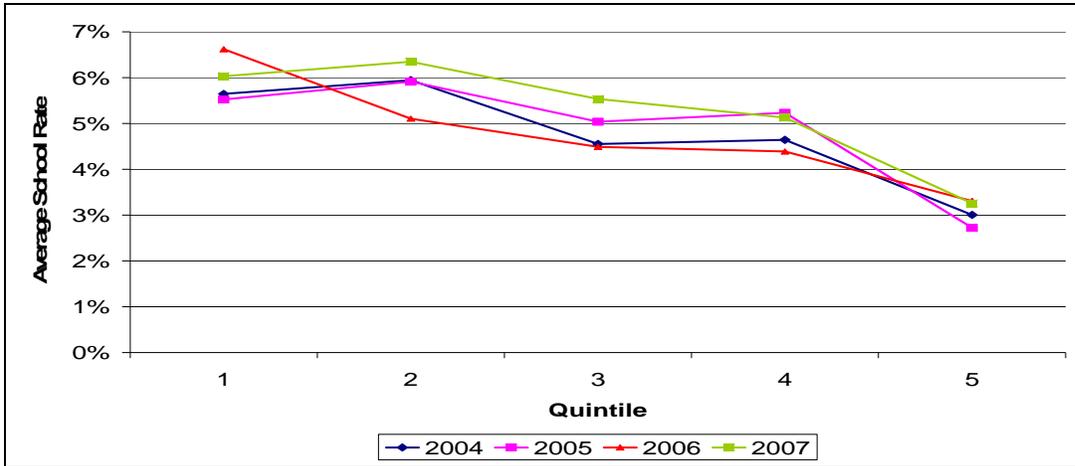


Figure 5.12: Rates of PERSAL recorded school leave, for Western Cape, by quintile rank

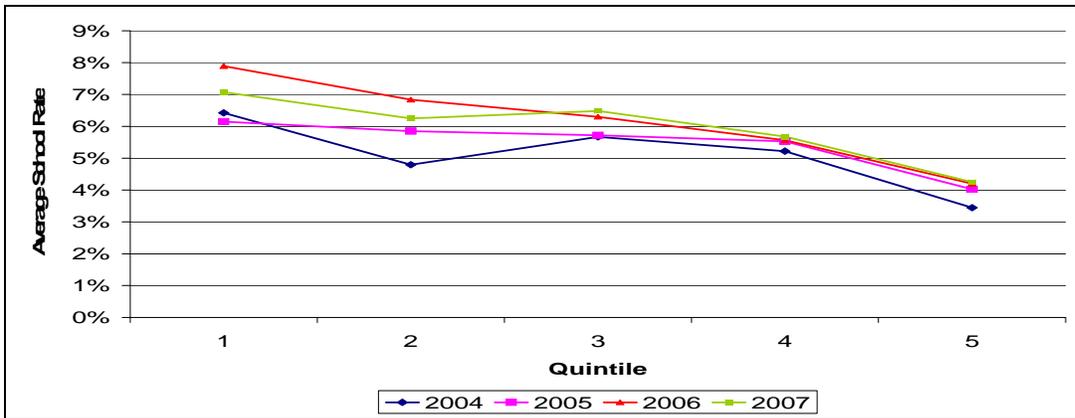
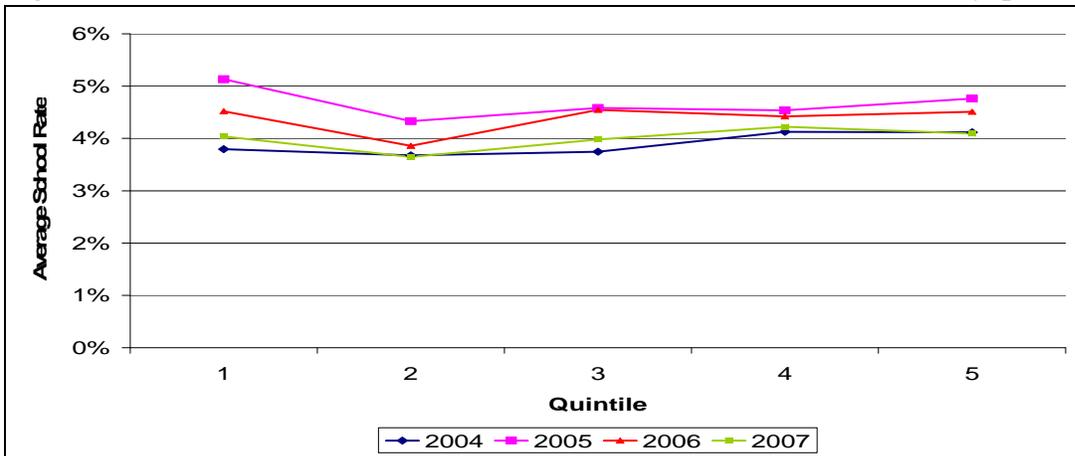


Figure 5.13: Rates of PERSAL recorded school leave, for KwaZulu-Natal, by quintile rank



The Western Cape and Free State provinces had higher PERSAL recorded rates of leave – suggesting that the system of leave recording was better in these provinces. In both the provinces, the schools with the lower quintile ranking (schools in lower income areas) had higher rates of recorded leave than schools with a higher quintile ranking (schools in higher income areas). In

KwaZulu-Natal, where the PERSAL recorded leave rate is lower, implying that not all leave taken was recorded on the PERSAL system, we see that the average school leave rate across the different quintile ranks are similar.

We categorised the schools in the PERSAL dataset into the departments they were categorised in during the apartheid administration⁴⁷. This provides a categorisation by socio-economic status and historical legacy of the schools and provides an indication of the geographical area in which they are located⁴⁸. Generally the schools classified as ex-Department of Education and Training for African learners would have received the lowest funding from the state and be located in areas with the lowest household income. Schools classified as ex-House of Assembly historically received the highest funding from the state and are located in areas with higher household incomes. Figures 5.14 to 5.16 illustrate the extent of leave in schools from different historical backgrounds.

Figure 5.14: PERSAL School leave rates by ex-department, for Free State, from 2004 to 2007

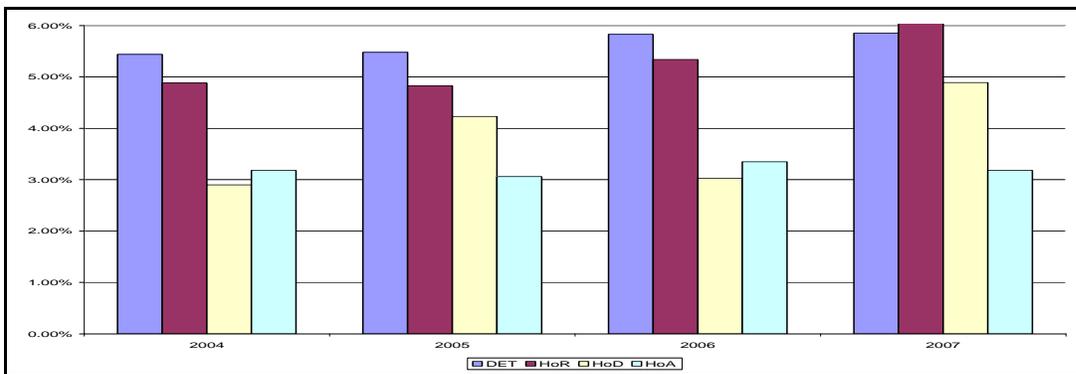
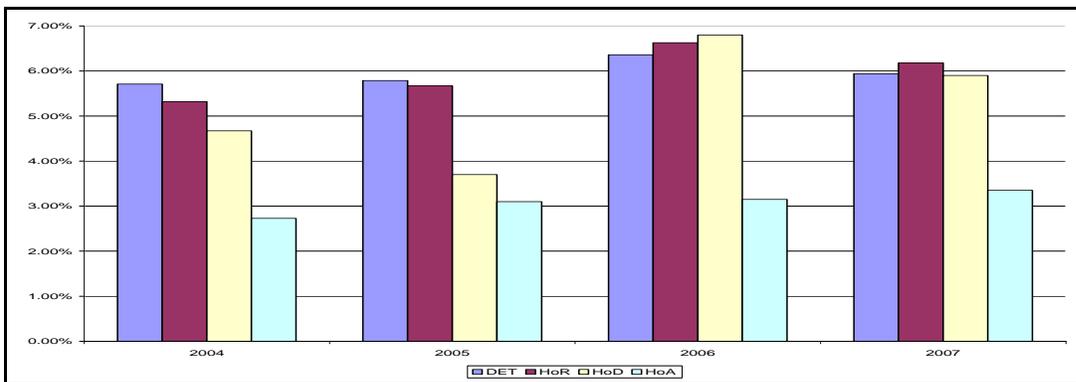


