

**FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN
LESOTHO SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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DECLARATION

I declare that the study titled **FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN LESOTHO SECONDARY SCHOOLS** is my work and is supported by duly referenced material which has been fully acknowledged.

M`aliopelo Johanna Mokhorro

Date

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ABBREVIATIONSAND ACRONYMS

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of a Child
ECCD	Early Childhood Careand Development
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
PS	Principal Secretary
RSA	Republic of SouthAfrica
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

ABSTRACT

Learners in Lesotho are obliged to attend school as stipulated by the Ministry of Education and Training. Attendance must be regular for them to attain quality education. Bronfenbrenner`s bio-ecologica ltheory of human development is used as a lens in this study which investigated factors contributing to learner absenteeism in Lesotho Secondary Schools.

As qualitative study, this study used Semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussions and formal documents to collect data, while thematic data analysis was employed to analyze data. The findings revealed that there are a number of factors contributing to learner absenteeism in Lesotho Secondary Schools. These are lack of support from parents, learners hiding in rented houses, boys and girls who are engaged in different activities at home, influence from neighborhood, initiation schools and lack discipline. Furthermore, this study revealed that parents curb absenteeism by dropping their children at school, liaising with class teachers and co-working with parents nearest to school. Talking to learners, calling parents to school to discuss children`s problems and sometimes use of corporal punishment are some of the measures employed by school to curb absenteeism. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education and Training should strengthen measures meant to combat learner absenteeism and develop policies on school attendance to deal with absenteeism in schools and ease the work of teachers.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, and objectives of the study. The chapter also highlights the significance of the study and the methodology used. It ends with the summary of the chapter. The following section focuses on the background to the study.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Children have a right to education and states should ensure that they attend school. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) states that every child has a right to education. Article 11.1 (ii) specifies that the education of a child shall be directed to the promotion and development of children's personalities, talents, mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. In addition, the state parties shall encourage the development of secondary education in its different forms and progressively make it free and accessible to all Olowu (2002). Lesotho, being a signatory to ACRWC, has pledged to ensure that all children have access to education (African Charter on Rights and Welfare of a Child).

Poor learners' school attendance lowers the literacy and numeracy rates of any country Thompson, (2008). Chronic absence is associated with lower student academic achievement Sanchez (2012). This is because the number of learners enrolled at the beginning of a year keeps on changing up to the point where the end-of-year examinations are written by a limited number of learners. This suggests that the completion and literacy rates are declining. Absenteeism places students at the risk of dropping out of school. Every missed class means that they are educationally a step backward compared to their counterparts who remain in school. School absenteeism is extremely diverse and includes several factors such as social, pedagogical, psychological and economic factors Blandul, (2012).

Absenteeism affects learners socially and those with poor school attendance miss their friends as the latter find new ones. This is assigned that absenteeism does not harm only the students who do not go to school, but also the other students at school. Absentees deny themselves the chance to know other learners better because of being away from school many times. A study conducted in Lesotho by Smiley (2011) shows that caregivers provide children material support as well as behavioral guidance, leading them to appear physically well cared for and they tend to follow local norms appropriate for child behavior. Learners who get poor home care tend to absent themselves from school. Smiley (2011) further portrays a clear pattern that poverty, general lack of adult care in particular, is strongly associated with educational challenges suggesting that absenteeism does not just happen, there are reasons behind it.

Persistent absentees are likely to come from disadvantaged home backgrounds and unfavorable social circumstances. Learners from these backgrounds do not have self-acceptance to cope with their studies. Citing a local example, on 22 October 2017, two school girls were found by the police in Semonkong, a small town in the highlands of Lesotho, after being away from school for a full week (Semonkong Police, 2017). Upon interview, it was discovered that these two learners went to stay with a taxi driver because they ate delicious food at this place. According to Malcolm, Thorpe and Lowden (1996), students who are habitually absent are bad models of absenteeism to those who are regularly in school. Consequently, even students who attend school regularly copy the wayward behavior by being absent from school. Ultimately, such students end up breaching school regulations on school attendance.

Psychologically, the absentees are disturbed when they find considerable work done during their absence. They feel left out and sometimes feel guilty that they do not do their schoolwork. Absentees may further be negatively affected when they become aware that they are academically behind in other topics and skills which might have been covered while they were not at school.

Pedagogical factors include teaching styles which teachers may employ in their different lessons. A certain teaching style may be more interesting to some learners than the other. For instance, for effective learning to occur, students must actively process the knowledge by making sense of the concept themselves. Diversified teaching and learning techniques can yield learners who really want to learn Caine & Caine, (1994). Equally important, teachers can foster interest and creativity by providing quality feedback which in turn contributes to intrinsic motivation to learners Amabile, (1989). Students' school absenteeism is such a problem that extends the scope of school, affecting the students themselves because they fall behind in their studies.

The rates of school absenteeism vary in different countries in the sense that some experience high rates of absenteeism than others. A study conducted in 2000 in Denmark shows that the highest rate of school absenteeism recorded was twenty-four percent Garcia & Weiss (2018). In Belgium there was a slight percentage drop in the number of reported cases of absenteeism on the total population during the 1999-2000 school years. Grewe (2005) The lowest values recorded were nine percent Grewe (2005). In France, school absenteeism increases together with the pupils' age by two percent. Learners aged seventeen and nineteen were found regularly absent from school. In England, data for the 2001-2002 school year showed that it is understandable if a child misses school for 19 days, a period which is referred to as the minimum of time students can be absent from schools Matthys, De Vries & Van Engeland (2005).

Countries' national laws relating to school attendance support a more punitive approach which, in countries such as Britain includes sentences and even imprisonment for school absentees' parents (Zhang, 2007). The United States of America (USA) is not an exception in this issue of school absenteeism where it is a serious problem worthy of criminal fines. Baker, Sigmond and Nugent (2001) reported that in line with that law of Britain, absenteeism is the major problem that affects the future of students in a negative way. According to article 5 of the Education Act, chapter 327 of the laws of Malta, it is the duty of every parent of a child who is of compulsory school age to ensure that the

child attends school everyday unless the child has a good and sufficient cause to be absent from school.

Interms of the South African Policy for Learners` Attendance (Motshekga, 2010), a learner at a public school whom is sesten consecutive school days is regarded as a continuous absentee. All learners in the Republic of South Africa (RSA) who are registered at schools are obliged to attend. It is an obligation for all learners to comply with a school`s code of conduct for learners (RSA 1996 [b]). The Policy on Learner Attendance also mentions that class teachers should bring repeated absence of a learner to the attention of the principal. Teachers are required to keep lesson attendance registers and report to the headmaster`s office if a learner is absent from class without a valid reason.

Lesotho is not immune from chronic learner absenteeism in schools. It is affected like other countries. As it is stipulated by The Ministry of Education and training when a learner violates the compulsory attendance code which states that a learner shall attend school each day and for such parts of the day as instruction is provided at the school for the learner, there is a penalty. A report can be made to a school principal either verbally or in a written form if a learner is unable to attend school. Otherwise, the parent of such a learner is guilty of an offence and could be convicted and sentenced to do some community service as the court may determine. Apart from that, a fine of not less than M1000.00 or imprisonment for a term of not less than one year or both is served to a parent (Ministry of Education and Training, 2010).

The Government of Lesotho provides for access to education as the basic right of every child and it ensures that all children have access to quality education from ECCD to tertiary level. In Lesotho, learners between age 6 and 17 are expected to attend school for 180 days per annum. To ensure regular attendance for every student, MOET provides attendance registers to every school. From this document, teachers can notice any student who has poor school attendance and may be in a position to find the reasons behind such absenteeism. The regular attendance is checked in line with the school

calendar issued by MOET. Regardless of the clear rules regarding school attendance, absenteeism is still a problem that increases annually in Lesotho schools. In one school codenamed Litlemo, statistics of absentees were as follows: in 2012, the number of absentees per week was 24, and in 2013 and 2014 it rose to 27. In 2014 there were 27 absentees, 30 in 2015 and 31 in 2016.

The MOET issues primary and post-primary schools with a calendar every academic year, which must be followed. The MOET circular states that any variation of the given school calendar must be referred to the Principal Secretary (PS) for approval. The sum of 180 days per year must be maintained, notwithstanding this or any other concession.

In Nigerian schools, absenteeism has been more common in rural than in urban areas (Fagbenle, & Elegbeleye (2014)). The schooling of rural children lags because parents do not see how their children's education will be used in their local market (Huisman & Smits, 2009). The children who never attend school are often those in the least developed rural areas because schools are far from their homes. Factors that contribute to lower educational participation in rural areas as compared to urban areas include opportunity costs of attending school which are often higher in rural areas (Lockheed & Verspoor 1991). Rural schools rarely adapt the curriculum to make use of local examples or to link the curriculum to local needs (Taylor & Mulhall, 2001). Therefore, learners whose families own sheep, for example, may not find it as onerous learning English at school because what they need may be skills to take care of their livestock for a better life. When they attend school, they may find the curriculum less relevant to their lives. Much of what we presently accept as teaching is based on the mistaken belief that students can be taught reading and writing as separate from meaning and purpose. Somehow what happens in the classroom does not affect the real world that children and adults inhabit (Caine, 1991). In addition, children receive less support from the home environment due to low education standards of their supporters, which leads to absenteeism (Aidan & Dandan, 2008).

Children in rural areas may be considered more difficult to educate. They are likely to have minimal parental encouragement to go to school because of competing demands on their time. Many children seem to carry this culture of being difficult to educate from primary to secondary school and they find no reason to attend school regularly due to different challenges they meet. Such challenges include lack of transport to school and lack of school needs. This translates to the search for common patterns and relationships. It is a matter of finding out how curriculum content relates to what the learner already knows and values, as well as the connection between curriculum and their own personal experiences (Caine 1991). This necessitates searching for problems encountered by children when it comes to their loss of interest in schooling.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Parents send children to school to be educated so that children may be in a position to lead better life in the future. Armed with skills acquired from attending school, children are in a position to face challenges and be able to solve problems they meet. The Government of Lesotho through the Ministry of Education and Training mandates all children of school going age to attend school. Parents pay school fees and buy uniform for their children and, for learners who are from far away, there are added costs of rented houses and transport to enable them to attend school. The government, through the Ministry of Social Development, helps to pay tuition fees for orphaned and needy children. In spite of the concerted efforts by teachers, parents and the government, there are still learners who absent themselves from school and this seems to be a persistent problem.

1.4 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

The main research question that this study seeks to answer is formulated as follows:

What are the factors that contribute to learner absenteeism in Lesotho secondary schools?

1.4.1 SUBSIDIARY QUESTIONS

To help address the main research question more directly, the following subsidiary questions are posed.

1.4.1.1 Which categories of learners are regularly absent from school?

1.4.1.2 Which measures are taken by schools to combat learner absenteeism?

1.4.1.3 What role do parents play to curb learner absenteeism?

1.5 AIM OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate factors that contribute to learner absenteeism in Lesotho secondary schools.

1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.6.1 TO DETERMINE CATEGORIES OF LEARNERS WHO ARE REGULARLY ABSENT FROM SCHOOL.

1.6.2 TO INVESTIGATE MEASURES TAKEN BY SCHOOLS TO COMBAT ABSENTEEISM.

1.6.3 TO DETERMINE THE ROLE PLAYED BY PARENTS TO CURB LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOLS.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study could assist principals and teachers to understand the reasons for high rates of learner absenteeism in schools. The results from this study could enable teachers to understand ways in which factors at school contribute to learner absenteeism. This knowledge might help teachers to apply relevant corrective measures to the situation.

The findings from the current study could also raise parents' awareness of students' absenteeism and its impact on performance in their academic work. This awareness could enable them to ensure that their children attend school regularly. Parents might also be encouraged to take regular visits to school to ask teachers about their children's

academic work and progress. This could enable both teachers and parents to communicate similar information for the success of learners.

Knowing the factors that contribute to learners' absenteeism could help policy makers at the Ministry of Education and Training to design appropriate policies on learner absenteeism. Such policies could specify measures which schools could take to curb absenteeism. Measures to be taken in cases where learners continue to be absent from school will also be specified.

The findings in this study will assist teacher training institutions to identify gaps in teacher training that could lead to student absenteeism. Such information will be of importance to teacher trainers to infuse relevant information on learner absenteeism in their courses. In-service programs on learner absenteeism can also be designed for teachers who are already in the field. These moves could equip teachers with skills to prevent and curb learner absenteeism in schools.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Dawson (2005) defines research methodology as the philosophy or general principle which guides one's research. This section specifies the research methodology used in the current study. It highlights the research paradigm as well as data collection and analysis procedures. It also highlights the ethical issues that were considered when carrying out this study. The study follows the qualitative research methodology. The following section focuses on the research paradigm. (This is repeated in Section 3.1 as it is. This is unscholarly and you must avoid it. In this chapter, you can just give a synopsis and Repetition.

1.8.1 THE RESEARCH PARADIGM

A paradigm is a term that originates from the Greek word "*paradeigma*" meaning pattern. It was first used by Kuhn (1962) to denote a conceptual framework shared by a community of scientists which provided them with a convenient model for examining problems and finding solutions. Kuhn (1962) defines a paradigm as an integrated cluster

of substantive concepts, variables and problems associated with corresponding methodological approaches and tools. The term paradigm refers to culture with a set of common beliefs regarding the nature and conduct of research (Kuhn, 1977). A paradigm implies a pattern, structure and frame work or system of scientific and academic ideas, values and assumptions in a study (Olsen, Lodwick & Dunlop, 1992; Orman (2016) defines a paradigm as a specific theoretical orientation based on a particular epistemology and research methodology, reflective of a particular scientific community at a particular time in history. It frames and directs the nature of the type of research in inquiries generated from that theoretical orientation. It also provides the fundamental basis for evaluating the results of the generated research.

The current study follows the interpretivist paradigm. Reeves and Hedberg (2003) show that the interpretivist paradigm stresses the need to put more emphasis on context. This paradigm is concerned with understanding the world as it is from the subjective experiences of individuals. Interpretivists rely on a subjective relationship between the researcher and the subjects. Interpretive research does not predefine dependent and independent variables but focuses on the full complexity of human sense-making, as the situation emerges (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994). The interest of interpretivists is not generation of a new theory but to judge or evaluate and refine interpretive theories. For this study, interpretivism is appropriate because the researcher's intent is to develop in-depth understanding of the social phenomenon of learner absenteeism. Interpretivism assisted the researcher to understand and to make sense of learner absenteeism within the absentees' environments. To interpretivists, human actions have reasons to occur in given social structure (Philip, 1989). To understand actions of absentees contextually, it is necessary for different interpretations of actions to be conceptualized and expressed and understood by the actors (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

1.8.2 RESEARCH METHOD

This study was based on the qualitative research methodology. Dawson (2009) adds that qualitative research methodology explores attitudes, behaviors and experiences. In addition, Dezinand Lincoln (2000) posit that because of its flexibility, qualitative research methodology allows greater spontaneity and adaptation of the interaction between the study participants. In qualitative methods, open-ended questions are asked and participants are free to respond in their own words. In qualitative research approach, methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups and participants' observations are accommodated. Collins and Hussey (2003) reiterate that qualitative research offers a complete description and analysis of research subjects without limiting the scope of the research and the nature of participants' responses.

1.8.3 PARTICIPANTS

Participants are finite parts of the population whose properties are studied to gain information about the whole (Webster, 1985). When dealing with people, a sample may be portrayed as a set of persons singled out from a larger population for the purpose of a study.

