

**A theory-based evaluation of South Africa's education policy**  
by

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## **Declaration**

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**Abstract**

This thesis applied a form of theory-based evaluation known as realistic evaluation to uncover and evaluate the assumptions underpinning South Africa's basic education policy. Advocates of realistic evaluation, Pawson and Tilley (1997), maintain that a good program theory comprises of context, mechanism and outcome (CMO) configurations. Following a document-based study, this thesis made use realistic evaluation as an analytical tool to uncover the CMO and build a program theory that revealed the assumed causal links between inputs and outputs intended to address the policy problem of a lack access to quality basic education. Subsequently, the assumptions underpinning the basic education policy were evaluated by applying the realistic evaluation question of what the basic education policy assumes 'works, for who, and under what circumstances'.

An overview of global trends in program evaluation was given whilst program evaluation in South Africa is detailed in more depth. The literature review conducted found that program evaluation is still developing in South Africa with critical and impact evaluations as the most popular amongst scholars of South African education policy. There is consensus amongst scholars that South Africa's education policy has not been entirely successful in delivering basic education of acceptable level. However, there is a gap relating to the use of theory-based evaluation to provide clarity on the rationale behind policy interventions. Therefore, this thesis undertook a qualitative approach to evaluate the theory underpinning the basic education.

The findings revealed that political history and socioeconomic disparities are the most influential contexts that inform education policy processes. While mechanisms for culture of learning; attracting learners and teachers to school; and fostering receptive learners all inform provision of resources. From these mechanisms, the intended outcomes are improved learner performance, increased enrolment and retention rates and effective school management. The assumptions of the basic education policy regarding what works for who and under what circumstances in order to deliver access to quality basic education were evaluated. The assessment of policy assumptions showed that some of the assumptions are poorly aligned with South African contexts and realities at an individual, school and community level of beneficiaries. These assumptions are poorly aligned because policy-making soon after apartheid ended engaged less with rationalising activities and drawing causal links and more with symbolism. These assumptions are however still informed largely by the political context of apartheid with little account for how democratic processes can influence the success of basic education policy. This thesis also provides a synthesis of the policy notions that inform basic education policy.

## Opsomming

Hierdie tesis het realistiese evaluering gebruik om die teorie en aanname agter die Suid-Afrikaanse basiese onderwysbeleid bloot te lê en te evalueer. Voorstanders van realistiese evaluering, Pawson en Tilley (1997), meen dat 'n goeie programteorie uit konteks, meganisme en uitkoms (CMO) -konfigurasies bestaan. Realistiese evaluering is 'n vorm van teoriegebaseerde evaluering. Dokumente is bestudeer en gebruik om 'n programteorie te bou wat die aangenome oorsaaklike skakels tussen insette en uitsette uitlig. Die probleem waarop die programteorie gebou is, is gebrekkige toegang aan gehalte basiese onderwys. Die voorstanders van realistiese evaluering, Pawson en Tilley (1997), handhaaf dat 'n goeie programteorie bestaan uit 'n aantal konteks-, meganisme- en uitkoms-groeperings (KMU-groeperings). Daarom het hierdie tesis realistiese evaluering gebruik as 'n analitiese benadering wat die aangenome oorsaaklike skakels tussen hierdie KMU-groeperings blootlê. Daarna is die programteorie agter die basiese onderwysbeleid geëvalueer aan die hand van die realistiese evalueringsvraag van wat, volgens die beleid se aannames, 'werk, vir wie, en onder watter omstandighede'.

Die tesis het 'n oorsig oor globale tendense in progamevaluering gebied, en Suid-Afrikaanse progamevaluering in meer diepte beskryf. Die literatuurstudie het gevind dat progamevaluering steeds aan die ontwikkel is in Suid-Afrika, en dat kritiese en impakevaluering die gewildste is onder kundiges met betrekking tot die Suid-Afrikaanse onderwysbeleid. Daar is konsensus onder kundiges dat die Suid-Afrikaanse onderwysbeleid nie heeltemal daarin geslaag het om 'n aanvaarbare vlak van basiese onderwys te lewer nie. Daar is egter 'n leemte ten opsigte van die gebruik van teoriegebaseerde evaluering om die logika agter die beleidsingrypings te verklaar. Daarom het hierdie tesis 'n kwalitatiewe benadering gevolg in die evaluering van die teorie agter basiese onderwys.

Dit is bevind dat die politieke geskiedenis en sosio-ekonomiese ongelykhede die mees invloedryke kontekste is wat op die onderwysbeleidsproses inspeel. Die voorsiening van hulpbronne word beïnvloed deur die meganismes vir die bevordering van 'n leerkultuur; om leerders en onderwysers na die skool toe aan te trek; en om ontvanklikheid in leerders aan te moedig. Die bedoeling is om deur hierdie meganismes die volgende uitkomst te bevorder: leerderprestasie, leerderinskrywings- en leerderbehoudingsgetalle. Die aannames omtrent wat werk, vir wie en onder watter omstandighede, is ook geëvalueer. Die beoordeling van beleidsaannames het getoon dat sommige beleide swak ooreenstem met Suid-Afrikaanse kontekste en realiteite op individuele, akademiese en gemeenskapsvlak van begunstigdes. Hierdie aannames is swak in lyn omdat beleidmaking na apartheid geëindig het, minder

georiënteerd was met die rasionalisering van aktiwiteite en hul oorsaaklike verbande, en meer met simboliek. Hierdie aannames word egter grotendeels beïnvloed deur die politieke konteks van apartheid, met min uiteensetting van hoe demokratiese prosesse die sukses van basiese onderwysbeleid kan beïnvloed. Hierdie tesis bied ook 'n samestelling van die beleidsbegrippe wat die basiese onderwysbeleid inlig.

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## Table of Contents

<i>Declaration</i> .....	<i>i</i>
<i>Abstract</i> .....	<i>ii</i>
<i>Opsomming</i> .....	<i>iii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	<i>v</i>
<i>List of Abbreviations and Acronyms</i> .....	<i>ix</i>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1. BACKGROUND .....	1
1.2. GLOBAL TRENDS IN PROGRAMME EVALUATION .....	1
1.3. BACKGROUND: BASIC EDUCATION SYSTEM LANDSCAPE .....	5
1.4. POLICY ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH APPROACHES FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW .....	8
1.5. THEMES IDENTIFIED FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW .....	9
1.6. APPROACHES TAKEN IN THIS THESIS .....	11
1.7. THE LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY .....	13
1.8. CHAPTER CONCLUSION .....	14
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>15</b>
2.1. INTRODUCTION .....	15
2.2. THEMES IN IDENTIFIED IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN BASIC EDUCATION LITERATURE .....	15
2.2.1 <i>The thinking behind education policy transformation</i> .....	16
2.2.2 <i>Critics of post-apartheid education policy</i> .....	19
2.2.3 <i>Approaches to quality of education</i> .....	21
2.2.4 <i>Measuring quality of education</i> .....	23
2.2.5 <i>Access to quality education</i> .....	24
2.2.6 <i>The role of funding in education</i> .....	26
2.2.7 <i>Implementation gaps</i> .....	28
2.2.8 <i>Approaches to analysis South African education policy in the literature</i> .....	29
2.3. THEORY-BASED EVALUATION.....	31
2.3.1 <i>Theory-based evaluation in South Africa</i> .....	33
2.4. CONCLUSION .....	35
<b>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS</b> .....	<b>36</b>
3.1. INTRODUCTION .....	36
3.2. RATIONALE FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH .....	36
3.3. DATA COLLECTION METHOD.....	38
3.3.1 <i>Advantages of document review</i> .....	40
3.4. DATA ANALYSIS .....	41
3.5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	43
3.6. CONCLUSION .....	44
<b>CHAPTER 4: CONSTRUCTING THE PROGRAM THEORY UNDERPINNING SOUTH AFRICA'S BASIC EDUCATION POLICY</b> .....	<b>45</b>
4.1 INTRODUCTION .....	45
4.2. POLITICAL HISTORY AND SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXTS OF BASIC EDUCATION POLICY .....	45
4.2.1 <i>Education as a basic human right</i> .....	46
4.2.2 <i>Policy development under impending regime change</i> .....	47
4.2.3 <i>Redressing apartheid legacies</i> .....	48
4.2.4 <i>Socioeconomic inequalities</i> .....	49
4.3. MECHANISMS OF BASIC EDUCATION POLICY .....	51
4.3.1 <i>Restoration of a culture of learning</i> .....	52
4.3.2 <i>Attracting learners and teachers to school</i> .....	55
4.3.3 <i>Fostering receptive learners</i> .....	56
4.4. INTENDED OUTCOMES OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN BASIC EDUCATION POLICY .....	59
4.4.1 <i>Improved learner performance</i> .....	59
4.4.2 <i>Increased enrolment and retention rates of learners at school</i> .....	60
4.4.3 <i>Effective school management and governance</i> .....	61
4.5. PROGRAM THEORY OF THE BASIC EDUCATION POLICY .....	62

4.6. CHAPTER CONCLUSION .....	64
<b>CHAPTER 5: EVALUATING THE THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS UNDERPINNING BASIC EDUCATION POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA.....</b>	<b>65</b>
5.1. INTRODUCTION .....	65
5.2. A PRO-POOR APPROACH FOR DELIVERING QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION .....	68
5.3. THE USE OF PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE .....	69
5.4. THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN DELIVERING QUALITY EDUCATION .....	71
5.5. EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT .....	72
5.6. PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE OF SCHOOLS.....	73
5.7. THE INFLUENCE OF REMAINING APARTHEID LEGACIES.....	74
5.8. CHAPTER CONCLUSION .....	77
<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>78</b>
6.1. OVERVIEW .....	78
6.2. FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION.....	79
6.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .....	82
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>84</b>

## List of figures and tables

Table 1: Code Rules.....	43
Diagram 1 Program theory of Basic Education Policy in South Africa .....	63
Diagram 2: Refined program theory of basic education policy .....	67

## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

ANC	African National Congress
ASIDI	Accelerated Schools Infrastructure Delivery Initiative
CMO	Context Mechanism Outcome
COSATU	The Congress of South Trade Unions
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DPME	Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EE	Equal Education
GEAR	Growth, Employment, and Redistribution
GWMES	Government-wide Monitoring and Evaluation System
IPET	Implementation Plan for Education and Training
NECC	National Education Coordinating Committee
NEPA	National Education Coordinating Committee
NEPF	The National Policy Framework
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation
NNSSF	National Norms and Standards for School Funding
NPO	Non-Profit Organization
NSC	National Senior Certificate
OBE	Outcome-based education
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SACMEQ	Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SASA	South Africa Schools Act (1996)
SGB	School Governing Body
TBE	Theory-based evaluation
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1. Background

Following the transition of power from the apartheid state, the South African democratic government faced the task of transforming the country and addressing the legacies of apartheid. Part of this involved developing a new education policy to transform the education system inherited from the apartheid system. Pawson and Tilley (1997: 1) write that “modern bureaucracy is managed by opening its every activity to ‘review’, ‘appraisal’, ‘audit’, ‘quality assurance’, ‘performance rating’, and indeed ‘evaluation’”. Christie (2008:118) writes that studying public policies provides insight into how governments in their capacities as legitimate decision-makers work to attain goals within their political, social and economic contexts (Christie, 2008a: 118).

## 1.2. Global trends in programme evaluation

Programme evaluation was pioneered in the United States of America (USA) and is deeply rooted in the United Kingdom (UK). The emergence of programme evaluation in the USA can be traced back to World War I, “when the US federal government’s vast expenditure on the social sphere required a more systematic and rigorous review of spending” (Mouton, 2010:10). When programme evaluation finally made its way to South Africa, the USA had already been engaging in debates concerning the legitimacy of the discipline of program evaluation, which formed the conceptualisation of different training options and produced a large number of theorists and evaluation paradigms (Mouton, 2010:10).

According to Mouton (2010:10), the emergence of programme evaluation in both the USA and UK is linked to fiscal, political and economies of the times. In both cases, the government drove the increase in programme evaluation which in turn also influenced the decline in the popularity of programme evaluation over time. Fiscal constraints in the UK led to programme evaluations as government administrations had to “rationalise resource allocation” (Mouton, 2010:11). Programme evaluation was institutionalised quicker in the USA than in the UK because the USA possessed a strong base of applied social science after World War II, and the expansion of the General Accounting Office allowed for financial support of evaluation system. In comparison to the USA, the UK did not possess a large financial capacity to support evaluation activities.

While in the UK and USA evaluation was government-driven, evaluation in South Africa was largely driven by donors (Mouton, 2010:57). Evaluation studies in South Africa emerged within the Non-Profit Organisation sector (NPO) during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and increased post-1994 as a means of accountability and cost-effectiveness (Mouton, 2010:57). Prior to 1994, donor funding did not come with strings attached, especially for anti-apartheid movements (Mouton, 2010:82). This was due to the risk that came with working within anti-apartheid movements. To conduct rigorous evaluation would have exposed people in anti-apartheid movement and risk them going to jail (Mouton, 2010:181). As such, accountability methods for programmes were flexible with reports and annual financial statements considered to be sufficient for accountability. Additionally, many of the programmes pre-1994 ran by NPOs were driven by anti-apartheid rationale instead of developmental rationale (Meyer and Hofmeyr, 1995:356).

Policy analysis in South Africa has followed a critical or evaluative approach (Goddard, 2018:1). Fifteen years ago, ‘programme evaluation’ or ‘evaluation research’ was considered to be fairly new in South Africa (Abrahams, 2015:1). According to Abrahams (2015:1), “its development in South Africa was limited in part by the interdisciplinary nature of monitoring and evaluation”, and “trying to find roots within historically, a very discipline-based higher education system”. However, there has been a growing interest and practice of programme evaluation amongst academics and professionals trained in the fields of psychology, sociology, economics, education, health, philosophy or political science. In the beginning, the government leaned more towards monitoring. As time moved on, however, the government shifted towards the inclusion of evaluation. In the last ten years, South Africa has seen an increase in the number, scope and quality of evaluations performed.

The Policy Framework of Government-wide Monitoring and Evaluation System (GWMES) is the all-encompassing policy that informs the monitoring and evaluation system in South Africa (RSA, 2007:2). The National Policy Framework (NEPF) prescribes evaluation in the country. In 2010, the national Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) was established with the “intention to formalise the establishment of the National System of Evaluation to implement and provide oversight over public sector over public sector evaluations” (Mbava, 2017:2). In addition, the DPME provides oversight over the NEPF. The DPME also established “standards, competences, training and the conducting of evaluations at

national and provincial levels, as well as part-funding of evaluations with departments” (Abrahams, 2015:1).

Coupled with an increase in evaluation practice within the public sector, there has been development in the professionalisation of evaluation. Abrahams (2015:5) states that the professionalisation of Monitoring and Evaluation can be observed through “the conferences, the professional organisation, the growing body of knowledge, organisational linkages, the engaging policy environment and cooperative resolutions”. The establishment of the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA) has played a role in creating a platform that brings together emerging and experienced evaluators (Abrahams, 2015:2). Through its varied membership, SAMEA has been an essential independent voice, “providing advice to the DPME-the custodian of M&E within government” (Abrahams, 2015:5).

Mouton (2010:184) reasons that South Africa needs a new generation of evaluators to “fill the much-needed gap to ensure a particular standard of monitoring and evaluation is maintained”. In their earlier writing, Meyer and Hofmeyr (1995:356) noted that there are not many education programmes that have been evaluated to assess their effectiveness and efficiency. Accordingly, Meyer and Hofmeyr (1995) recommended that upcoming educational programmes must be subjected to meticulous evaluation to shape future policy landscape.

Meyer and Hofmeyr (1995:360) highlight that there are implications upcoming evaluators must take into consideration. The first consideration evaluators must be aware of are the varying evaluation paradigms, namely the scientific paradigm, naturalistic paradigm, eclectic paradigm, and critical inquiry paradigms. The scientific paradigm is explanatory and aims to uncover connections between cause and effect. The naturalistic paradigm is interpretative as it aims to not control variables but understand them in their own natural setting. Eclectic paradigms advocate for mixed application of scientific and naturalistic paradigms as well as qualitative and quantitative techniques. A critical approach to evaluation is “concerned about social justice and accentuates the normative aspects of any evaluation” (1995:360). These paradigms are important to be aware of because they have different implications for evaluation.

The second implication to consider is the training that an evaluator needs in order work within any of the paradigms explained above. Meyer and Hofmeyr (1995:361) provide a list by Patton (1990), which describes components of an evaluator’s training. An evaluator needs training in the conceptual understanding of concepts of the field, theoretical background and main

scholars of key theories. Additionally, the evaluator needs knowledge of qualitative and quantitative methods. Another piece of essential training is knowledge of organisations as well as political sophistication to navigate the political sphere while keeping their work credible. Furthermore, an evaluator needs to possess communication skills to present their work in oral or written form (Meyer and Hofmeyr, 1995: 362). To increase evaluations of education policy, the evaluator needs to master these skills.

While there has been momentum in the practice of evaluation in South Africa, Abrahams (2003:2) is concerned that in present-day evaluation studies there is a lack of focus on the theoretical aspects of social programmes. In evaluation, the term ‘theory’ has different meanings and applications which can refer to “grand over-arching theories such as Marxism to specific hypotheses that are tested in a laboratory experiment” (Wong, Westhorp, Pawson & Green, 2013: 10). The missing theoretical aspect that Abrahams (2003) refers to is “the theory about what a program or intervention is expected to do and in some cases, the theory about how it is expected to work” (Wong *et al*, 2013: 10).

For a long time, evaluation followed experimental methods because they were “relatively simple, and intuitively understandable, appealed at least conceptually to policymakers” (Abrahams, 2003:2). In agreement, Mbava (2017:2) writes that the South African public sector has mostly seen impact evaluations with methodological approaches of randomised controlled trials. However, while experimental methods have been instrumental in illuminating whether a programme worked or not, they have failed in explaining how and why a programme works or defining the ‘program mechanism’ (Pawson and Tilley, 1997:3; Abrahams, 2003:2; Mbava, 2017:2). Consequently, experimental approaches to evaluation in South Africa have deprived policy-makers of essential knowledge regarding vital causes of programme success or failure, as well as critical information relating to replication of programmes in varying settings Mbava (2017:2).

Accordingly, scholars such as Chen and Rossi (1983), Lipsey (1985), Bickman (1987), Weiss (1997) and Pawson and Tilley (1997) reject method-oriented approaches to evaluation and call for a theory-oriented approach instead. Birckmayer and Weiss (2000:408) describe theory-based evaluation as "an approach to evaluation that requires surfacing the assumptions on which the program is based on in considerable detail: what activities are being conducted, what effect each particular activity will have, what the expected response is, what happens next, and the expected outcomes".

There is growing support for evaluation methodologies that can illuminate “in what way, under what circumstances, and with what effects, programmes have worked” (Mbava, 2017:3). Furthermore, Mbava (2017:3) argues that “since causal analysis in government programmes and policies is inadequate, the South African public sector requires robust and distinct programme planning and implementation phases that shed insights on what works”. Consequently, theory-based evaluation approaches such as realist evaluation, are becoming the first choice for opening the black box of programme mechanism and give information of causality.

The discussion about global trends of evaluation shows criticism of experimental evaluation by Chen and Rossi (1983), Lipsey (1985), Bickman (1987), Weiss (1997) Pawson and Tilley (1997). In addition, the literature found that that programme evaluation is an emerging and developing phenomenon in South Africa. It is with this background in mind, that this thesis justifies the use of theory-based evaluation to assess South Africa’s basic education policy.

### **1.3. Background: Basic education system landscape**

Divisive apartheid policies such as the Bantu Education Act (1953), left the legacy of a broken education system characterized by high levels of illiteracy, poorly trained teachers and underdeveloped schools (Manganyi, 2001:26). Facing the challenge of redressing the damage of apartheid’s discriminatory education policies and creating a new path for the future, policy development became a key priority for the democratic government (Christie, 2008a:128). According to Hartshorne (1999:5), "education policy, like any other state policy, may be defined as a course of action adopted by government, through legislation, ordinances, and regulations, and pursued through administration and control, finance and inspection, with the general assumption that it should be beneficial for the country and its citizens".

Following the anticipation of negotiations for the end of apartheid, the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (1993:152) emphasised that the priority of the development of an education system and its policies is to improve the quality of universal basic education. Basic education plays a pivotal role in the fight against poverty, contributes towards empowering people and opens opportunities for development. Consequently, “when basic schooling delivers effective communication skills and cognitive competencies, further education and training become worthwhile” (1993:152). As such, the plans and strategies to attain basic education are expressed in various governmental policy documents.