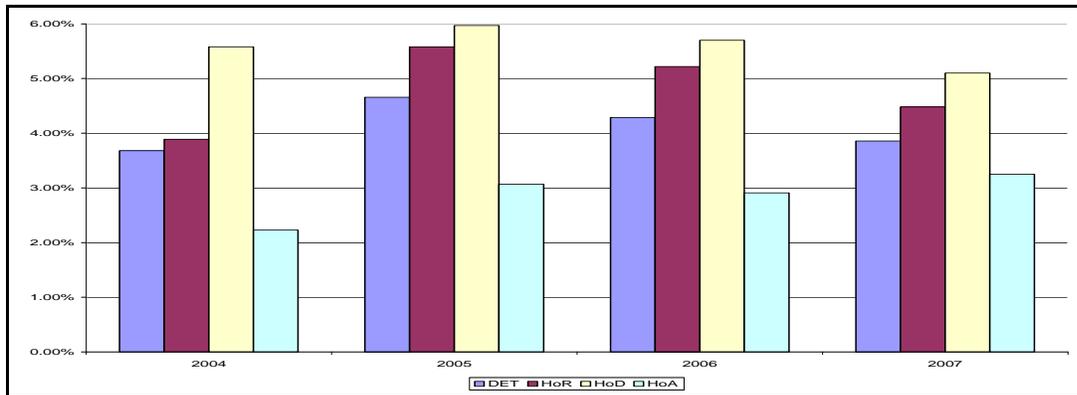
Figure 5.15: PERSAL School leave rates by ex-department, for Western Cape, from 2004 to 2007



⁴⁷ In this categorisation, schools that were for African students (DET/ homelands) are classified as DET

⁴⁸ There are schools for which we could not determine their categories and that we called 'unknown', and schools who were built post-'94 and they were categorised as 'new'.

Figure 5.16: PERSAL School leave rates by ex-department, for KwaZulu-Natal, from 2004 to 2007



Again, because the Western Cape and Free State provinces have better PERSAL recording systems the patterns are clearer. In these provinces, the ex-Department of Education and Training and ex-House of Representatives schools recorded higher rates of recorded leave than ex-House of Assembly and ex-House of Delegates schools. A similar result was obtained in the analysis of the HSRC recording of absence rates during the field visit (Reddy, *et al*, 2010). In KwaZulu-Natal, where there is poorer recording of leave on PERSAL systems, the analysis shows surprisingly that the ex-House of Delegates and ex-House of Representatives schools record higher leave rates than the ex-Department of Education and Training schools. Coupling this with the provincial absence rates recorded in the 2008 Khulisa Consortium audit of ordinary schools study, it would suggest that there is higher under-reporting and under-recording of leave in ex-Department of Education and Training schools.

5.4 Timing of leave taking

The PERSAL datasets were used to analyse the timing of leave taking using the methodology of the calendar of leave. This will be corroborated with data from our fieldwork in this study.

Calendar of leave

From the PERSAL data we created a calendar of leave days taken for the months of data received. The analysis of these “calendars” provides further insight into the daily, weekly and monthly patterns of leave, as well as the underlying trends in the system from 2004 to 2007⁴⁹. We present and analyse the calendar in two forms. The first calendar records the instances of every length (excluding maternity and discounting) of leave recorded for each day of the month. The second calendar reports on instances of leave which are of a single day in length. The calendar reports the number of leave days recorded on any observed day within our eight ‘snapshot’ months. Tables 4.5 and 4.6 represent the calendars for South Africa for **instances of all length of leave** and **one day instances** respectively. In these calendars, the red blocks are the days of highest leave recorded; the blue blocks are the second highest days recorded. The 9th of August was a public holiday.

⁴⁹ Maternity leave was excluded from these calculations

Within our eight periods the range of recorded leave days, **for all instances of leave of absence** for South Africa, on any particular day, ranged from 8 335 to 14 030 days. The patterns from the calendar representation of leave shows that Fridays record the highest number of leave days. Of the 28 full weeks⁵⁰ of data, in 26 weeks the highest number of leave days taken is on a Friday. The second highest frequency of recorded leave days is Thursday (of the 28 full weeks, Thursday is observed 19 times as exhibiting the second highest frequency). The range of recorded leave days, **for one day instances** for South Africa, on any particular day (within our eight periods) ranged from 1 398 to 4 606 days. Analysis of the calendar representation of the one day leave instances shows that the highest number of recorded days of leave in a week is a Friday (of the 28 full weeks of data, 21 weeks observed that the highest recorded leave is on a Friday).

⁵⁰ That is, we have complete PERSAL data for all five days in that week.

Table 5.4: Calendar representation of one day instances of PERSAL leave

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri		Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri		
2	3	4	5	6	February 2004	2	3	4	5	6	August 2004	SOUTH AFRICA ~ ONE DAY
	1995	1935	1793	2961		4066	2541	2010	1991	4404		
9	10	11	12	13		9	10	11	12	13		
2581	1569	1398	1401	2710		0	3356	1805	1507	2901		
16	17	18	19	20		16	17	18	19	20		
2408	1503	1427	1505	3099		2610	1649	1536	1447	3145		
23	24	25	26	27		23	24	25	26	27		
2774	1921	1944	1753	3781	2457	1714	1437	1983	2895			
					30	31						
					2598	1431						
	1	2	3	4	February 2005	1	2	3	4	5	August 2005	SOUTH AFRICA ~ ONE DAY
	2729	2410	2180	3926		4606	2569	2151	2065	4340		
7	8	9	10	11		8	9	10	11	12		
3209	2041	2021	2150	3786		578	1	2739	1647	3032		
14	15	16	17	18		15	16	17	18	19		
3047	2361	2123	1941	3218		3081	1976	1725	1772	3523		
21	22	23	24	25		22	23	24	25	26		
2888	1791	1683	1581	3597	3079	1777	1600	1575	3602			
28					29	30	31					
3871					3064	1816	1693					
		1	2	3	February 2006		1	2	3	4	August 2006	SOUTH AFRICA ~ ONE DAY
		2169	1994	3735			2755	2470	2330	4230		
6	7	8	9	10		7	8	9	10	11		
3351	2032	2005	1948	3228		3456	2727	0	2476	3378		
13	14	15	16	17		14	15	16	17	18		
2759	1603	1881	1732	3103		2817	1990	1999	1737	3737		
20	21	22	23	24		21	22	23	24	25		
2884	1826	1752	1567	3090	3026	1984	1799	1851	3830			
27	28				28	29	30	31				
2805	2355				3202	1760	1873	1854				
			1	2	February 2007			1	2	3	August 2007	SOUTH AFRICA ~ ONE DAY
			2118	3927				2433	2236	4185		
5	6	7	8	9		6	7	8	9	10		
3446	2214	2139	1966	3346		3473	1961	2809	1	719		
12	13	14	15	16		13	14	15	16	17		
2914	1958	1635	1861	3621		3643	1960	1937	1977	3949		
19	20	21	22	23		20	21	22	23	24		
2831	1822	1860	1803	3537	3230	2115	1916	1950	4314			
26	27	28			27	28	29	30	31			
3169	1977	1976			3331	2201	1816	1955	3956			

If all leave taking was essential, each day of the week would have an equal probability of being chosen. It seems that there is higher leave taking on days preceding or immediately after the weekend. This suggests a degree of abuse of leave taking by educators. The analysis from our fieldwork for one day leave corroborated this finding. The educator leave rates by day of the research visits to schools was Monday at 10.7%; Tuesday at 5%, Wednesday at 6.6%, Thursday at 4.8% and Friday at 8.5%. Educators were more likely to be away from school on Mondays and Fridays. This is consistent with findings from international literature.