Eight learners who were regularly absent participated in this study. The chosen group was taken from all the classes. Even though the Form A (Grade 8) students were newly enrolled and not yet used to the rules and regulations of the school, they were still included. Two teachers were included, and class teachers were asked to give evidence of the absence of students the researcher was inquiring about.

Table 1.1 Number of Participants by Group

Participant Group	No.
Students	16

Teachers	08
Parents	08
Total	40

1.8.4 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Selection of participants refers to a process of selecting observations (Mouton, 2003). It is choosing a sub-group from a population to take part in a study. As it is a process, the number of participants is selected for a study in such away that the individuals selected have characteristics of the total group of informants (Ogula, 2005).

1.8.4.1 Procedures of Selecting Participants

Participants in this study were learners who regularly missed school. Eight learners were selected from different classes depending on how of ten they were found to be absent from school and how of ten they absconded from classes per, week per subject. Three different groups were identified and these consisted of eight learners, eight parents and two teachers at the participating schools. McMillian and Kenneth (2014) state that a researcher selects a particular element from the population that will be representative and informative about the topic of interest. Learners who are involved in the issue of absenteeism serve as the sample. A group of two teachers were selected based on the number of absentees from classes. Teachers were selected as group of people who gave valuable information about learners who were absent from school regularly.

1.8.4.2 Data Collection

The main data collection instruments in this study were focus group discussions and interviews with the absentees, parents and teachers. Interviews enabled the researcher to collect participants' views, narratives, feelings and attitudes on the issue of absenteeism from school.

The significance of collecting qualitative data through interviews was to capture participants' perspectives through their verbal interactions with interviewers (Cohen & Manion, 2000). According to Janesick (2002), another great importance of interviews is its adaptability to allow the interviewer to follow ideas, probe for the responses and investigate motives and feelings. The interviews were neither completely structured nor completely unstructured as Bell (1999) points out that the loose structure is to ensure that all topics which are considered to be of certain importance to the study are covered to eliminate the problems posed by completely structured interviews. Unobtrusive measure of data collection is a term coined by Webbin 1966 (Lee, 2000).

According to Lee, unobtrusive measures refer to data gathered by means that do not involve direct elicitation of information from research subjects. These measures are non-reactive. They are presumed to avoid the problems caused by the researcher's presence. Unobtrusive measures are used to avoid methodological weaknesses of 13 interviews and questionnaires as was the case in this study. In this study the researcher employed semi-structured interviews for teachers, parents and learners' focus groups. Mouton (2005) supports the idea of visiting different sources by bringing in the term triangulation which refers to the use of multiple methods of data collection. The idea behind the employment of a variety of methods and techniques of data collection in a single study is that various methods complement one another and their loopholes can be balanced.

1.8.4.3 Triangulation

In search of something important researchers visit different places, people, books and other sources which may be helpful in finding what is needed. In addition, triangulation can reinforce the validity of a finding which makes it much easier to explain and justify it. In this study different participants; parents, teachers and learners were asked similar questions in relation to learner absenteeism in schools.

1.8.4.4 Focus Group Discussion

A focus group discussion is a qualitative data collection method that engages six (6) to twelve (12) people with shared characteristics applicable to the specific discussion topic and is led by a trained facilitator. The shared qualities may relate to a particular problem, livelihoods, occupation, age, social group, place of residence, experience of adopting or not adopting a specific behavior promoted by a project (Dummut, Hagens & More 2013). The discussion starts with a general issue and gradually moves to a more specific one. Probing questions are asked to reveal more in-depth information.

1.8.4.5 Ethical issues/Considerations

Participants need to be assured that the information they give is going to be used for research purposes only and will not be used in any way that will cause embarrassment or any harm to them thereafter (Bell, 2007). Anonymity was maintained by avoiding the use of unique information that may have identified participants. Pseudonyms for both participants and their schools were used. It was explained to the participants that they should willingly participate in the study. If one decides to take part in a project it should be out of one's free choice, not from a certain kind of pressure or any fear of being victimized in one way or the other. Participants were also informed that they may withdraw from the study at any point. Permission was sought from the Ministry of Education and Training and from principals to collect data from their schools. This was done through writing a letter to the Ministry seeking permission to conduct the research.

1.8.4.6 Credibility and Trustworthiness

According to Rubin & Babbie (2007:101) Trustworthiness is "the degree of consistency in measurements" while credibility is "the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under the consideration" (Rubin & Babbie 2007:103). Furthermore, to ensure credibility, participation validation was employed and this refers to member checking. It is a technique for exploring the credibility of results. Results are returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Birt, 2016).

1.8.4.7 Transferability

Transferability shows that the findings have applicability in other contexts (Bitsch, 2005). This is needed to show that the research findings can be used widely. Although the sample used cannot allow for generalizations, the findings may be transferable to other contexts where absenteeism is a problem in schools. The findings of the current study may be useful to other researchers, the readers of the study and the stakeholder for in the future for improvement of learner attendance in schools.

1.8.4.8 Dependability

Dependability shows that the findings are consistent and could be repeated (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorensen, 2010). In addition to that, Mqulwana (2010) says that dependability is concerned with whether the same results would be obtained if one could observe the same thing twice. The need for the researcher to justify for the everchanging context within which research occurs is emphasized by the idea of dependability. Giving the description of changes and how these changes affected the way the researcher approached the study, is the responsibility of the researcher. Tsomo (2012) speculates that dependability refers to the stability of data over time and conditions. In this study the concept of dependability is appropriate to assist the researcher in finding whether the findings may be similar or different for a certain period of time.

1.8.4.9 Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the responses and not by researcher's biasness, motivation or interest Bowen, 2009; Koch, (2006). This is needed to allow anyone who would like to recheck what has been done to do so. For confirmability to be guaranteed, the final reports should be sent to the participants to verify whether the findings reflect what they had offered as information Wilson, (2009).

1.8.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

No scientific study goes without some shortcomings and failures regarding the interpretation or application of the findings, and these shortcomings should be made clear (Grinnell, 2001). One of limitations of qualitative research approaches according to Silverman (2010) is that sometimes contextual sensitivities are left out the focus is more on meanings and experiences. In addition, the analyses of the cases are time consuming and one can generalize the result to the larger population. One more limitation is that qualitative research has tendencies of measuring variables at a specific moment in time and disregards whether the picture taken in the study has captured all was needed, (Schofield 2007) that might be the case in this research.

1.9 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

The key terms which have been used in the study to ensure there is no confusion in what is being referred to, are learners, absenteeism and school.

LEARNER

According to Gasa (2006:10) a learner is defined as any person ranging from early childhood development to adult education phases who is involved in any kind of formal or informal education and training activity; any person who receives education. The term learner refers to persons studying in an ordinary public school.

ABSENTEEISM

Absenteeism is the habitual or intentional failure to go to school. According to Balfanzand Byrnes (2012), chronic absenteeism is typically based on the total days of school missed including both excused and unexcused absence. It is often defined as missing ten percent or more of school days.

SCHOOL

School means an institution, the source of which both persons and things are ordained towards the promotion of the education and training of other persons through the dissemination of knowledge. School refers to primary, middle, secondary schools, resource center and learning support center (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014).

1.9.1 STUDY OUTLINE

This study is divided into five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 is the introduction which highlights the background, research questions, research objectives and significance of the study. It also encompasses the research methodology which includes research paradigm, population, sample, sampling procedures as well as ethical considerations of the study. Credibility and trustworthiness, and limitations of the study are also included.

Chapter 2 details the related literature and the theoretical framework.

Chapter 3 details the methodology used in this study. The research design, population, sample size, credibility and trustworthiness; ethical issues, data collection methods and data analysis procedures are also elaborated.

Chapter 4 focuses on data presentation of the research findings.

Chapter 5 presents the discussion, conclusion and recommendations of the study.

1.7.8 SUMMARY

This chapter has covered the background of the study together with the research questions, the objectives, significance, research paradigm, research design, research methods, data collection methods, research analysis, ethical considerations, definition of key words and delimitation of the study. In the next chapter, related literature will be reviewed. The chapter will give the details of some previous studies on learner

absenteeism from different places around the world. In addition, the theoretical framework will also be given as the lens which guided the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided the introduction and background to this study. The current chapter reviews related literature and highlights of previous studies on learner absenteeism in various countries. This includes factors contributing to learner absenteeism in some countries and in Lesotho secondary schools, categories of learners who regularly absent themselves from school as well as measures that could be taken by both parents and schools to combat learner absenteeism. Lastly, the theoretical framework used as a lens in the current study is discussed. The following sections focus on the prevalence of learner absenteeism worldwide.

2.2 PREVALENCE OF LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN THE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

School absence seems to be a problem from time immemorial. In England and Wales, learner absenteeism has been a problem even before education became free and compulsory, and it has continued to be so ever since (Galloway, 2011). Learner absenteeism was listed as a number one problem in daily administrative activities as early as 1970. A study by Defours (1983) using a random sample of 500 members of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, found that principals were worried about high rates of absenteeism of learners in almost all 500 schools where they worked. As a result, the association strives to improve the situation by setting effective policies and procedures to upgrade the level of their schools.

Different countries view learner absenteeism differently. In Turkey, chronic absenteeism is misdefined as missing 20 days of school in a year for any reason (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). In the USA, Jordan and Miller (2017) portray learner absenteeism as missing instructional days either excused or unexcused. It also includes those days taken by a learner away from school as a result of disciplinary action. Chimiz (2011) says that in

England, 3.8% of junior high school population is recorded as long-term absentees who miss school for 30 days or more in a year.

The annual monitoring data of absence from school records show that about 10% of learners in the UK missed school (Chimiz, 2011). In the same breath, lack of consistent attendance in classrooms in American schools today is one major barrier to learning faced by learners and teachers (Goldstein, 2003). Absenteeism is linked to performance differences among learners and it has recently been identified as being at crisis proportion (Kearney, 2003). Despite the fact that absenteeism is a major challenge, many schools and educational researchers have not consistently given this topic the attention it deserves (Corville-Smith, 1995).

Learner Absenteeism has negative repercussions. Khalid (2014) points out that class participation is away of learning. Therefore, by being absent from class, a learner denies himself a chance to participate in class activities such as giving examples needed and asking questions where necessary. A learner also misses small group discussion opportunities during lessons. Furthermore, absenteeism forces a teacher to re-teach a lesson and take instruction all time away from students who attend school regularly. A teacher also spends extra time assisting learners on a topic which was taught two or more days ago. When re-teaching, valuable information is often not said as it was given in the first time (Williams, 2000).

Absenteeism leads to poor academic achievement among absentees. Physical presence of learners during the discussion in class is important because it affords a learner an opportunity for more understanding (Khalid, 2017). School absenteeism is linked to performance differences among learners. Students with low attendance often miss the opportunity to learn new techniques and as a result lag behind their colleagues. Peters and Kethley (2002) found that at poor attendance of classes affected learners' performance in the examination negatively for their performance was low. In addition, Marburger (2001) revealed that learners who missed class on a given day were significantly more likely to respond incorrectly to the questions relating to material covered that day than learners who were present. That occurred because such learners

were absent, so they did not acquire skills that were taught on that day. The fact that such learners are not at school many times may cause them to drop out of school and put themselves at long-term disadvantage in becoming productive citizens.

Kamokech and Osuu (2014) point out that throughout the 1970s, American high school principals consistently identified poor school attendance as the major problem facing secondary school administrators. It was found that urban schools had the lowest attendance rates while schools in other areas had the highest attendance rates. In these different geographical settings, it was noticed that even the factors in relation to attendance are also different. Such factors are teaching styles, the infrastructure and accessibility of the school to mention but few.

With reference to research done in Japan by Chimiz (2011) it is shown that throughout modern Japanese history, the issue of long-term non-attendance of school has been a recurring theme of discussion on education and society. The Government of Japan redefines the phenomenon and includes total absentee children in its annual statistics often prompting sensational reports in the media. This issue of non-attendance frequently becomes a major topic of seminars and symposia not to mention movies, comics and films. Around 2.7 percent of the total of junior high school learners stayed away from school for a month or even more Chimiz (2011).

Recently, in (the USA?), learner attendance has been identified to be in crisis (Kearney, 2003). Student attendance is determined by the number of days a student was present based on 180 school days' policy over a period of one year. The attendance percentage of 94% is considered good for public schools while 93-85% is used as a sign in need of improvement. Eighty-four percent and below is used as a benchmark for poor attendance as defined by The No Child Left Behind (Act of 2001) & Andrew, & Lee, (2002). Having looked at learner absenteeism from developed countries, the following section focuses on learner absenteeism in African countries.

2.3 EXISTENCE OF LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

African countries are no different from the developed countries in terms of learner absenteeism in schools. In a study conducted by Rothman (2001) in Uganda, high student absenteeism rates were found to affect the achievement of students who attend school regularly by disrupting the learning of regular students. Teachers' progress was slow because they cater for those who come to school on other days. In a study of learner absenteeism in Uganda, using a sample of 278 respondents, Komakech and Osusu (2014) found that the causes of learner absenteeism were unexcused absences which affected 64.3% of learners while 35.5% were excused absences. Excused absences include illness, loss of parents, taking care of the sick and bad weather, to mention but a few.

Learners miss school activities and lessons and it becomes a problem when they are away from school for many days. The more a learner is away from school, the more they lose interest in school-related activities and information. Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) refer to student absenteeism as a silent killer of universal secondary education because its symptoms are recognized after a long time. Absenteeism is not reported, not measured or acted upon. Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) When authors are two, cite both of them throughout. Use et al when they are three or more at the end) reiterate that absenteeism like bacteria, can wreak havoc long before it is discovered. Countries usually report average attendance of learners in a year which masks more than it reveals. Daily attendance registers which give a true picture of what really happens are not given to save space and time.

A study conducted in Kenya by Murugi, Wafula and Walumoli (2018) showed that aggressive tendencies of children were another cause of learner absenteeism in schools. A sample of 20 children with aggressive behavior was used along with 40 teachers who were working with such learners. The study showed that children with aggressive behaviors are found to be less helpful, nurturing and responsive to others. Children with aggressive tendencies were found to show poor school attendance but rarely dropped out of school. Poor school attendance predicts poor academic performance and negative teacher-pupil attitude Roby (2004).

The South African Human Rights Commission (2007) established that school absenteeism rates in South African schools ranged between 5% and 15%. Another study by Otto (2014) that focused on Grade 10 learners in three schools of the Frances Baard region of in South Africa's Northern Cape Province revealed that four or more learners per class missed certain lessons during the week. Lessons which were more likely to be missed were Mathematics and Biology. Learners started first by bunking some lessons, which eventually led to absenteeism at school.

When learners are aware that their performance in particular subjects is not pleasing, they opt to be away from school especially when the given work is not well done. Budlender (2007:49) conducted a household study in South Africa which revealed that school attendance of children aged between 10 and 17 was fairly poor. The attendance rate of children of this group age was 92% while the absence rate was 8%.

Lesotho is not an exception when it comes to specifying the number of days on which a learner is expected to be at school. The school calendar which is issued every year to schools by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) supports the idea of going to school for 90 days in each semester (Annual school Calendar). However, there are no studies which show why learners absent themselves from schools especially in secondary schools. Eventhough there is scarcity of studies on learner absenteeism in my school I have observed that some learners do not go to school regularly. The following section will concentrate on the factors that contribute to learner absenteeism from school beginning in the developed countries.

2.4 FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN THE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Learners do not go to school regularly due to different reasons such as sickness, lack of food and school uniform. A study conducted by Balfanz, Robert, Vaughan and Byrnes (2012) in the US shows that six states reported chronic absence rates ranging from 6 to 23 percent. The majority of chronically absent learners were reported to be from high poverty urban areas where about one-third of learners absent themselves from school due to poverty. Chronic absenteeism is high among low-income students wherein

inpoverty- stricken rural are as one learner in four can miss school for at least a month. Learners begin to be chronically absent from school starting from middle school and continue through 12th Grade. It is shown that reasons which force learners to miss school can be of three categories, namely: lack of support from parents, bullying and illness and poverty. These three factors are elaborated upon in the sections below.

