

GORDON KIRK TRAVEL SCHOLARSHIPS

Dear James,

Please find enclosed application and outline for the Gordon Kirk Travel Scholarship. I am outlining the project focus, approach, and key research questions, as well as a schedule and budget for the project below.

Project Title:

A critical exploration of how a senior leadership course can develop novice headteachers in township and rural schools in South Africa, to drive social mobility.

Introduction:

Lynch (2024) highlighted in a landmark study, that the best headteachers, can add two GCSE grades to learners' outcomes. Hattie (2012) points out that strong leadership in schools can make the second biggest impact on learner outcomes. It is therefore imperative to develop future leaders to progress as strong leaders into leadership roles. However, in countries like South Africa, due to Covid-19, leadership progression is hampered, and leaders are often required to step into leadership roles without any formal development opportunities. Researchers from the University of Wolverhampton (UoW), work in collaboration with researchers from the University of Johannesburg (UoJ), to investigate, how effective leadership development through the delivery of an online senior leadership course, can impact on the learner outcomes in rural and township communities, with the aim to provide evidence of how leadership development can help to promote social mobility within these challenging areas. The aim of the project is to provide detailed evidence of how leadership development can help to drive school improvement and provide life-chances for learners in the poorest of communities. The researchers aim to provide evidence and key recommendations to the department of education in South Africa, to provide development opportunities for future and novice headteachers to fully equip them in their role, as part of their teacher education and development journey.

Research Approach:

This mixed methods case study, aims to evaluate, how a leadership programme, which was developed to equip novice headteachers within 32 rural and township schools in the North of South Africa in collaboration with the UoW and UoJ enabled headteachers to develop strategic leadership skills, and the necessary administrative skills to lead their schools. 32 novice headteachers volunteered to participate in the senior leadership course provided by the partnership universities. The 32 novice headteachers were recruited via invitation, and their engagement is voluntary, and participants are aware that they can withdraw from the study at any given point in line with the BERA (2018) ethical guidance. All the necessary ethical requirements and considerations, including participant and stakeholder consent will be fully in place at the time of the data collection point for the project.

The study aims to track the outcomes for learners based on learners' end of year outcomes, as well as departmental reports available publicly. In addition, the study aims to collect primary data via the use of semi-structured interviews with novice headteachers, and their senior leadership teams, to evaluate the perceived impact they felt their engagement with the senior leadership course had, on their own development, that of their teams, and their learners.

Quantitative data will be analysed through the use of comparative methods exploring how the 32 schools' where novice headteachers engaged with the senior leadership course, compared to novice headteachers' school outcomes who did not engage with the study (Cohen et al. 2018).

Qualitative data will be analysed through the use of Braun and Clarke's (2022) 6 phase thematic analysis to gain a clear understanding of how headteachers and senior leaders perceived the impact of the senior leadership course with the key research questions below in mind:

The research study aims to evaluate the following research questions:

Main Question:

How can a senior leadership course, develop novice headteachers' strategic leadership and administrative skills to lead their schools?

Sub-questions:

- How does a senior leadership course, provide novice headteachers' with the necessary skills to direct and lead curriculum development within rural and township schools in South Africa?
- How does a senior leadership course, provide novice headteachers with the necessary skills to strategically lead their senior leadership teams?
- How does a senior leadership course, provide novice headteachers with the necessary skills to track data effectively to support learners' outcomes?
- How does a senior leadership course, provide novice headteachers with the necessary skills to use theories of change to lead effective school improvement in rural and township schools?

The study will be conducted in South Africa, where the researchers will have access to the required data reports, for the secondary data analysis of learner outcomes. In addition, due to the fact that headteachers are based in rural and township schools with limited access to platforms such as TEAMS, semi-structured interviews will be conducted in person, at the respective schools of school leaders, where the data will be recorded, and then transcribed at the UoJ. Transcriptions will be checked and approved by participants for accuracy, and then thematically analysed.

The analysed data will be written up in a detailed report to provide UCET with a full update on the progress of the project. In addition, all findings will be disseminated via journal articles, blogs, and conference presentations.

Scholarship Budget:

Scholarship Funding	Expenses
Travel Cost	750
Accommodation	250
Data Gathering and analysis	250
Transcription of Semi-Structured Interviews	250
Meeting Costs	250
Dissemination (Conference Fees)	250
Total	2000

Project Timetable:

Data Collection Points	Checkpoints	Data Collection
April	Ethical approval	Complete stakeholder consent prior to data collection point

May – Arrangements to travel to South Africa	Book appointments and flights	Prepare documentation for data collection
June – July	Collect required secondary data documents for analysis	Use Boland et al.'s (2016) framework to evaluate secondary data, and any additional documentation and reports provided.
August	Travel to South Africa	Qualitative data collection
Mid-August	Develop Transcripts	Check stakeholder approval of transcripts re: accuracy
September	Data Analysis	Data report
October 2024	UCET Report	UCET Report
November	Dissemination – Conference and journal articles	Conference presentation and journal articles sharing of key findings and future recommendations

As a result of the scholarship funding the researchers hope to also present the key findings to the regional branches of the North West, and North East, Department of Education directors. The researchers already have been in discussions regarding the project and its potential to support future novice headteachers within the regions, and also nationally.

**Appendix A:
Statements of support:**



Prof Raj Mestry
Professor
University of Johannesburg
25.03.2024

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: UCET Scholarship Grant

I can confirm that I am looking forward to collaborating on working with Dr. Lizana Oberholzer and Dr. Sean Starr on the Headteachers' development project in South Africa.

Dr Oberholzer, Dr. Starr and I worked on the Headteacher development project as a collaborative piece, to support the development and learning of novice headteachers in rural and township schools. Our ambitions are, to provide a senior leadership course nationally, that will equip novice headteachers to develop the skills and confidence to lead their schools effectively to make a positive impact on learner outcomes over time. This project is the first step towards making this vision a realisation. In a country like South Africa, the challenges for learners are vast, and to provide them with an opportunity to engage with a high-quality education can change lives. Our work is vital in driving social mobility in the most challenging areas for South Africa and we can see that it can make a real difference to the potential life chance of the children these headteachers are supporting.

I am looking forward to being able to evaluate the outcomes of the work we did so far to progress the project, and to provide detailed evidence of the impact of the project on learner outcomes, with the aim to make key recommendations for future development opportunities for novice headteachers too. We believe that this opportunity to formalise the study by evaluating the impact will be an important next step on our journey.

I am in full support of the project and look forward to working with colleagues from the University of Wolverhampton on this project.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R Mestry", enclosed within a hand-drawn oval.

Prof Raj Mestry



25.03.2024

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I can confirm that I am looking forward to collaborating on working with Dr. Lizana Oberholzer and Professor Raj Mestry on the Headteachers' development project in South Africa.

Dr Oberholzer, Professor Mestry and I worked on the Headteacher development project as a collaborative piece, to support the development and learning of novice headteachers in rural and township schools. Our ambitions are, to provide a senior leadership course nationally, that will equip novice headteachers to develop the skills and confidence to lead their schools effectively to make a positive impact on learner outcomes over time. This project is the first step towards making this vision a realisation. Our work is vital in driving social mobility forward, in the most challenging areas for South Africa.

I am looking forward to being able to evaluate the outcomes of the work we did so far to progress the project, and to provide detailed evidence of the impact of the project on learner outcomes, with the aim to make key recommendations for future development opportunities for novice headteachers too.

I am in full support of the project and look forward to working with colleagues from the University of Johannesburg on this project.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr. Sean Starr
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