The ideas and rhetoric about what the post-apartheid education policy would look like began before the 1994 democratic elections. In anticipation of the transition of power, formal policy development began with the National Education Policy Investigation, followed by the African National Congress's (ANC) Implementation Plan for Education and Training. The next step towards transforming the new education system was to remove the nineteen separate apartheid departments of education into nine provincial departments and a national department (Christie, 2008:130). As of 2009, education is governed by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Higher Education (DHE). According to the DBE website, "the role of the DBE is to translate the government's education and training policies and the provisions of the Constitution into national education policy and legislative framework". The scope only focuses on the DBE, which deals with all schools from Grade R to Grade 12, as well as adult literacy programmes.

The development of a new education policy materialized in 1995 with the publication of a White Paper on Education and Training. The White Paper on Education and Training (1995) is the first official document outlining a framework for the transformation of the post-apartheid education system including governing principles and intended initiatives (Christie, 2008:13). This document is based on principles of democracy, equality, and redress. It eventually led to the creation and adoption of the National Education Policy Act of 1996 (NEPA). The NEPA inscribed into law the "policies, the legislative and monitoring responsibilities of the Minister of Education, as well as the formal relations between national and provincial authorities" (Department of Basic Education, 2016:23). The formulation of national education policies in general and further training education concerning curriculum, assessment, language, and quality assurance is legislated by NEPA. Accordingly, policy documents addressing different aspects of the education system have been developed under the umbrella of NEPA.

The right to basic education is enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa. In turn, the South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996) aims to ensure that all children have access to quality basic education without discrimination, and makes schooling compulsory for all children between the ages of seven to fifteen years (Department of Education, 2016:23). However, this thesis focused on the aspect of basic education specifically for Grade R to Grade 12. This scope is important as Spaul (2013:3) argues, because it is undeniable that South Africa's education is in a crisis and that the young people are the most affected population group.

Limited access to quality basic education is a major problem area which the basic education policy aims to address. However, even with their intentions to improve and develop society, education policies are not always successful in addressing educational problems (Christie, 2008a: 17). Studies by education policy scholars such as Jansen (2012), Motala (2011), Hartshorne (1995), de Clercq, (1997) and Sayed (2002), argue that ongoing policy goals and initiatives to improve access to quality basic education have not been successful. Jansen (2002: 199) argues that "despite unprecedented investment in policymaking and policy production in the years anticipating and following the end of legal apartheid in South Africa, there appears to be very little change in the daily routines of schools and classrooms of the nation". Reports from the Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) confirm this, showing that learners from grade 1 to grade 12 have poor numeracy and literacy skills (Spaull, 2013:4).

South Africa has a 98 per cent rate enrolment and access to school while quality educational outcomes such as literacy and numeracy skills are inadequate, especially among poor and rural learners. Generally, grade 1 to grade 12 learners, despite having access to schoolings, they possess numeracy and literacy skills of a standard lower than their grade (Spaull, 2013:14). The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), found that the international Grade eight test was too hard for South African Grade eight learners. Alternatively, in the 2011 test, Grade 9 learners took the Grade 8 test, which led to the TIMSS to conclude that an average Grade 9 learner is two grades behind in terms of their learning (Spaull, 2013:17). Spaull (2013:21) concludes that "many pupils in Africa sit through six years of formal full-time schooling yet do not acquire even the most basic numeracy and literacy skills". While the number of children enrolled in school is within acceptable levels, the quality of education they are receiving is poor.

Another task education policy is faced with addressing is the provision of resources to ensure the delivery of education. Key educational resources include teachers, physical infrastructure, and learning material. The historical and economic landscape of South Africa has created unequal access to these essential resources.

It is against the background of a poor basic education system that this evaluation research aims to answer the question: what are the theoretical assumptions underpinning South African basic education policy? The research question will thus be answered in a theory-based evaluation through the application of realistic evaluation. Through this study, I contribute towards the

creation of knowledge in policy evaluation and solutions to improve the state of basic education in South Africa.

#### **1.4. Policy analysis and research approaches from the literature review**

Spren and Vally (2010:429) conducted a review of post-apartheid education policy research and analysis in South Africa. The review is intended to gain an understanding of policy formulation as well as the prospects and pitfalls of education policy. Their review followed a discourse and content analysis to explain the trends with policy analysis and research literature in education policy. Spren and Vally (2010:430) highlight five important books on policy formulation and implementation in post-apartheid South Africa: *Implementing Education Policies: the South African experience* (Jansen and Sayed, 2001), *Education and Equity: the impact of state policies on South African Education* (Motala and Pampallis, 2002), *South African education policy review* (Chisholm, Motala and Vally, 2003), *Changing class: education and social change in Post-apartheid South Africa* (Chisholm, 2004) and *Elusive equity education reform in post-apartheid South Africa* (Fiske and Ladd, 2004). According to Spren and Vally (2010:430), these books are comprised of local debates on the topic of transformation of education and post-apartheid policy development.

Kraak (1998), Rensburg (2001) and Jansen (2001) place emphasis on assessing the thinking behind the development of post-apartheid education policy. De Clercq (2007), and Badat and Sayed (2014), critically analyse post-apartheid education policy documents such as the White Paper for Education and Training (1995), the ANC's Education and Training Framework and Implementation plan. Also, Sayed and Ahmed (2011:04) and Spren and Valley (2006), focus on analysing the policy problem of quality education concerning the three approaches of human rights, human capital and social justice. Motala (2011) assesses the impact of funding policies on education as well as the human rights aspect of education. Furthermore, there is a consensus among scholars there are major implementation gaps in the policy practice. In the effort of locating an alternative explanation for this gap, Jansen (2002:199) applies a theoretical framework of policy symbolism.

These approaches show that scholars in South Africa have immersed themselves in education policy to understand policy failures and weaknesses. Their approaches also show that there is still room within the literature to provide more explanation concerning policy failures and improvement. Furthermore, the analysis of the literature also showed that efforts to improve

education must not only focus on access but the quality of education as well. Spaul (2013) confirmed that the majority of children have access to education, however, the quality levels are amongst some of the poorest in the world. Accordingly, this research combines access and quality education as focus points for evaluating the basic education policy.

### **1.5. Themes identified from the literature review**

The analysis of literature on education policy found common themes evaluated by scholars. The themes identified are: the thinking behind the education policy transformation, critics of education policy, approaches to quality education, measuring quality education, access to quality basic education, the role of funding policies and implementation gaps. The literature review also discussed the scholarship on global trends of theory-based evaluation.

The theme of the thinking behind education policy transformation is found in Kraak's (1998) and Rensburg's (2001) work. Kraak focuses on the policy discourses that shape policy transformation in post-apartheid South Africa. The three discourses identified are movement of the radical people's education in the mid-1980s, the systematic approach and an outcome-based approach. Rensburg (2001) unpacks the assumptions underpinning the policy transformation process: national identities, the three-tier system of national, provincial and local division, national unitary government with a centralised education system, and teacher's organisations. The discussion from Kraak (1998) and Rensburg (2001) provide context for the rationale that informed the transformation of education policy.

Another theme focuses on the critics of education policy. This theme points to the flaws with the process of education policy-making. De Clercq (2007) and Jansen (2002) argue that the manner in which the policy has been formulated is unlikely to produce the intended results. These two scholars point out that the policy-making process was symbolic and filled with beliefs and rhetoric. Badat and Sayed (2014), Cross *et al.* (2002) and De Clercq (1997) argued that those involved in the policymaking failed to account for thorough strategies of implementation.

The literature review also identified the theme of scholarship on the approaches to quality education. This theme concerns the varying aspects of what constitutes quality education. Nikel and Lowe (2010) are of the idea that in low-income countries, the concept of quality education has not been extensively developed enough for it to shape policy processes of educational

development. Sayed and Ahmed (2011), Spreen and Valley (2006) and Motala (2011), apply the human rights approach to conceptualised quality education. Sayed and Ahmed (2011) note criticism placed on the human rights approach. Other noted approaches are the human capital approach and the social justice approach.

The theme of measuring the quality of education is concerned with the appropriate means to measure quality in the context of South Africa. Sayed (2008) argues against using matric results as a tool for measurement. Spaul (2013) highlights measuring unquantifiable outcomes and cognitive skills.

The theme around access to quality basic education emphasises the difference between structural access and meaningful access (Motala, 2001:96). These types of access can inform prioritisation of strategies in basic education interventions. In addition, Spaul (2013) provides background on the educational performance of South African learners in comparison to other countries. Badat and Sayed (2014) then discuss differentiated access to quality basic education between schools and varying phases on schooling.

Another theme identified in the literature review is the role of funding in education. Motala (2003), Vally (2003) and Fiske and Ladd (2004) point out the unequal capacity of school governing bodies to raise school funds and its related impact on the delivery of quality education. Therefore, funding policies are said to increase inequalities between schools.

The theme of implementation gaps is explored by Sayed (2002), Motala (2002) and Lewis and Motala (2004), who argue there is a mismatch between policy practice and policy outcomes. Jansen (2002) argues that there is a shortage of scholarship that provides new explanations on the implementation gaps beyond resource limitations. According to Greenstein (2003), the gaps in implementation can be attributed to poor clarification of on implementation plans.

The literature review is essential for insight into not only the approaches to education policy but the identification of problems that scholars prioritise as well. Accordingly, the literature review takes note of the theory-based approach of this thesis as it revealed a shortage in that aspect of the scholarship. It was crucial to review the literature of education policy to gain deeper insight into the policy problem of lack of access to quality basic education.

## 1.6. Approaches taken in this thesis

Since this thesis seeks to uncover the theoretical assumptions underpinning South African basic education policy, it follows a theory-based evaluation approach by applying Pawson and Tilley's (1997) realistic evaluation as an analytical tool. This approach echoes Spreen and Vally's (2010:435) argument that "policy research conducted in South Africa to date has primarily identified the financial constraints as the biggest barrier to policy implementation and reform, without fundamentally challenging or questioning the original policy assumptions".

A central element of theory-based forms of evaluation is a program theory. A program theory, which is usually in a graphical diagram, identifies relationships among programme or policy inputs, actions, and outputs. Inputs refer to the different forms of resources, human, financial and physical, essential to the intervention. Actions are the activities performed to achieve the desired results.

Realist evaluation stresses that "a good program theory should be context (C) and mechanism (M) which account for the outcome (O)" (Stame, 2004:62). Context refers to the backdrop of programs and research as well as "any condition that triggers and/or modifies the behaviour of a mechanism (Wong *et al.*, 2013:13). Mechanisms can be described as "an account of the make-up, behaviour, and interrelationships of those processes which are responsible for the regularity. A mechanism is thus a theory which spells out the potential of human resources and reasoning" (Pawson and Tilley, 1997:68). Outcomes refer to the "anticipated changes that occur directly or indirectly as a result of inputs, activities, and outputs" (Coryn, Noakes, Westine & Schroter, 2011:202). In realistic evaluation, a program theory establishes the causal links between mechanism and outcomes while paying attention to the contexts within which this causality happens (Pawson & Tilley, 1997:57).

According to Pawson (2003:473), "interventions work when the resources on offer (material, cognitive, social, emotional) strike a chord with programme subjects". In this thesis, a program theory for education policy embodies how programmes, interventions, activities and resources are assumed to work in order to address the policy problem of lack of access to basic quality education. Realist evaluation is concerned with unearthing and inspecting key programme mechanisms. Pawson (2003:472) argues that programmes are 'theories' grounded on the

hypothesis of “if we provide these people with these resources it may change their behaviour”. Essentially, evaluation becomes a process of testing programme theories.

In addition, realistic evaluation is different from method-driven approaches because it does not require the use of randomized controlled experiments in order to know how intervention is expected to make an impact (Tilley and Clarke, 2006:524). Instead, a realist evaluator assesses an intervention by uncovering its contexts, mechanisms and outcomes (CMOs) to build a program theory, which will shed light on assumptions underpinning a specific policy. Accordingly, methods chosen for a realistic evaluation have more to do with whether they can produce knowledge about contexts, outcomes and mechanisms needed to build a program theory and to further understand the underlying assumptions (Clarke, 2011:28).

This thesis aims to determine and evaluate the assumptions underpinning South Africa’s basic education policy, using realist evaluation CMO configurations and a program theory. Therefore, the first objective of this thesis is to find and present the CMOs of the South African basic education policy found in policy documents. It is up to the evaluator to decide which contexts, mechanisms and outcomes are prioritized to be part of the investigation and centre of the realist evaluation (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007:447). This decision can be supported using existing literature and the evaluator’s prior knowledge and experience of the intervention and is less dependent on the contribution of stakeholders. The basic education policy addresses various problem areas of the education system, therefore the scope of this thesis chose ‘lack of access to quality basic education’ as the problem area to focus on. Therefore, the CMOs identified for this research study are related to the overall basic education policy’s goal to enhance access to quality basic education.

Following the presentation of CMOs, the second objective of this thesis is to establish the program theory that informs provision of basic education and present it in a graphical diagram form. A program theory is not completely separate from the CMO discussion. Rather, it is an extension and simplification of the causal links between the CMOs in relation to how they are assumed to operate. The configurations of CMOs hypothesize the causal and situational triggers for changes in behaviour or responses to the intervention (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007: 446). In a realistic evaluation approach, the underlying assumptions of a programme are found within the components of CMO (Stame, 2004: 62). Accordingly, engaging with how the configurations of CMO are intended to work is instrumental for the identification of inputs, activities, outputs that form part of the basic education policy.

After the configurations of CMO are discussed and a program theory has been established, the third objective of this thesis is to extrapolate and assess the underlying assumptions. The assessment of the assumption will follow Pawson and Tilley's (1997) realist question of "what works, for who and under what circumstances" as expressed by the DBE. Once these assumptions are presented, they are evaluated. The rationale of these assumptions will be tested against existing studies and data on the state of education and its impact as documented by researchers and research organizations. These assumptions will be evaluated according to the realistic evaluation question of 'what works and for who and what circumstances' in the efforts to provide access to quality basic education.

### **1.7. The limitations and delimitations of this study**

The basic education policy addresses a multitude of problem areas within adult basic education, higher education, teacher education, general education and education for special needs children. This thesis is delimited to only focus on the policy issues of 'lack of access to quality basic education for Grade R to Grade 12'. The terms 'access' and 'quality' are used simultaneously in relation to basic education to emphasise that just access to school is not sufficient to secure acceptable quality of basic education. Moreover, adult basic education and education for children with special needs are not individually addressed. These two excluded aspects of basic education are already big topics by themselves and there is not enough space to comprehensively include them in this study. Furthermore, this evaluation focuses on the education policy from 1994 to 2018.

Also, there are many programmes prescribed by the basic education policy designed to deliver basic education. Because of the size of the policy, not all the programmes are part of this thesis. Programmes that are included are The Accelerated Schools Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI), the National School Nutrition Programme, Funza Lushaka and Dinaledi Programme. These programmes are included due to their shared objective of improving access to quality basic education. However, these programmes are not individually discussed. Rather, they are discussed in relation to specific themes within this evaluation research and their role in the provision of access to quality basic education.

Because theory-based evaluation in South African academic literature is still developing with a few theory-based evaluations, specifically in basic education, this thesis still depends on conceptualizations from outside the country. For instance, political history as an influential

context to policy development is not often included in theory-based evaluation scholarship. However, in South Africa, the context of the political history of apartheid continues to inform policy development even in sectors outside of education. However, despite a lack of presentation of political history, theory-based evaluation does provide flexibility to include contexts that are relevant to the policy being evaluated, even if that context is not popular among the scholarship. This thesis makes a contribution in expanding theory-based evaluation concepts into South African contexts.

## **1.8. Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter gave an overview of how the research question would be answered. In addition, the chapter addressed the motivations behind the choice of research methods and analytical approach. Furthermore, the justification for using theory-based evaluation was discussed, stating the fact that the use of theory-based evaluation is still developing in South Africa makes this thesis valuable.

This thesis is comprised of six chapters with the first chapter providing the background with which this thesis is situated in relation to. Chapter two provides a literature review of the scholarship on South Africa's basic education policy and theory-based evaluation. Chapter three discusses the research methods followed in this thesis to analyse policy documents, build a program theory and to unpack and evaluate the theoretical assumptions underpinning South African basic education policy in achieving access to quality basic education. The choice to conduct qualitative research as well as the application of realistic approach will also be discussed. Through the application Pawson and Tilley's (1997) realistic framework, Chapter four discusses the CMO configurations informing South Africa's basic education policy. Chapter four also presents these configurations in a program theory. Chapter five unpacks and evaluates the assumptions of basic education policy based on findings discussed in Chapter four. The evaluation of the assumptions was based on Pawson's (2003) realistic question of 'what works and for who'. Chapter six, the final chapter, addresses the purpose of the thesis as well as the research question that guided the process of this evaluation research. The main findings are also discussed. Finally, the concluding remarks will reflect on the process of conducting this thesis as well as recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Several scholars in South Africa have written about South African education policy. This chapter provides a literature review of the scholarship that addresses various themes about education policy. It also addresses scholarship on theory-based evaluation, which includes theories of change and realist evaluation. In addition, important terms will be conceptualised within discussions of each theme instead of separately. There are varying approaches to evaluating South African education policy scholars have teased out.

South African education policy has different areas of interest such as addressing legacies of apartheid education policy and ensuring access to quality basic education. According to Hartshorne (1999:5), "education policy, like any other state policy, may be defined as a course of action adopted by government, through legislation, ordinances, and regulations, and pursued through administration and control, finance and inspection, with the general assumption that it should be beneficial for the country and its citizens". The process of education policy development is studied from varying perspectives.

For De Clercq (1997:128) and Christie (2008:122), South African education policy documents can be characterised as symbolic, regulatory, substantive and redistributive. Symbolic policies are more rhetorical about necessary transformations while substantive policies, such as the South African Schools Act of 1996, reflect actions that ought to be taken by the government. The Constitution of South Africa is called a symbolic policy which details ideals that cannot be practically achieved. Redistributive policies redirect the allocation of resources or rights among social groups. For instance, the National Education Policy Act of 1996, is regulatory or procedural because it guides the actions through laws and regulations or detail procedures for activities to be undertaken.

### **2.2. Themes in identified in the South African basic education literature**

The literature on South African education policy is large; thus, this chapter is limited to literary work that deals with the policy problem of access to quality education for Grade R to Grade 12. This body of literature has been approached from different perspectives yielding various themes surrounding the provision of access to quality education and the overall post-apartheid education policy. Additionally, this literature review aims to illuminate various developments

in the study of public policy, such as education policy. Furthermore, this chapter aims to position this thesis in answering the research question and application of realistic evaluation.

### **2.2.1 The thinking behind education policy transformation**

Kraak (1998:1) highlights three distinct policy discourses that have shaped education policy transformation in post-apartheid South Africa, and pays attention to different goals advocated by each discourse. The first discourse is the movement of radical people's education in the mid-1980s. The people's education movement not only resisted Bantu Education, but it also viewed classroom space as a political struggle against apartheid. Kraak (1998:2) notes that "the people's education movement became an educational pedagogy encompassing the development of critical thinking, interdisciplinary curriculum content, learner-centeredness, participatory teaching methods, community involvement and a concern to link the focus of formal education with the world of work". Eventually, the discourse of the people's education movement evolved from an egalitarian approach to an expert-led, multi-stakeholder policy-making process with an economic and systematic focus signalling the fall of the people's education movement (Kraak, 1998:3).

The second discourse took place prior to the 1994 elections and advocated for a systematic approach with a focus on structural change within the education and training system. It viewed education policy in relation to structural matters such as the distribution of power between the state, market and education and training institutions. Accordingly, this discourse's interest lies in the interrelation between divisions of the economy, labour market and occupational structure of the education system. Moreover, the systematic discourse called for a single unified educational framework to guide operations of education and training (Kraak, 1998:5).

The third discourse presents a move away from systematic approaches towards an outcome-based education (OBE) and training approach (Kraak, 1998:1). While the systematic discourse was present within the ANC and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) policy notions from 1990 until 1994, it was eventually superseded by an OBE discourse (Kraak, 1998:22). According to Kraak (1998:23), OBE discourse became part of ANC and Cosatu's policy frameworks as evidenced by their 1993 document of a framework for Lifelong Learning, and also in the *ANC's 1994: A Policy Framework for Education and Training*. Essentially, OBE "sought to go beyond the narrow cognitive confines of competency models by incorporating the progressive pedagogic principles of people's education" (Kraak, 1998:22).