2.4.1 LACK OF SUPPORT FROM PARENTS

According to Pehlivan (2006), parents who are not interested in their children's education do not take the initiative to help them either to do their work or encourage them to go to school, leading to learner absenteeism from school. Parents who do not have interest in their children's work are not concerned with their academic success or failure. Hallamand Rogers (2008) support the idea that such parents are not active in helping learners solve their school problems either at home or at school. They seldom attend parents' school meetings. Such parents are unlikely to create a disciplined environment for children at home for learning. A study conducted in Glasgow by Malcom, Wilson, Davidson and Kirk (2003) reiterates that some parents do not support and value education because they are not educated as well. Sahin, Kilic and Arseven (2018) confirm that less educated parents' lack of support for their children's education appears to be a clear cause of absenteeism. Parents who under value their children's learning make them miss school even during term tests. Consequently, such learners' performance becomes poor.

2.4.2 ILLNESS

Illness is one of the factors that make some children to absent themselves from school. Many children at school are diagnosed with some health conditions that affect their regular school attendance. Those range between 15.9 and 17.5 percent of children aged 6-11 and 12-17 years. Yildiz and Kula (2012) confirm that the biggest cause of learner absenteeism rises from the learners' illhealth. A learner from a poor family is not that interested in any thing except maintenance of life. A study conducted by the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) in Atlanta, USA, shows that asthma

is one of the common diseases among children and the dominant cause of absenteeism. Additionally, a California USA Report on Health and Education (2017) shows that tooth decay is common among the Americans and it causes disturbance to those who have to undergo certain treatments for such a health problem. As a result they do not go to school regularly. When children miss class, they do not learn well and miss instructional time. Sahin, Kilic and Arseven (2016) strengthen the issue of illness regarding learner absenteeism from school by saying that among the causes of learner absenteeism, illness is the factor that has a prominent effect.

2.4.3 BULLYING

There are learners who do not go to school because they are afraid of being bullied by other learners at school. Electronic bullying was associated with missing of school days. It was found that many learners were afraid to go to school in fear of being electronically bullied (Myburgh & Poggenpoel, 2009). Electronic bullying, cyber bullying or online social cruelty include bullying through e-mails, instant messaging, Facebook, in chatroom, on a website or through digital messages or pictures sent to one's cellphone (Juvonen, Nishina & Graham, 2000). Many electronic bullying victims showed that they did not know the perpetrator's identity (Kowalski and Limber, 2007). A study conducted by Notar, Padgett and Roden (2013) in the USA shows that cyber bullying victims encounter various academic and social problems. One of these is school absence which leads to school withdrawal. Their findings showed that Grade 9 learners were bullied more than Grade 7 learners. It also found that cyber bullying increased as grade levels increased, but few learners reported the bullying while many were being bullied. Learners are reluctant to report such kind of bullying due to fear of reaction from their parents assuming that parents will not act. Furthermore, fear can undermine learning and contribute to chronic absenteeism. Learners may respond to unsafe and stressful environment with avoidance behaviors such as absenteeism from school on certain days (Chang, Osher, Schangfield, Dundius & Bauer, 2019).

2.4.4 LACK OF ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

A study conducted by Rivers (2010) revealed that some learners may absent themselves from school because they find school work boring. This perception of school work as boring makes them lose interest in school activities. They feel that they do not belong to that classroom and find it difficult to align themselves with the objectives and activities of the class and, consequently, they decide to skip school (Rivers, 2010). Weaver and Qi (2005) argue that

Learner-participation is not confined to student engagement within the classroom through discussion due to different learners` personalities. From personality diversity of learners, even their participation in class would differ. Weaver & Qi (2005) coined the term para- participation which is defined as an alternative form of communication initiated by learners which includes talking to professors outside class with regard to class activities. Therefore, many learners who do not participate in any school activity are at risk of being absent from school many times in a year. It continues to be shown that student engagement is very important because it benefits learners academically for they are always at school for their academic work. In their academic work, learners also improve their caring relationship with others and the degree to which they feel fitting well with their peers (Christenson & Reschly, 2008). Absenteeism from school is mostly preceded by learners` disengagement from school and absence of student social and emotional well-being at school is a clear warning sign that disengagement will follow. It is important for many students that they like and feel attached to school so that they want to attend. Academic performance, behavior and attendance are positively related to learners` liking school (Hallinan, 2008).

2.5 FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Studies conducted in Africa point to environmental factors leading to learner absenteeism. It was found that the prominent environmental factors leading to learner absenteeism are peer pressure, alcohol abuse and lack of parental involvement in

learners' education. The details of the mentioned factors are provided in the sections below.

2.5.1 PEER-PRESSURE

One of the pointed factors to learner absenteeism is peer pressure. The findings of a study conducted in Namibia by Chimwamurombe (2011) on the influence of peer pressure on school attendance revealed that peer pressure fuels learner absenteeism. It tends to influence the group to loiter in the streets and even bunk classes. The study was conducted in Windhoek in both advantaged and disadvantaged secondary schools using a sample of 300 students aged 13-17 years. Reid (2005) reports that peer pressure is a strong factor because some learners do not go to school as their peers force them to join and participate in group activities which continue during school hours. Being afraid of other group members, they miss school and join their peers' activities. "Peer pressure is one of the powerful forces that influence teenagers. It can be either negative or positive" (Molina, 2017). "Negative peer pressure is when there are bad things going on and you are either being forced in to doing something against your will" (Salinas, 2012). Negative peer pressure can cause odging of classes and absenteeism. As a result, weaker students can be influenced to skip school as well.

2.5.2 ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Students who use alcohol absent themselves from classes because they drink so heavily that they oversleep and fail to make it to school. Furthermore, the Botswana National Alcohol Policy (2017) shows that learners drink alcohol and they are often found at she beens. Those drunken learners sometimes spent nights out at the public bars and the end result is skipping classes. Moreover, Chauke, Heever, & Hoque (2015) in a study about drinking behavior of learners which was conducted in South Africa with a sample of 177 males and 206 females aged between 15-23 years found that age, gender, parental alcohol use and peer pressure were found to be the major contributing factors to alcohol use among learners. The study showed that alcohol use by learners leads to learners' poor performance and absenteeism from school. Ten percent of both boys and girls

reported that they did not go to school on certain days because of alcohol use. The report shows that more boys absent themselves from school and also failed given tests.

2.5.3 LACK OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN LEARNERS' SCHOOLWORK

Some children have less parental encouragement in their schoolwork. Parents who are not interested in education do not make an effort to ensure that learners do their work. In such cases, learners take chances and skip school days without parents being aware. Equally important, Mafa (2018) noted that poor parental support contributes to learner non-attendance. Clinton and Hattie (2013) show that parents can show involvement in their children's school work by making follow-up on their work to the extent of talking to both subject teachers and class teachers so as to find areas where learners meet challenges such as poor school attendance. At the same time, parents who do not bother about their children's work do not even know their teachers to talk about their children's school work. As a result, learners do not do school work and miss school freely because nobody cares at home. Lack of parental support can have a negative impact on student attendance at school. Parents who exhibit poor supervision, intense conflict and chaos, and a history of school attendance issues further compound the negative impact on student attendance in schools (Kearney, 2008). From a study conducted in Bohlabela district in Mpumalanga, Magashoa & Mboweni (2018) found that one of the challenges and factors contributing to learner absenteeism is a lack of parental involvement. Parents who exhibit poor supervision may not be aware that their children are not at school. Cox (2007:564) agrees that if a parent is illiterate it becomes a problem for a learner to get the required support in school work.

Furthermore, Sanders and Sheldon (2009) supports the idea that it is the duty of the school to work out strategies to improve learner attendance by establishing a good relationship with parents. This kind of partnership will fill the gap between the home and the school and reduce the rate of absenteeism among learners. A good relationship between learners and their parents will lead to a greater parental awareness when their children are absent from school. That awareness will enable parents to monitor their children's attendance. In cases where learners live with their grand parents there is a

weak relationship between grand parents and children which leads to significant learner non-attendance (Togo, 2009). Learners sometimes do not communicate their need and how the school day went, with their grandparents because they believe that grand parents will not understand what they explain with regard to their school work. Therefore, if parents or guardians are not involved in their children`s lives, they will not be able to supervise learners` whereabouts or even encourage them to discuss school issues hence absenteeism from school could go unnoticed (Wong & Hughes, 2006). A good relationship between parents and learners is also regarded as a factor that reduces problematic behavior among learners and between learners and their teachers. Such warm relations help to improve learners` academic achievement (McNeal, 2012).

2.5.4 UNDISCIPLINED LEARNERS

In a study conducted by Ndaita (2016) in Kenya, from 1753 teachers and 144 principals in 144 schools, in discipline in the classroom is a phenomenon which owing to its extent and social resonance requires the attention of all those who are involved in teaching. Lack of discipline among learners is a reflection of attributes, values and practices of their society. Discipline problems reflect those in the home because schools are micro cosms of society. As problems like drug abuse, crime and physical abuse increase in society, so will the discipline problems at schools (Lochan, 2010). Evans and Miguel (2007) found out that Kenyan students who do not have the guardianship of biological parents had higher rates of misbehavior and absenteeism from school. Another study conducted in Senegal, West Africa, shows that among the causes of absenteeism from school in discipline is included (Etsey, 2005). According to Cheinyane (2008) learners themselves are a source of indiscipline in schools. They use drugs before coming to school or while at school, and learners who use drugs are hard to discipline wherever they are. Once they are rebuked at school for their bad behavior, such learners begin skipping lessons.

2.5.5 OVER CROWDING IN CLASSES

Yaman and Uygulamada (2009) found that large classes can force teachers to abandon student-centered learning style and focus more teacher-centered lessons. Big class sizes

influence students to display learning behaviors such as not responding to the teachers' questions and bunking classes or not coming to school. Earthman (2002) and Yaman & Uygulamada (2009) show that big classes also hinder the achievement of learning objectives and reduce the completion of students' learning activities in the class. Insituations such as these, the quality of learning may be compromised because of poor attendance by some learners. Learners' absenteeism and high failure at eare experienced in over crowded classrooms because teachers do not manage the classes well due to their large sizes.

2.5.6 POOR SCHOOL FACILITIES

In their study done in Braamfontein, South Africa, Weideman, Goga, Lopez, Mayet, Macun and Barry (2017) pose that various studies have found that there are schools that do not have flush toilets and electricity. It is believed that poor school facilities contribute to absenteeism. It has been found that many girl learners tend to stay at home during their menstruation period due to inadequate facilities at school. There are toilets but which do not have doors for girls to assist themselves during time of special need. So staying at home till the end of that period is the best option for girls Mbude, (2017). Furthermore, according to Green and Dorn (2002) students attending schools within sufficient learning equipment are handicap ped in their academic achievement. Some learners who do not have accessor who have less access to learning equipment lose interest to go to school and end up attending irregularly. In this way not only academic achievement is affected but also school attendance.

A study of Australian children aged 8 to 12 found that 7 percent of playtime occurred in parks and playgrounds. A play ground is defined as enough out door space to offer children freshair, space to meet friends and to exercise (JEN, 2000). Learners hardly miss school when they think of the good time they spend with their friends at the playgrounds. So, where there are no playgrounds and special time allocated for sports, learners easily miss school especially those who have poor performance. A study carried out in Bohlabela in Mpumalanga Province-South Africa-shows that lack of sporting facilities promotes learner absenteeism. In addition, Mboweni (2014) portrays that poor

school facilities negatively influence learners' school attendance. It is shown that it is difficult for learners to go to school everyday during unfavorable weather conditions because of leaking roofs and broken window panes. Such conditions make learning difficult hence the high rate of absenteeism during very cold and rainy days. Sporting activities and extra-mural activities attract learners to attend school regularly. Learners like to play since this gives them time to exercise and refresh their minds. Learners claim that it is boring to go to school on a daily basis when there are no sports even trips to be taken.

2.5.7 CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Mboweni (2014) shows that the use of corporal punishment in schools increases learner absenteeism because learners stay at home every time they are given feedback of the tests since they know that when they have failed, they are going to be brutally beaten by teachers. Mthanti and Mncube (2014) found that corporal punishment impacted negatively on learners and makes them develop a negative attitude towards education and results in such ills as absenteeism, fear and bunking of lessons. Regard less of the banning of corporal punishment in Kenya in 2001, some teachers still continue to administer it in schools (Mweru, 2010) yet the same teachers complain about learners' poor school attendance and poor academic performance. Baleinakodawa (2009) comments that researches on the causes of truancy leading to school absenteeism revolve around the poor relationship between teachers and learners which is because of teachers' application of corporal punishment in schools.

2.5.8 ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITION

Hogan (2008) reported that regular changes to the flood plains in the wet land system in Tanzania forced parents to move their crop lands regularly. Since that was not scheduled for in the school system, children often had to move with their parents away from where the school was located. In that manner, learners had to miss school unintentionally. In addition, UNICEF (2007) reported on the projected impact of climate change on children. The report showed incidences of extreme weather conditions such as droughts, floods and heat waves which were likely to affect learners' participation in

education. Northern Namibia has experienced severe flooding, increased heat, drought, and flooding was said to be going to affect behavior and livelihood patterns of people living in poverty (UNEP, 2006).

2.6 FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN LESOTHO SCHOOLS

It was show nearer that there are no studies in Lesotho about learner absenteeism in Lesotho secondary schools but from the analysis done by Moloji and Straus (2005) on absenteeism, reports were more on the number of days learners were absent rather than causes of learner absenteeism from school. From learners` information it was found that the number of days absent was 1.6 nationally (Moloji and Strauss, 2005:78). This section focuses on the factors that contribute to learner absenteeism in Lesotho secondary schools. These can be categorized into social, environmental, psychological and learners` personal factors. Some of these factors are detailed below.

2.6.1 SOCIAL FACTORS

There are various social factors that contribute to learners` absenteeism. Those factors include poverty, lack of parental support and dysfunctional learners` home environment. Nyabanyaba (2009) shows that among the reasons given by a local chief in relation to learner absenteeism at one school in Leribe, poverty, orphan hood and looking after sick parents were included.

2.6.1.1 Poverty

Are port from Lesotho given in survey of ICT and education in Africa presented by Isaacs (2007) shows that approximately 25% of children do not have regular school attendance. Those in the rural areas have irregular attendance because of lack of school needs such as shoes and other educational materials which are not affordable for many families. Countries which have low income have high rate of absenteeism as compared to those with high income (Nauer, White & Yerneni, 2008). Railsback (2007) continues to show that learners who do not pay school fee are expelled from school, thus being absent for a number of days while looking for the school fees money.

2.6.1.2 Orphanhood

HIV/ AIDS has added stress to the education system in Lesotho. There are many reports on growing numbers of orphans and vulnerable children who head families in the absence of their parents who died as a result of HIV infection. For these children, going to school is a problem due to change of care givers who understand schooling indifferent ways. As a result, their school attendance is irregular (Isaac, 2007). In the absence of somebody to monitor children in th efamily, orphans go to school at their interest, and do not find going to school an obligation. Campell, Andersen, Mutsikiwa, Madanhire, Nyamukapa and Gregson (2016) reiterate that in child-headed households, there are no parents to ensure that the children go to school daily. Non-attendance of orphaned children shows that such children fail to exercise their right to basic education fully.