5.5. Reliability of PERSAL data

Section 4.7, the ‘path of the leave form’, outlines the route from the time an educator completes a leave form at school to the time it is captured on the PERSAL dataset. The calculation of the extent of leave from PERSAL data was much lower than the expected leave rates – this could be due to under-reporting by individuals at the school level or under-recording on the electronic system. During the school visits of this study, we delved into areas of challenge regarding the recording of leave data.

5.5.1 Comparisons of school documentation to captured PERSAL data

In our fieldwork in schools we recorded the names of educators (from the leave register) who had taken leave in August 2007. We attempted to identify these names in the PERSAL dataset to see if the records had been captured⁵¹. In undertaking this exercise, four caveats must be noted. Firstly, if a school had not recorded leave, those instances of leave would neither appear in school records nor in PERSAL. Secondly, if a school’s recording system was unsystematic, then some leave forms may have been submitted to the provincial authorities and not reflect in the school’s own records. Thirdly, problems with school identifier fields (“Paypoint” & “Component”) meant that linking school records and other information to PERSAL is problematic. Lastly, where school identifier fields are captured incorrectly, the educator would be untraceable on the PERSAL systems.

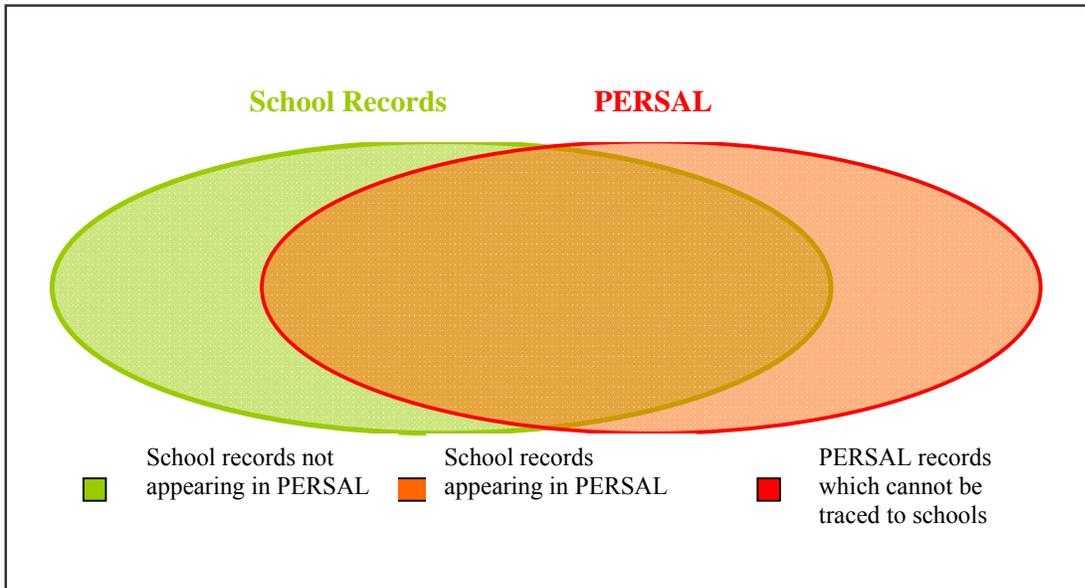
During the field visit we recorded 703 instances of times when an educator was not in school for August 2007⁵². Of these 703 instances; 540 (77%) instances were for leave taking; 125 (18%) were for other business and for 38 (5%) instances the reasons were unknown. We then tallied the number of instances of leave that reflected in PERSAL for the schools we had collected the data from. We found that three quarters of the instances – i.e. 402 of the 540 instances were recorded on PERSAL. We tried to locate the names of educators who had taken leave to the PERSAL dataset and were successful with 221 (41%) of those who should have been located in on the PERSAL dataset. We then worked backwards and listed the names of all educators who appeared in PERSAL for August 2007 and tried to locate these names in the school leave lists. We were able to locate 55% of the instances from PERSAL to the school.

⁵¹ Where available, identification occurred with cross confirmation of the following fields: surname, initials, gender, leave category, length of leave, and leave date/s.

⁵² In one school it was for February 2006.

In this analysis we found that there is leave which is recorded at school, but not found on the PERSAL records and there are PERSAL records of leave taking, but these records have not been kept at schools. This is illustrated in Figure 5.17. The ellipse to the left indicates school records of leave; the one to the right PERSAL records. If the system captured all forms submitted, there would be a single oval shape (of overlap). The non-overlapping area to the left represents leave forms not appearing in PERSAL, thus unrecorded leave. The non-overlapping area to the right indicates poor record-keeping in schools, where leave forms are submitted but no documentation remains at the school.

Figure 5.17: Tracing school leave (and absence) records to PERSAL



Based on the above analysis we concluded that the quality of the PERSAL leave data is questionable. This would be due to under-recording of submitted leave forms to PERSAL and we would estimate that a quarter of leave forms submitted is not captured on PERSAL. Secondly, a school’s own record system may be unsystematic, and some leave forms may have been submitted to the provincial authorities and not reflect in the school’s own records. Thirdly, there seems to be mis-capturing of records so that individual records may not be correct. Fourthly, this analysis is unable to comment on whether all leave takers completed a leave form at school.

5.6 Concluding comments

This chapter examined the extent and patterns of leave and absence using multiple sources information and juxtaposed this against the international and national literature relating to educator absence. Analysis of the 2008- Khulisa Consortium audit datasets and proxy calculations from other studies conservatively and optimistically estimate that the educator leave rate in South African public schools is in the 10-12% range. This figure includes those who took leave according to the prescribed leave measures and those who were away from school on official business. From PERSAL data we calculated that 0.5% of educators were on maternity leave. When an educator is on maternity leave, a substitute educator may be employed and this policy was successfully applied in schools. Therefore we conclude that, on average, between 9.5- 11.5% of educators are away from

school at any one time, and there might not be a substitute educator. This translates, on average, to 19 – 23 days a year of instructional time being lost by each educator.

A conservative analysis of the school level data suggests that half the schools have a leave rate of less than 5%; 20% have a leave rate of between 5% and 10%; 18% have a leave rate between 10-20% and 12% have a leave rate of over 20%. The concern is in the 30% of schools which have a leave rate of over 10%. A greater concern is the 12% of the schools, where over 20% of educators were not in school on the day of the announced survey.

There are variations in the extent of educator leave rates between provinces. There is a link between individual school leave rates and poverty levels of the community and schools. The poverty level of schools is determined by the quintile ranking of schools, ex-department categorization with African schools being the most poorly resourced and in areas of low income households. Leave rates are highest where the socio-environmental condition, like poverty, is the highest.

Just over three quarters of all leave instances recorded on the PERSAL system are of one or two days duration, that is, discretionary leave not requiring a medical certificate. Mondays and Fridays are the most popular discretionary leave days. The school principal is responsible for managing discretionary leave and potential misuses on Mondays and Fridays, but we did not find evidence that the 8-week rule⁵³ was applied in schools.