While Kraak (1998) presents the thinking behind the education policy transformation in terms of dominant discourses, Rensburg (2001) emphasises assumptions underpinning the policy transformation process. He argues that these assumptions have shaped South African education policy transformation and policy implementation (Rensburg, 2001:121). In addition, Rensburg (2001:121) argues that while some of the assumptions are problematic, they are instrumental for future policy development and implementation processes.

The first aspect of education policy assumptions Rensburg (2001) presents pertains to national identities. For national public service managers, South Africa's anti-apartheid and national liberation struggle identities became integrated into their new identities (Rensburg 2001:122). However, in the post-apartheid period, nation-building programmes had to move away from a preoccupation with the national liberation struggle. Unfortunately, what these anti-apartheid identities lacked when they became immersed in policy development is the adoption of identities that transcend political struggles and advancing interests of the majority population. Accordingly, planning the transformation of the education system was largely shaped by "assumptions of a national unitary government and centralised education policy, planning and financing mandate and capacity" (Rensburg 2001:125).

Rensburg (2001:125) notes the contradictions between the intentions of a nation-building programme and education policies that transpired in the post-apartheid period. For instance, while the development, design and implementation of curriculum policies are legitimised by a democratic state, they are deeply epistemologically and theoretically rooted in anti-apartheid sentiments and national liberation struggles (Rensburg, 2001:122). This underpinning became unsustainable in the context of freedom and democratic governance.

The entrenchment of national identities in policies is illuminated by a preoccupation with changing programmes and implementation issues rather than with theoretical assumptions of these policies (Rensburg, 2001:123). It is only recently that epistemological and theoretical foundations of education policies are being investigated, especially within curriculum policy studies. The increase in the use of theory-based evaluation in South Africa is a valuable addition to the observation Rensburg made regarding increasing interest in policy assumptions in the education policy.

The next aspect of the theoretical assumptions of educational policies are concerned that which holds the national education system together: the three-tier system of national, provincial and

institutional division. The core theoretical assumption pre-1993/4 shaped the reconstruction and development was that of a unitary national state. However, the creation of a three-tier education system in the post-apartheid period brought about confusion regarding responsibilities, accountability and roles between the national, provincial and institutional powers that were unaccounted for (Rensburg, 2001:124). Because such separation of leadership within the education sector was unforeseen during the early days of policy development, the national government is continuously faced with a challenge regarding its leadership role in educational change.

Another pre-1994 education policy assumption is that of a national unitary government and a centralised education policy, planning and financing mandate and capacity. This assumption was challenged by the establishment of a constitution that founded an education authority comprised of one national and nine provincial departments (Rensburg, 2001:126). Despite a focus on the theoretical unitary national government, senior management across national, provincial and institutional levels had an opposing understanding of interpreting and implementing education policy, which causes fragmentation in the outcomes of policies (Rensburg, 2001: 126). Human capacity characterised by different competencies, philosophies and attitudes made it problematic for those involved to interpret the developmental and transformational requirements of a post-apartheid basic education policy in the same manner.

Rensburg (2001:128) turns to the assumption relating to teachers' organisations in the national education change programme. The main point of this assumption is that by transitioning into the post-apartheid period, teacher unionism would autonomously shift towards a new professional identity. Additionally, the assumption held that teachers would become deeply entrenched in the provision of education service and be participatory in curriculum projects. However, this assumption has failed as teacher unionism remained removed from matters of educational reconstruction and development (Rensburg, 2001:128).

In addition, Rensburg (2001:125) highlights policy assumptions that did not materialise in the post-apartheid period. In the first five years of democracy, the majority of senior managers functioned under the assumption that they would follow an expansionary framework, rather than a macroeconomic and fiscal framework. An expansionary framework would make available much-needed resources to see through the country's reconstruction and development plan. However, this assumption fell through with the introduction of the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) framework.

The introduction of GEAR in the place of Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was heavily criticized by policymakers and senior managers, causing a setback in the policy announcements and implementation. The lack of alignment between policy programmes and budgets has demonstrated a significant policy weakness (Rensburg, 2001:125). With the assumptions identified in mind, Rensburg (2001:130) suggests that for the sake of the education progression, the focus should be placed on strengthening and building policy leadership, improving analytical capabilities and establishing robust policy institutions (Rensburg, 2001:130).

This background on the discourses and assumptions informing education policy transformation shines a light on the thought processes behind South African education policies. Furthermore, it provides context for how and why certain policy ideas became part of post-apartheid policies while others were not. As such, the discussion by Kraak (1998) and Rensburg (2001) indicates that the final form of education policy options did not develop overnight. The build-up towards adopted policy documents took place before apartheid fell.

### **2.2.2. Critics of post-apartheid education policy**

While the education policy was in the making for a long time before the fall of apartheid, it is not without criticism. De Clercq (2007) and Jansen's (2012) criticism of post-apartheid education policy focuses on its early development period. De Clercq's (1997:127) starting point is that "educational restructuring policy frameworks as they have been formulated and reformulated, are unlikely to fulfil their promised intentions of bringing about greater development, equity, participation, and redress". In agreement, Jansen (2002:208), De Clercq (1997:133), Badat and Sayed (2014:130) and Cross *et al.* (2002:174), argue that National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) and ANC policy group failed to promote capacity building, increased participation, and empowerment through democratic processes in education. Instead, the focus was placed on education as a tool for developing social groups and democratic power relations, which compromised promotion of performance, outcomes, cost-effectiveness and economic competitiveness.

In addition, Badat and Sayed (2014:130) argue that the post-apartheid government lacked policy resources to utilise and formulate a clear and focused strategy that would develop a sound education system. Consequently, crucial policy documents such as the NEPI documents, and the ANC's Education and Training Framework and Implementation Plan, were saturated

with values and beliefs but lacked emphasis on strategies about personnel and finances required to see through an effective transformation of the education system (2014:130). In agreement with Badat and Sayed, de Clercq (1997:133) critiques the ANC Policy Framework for its failure to establish intervention stages to commence with the transformation of the apartheid education system. Based on these failures by the ANC during the policymaking process which started before the 1994 election, de Clercq (1997:133) argues that the ANC policy experts failed to engage with the policymaking process itself and did not account for present education issues during the policy formulation process. The position of these scholars on the process of education policy development illustrates that while the project of education transformation took place over an extended period of time, policymakers failed to produce sustainable and tangible education policies that would be compatible with South African post-apartheid political, economic, social and institutional contexts.

Jansen (2002) applies the theoretical framework of political symbolism to critique South Africa's post-apartheid education policy. Jansen (2002:199) argues that education policies that came out of the fall of apartheid were just politically symbolic and were underpinned by political ideologies. Essentially, "despite unprecedented investment in policymaking and policy production in the years anticipating and following the end of legal apartheid in South Africa, there appears to be very little change in the daily routines of schools and classrooms of the nation" (Jansen, 2002:199). Consequently, the formulation of education policy can be observed as a struggle to acquire wide political symbolism to signify a shift away from apartheid towards a democratic society (Jansen, 2002:200).

This political symbolism is evident in policy processes concerning the education system. For instance, apartheid syllabi were completely scrapped soon after the appointment of the first post-apartheid Minister of Basic Education in late 1994. In three months, over 100 apartheid syllabi were reviewed. One consequence of such a rushed change in syllabi is that theoretical changes were made, however, they lacked interventions to help materialize and sustain those changes in classroom environments (Jansen, 2012:56). While Jansen (2012:56) understands the need to replace apartheid-era curriculums, he also points out that these changes received political recognition but did nothing to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

In agreement with Jansen, De Clercq (1997:135) states that the White Paper on Training and Education (1995) was viewed by many as "gestural and with some momentary public relations importance, designed to reassure all stakeholders with uncontroversial educational principles

and values as well as broad and general symbolic regulatory policy frameworks". Additionally, despite the White Paper outlining the importance of consultation among various stakeholder to finalize education policy, in practice, only a few experts were involved in finalizing the policy. Accordingly, the post-apartheid education policy is characterized by last-minute implementation plans.

Based on the arguments brought forth by various scholars above, it can be said that South African education policy creation in the post-apartheid era lacked focus concerning implementation and feasibility and is instead saturated with political statements.

### **2.2.3 Approaches to quality of education**

One of the priorities of post-apartheid education is to improve the quality of education. While there are varying conceptualisations and understanding of quality education, these still lack a concise explanation of what constitutes quality. The concept of quality education in low-income countries has not been developed to an extent where it informs policies and strategies for educational development (Nikel & Lowe, 2010: 590). In an attempt to frame education quality in the context of South African education, Sayed and Ahmed (2011:103) outline three approaches to education quality from the work of Tikly and Barret (2009). These approaches are the human capital approach, the human rights approach and the social justice approach. Under the human capital approach, education is regarded as a crucial input for economic development. This approach is instrumental for "identifying and quantifying inputs and outputs, examining the relationship between them and is potentially helpful for redirecting policy to processes that influence outcomes" (Sayed & Ahmed, 2011:104). However, Sayed and Ahmed (2011:104) argue that using this approach to conceptualise education quality is weak because it overlooks the importance of process, depends too much on standardised assessments of cognitive learning and does not address matters of human rights.

The human rights approach is more prevalent within low-income contexts. This approach interprets education as "a basic right that a learner is entitled to, and government and institutions need to work towards creating conditions for quality education for all" (Sayed and Ahmed, 2011:104). This approach has been instrumental in creating common ground for advocates of equity, critics of market forces and those that consider economic growth as positive and necessary (2011:104). Spreen and Valley (2006) use the human rights framework to discuss policy changes in South Africa. For these scholars, the definition of rights includes

promoting and protecting access to quality education and educational opportunities (Spren & Vally, 2006: 352) (Motala, 2011:92). As such, their main argument about the human rights approach is that “the introduction of user fees and the burden of other costs have rendered abstract the idea of education as a right” (Spren and Valley, 2006:352).

Additionally, Arendse (2011:120) argues that the fact that there are children who are unable to attend school due to educational costs such as transportation and school fees, as mentioned by Spren and Valley (2006), are realities contradictory to the domestic and international commitments South Africa has made to provide free access to primary education. Along with access to education as a human right, Arendse (2011:101) points out that education is also understood as a crucial instrument for individual and human development.

Despite these goals, the human rights approach has not gone without criticism. Sayed and Ahmed (2011:104) argue that it is merely narrow and legalist in that it understands rights as mainly legal rights instead of substantive rights, and it does not address socio-political contexts that affect human rights and education. While both the human capital and human rights approach expand conceptualisation of education quality, their biggest shortcoming is the inability to create comprehensive and contextual considerations (Sayed and Ahmed, 2011:104). Motala (2011:92) brings forth an argument that human rights should be at the centre of education policy initiatives and prioritise translating these rights into “human right obligations”. The human rights approach is significant for evaluating education policy because in South Africa, education as a basic human right is a constitutional provision. Therefore, the human rights approach can be instrumental in probing the delivery of quality education as a constitutionally given right.

The final approach is a social justice approach, which is an extension of the human rights approach in two ways. Firstly, it advocates for substantive rights over legal rights as understood by the human rights approach. As such, it views participation as key to quality education and advocates that giving a voice to everyone, especially those that are marginalised, and they should be part of improving quality of education (Sayed and Ahmed, 2011:104). Secondly, it draws its attention towards capabilities in education as advocated by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2006). Capabilities refer to any potential functioning that is valued in society. As such, the social justice approach expands education to “doings and beings valued by society” (Sayed and Ahmed, 2011:104).

Along with the three approaches, Sayed and Ahmed (2011:105) highlight categories of what makes up quality education as identified by Barret et al (2008) and Nikel and Lowe (2010). The first five analytical components of quality identified from Barret *et al.* (2008), include effectiveness, efficiency, equality, relevance and sustainability. Sayed and Ahmed also point out two more additional categories identified by Nikel and Lowe (2010): responsiveness and reflexivity. These seven dimensions recognise the quality of education as a concept that transcends classroom engagement which becomes stronger when its operationalisation is strengthened.

#### **2.2.4 Measuring quality of education**

Alongside concerns of quality of education, it is important to discuss appropriate ways to measure the quality of education. Clarity about which methods are best for measuring quality education is essential because it is instrumental for establishing policy outcomes. On the one hand, scholars focus on "unquantifiable outcomes of education such as political participation, social and democratic values and egalitarianism" (Spaull, 2013:12). On the other hand, scholars emphasize "measurable cognitive skills acquired at school, especially numeracy and literacy" (Spaull, 2013:12). Spaull (2013:12) then argues that emphasis on numeracy and literacy is preferable because they are easily measurable and produce "verifiable scientific evidence".

Sayed (2008:127) argues that using matric results as a measurement tool is insufficient. All learners in Grade 12 write a national standardized exam to qualify for a high school leaving diploma called National Senior Certificate (NSC). Higher education institutions then make use of these matric results to decide whether a learner meets university requirements to qualify for further studies. While there has been an improvement in matric results, caution must be exercised when viewing this improvement as a sign of improving quality education. It is important to be cautious since using matric results as a tool for measuring the quality of education does not take into account the performance of learners in grades before Grade 12, in addition to those learners that drop out before reaching Grade 12 (Sayed, 2008:127).

Furthermore, matric results are not representative of how the education system works as a whole for learners (Sayed, 2008:127). For instance, out of hundreds of learners that start Grade 1, only fifty of them progress to Grade 12. Out of that fifty that make it to Grade 12, only forty of them will receive their NSC while only twelve qualify for university (Spaull, 2013:5). Even

when they do not drop out and complete matric, many do not qualify for university due to poor levels of their numeracy and literacy skills.

Carter (2008:25) notes that since 1994, dropout rates have improved between black and white learners. It is, however, concerning that learners go through the process of schooling, yet do not acquire sufficient numeracy and literacy skills to even progress their education. While matric results have been deemed an insufficient measure of overall quality of education, Jansen (2012:56) maintains that the failure of 294,244 matric learners out of 556,246 in 1997, which is a rate of 52.9 per cent, illustrates the "unmitigated failure of education policies since 1994". This policy failure is a result of the "overinvestment of the state in the political symbolism of policy rather than its practical implementation" (Jansen, 2012:56). While matric results can be used as part of studying and understanding the state of education in South Africa, they cannot be utilised in a vacuum from other aspects of measuring the quality of education.

### **2.2.5 Access to quality education**

There are two main conceptualisations of access within education research and policy provision: structural access and meaningful access (Motala, 2011:96). Structural access frames access as a matter supply side that can easily be fixed by building enough schools. South Africa has placed emphasis on structural access thus "prioritising research on encompasses enrolment, retention, dropout rates, household income levels, budget allocation, educator training and deployment, resource availability and distribution, and personnel and capital expenditure" (Motala, 2011:96). Therefore, factors such as gender, age, HIV/AIDS, nutrition, child labour and pregnancy are deemed to be statistically significant in affecting the structural access and retention rates. As such, structural access must be understood in conjunction with how these factors play a role in the provision of structural access. While structural access is vital, it is simply not enough to ensure the provision of quality education (Motala, 2011:97).

Structural access does not mean much unless accompanied meaningful access which is characterised by regular class attendance, progression within grades at appropriate ages, meaningful and useful learning, grade achievement and completion with high standards (Motala, 2011:96). Different to structural access, meaningful access prioritises research into "sexual harassment, racism, xenophobia, HIV/AIDS, violence, quality of achievement, epistemic access, learner participation, and educator preparedness and competency" (Motala, 2011:96). Furthermore, any development in structural access will enhance meaningful access

even though meaningful access on its own would impact fair and equitable experience of schooling (Motala, Dieltiens, Carrim, Kgobe, Moyo and Rembe 2007:98).

According to Spaul (2013:3) and Bloch (2009:17), it is undeniable that South Africa's education system is in a crisis and young people are the most affected. Carter (2008:22) observes that "even though access to education in South Africa may be good, there is an abundance of evidence that the quality of education in South Africa is sub-standard". Even by international standards, access to education is satisfactory while quality is considered poor.

Spaul (2013) and Carter (2008) draw from the Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) cross-national study between fourteen southern and eastern African countries. This study tested numeracy and literacy knowledge of Grade 6 learners from each of the fourteen countries. Out of the fourteen countries tested, South Africa came ninth in mathematics and eighth in reading skills. In recent studies by the SACMEQ, South Africa performed worse than some of the poorest countries including Kenya, Tanzania, and Swaziland (Spaul, 2013:4). In addition, based on studies done locally and internationally, it is clear that while provision to access and quality education should be mutually exclusive, South Africa is failing in attaining the quality aspect of education provision.

Badat and Sayed (2014:17) look at the progress South Africa has made in "realising laudable constitutional and policy goals, especially equity, quality and social justice in education". South Africa still faces differentiated access to various school environments. Learners from poor families still make up the majority of students in historically black schools, while learners from wealthier families are concentrated at historically white schools (Badat & Sayed, 2014:135).

According to Badat and Sayed (2014:135), primary and early childhood development portray a bleak but clear picture of differentiated access to school. Early childhood development remains inaccessible to vulnerable and poor communities as this service is often privately provided at a high cost. Although the government has shifted more focus towards primary education, the quality is still poor. Badat and Sayed (2014:135) thus conclude that provision of quality education from a young age "is the most important equity measure that can be taken to strengthen South Africa's educational attainments". Exposure to such poor quality of education deprives children of an educationally stronger position as they move up the schooling system.

Adding to the conversation of access, Motala (2011:96) argues that access in the post-apartheid era should transcend an emphasis on structural access to school. Historically, access was not so much an issue of physical access considering that black learners could go to school, however, their access was characterised by division and inequality. Consequently, conceptualisation and policy understanding of access lean towards the subject of who has access, what kind and on what basis (Motala, 2011:96). Additionally, at the core of South African post-apartheid education policy are legislations and procedures intended to enhance access to education for every South African. Consequently, the failure to provide access to quality schooling is attributed to policy failure (Jansen, 2012:56)

### **2.2.6. The role of funding in education**

In the education policy literature, there is also a focus on the role of funding in education. Policies concerning funding and budgets have much to do with addressing access to education as much as they have to do with improving the quality of education. Motala's (2011:87) point of view is that for a conducive learning environment to be possible, matters of financing and resources have to form part of policy prioritisation.

The South African Schools Act (1996) made provision for an establishment of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) as a tool to enhance access to quality education in South African schools, and alleviate financial pressure within the education system (Motala, 2003:300). SGBs are comprised of teachers, parents, non-teaching staff and learners who ensure that schools guard the interests of all stakeholders. The South African Schools Act outlines that "school governing bodies will be responsible for school development through the provision of quality education" (Motala, 2003:300).

Furthermore, SGBs have leeway to raise capital for their schools in ways they see fit such as increasing school fees (Vally, 2003:466). However, school fees have maintained inequalities between schools that can raise capital on their own and those that cannot. The idea behind increasing fees was to entice learners from middle-class households to remain in public schools because "those schools were able to hire additional educators, and acquire other features that enhanced the provision of quality education" (Motala, 2011:90) (Fiske and Ladd, 2004:74). Though, charging fees is deemed an obstacle for learners to access schools that achieve positive educational outputs while poor schools cannot increase their capacity to achieve positive educational outcomes (Motala, 2011:90) (Vally, 2003:466). Consequently, school funding

policies are perceived to contradict existing policy commitments towards the provision of basic education (Vally, 2003:466). Correctly, De Clerq (1997:127) anticipated the division that would be caused by education transformative policy frameworks. Her stance was that the conceptualisation of education problems and policy processes were likely to produce conditions that would favour privileged schools while hindering disadvantaged schools from dealing with their educational challenges.

While eventually scrapped, the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) was created to bridge the financial gap caused by the existence of SGBs. Parents who could not afford fees were exempt from paying them while independent schools were subsidised. An attempt by the Department of Education to assist poor school worked in the favour of wealthier school while it backfired for poor schools (Motala, 2011:90). While Lewis and Motala (2004:132) acknowledge the role played by SGBs in increasing school resources, they also point out that due to limited documentation of SGB expenditure, there is no fool-proof evidence to showing that SGBs allocate resources towards improving the quality of education in schools. However, SGBs have played a major role in strengthening the teacher-to-learner ratio through hiring additional teachers as an attempt towards improving quality learning environment. Furthermore, there is limited evidence pointing towards major contribution by the SGBs to enhance physical conditions of schools (Lewis and Motala, 2004:132). While education funding policy makes provision for the exemption of poorer parents from paying schools fees, other measures can be employed to prevent these parents from admitting their children into fee-paying schools (Vally, 2003:455).