2.7 CATEGORIES OF ABSENTEE LEARNERS IN THE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

In a study conducted by Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) in the USA using data from Georgia, Nebraska and Maryland, it was found that chronic absenteeism is higher for Native American learners than learners of other minority ethnic backgrounds. High rates of poverty are in the rural are as and where the states' large population of Native American tribes and communities are, hence chronic absenteeism among them. It was also noticed that there was no outstanding difference between males or females as far as missing

school was concerned. The other states which have data suggest that there may not be that difference across urban, suburban, town and rural areas.

2.7.1 LEARNERS FROM LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

From the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), (2015) it was shown that Utah and Wyoming in the USA had the largest shares of learners missing school more than 10 days a month. It is shown that one in five children miss school three days or more in a month. Washington DC has students who miss school three or more school days a month. Learners miss regularly because in the absence of parents who have gone to look for piecejobs, learners remain at home with the siblings. Sometimes they remain at home due to harsh disciplinary measures which, to a larger extent, are linked to the likelihood of being absent from school Ready, (2010).

2.7.2 CATEGORIES OF ABSENTEE LEARNER SIN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

In schools, there are learners from different places and social classes. There are those who like to attend school but fail to do so due to some problems which prevail in their respective families. The following sections present the categories of learners who regularly miss school in African countries.

2.7.2.1 Learners Who Lack Interest in Attending School

The categories of learners who regularly absent themselves from school were found to be those who have lost interest in studies. In a study conducted in Malawi by Munthali (2006), learners claim that they miss school because it was not preparing them to earn a living. They continue to say that there is little relationship between school experience and their immediate needs. Therefore, when they find piece a job, for example during the week, they prefer the piece job to schooling. In Namibia, Sanzila (2011) states that learners who lack interest in studies may lose interest in school attendance. To help them regain interest, learners who are no longer interested in school are to be shown how valuable education is. Nuutila, Tuominen and Tapola (2018) suggest that the most powerful ways teachers can employ to ensure learner motivation in different subjects is by improving learners' competence in different subjects as well as in school attendance.

Learners who attend school regularly are not left behind in every school activity. Kearney (2008) points to inadequate or non-praise for learners' achievement and attendance resulting in lack of motivation among them. He further states that motivation is important since it leads to self-confidence and school commitment.

A study by Harackiewicz, Duric, Barron, Linnenbrink-Garcia and Tauer (2008) reveals the relationship between interest and mastery goal overtime. Mastery goal suggests that interest can deepen overtime because initial interest motivates an individual to make an effort to learn more about something. Dewey (1913:95-96) show show important this interest is. "If we can cover a child's urgent needs and powers and if we can supply an environment of materials, appliances and resources to direct their adequate operation, we shall not have to think about interest. It will take care of itself."

A learner who is not interested in schoolwork does not make any effort to do it or even to know anything new which is educational. Many initiatives may be done at school to assist learners, but those without interest will still remain unmoved and they will opt to stay at home due to boredom by school activities.

2.7.2.2 Orphans

Operario, Cluver, Rees, MacPhail and Pettifor (2008) state that research has established that orphans are more often absent from school. Since orphans are found worldwide, they are looked at differently in different countries. In Malawi, Harris, and Schubert (2001) show that 40% of orphans regularly absent themselves from school. The orphan learners state that they miss school due to caring for the sick at home. Apart from caring for the sick at home, some orphans regularly miss school because of the teasing and bullying they get from other learners at school Streuli & Moleni, (2008). As seen in many African countries, Pillay (2012) shows that orphans absent themselves from school due to economic hardships, which at times make learners victims of child labor. Food is one of the most important needs of learners. Because of poverty there are learners who do not attend school due to lack of food, Wittenberg, (2005). Lack of motivation and poor relationships between orphans and teachers because of stigmatization are other reasons for non-attendance by orphaned learners (Wood & Goba, 2011).

2.7.2.3 Learners with Disabilities

In a study done in Malawi by Banks and Zuurmond (2015), learners with disabilities have various challenges of not only starting school in time but also of not going to school regularly as compared to their counterparts. In the study, one parent stated that her child with a disability did not go to school regularly because sometime she beat others learners. Upon doing that, the child would remain at home for some days in fear that he would be severely beaten at school in return for what he did. Moreover, disabled girls especially those walking for long distances, were not often going to school because of being insecure in front of others who might attack them along the way. In a study conducted in Uganda by UNICEF, Uganda (2017), it was found that children with disabilities are at risk of not going to school daily, more especially when they walk for long distances.

2.7.2.4 Poorly Performing Learners

Poorly performing learners are associated with poor school attendance because academic performance could either motivate or discourage a learner. A study in Tanzania established that learning difficulties include short memory and poor reasoning, poor reading skills and difficulty in calculations (Igwue & Ashani, 2013; Mgonja, 2016). In the light of these learning difficulties, poorly performing learners resort to regular absence from school. Karande and Kulkarni (2005) posit that there are various reasons for children to under perform at school and such reasons include medical problems, low average intelligence, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, specific learning disability and emotional problems. Children with specific illness such as poorly controlled asthma have increased school absenteeism. Their poor performance is associated with a chronic illness.

2.7.2.5 Labour-Involved Children

According to a study by CASE/JET (2000) in South Africa, it was found that 38% of children do not go to school on daily basis in the rural areas of South Africa due to child labor. Children's families want them to do certain extensive work in the family. South African girl learners engage in domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, gathering

firewood and caring for young children, looking after the animals in the fields, fetching some water and going shopping. The given chores are additional load to learners because at school, learners are expected to do certain work. They have to sweep their classrooms or smear them with mud for thorough cleaning. From the analysis done by the Labor Force Survey (2006) on learners' school attendance and work, it was found that school attendance was higher for those who had not been doing any work for at least a year compared to those who had been working. Much of these mentioned activities which learners engage in either at home or at school are done for free. Furthermore, Attwood and Croll (2006) argue that low socio-economic status as well as the need for student employment to supplement family incomes, contribute to poor student attendance in schools.

2.7.2.6 Learners from Disorganised and Unsafe Neighbourhoods

A disorganized environment is due to lack of programmed activities that learners should follow under the guidance of teachers throughout their school days. Many schools in South Africa fail to provide adequately organized schooldays. At school some learners bring dangerous weapons which they use to threaten others. Learners who experience such threats do not come to school the following days till afraid of co-learners who threaten them Mazila, (2004). Xala (2006) also says that some learners live in informal settlements and their homes do not provide an atmosphere conducive for learning. These learners do not go to school regularly especially on days they failed to write their assignments.

2.8 CATEGORIES OF ABSENTEE LEARNERS IN LESOTHO

The following sections discuss the category of learners who regularly miss school. These are classified into girl-childcarers, boys and orphaned learners, disrespectful learners and learners with low self-esteem. Because the issues of orphan-hood, undisciplined learners and low self-esteem have been discussed in the preceding sections, under other African countries, they will not be repeated.

2.8.1 GIRL-CHILD CARERS

Yamba (2017) evidenced that child-carers missed school for both non-caring and caregiving responsibilities. Missing school affected their schoolwork, something that was considered a barrier to getting the education needed to achieve their future goals. According to Thoma set al. (2003), absenteeism among young carers was not a major issue as they wanted to go to school but were forced by circumstances to stay away from school. Going to school when there was a sick person at home had an emotional effect on the children as they still worried about their care recipient and the costs associated with seeking health serves. In addition to these, some studies were conducted in relation to the absenteeism of learners in rural primary schools (Mulkeen & Chen, 2008). The findings showed that learners walk for very long distances when going to school, and during bad weather conditions they remain at home. Another problem is that learners were also aware that usually when teachers had gone to collect their salaries, they spent two more days at home so they copied the same habit of not going to school on Fridays and Mondays.

2.9 MEASURES THAT COULD BE TAKEN BY PARENTS TO CURB LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOLS

For success of both learners and theirrespective schools, astrong and positive relationship among learners, parents, teachers and communities is encouraged Sanders and Sheldon, (2009). Benefits of astrong relationship between the school and the home lie in the development of trust between parents and teachers. The belief which parents and teachers can have in the ability and willingness of each group in the fulfillment of each other`s responsibility will help in building mutual understanding for success in learners` education Muscottetal, (2008). According to the findings of Sander and Sheldon (2009), parents have to take part in monitoring their children`s whereabouts, have discussion with children about everything in relation to schoolwork and volunteer in taking part in certain activities of the school.

2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWOK

The section sets out to present the theoretical framework guiding this study. The study is built on Urie Bronfenbrenner's (2006) Bio-ecological Theory, as its framework. The Model has five different levels: the micro system, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. These different levels in the Bio-ecological Theory explain how personal, societal, political and economic factors are interconnected in influencing a person's behavioral outcomes (Pocock et al., 2012). These layers directly or indirectly affect the biological maturation of a child. The influences contribute in different ways to the behavior a child may adopt when progressing in studies (Smith et al., 2003). In addition to these five levels, to improve the model, two more dimensions were introduced, namely processes and the person. Among the dimensions there is interactive relation (Araujo & Davids, 2009). The details of each of these systems are given below beginning with the processes.

2.4.1 PROCESSES

Processes, shown as the first element of the model, indicate interactions with the objects, symbols, and other individuals in which and to whom one is actively and consistently engaged (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). For better results, these interactions could be practiced and be noticed on a daily basis. They are called proximal processes because they are face-to-face interactions. They involve a linear movement of energy from an individual to the environment either sequentially or concurrently. Sequential bi-directional movement emanates from an individual to the environment or from the environment to an individual while concurrent movements simultaneously move between an individual and the environment (Araujo, 2009; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Currently, bi-directional movement of energy between teachers and learners may be seen in the case where learners absent themselves from school due to poor relations which exist between the two groups in the teaching or learning processes.

Ashiabi and O'Neal (2015) posit that proximal processes are engines of human development because through them, genetic potentials for effective psychological functions are actualized. The presumed future of a child is recognized through the

interactions with an environment. Through such interactions, the observer realizes that a child is not a passive object but engages in activities that enable his/her development. It is through this process that children understand the world and their place in it and then play their part by changing and fitting in it. To try to fit themselves in the world, learners absent themselves from school if there is something wrong at school between learners and teachers or among themselves as learners. In the long run, children develop skills, knowledge and abilities that lead to their behavior across situations (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

2.4.2 PERSON

Person is the second element of the Bio-ecological model. It refers to personal characteristics brought by the individuals into any social situation. The Bio-ecological model suggests that understanding the significant person or dispositional variables that individuals possess can assist in shaping and informing the creation of effective environments for learners Taylor & Gebre, (2016); Tudge & Odorowanga, (2009). The personal characteristics are divided into three forms, namely demand, resources and force characteristics. The first form is the demand and its characteristics act as stimuli to the environment on the first contact. It mildly influences the environment. One's ability to engage effectively in proximal interactions is influenced by the resource characteristics (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Resource characteristics are not obvious to the environment but moderately influence it. Secondly, there are force characteristics, also called dispositions, which relate to differences in aspects such as individuals' temperament, motivation and persistence. Force characteristics highly influence proximal interactions. Highly motivated people are persistent in their actions and usually influence the environment to achieve what they want (Tudge et al., 2013). It is from this perspective that learners who are under performing at school will be influenced by their environmental factors, both inside and outside the school, which may perpetrate absenteeism.

Continuous interactions between the individuals' innate characteristics and unique environmental influences have an impact on human development (Johnson, 2008). If

interactions are constant, they produce effective results and on a one-to-one basis among parent-child, child-child and teacher-learner relations Bronfenbrenner, (1994). Bronfenbrenner refers to these continuous interactions as proximal processes.

2.4.3 MICROSYSTEM

The microsystem is the most proximal ecological level which includes the settings in which individuals directly interact. Microsystem is related to the child and its immediate environment. Most of the activities found in this layer revolve in the person`s immediate surroundings such as schoolmates and playmates. Organized school activities such as sports, debate clubs or support groups represent microsystems within a school setting. Learners` participation in any of the activities displays more positive social, emotional, psychological and physical outcomes than their non-participating counterparts. Those who participate in certain types and patterns of activities are associated with more positive outcomes than others (Ettetal & Mahoney, 2017). Bronfenbrenner (1994) suggests that students learn and develop through their person-to-person interactions with parents, teachers and peers through the influence of their personal characteristics.

2.4.4 TEACHERS` INFLUENCE IN THE MICROSYSTEM

The importance of interaction between teachers and learners was found to be fundamental in influencing the development of learners. The learners who have good relations with their teachers are found not only to be well in class but also to perform well in their schoolwork (O`Connor & McCartney, 2007). Teachers not only help individual students develop productive relationships with classmates, they also develop, guide and direct the class as a group (Farmeretal, 2011).

Wentzel (2002) states that teachers` emotional supportive practices are based on the idea that students learn how to treat and interact with one another through teacher-student relationships they experience and observe daily. Teachers` emotionally supportive practices provide a model of pro-social behaviors that students internalize. Learners spend much time with teachers at school; hence, it is not surprising that many socialization activities happen at school where learners learn many new things in the

presence of both teachers and classmates. At school, children grow socially and personally and also learn conflict resolution strategies. The Life Orientation Policy (2006) of South Africa indicates that teachers should understand and put the Outcomes Based Education focus into practice by designing effective learning activities. Teachers should be able to identify unique content for each grade level. Teachers have to understand the importance of the learning area and know how they could contribute to the holistic development of the learners.

2.4.5 MESOSYSTEM

Mesosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person, such as relation between home and schooling. For instance, the living conditions of a child at home influence what happens at school. A child who is happy at home is even free to tell parents about parents' meeting which is to be held at school. Parents attending school conferences or meetings about learners' performance and school concerts are part of the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998). Eggen and Kauchack (2010) believe that the good relationships which transpire at home influence what happens at school. Walker (2008) reiterates that learners who are academically and socially successful are those who experience authoritative teaching style with consistent classroom management and support from home which increases their learning interest. In the same vein, Taylor and Gebre (2015) maintain that mesosystem influences provide the brighter examples of the potential of how teacher-learner relations may correlate with other social contexts such as home in ways that are relevant to learners' personalized learning and behavior in the classroom. Hollooway, Yamamoto, Suzuki and Mindnich (2008) posit that parental involvement in children's education has positive outcomes as the parents gain knowledge about school activities and would render valuable guidance to their children.

According to Tayloretal (2015), emerging research suggests that supportive school environments may buffer against the negative effects of adverse home experiences. This was reiterated and examined by O'Malley, Voight, Renshaw, and Eklund, (2015) when examining the moderating effects of school climate on relations between family structure

and academic performance of learners. Learners who do not receive any support from their care givers with home work may avoid school because they are afraid of their teachers` reaction in the class in the absence of completed homework and they have no reason to interact with them without work (UNESCO, 2011). Interactions in the mesosystem can be categorized into four groups, namely multi-setting participation, indirect linkage, inter-setting knowledge and inter-setting communication (Sontag, 1996). Multi-setting participation occurs when same person engages in activities in more than one setting. A typical example may be when a child spends time both at home and day care center. Secondly, indirect linkage refers to a situation where a child is indirectly involved in a certain activity by participation of a parent or someone closely related to a child, for example, teachers-parents meeting where two parties discuss issues in relation to children`s education. Thirdly, inter-setting knowledge refers to information or experience that exists in one setting about the other. Such knowledge may be obtained through interesting communication or forms of external to the particular setting involved, for example information from library books or from neighbors about the school (Sontag, 1996; Lindon, 2005).