Analysis of PERSAL data calculates the national recorded leave rate between 3 to 4%, which is far less than the estimated leave rate. The under-recording on the PERSAL system may be due to educators not completing leave forms at school or leave forms are completed but not captured onto the electronic system. Comparing school leave records and PERSAL records, show that around 25% of submitted leave records were not recorded on PERSAL. In addition, mis-capturing onto the PERSAL system leads to incorrect balances for individuals.

The conservatively estimated leave rate of 10 - 12% in South Africa is higher than the rate in high income countries, but lower than the rate in many low income countries, calculated in the WBNAS. However, the first concern would be in the almost one third of schools which have a leave rate of over 10%, and one must first set up intervention strategies to target these schools to reduce the leave rates. To reduce leave taking, another strategic area to intervene in is to reduce the number of discretionary leave taking days, especially on Mondays and Fridays.

⁵³ An employee who has been away from school on more than two occasions within 8 weeks may be required to provide a medical certificate as proof of incapacity.

CHAPTER 6

REASONS FOR AND EFFECTS OF TAKING LEAVE

6.1 Introduction

International studies on teacher leave and absence contributed knowledge about reasons for leave taking in high-income countries (HICs) and low-income countries (LICs). As pointed out in Chapter 3, analysis of reasons for teacher⁵⁴ absence across different countries shows that the main reason for teacher absence is illness. In general short-term personal illness is the most common reason for absence; this was generally followed by medium-term illness, death in the family, maternity and critical family issues. However, there were differences in high-income countries (HICs) and low-income countries (LICs) to the reasons for teachers' absence:

- illness is the most common reason for teacher absence in HICs. In LICs, there is high absence rate from the school due to the Principal and teachers being taken away from the classroom and school for official business, more so in remote schools;
- in HICs women were more likely to stay home to care for a sick child or dependent adult than were men; teachers with the least or most experience were absent less often. In LICs senior teachers took most leave; men were absent more often than women; head teachers (or principal) were absent more often than teachers; and better educated teachers appeared to be absent more frequently.
- In HICs commuting distances were related to higher absence rates, due to bad weather and other obstacles. In LICs commuting was linked to poverty issues, where teachers earned more than others in the community and stayed a distance away from the community, and contributing to increased levels of leave taking.
- school climate, school ethos and strength of leadership had an impact on teacher absence through job satisfaction and recognition which facilitated higher attendance. Poverty affected teacher absence (in LICs) as a result of poor working conditions, limited school infrastructure, and living in communities with limited amenities and poor conditions.

There have not been specific studies related to reasons for educator absence from schools in South Africa. However we could use other evaluation studies to provide an indication of reasons for absence and a loss of teaching time. A localised study was undertaken early in this decade in the George area in the Southern Cape among 132 secondary-school educators (from five randomly selected schools with high resignation rates) about the extent and causes of stress among educators. Olivier and Venter (2003) speculated about the potential of stress and burn-out in forcing educators to take high volumes of sick leave (or quit the profession). They found that alcohol and drug abuse, depression, frustration, hypertension and other serious physical conditions, such as heart disease contributed to the extent of leave taking. Chisholm *et al* (2005) related a chain of circumstances that would impact negatively on educator attendance in rural areas. To start with, in these areas there could be greater proportions of poorly educated educators, for whom teaching may not have been their first-choice career. Next, given these educators' slightly higher earning capacity compared to

⁵⁴ We will use the terminology as used in the literature for international studies. For South Africa we would refer to either teachers or educators.

people living within these communities, they would be staying on average 36 kilometres from their school. According to Chisholm *et al.* (2005) the perception and/or reality of high workload, partly exacerbated by the introduction of new curriculum policies and school systems, and the subsequent levels of stress, burn-out and related dissatisfaction, are said to contribute to high (rising) levels of educator absence, apart from (intended) resignations, under-performance and substance abuse.

To understand leave taking in South Africa we analysed the PERSAL data for reasons of leave taking and in our fieldwork to 50 schools, probed reasons for absence from schools. Although the PERSAL data is incomplete this analysis does provide us with indicative patterns of the reasons why leave was taken. In our fieldwork we probed these reasons further.

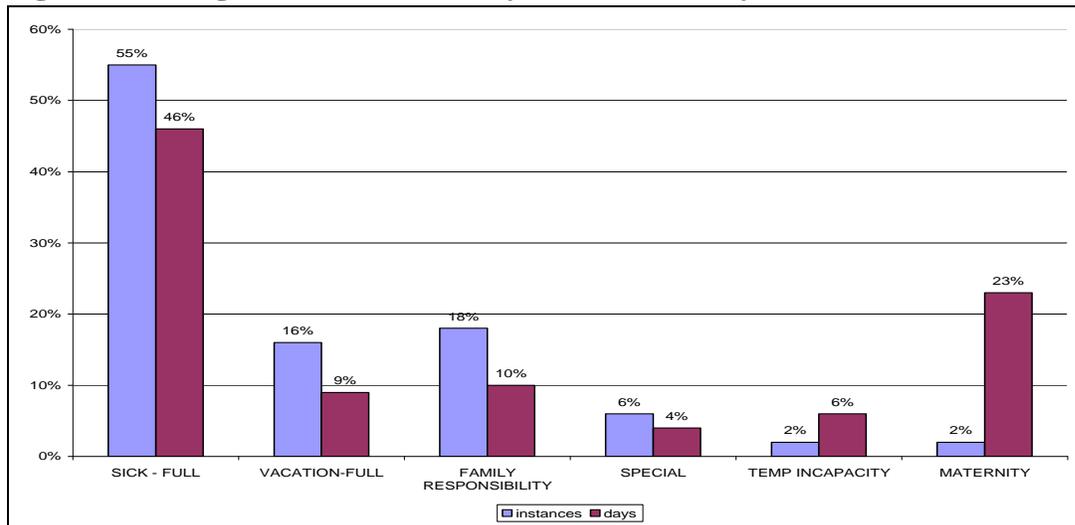
6.2 Reasons for leave taking

From PERSAL analysis

When educators complete a leave form at school, they are provided with the categories of leave and asked to indicate the category of their leave (annual leave, normal sick leave, temporary disability, permanent disability, leave for occupational injuries and diseases (specify), adoption leave, family responsibility leave (provide evidence); special leave (specify), leave for union office bearers, unpaid leave, maternity leave.

We analysed the PERSAL dataset, according to the categories on the leave form for the reasons that educators took leave. Figure 6.1 plots the proportion of leave taken in the different categories, by instance and days. Since 1.3% of the leave instances and 2% of days were taken for the categories of Adoption, Leave without pay, Occupational Injury, Permanent incapacity, shop steward/ office bearer we excluded these categories from the graph below.

Figure 6.1: Categories of leave taken, by instances and days



The main reason for the recorded leave is sickness. Leave attributed to (full-pay) sick leave constituted 55% of the instances and 46% of days of educator leave, aggregated across the eight months. The other main categories of recorded leave are family responsibility (18% of instances and 10% of days taken), vacation (16% of instances and 9% of days taken) and special leave (6% of instances and 4% of days taken). From the graph we see that maternity leave constitutes 2% of

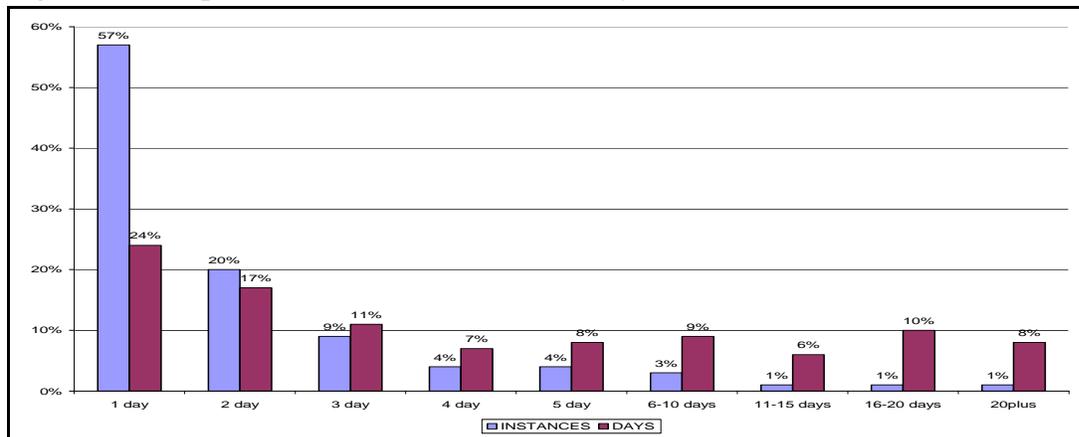
instances and 23% of the days taken, strongly suggesting that there is an under-recording of leave. If we remove maternity leave from the dataset, the percentage of days taken for sick leave is 60%, for family responsibility is 13%, for vacation is 12% and for temporary incapacity is 8%.