Although the availability of funding can assist in improving the educational needs of learners, there are also challenges poorer schools face in seeing through that task. For instance, provincial departments categorise their schools from poorest to least poor, and use this category to provide funds for non-personnel needs. The NNSSF made provision for 60 per cent of total funds to be directed to the poorest 40 per cent of schools (Motala, 2011:90). However, these poorer schools lacked the financial capacity to deal with the huge injection of funds. Accordingly, they received paper budgets, which meant that these schools had to lodge a claim for material needs and often they do not receive them. Eventually, funds were spent on services such as electricity, water, photocopying, gardening and scholar transport until they ran out (Motala, 2011:90).

Meanwhile, wealthy schools did not depend or rely on departmental support, therefore they maintained increased school fees which in turn were used for quality differentials such as additional teachers and lower pupil-teacher ratios (Motala, 2011:90). Even though the policy of the NNSSF did not have intended results to improve access to education for all, it illuminated that “the reduction of socioeconomic disparities has taken place at an even slower pace than improvements in the overall quality in education” (Motala, 2011:91). Assessment of the impact of funding policies designed to assist poor schools illuminate that these schools are not even equipped to handle programmes that are designed to help them. Thus, the challenge that remains is to provide these schools with necessary skills to independently cultivate access to quality education.

### **2.2.7. Implementation gaps**

Implementation gaps is one of the themes that is prominent within education policy analysis literature. Sayed (2002:29) describes implementation gaps as “the mismatch between policy intention and policy practice and outcome”. A literary focus on implementation gaps emphasizes the tensions government is faced with when translating policy rhetoric into intended policy outcomes. Policy scholars understand and study implementation gaps in varying ways. An example of implementation gaps brought forth by Sayed (2002:29) is the “the gap between the commitment to equality and equity in policy texts, and the realisation of these values in the field of practice”. Another understanding of gaps concerns the implementation of the policy of teacher rationalisation. Additionally, Nakabugo and Sieborger (1999) understand implementation gaps by looking through assessments surrounding Curriculum 2005. Motala (1999), in contrast, looks at implementation gaps in the context of quality schooling in terms of pedagogy (Sayed, 2002: 29).

Lewis and Motala (2004:115) argue that policy and research have placed too much attention on the implementation of formal rules and roles, while less attention is paid towards the way policies are put into practice and how low-level actors experienced decentralisation in terms of stated goals. As such, questioning and enquiring about the substance of policy is not prioritised by researchers and policy-makers. With that in mind, Lewis and Motala (2004:116) claim there is a link between school-decentralisation and the quality of education received by learners.

While Jansen (2002:199) acknowledges the existence of implementation gaps within the education system, he also points out the shortage of scholarship on new explanations that go

beyond the ‘lack of resources’ explanation for these gaps. Instead, he chooses to focus on uncovering the reasons behind the lack of transformation in schools and classroom practices despite a creation of a large number of formal education policy documents (Jansen, 2012:56). Jansen (2002:200) argues that policy making processes portray the different ways in which the state is preoccupied with reconciling the political struggle in the political sphere, instead of the realm of practice. He also argues that too much focus on matters of implementation will not uncover “broader political intentions which underpin policymaking after apartheid” (Jansen, 2002:200). Jansen’s call to uncovering policy intentions underpinning education policy is aligned with the principle theory based evaluation applied in this thesis.

Pretorius (2003:7) is concerned with the ability of education policies to fulfil their intended purposes, thus also drawing attention to implementation gaps. His concern is based on the assumption that even well designed policies can fail to create intended outcomes. In agreement, Greenstein (2003:201) criticises the ANC’s Policy Framework for Education and Training, and its practical offshoot, the Implementation Plan for Education and Training. These two policy documents lacked clear guidance about how the post-apartheid government should go about with transforming the education system. Specifically, these documents do not account for how they will materialise within the South African institutional context. Even more crucial, the success of these policy documents was challenged by post-election division of power which meant that people who were not involved in the formulation of these documents became tasked with implementation plans (Greenstein, 2003:201).

Additionally, Greenstein (2003) maintains that the White Paper on Training and Education (1995) seemed more realistic than prior documents. Its realism was not welcomed by those that viewed it as a cause of bureaucratic obstacles through its consultation mandate. The consultation mandate required everyone to agree on educational processes which allowed for those who want to maintain status quo veto power (Greenstein, 2003:202). It is clear there is a noticeable struggle between policy intention and policy practices, which in turn has compromised South Africa’s ability to cultivate access to quality education.

#### **2.2.8. Approaches to analysis South African education policy in the literature**

The analysis of the literature revealed that there are multiple approaches to assessing South African education policy. Kraak (1998) and Rensburg (2001) engage with the thinking behind the process of the education policy transformation. Their approach draws attention to the idea

that education policy development happens through contesting. In her Master's thesis, Goddard (2018) undertook a critical analysis of the assumptions underpinning the problem presentation within basic education policy documents. Goddard (2018:60) identified the underpinning assumption by analysing problem presentation within policy documents using Bacchi's (1999) "What is the problem presented to be" (WPR) approach.

Another approach observed in the literature is the analysis of the policy problem concerning the lack of access to quality basic education. Sayed and Ahmed (2011) present the three frameworks to education quality: the human capital approach, the human rights approach and social justice approach. The human rights approach does not lend itself well in the context of South Africa whereby funding policy creates barriers to education and enables inequality (Sayed and Ahmed, 2011:104). With the human rights approach in mind, Motala (2011:92) argues that human rights should be the bedrock of education policy interventions.

De Clerq (1997:127) and Badat and Sayed (2014:30), provide a critical analysis of the education policy documents and frameworks. They argue that the goals and objectives of these documents will struggle to come to fruition due to the lack of implementation strategies to accompany these documents. In addition, the approach notes that the poor state of basic education is a manifestation of poor policy frameworks with no comprehensive implementation plans. De Clerq (1997:127) maintains post-apartheid education policy documents are filled with beliefs and gestures.

Jansen (2002) approaches the analysis of South African education policy from the theoretical lens of political symbolism. This approach argues that much of the failures in the transformation of the post-apartheid education system can be attributed to "struggle for the achievement of a broad political symbolism that would mark the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid" (Jansen, 2002:200). Therefore, an investigation of implementation details would not yield much knowledge as it could overlook the underlying policy rationales that inform the process of post-apartheid policy making. Jansen and Sayed (2001) maintain that the choices in adopting certain education policies was mainly for symbolic reasons without any account for comprehensive implementation plans. This view shared by Jansen and Sayed is said to be instrumental for understanding and examining policy outcomes post-apartheid (Spren & Vally, 2010:437).

### 2.3. Theory-based evaluation

Before explaining the analytical tool of realist evaluation, it is beneficial to clarify how realist evaluation differs from other forms of theory-based evaluation. White (2009:272) describes theory-based evaluation as “examining the assumptions underlying the causal chain from inputs to outcomes and impacts”. Blamey and Mackenzie (2007) state that the ‘theory’ in theory-based evaluation, has two conceptualisations. The first refers to “the hypothesised links between programme’s activities and its anticipated outcomes” (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007:444). The second conceptualisation of theory refers to “the hypothesised causal links between mechanisms released by an intervention and the anticipated outcomes” (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007:445). Theory-based evaluation has evolved and been refined, producing various scholars who advocate for varying approaches to theory-based evaluation.

Firstly, theory-based approaches emphasise uncovering expected results as accounted by stakeholders and/or interpreted by evaluators. Secondly, context is central to the evaluation of programmes. Thirdly, there are no set methods for evaluating programmes, as such evaluators can use any fitting method without bias or too much dependence (Stame, 2004:63). Within differing interpretations of theory-based evaluation, the intention is to engage with what happens between input processes and output processes of interventions.

The first approach to theory-based evaluation by Chen and Rossi (1989), is a response to the black box problem. Stame (2004:58) defines the black box as “the space between the actual inputs and the expected outputs of a programme”. For a long time, policy makers concerned themselves with the inputs of policy programmes and ignored expected activities, such as the how and why, informing interventions. Method-driven evaluators tend to primarily pay attention to measuring outputs by attributing them to the inputs. Therefore, Chen and Rossi (1989:299) argue that black box programmes are the way they are due to the absence of theory informing them, their goals are unclear and measures are incorrect. Accordingly, Chen and Rossi’s (1989) theory driven evaluation approach advocates for “studying treatment, discussing stakeholders’ and evaluators’ views on outcomes, examining why and how a programme fares as in does” (Stame, 2004:61).

The second theory-based approach advocated by Weiss (1987) argues, contrary to Chen and Rossi, that programmes do have theories of change in the form of assumptions (Long, 2006:465; Stame, 2004:61). Theories of change emphasise the importance of ‘implementation

theory' and 'programme theory' in evaluation. The 'implementation theory' refers to activities to be performed during the implementation stage of a policy programme which Chen calls 'descriptive theory' (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007:444). The other theory is 'programme theory' which refers to "the responses of the people to the programme activities" (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007:445). Chen (1990) refers to this kind of theory as 'prescriptive theory'. However, Blamey and Mackenzie (2007:445) argue that evaluators who apply theories of change tend to lean on only explaining implementation theory.

The last approach to theory-based evaluation advocated by Pawson and Tilley (1997), which is also applied in this thesis, is a realist evaluation. Different to theories of change, realist evaluation emphasises the importance of uncovering a 'programme theory' rather than an 'implementation theory'. However, realistic evaluators do use the process of 'implementation theory' to gain deeper understanding into an intervention's activities, target population, and intended outcomes. Nonetheless, the use of implementation theory is merely a path to "hypothesise the causal triggers that fire the appropriate mechanisms in certain circumstance" (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007:446).

Thus, the description of realist evaluation refers to "context, mechanism, and outcome configurations (CMOs) that attempt to hypothesize the causal and situational triggers for changes in behaviour or responses to an intervention" (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007:446). Realist evaluators do not regard programmes as the drivers of change, rather, it is people, operating in their given contexts, who, when they encounter programmes, behave in a way that activates given mechanism and change (Pawson, 2003:474). The principle of realist evaluation is centred around the psychological and motivational responses causing change in behaviour (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007:446).

Birckmayer and Weiss (2000:409) outline the advantages of theory-based evaluation. When it comes to program planning and improvement, theory-based evaluation elicits information about the mechanisms that intervene between program activities and the success or failure of the intended results. Thus, an evaluation with an exhaustive program theory underlying an intervention, will show which program assumptions are supported by data collected and which are not. In addition, Birckmayer and Weiss (2000:410) argues that in an evaluation that applies a theory-based approach, "the evaluator can choose to collect data on the linkage mechanisms assumed to be operative in one theory, or in several theories, or select a set of particularly

central (or problematic) assumptions and direct the evaluation towards investigating that specific link in the theory chain”.

### **2.3.1. Theory-based evaluation in South Africa**

The use of theory-based evaluation in relation to the evaluation of policies and programmes is still developing and growing in South Africa, with the establishment of DPME and focusing on the monitoring and evaluation profession through SAMEA. Most theory-based evaluations are commissioned by the government. Unlike in first world countries, where programme evaluation stems from government itself and is built upon at top-down approach, South African programme evaluation emerged due to an increase in donor funding as a means to establish accountability for programmes and stemmed from bottom up (Heradien, 2013:4).

The DBE has commissioned evaluations for some of the programmes intended to uphold the goals and objective of the education policy. The DBE has conducted implementation evaluations of Early Childhood Development (2013); Funza Lushaka (2013-2015); National School Nutrition Programme (2014-2015); Curriculum and Policy Statements (CAPS) (2015); and Scholar Transport (2019) (Department of Basic Education, 2019). In addition, the department has done two impact evaluations of Early Grade Reading (2015) and Grade R introduction (2013).

The use of theory-based evaluation by South African scholars is largely driven by the need to fill the gap in theory-based evaluation scholarship in the country. Mbava (2017) and Heradien (2013) believe in the potential benefits of theory-based evaluation to improve the formulation and implementation of public policy programmes in South Africa. Mbava’s (2017:13) Doctoral study was interested in exploring the potential benefits of a realist evaluation approach “in impact evaluations in South Africa in terms of providing new insights and understanding of how and why change happens in programme evaluation so that results of evaluation findings are meaningful, have utility value and aid in policy-making”. Mbava (2017) utilised a realist evaluation approach from Pawson and Tilley (1997), who argue how and why programmes and policies work is a combination of contexts and mechanisms. In other words, programmes and policies can have the same mechanism but produce varying outcomes under different contexts.

Through the lens of a realist evaluation micro-analyses of case studies, Mbava (2017:149) found that the majority of existing impact evaluations of policy programmes lacked a clear and

established programme theory of change. That is to say, most evaluations in South Africa do not account for how and why programmes work.

Mbava's case study methodology includes policy interventions in social protection, basic education and social housing which is useful for providing a broad overview of how policy evaluations are conducted in the country. In addition, by using realist evaluation, Mbava (2017) was able to provide insights into how and why these policy interventions work, something which impact evaluation has been unable to. Mbava's methodology is expansive in that it covered multiple policies and programmes, and provides a reliable overview of the state of public policies in South Africa. In addition, Mbava's approach shows how realistic evaluation can be applied across different policy programmes.

The research under study is similar to Mbava's (2017), in that it seeks to investigate and understand the assumptions of how change happens underlying the program theory of South Africa's basic education policy. While Mbava's (2017) research included policy interventions from the social protection sector, basic education sector and housing sector, this research only focuses on the basic education policy and its interventions. Another major difference is that Mbava's study (2017) evaluates completed evaluations in each of the previously mentioned sectors. She then tests the observed programme outcomes through stakeholder engagement. In contrast, this research only analyses the basic education policy and utilises a selection of programmes to understand the intentions of the policy. Furthermore, the assumptions underlying the basic education policy are assessed against existing data and literature rather than stakeholder engagement.

The contribution this research makes in addition to Mbava's, is that it demonstrates the importance of considering policy documents that engage with the rationale behind policy intervention rather relying on stakeholders only to articulate the program theory and its assumptions. If policy documents contain explicit rationale with causal links, it would be easier for evaluators to test the theory from the get go rather than spending a lot of time searching for theories in numerous policy documents. In addition, this research pays specific attention to how a combination of basic education programmes are assumed to deliver basic education, while Mbava (2017) limits her focus to the impact of Grade R introduction on learning impacts.

Similar to Mbava (2017), Heradien (2013), in her Master's thesis, applied theory-based evaluation to uncover theoretical assumptions underpinning South African Expanded Public

works Programme (EPWP). While Mbava approached theory-based evaluation from a realistic evaluation framework, Heradien uses Rossi's approach of implementation programme theory. Most programme evaluations of EPWP have focused on measuring the success of the programme against the intended outcomes. Alternatively, Heradien's study pays attention to the thought process behind the development of the EPWP programme (2013:5). Heradien (2013:21) notes that "experimental approach is based on a quantitative nature and produces robust and systematic evidence about the impact of programmes". However, theory-based evaluation is grounded on the beliefs and assumptions underpinning the activities of the policy. As such, qualitative research methods are considered more fitting to quantify beliefs and assumptions whereas quantitative methods are unsuitable due to their numerical nature.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with various themes found in the scholarship of evaluation and study of South African basic education policy. Based on the discussed literature, it can be said that many scholars engage with the basic education policy. However, the shortage of theory based evaluation by academics in addition to the call by Jansen (2002) to search for better explanations regarding poor education outcome, show that there is still a need for differing perspectives in education policy evaluation. The various themes identified by different scholars highlight the dire pressure that the education system is in to produce access to quality education.

The literature in this chapter makes a contribution towards understanding the context of education policy development and implementation. In addition, different perspectives from scholars further underline that solving the country's education crisis will have to be multifaced and nuanced. It is clear that there is a disconnect between policy rhetoric, policy practices and policy outcomes. This observation will be included when the assumptions underpinning basic education policy are unpacked and evaluated later in this thesis.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methods**

### **3.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the research methods used to conduct the evaluation research on South Africa's basic education policy. Research methods refer to the procedures used to collect and analyse data (Mouton, 2001:560). The most common breakdown of research methods is between qualitative and quantitative research methods. Therefore, the focus of this chapter also includes the appropriateness of a qualitative approach to answer the research question that guides this thesis: what are the theoretical assumptions underpinning South Africa's education policy to provide access to quality basic education? In addition, this chapter will discuss document review as the chosen data collection method to answer the research question under study.

This chapter will also discuss how a qualitative approach is instrumental in applying a realistic evaluation framework used to uncover the configurations of CMOs. Furthermore, it is argued that both thematic analysis and content analysis are suitable to present the findings of CMOs as provided by the realistic framework.

### **3.2. Rationale for qualitative research approach.**

The purpose of this thesis is to conduct an evaluation of South African education policy; and this section will focus on discussing the chosen research methodology. According to Shaw, Greene and Mark (2006: 20), "evaluation integrally involves the systematic and defensible use of methods for gathering or generating, analysing and interpreting, and representing—usually in written or orally—information about the quality of the program, practice or policy being evaluated".

A quantitative or qualitative approach can be applied to conduct an evaluation of a policy, program or intervention. A quantitative approach makes use of numerical data and statistical analysis. As such, "quantitative methods make use of standardized measures so that differing views and experiences of subjects can be placed into a limited number of pre-set response category to which numbers are assigned" (Patton, 2002: 14). The use of either a qualitative or quantitative approach depends on the kinds of data needed to provide answers to a specific question.

A qualitative approach utilizes text as empirical data, and is interested in the perspectives of participants, regular practices and everyday knowledge referring to the issue under study (Flick, 2011:2). Tilley and Clarke (2006:525) reason that a qualitative approach in evaluation research “makes it possible to examine the nature of process-outcome relations, identify unintended consequences, establish causal mechanisms and map out the temporal dimension of critical events”. Correspondingly, qualitative methods facilitate in-depth research of topics and place emphasis on dynamics, meaning and context (Weiss, 1972:335). With this in mind, a qualitative approach was used to uncover the ideas and reasonings of policy makers in order to build a program theory and evaluate the assumptions underpinning the basic education policy.

The qualitative data for this research was not collected through fieldwork such as conducting interviews, observations, or experiments of chosen subjects. Rather, a document-based research approach was used. A document-based research approach is useful in cases where rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, organisation, policy or program is needed (Bowen, 2009:29). For this thesis, a document-based approach was chosen to conduct research on South Africa’s basic education policy and its related programs. This is because in building a program theory, a realist evaluator uses existing evidence base and their own knowledge and experience, and less emphasis is placed on “relative importance placed on theories by implementers per se” (Blame and Mackenzie, 2007:447). In other words, realist evaluators place less emphasis on involving stakeholders to develop an intervention’s program theory. Rapley and Jenkins (2010:380) argue that “document-based research in qualitative educational research, as in all areas of social sciences, is relatively small-scale enterprise”. However, different kinds of documents are capable of “uncovering meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (Bowen, 2009:29).

Its ability to elicit descriptive views, often found in documents, made a qualitative approach instrumental for developing a program theory for basic education policy and evaluating the assumptions underpinning South African basic education policy. Heradien (2013:17), notes that information on contexts is easily attainable from data when a qualitative approach is used. Accordingly, a qualitative approach is essential for exploring the mechanisms, intended results and contexts central to the operationalization of basic education policy expressed in relevant documents.

Coryn *et al* (2011:204) highlight that “theory-based strategies and approaches to evaluation are method-neutral, or methodologically pluralist versus dogmatic, not giving primacy to any particular method, and are therefore equally suited to either quantitative methods, qualitative methods or both”. As such, this thesis applied a qualitative desktop review. There was no fieldwork involving the conducting of interviews, experiments, questionnaires or focus groups to answer the research question.

Furthermore, in developing a program theory for this thesis, a deductive approach was followed. A deductive approach extracts data "from informal and formal documentation about the problems the program is addressing, the causes and consequences of the problem, and wider research literature and professional experience that is relevant to the program and effective practices" (Funnell & Rogers, 2011: 102). As such, collected and analysed data will be text-based.

Document analysis formed part of the methodology. Bowen (2009: 27) describes "document analysis as a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents, both printed and electronic material". The process of data of analysis included an extensive reading of collected policy documents alongside the literature review. Document analysis will be discussed in detail in later in this thesis. Data collection methods encompassed collecting documents instrumental for building a program theory that would lead identification of theories and assumptions that underpinning the basic education policy.

### **3.3. Data collection method**

Theories underlying a program can come from various sources. According to Birckmayer and Weiss (2000:408), “an evaluation that investigates the theories underlying a program collects data at many points along the course of the program”. Scholars such as Chen and Rossi (1992) argue that program theories “should be social science theories with a reasonable scientific pedigree” (200:408).