Lastly, inter-setting communication is seen in process when a child engages in two microsystems; home and the school. West and Hewlett (1998) show that in this setting, messages are transmitted from one setting to the other with the express intent of providing specific information to persons in the other setting. For instance, parents at home may report to the teachers at school about a learner`s problem in relation to homework which might have not been well done due to lack of understanding. In this research, this information may assist the researcher to explain how the interaction between the parents and teachers may bring a solution for learner absenteeism from school as a response to both the role played by parents in curbing learners` absenteeism and the measures that could be taken by schools to combat learner absenteeism. This part of the theory will help the researcher in the current study to explain the influence of ecosystem on learners` absenteeism from school.

2.4.6 THE EXOSYSTEM

The exosystem consists of the linkage and processes between settings in which the child does not directly interact but that may play a significant role in their adjustment. Such contexts include the parent's workplace, neighborhood or community contexts and the learner's extended family. A parent as a member of a child's microsystem may use experiences from that system to influence the child experiences (Tudge et al., 2009). In a case where a parent's workplace is very far, both the parent and the child wake up very early. A parent prepares for work and thereafter prepares a child for school. In this way a child has not slept enough hours and would not be as active as expected at school for their studies Balkin and Wessenden, (2011).

Likewise, community facilities, adequate water supply and electricity, may in any way have an impact on families and they are considered to be part of exosystem (Stivarios, 2007). These facilities are helpful to learners because availability of water and electricity enables learners to find food and other learning materials easily. Water is the source of life for both people and plants. From water, electricity is produced to help people. These community facilities open doors to knowledge and ideas for learners. Without these community facilities life could be colorless and difficult. The exosystem which surrounds the microsystem is removed from the individual but affects him indirectly. In the presence of risky factors in the mentioned environment there may be profound effect on children in terms of learning pro-social skills (Bronfenbrenner, 1998; Jeffries, 2013). Also observed by Hill and Torres (2010) social clubs and even church organizations can enlarge one's support in the exosystem. In the social club, some one may join dance to participate in dancing; one who is active may benefit by being able to cope with problems easily Brown, Nesse, Vinokur and Smith (2003).

2.4.7 MACROSYSTEM

Macrosystem is the fourth environmental layer. It is the most complex of ecological systems encompassing linkages and interactions among micro, meso, and exosystems (Weiss, Kreider, Lopez and Chatman, 2005; Berk, 2000). The macrosystem is represented by ideologies, culture, religion, economy and politics. It is referred to as the societal blue

print of a particular culture (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). Bronfenbrenner (2002) shows that macrosystem dictates what should be taught to children and how they are to be treated. The values, beliefs and traditions are fixed into a child at his developing stage through daily performances and interactions with the immediate environment. For further clarity, Charles(2002) states that educators should have a solid system of discipline on which to rely; much as they want to be humane but they also need discipline to be effective. They want to make absolutely clear what sort of behavior is appropriate in the classroom. They want to be sure they have the power to put an immediate stop to a behavior; that is to understand how the child thinks about discipline.

Puroila and Karila (2001:224) concluded that under the notion of macrosystem, Bronfenbrenner might have meant not only the society but cultures and subculture as well. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory and Family Involvement shows that in educating children, discipline is the key issue. Culture and other external forces influence the development of emotions such as fear of strangers, shame and romantic love. The shameful emotion of not completing schoolwork makes a learner uncomfortable to face the teacher in class when work is not properly done, hence absenteeism from school. Berk (2000) posits that much as macrosystem is the outermost layer for the child, it has no distinct framework but its influence penetrates through all layers. So, one has to be well equipped and informed about learner absenteeism so as to help each individual accordingly. It is also helpful for teachers to make them aware that the ecological model is worth using in thinking about how contemporary educational issues are influenced by school, family and societal links.

2.4.8 CHRONOSYSTEM

Chrono system as the final systems parameter extends the environment into a third dimension. Chronosystem encompasses changes and inconsistencies overtime, not only in the characteristics of the person but also in the environment in which that person lives. The effects of environmental changes can also depend on the age of a child Hertherington & Clingempeel, (1992), changes of life in the family structure, socio-economic status, employment and instability in the country. A learner whose parent has

lost a job is affected. There might be no money for school fees and bus fare, even for lunch at school. An ecosystem approach in dealing with learner absenteeism implies that the relationship between absentees and other individuals, the absentees' developmental level and the environment in which they live will have to be considered Guckin & Minton, (2014); Von Bertalanffy, (1950). Berk (2003) contends that Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is an appropriate theoretical framework for the overall understanding of the nature and intensity of learner absenteeism. Understanding why a learner has missed school, teachers will try to unearth means to help a learner solve whatever problem that could be regarded as the source of absenteeism. In the same manner, even parents will take the initiative to report the learner's problem to the school administration with the aim of assisting the child. As a result, a learner's problem could be solved.

In the light of Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological theory, the researcher will be able to analyze various contextual systems in which a child maybe, to see how much impact each has in their development. In trying to be familiar with a situation of an absentee, a teacher or administrator at school and a parent at home could give themselves time to discuss the child's issue at different levels: microsystem, microsystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem, which could have influenced their absenteeism.

2.4.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The current chapter reviewed literature on learner absenteeism from school from different countries world-wide. The literature is looked at beginning from developed countries, African countries and then in Lesotho. To add on that, Bronfrenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory is employed to assist in the same study. The appropriateness of Bronfrenbrenner's Theory in this particular study is presented as well. The following chapter will deal with methodology and design of the study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter reviewed literature related to student absenteeism and the theoretical framework used as lens in this study. The current chapter looks at the research methodology used to collect process and analyze data. Research paradigm which is interpretivism whose goal is understanding of how individuals create meaning in their daily activities and experiences is to be used as well. The qualitative research design is found to be the most appropriate in this study. There will be a certain group of people referred to as population which will participate in the study. Sample, sampling techniques, data collection procedures and data analysis procedures are explained in detail in this chapter. The methodology discussions begin with the definition of research methodology.

3.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Rocco, Bliss, Gallagher and Perez-Prado (2003:19) define a paradigm as "world view". It is a "basic set of beliefs or assumptions" that guides a researcher's inquiry. In addition, Lincoln (2000) defines paradigms as human constructions, dealing with principles which indicate where the researcher comes from in an effort to construct meaning embedded in data. The researcher's philosophical orientation and significant implications for every decision made in the research process are defined by a paradigm. The interpretivism paradigm was used in this study on the basis that its goal is the comprehension of how individuals and groups create meaning in their practices, communication styles and lived experiences in their day-to-day lives. As scholars interested in the way groups and individuals create meaning in their own actions, interactions, rituals and experiences, interpretivists look at the meaning of texts, code and rules Vannini, (2009). An interpretive paradigm belongs to the sociology of regulation and its purpose is to understand the world from an individual's view point.

As such, this paradigm sometimes called a constructivist paradigm. In this paradigm, research precedes theory so that its grounded on the data generated by the research. Suri (2017) holds the idea that the world is socially constructed in terms of meanings attributed to events. Contextual particularities and their interaction with the perceptions of different groups and individuals are explained in the constructivist paradigm.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Dawson (2005) defines research methodology as the philosophy or general principle which guides one's research. This section specifies the research methodology used in the current study. It highlights the research paradigm as well as data collection and analysis procedures. It also looks into the ethical issues which were considered when carrying out this study. The study follows the qualitative research methodology. So, qualitative research approach enables the researcher to have face to face interaction with participants for them to give deeper information needed by the researcher. Qualitative approach makes it easy for the researcher to observe the participants in their places. In that way the researcher will get much of the information which is relevant to the study. The following section focuses on the research paradigm.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Kinnear and Taylor (1996) define research design as a basic plan that maps the data collection and analysis phases of the research. It provides the framework that specifies the type of information to be collected, its sources and collection procedures. In addition, Macmillan and Schumacher (2001:166) define it as a plan for selecting subjects, research sites and data collection procedures to answer the research question(s). They indicate that the goal of a sound research design is to provide results that are judged to be credible. Furthermore, Akhtar (2018) shows that research design can be seen as the structure of research; it can also be seen as the glue to which all the elements of a research project hold together. To say research design is a plan of a proposed research work is acceptable according to him. Research design has different frameworks which can be classified under two major categories which are Exploratory and Conclusive categories.

The conclusive can be divided into descriptive and casual research (Seth Ginsburg, 2011). It is the conclusive category which is associated with quantitative studies while exploratory research is to do more with qualitative studies which provide insight and understanding of the problem setting. In this stud, the qualitative research design has been employed. Qualitative research design probes beneath the surface of events to elicit the meanings, interpretations and explanations which are deeply buried. Qualitative design is, therefore, relevant in the current study because it enables deeper understanding of a phenomenon.

3.4 PARTICIPANTS

According to MacMillanetal, (2001), population is a group of elements orcases, whether individuals, objects or events, which conform to specific criteria and to which the results are intended to be generalized. Lapan, Quartaroli and Reimer (2012) reiterate that population refers to the people who possess certain characteristics which help the researcher to address the problem statement of the study. For the purpose of this study, the population consists of all learners who are regularly absent from school, teachers, class-teachers and parents of learners who are regularly absent from school. Learnersweretheretojustifytheirstancefor not being at school or evenin class regularly while teachers and parents represented a disciplinary body of the school for the development and welfare of a learner both at home and at school Singh, Mbokodi and Msila, (2004).

3.5 SAMPLING

A sample is a group of individuals from whom data is collected, often representative of a particular population. A sample can be selected from a larger group of people, identified as the population. The sample of this study was characterized by four focus groups who are involved in absenteeism in each school.

3.6 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Purposive sampling was used to select the learners, teachers and parents. Purposive sampling is "selecting information rich cases for study in depth" (McMillan and Schumacher 2006:319). According to Creswell (2009), purposeful sampling seeks information-rich cases for an in-depth study and is used to ensure certain types of individuals displaying certain attributes which are included in the study. Participants were chosen so as to explain absenteeism. Learners know reasons which force them to be absent from school, teachers deal with such kind of learners in their different schools and could therefore provide important information on the subject. Lastly, parents are part of a group of people who know that learners do not regularly go to school. Parents get information about their children's absenteeism from the respective schools where their children attend.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Qualitative data collection methods were used to collect data in this study, namely: semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions. Each of these data collection methods is elaborated below, starting with semi-structured interviews.

3.7.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The main data collection instruments for this research were semi-structured interviews for class teachers and parents of the concerned learners. In semi-structured interviews, a number of planned questions are included but the interviewer has more freedom to modify the wording and set the order of questions Abawi, (2014). Interview gives an interviewer chance to be one-on-one with the interviewee to gather information on a specific set of topics Harrell and Brandly, (2009). The interview process is a meaning-making endeavor embarked on as a partnership between the interviewer and interviewee o Hesse-Biberand Levy, (2006). One of aims of holding an interview is to investigate motives and feelings which a questionnaire cannot capture (Creswell, 2003). Semi-structured interviews were employed in order to get from each absentee

information in relation to an individual's absenteeism. Experiences and challenges the participants encountered which led them to absenting themselves from school was also understood. Leedy (2002) says that in the semi-structured interviews, the researcher may follow the standard questions. There were face-to-face interviews in this research and these have a distinct advantage of enabling the researcher to establish rapport with participants and therefore gain their cooperation; such interviews yield the highest responses rate.

3.7.2 FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

A focus-group is a "...technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected because they are a purposive, although not necessarily representative sampling of a specific population, this group being focused on a given topic" (Rabiee, 2004:655). According to Lewis (2000), a focus group interview is a carefully planned discussion designed for the purpose of gaining perceptions in a defined area of concern in an accommodating, conducive environment. Similarly, a focus-group is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people is asked about their opinions, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards idea, concept, service, product, advertisement or packaging Nachmais, (2008).

In a group setting, participants are asked questions which are to be answered spontaneously and freely without restrictions. Participants are also expected to be open when sharing their ideas. Furthermore, Nachmais (2008) portrays focus-group interview as a form of interaction which capitalizes on communication among research participants for generation of data. According to Krueger and Casey (2000), an individual's self-disclosure tends to be natural and comfortable. Expressions other than those in verbal form such as gestures and stimulated activities can provide a researcher with useful insights. In addition to interviews, focus groups were also used as other ways of collecting data. Lastly, free and open discussions among the respondents resulting generation of new ideas which can be worth noting for decision-making.

3.8 DATA CODING AND ANALYSIS

Data collected in the previous stage has to be processed and analyzed. Data processing refers to editing, coding, classification and tabulation of collected data so that they are amenable to analysis. Data coding refers to the processes of assigning numerals or symbols to participants' responses so that data collected can be put into categories or classes. Such classes should be appropriate to the research problem under consideration and must have the characteristics of exhaustiveness (Kothari, 2004). Classification is a process of arranging data into various types, forms or any distinct class to enable needed separation.

Data analysis refers to the computation of certain measures along with searching for patterns of relationships that exist among data groups (Kothari, 2004). It is a search for patterns in the data collected Neuman, (2005). To strengthen this point Yin (2003) posits that data analysis comprise sex amining and categorizing. The current study used thematic data analysis approach. Thematic data analysis involves identifying recurring themes or patterns in the data Garneretal. (2012). Data collected from semi-structured interviews was grouped according to the different themes. Coded data was then arranged in categories which were merged into themes and sub-themes related to the research questions. This type of data analysis is the appropriate to the current study because the researcher wanted to get emerging reality as seen by the participants on learner absenteeism. The thematic content analysis allows information obtained to be interpreted as it is without distortion, and more expressions were captured and represented verbally Alhojailan, (2012).

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics concern moral principles and in undertaking research, it is the researcher's principled duty to safe guard the human rights and well-being of the participants McMillan and Schumacher, (2006). Ethical considerations such as asking for permission to use participants' shared information, faithfulness to confidentiality, right to quit from the group, no payment to be given for sharing the information were considered in this

study. The permission was sought from schools, and participants were assured of confidentiality of the information they would share. They were asked to feel free to quit if they felt like. They were also made aware that there was no payment to be given. The participants were assured that the information they were sharing was going to be used for research purposes only and would not be published in any way that would cause embarrassment or any harm to them the reafter (Bell, 2007).

3.9.1 CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Anonymity was maintained by avoiding the use of unique information such as research sites and identity of participants that may have identified participants. The researcher used pseudonyms for both participants and their schools. Such names were used to conceal the names of participants to ensure that any person who reads the research report will be unable to associate responses with a particular participant. Information from participants was kept confidential.

3.9.2 INFORMED CONSENT

The purpose of this study was explained to the participants and they were requested to participate out of their free will and not from out of pressure or any fear of being victimized in one way or the other. Participants should willingly participate in a study a sit is clarified by Bray (2007:447) that participants should be guaranteed a clear explanation of the purpose of the research and a clear choice as to whether they want to participate based on full knowledge and understanding of what is involved. Participants were made aware that they may also withdraw from the study at any point if they felt there was a need to do so.

3.9.3 PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT THE STUDY

Permission was sought from the Ministry of Education and Training and from principals of the selected schools to collect data. To obtain such permission, the researcher had to write an application letter to the Education office which had a covering letter from the researcher`s supervisor as proof that such a researcher was known by the institution

(NUL). In the application letter, it was shown that the researcher wanted to carry the study at the mentioned schools. After permission was given, it was then that request letters were written to principals of the selected schools to allow the researcher to continue with the research at their schools.

3.9.4 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Holloway and Wheeler (2002) posit that credibility is having confidence in the truth of findings. In the same vein, Maree (2010) states that credibility is concerned with answering questions relating to findings in respect of research. Anney (2014) strengthens the point that trustworthiness involves establishing credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. In the current study, the researcher used participants' words to show how they expressed their views on learner absenteeism.

3.9.5 TRANSFERABILITY

According to Bitsch (2005), transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts with other respondents.