Leave applications for sick leave of three or more days, requires the applicant to provide a medical certificate. We found that some of these fields were recorded in the PERSAL dataset. The data capturer would have inputted the reason given on a medical certificate and this has not been coded, thus we cannot meaningfully analyse the reasons. At a glance, the main reasons given for sick leave were flu, depression and stress related. The main reason provided for temporary incapacity was depression.

Length of leave: instances and days of leave

We further examined the patterns of leave by analysing the length of each instance of leave. An instance is defined as each time a person took leave; each instance could be of different time lengths. Figure 4.17 represents the proportion of the length of the instances and the days of leave⁵⁵ (this table does not include maternity leave). For more detailed information please refer to the Phase I report(Reddy *et al*, 2010).

Figure 6.2: Proportion of leave instances and days of leave recorded



Just over three quarters of leave instances (77%) were of one or two days in length. The leave of one or two days in length constitutes 41% of all leave of absence days recorded. This is leave that does not require any certificate to be provided – i.e. discretionary leave. Thus only a quarter of all instances require documentation related to leave taking.

What do schools say about reasons for leave taking?

Educators were interviewed to determine the reasons for taking leave in the school. Most educators ranked sick leave as the most common reason for educator leave taking in schools. Such leave would typically be taken for reasons of seasonal flu and colds, but could often be related to stress levels. Severe chronic conditions, operations and accidents were not seen to occur very frequently. However, as noted elsewhere, chronic illness was identified as a problem in that a few individual

⁵⁵ That is days of recorded leave in the month. Furthermore, the days recorded are those which fell in one of the snapshot months, so leave instances which are truncated by month end will appear as shorter leave instances than actual fact.

educators tended to take most leave and presented the most problems in terms of excessive leave taking in schools.

The next category of leave most taken by educators varied across provinces, and was either leave for urgent private matters or family responsibility leave. Educators would apply for family responsibility leave to take a child, say to register at university or to a graduation ceremony, or for looking after (or taking to a doctor) a close family member who is ill or if an educators life partner or spouse gives birth. According to PAM and BCEA, family responsibility leave may only be taken when a child or spouse is sick or when there is death in the immediate family. Some principals apply this provision very strictly, but others seemed to have treated it more loosely. Private matters is not a category on the leave form, but educators indicated that they applied for leave for matters such as renewal of car licences or business at municipalities during office hours for domestic arrangements pertaining to electricity and water, etc. Again, these reasons do not fall under the category of urgent private affairs, which is normally defined as being absent due to an **unforeseen urgent** matter, which would cause financial or personal damage if the educator does not attend to it. In schools where the policy is applied correctly, educators would apply for leave under the category of “sick leave” to attend to matters such as those mentioned above. As a result, it appears as if sick leave is used as a category of leave, especially for one or two days in length, to attend to private matters.

With family responsibility leave, most educators interviewed were dissatisfied with the number of days allocated, suggesting that family responsibility tends to be unplanned and unpredictable in terms of the length of time an individual educator may need to fulfil his/her responsibilities, particularly pertaining to funerals. One principal of a school indicated:

Family responsibility leave is a problem. The Act says it must be taken when a spouse/child passes away or is sick. It provides five days if a spouse passes away. Educators want to take leave when their parents are sick.

Geographic location and distances travelled to school by both educators and learners also had a negative impact on educator leave taking. For example, the following two vignettes, constructed from interviews and observations in different schools, illustrate:

There seems to be very unique interactions between vast travel distances for teachers (half of the 14 stay 75 km away (because there is no suitable or not enough accommodation at or close to the school – explanation added by authors), costing them R1 500 per month in fuel alone and school attendance/leave taking. Also, learners walk very far. Coupled with being a small school with high teaching loads by virtue of teachers having to cover many learning areas and grades, stress, depression, fatigue and burnout always linger, propelling the need upwards to take leave to recuperate. There is an added load for teachers when a teacher is away. (Provision is often made only for the principal and some educators to stay on the school premises – explanation added by authors.)

Learners in this case often walk two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon to cover the 10-15 km one-way. When linked to a small staff of five, of which four form a drive

club to town (101 km away), even doctor's visits, or car breakdown and/or service becomes a reason for taking leave (or being absent from school).

6.3. Leave and absence from classrooms on official business

During our October 2009 fieldwork, in our small sample of schools, respondents were asked about reasons for general absence from school and from teaching in the classroom other than formal leave. Curriculum workshops and other training by the various offices of the Department of Education were rated as the main reason for educator leave taking. In particular, some principals and other members of the SMT reported being heavily burdened with organised management courses. This, they felt, had a negative effect on teaching and learning, particularly in small schools where principals, and other SMT members, tended to have an almost full teaching load. Lectures linked to the Advanced Certificate in Education qualification at university often took up to two days at a time, for weeks on end, and resulted in the affected staff being away to attend these lectures for many days in a year, losing valuable teaching time in schools (e.g., in Gauteng linked to the Matthew Goniwe Leadership course).

Among educators, workshops for the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and related training were identified as the main reason for official absences from school. This finding is corroborated by the finding of the Task Team on Review of the Implementation of the national Curriculum Statement (personal communication). In general the memorandum of understanding between district offices and schools, and with unions, appeared to be followed, and such events (if not in the winter holidays, for instance) were held after school, at most as early as 13:00. In rural areas, though, travel sometimes took staff away from school for a further two or three hours either way. As the research team learned, this agreement was not adhered to in a few cases and as one principal complained:

Workshops are a problem. It happens very often. Workshops are supposed to happen from 14:00 to 16:00, but educators leave school at 08:00. It is four teachers for two days and then another four teachers for another two days. It paralyses everything at the school, especially the National Curriculum Statement (NCS).

This is echoed by the experiences at another small, rural school:

There are a number of subject related workshops. Each directorate organizes workshops – e.g. content areas, gender, HIV/AIDS. For small schools a single teacher may have to attend a number of workshops – hence loss of teaching time. For example, by end of term 3, a teacher could lose 10 days on official business, including moderation of CASS marks. As a Principal I have missed around 30 days because I had to attend to a number of workshops. We need to have a serious look at the attendance of official business.

According to the Educator Workload provisions, in addition to their teaching responsibilities, educators may be required to spend 80 hours on professional development activities. This could take place during school holidays or weekends. In the case of professional development programmes taking place during the school holiday, the provincial department of education must

give at least one term's notice. In the Western Cape, these 80 hours for professional development activities take place during the July holidays. In many other provinces, principals and teachers seem unaware of this provision, and assume that workshops occurring within the holidays would be in their annual leave and they should be reimbursed for attending these workshops.

The second most common reason identified for 'official' educator absence from schools was union activity. Again this was reported as occurring mostly at the frequency of one afternoon (from 12:00 or 13:00) per quarter, but would increase depending on whether someone was a site steward, or part of branch, regional or other management. In addition in rural areas where transport was a challenge, educators had to leave earlier than 12h00 to ensure that they reach the meeting venue on time.