An appropriate and suitable method of data collection is crucial in order answer the research question underpinning this thesis. Researchers can make use of various methods to gain either qualitative or quantitative data. Qualitative methods include in-depth, open-ended interviews, focus groups, direct observation and written documents. These data collection methods are

useful for eliciting contexts and descriptive information about policies, programs and interventions (Patton, 1990:4) (Heradien, 2013:17).

The data collection tools mentioned in the section above have their own benefits, however, document review is sufficient for obtaining answers relevant to the research question under study. While document review can be used to complement other data collection methods, it can also be used as a stand-alone method (Bowen, 2009:29). Document review involves collecting and reading excerpts, quotations, passages from organizations, program records memoranda and correspondence, official publications and reports (Patton, 1990:4). Documents are advantageous for eliciting contexts, background, as well as historical insights Bowen (2009:29). In the case of this evaluation research, it will be used on its own.

The types of documents collected include primary sources listed by Rapley and Jenkins (2010:384), which are policy documents, books, internal organizational documents as well as secondary sources from the literature scholarship on the development of South African education policy. Only documents relating to basic education for Grade R to Grade 12 learners were collected for this thesis. Policy documents that deal with Adult Basic Education Policy and Education Policy for Children with Special Needs, are outside of the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, the theory underpinning basic education will be established using those documents relating to the post-apartheid education system.

Since 1994, there have been numerous policy documents published concerning the provision of basic education in South Africa. The literature review in Chapter two was instrumental in providing focus as to which specific policy documents are central to the provision of access to quality basic education in South Africa. These documents are the ANC: A Policy Framework for Education and Training (1994); the Implementation Plan for Education and Training (1994); White Paper on Education and Training (1995); and the Implementation Plan for Education and Training (1994). Additionally, books identified from the literature review were instrumental in giving an in-depth account of contexts under which the development basic education policy. Work from scholars such as Hartshorne (1999), Chisholm and Kgobe (1993) and Christie (2008) was used in understanding the background of basic education policy. These scholars have played varying roles in education policy development and research.

Furthermore, documents can also be substituted for information from stakeholders who were part of the education policy development but are not available anymore. This aspect of

document review is relevant for this study due to absence of stakeholder opinions. Policy documents such as the ANC: A Policy Framework for Education and Training (1994); the Implementation Plan for Education and Training (1994); and The White Paper for Reconstruction and Development Programme (1994), were instrumental for gaining access to the thought processes behind education policy formation. In addition to these, the White Paper on Education and Training (1995); Plan of Action: Improving access to free and quality basic education for all (2003); Action Plan to 2019: Towards the realisation of schooling 2030 (2015); The National Policy for an Equitable Provision of an Enabling School Physical Teaching and Learning Environment (2010); and the National Education Policy Act (1996), provided information on overall policy objectives and justifications for utilising certain resources related to achieving access to quality basic education. These documents contain information on different aspects of the provision of basic education such as goals, activities, and policy subjects as intended by the DBE. All of the documents mentioned above were analysed and played a role in building a program theory for basic education policy.

Weiss (1998: 157) points out that organisations publish documents specifying the purposes and intentions of their interventions. In South Africa, government documents regarding basic education are written and published by the DBE as well as key policy players which include the ANC, National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC) and the Republic of South Africa. The involvement of these key policy players in the development and implementation of post-apartheid basic education policy make these documents valuable for understanding the assumptions informing South Africa's basic education policy.

### **3.3.1. Advantages of document review**

Documents hold certain advantages for conducting an evaluation study. They are instrumental for tracking change and development (Bowen, 2009:30). According to Weiss (1972: 260), “a major advantage of documents is that they were written contemporaneously with the events they chronicle, and thus are not subject to memory decay or memory distortion”. In addition, documents can provide a behind-the-scenes view of a policy and its programs, which might not otherwise be observable or illuminated through interview questions. Collecting documents can also cut down on the costs associated with other data collect methods. Lastly, collecting documents for research is essential for providing an idea as to the kind of data already available and narrow down new information that can be collected from other sources. Bowen (2009:29)

states that document review is instrumental for providing a detailed description of how a policy works to achieve its goals and objectives.

When planning to collect documents, Bowen (2009:32) emphasises that issues of access must be taken under consideration. Even when placed in a public forum, public documents are not always accessible for studying while private documents do not always have restricted access (Clarke, 2011:84). Public documents are administrative records held by national and local governments, official statistics, and government select committees reports. Most of these documents are accessible for free, while unpublished government documents can be restricted. Public documents can include newspaper articles, press releases, annual reports, editorial and professional journals.

The DBE website gives access to education policy white papers, basic education annual reports, basic education programme reports, policy drafts and proposals. The website allows members of the public to download and use these documents. In addition, Stellenbosch University's library provided access to reputable electronic documents through trusted databases, as well as hardcopy documents. Electronically downloaded documents were stored in a digital format. Notes on each studied document were kept. During data analysis, patterns and themes were easily recognised and retrieved.

### **3.4. Data analysis**

Once data is collected, it must be analysed so that it makes sense in relation to the research question under study. According to Pawson and Tilley (1997:56), "the careful enunciation of program theory is the prerequisite to sound evaluation". Therefore, the first part of analysis in this thesis is to build a program theory of South Africa's basic education policy that reflects the configurations of CMOs. During this process, the realist evaluator identifies details in the documents related to these configurations. These CMO configurations are then presented in a diagram form that presents the assumed causal relationship between them in relation to how the achieving the access to quality basic education. The second part is to evaluate the assumptions underpinning the basic education policy as they appear in the program theory. The evaluation of the assumptions will apply the realist question of 'what works for who, under what circumstance' as assumed by the basic education policy. Correspondingly, existing academic literature, evaluation studies or published studies will be utilised to identify breakages in the assumed causal link. When extracting information from documents, the

analysis process is comprised of finding, selecting, appraising and synthesising the data (Bowen, 2009:28). In other words, document analysis involves drawing out meaning and gaining understanding and knowledge.

Bowen (2009:32) argues that analysing documents can be made up of a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis. On the one hand, content analysis is “the process of organising categories related to the central questions of the research” whereby “relevant and meaningful passages of text or other data are identified” (Bowen, 2009:32). On the other hand, thematic analysis involves recognizing pattern that emerges from collected data (Braune and Clarke, 2006:79). A theme highlights an important idea from the data relevant to the research question at hand (Braune and Clarke, 2006:79).

This thesis will thus apply a thematic and content analysis informed by the analytical tool of realistic evaluation. It is important to first distinguish between inductive and theoretical thematic analyses. In inductive thematic analysis, the identified themes are related to the data. As such, the data analysis is done with no analytical preconceptions. Theoretical thematic analysis is strongly shaped by the researcher’s theoretical and analytical notions (Braune and Clarke, 2006:83). Documents were analysed combining both thematic analysis and content analysis. In the research under study, the realistic evaluation framework shaped the analysis of documents. Realist evaluation stipulates that an evaluation of an intervention must reflect a programme theory comprised of CMOs. It must also present a set of assumptions concerning “what work, for who, and under what circumstances?” in relation the policy problem of lack of access to quality basic education. Therefore, identified themes will be related to the categories of CMOs. In addition, the data analysed will contribute towards answering the research question on what theoretical assumptions underpinning education policy are.

Thematic analysis differs for every scholar, therefore, the presentation and arrangement of themes chosen depends on the answers needed for a given research question. There are, however, general guidelines of qualitative analysis can be followed when applying thematic analysis (Braune and Clarke, 2006:32). The data has to be first read in great details, then topics that are deemed relevant to the research question are organised according to themes or patterns. Identification of themes in the data can even begin during the data collection process. Pawson and Tilley’s (1997) realistic framework provided the areas of interest which are context, mechanism and outcome.

According to Braune and Clarke (2006:86), extensive reading of documents should go hand in hand with writing. Thus, as the documents were being analysed, the reoccurring themes were written down immediately. Establishing the CMO configurations of South Africa's basic education policy first was essential for drawing out the policy assumptions. In addition, the flexibility of being open to other themes is a characteristic of qualitative analysis. A code rules framework was created in order to ensure that data analysed in the collected documents is relevant to the research question as well as the main themes.

*Table 1: Code Rules*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Code rules</b>
Subjects	The population group which the basic education policy is intended to affect.
Contexts	Political historical and socioeconomic contexts informing basic education policy.
Mechanisms	Explanation or justification for using certain ideas, services, resources and performing specific activities.
Outcomes	Intended change in knowledge, skills and behaviour.

### **3.5. Ethical considerations**

In conducting this research, there were ethical considerations to keep in mind. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Department of Political Science Ethics Committee. When it comes to the issue of ethics, Mouton (2001:239) highlights that "ethical issues arise from our interaction with other people, other beings, and environment, especially at the point where there is a potential or actual conflict of interests". Due to the desktop nature of this study, there were no human participants. Existing information regarding subjects of South Africa's basic education policy was collected and analysed equally based on its relevancy the research question and theory. However, none of the documents contain the identities of subjects of South Africa's basic education policy. Data collection was based on whether it contributes answers to the research question or not. Accordingly, this thesis was not be framed to favour any specific organizations, persons or ideologies.

The results, analysis and interpretations of data follow the configurations of realist evaluation theory which prevent prejudice towards data analysis. Only peer-reviewed articles,

professionally published books, and official government documents were used and appropriately referenced. Finally, this research intends to contribute to academic knowledge that can be used to improve people's lives and to improve existing literature on education policy in South Africa.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

The focus of this chapter discussed the choice of research methods followed in this thesis to uncover theoretical assumptions underpinning South African education policy. A qualitative approach was identified as a suitable approach because it allows an in depth and descriptive examination of South Africa's basic education policy.

This chapter also highlighted that the realist evaluation approach does not require stakeholder participation in establishing a program theory. Therefore, there was no fieldwork such as interviews, focus groups or completing questionnaires involved in this thesis. This thesis is thus document-based. Document review was chosen as the suitable method of data collection to uncover the theory underpinning basic education policy. This chapter also noted that the literature review in chapter two played a role in giving direction as to the kinds of documents needed to understand the ideas and presumptions behind the basic education policy.

This chapter emphasised that analysing documents is not simply about copying and pasting excerpts from documents. Instead, it involves mining meaning from documents in relation to the research question as well as following the realistic evaluation framework. Policy documents are not often written with a specific research question in mind, so the evaluator has to search for the parts of the documents that relate to the topic and framework. Accordingly, the configuration of context-mechanism-outcome, which are central to Pawson and Tilley's (1997) realistic evaluation framework, were identified as useful for organising themes and understand the content of documents.

## **Chapter 4: Constructing the Program Theory Underpinning South Africa's Basic Education Policy**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the theory underpinning the basic education policy through the application of Pawson and Tilly's realistic evaluation by first identifying the CMO configurations from policy documents. The CMOs are then used to build a visual presentation of the program theory of South Africa's basic education policy. The assumptions embedded in the program theory will be discussed further in Chapter five.

While some of the policy documents related to basic education contained information on the contexts informing policy, the literature review in Chapter two was instrumental in identifying scholarship that would contribute to a refined and expanded understanding of the settings in which education policy developed and operates. Once these configurations are presented, assumptions underpinning South Africa's basic education policy concerning access to quality basic education deduced from the programme theory are discussed and evaluated. The chapter is organized into four themes of CMOs, and the assumptions underpinning basic education policy.

### **4.2. Political history and socioeconomic contexts of basic education policy**

Realistic evaluation regards contexts in which policy is developed and implemented to be influential. Context refers to the political, socioeconomic, and historical factors that make up part of the setting in which an intervention is to operate (Pawson and Tilley, 1997:70). Contexts are important in policy evaluation because they illuminate why under varying contexts some mechanisms can be triggered while some are not. It is also crucial to be aware of contexts, because it is through contexts that we can learn about which mechanisms produces which outcomes.

Political, historical and socioeconomic contexts are the most prominent in South Africa's basic education policy. The contexts of past inheritance and economic conditions played a role in how policy development and implementation unfolded, when it did (Hartshorne, 1999:105). Hartshorne (1999:8) writes that "education does not and cannot operate in a vacuum, but in a particular political, economic, social and constitutional surround or context". These contexts

also provide an understanding of why certain priorities formed part of education policy and the reasonings behind policy activities. Additionally, contexts can include more than one point in time to reflect evolving policy developments such as between apartheid and post-apartheid, and between policy formulation and policy implementation. This multiplicity is important to understand because these contexts from different times can also explain the ongoing landscape of post-apartheid South African.

#### **4.2.1. Education as a basic human right**

The literature on South Africa's basic education policy shows that in the case of policy development, historical context plays a crucial role in shaping present outcomes. The development of South Africa's basic education policy can be understood within the historical context of education as a basic human right. Historically, under the apartheid regime, basic education had been a right experienced unequally, with black learners receiving an inferior form of education while white learners had better forms of schooling (Hunt, 2011:45). The apartheid constitution made schooling compulsory for White, Indian and Coloured children but not for Black South Africans. The consequence of educational discrimination resulted in large numbers of illiterate children and adults, unskilled labour and out of school children who were still of school going age.

Securing the basic human right to accessing quality basic education is reflected in many of the post-apartheid policy documents reviewed in this chapter. In anticipation of the collapse of the apartheid regime, in its Policy Framework for Education and Training Draft (1994), the ANC (1994) argued that in light of past racial discrimination within the education system, "the right to education and training should be enshrined in a Bill of Rights which should establish principles and mechanisms to ensure that there is an enforceable and expanding minimum floor of entitlements for all". The historical denial of access to quality basic education sets the tone for a post-apartheid basic education policy that secures the provision of basic education for all.

To adhere to the position of education as a basic human right in the democratic dispensation after 1994, the White paper for Education and Training (1995) thus declared that all children are set to complete a basic education programme of acceptable quality through school facilities. Whilst the youth and adults are to receive their basic education through programmes suited to their ages and personal contexts (Department of Education, 1995:40). Furthermore, a new Constitution (1996) made education compulsory, a change also reflected in the South African

Schools Act of 1996, ensures all learners between the ages of seven and fifteen attend school. In the early planning stage of formulating South Africa's basic education policy, the ANC had already made it clear that it intended "to introduce ten years of free and compulsory general education...of high quality, starting with a reception year, and proceeding for a further nine years to standard 7" (African National Congress, 1994). Considering the dynamics of a democratic society, policy development had to be considered within a framework whereby everyone would have access to quality basic education without discrimination based on their race, age, social status and gender.

#### **4.2.2. Policy development under impending regime change**

The development of South Africa's basic education policy is situated within the political context of regime change. Efforts toward formulating a new basic education policy began even before the first democratic elections in 1994. Ideas and alternatives of what constitutes an acceptable education system were rising among student movements, struggle parties and civil groups who were calling for a resistance of the apartheid system along with its discriminatory education system (Fataar, 1997: 344). Early notions regarding educational change surged between 1974 through to the 1980s, with student protests. Hartshorne (1999:26) writes that during this period "communities were no longer prepared to accept inferior education systems arising from policies of separation and isolation". Events such as the student riots on the 16<sup>th</sup> June 1976, demonstrated an ongoing rejection of "segregation and general inferiority of black education, the obvious discrimination in terms of finance and resources, and its ideological direction" (Hartshorne, 1999:27). This rejection of inferior basic education was the first step toward placing pressure on the apartheid regime in order to initiate its collapse.

Accordingly, when talks about negotiations for a political transition surfaced, various groups began the process of developing post-apartheid education policy proposals and options. The NECC commissioned an investigation into education policy options in anticipation of a regime change. It is under the context of impending regime change, between 1990 to 1992, that the NEPI started its education policy inquiry (The National Education Co-ordinating Committee, 1993: 7).

The imminent regime change created educational power struggles between the National Party, which was attempting to retain some form of power over the direction of educational transformation, and the democratic movement which placed its efforts on dislodging the

present education system instead of building a new one (Chilsholm and Kgobe, 1993:3). Under this environment, the NEPI faced a task of enhancing interest and debate, to inform the various processes concerning policy alternatives COSATU, and to create policy capacity (NECC, 1993:8). While the NEPI developed policy options, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) held workshops placing emphasis on developing an education policy framework. However, the National Party was still in power, and NEPI faced a barrier to access relevant information that would have helped in producing policy alternatives for the future system (NECC, 1993:41).

All the events leading up to regime change in 1994, which laid a foundation for the basic education policy in post-apartheid South Africa, were then followed by the creation of various policy documents starting with ‘discussion documents’ sometimes called Green Papers, and wide consultations, followed by the reports various committees and other groups tasked by government to investigate particular facets of education policy (Hartshorne, 1999:105). Thereafter, the White Papers on education were drawn with the suitable legislation necessary to address South Africa’s unequal education environment. The basic education policy adopted post-apartheid is a result and reflection of the work conducted by both the NEPI and COSATU during the regime change in the 1990s.

#### **4.2.3. Redressing apartheid legacies**

Post-apartheid South Africa inherited an education system that was not only “divisive and discriminatory” due to inferior education infrastructure laid in place by the apartheid government, “but also ineffective and inefficient, with a particularly low level of morale among the teachers in the system and poor standard of management performance” (Hartshorne, 1999:106). Before a new basic education policy was adopted in 1994, the South African education system was characterized by the unequal distribution of resources between white schools and majority black schools. The unequal distribution of resources meant that majority black schools received inappropriate curricula, unqualified teachers, ill-prepared school managers, inappropriately used school inspection, few books and instructional material and overcrowded, uncondusive learning environments (Department of Basic Education, 2010: 15). In addition, apartheid education policies left millions of South Africans illiterate due to the denial of quality education, barriers to school and being subjected to substandard curriculum (Department of Education, 1995).

The Plan of Action (2003): Improving access to quality education for all, mentions that post-apartheid education policies would develop and operate within a public schooling system characterized by inequalities between schools (Department of Education, 2003: 5). Former Model C schools as well as urban schools, which received more educational support during apartheid, remain more developed in terms of resources and school conditions. Schools in rural areas, townships or where black learners went, were neglected by the educational policies formulated by the National Party, which inhibited educational development (ANC, 1994: 333). Consequently, the majority of black schools still have mud buildings, no electricity and no proper sanitation and learning facilities like labs (Department of Education, 2003:5). Additionally, poor rural areas and informal settlements receive lower quality of Early Childhood Development than formal urban areas (Department of education, 2001).

According to the DBE (2003:5), the provision of free basic education for those previously disadvantaged and poor must be viewed in the context of redress. In light of the inequalities outlined above, the government emphasized directing more funding, subsidies, school fees exemptions and trained teachers towards the poorest schools (Department of Education, 2003:5). In addition, scarce resources would be directed to those that need them the most, such as marginalized youth, special needs children, victims of violence and those with limited access to quality education and consequently unemployment (NECC, 1993:222). The DBE (2003:5) maintained that despite this selective focus on disadvantaged schools, the unity of a public-school system, whereby a high number of learners enter the schooling system and participation of the middle class, is of outmost importance.

#### **4.2.4. Socioeconomic inequalities**

Socioeconomic challenges such as poverty, unemployment and income inequalities that characterized apartheid South Africa, have continued to inform the development of basic education policy in the post-apartheid era. The post-apartheid education system was set to work within a system whereby 47.7 percent of the population, out of a total of eighteen million people, lived below the poverty line. In addition, there were serious inequalities between provinces, with the Northern Cape accounting for 69.3 per cent of people living in poverty, and the Eastern Cape with 64 percent (Hartshorne, 1999:106). According to the White Paper for Early Childhood Education, “children raised in these poor families are most at risk of infant death, low birth weight, stunted growth, poor adjustment to school, increased repetition and school dropout” (Department of Education, 2001). Therefore, the Department of Education

(2001) emphasized that poverty riddling 40% of families with children between the one to nine years is an important background in which the policy is expected to operate (Department of Education, 2001).

The OECD (2008: 32) states that “poverty directly affects the affordability of, access to, and potential benefits from, education”. In lieu of this, the Department of Education (2003:5) underlines South Africa’s adoption of the Dakar framework for Action of 2000, which stipulates the country’s commitment to fight poverty and empower people through provision of quality basic education and remove access barriers for children. The Dakar Framework laid the foundation to pursue a pro-poor education approach and was the driver behind the development of pro-poor school funding (Department of Education, 2003:5).

According to figures in 2003, 13.9 percent of South African’s population did not have access to running water, 21.3 percent did not have electricity while 43.3 percent were without proper sanitation (OECD, 2008:31). A high number of these poor households depend on social grants and pension for income, and do not have formal schooling (2008:31). In the context of these socioeconomic inequalities in South Africa, poverty can be a barrier to accessing quality education, while access to quality education can also allow children to break the poverty cycle (UNESCO, 2000:46).