Furthermore, Bitsch (2005) explicates that the researcher facilitates the transferability judgement by providing the reader with full and purposeful account of context, participants and research design so that the readers can make their own determination on the transferability of the study. Li (2004) states that judgement about how well the context of the research fits other contexts, is enabled by thick descriptive data. Thorough descriptive information capacitates the researcher to elucidate all the research processes from data collection, context of the study to production of final report.

3.9.6 DEPENDABILITY

According to Tsomo (2012), dependability refers to the stability of data over time and conditions. In addition to that, Mqulwana (2010) says that dependability puts emphasis on the need for the researcher to account forever changing context within which research occurs. The responsibility of the researcher in this study was to describe the alterations

that occurred in the setting and how those alterations affected the way the study was approached.

3.9.7 CONFIRMABILITY

Confirmability is the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the responses and not by the researcher's biasness, motivation or interest (Bowen, 2009; Koch, 2006). This is needed to allow anyone who would like to recheck what has been done to do so. There are a number of strategies for enhancing conformability. Documentation of the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study can be one of the strategies. Thereafter, a researcher can conduct a data audit to examine the data collection and analysis procedures for making judgement about the potential for bias or distortion of information (Mqulwana, 2010:62). Negative instances which contradict prior to observations could be found and be described. To ensure conformity this study sent to the participants to verify whether the findings and reflect what they had offered as information in line with Wilson's (2009). Bray, (2007:539) suggests that this step is taken to avoid subjectivity that may include biasness in analysis, motivation and perception on the part of the researcher.

3.9.8 AUTHENTICITY

The term authenticity refers to the extent to which the researcher fairly and faithfully shows arrange of different realities (Bray, 2007). To ensure authenticity of the study, negative information that runs to the themes and the tone of the participants was offered (Creswell, 2009:192). In the current study all in formation in relation to each theme was presented as realistically as possible.

3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

No scientific study goes without some shortcomings and failures regarding the interpretation or application of the findings, and these shortcomings should be made clear Grinnell, (2001). The first limitation of the study is that being a qualitative study, a

small sample was used. The findings will therefore not be generalized to the whole population.

3.11 SUMMARY

The chapter focused on the research methodology where qualitative research approach was employed as the way of data collection and analysis. Data collection was done through the use of semi-structured interviews, focus-group interviews and observations. To analyze data, thematic analysis was used. Though time consuming, qualitative approach was employed since it allows participants chance to express their views and experiences. During data collection the researcher was vigilant enough to observe and consider ethics of the participants since that is very crucial for their social welfare. The next chapter presents the analysis of data and findings.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the methodology adopted by this study. Research paradigm which shapes the view of the researcher, qualitative approach that frames the researcher`s work, the theory which is the lens of the researcher as well. The current chapter provides the analysis of data collected through semi-structured interviews with eight teachers, eight parents and four focus group discussions with learners from four secondary schools in Lesotho. Two schools are located in the lowlands, one school in the foothill sand the other in the mountainous part of the country.

The schools where data was collected are referred to as School A, School B, School C and School D to protect the participants and ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Schools were labelled at random, with no specific pattern followed. Data used in this study was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Two teachers from each school were interviewed as well as parents or guardians of the selected learners from the school. Each focus group consisted of six learners. The participants` responses were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The matric data analysis was used to analyze data. The results are presented according to the main ideas which emerged during the discussion with the participants on the prevalence of absenteeism among learners in Lesotho schools. The findings are presented according to the following objectives of the study as follows:

- To investigate the categories of learners who are regularly absent from school.
- To investigate measures taken by schools to combat absenteeism.
- To determine the role played by parents to curb learner absenteeism in schools.

4.1. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Before getting to the analysis of data, the contextual information of the schools will be given to highlight the readers about the schools which were visited to collect data. The profiles of the schools are presented below beginning with School A.

SCHOOL A

School A is situated in the high lands of the country and it is a government school with a roll of 395 learners. It had 13 teachers; five males and eight females. The school enrolled both boys and girls and has eight streams; two per class from Form A to Form C. Form D and Form E have one stream per class. The school is miles away from the main road and is not easily accessible, especially during rainy seasons because the road is slippery. Since the school is in the mountainous part of the country, it is very cold in winter.

SCHOOL B

School B is a high school as well and is found at the foothill s of the country. It is easy to reach because it is near the main road. There are many villages around the school, but some learners come from far away villages where they walk for one to two hours before reaching school. As a result, when they arrived at school, such learners were most likely to be tired. There were nine female teachers at the school and no male teachers. The total roll of learners was 193. Both boys and girls are admitted at this government school and there are five classes; Form A, Form B, Form C, Form D and Form E.

SCHOOL C

School C is a church school located in an urban area and is near the main road. It enrolls both boys and girls. Learners with disabilities are also admitted in this school. There are 22 teachers; 10 male and 12 female. There are 650 learners and classes are in 15 streams; five streams of Form A, four of Form B, two streams of Form C, two of Form D and two of Form E. School C has an average of 6 learners absent from school every stream from

Form A (Grade 8) to Form B (Grade 9) per week. This is a big number as well when looking at the number of learners enrolled in this school and considering its urban geographical setting.

SCHOOL D

The last school, School D, is also church-owned and is situated in town. It is near the main road, close to many businesses. Both boys and girls are admitted in this school and the total number of learners is 1424. There are 38 teachers; 20 females and 18 males. Classes are in 24 streams; five streams of Form A, six of Form B, five of Form C, four of Form D and four of Form E. Though it is an old school that was established 50 years back, it had been recently renovated and the classes are conducive to learning.

4.2 PARTICIPANTS

The participating teachers were all degree holders in different subjects. Two had degrees in Mathematics and Science, five in English, Sesotho and Religion and the last one had a Postgraduate Diploma in Education. Among this group of teachers, five were male and three females. Parents consisted of one male and seven females. The male parent was a miner who acquired basic literacy at the mines. The female participants comprised two primary school teachers, three had completed COSC (Cambridge Overseas School Certificate) and the last two were domestic workers; one had passed Form A and the other dropped out of school while in Standard 6.

Learner participants were all in secondary school. There were 20 learners in all; 10 males and 10 females. They were from different class levels; five from Form A (Grade 8), ten from Form B (Grade 9) and five from Form D (Grade 11). Their ages ranged between 15 and 20. Learners were allowed to use either of the formal languages during the discussions and they preferred to communicate in Sesotho to enable them to give their points clearly and freely. Having discussed the participants and the context of this study, the following section focuses on the data categories of learners who were regularly absent from school.

4.3 CATEGORIES OF LEARNERS THAT ARE REGULARLY ABSENT FROM SCHOOL

To generate ideas on this objective, teachers, parents and learners were asked the following question: which categories of learners are regularly absent from school? The themes that emerged from the data collected on this question are as follows: boys and girls doing many family activities, girls who stay in rented houses, those from poverty-stricken families, ill- disciplined learners and or planed learners. Each of these themes is explained in detail below, starting with boys and girls doing different family activities.

4.3.1 BOYS AND GIRLS DOING DIFFERENT FAMILY ACTIVITIES

The data collected revealed that boys were more often absent from school because they were sent to do some family chores.

Parent 8 explained that:

Fathers in particular, do not take care of children when staying with them in the absence of mothers. They send children, particularly boys to the grinding mill and let them look after the animals instead of going to school.

Parent D from School A reiterated that:

Parents neglect their own responsibility in the family. They force children to miss school regularly because children are sent to grinding mill during school days especially on Friday.

Teacher 3 from School A reiterated that,

Boys miss school many times due to accompanying grandparents to collect pension. In case of preparing for a funeral of a family member, a boy stays at home from the day a parent died. Relatives say that boys are responsible in the family, and so they have to learn from them by being closer to them. In that manner, a boy remains at home till the end of funeral preparations.

Data further revealed that girls also absent themselves from school due to nursing sick relatives. Teacher 3 put it in this manner:

Sometimes girl students miss school more often because of caring for their parents who are sick. Due to staying with sick parents, girls have to clean the house, prepare food and help the sick parent to take medication before they go to school. In an event where these activities are not completed on time to allow a learner to go to school, she misses school to avoid being punished for late coming. On other days when things were not smooth with the sick, such girls absent themselves from school to take care of the sick parent. Sometimes girls go to the health center to collect medication for the sick parent or for the elderly who cannot manage to walk on their own for the services they need

This data suggests that in some cases a girl learner may accidentally absent herself from school because of being late while on other days, they plan to be absent from school because they know that they have to run house hold errands such as collecting medication or accompanying the old to a health center or post office to collect old age pension for their old grandparents. This finding is in line with the Basotho culture which puts a girl child as a care taker of the family.

4.3.2 LEARNERS WHO HIDE THEMSELVES IN RENTED HOUSES

Learners who live in rented houses were also found to be fond of absenting themselves from school. Some learners who originate from places located far from school rent houses closer to schools. Parents make this arrangement to enable such learners to easily reach schools. However, some of these learners stay in rented houses and miss school due to laziness. Teacher 3 explained it in this manner:

Learners who live in rented houses are not interested in learning. Sometimes they hide in their rented rooms, absent themselves from school. This mostly occurs in cases where landlords do not stay nearby and there is no one to ensure that learners go to school. In such a case, learners are free to do what suits them.

Learners' absenteeism from school because of hiding in rented houses was reiterated by their focus group discussion. Litumeliso from a focus group discussion held at School C explained that in cases where learners who stay in rented houses feel tired of going to school or when they have not done assignments which were given on the previous day,

they absent themselves from school. This is further aggravated by negligence from the school, as sometimes nobody bothers to ask them to explain their absence. This suggests that some learners who stay on their own lack discipline to regularly attend school. They do as they please as they do not have parental support and sometimes teachers fail to enquire about their absence.

Teacher 6 reiterated that some learners living in rented houses lived with their parents who work at the factories. Parents left home very early and come back very late and tired from the day's work. So, they are never sure whether their children went to school or not. Some children pretend to go to school but do not reach school. They do other activities instead of going to school.

Some learners, particularly orphans who stay with relatives, hide in their friends' rented rooms. This occurs because relatives ill-treat them. Lesiba from School A focus group discussion expressed this thus:

Staying with relatives is a torture to us because every activity is on us. When cooking is done late we are blamed, pigs are not fed we are blamed. Many family activities are to be done by us. Sometimes we leave home and hide in our friends' rented houses just to have a short rest running away from much work done at home.

These learners absent themselves from school to take a rest as they have pointed out. They know that school is the first place to be visited when they are not seen at home; that is why they decide to hide in their friends' rented rooms. Should they be seen by mistake, they claim ill-health.

Teacher 1 from School D strengthens the issue of rented houses saying:

Girls who live in rented houses are troublesome. When they do not want to go school, they claim to be sick when they are asked at school. Their carelessness of waking upon time and of not doing the given school work makes them to hide behind sickness every time

Parent 5 was not even aware that her child was not attending school well but rather staying at a rented house. What surprised her was her child's early arrival at home every

month- end when going home to ask for food allowance. When the parent asked her about early arrival, she often responded that she got a lift from a friend's family car. This parent only realised during the interview for this study that her child was absenting herself from school on Fridays so that she could go home early.

Besides hiding in rented houses, some learners, particularly boys, missed some lessons because they hid in school toilets. Such learners attend morning lessons and skip less on that come after the short-break or after lunch. This group of boys used to have weekend plans together. They skip lessons to discuss weekend activities. This is common in schools located in urban areas. Teacher 4 from School D explained it in this manner:

In the first four lessons, learners are all seen in class. The problem comes after

The short break when many boys do not come back to class. Many of these boys hide at the toilets smoking, and thereafter, they sneak out and go to town. In most cases, we get calls from our colleagues from neighboring schools, making us aware that some of our students, wearing school uniform, are walking along the streets. When we ask these learners the following day, they claim to have gone to pay school fees at the bank. This in most cases is not true because such students would be in town for their own reasons that do not involve school fees.

4.3.3 LEARNERS WHO DO NOT GET SUPPORT FROM PARENTS

Parental support is important for school attendance. Parent 1 from School B clarified that there are children who do not attend school regularly due to lack of parental support. Some parents lack interest in their children's education. To show lack of interest, parents cannot even ask their children how they spent their day at school. As a result, parents do not want anything from children which needs their attention. Parent 1 continues by giving an example that when a learner shows that they have been given home work to be done and that she/he has to sit and do the work, parents' response is that teachers have to remember that at home children have some work to be done. Books are to be checked at school. Learners, whose parents do not check their books and sign

for verification, do not reach school because they know how their teachers are going to treat them.

Parent 3 from School C described a situation at home where her husband hindered their son to attend school properly. She explained that they have two children, a son and a daughter and the girl attends school well while the boy has poor school attendance because his father always sends him to do farming responsibilities and does not support the boy's school attendance. The mother decided to transfer the boy to another school for him to receive good education like his sister. Parent 3 explained:

Their father has developed a new way of doing things. He no longer buys these children anything required at school. As the mother, I must find means to support my children for their future. The children have started to lose interest in learning because of what they see happening in the family.

Parent 7 reiterated that parents are to blame for the poor attendance of learners. This is seen particularly where parents do not help children with what is needed to do school work. He put it in this manner:

In the evening, a child is unable to do school work due to lack of light because I always say I don't have money to buy candles which can be used to provide light for the whole night.

4.3.4 LEARNERS IN URBAN AREAS

A neighborhood plays an important role in an individual's life regardless of whether they are learners or not. In urban areas, money is used a lot and everybody needs it. Some learners who attend schools in urban areas are mostly tempted to miss school because they look for temporary jobs to get money.

Teacher 8 from School B puts it this way:

Children are more on the street because they see their friends and age-mates washing cars and being given M30.00 per car. So, they are

attracted to such life style and bunk school to wash cars so that they can make money. It is not only needy and vulnerable children that are seen at such places but also children from rich families.

In three focus group discussions, learners showed that certain male students miss school to go and wash cars for money even though the parents still provide them with their school needs. Such learners do not have a dire need for money except being attracted by the lavish life style that some of their friends have due to earning money from washing cars.

Furthermore, students who bunk school seem happy when being in such company. Lekhala, a member of the focus group in School A said:

The epeismy friend sir, he is my classmate and I know his parents have money. He cleans cars with us saying, "Augh! I will go to school next week; my father has gone some where, he will be back on Saturday so nobody will realise that I am not attending school properly."

4.3.5 LEARNERS FROM POVERTY-STRICKEN FAMILIES

Data collected pointed out that some learners do not go to school regularly because of poverty. They do not have many of the necessary requirements needed at school. They lack stationery, school uniform and even school fees. A child who is always on the list of debtors or among those learners who are sent home to collect school fees ends up losing interest in education.

Parent 2 explained it in this manner:

At the school where my child is, learners are forced to wear ties. Going to school without a tie is seen to be in appropriate and learners are punished for that. In such instances some parents tell their children to stay at home until they have money to buy school requirements.

Some of those parents said they work as street vendors, selling fruits to get money.

Parent 5 reiterated that her children are regularly absent from school because she cannot afford to buy everything needed at school especially in January when schools open because that is the time when many things are needed. The situation is further

aggravated by teachers who demand things on short notice, forgetting that some parents have many children and cannot afford the school requirements within a short notice.

Parent6added that,

As poor parents they are even shy to say their problems to teachers because they are not welcomed because of their poverty. When they ask for a favor that their children be given a chance to attend school, and they will pay bit by bit, teachers suspect that they are not honest and refuse to grand them the requested favor.