This was followed by sports, religions and cultural activities, with schools, especially in rural areas, reporting cancelling classes or closing schools to attend sports or cultural meetings. While this, with off-site education excursions, could mostly be seen as educational activities (the holistic development of the learner), in some instances educators would also be absent as part of their participation in coaching, training, refereeing or serving as officials, etc. A delicate balance then pertains to such activities. While some teaching time may be lost, more so during the athletics season, academic or potentially other related benefits were claimed to accrue in this way to learners, staff and schools. These could be related to prestige for the school, giving a sense of belonging, immediate benefits to learners participating, and all the related social-psychological benefits pertaining to social skills, self-image, self-confidence, and "a healthy mind in a healthy body" outcome, etc.

Our field work analysis estimated that around 65% was leave according to one of the categories in the leave measures; 30% was being away from school on official business with reasons being professional matters (e.g. cluster meetings, moderating Grade 12 marks, workshops), taking class on excursions, involvement in sport, being away from school to buy book prizes for an award ceremony, and hosting VIP guests of the school; and 5% were AWOL – the principal could not explain where the person was. Given that there was a higher level of official business away from schools during this period (for educators writing exams and educators participating in moderation activities), we would estimate that activities for official business over the year is between 20-25%; educators unaccounted for is 5% and leave taking is between 70-75%. In small schools, the extent of educators being away from school on official business is higher, as educators have to attend a number of meetings called by provincial and district officials and principals are away from schools to a greater extent than are educators.

The time away from school on official business, while it may seem essential, has a negative impact of teaching and learning activities. This negative impact is higher in smaller and more under-resourced schools, thereby further inhibiting the opportunities and disadvantaging the very learners who need quality schooling the most so that they could escape the poverty traps.

6.4 Perceptions about the extent of leave

Generally educators, and to some extent school managers, were of the opinion that they and their colleagues did not abuse leave. Most interviewees considered leave taking to be realistic and within

a normal range. In fact, most felt that they deserved more leave days (while educators said that, we found that they had not exhausted the number of days due to them). A few did acknowledge that some excesses occurred with a few individuals. This was attributed to job stress and excessive workloads, especially in schools characterised by overcrowding and other educational, social and geographic challenges. In our interviews we found a small number of educators of the view that they needed to exhaust their leave 'entitlements'. Most educators agreed that such abuses could be attributed to only a few educators (usually one or two in a school). A vignette from an educator interview illustrates:

Leave taking is average at the school but is also dependent on the weather. In winter lots of educators are sick. There is one chronic absentee in the school and the case is now with the Department. The educator's class is being supervised by other educators. The educator comes to school now and then. The educator is absent two to three times per week.

The perception by teachers and school managers that leave taking is not a problem, does not seem to be consistent with the seemingly general perception that the extent of leave taking in South African schools is very high. It would seem that in the majority of cases, leave taking is within reasonable levels, but there are few cases of abuses of leave and it is those cases that become the picture for the whole country.

Observations in this study suggest that, first, where the ethos, management and functionality at a school are poor, a host of negative attitudes, perceptions, and practices tend to characterise the school culture in which much leave is taken and many people tend to be absent for a variety of reasons. Where the inverse is true (positive ethos and good management), low leave rates tend to be reported and experienced. To understand this further, more in-depth qualitative studies, including ethnographies, are needed. Second, the geographic and structural conditions of the school also seem to explain the rates of leave taken by educators. The findings from our research suggests that some rural schools, often far out in the country; tend to be typically combined or comprehensive schools. They often have low learner enrolment rates. Such conditions would dictate that there is only one educator per grade, and even sometimes multi-grade and multi-subject / learning area teaching for each of the educators. Linked to these challenges is the fact that such schools tend not to be embedded in the community. This means that both educators and learners have to travel long distances to and from school, often missing big chunks of the school day and even an entire day. When they do reside in the vicinity of the school, they tend to struggle to obtain scarce accommodation. These increase the chances that educators would use any opportunity to take a break from school and use every reason for taking leave, even outside the real categories that may be relevant.

Some principals reported that leave taking in their schools was not abused. This may be due to their reluctance to paint a negative picture of their schools or it may reflect their true perceptions and/or experience of the phenomenon. On the other hand, others reported high rates of leave taking and abuse, albeit by a small number of individual educators, and often by the same individuals. To illustrate, in one school, both the principal and educators reported the case of a problem educator, who had a substance abuse problem and who was known to the circuit office. This educator, in their

opinion, should have been fired a long time ago. In another school, the problem was the result of chronic illness.

An educator [was] having a chronic illness and in one year used up all her leave days. As a humane way of dealing with the problem and to avoid being put on leave without pay, the principal advised her to come to school and take rests during the day by going to lie down and so on. The same educator was reported to be enjoying better health in 2009 and her attendance was now regular.

Parents (mostly SGB members) interviewed in this study were generally unaware of rates of leave taken and the rules pertaining to educator leave in schools. Most expressed the view that educators were generally in school and were entitled to the leave that they do take. Some expressed the view that it was not their place to monitor educator leave as they regarded that as the purview of the principal and district and circuit officials. They therefore rarely expected or suspected that leave abuses would occur. Those parents serving on SGBs largely had a good sense that they had a support role to ensure that learners got all the teaching (time) they required at schools, and that the school did everything in its power to avoid time loss through unnecessary leave and absences. As such, some reported being called upon to supervise classes when educators were away. Only in a few schools, often determined by geographic location (urban) and socio-economic/quintile level (high socio-economic status / quintile), were members of the SGB aware and conversant with policy governing educator leave as well as with rates and reasons for leave taking by educators. For example, in city environments, the parents and SGB members appeared to be well-informed and active with regard to leave and attendance issues and their role as parent community.

In another example, a school's SGB chairperson similarly contradicted the principal's report that leave taking and educator movements were well-controlled and happened within acceptable parameters, claiming that educator movements were not properly monitored and that his fellow SGB members frequently observed educators "moving around the community" during school hours. Some noted that their votes in job interviews for educators were crucial for selecting committed staff, not prone to absenting themselves from school or absconding. Again, such perceptions suggest that recruitment practices may encourage absence or help in the reduction of absence. Therefore it may be useful to tie absence management strategies with good selection criteria which focus not only on teacher competence but also on teacher commitment. In rural schools, some parents reported that they knew about some level of educator absence because it happened that parents living in the vicinity of the school, as well as unemployed ex-matriculants, were called upon to supervise classes and to 'teach' in the absence of educators.

Leave taking was sometimes discussed in SGB meetings and educators were encouraged not to be absent. Issues of educator absence were sometimes addressed in SGB quarterly meetings, in *ad hoc* meetings, and when cultural festivities were held. If a state-paid educator was absent, the SGB met with the School Management Team and discussed the issue, but if an SGB-paid educator was absent the SGB talked to him/her directly.

District and provincial officials did not keep aggregated statistics of leave taking in schools and in their districts and could not provide concrete patterns of leave. They voiced their perception that

leave rates are rather high, but could not state particular cases where district officials were aware of excessive leave taking. They also failed to analyse leave taking patterns. In one case, the provincial official responsible for leave was in the process of analysing leave taking in the province. Neither district nor provincial officials seemed to see it as their responsibility to promote responsible leave taking in schools, and claimed this to be the function of circuit managers.

6.5 The effects of leave taking and absence from school and classrooms

Generally, all school-based respondents (principals, educators and parents) agreed that educator leave taking and absence from school impacted negatively on teaching and learning. First, there was an awareness and acknowledgement of negative impacts on learning and learning results, particularly at high-school level, when learners were left unattended for long periods. For example, educator leave often meant an incomplete programme of work, with some schools arranging for 'make-up' time, and others not making up for lost time. As such, educator absence from school was acknowledged as affecting learner achievement. For example, a principal felt that:

Yes, learner attainment goes hand in hand with the presence of the educator in class. There is a high failure rate in schools where regular teaching does not take place. In the school, learner attainment is acceptable but is not good. If educators are not absent, the school can get a 100% pass rate.