In the context of socioeconomic inequalities, South Africa has adopted socioeconomic frameworks which inform its basic education policy. The first influential framework for policy development and implementation identified in the White Paper for Education and Training (1995) is the RDP (Department of Education, 1995). According to the DBE (1995:25), “the main theme of the Reconstruction and Development Programme is the empowerment of people, through education and training, including specific forms of capacity-building within organizations and communities, to participate effectively in all the processes of democratic society, economic activity, cultural expression and community life”.

In addition, according to the RDP, South Africa faced a challenge of poor human resources which could be remedied through provision of quality basic education to all South Africans (Department of Education, 1994:9). In 1995, the RDP put forth the idea of balance economic growth and increased human resource development. Thus, the White Paper for Education and Training notes that “the most secure source of additional public funds for education will accrue from real economic growth and increased revenues” (Department of Education, 1995:65).

In 1996, the government adopted a macro-economic strategy named GEAR, which still abided by the objectives of the RDP (OECD, 2008:96). Christie (2008:91) points out that “whereas the RDP had intended to stimulate economic growth in ways that would lead to the reduction of poverty and inequality, GEAR focused on economic growth along the line that would be attractive to international and domestic investment”. However, the nature of GEAR would go on to decrease government’s expenditure on education (Christie, 2008:91). Essentially, these frameworks represent government’s response to the socioeconomic landscape of South Africa in delivering basic education. Additionally, the context of socioeconomic challenges continuously inform the agenda of basic education policy.

### **4.3. Mechanisms of basic education policy**

Undertaking a realistic evaluation involves uncovering the intended mechanisms of policy interventions. Understanding policy mechanisms requires identifying how the resources, opportunities and ideas offered by an intervention are intended to affect subjects’ responses (Pawson and Tilley, 1997:66). Pawson and Tilley (1997:57) maintain that “programs work (have successful outcomes) only in so far as they introduce the appropriate ideas and opportunities (mechanisms) to groups in the appropriate contexts”. While mechanisms are not visible, they can be inferred through responses of subjects represented in a form of expected change in attitudes and social behaviour. These expected responses are deemed crucial towards attaining policy outcomes. The description on mechanisms by Pawson and Tilley (1997) captures the core of what mechanisms are and how they will be presented in this section.

Based on the discussed definition of mechanisms above, this section will discuss the behavioural and cognitive responses intended to be stimulated through the use various resources, services and ideas of basic education policy. Within policy documents, mechanisms can be found in the justifications provided for using a service, resources and ideas to achieve the intended outcomes for creating access to quality basic education. Three major themes related to mechanisms discussed in this section are the restoration culture of learning and teaching; creating attraction to school for learners and teachers; and fostering receptiveness amongst learners. The logic of the basic education policy in South Africa is that triggering these mechanisms will enable achieving the goal of providing access to quality basic education.

#### 4.3.1. Restoration of a culture of learning

A 'culture of learning' is identified as a mechanism that is intended to come out from the interaction between educational resources and policy subjects. Establishing a culture of learning is necessary because "apartheid education and the aftermath of resistance destroyed the culture of learning within large section of our communities, leading in the worst-affected areas to a virtual breakdown of schooling and conditions of anarchy in relations between students, teachers, principals and the education authorities" (ANC, 1994). Thus, for the post-apartheid education system to be effective, a culture of learning must be fostered.

In the case of South Africa, fostering a culture of learning involves reconceptualizing roles and professionalism within all levels of the education system (Jansen & Sayed, 2001:207). The South African government advocates for a participatory education system to foster a culture of learning in the effort to rectify previous educational discrimination and exclusion of the majority population in decision-making within the education system. Accordingly, the post-apartheid government has pursued strategies that would reach as many people as possible within the school population (Jansen & Sayed, 2001: 35).

One of the principles highlighted in The ANC Framework for Education and Training (1995), is that "education and training policy and practice shall be governed by the principle of democracy, ensuring the active participation of various interest groups, in particular teacher, parents, workers, students, employers and the broader community" (ANC, 1994). Similarly, in the White Paper for Education and Training, the Department of Education (1995:19) declares that "it is now the jointly responsibility of all South Africans who have a stake in the education and training system to help build a just, equitable, and high-quality system for all citizens, with a common culture of disciplined commitment to learning and teaching". That is, for access to quality basic education to be attained, involvement of all interested parties concerning matters related to the basic education system is required. Therefore, encouraging participation will elevate the culture of learning.

An absence of a culture of learning in South Africa can be discerned in the low morale of teachers, deteriorated learner-teacher relationships, negative perceptions of school attendance by learners and low involvement of parents in matters of their children's education (Christie, 2008b: 283). Each of these factors contribute to the broader lack of a culture of learning. A culture of learning is a "common purpose or mission among students, teachers, principals and

governing bodies, with clear, mutually agreed and understood responsibilities, and line of cooperation and accountability” (Department of Education, 1995:22). However, a guiding principle that aligns the interests of a variety of stakeholders in matters of education is missing (Department of Education, 1995:22).

Through varying policy documents, the basic education policy of post-apartheid South Africa expresses that it intends to provide the means through which the ‘culture of learning and teaching’ can be cultivated among learners, teachers and parents. Furthermore, the Implementation Plan for Education and Training, states that “it is important for learners to become committed to learning and taking increasing responsibility for their own learning” (ANC, 1994:165). Adequate teacher training, SGBs and community centres are some of the sources through which the mechanism of learning and teaching culture would be cultivated.

Supporting teachers is instrumental in encouraging a culture of learning for learners and teachers within the school system. In the wake of democracy, the education system was made up of teachers who received sub-par training under apartheid (Department of Education, 2003:10). Therefore, the Department of Education (2003:12) put forth that teachers need to be adequately prepared for their responsibilities through “a careful balanced combination of in-service training, improvements to the conditions of service, access to better support materials, awareness-raising campaigns, an effective system of rewards and incentives and decisive yet fair disciplinary procedures”. In addition, “efforts to ensure that quality teachers enter public education have the driving force behind the Funza Lushaka bursary programme” (Department of Basic Education, 2013: 19). The Funza Lushaka (Teach the Nation) bursary programme is a multi-year programme that supports eligible young people pursuing a teaching qualification at Higher Learning Institutions with financial support in order to improve the number of people entering the teaching services (Department of Basic Education, 2010:69).

In turn, such teacher preparation would foster cooperation between teachers and learners, discourage absenteeism and increase productivity. Training teachers on better disciplinary measures and banishing corporal punishment is intended to create and sustain positive perspectives on schooling and discipline (Republic of South Africa, 1996). In other words, when teachers adopt a culture of teaching, they will place value in adequately doing performing their teaching duties.

Another source identified as necessary for establishing a culture of learning is the development of community learning centres (ANC, 1994). A learning centre refers to a place that regularly supports and services students in pursuit of their learning goals. Community learning centres would then encourage learners to partake in educational activities as a meeting point, class sessions, book collection and other learning material (ANC, 1994). To further embed a learning culture beyond learners, can be achieved through choosing community centre tutors and managers from the community itself. Involving communities in educational matters is important for maintaining a broad culture of learning, because they are primary stakeholders.

The adoption of SGBs is another essential vessel for embedding a culture of learning amongst teachers, learners and parents by creating an accountability and participation forum (Department of Education, 1995:25). In primary schools, SGBs would involve parents and teachers while in secondary schools, parents, teachers and students would be included. The SGB promotes the involvement of interested parties to create a constitution and mission statement of the school; to choose the school's admissions policy within certain boundaries; safeguard and maintain the use of school property; recommend the hiring of teaching and non-teaching staff to the Department of Education; and create a school budget to be presented (Department of Education, 1995:70).

Furthermore, the Admissions Policy (Republic of South Africa, 1996:12) also explains the role to be played by parents stating that they are expected to ensure their children attend school. Jansen (2001:35) highlights that the government's strategy in fostering a culture of learning was rooted in establishing schools as a forum in which parents would take an interest in. Additionally, the Admissions Policy emphasizes parents' obligation to partake in budgetary decision-making meeting and the Code of Conduct (Republic of South Africa, 1996:12). Accordingly, establishing a forum for participation such as a SGB, instils a culture of learning for parents.

According to the Department of Education (1995:69), without participation from interest parties, educational change is said to be "predictably disastrous" as it plays a crucial role in encouraging a culture of learning. Stakeholders' participation, which gives educational responsibility to everyone involved and enforces interest towards provision of basic quality education, contributes towards fostering a culture of learning. An embedded culture of learning is essential in educational change as it results in the increase in value placed on education by stakeholders (Christie, 1998: 284).

#### 4.3.2. Attracting learners and teachers to school

It is the intention of South Africa's basic education policy to encourage learners and teachers to be motivated to go to school by making school an attractive option over other alternatives. Providing access to quality basic education would not be meaningful if both learners and teachers do not go to school. On one hand, attracting learners to schools requires removing barriers to schooling or factors affecting children from staying at school such as "distance and lack of transport, hunger, disability, looking after younger siblings, herding, household tasks, lack of parental guidance, homelessness, having to find work, and inability to pay for uniforms" (Department of Education, 1995:73).

On the other hand, attracting teachers to school requires discouraging teacher absenteeism and introducing better incentives to encourage a move towards the teaching profession. Providing teachers with better incentives is meant to not only encourage teachers to regularly go to school but to also break the pattern of teachers clustering towards urban schools (Department of Education, 2003:12). The Funza Lushaka bursary, discussed earlier, "aims to increase the number of new qualified teachers the schooling system, and to ensure that schools, particularly in rural areas, do not suffer from a shortage of teachers" (Department of Basic Education, 2010:69). According to the DBE (2013:90), "the placement of Funza Lushaka bursary scheme graduates is part of the overall teacher deployment process that occurs annually, that includes redeployment of educators additional to the post establishments in schools and conversion of temporary opportunities to permanent". Particularly, fostering attraction towards the school environment suggests that something about basic education policy interventions is intended to make both teachers and learners enter the school system. The mechanism of attracting learners and teachers to school is crucial for achieving the policy outcomes in order to deliver access to quality basic education.

Learners are encouraged to 'want' to go school through the adoption of compulsory free schooling for children between the ages of one to nine. While free compulsory basic education targets those between the age of one to nine, the basic education policy provides fee exemption to those who are poor at the discretion of schools and for orphans (Department of Education, 1995:73). Making schooling free for those that cannot afford it makes school attainable. To provide another incentive for attending school, the DBE has established the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) which provides poor children with a meal every day (Department of Basic Education, 2010:65) (OECD, 2008:60). As such, the availability of

nutrition at school is stated to remove hunger as deterrent for school attendance (Department of Education, 1994:46) (Department of Basic Education, 2010:65).

The availability of well-functioning physical infrastructure is also intended to attract learners and teachers to school. Therefore, fostering attraction to school is accompanied by efforts of enhancing physical access to school (Department of Education, 2003:8). Basic infrastructure includes water, toilets, electricity, administration blocks, libraries, laboratories, and workshops. The emphasis on drawing learners to school is identified in the broad policy principles of White Paper for Education and Training, which states that physical infrastructure is intended to create a “supporting environment to encourage students and their parents to value regular school attendance for the duration of the cycle” (Department of Education, 1995:73).

In the National Policy for an Equitable Provision of an Enabling School Physical Teaching and Learning Environment (2010), it is argued that “poor learning environments have been found to contribute to learner irregular attendance and dropping out of school, teacher absenteeism” (Republic of South Africa, 2010:7). Furthermore, building schools closer to communities and rehabilitating existing ones is intended to make school accessible by making the choice to go school easily attainable (Department of Education, 1995:67). While attracting learners and teachers to school is essential, the basic education policy recognizes that learner must also be responsive to any school content taught at school (Department of Education, 1995:74).

#### **4.3.3. Fostering receptive learners**

The Department of Education (1995:74) notes that access to schooling does not equate to quality basic education, especially if learners are not responsive to teaching. Learners with low receptiveness are characterized by low attention span, frustration, reduced mental efficiency, increased rate of learner errors and deterioration of work patterns (Republic of South African, 2010:7). Therefore, the use of resources and initiatives that would enhance the receptiveness of learners in school is crucial for achieving access to quality basic education. As such, learners need to be in a positive mental, physical and emotional state that activates their ability to understand content.

Within policy documents, the provision of ECD is identified as a trigger for the mechanism of activating receptive learners. Early Childhood Development refers to the ways in which children between the ages of zero to nine years grow and flourish, physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and socially with active participation of their guardians (Department of

Education, 1995:33). Specifically, the emphasis from the education policy is on the addition of a reception year as part of general education and establishing strategies to enhance greater continuity between early childhood education and schooling (ANC, 1994). The main purpose of ECD is “to oversee the protection of children’s right to meet their cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential” (Department of Education, 2001).

The justification for early educational involvement is that “educational efficiency would improve, as children would acquire the basic concepts, skills and attitudes required for successful learning and development prior to or shortly after entering the system, thus reducing their chances of failure” (Department of Education, 2001). Similarly, the ANC (1995) argues that exposing children to formal education without preparation can cause frustrations and poor learning. Therefore, early involvement provides learners with the preparedness that will activate the mechanism of reception to school content as they move throughout the schooling system.

Another source identified that is intended to elicit ‘receptiveness’ among learners is provision of nutrition. Christie (2008:100) argues that children from poor families tend to go school without having eaten anything, are malnourished and unwell. Consequently, under such conditions, school attendance is negatively affected and the benefits of schooling like learning are impacted. According to Mkwanazi-Twala, Mwira and Greenstein (2003:149) and Nzimande and Mathierson, (2004: 25), provision of nutrition would improve concentration of learner in class thus making them receptive to receiving information.

The provision of nutrition to learners, especially in poor communities, can influence the behaviour of learners. On its website, the DBE highlights that a nutrition programme is intended to “give learner energy, to make them alert and receptive during lessons”. The NSNP “was conceptualised primarily as educational intervention aimed at enhancing the education experience of the neediest primary school learners by promoting punctual school attendance, alleviating short-term hunger, improving concentration and contributing to general health development” (Department of Basic Education, 1994:46). While nutrition contributes largely to the mental state of learners, it does play a role in also activating the mechanism of ‘attraction to school’ and stimulates learners’ intellectual development.

Intellectual stimulation is a big part of receptiveness towards school content. According to the Department of Education (1995:74), teachers must be provided with training and skills that

will assist them in stimulating learners. The training of teachers requires providing subject specific training in areas of mathematics, science and technology, as well as age and grade relevant training to protect learners from inappropriate teaching methods and curriculum (Department of Education, 1994:74). Accordingly, in 2001 the Department of Basic Education (2010:67) established the Dinaledi Programme “improve the number of learners passing mathematics and physical science in the NCS”. The programme also placed emphasis on training teachers in the Dinaledi schools. The ANC (1994) notes that “under-qualified and poorly prepared teachers in turn produce weak and poorly prepared school students, and they cannot be expected to teach the subjects with enthusiasm”. As such, it can be said that well prepared teachers will be able to transfer knowledge to learners in ways that learners will understand and retain more effectively.

Furthermore, receptiveness of learners can be cultivated through provision of a conducive physical learning and teaching environment (Department of Education, 1994:74). Poor learning environments are said to be influential towards teachers’ ability engage in teaching and learning processes (Republic of South Africa, 2010:7). Within the basic education policy, the conceptualization of conducive learning and teaching environments includes “school infrastructure, basic services, furniture, equipment, co-curricular facilities, books, computer lab and instructional material” (Republic of South Africa, 2010:9). The DBE (2013: 25) has overseen the development of school infrastructure through Accelerated Schools Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI). The purpose of ASIDI is the “introduction of water, sanitation and electricity to schools lacking any form of these services as well as the eradication of inappropriate structure” (Department of Basic Education, 2013: 109).

The White Paper for Education and Training (1995) argues in favour of the need for conducive learning spaces, stating that “we should not be satisfied by a system in which some children have sufficient textbooks in every subject and well equipped libraries and laboratories, while other children sit on the floor in large classes, in tents or under a tree, and lack books, furniture, libraries and laboratories” (Department of Education, 1995:74). Physical infrastructure is instrumental in triggering both the mechanisms of ‘attraction to school’ and ‘receptiveness of learners’. While the presence of physical availability of schools is aimed at encouraging learners to school, physical infrastructure provides learners with an enabling environment to learn.

According to Pawson and Tilley (1997:58), mechanisms of intervention are enablers for attaining intended outcomes and the overall goal. In the case of South Africa's basic education policy, the overall goal is improvement of access to quality basic education. Following Pawson and Tilley's (1997) logic of realistic evaluation, the identified mechanisms for 'creating a culture of learning and teaching, 'attracting learners and teachers to school', and 'fostering receptive learners' are necessary for attaining outcomes, to be discussed in the next section, that will lead to access to quality basic education.

#### **4.4. Intended outcomes of the South African Basic Education Policy**

In realist evaluations, outcomes can be expressed as expected changes in knowledge, skills, capabilities and behaviour (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007:446). The outcomes to be discussed in this thesis that were identified from analysing policy documents are learner performance; enrolment rates and retention rates; and effective school management. Malcolm (2001:200) argues that outcomes related to education policy "have to be defined with sufficient generality that they enable learner-centred education- a curriculum that is matched to the experiences and contexts of learners in particular school and location- but precisely enough that learners throughout the country can properly claim that they have achieved the same outcomes".

According to the Pawson and Tilley (1997:57), outcomes flow from mechanisms cultivated in particular contexts. The process of causation leading to outcomes is expressed as: outcomes = mechanisms + contexts (Pawson and Tilley, 1997:57). Following this logic, policy outcomes discussed in this section represent the intended results from creating the mechanisms of 'culture of learning and teaching'; 'promoting attraction of learners and teachers towards school'; and 'fostering receptive learners'.

##### **4.4.1. Improved learner performance**

Through its varying interventions that will elicit mechanisms of 'receptiveness' and 'attraction to school', South Africa's basic education policy aims to attain high levels of learner performance. An increase in the provision of resources is expected to improve learner performance, thus failure is regarded as a waste of resources (Department of Education, 2003:7). Therefore, an expected result of the interaction between contexts and mechanisms is "learner performance, or the skills and knowledge that learners have acquired at the end of a school year, or at particular exit points in the system" (Department of Education, 2003:7).

Performance of learners can be observed through “language and literacy development, the development of numeracy and other mathematical concepts, and the development of critical skills, that meet children’s needs at their particular stage of development” (Department of Education, 2001). In addition to performing well in individual grades, improved performance of learners is intended to be accompanied by achievement of acceptable score in international tests standards.

The Plan of Action to 2019: towards the Realisation of Schooling 2030, assumes that improvement in learner performance would be visible in the increase in the number of Grade 3 learners who have become proficient at minimum language and numeracy skills, as well as an increase in Grade 6 and 9 learners’ proficiency in minimum language and mathematics skills (Department of Basic Education, 2015: 3). The document also reported that it is the intention of the Department of Education to achieve improve average performance of Grade 6 learner in both languages and mathematics, as well as mathematics for Grade 9 learners.

Improved learner performance can be deduced in the performance of Grade 12 learners. Enhanced education standards and improved learner performance would result in an increase the amount of Grade 12 learner who pass mathematics and physical science (Department of Basic Education, 2015:3). In addition, high levels of learner performance as identified within the Plan of Action to 2019, would be evident in an increase in the number of Grade 12 learners who meet the criteria to qualify for a bachelor’s programme at a university. Learners completing Grade 12 with high performance represents the contribution of the whole schooling phase from Grade R and allows them to continue their education through Further Education and Training.

#### **4.4.2. Increased enrolment and retention rates of learners at school**

The mechanisms of ‘attraction’, ‘culture of learning’ and ‘receptiveness’ are expected to contribute towards attaining the outcome of increased enrolment and retention rates. The NEPA states that “repetition of grades seldom results in significant increases in learning attainment and frequently has the opposite result” (Republic of South Africa, 1994:11). Accordingly, increased enrolment has to be accompanied by steady retention rates, meaning that the intended outcome is to see enrolled learners complete the compulsory schooling phase until they are fifteen years with little to no repetition and no dropout (Department of Education, 1996:15).

Age appropriateness of learners within the school system is an essential element of achieving effective enrolment. Placing underage children in the Reception Year of ECD is expected to balance enrolment in Grade one and mitigate overcrowding in this grade (ANC, 1994). Accordingly, children must be enrolled in grades that are appropriate for their ages and progress along with their peers. As long as children remain in school and progress, the education system will avoid underage or overage children in schools.