Teacher 1 reiterated that:

Girls miss school because of poverty. Most of the time, they do not have basic needs such as sanitary towels. In the absence of sanitary towels learners stay at home till the end of that menstrual period. These girls claim to be embarrassed if their sanitary towels leak and other people realise that they are on their menstruation period. This occurs because according to the Basotho culture menstruation is a taboo, and it is not discussed with anybody at any time. So, these girls are not brave enough to report their needs of sanitary towels to any teacher.

4.3.6 LEARNERS FROM INITIATION SCHOOLS

Initiation schools indirectly influence learners' absenteeism, particularly boys in the highlands. Hired herd boys who look after animals while the sons of the owners of the animals attend school leave their work and go to initiation schools. In the absence of the employed herdboys, the sons miss school to look after animals. In this way initiation schools promote absenteeism because boy learners are forced to miss school because substantive herd boys go to initiation school and the boys had to be absent until a new herd boy is employed.

Teacher 1 from School C put it in this manner:

Boys miss school more in the summer season because many herd-boys leave their work and go to initiation school. During that time owners of animals let their children who attend school to look after the animals while

looking for another herd-boy. This had been a problem for many years and it is still a problem up to now.

Parent7 reiterated that: “Some children leave school and go to initiation school”. She narrated that her son requested to go to circumcision school. She said that she did not permit him to drop out of school for initiation school. However, the herd-boy be at the son to it and the son had to look after the animals before a new herd-boy was hired.

Parent 4 puts it this manner:

Schools must understand that initiation is part of our Basotho culture. Our children should be accepted to attend formal school when they come back from initiation school. Above all, boys who went to initiation school have a right to education like others.

Teacher 7 from School A added that boys who are from initiation schools have the right to education just like other Basotho children. But the great challenge is that these boys are difficult to discipline. Most of them do not want to follow rules and regulations which are followed at school. Examples of these rules are sweeping the classroom, cleaning the chalkboard, cleaning the toilets and putting on school uniform properly. Boys from initiation schools do not want to abide by the mentioned rules. It is from there that they begin behavioral problems. They are called for disciplinary hearing many times per month as a result of violating some of the mentioned rules.

4.3.7 LEARNERS WHO LACK DISCIPLINE

There are learners who miss school many times due to lack of discipline. Some of them are not interested in education. They focus on affectionate relationships with married men and put little focus on school activities. Teachers try different measures to help such learners to be disciplined but to no avail.

Teacher 4 explained that:

Some girls miss school because they concentrate on love affairs with rich men, taxi-drivers, shop owners and the miners. This occurs because such men buy expensive clothes, cellular phones, and food for them. Anytime

they want to stay at home with the rich men, they do so. They respond so arrogantly when we ask them about their absence. This belittles us so much that we feel like we are students and they are teachers. And that is hard to bear. Girls with this behavior are those staying in rented houses.

Parent 8 strengthens the point thus:

Girls like fashionable clothes, so they run after the boyfriends to buy them beautiful clothes, smartphones and to travel in beautiful cars. Girls also like fun so school is not their priority because it denies them the luxury they want, that is why they decide to miss school whenever they wish to satisfy their interests.

Teacher 1 reiterates the point thus:

We believe that at school we strengthen discipline basis which had been laid at home so, as to mould a child to be a better person in the future. To our surprise it is not always the case for other learners; they find teachers as their enemies when they discipline them and decide to miss school.

4.3.7.1 Pregnant Girls

It was further explained that pregnant learners regularly absent themselves from school. This was expressed by two focus-groups which pointed out that some girls miss school regularly when they are pregnant. Seruoe from a focus group in School D pointed out that:

Pregnancy affects individuals differently. Some feel sick regularly, others are not disturbed a lot while others remain without any problems. So, those who feel sick regularly miss school many times.

4.3.7.2 Boys Who Use Drugs

Data collected further pointed out boys who used drugs as another category of learners that is fond of being absent from school. Teachers from three schools agreed that boys who are drug addicts are not regular at school. These boys are not easy to discipline and argue with teachers. Such boys opt to miss some school days when they feel like they should not be disciplined by young teachers at school. Some of such boys originate from urban areas but attend school in rural areas because their parents felt that the urban environment causes the drug problem. Their parents moved them to rural areas with the

hope that their lives would improve when they are far from their urban friends. Contrarily, these town boys do as they please in the absence of parental support.

Parents reiterated the idea of learners missing school because of drug use. These parents opined that boys who have more money than they need buy drugs with it.

Parent 2 from School A put it in this manner:

Parents are really to blame because they give children too much pocket money. When they do not know what to do with it, they think of all these unhealthy activities. In this way teachers will not afford to deal with such kind of learners.

4.3.7.3 Orphaned Learners

Data collected also pointed to orphans missing school very often due to various reasons. These range from lack of school requirements, household chores and farming activities.

Teacher 2 explained that:

Orphans miss school many times because of having no materials needed for school activities; materials such as proper uniform. When there are some activities to be done at home, their caretakers give orders to them to accomplish. Orphans go for sheep shearing, or go to collect registration documents for animals and when animals are lost, they miss school to go and find those lost animals.

Teacher 7 reiterated that:

The orphans miss school during time of sports at school. When the day for a trip approaches they stay at home because they do not have money to pay for the trip. So, two or three days before they stay home hiding behind sickness.

Orphans from child-headed families miss school in order to fend for younger siblings. When there is no food they absent themselves from school in order to have time to wash neighbors' clothes so as to get money to buy food for the family.

Learners added that, "Orphans who are bread-winners in their families miss school many times in search of part-time-jobs."

4.4 MEASURES TAKEN BY SCHOOLS TO COMBAT LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

There are different measures taken to combat learner absenteeism. Teachers from four schools (Schools A, B, C and D) raised three measures which are used. They said they punish learners, talk to learners asking them their reasons for missing school regularly and they call parents to school to talk to them. Each theme is described below, starting with punishing learners.

4.4.1 PUNISHING LEARNERS

Learners` in their focus group discussions showed that teachers punish them for missing school. They explained that they are punished on daily basis when they have missed school.

They are asked to do different tasks depending on what a teacher wants them to do. Learners` focus groups in School C and School D reiterated that their punishment is announced at the assembly in the presence of all learners. Other learners are told why they are seen serving punishment.

Another learner from School D expressed it in the following manner:

We are called to stand in front of all students during the assembly and everybody is told why we are punished. From the assembly we go to the stipulated place to work for the whole day while others are going to classes.

Teachers work hard to try to find successful ways to deal with absentees in schools because the absentees force teachers to repeat work done when they realize that there are learners who are left behind. From their realization, teachers try to find out why other learners missed school. It is from there that learners are punished when it is found that they did not even report their absence.

Teacher 5 from School A presented the measures they take to deal with absenteeism in this way:

Sometimes we give punishment to learners. We tell them to do manual work such as cleaning the school hall or the pigsty. This means learners do that for the whole day without attending classes. They are told that they will attend classes only when they have accomplished the given task. If it happens that they do not finish, their punishment extends to the following day. Learners are given the whole day to serve punishment to deter them from repeating the same mistake within a short time. As teachers we believed that serving punishment in the presence of friends can make them think in a positive way.

It further emerged that learners are sometimes given corporal punishment for being absent from school. Some learners further absent themselves after being beaten for being absent.

Buka from School B explained thus:

Sometimes we are asked to squat for more than 10 minutes. That is painful when one does it for a long time especially one who does not exercise every day. In the next day I simply stay at home claiming to be sick and I will go to school when I feel better. At the same time we are afraid that other learners could tell our parents the true story of what had happened at school.

Tumo from focus group at School C said:

I prefer to be whipped and be the end of the story. The worst punishment I was given was that my Maths teacher told me that he would count days I missed school and he would not mark my work for that long. I found that as the worst punishment. By the time I decided to leave school for some weeks my friend advised me to report that to the principal may be there would be a change.

Tumo's account points to a possibility of some teachers going overboard with learners' punishment in an effort to curb absenteeism in school. Not marking learners as a form of punishment does not seem to solve the problem, but is likely to exacerbate it.

Teachers from three schools agreed that sometimes they use corporal punishment because talking to learners and calling their parents is time-consuming.

Teacher 1 from School A said:

Talking to one learner wastes time for the other 29 learners I have left in class. So the best way sometimes is whipping a learner and then going back to class.

It further emerged that some teachers unfairly apply punishment to learners and this saddens students. Qiti, a learner, from focus group at School D reiterated that:

Teachers use favoritism at school. They give punishment in an unfair way. Some teachers give us many strokes and make us work for many hours while other students work for a few hours. When we complain they claim to have forgotten how many hours they allocated to the previous group.

Parents agreed with students that some forms of punishment are unfair.

Parent 1 from School D explained that:

We understand that learners can be punished but other punishments given by teachers to our children are not acceptable. My child told me that a teacher asked them to kneel on the floor for the whole period (lesson) and he did not allow them to put anything under their knees. What kind of a punishment is that to kids?

4.4.2 TALKING TO LEARNERS

Another measure which is used at school to combat learner absenteeism is talking to learners trying to establish why they miss school. Teachers in all the participating schools showed that class-teachers take responsibility to talk to learners who are regularly absent from school to determine their problems. Learners from all focus group discussions acknowledged that initiative. Ntho, a learner from School A, said that because they are afraid of beatings from teachers, they are not always free to reveal their problems. It takes time for them to relax in front of their teachers to say what really matters in their lives. To add to that, Ti from School B strengthens the point of lack of freedom in front of teachers by stating that they feel somehow free when talking to local lay counselors who visit their school occasionally. Those lay counselors follow a student for two or three more sessions if need be.

Ntho, a learner from focus group A, expresses himself in the following manner:

I have a problem of telling teachers about my problems and why I have irregular school attendance. I know teachers will beat me because my father told them to beat me when I have missed school even when I have done nothing wrong at school. My father is the one who needs to understand the importance of regular school attendance.

Ti, a learner from focus group B, says:

We are not free to talk to teachers because we know that when we are not stating our points clearly we are going to be whipped. So, sometimes I find it unnecessary to explain what will never be understood. So talking to lay counsellors is a relief to us learners. At least they take their time to listen.

Teacher 5 from School A puts it in this manner:

We talk to learners understanding that as human beings their rights everywhere are to be respected. When talking to our learners we try to show them the effects of not attending school well. But along the way we just lose track forced by the calibre of learners we are dealing with and their way of looking at ideas we bring to them.

Teacher 3 from School C stated this in the following way:

As teachers we try our best to talk to learners hoping to see improvement in a short time. When we do not see any improvement sometimes we seek assistance from nearby facilities which have lay counsellors. From the day we called such people we realized that there is much information which we do not get from children because sometimes they are not free to say what problems they have.

Teacher 2 from School D says:

In the beginning when I started to deal with absenteeism in my class I wanted to give up because I did not see any improvement after a week to two weeks. What worried me was that those learners who had bad school attendance were brilliant. But one day I shared the problem with my neighbour at home who is a lay counsellor and who volunteered to visit my school to talk to learners in my class. Learners talked to him and shared information which they hid from me.

4.4.3 CALLING PARENTS TO SCHOOL

From Schools A, B, C and D, teachers showed that they prefer calling parents to school to discuss their children`s absenteeism at school. Teachers prefer because they have realized that when they have talked to parents there is a noticeable change to children.

Teacher 1 from School A says:

Calling parents is helpful to us because children do not want their parents to know what is happening at school. If they know exactly what happens it would be difficult for learners to cheat parents after they have got succinct explanation from teachers. Before calling parents we discuss the issue amongst ourselves as teachers and then give a report to the principal. After the reporting we ask permission to call parents to school for a discussion on the concerned learners.

Teachers from School A reiterated that by saying:

You know what, calling parents is the best for us because it is another chance we get to talk to parents individually or in groups to make them aware of the importance of checking their children`s daily work so as to help where there are problems and to encourage them where work is well done.

It was however noted that calling parents to school does not work well in cases where there is poor respect between parents and teachers. This is seen where the discussion between the two parties is not fruitful and teacher ends up feeling that the parents know it all. Teacher 3 from School C revealed that:

In some cases teachers say a parent is arrogant. The idea behind this saying is that the parent thinks he/she knows a lot. Parents come to school as they are called but our discussions are not productive. That is our fault. When talking to parents sometimes we forget that parents are different from the children we teach. We want them to believe what we tell them about their children instead of giving them chance to say what they know and what they think could be done to solve the problem.

It however emerged that some parents do not appreciate being called to school. Such parents prefer to be told on the phone. They feel that coming to school is a waste of their time. Teacher 5 from School D disclosed that:

Parents are given report on a phone and whatever is displeasing about a child is said on a phone because one parent had asked a teacher: "How can you call me to school for that? You should have told me on the phone. "For that matter a parent was saying that showing signs of not appreciating what a teacher did.

Teacher 1 from School A said:

It is true we call parents to school to share their children`s work and behavior but other parents seem to be against that style. They are unwilling to help in the discipline of their children. One parent showed that teachers think parents do not have much to be done at home that it why they keep calling them to school. A parent continued to say that as a parent his responsibility is to pay for a child all what is needed at school not to attend school with a child.

4.5 USE OF OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

Use of official documents was part of tools used to collect data in this study. At all four schools, attendance registers are used as important documents to monitor learner attendance. This is marked by class teachers in these four schools. At School A, there is an additional register; class/lesson attendance register. The register is marked by a class prefect, and at the end of every lesson, the register is marked in the presence of the subject teacher to avoid cheating by learners. In such away, the lesson attendance register is helpful to teachers and provides a clear picture of learners who attend lessons well and those who do not.

Teacher 5 puts it in this manner:

I like lesson attendance register. It saves my time because I am aware that a student who is allocated to mark that register likes the work so it is well one in my class. So when I notices someone absent I knows that the reason for absence is clearly stated. I find it helpful.

Lastly, School D has an average of 4 learners absent from school from every stream of Form A (Grade 8) and Form B (Grade 9). This is also a big number though it is a big school. There is a difference between these two urban schools (C and D).

Teacher 8 from School A says:

We thought of lesson attendance register when we realized that a number of learners are missing certain lessons. After the introduction of such register there was a little improvement. Much as we tried to monitor learners, on the register it is not stated whether a learner was lawfully or unlawfully absent. A part from that, when teachers are absent learners do not mark such register.

Data collected further illuminated that the use of the attendance register is not efficient in curbing learner absenteeism. This inefficiency is seen where teachers are not aware of the legitimacy of learner absence. Consequently, teachers are unable to follow up cases of unpermitted absence from school. In some cases, teachers are not interested in keeping the register. Teacher 3 explained that:

Not all teachers are interested in lesson register, so it is not working well all the time because sometimes it is not marked.

4.6 MEASURES TAKEN BY PARENTS TO COMBAT LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

Parents, like others take holders, take part to combat learner absenteeism and they are expected to play a bigger role in learners' education. Parents are disturbed too when they know that their children have bad school attendance. From the collected data, it was found that parents take part to curb learner absenteeism from schools. They work hard to help their children to attend school as it should be but their efforts are not always successful. Among others, parents take their children to school, monitor them by liaising with the class teacher and they closely work with the parents nearest to school.

4.6.1 PARENTS TAKE CHILDREN TO SCHOOL

Parents feel that it is safe to take children to school every morning well prepared. Some learners do not reach school while others are seen at school for certain lessons. These

learners either attend morning or afternoon classes. When they are asked by their class teachers they tell lies and say that they had gone to pay school fees and sometimes they were sent for family businesses. To try to solve these problems, some parents found it better to take children to school every day. Parent 3 states his point in this manner:

I make sure that I drop my child in the school yard every day at seven o'clock in the morning to give him chance to complete school work which might have been left behind in the previous night. At work I feel relaxed knowing that I have left him at the right place.