Also, leave taking was identified as impacting negatively on learner safety. This was particularly true if learners had to be released early from school when educators were not at school. Some learners, particularly in rural areas, travelled long distances and this possibly put them in danger as they were then unsupervised for longer periods of time and walked alone.

Educator leave taking also impacted negatively on colleagues' (i.e., those left to look after the absent educator's classes) workloads, as they had to take over classes left unattended. The general feeling among the educators in this study was that absenteeism among them led to a work overload for colleagues as they had to supervise and sometimes teach the absent educator's classes. The impact was mostly felt when the educator was away on an emergency. For example, a scenario painted at one school by members of the SGB suggests that:

If one educator is absent, then other educators have to absorb the absent educator's learners, but some educators are reluctant to do this and this impacts negatively on the learners. Then the learners are roaming around the school because educators did not want to absorb them. This does not happen often. It is useful to know in advance if the educator is attending workshops but is difficult to predict sick leave. When an educator teaching the higher grades was absent often, the principal moved him to the intermediate grades so that it didn't impact on the matric exams.

Obviously, neither scenario was acceptable. Moving the problem to the lower grades does not amount to solving it. Putting it more succinctly, members of the SGB at this same school felt that:

The first impression is when an educator is absent, the learner is naked. If the educator is not there, there is no order in the class. If a subject teacher is absent, the learner is deprived of learning. In the secondary grades, if one educator is constantly absent it creates the wrong impression for the other educators. They think that nothing is being done. The unions cover for the educators. Educators forget that when they are absent the learners suffer and lose a day.

It was acknowledged too by a parent in one school that educator absence in class had a negative impact on learners because educators were reluctant sometimes to take over other classes, with the result that learners loiter in the school yard because of lack of supervision.

Those teachers present absorb the kids. There is sometimes reluctance by teachers who are present and learners loiter in the yard. But now this has been dealt with and teachers cooperate.

The reluctance largely existed because educators preferred to use their free time to prepare for their classes, do marking and also do some of the paperwork which is expected of them by the Department. More so, some educators indicated that it was difficult to control those classes and to supervise them because learners did not respect them but respected the responsible subject educator. Some said that they felt that they were overburdened and their subjects were suffering because they had to give attention to the absent educators' classes. Furthermore, there was no continuity of learning and learners' performance was affected. Some learners lost interest in the subject of the absent educator, especially if the educator was always absent.

6.6. Concluding comments on reasons for leave and absence

In this chapter, it was shown that illness is the most common reason for teacher absence in both HICs and LICs. In LICs high absence rate from the school is also due to the principals and teachers being taken away from the classroom and school for official businesses. This analysis shows that sick leave is recorded as the most common reason for leave taking in South Africa, however this category is also used for one and two days for personal activities. Therefore the leave category of urgent private matters may have to be reviewed to allow for additional reasons to be recorded here. We see that Principals and teachers are away from school and classroom for official reasons (professional development activities, union meetings, sporting and cultural activities) and while all are important they due contribute to loss of teaching time for students and impact negatively on their achievement.

Sick leave is the most common cause of leave taking and three quarters of all PERSAL instances of leave are of one or two days in length – that is, it is dependent on the discretion of the individual, and not requiring a medical certificate. While educator absence is a concern, the perception is that the extent of leave taking is not actually taking place at an alarming rate throughout the systems. There are a few individuals and institutions that are abusing leave taking and there are particular socio-environmental conditions that promote higher leave taking. However, leave taking by teachers brings about loss of teaching time and it is essential to reduce time away from schools and classrooms.

CHAPTER 7

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of the study was to contribute to “the existing knowledge base on educator leave in South Africa by investigating the extent of educator leave and reasons thereof. Additionally, the study sought to examine the systems in place to record, monitor, measure and reduce educator leave”. In this section we identify key findings and comment on the extent, reasons and management (including policy) of leave taking.

7.1 Key findings

7.1.1 The extent of leave and absence

From the analysis of the three datasets and the literature, we estimate that conservative, optimistic leave rate of educators in South Africa is between 10-12%. This leave rate includes both those who took leave according to the prescribed leave measures and those who were away from school on official business. The conservatively estimated leave rate of 10 - 12% in South Africa is higher than the rate in high income countries, but lower than the rate in many low income countries, calculated in the WBNAS. We estimate that 0.5% of teachers are on maternity leave, during any time. There are policies allowing for substitute teachers when educators are away on maternity leave, and we found that this policy was successfully applied in schools, thus in these classes there would not be a loss of teaching time. On average, every educator is away from the regular classroom teaching for 20-24 working days a year.⁵⁶ Educators would be away from school and regular classroom activities for both leave taking according to the leave measures and participating in official business (e.g. workshops, excursions, meetings etc).

Variations of the extent of leave

There are variations of the extent of leave for schools categorised according to province, quintile ranking, previous racial department of school and fee status. Schools with the highest level of disadvantage and located in area of low income households recorded higher levels of leave taking. This links to the international literature that in areas of low household income and poor working conditions, the leave rates are higher. Thus while the estimated national leave rate is between 10-12%, there is a high level of variation in the rates and this variation is related largely to socio-environmental indicators.

The conservative, optimistic estimate of educator leave rate in the country is that half the schools have a leave rate of less than 5%; 20% have a leave rate of between 5% and 10%; 18% have a leave rate between 10-20% and 12% have a leave rate greater than 20%.

Leave and being away from class on official business

In our analyses we needed to differentiate between leave taken according to the categories of leave measures and leave from regular school and classroom activities while on official duty (like attending professional development workshops, meetings, accompanying learners on excursions,

⁵⁶ This means 8% of a 200 school day year.

etc). From our analysis we estimate that for 20-25% of time when educators are away from school, they are on official duty. Using the leave estimate range of 10-12%, we estimate that 2.5% - 3% of the time away from school is on official duties and estimate that for 7.5 - 9% educators are away from school according to one of the leave measure categories. The extent of leave from school for official business is higher in small schools as there are fewer teachers to attend a number of meetings or workshops away from the school. Principals are called away from school, for official duties, more times than are educators.

7.1.2. Recording of leave and the reliability of PERSAL systems

Comparing rates of leave estimated from literature and secondary data analysis (10-12%) to the calculated PERSAL leave rate of three and four percent leave indicates that there is under-recording in the PERSAL system. This under-recording may be because educators are not completing leave forms at school, or leave forms completed at school are not captured into the electronic systems. Comparing leave records kept at school level to the PERSAL system we estimate that between 20-25% of submitted school records are not recorded properly in PERSAL. In addition there is mis-capturing onto the PERSAL systems so that the individual records of leave balances could be incorrect.

In schools with an administrative clerk, the reporting of leave taking and completion and submission of all forms is more efficient than schools where there are no administrative clerks and this administration becomes an additional responsibility for the principal. Once a completed leave form leaves a school, it could pass through a number of offices without proper recording of its route before it is captured onto the electronic systems. In provinces where the leave is captured onto the electronic system at the school level, it is more likely that there is a stronger match between leave taking and reporting and leave recording.

7.1.3 Reasons and patterns of leave taking

The main reason recorded for PERSAL leave is sickness, with this category constituting just over half of all leave taken. The sick leave (especially for one day leave) category may be used not only when an educator is sick, but also to take leave for any personal business. The other main categories of recorded PERSAL leave are family responsibility, vacation⁵⁷ and special leave. Just over three quarters of all leave instances and 41% of leave days are of one or two days in length in PERSAL. This is discretionary leave and educators are not required to produce a medical certificate on their return to school.