The DBE's annual reports concerning performance of schools in South Africa provide insight into specific details regarding policy outcome of enrolment and retention rates. An expected result of grade attainment is "improved promotion of learners through Grade 1 to 9" as well as "improved access of children to quality ECD below Grade 1" (Department of Education, 2015:3). It is the intention of the basic education policy to avoid multiple repetition of one grade. Repetition of grades would exacerbate overcrowding because the number of new learners would add to the number of repeating learners. In addition, repetition of grades would imply that the outcome of improving learner performance is failing.

#### **4.4.3. Effective school management and governance**

One of the intended outcomes of South Africa's basic education policy is to improve the way schools are managed. The Department of Education (2003:12) deems efficient management and governance of schools as one of the best ways to deliver access to quality basic education. The mechanism of creating a culture of learning encompasses the use of SGBs to manage and govern schools. Therefore, the more involved the members of the SGBs are, the more it is expected that the functioning of the school would improve.

School management involves administering the budget, completing the curriculum, setting timetable, managing school premises and administering admission of learners. The Department of Education (2003:12) argues that "good time management in a school, in particular a good timetable, means workload amongst educators is fairly and effectively spread, and learners focus on appropriate things at different times of the day and the week". The ANC (1995) stresses that management practices have to fall within the scope of the constitution by protecting the human right of children having access to quality basic education.

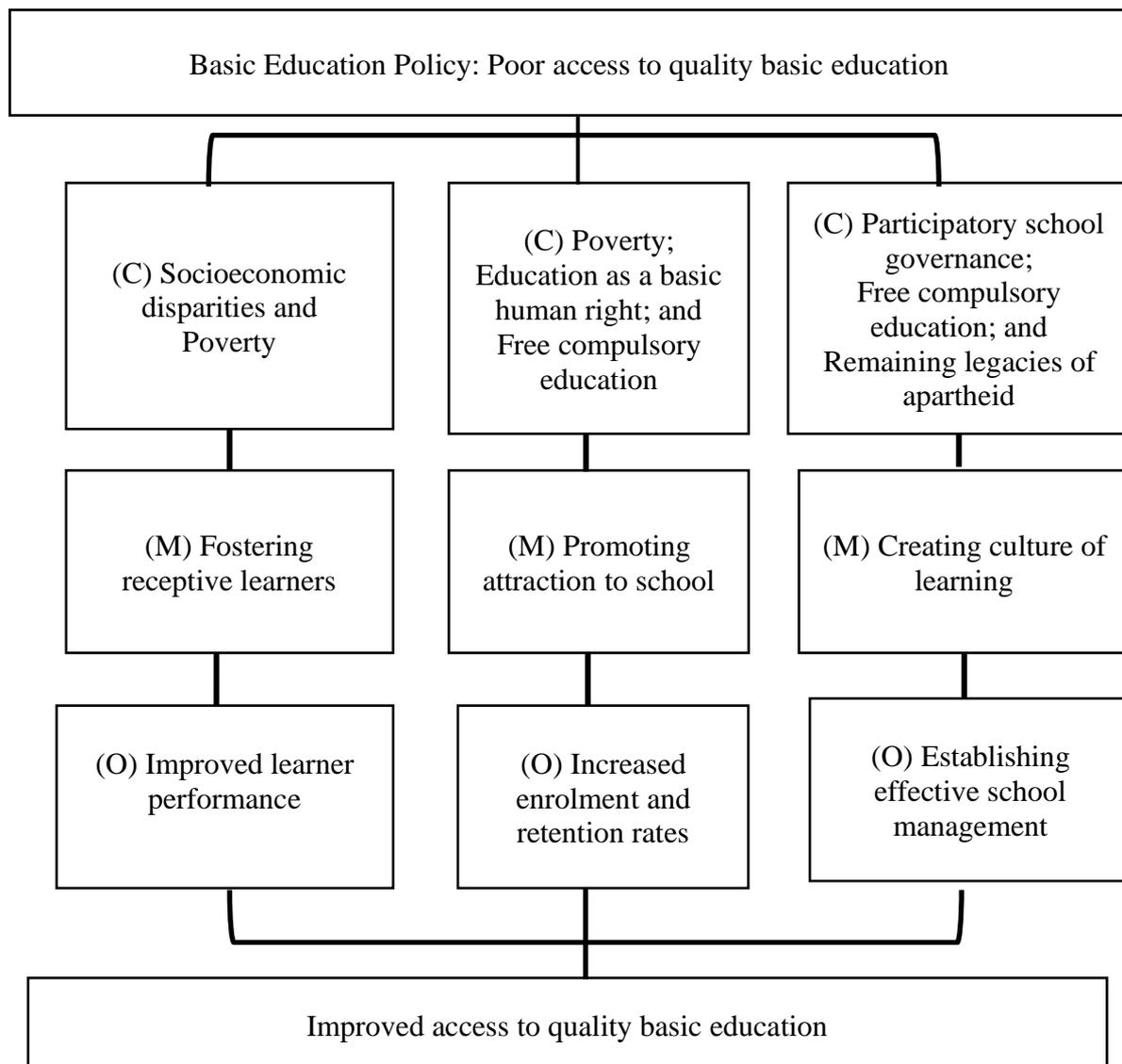
The analysis of policy documents leads to the identification of the outcomes intended through the basic education policy. The outcomes of 'improved learner performance', 'increased enrolment and retention rates of learners' and 'effective school management and governance'

are introduced by the mechanisms of ‘culture of learning and teaching’; ‘promoting attraction of learners and teachers towards school’; and ‘fostering receptive learners’. Attaining these outcomes is essential for solving the policy problem of access to quality basic education.

#### **4.5. Program Theory of the basic education policy**

Below, Diagram 1 is a program theory that gives a visualization of the assumed link between the realist configurations of contexts, mechanisms and outcomes operating to deliver access to quality basic education. According to White (2009: 274), “causal chain embodies the programme theory as to how the intervention is expected to have its intended impact”. A detailed discussion on the assumptions underpinning this program theory will be presented in the next chapter.

Diagram 1 Program theory of Basic Education Policy in South Africa



## 4.6. Chapter conclusion

This chapter discussed the three fundamental aspects of CMOs that form a realist program theory of South Africa's basic education policy. The socioeconomic and historical contexts have informed the development of post-apartheid education policy, which has implications for the implementation of basic education policy. After analysing policy documents relating to South Africa's basic education policy, it was identified that the mechanisms of 'promoting culture of learning', 'attraction of learners and teachers to school' and 'fostering receptive learners' are central to achieving policy outcomes. The identified assumed mechanisms are deemed instrumental for achieving policy outcomes of improved learner performance; increased enrolment and retention rates; and effective school governance and management. A visual representation of the program theory is then presented.

## **Chapter 5: Evaluating the Theoretical Assumptions Underpinning Basic Education Policy in South Africa**

### **5.1. Introduction**

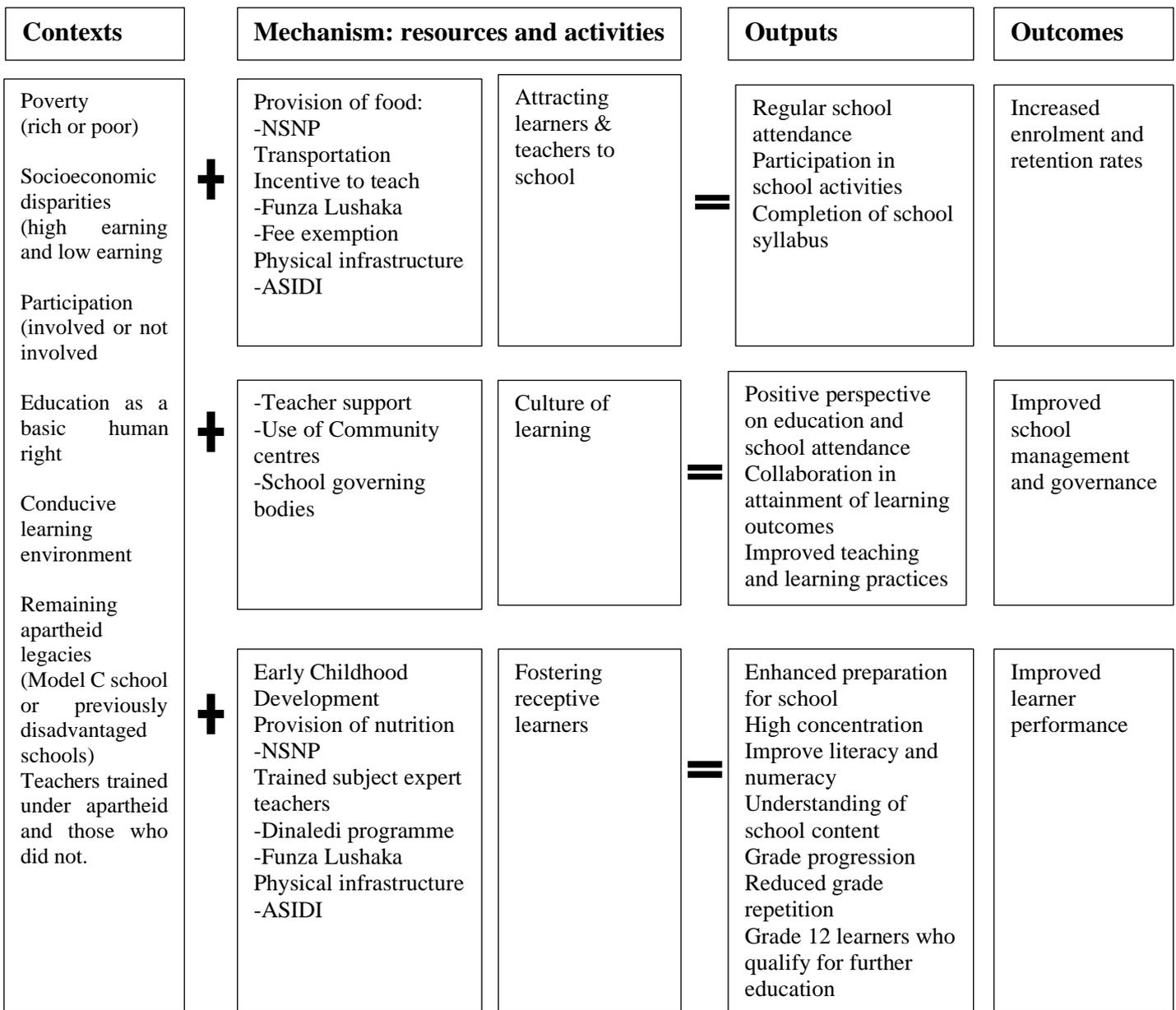
This chapter brings together, through a refined program theory, the CMO configurations of the basic education policy in delivering quality basic education. Diagram 2 is a refined visual representation of the program theory of the basic education policy which shows the links between enabling and constraining contexts, mechanisms and the desired outcomes that are assumed to operate in order to solve the policy problem of lack of access to quality basic education. Essentially, “CMO configuration is a proposition stating what it is about a program which works for whom in what circumstances” (Pawson and Tilley, 1997:217). Accordingly, this chapter evaluates the assumptions underpinning education policy through the lenses of Pawson and Tilley’s (1997:217) realist evaluation question of “what works, for whom in what circumstance?” in addressing the policy problem of provision of basic quality education. Therefore, the evaluation will also identify breakages in the assumed links through the use of existing literature on basic education policy and the state of education. Due to limitation of data available, not all the breakages in the program theory can be proved with existing literature.

According to Pawson (2003:474), the configuration of CMOs elicit a program theory comprising of policy assumptions about what works for whom in what circumstances. In evaluating the constructed theory, a realist evaluator aims to understand the circumstances that are favourable and constraining for basic education policy ideas and resources for achieving access quality basic education. Realistic program theory can be presented as an equation of  $C+M=O$ . Policy assumptions are thus found in the explanation of how context and mechanism operate to produce expected outcomes.

Pawson and Tilley (1997:70) use a crime fighting program as example of the how the interaction between context and mechanism works. For instance, in a case of a crime fighting program, in activating the mechanism of ‘confidence building’, “messages of reassurance from the community constable are likely to fall on deaf ears if the local crime rates remain static and repeat victimization continues to bite” (Pawson and Tilley, 1997:70). This example illustrates how contexts can enable or constrain mechanisms as well as desired policy outcomes. The section on mechanisms, which discussed reasonings for the use of resources and ideas, CMOs

discussed in the previous as well as in the program theory are instrumental in illuminating some of the assumptions underpinning the basic education policy.

Diagram 2: Refined program theory of basic education policy



**Goal: Improved Access to Quality Basic Education**

## 5.2. A pro-poor approach for delivering quality basic education

The context of socioeconomic disparities has an influence on a learner's school attendance and performance (Statistics South Africa, 2017:64). Porteus (2003:770) conducted a study that found that learners from low-income households make up the majority of out-of-school learners. The program theory illustrates that provision of food, transportation to school and fee exemptions are some of the measure taken by government in order to engage learners from poor households to go to school. Statistic South Africa (2017:64) also notes that "the government places an emphasis on mitigating the effects of socioeconomic challenges through programmes such as the social grants, no-fee schools, school nutrition programmes and scholar transportation". Thus, South Africa's basic education policy assumes that a pro-poor approach is best for delivering quality basic education for the majority population.

In addition, the focus placed on mitigating the effects of poverty implies that access to quality education is easily attainable for those with financial means while those that are poor have less chances of attaining education. However, the contradiction in this assumption is that the policy acknowledges that poverty affects school attendance and performance, yet the policy insists on imposing a school going-age in order to attain its enrolment outcome, which results in many children from low-income households exiting general education school because they are classified as out-of-age (Porteus, 2003:770).

The pro-poor approach to South Africa's basic education policy is also an essential part of South Africa's task at increasing the human resource and alleviate poverty. Investing in education for those that are poor is said to provide opportunities to break generational poverty (Department of Education, 2003:7). The policy places an emphasis on improving the performance of learners in the subjects of mathematics, science and technology. These subjects are expressed as critical tools for the development of human resources and economic advancement (Department of Education, 1995:22).

Furthermore, socioeconomic frameworks such as the RDP and GEAR, present education as a means for those that are poor to empower themselves, while acknowledging that poverty is also a constricting factor for those pursuing access to quality basic education (Republic of South Africa, 1995:9) (Department of Finance, 1996: 13). South Africa's basic education policy is continuously informed by socioeconomic frameworks, thus implying that basic education is a vehicle through which poverty can be alleviated. The goal to overcome

socioeconomic inequalities facing the majority of South Africans underpins the provision of basic education policy.

However, based on existing literature, breakages can be found in the assumed link between school attendance and alleviation of poverty. The DBE (2010:69) reported that “the no-fee school policy has resulted in greater school allocation for poorer learners and has strengthened the pro-poor aspects of education policy”. Fee exemption, though, only secures access to schooling without guaranteeing the quality of education received by learners. According to StatsSA (2019), the unemployment rate in South Africa continues to rise with youth unemployment being 55,2 per cent in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2019. StatsSA (2017:44) also reports that while those with only primary school qualification have a higher chance of being unemployed, completing secondary school does little to increase the chances of employment. With this in mind, Motala (2001:244) argues that “the preposition that education helps reduce poverty by increasing the productivity of the poor may only be true in certain circumstance”. This argument is aligned with the realist framework that policy intervention and their assumptions tend to produce intended goals depending on the contexts. Thus, in the context of poverty, learners from poor households struggle with attaining the full benefits of education due to the barriers to schooling as a result of poverty.

While this assumption is valid for providing learners with greater opportunities to attend school, this assumption does not account for attracting learners to school with quality teaching. The pro-poor rhetoric comes short on attracting learners to schools where they would receive quality school. Public schools with fee exemptions are the most attractive to those that are poor. However, schools consisting mostly of learners from poor households means that these school cannot raise extra funds while schools that charge fees consisting of learners from wealthy households get to benefit from extra resources acquired through extra funding.

### **5.3. The use of physical infrastructure**

The program theory illustrates that the use of physical infrastructure is instrumental in providing access to school and establishing a conducive learning environment. The results presented under the theme of mechanism revealed that physical infrastructure is deemed as a necessary source of encouragement for learners to want to go to school, teachers to teach and to provide a conducive learning environment that cultivates receptiveness among learners.

South Africa's basic education policy makes school compulsory for the first ten years of a child's life. The Implementation Plan for Education and Training states that "quality in education ultimately occurs at the level of the classroom" (ANC, 1994:333). There are three assumptions underpinning the efforts, as shown in the program theory, to enhance physical infrastructure. First, provision of physical infrastructure is intended to ensure regular and sustainable school attendance by making schools accessible for those first ten years (Department of Education, 1996:15). Therefore, in the context of free compulsory basic education, it is assumed that the availability of physical infrastructure encourages learners to attend school.

Second, the program theory shows that physical infrastructure is meant to encourage learners to stay at school throughout their schooling phase. Therefore, it is also the assumption of South Africa's basic education policy that learners stand to benefit from schooling the longer they remain at school without dropping out. This assumption is supported by the policy's stance of 'enrolment and retention rates' as one of the intended outcomes of the basic education policy. Thus, it is assumed that in the context of availability of physical school, there is causality between learners' school attendance, the duration they remain enrolled and the benefits derived from school retention.

According to StatsSA (2017:5), the number of learners enrolled in school is within acceptable levels. However, prior studies show that most learners, despite completing schooling through Grade 12, do not have the acceptable levels of literacy and/or numeracy skills (Spaull, 2013:10). These findings merely illustrate that completing schooling from Grade 1 through Grade 12 is not adequate to secure access to quality education. The policy is headed in the right direction in underpinning its actions towards keeping learners at school for the duration of the school cycle. The challenge that remains is making the time spent at school fruitful and beneficial.

Third, the discussion on fostering 'receptiveness' revealed that the Department of Education utilises physical infrastructure to create conducive learning environments. Priority is placed on building safer school buildings, provision of services such as water, electricity and sanitation, in order to create a decent learning environment. The argument is that "there is a link between the physical environment learners are taught, and teaching and learning effectiveness, as well as learning outcomes" (Republic of South Africa, 2010:7). This statement implies that learners cannot learn under unfavourable conditions. Therefore, it can be said that it is the assumption

of the basic education policy that quality learning requires a structural environment that secures comfort and security to enhance learner performance.

The assumption that learning requires a conducive learning environment is supported by the reports on educational outcomes between rural, township and urban schools. According to Hoadley (2008: 28), affluent schools in South Africa often have conducive learning environments accompanied by positive learning outcomes such as high literacy and numeracy rates. In contrast, poorer schools often without conducive learning environments, continue to produce poor educational outcomes. Infrastructure development programmes are critical for establishing a conducive environment, however, the socioeconomic nature of rural areas has proved to be a challenge. According to South Africa's basic education policy (2013:113), "the majority of the ASIDI backlogs are in the remote rural areas where access to the sites is difficult due to the terrain and poor road conditions, causing difficulty in delivering materials to sites". The differences observed by Hoadley (2008) relating to educational outcomes between rural and affluent schools suggest that the assumed link between conducive learning environments and educational outcomes is true. However, the socioeconomic disparities between rural and affluent schools challenge the assumption from materializing.

#### **5.4. The role of teachers in delivering quality education**

When adopting a new basic education policy, the DBE had to address the issue of poorly trained and underqualified teachers stemming from the apartheid education system. The discussion on the theme of mechanism revealed trained teachers are deemed necessary to foster receptiveness and establish a culture of learning in order to enhance the performance of learners. It is therefore the assumption of South Africa's basic education policy that adequately trained teachers would contribute towards securing basic quality education. The assumption that trained and qualified teachers are essential for delivering quality basic education is sound. Teachers are charged with the task of transferring knowledge to learners in a manner that learners can understand.

In the wake of democracy, South Africa faced an environment whereby the best trained teachers were in wealthier schools. In addition, there is a recognition that there is a weak culture of learning among previously disadvantaged schools. Consequently, rural areas are then left with fewer trained teachers, coupled with bad schooling practices. The program theory showed that in the context of apartheid legacies such as uneven school development, there is an

assumption that strengthening the competency of teachers would enhance the level of learners' receptiveness thus leads to improved learner performance. In 2009/2010, through the Dinaledi Programme, 398 mathematics teachers and 370 physical science received training. The Dinaledi Programme "contributed to the improvement in mathematics and physical science results of Grade 12 learners from mainly historically disadvantaged schools" (Department of Basic Education, 2010: 67). It can be said that the assumed link between trained teachers and learner performance is true.

In addition, considering the poor level of value placed on the teaching profession and school attendance, the Department of Education (1995:63) maintains that an increase in incentives such as better working conditions, increase in salaries and recognition would attract qualified teachers to previously disadvantaged school and boost perceptions towards the profession of teaching.

The OECD (2008:84) reported that many teachers who left their jobs cited poor job satisfaction such as "lack of career advancement, and recognition, poor working conditions, and lack of discipline and respect". Other reasons included factors causing profession exit include "lack of facilities for teaching, overcrowding of schools and classrooms, inadequate incentives, poor parental participation, role conflicts, nepotism" (OECD, 2008:84). However, the DBE reported that the "the introduction of Funza Lushaka scheme has resulted in a significant increase in the number and quality of applications for teacher education programmes at HEIs, in some case doubling the intake". In addition, the bursary is said to have drawn more teachers in Mathematic, Physical Science, Technology and Languages. It can therefore be said that the basic education policy is justified in presuming that satisfied and trained teachers would enhance the role played by teachers in delivering education as well as the culture of teaching.

## **5.5. Early Childhood Development**

The discussion on the intended policy mechanisms 'fostering receptive learners' revealed that ECD is an essential initiative to achieve overall access to quality basic education. The program theory illustrates that as part of the ten-year compulsory basic education plan, the DBE added a Reception Year for all children before they begin formal schooling. In the Implementation Plan for Education and Training, it is said that preparing learners for formal school early, lessens their chances of "frustration, poor learning, school failure, dropping out and repetition of grades" (ANC, 1994:313). In the program theory of basic education policy, there is an

assumption that emotionally, physically and mentally preparing children from an early age through to the reception year will improve their performance at school and the retention rate of schools more broadly.

Studies have shown the positive impact ECD has on children's educational prospects (OECD, 2008:223). According to StatsSA (2017: 59), "the late entry into the education system and early exit from education institutions are related to a number of negative outcomes". Furthermore, an impact evaluation of the reception years found that "while the effects of school-based reception grade provision are indeed beneficial, quality improvements are essential to ensure consistent and sustainable benefits" (Department of Basic Education, 2013: 63). Thus, the assumption of South Africa's basic education policy concerning the importance of the wellness of children from an early age is substantiated.

In the initial development of ECD, it was rationalised to benefit those disadvantaged despite ECD being mostly provided by private organisations. The 2013 annual report showed that there has been an increase in the number of five year old learners who have are enrolled in ECD (Department of Basic Education, 2013:19). However, in the context of socioeconomic disparities in South Africa, it means that those from poor households do not have access to ECD due to expensive the nature of ECD not being fully funded by the government (OECD, 2008:220). The socioeconomic contexts at play limit the realization of the assumption of ECD as critical tool for positive educational outcomes.

## **5.6. Participatory governance of schools**

The principles of non-racism, non-sexism, democracy and unitary system and redress underpin education policy development and formulation. However, these principles do not translate well in the context of socioeconomic disparities that exist in South Africa (Donaldson, 2001:71). During the period of policy formulation and debates, the idea of unity overshadowed the provincial divisions that would come with democracy. While policy concerns recognized the differences in capabilities between those previously disadvantaged and advantaged, the differing capabilities of provinces was only recognized later. Thus, most policy debates happened under the assumption on a united and central education system. However, under a new interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, nine provinces with political and legislative anatomy were formed (Jansen, 2001:18). These nine provinces also had unequal bureaucratic capabilities to adopt and implement basic education policy.

The short-sightedness of an assumed united and democratic South Africa is clear in how SGBs have functioned. Within the context of democracy, whereby education is a basic human right, teachers, principals, parents and administrative staff are expected to place value in the responsibility they have to deliver education. Sayed (2001:257) states that the government “assumes that the new school governing bodies will make information available to all parents, and that predominantly wealthy and middle-class bodies will take into consideration the financial circumstances of all parents as a whole in determining school fees”. In addition, SGBs in advantaged schools often use their governance power to adopt admissions policies, language policies and school fees policy to restrict access to those from disadvantaged households (Nzimande and Mathieson, 2004:10) (OECD, 2008:23). Therefore, merely assuming that democratic governance will compel all members of the SGBs to safeguard the right to basic education of learners is short-sighted.

The discussion on the mechanism of ‘fostering a culture of learning’ revealed that the DBE perceives the illiteracy of parents as a constraint towards parental participation in their children’s education. This position is flawed in assuming that parents cannot understand the educational needs of their children without being literate and financially able to donate to the schools. The OECD argues the basic education policy overlooks other participatory ways parents can use to improve educational outcomes. The measures include storytelling, singing songs or buying alphabet toys and word games (OECD, 2008:222). A united and democratic government gives interested parties the opportunity to participate in the provision of education, however, this assumption provides a limited scope for participation, and it lends itself to practices of exclusion within the education system.

### **5.7. The influence of remaining apartheid legacies**

The data from policy documents revealed that the rationalization of the post-apartheid basic education policy is rooted in dismantling apartheid rhetoric and addressing the negative legacies of apartheid that still plague South Africa’s education system. From the early days of policy development prior to 1994, there was already recognition going into the democratic era, that discriminatory education policies have had a lasting impact on the education system as well as on the majority of South Africans. Accordingly, the mechanism for fostering a culture of learning and teaching stems from the notion that the apartheid education system destroyed

it, which means there needs to be an effort to introduce it in the post-apartheid education system.

The efforts placed on overcoming the legacies of apartheid imply that access to quality basic education will be constrained while these legacies are still present. The program theory shows those remaining apartheid legacies such as inadequately trained teachers, underdeveloped schools and communities, and socioeconomic inequalities among the population will continue to influence the delivery of access to quality basic education. It can be said that the assumption underpinning basic education policy is that access to quality basic education is difficult to attain for those who continue to be affected by the legacies of apartheid, specifically previously marginalized groups. For instance, the ASIDI programme is said to “restore pride and dignity of our communities that were previously neglected by the apartheid regime” (Department of Education, 2015: 145).

However, this assumption does not account for how the democratic approach to delivery of education, where education is constitutionally provided, could also reinforce these legacies. During apartheid, most of the resources necessary for the provision of basic education were directed towards the minority group while in the democratic dispensation, where everyone has the right to free basic education, the government has to provide education for everyone (Lemon, 1995:111). This means that the current government has to stretch limited resources and poor infrastructure to cater for a large population in which everyone has a constitutional claim to free basic education. Similarly, Asmal and James (2001:186) point out that “as the government seeks to distribute resources fairly, it finds growing inequality to be a barrier”. Accordingly, within the context of remaining apartheid legacies and negotiated democracy, the mechanism of a culture of learning will be hard to obtain as long as learners’ claim to their right to basic education is not fulfilled due to unequal resource distribution.

South Africa’s post-apartheid schooling system is characterised by the principle of inclusivity and education as a constitutional afforded human right, which means that schools cannot deny learners admission to schools on the basis of their background, language, race or class. Asmal and James (2001:86) note that South Africa’s challenge is that “the sustainability of quality schools depends in larger measure on the sustainability of democratic ethos in civic life and, therefore, thriving partnerships between the core institutions of civil society”. However, the decision making powers schools can enforce exclusion and discrimination because not all everyone interprets the principles of democracy in the same way. For instance, SGBs have the

power to decide admission criteria, school fees and language of tuition. That being said, SGBs cannot use this democratically given power to exclude those who do not fall within a set of criteria. It is up to the SGBs and school at large to abide by the democratic ethos and create inclusive schooling admissions criteria. It can be said that while apartheid legacies inhibit access to education for most learners, it is also true that democratic principles of collective governance can create an enabling environment for schools to discriminate against learners based on their language, background and race, under the guise of admissions criteria.

The assumptions discussed above have enabling and constraining contexts that must be taken into consideration. The assumptions about the use of infrastructure, the role of teachers in delivering quality basic education and ECD are the strongest ones in South African contexts. The benefits that lie in the fulfilment of these assumptions have been proved in various studies within South Africa. However, the challenge in reaching the full benefits lies at the implementation stage of policy interventions as well as resource constraints. In addition, the ability of teachers to deliver quality basic education requires an environment where there are efficient training institutions. Therefore, this assumption requires an environment whereby there is an incentivising tool for attracting people to the profession of teaching.

This chapter also presented other assumptions that were found to be wanting. For instance, the assumption about a pro-poor approach to education does not lend itself to work in an environment whereby the job market is not receptive even to those with schooling. The use of physical infrastructure for creating a conducive learning environment and attracting learners to school is challenged by the socioeconomic contexts of rural areas. In addition, the ability of teachers to deliver basic education requires a context where there are efficient training institutions. This assumption also requires an environment whereby there is an incentivising tool for attracting people to the profession of teaching. The assumption on participatory governance of schools is constricted by the socioeconomic disparities facing many households who cannot participate in schools matter. Finally, the assumption about the legacies of apartheid as a constraint can also be reinforced by the democratic principles and relies heavily on society interpreting these principles in the same way. The flaw in this assumption is that democracy gives people the choice and power to maintain the privilege stemming from apartheid unequal distribution of resource.

## 5.8. Chapter conclusion

This chapter presented a visual representation of a realistic program theory that informs South Africa's basic education policy in delivering access to quality basic education. With the program theory in mind, the chapter assessed the assumptions underpinning South Africa's basic education policy by looking for breakages and validity in the assumed links of context, mechanisms and outcomes. Due to the large scale nature of research related to educational outcomes in South Africa, only a handful of assumptions from the program theory were assessed. The main identified theoretical assumptions underpinning South Africa's basic education policy are a pro-poor approach for delivering quality basic education; the use of physical infrastructure; the role of teachers in delivery access to quality basic education, ECD; participatory governance of schools; and the influence of apartheid legacies.

The assessment of the assumption was based on Pawson and Tilley's (1997) realistic question of what works, for who and under what circumstances. First, the findings showed the assumptions are that access to quality education works for children from poor households when there are no barriers to school. Secondly, physical infrastructure that provides a conducive learning environment is necessary to attain positive education outcomes. Third, learners perform better at school when they are taught by highly trained and qualified teachers. Fourth, learners are most likely to positively progress through the schooling system when they are mentally, physically and emotionally developed before they start formal schooling. Fifth, schools are effective when they are governed through a participatory system like SGBs. Lastly, access to quality basic education will remain hard to realise for those that are still negatively affected by the legacies of apartheid, such as those relegated to attending underdeveloped schools in the rural areas. Based on the data from StatsSA and other literature, some of the policy assumptions have a basis for the assumed links of the mechanisms and outcomes. However, these assumptions underpinning the basic education policy often do not account for how they would materialize in the varying contexts of socioeconomic disparities and political history of South Africa.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

### 6.1. Overview

The main aim of the thesis was to establish the theoretical assumptions underpinning South Africa's basic education policy for providing access to quality basic education. The analysis of the literature review in Chapter two revealed that there is a mutual agreement among scholars that the state of education in South Africa is unacceptable. While the majority of children were enrolled in school, they were receiving poor levels of education quality coupled by dropout rates, poor retention rates. Because access to schooling only is not adequate, this thesis did not choose to combine its focus on the problem area of 'access to quality basic education'. Bearing in mind that scholarship on theory-based evaluation of South African education policy is still developing, the intention of this thesis was to gain an understanding of the basic education policy through a different perspective.

Chapter two discussed the themes identified in analysing the literature on South Africa's basic education policy. The themes identified in the literature view are: the thinking behind education policy transformation, critics of education policy, approaches to quality education, measuring quality education, the state of access to quality basic education, the role of funding policies, implementation gaps, theory-based evaluation and approaches to policy analysis of South Africa's basic education policy.

In the literature discussion in Chapter two, authors such as Spaul (2013), Jansen (2012) and Sayed (2008) found that while access to schooling has increased since 1994, access to quality basic education is still at an unacceptable level. South African children have continued to perform poorly in tests administered by the SACMEQ, as well the TIMSS. These studies have been continuously done since 1994 as part of efforts to keep track on whether the basic education is delivering acceptable level of education to children in South Africa. These studies illustrate that South Africa is struggling either with enacting its theory or that the theory is flawed. While some of the assumptions such as keeping children at school for long periods, training teachers and conducive learning environment are sound. Most of the shortcomings in these assumptions is in their implementation.

Chapter three qualified the use of qualitative research approach as well as the analytical approach of realistic evaluation. This research was done through document-based study and

there were no participants involved. The chapter also argued that realistic evaluation lends itself well to research when stakeholders do not participate in the processes of establishing a program theory. In addition, the chapter defends the choice to analyse the collected documents through the Pawson and Tilley's (1997) realistic configurations of context, mechanism and outcomes.

Furthermore, chapter three outlined how the process of applying Pawson and Tilley's (1997) realist evaluation would unfold in Chapters four and five. The first step was explaining the presentation of the CMO configurations. A program theory would then be presented as articulated in the finding of CMOs. The chapter further explains how from the program theory underlying assumptions would be extrapolated and assessed using the existing data on education. The aim of the evaluation process would be to understand how, for whom and under what circumstances is the basic education assumed to work in solving the policy problem of lack of access to quality education.

Chapter four reports on the findings from the analysis of collected documents. The findings are presented according to the thematic themes of context, mechanisms and outcomes configurations. These configurations made it possible to discern between relevant information and provided a framework for analysing documents and then presenting the findings. In addition, these configurations of realistic evaluation gave insight into the resources, ideas, activities, initiative central to the operationalisation of basic education policy. A visual representation of the assumed causal links between contexts, mechanisms and outcomes was presented at the end of the chapter.

Chapter five focused on unpacking and evaluating the assumptions of South Africa's basic education policy based on the findings discussed in Chapter four. The evaluation was based on understanding the realist question of what works, for whom and under what circumstances. Therefore, existing data on basic education performance to assess breakages and strengthen in the program theory as well as the assumed causal links.

## **6.2. Findings from the evaluation**

The findings showed the intention of South Africa's basic education policy is that within political history and socioeconomic contexts, it is necessary to cultivate the responses of 'culture of learning and teaching'; 'attraction to school'; and 'foster receptive learners' in order

to achieve the outcomes of ‘improved learner performance’; ‘high enrolment and retention rates’; and ‘improved school management’. This causal relationship is operationalised through provision of programmes such as the Accelerated School Infrastructure Delivery Initiative, National Nutritional School Programme, Dinaledi programme, Early Childhood Programme and Funza Lushaka bursary programme. In addition, resources and activities such as the provision of food, transportation, physical infrastructure, learning materials, SGBs, community centres, training for teachers and fee-exemption are embedded and used for eliciting intended mechanism.

Once the program theory of basic education and its make-up was presented, the assumption underpinning the basic education policy were extrapolated and evaluated through identifying breakages and truth in the assumed causal links. Based on the findings on CMOs in Chapter four, as well as the refined program theory presented in Chapter five, it can be said that first of the assumption of South Africa’s basic education policy is a pro-poor approach to the provision of education. The argument by the DBE in favour of this assumption is that placing focus on poorer communities would ensure that quality education reaches the majority of the population. This requires placing more resources towards poor schools and removing barriers to schooling through provision of food, transportation, and fee exemptions.

The Department of Education (2003:7) has emphasized the link between distributing resources to those who are poor and have been marginalized and the intended educational outcomes. However, existing data shows that basic education has done little to increase the chances of poverty alleviation, exacerbated by fact poverty is also a barrier for accessing basic education. While the education policy emphasizes delivering resources to poor communities, it does not account for the fact many poor and rural communities are not easily accessible and often lack the capacity to utilize the provided resources.

The second assumption extrapolated is that provision of infrastructure is essential for creating the necessary conditions for learners to effectively learn. This assumption stands strong when one compares rural and urban schools against their ability to perform and their learning environment. While creating a conducive learning environment can contribute to positive learning environment, it must be considered alongside the necessity of efficient teachers in these environments.

The third assumption is that trained teachers are necessary for delivering quality basic education. This assumption is strong as reports from the DBE (2013) found that deploying trained teachers to poor school improved learners' educational outcomes. The extent to which this assumption materialises relies on the ability of the Department of Basic Education to draw more teachers into training institutions and deploying them to the appropriate schools.

The fourth assumption is that early preparation of children for school through ECD would improve learner performance throughout the school system. No breakages could be found in this assumed link of ECD and improving learner performance. However South Africa needs to address socioeconomic disparities facing the major because poor household cannot afford ECD, which is mostly privately provided. Research shows that there positive educational outcomes associated with introducing ECD.

The fifth assumption is that participatory governance of school through SGBs would encourage collective responsibility in delivering quality basic education. This assumption is flawed in the idea that collective responsibility through SGBs would equate to equal capacity to participate in matters of provision of quality basic education. The ability for SGBs to raise funds and set school fees at their own discretion provides an advantages for schools with learners from affluent households. Thus, SGBs among wealthy school with parental participation can has an impact on the availability of school resources. Though, SGBs in schools where most of the learners come from poor households do not benefit from the potential of extra funds from parents.

The final assumption is that the remaining apartheid legacies pose a challenge for achieving access to quality basic education. The policy does well in accounting for the challenges brought by apartheid education policy such as underdevelopment of rural and township schools, illiterate majority population and underqualified teachers. Without downplaying the impact of apartheid on the education system and South Africa as a society, it can be said the basic education does not account for how the political nature of a democratic South Africa can influence, both positively and negatively, the delivery of access to quality education. This assumption also confirms Jansen's (2001:32) theory that South Africa's basic education policies are mostly symbolic of the country's new direction towards a new and united democracy rather than representative of implementation orientation. Furthermore, Jansen (2001:271) argues that the lack of improvement in access to quality basic education is due to the symbolic nature of the education policy. The impression made by the basic education policy

documents is that apartheid legacies will always exist, and therefore do not provide a platform for the new democratic government to be held accountable for its own shortcomings in the education system.

Pawson and Tilley (1997) argue that contexts can elicit different mechanisms which lead to differing outcomes. The findings presented showed that the socioeconomic and political historical contexts of South Africa inform how the mechanisms of the basic education policy lead to desired educational outcomes. However, in analysing the documents, it was clear that the policy has accounted for which inputs are necessary and will be used to deliver quality basic education. That being said, there was no explicit rationalisation of interventions. Furthermore, some of the contexts identified in policy documents are too broad and general. Thus, in order for the DBE to achieve successful interventions, there needs to be more investigation into specific contexts at the specific level of schools, communities, households and learners. According to Pawson and Tilley's (1997) realistic evaluation framework, context is the most important aspect for how a policy intervention works or whether it yields the intended results. As such, policy development and implementation in South Africa needs to engage more with Pawson's (1997) realist principle of 'what works, for who, and under what circumstance' in order to adapt interventions accordingly under varying contexts.

### **6.3. Recommendations for future research**

This thesis applied Pawson and Tilley's (1997) realistic evaluation configuration to report the contexts, mechanism and outcomes, built a program theory and evaluate the assumptions underlying the basic education policy. This was done through using documents only, which according to Pawson and Tilley (1997), can be sufficient. Accordingly, the research question of 'what is are the theoretical assumptions underpinning South African basic education policy' was answered.

The recommendation for future policy evaluations in basic education is to involve stakeholders and policy beneficiaries to further refine understanding on the causal links between contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. Beneficiaries can help expand our understanding of relevant contexts specific to them which will further improve insights into why certain schools achieve positive education outcomes and others do not. To echo Mbava's (2017) conclusion, the use of theory-based evaluation will enrich policy evaluation in South African and ultimately influence the way policy makers thinks about policy formulation.

Another recommendation on future evaluation on basic education policy instead of evaluating the whole education policy, evaluate specific programmes such as Funza Lushaka, the National Schools Nutrition Programme, Accelerated Schools Infrastructure Delivery and Read2Lead, which are all designed to improve access to quality basic education. This would allow for comprehensive, deeper and focused engagement with how the DBE rationalises programme interventions.

The researcher found that there were many policy documents dealing with the delivery of quality basic education, which made the analysis challenging, because a choice had to be made concerning themes to be included in the presentation of findings. While the Department of Basic Education has commissioned and conducted theory-based evaluations for some of its programmes, the documents were not made publicly available during the course of this research. Furthermore, theory-based evaluation is still developing in South Africa. Therefore, the researcher had to spend a lot of time on grappling with the conceptualisation of a realistic approach in the context of education policy in South Africa. With that said, the evaluator learnt a great deal during this process and is more passionate about studying education policy to contribute towards improving the state of education in South Africa. The evaluator is also grateful for the opportunity to learn, contribute to the existing literature and become a better evaluator of South Africa's education policies.

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