Mondays and Fridays are the most popular leave days. This would suggest that there is a level of abuse of the leave provisions, since one would have expected equal distribution of leave over the five working days. There is a perception among some educators that given there is leave provision of 36 days sick leave over three years, they need to “use it or lose it”. The school and Principal need to manage the high number of leave days taken at the start and end of the week, and the high levels

⁵⁷ Within the PERSAL system, the category of leave “vacation” appears. This is not a category of leave according to the provisions set out in PAM.

of discretionary leave. The 8-week rule⁵⁸ could be invoked by Principals, but we did not find that this was used in most schools to manage possible abuse of leave taking in schools. Schools do not have central systems for monitoring and evaluating the extent of leave taking, and hence are unable to see the patterns and manage any abuse to reduce leave taking. At most schools managers kept a varied array of composite registers on cumulative leave taken against maximum entitlements, and made some weekly or quarterly submissions to district offices.

7.1.4 Management and administration of leave

The quality of within-school leave management and administration practices varied depending on (a) school ethos, commitment and functionality and (b) geographical location and school type. In general we found schools had copies of leave policies; management and teachers were aware of the policies (with the exception of 80 hours for professional development outside teaching hours) and there were systems within the school for the recording of leave measures and other movements of educators. The presence and contributions of a well-trained and conscientious administrative clerk expedited sound leave processing and recording, and supported educators and management in all facets of leave administration and management at schools.

Outside schools, within the various relevant provincial, regional, district, circuit and other offices, variations existed in the support to schools and the monitoring and management of leave taking. The main flaw in the system relates to the capturing of leave information and this is due to the lengthened processing chains in cases where schools were far removed from the final approval and capturing offices, especially if the routing of forms had to include many intermediate stops. ‘Long’ communication lines seemed to jeopardise turnover times, correctness of records, location of responsibility pertaining to approval and recording, feedback, substitution arrangements and the solving of queries, for instance. A centralised system, preferably an electronic one, at school seems the better way to go. This system serves to shorten and simplify the communication, and enhances the veracity of the records in the system.

While schools have been compliant in adhering to the administrative requirements regarding leave taking, they have not engaged enough with the strategic management of leave taking in order to reduce the extent of leave. Schools need to reduce the time educators are away from schools and classroom. This will require strategic monitoring of leave and leave patterns and implementing measures aimed at reducing such leave taking.

7.1.5 Long leave and substitute arrangements

Because educators and schools know about maternity leave well in advance, and the required doctors’, medical fund and hospital confirmations are more straightforward to deal with and the largely standardised, applications are submitted and processed in time for substitute educators to be located and appointed. Schools, especially in rural areas, may have difficulty in finding appropriate specialists educators (e.g. Science and Mathematics) especially in the secondary phase.

⁵⁸ When an employee has been away from work on more than two occasions during an 8-week period, they must submit a medical certificate to prove incapacity.

In cases where educators would like to take long periods of sick leave due to ill-health or some form of temporary disability, the process involves the completion of comprehensive set of forms and the final recommendation is not from an educators' doctor but from the services rendered by the Health Risk Managers. Educators indicated that this process was slow and inefficient.

7.1.6 Leave on official duty and 80 hours of professional development leave

The Educator Workload policy allocates 80 hours of an educators' workload for professional development activities to be undertaken outside the formal school hours (after school, weekends and over holiday periods). Most educators are unaware of this provision and assume that any professional development activity attended over holidays or weekends should be considered as overtime. We found that the Western Cape Province organised professional development activities over the school holidays.

Most schools did not keep any consolidated records of educators being away from school on official business. Schools may record each incident in a movement register or make a note in the educators' personal file, but they could not at any one time see the total picture of educators being away from school.

7.2 Key recommendations

The key concern for schools, society and the government is to find ways to manage leave taking so that the extent of leave taking by educators is reduced and the loss of teaching and learning time for students is reduced. The following are recommendations to achieve this objective:

7.2.1 The time away from school and classroom regular activities must be reduced.

This could be done by decreasing both the time spent away from school on official business and leave taken according to the leave measures. Specifically, the following measures could be taken:

- Reduce the number of days educators are away from school on official business. A number of provincial directorates organize workshops and meetings with teachers. There needs to be a co-ordinate plan involving the different provincial directorates and district officials, developed in advance, and sent to schools so that they could plan on how to distribute the responsibility of attending these meetings without compromising learning time for students.
- Increase awareness of 80 hours of professional development time in the educator workload policy which allows for workshops to take place outside the formal school hours, and use this time for professional development activities.
- Set a cap on the number of times a Principal is called away from the school to a meeting during school time. The Principal is key to the leadership, culture and ethos in a school. If a Principal is away almost a day a week, this affects the smooth functioning of the school.

- Schools must manage the high levels of discretionary leave taking, especially on a Monday or Friday. Schools must develop systems that will provide outputs showing the leave patterns and if it suggests abuse then principals would need to manage this abuse.
- Incentivize the reduction of discretionary leave because they are more disruptive to the running of the school and the teaching and learning processes.

7.2.2 Targeted reduction strategy

District and departmental officials must initially focus on schools where leave rates are greater than 10% and work with the principal and school management teams to reduce these leave rates.

7.2.3 Improve the systems to record leave onto PERSAL systems

Given that there is under-recording and mis-capturing of information, it is important to reduce the number of steps from the school to the place where the leave form is captured. Given the success of the electronic capturing systems there is a need to fast-track the roll-out of the electronic leave administration systems across all provinces and schools. This would include the appointment and training of relevant staff (both educators and support staff), as well as supplying and maintaining the relevant computer hardware and software. These systems must provide management reports to the principal for monitoring use in the school. The online systems must be linked to the PERSAL systems.

7.2.4 Administration and management leave in schools

All schools must appoint an administrative clerk to ensure the proper administration of leave (completion of leave forms, keeping school records, and monitoring the trends of leave). The role of the Principal should be the management and not the administration of leave. Principals should be provided with appropriate management reports to observe trends and possible abuse. They must be trained to use the 8- week rule and to manage situations of abuse of leave taking in schools. At the district level, officials need to monitor the extent of leave taking in schools and set up a management plan on how to reduce the extent of leave taking for schools with high levels of leave taking.

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Annexure 1: Frequency distribution of sample schools by province for a range of contextual variables

Table A1.1: Distribution of sample schools by province according to school size and school type

Province	School size			Type of school			Total
	Large	Medium	Small	Primary	Secondary	Combined	
EC	1	5	2	1	2	5	8
FS	2	0	3	2	1	2	5
GP	2	3	1	2	4		6
KZN	1	3	2	4	2		6
LM	1	3	1	1	3	1	5
MP	2	2	2	3	1	2	6
NC	0	2	2	2	1	1	4
NW	2	1	2	2	2	1	5
WC	2	3	0	2	2	1	5
Total	13	22	15	19	18	13	50

Table A1.2: Distribution of sample schools according to geo-type and poverty index

Province	Nature of geographical location		Poverty index: quintile					Total
	Dense, close to city	Rural, sparse population	1	2	3	4	5	
EC	0	8	1	2	1	2	2	8
FS	3	2	3	1			1	5
GP	6	0	1	1	2	1	1	6
KZN	2	4	1	2	1	1	1	6
LM	3	2	2	1	1	1		5
MP	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	6
NC	0	4	1	2	1			4
NW	3	2	1	1	2	1		5
WC	3	2	2	1	1	1		5
Total	23	27	14	12	10	8	6	50

Table A1.3: Distribution of sample schools according to former education department

Province	Former white schools	Former coloured schools	Former Indian schools	Former black schools	Total
EC	1	1		6	8
FS	1			4	5
GP	1		1	4	6
KZN	1		1	4	6
LM				5	5
MP	1			5	6
NC	1	2		1	4
NW				5	5
WC		2	1	2	5
Total	6	5	3	36	50