It was however noted that this strategy is not working for some parents because some children do not stay with their parents. Consequently, children absent themselves from school without parents' awareness. Parent 5 pointed that:

Because we are working far from our homes and it is difficult to monitor our children's movement to school, we just joined other parents who have organized transport for these children to school. It works well because the taxi owner keeps a daily record and it is agreed that absence of any child from school is reported by a written note from a parent or guardian.

Parent 4 reiterated that:

My child is living alone in a rented house because I am living far from the school. I have taken her to be near school. I don't have a chance to come regularly to check how she is doing.

This data suggest that there are parents who are able to support their children and ensure they attend school properly. However, there are those who are unable to support their children because of the distance between the schools and the homes. In such cases there is little that parents can do and children continue to absent themselves from school without valid reasons. It further occurred that some parents request support from teachers, as discussed below.

4.6.2 MONITORING BY LIASING WITH THE CLASS TEACHER

From the collected data, some parents have asked class teachers to give them phone numbers to ease the communication between both parties so as to get information about Learners' school attendance. However, use of cellular phones is advantageous to

parents in places where the network is available and reliable. There are parents who stay in very remote places where means of communication is not easy except by post. As a result, not all parents benefit from the use of cellular phones in relation to monitoring children at school.

Parent 1 presents her point this way:

Children`s regular absenteeism is disturbing. So as to minimize this problem of learner absenteeism, I think it is better to have the phone number of the class teacher to ease the communication between us.

Teacher 6 from School D said:

Since I have phone numbers of parents of learners in my class, problems have subsided. The five learners who were outstandingly troubling many teachers by missing classes are under control. Every time I call parent when I realize that her/his child is missing and I am comfortable because that is done in agreement with parents and children have nowhere to complain because parents are the owners of the decisions for their children. I see the green light for the future of these learners.

Parent 7 explained his views in this way:

The style of using phone calls is saving our time because teachers have pointed out that if we give written report for children`s absence, the reports should carry the chief`s stamp. Going to the chief is time consuming. I support the phone calling in every way because the responses are given to the right people at the tight time.

Parent 1 said:

I stay with my niece and nephew who attend different schools. So, I find phone calls to teachers are stand more affordable than going to schools.

4.6.3 PARENTS COOPERATE WITH THE PARENTS NEAREST TO SCHOOL

It was further revealed in the findings that there are other parents who are willing to help children to attend school well but due to the geographical setting of their places,

schools are not easy to reach. They reported that they have started to work cooperatively with parents nearest to schools for the benefit of children. The parents located closer to the school attend parents` meetings, and collect reports on behalf of substantive parents. The technique is successful to a certain extent. Once learners get familiar with the parents nearest to school, they do not give genuine reports to those parents.

Parent 2 presents her point in this manner:

We live far from where children attend school. In that manner we visit children after a long time to see how they are doing. We don't attend parents` meetings regularly instead we have asked the nearby people to keep an eye on our children even to collect their reports on due dates. We do not even know how children miss school yet we have paid for rented houses for them.

Teacher 3 from School B reported thus:

Parents are taken to be the major supporters of the school in all matters concerning children`s education but it is not always easy to work with parents with regard to their children`s behavior. Many times parents put the blame on teachers. Parents blame Children`s failure saying teachers have not taught them. Parents are playing a very little role in trying to curb learner absenteeism.

Teacher 5 from School A reiterated that:

Parents are playing a little role in curbing learner absenteeism because other parents are contributing to learner absenteeism. They send children to other places especially on Fridays saying that on Fridays teaching is not effective. They even call them home to collect money for food or call them to meet them at the bus stop at any time of the day.

Parent 3 stated that:

Parents are paying school fee for their children at school. We believe that teachers are responsible to see that children attend school regularly. Teachers are there working at school after training for a long time. Our belief is that they have all techniques needed to work with children of different personalities and characters.

Parent 7 said:

We are trying to talk to our children but currently they are not honest with us and to themselves. But at the end the blame is on us. But we will try to assist our children to attend school regularly.

4.7 SUMMARY

The current chapter focused on data presentation, its analysis and interpretation. Data were collected from four secondary schools in the country. From that data it is realized that there are factors which contribute to learner absenteeism in schools. This problem is seen to be a challenge which needs to be addressed not by the school only but by parents as well.

CHAPTER 5:

DISCUSSIONS CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the discussion of the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study on factors contributing to learner absenteeism in Lesotho secondary schools. The findings are discussed from the point of view of the objectives of the study, the literature on school absenteeism and Bronfenbrenner's (2006) Bio-ecological model of human development, employed to help in the understanding the phenomenon of learner absenteeism in schools. From the findings of the study, conclusions are drawn guided by the research objectives and themes that emerged from the findings. The following section presents the finding of the first research objective which looks at categories of learners who are regularly absent from school.

5.1 CATEGORIES OF LEARNERS WHO ARE REGULARLY ABSENT FROM SCHOOL

This section discusses the findings of the research objective which is phrased thus: categories of learners who are regularly absent from school. These categories are found to be boys and girls who are engaged in different activities at home, learners hiding in rented houses and those who lack support from parents in their school work. Each of these groups is discussed below.

5.1.1 BOYS AND GIRLS DOING DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES AT HOME

The current study found that boys and girls miss school regularly due to different activities which they perform at home. Boys are asked to look after animals in the absence of herd- boys. On such days, the boys do not go to school. They look after animals till herd-boys are found regardless of the number of days they have not been at school. A similar finding was revealed in South Africa where a boy learner from a rural area spent some time on agricultural activities such as looking after the animals and working in their household's farms (CASE/JET, 2000).

On other occasions, boys go to collect monthly pension money and medication for their grandparents. Sometimes the pension money is not issued on the same day so they have to miss school for two consecutive days. They are also responsible for preparing for family funerals. This happens where a father has passed away and the boy learner is the only elder male child in the family as in Sesotho culture a male is regarded as a head of the family who should assume household responsibilities. A boy stays at home for a week or two preparing for such family activity. This is evident from School A, where Parent D showed that boys miss school many times due to many activities that they are involved in.

Parents, especially fathers, do not take care of children when staying with them in the absence of mothers. Children experience a major shift in care and support after the death of their parents. The new care-givers understand going to school regularly in different ways. As a result, children begin to attend school irregularly.

Girls are not exceptional in this issue of doing various activities in the family. They are responsible for a number of activities such as cooking, caring for the sick, cleaning the house and looking after the little ones in the family. It emerged from Teacher 3 in School A that when there is no food, girls miss school in order to wash neighbors' clothes so as to get money to buy food for the family. Sometimes girl students miss school more often because of caring for their sick parents. Due to staying with the sick, girls have to clean the house, prepare food and help the sick parent to take medication before they go to school. This is in line with Yamba's (2017) finding that girls care for sick relatives and other children in the household. Kimane and Mturi (2001) show that general care-giving for sick relatives is part of the chores that are carried out by girls at home which lead to learner absenteeism from school. The absentees who are also young carers of the sick experience stress when given much work at school, yet a lot more is awaiting them at home (Malcom, Wilson, Davidson & Kirk, 2003; Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005).

5.1.2 LEARNERS HIDING IN RENTED HOUSES

The current study has revealed that there are learners who regularly absent themselves from school because they hide in the rented houses where they stay. On realizing that they have not done their homework these learners hide themselves. This finding is in line with Xala's (2006) assertion that some learners do not go to school particularly on days they did not manage to accomplish their assignments. In most cases, landlords do not stay at or close to the houses leased to students. As a result, there is no adult to ensure that these learners diligently attend school. On the other hand, these learners' parents stay far and nobody bothers to ensure that such learners regularly attend school. Mafa (2018) noted that poor parental support is a contributing factor to learner non-attendance of school. Some parents are not even aware that learners are missing some of the school days. When parents are not vigilant to that extent, it shows that they lack interest in the education of their children.

5.1.3 LACK OF SUPPORT FROM PARENTS

Other learners miss school regularly due to lack of support from parents who do not provide money for food, uniform and other needed essentials for learners' education. Such learners are sometimes sent home to collect money for school fees and are required to stay at home and not come to school until such money has been paid. Lack of parental support in these learners' education contributes a lot towards learner absenteeism from school. Rails back (2004) argues that there is a link between parental involvement in learners' education and attendance. Parents who help their children to do school work and even ask them about what was done at school sensitize learners about the importance of regular school attendance. Parents who care about education are able to follow their children's school work easily. Parental involvement dimensions were proved to be stronger predictors of school achievement. Children acquire a sense of knowledge and understanding of their parents' desired goals which are associated with school activities (Porumba, 2013). Furthermore, Sahin, Kilic and Arseven (2018) portray that lack of parental support demonstrates their disregard for education, and this appears to be a clear cause of learner absenteeism. Smiley (2012) shows that initiatives

such as the bursary scheme for orphaned learners in Lesotho secondary schools have partially improved access for orphans and vulnerable children.

In the current study, lack of parental involvement is a great problem. It was found that many parents are not at home with their children since some work in the factories. They leave home very early and come back very late tired from the day's work and they are never sure whether their children went to school or not. A similar finding was revealed by Railsback's (2004) who showed that some children pretend to go to school but do not reach school. This leads to both poor performance and learner absenteeism. A situation where learners bunk school and parents are not aware shows a negative influence in the learners' microsystem. Parents fail to do their duty to support their children's education because of poor vigilance. Roche, Ensminger and Cherlin (2007) posit that authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are associated with low academic achievement and higher levels of school problems. Thus such children create a negative influence on school activities.

5.1.4 INFLUENCE FROM NEIGHBOURHOOD

From the current study, it was established that some learners do not attend school regularly due to bad influences from the neighborhood. Teachers show that children from urban area are more on the street because they see their friends and age-mates washing cars and being given M30.00 per cleaned car. So they are attracted to such lifestyle and bunk school to wash cars to make money. Not only needy and vulnerable children are seen at such places but also those from rich families. Such unhealthy environment exists due to learners' lack of understanding of the importance of going to school regularly. Neighborhood safety is a concern for many students and that may have an impact on students' school attendance. According to Kearney (2008), a student living in a disorganized environment is also likely to be influenced by the conditions dictating the environment. Kearney shows that in South Africa for example, many schools fail to provide an adequately organized school day as sometimes teachers arrive late for school.

Recent research on chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh showed that the rate of violence and crime in a child's home neighborhood are other variables that predict the rate of absenteeism of students Deitrick, (2015). In addition, learners who attend school where buildings are not well repaired do not feel comfortable to go to such unattractive schools. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model explain show lack of interest and attachment to school leads to poor school attendance Lerner and William, (2006). The exosystem, which is one of the four spheres of Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic theory, affects an individual directly; for example, friends and neighbors Bronfenbrenner and Morris, (1998). Even though the individual does not play an active role in the exosystem, forces of this system, either positive or negative, will be influential to the individual Paquette and Ryan (2001). In addition, Warren and Knox (2000) show that irregular and unexpected behavior makes it difficult to predict and explain a typical behavior such as learner absenteeism.

5.1.5 CHILDREN FROM POVERTY-STRICKEN FAMILIES

Some children are found to miss school more often due to poverty. They do not have many of the school requirements. This situation, coupled with illiterate parents who do not value regular school attendance, makes learners to regularly absent themselves from school. The finding goes along with Moletsane (2013) who says poverty and changing of roles in families cause learner absenteeism that is why orphaned children miss school many times due to taking care of their siblings at home by trying to find what they can eat. In a study conducted in Tanzania, Bennell (2010) maintains that orphans of ten fail to go to school regularly due to lack of basic school-required necessities such as food, shoes and exercise books. Apart from that, some students absent themselves from school because of lack of materials needed for their learning. Materials referred to are books and stationery. Changing of roles in families causes learner absenteeism and this may include orphaned children taking care of their younger siblings. Such children miss school many times due to taking care of their sibling sat home by trying to find what they can eat.

The preceding paragraphs show that some learners absent themselves from school because of family and neighborhood activities. This is in line with Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem which shows linkages which take place between two or more settings containing the developing person. In this case the home environment influences the child's school attendance. Additionally, learners are unable to attend school because of family commitments such as looking after animals, preparing for funerals and collecting pension money for their grandparents. In the same breath, some teachers are aware of students who absent themselves from school due to factors at home. However, such teachers do not do anything to ease the situation. Thus the interaction between the home and the school is poor and does not help students to properly attend school.

5.1.6 LEARNERS WHO GO TO INITIATION SCHOOLS

The current study further revealed that initiation schools are some of the practices that attract learners. Some learners leave formal schools to join the initiation schools before the end of the school term and return to school afterwards. Many learners are not easily disciplined after they return from initiation school and teachers complain about their behavior. As Mohlaloka, Jacobs, and De Wet (2016) posit, many formal school teachers sweat to deal with the deviant behavior of boys from initiation schools. Such boys refuse to take part in class discussions, to answer questions in class, to do certain tasks given at school such as sweeping the classroom and they act in disdain towards female teachers and teachers who did not go for initiation. To avoid any punishment which may follow their bad style, boys from initiation school opt to absent themselves from school for some days. A similar situation was found by Mboweni, (2014) in the Bush buck ridge area, who revealed that both boys and girls did not to write the mid-year examination and went for initiation school. Parents supported that learners' culture is to be respected and initiation is part of learning so they should be allowed to go for initiation and later continue with academic learning.

5.1.7 LEARNER WHO LACK DISCIPLINE

The current study revealed that among the students at school, there are some who, due to lack of discipline, miss school regularly and such behavior disturbs not only teachers but also other learners. Chronic absenteeism has a prominent relationship with certain dangerous behaviors such as substance abuse and violence Ferrell, Nance and Torres (2013). The current study shows that boys who use drugs are among the learners who mostly miss school. These drug addicts often argue with teachers when they are to be disciplined and they mostly decide to stay at home when they realize that they are in trouble. That was proved by parents of learners from School A who showed that learners who have extra money buy useless materials such as drugs and they miss school regularly.

According to Kagema and Kakoiya (2018), absenteeism is a major area of in discipline among schools and mostly concerns educators and parents. In discipline is the foremost challenge faced by teachers worldwide. Findings of this study indicate that absenteeism and not finishing homework are prevalent in the participating schools. When learners are aware that the given work is not completed, they decide to stay in their rented houses hiding but claiming to be sick as one focus group participant in School C explained. Hogg and Reid (2006) in their study showed a positive correlation between academic performance and school attendance. To add to that, Maphosa (2011) asserts that learner absenteeism has taken center stage for a long time internationally. Teachers from three schools showed that boys who are drug addicts are not regularly at school. They are also not easy to discipline and argue with teachers especially young teachers. Such boys opt to miss some school days when they feel like they are not in a position to be disciplined by young teachers at school Eshetu, (2014).

5.2 MEASURES TAKEN BY SCHOOLS TO CURB ABSENTEEISM

The current study discovered that schools do not just look at learner absenteeism as a problem for them but there are some measures which they take to curb it. Most schools do not have policies with regard to learner absenteeism. All the measures are being

administered by teachers. Measures which are mostly found in the four visited schools are punishment of learners for missing school, asking and talking to learners about their problems and calling parents to school to discuss children`s school problems. The following section discusses the use of punishment to curb learner absenteeism.

5.2.1 USE OF PUNISHMENT TO CURB LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

The current study revealed that learners are punished for missing school, particularly if they do not give any reason for being absent. Different forms of punishment are used by different teachers depending on their choices. Preferred forms of punishment include corporal punishment, cleaning school premises or the pigsty and making learner`s squat for a certain time. All the given examples are administered by teachers and each uses his/her own discretion in deciding the type to administer for absenteeism. For example, Teacher 1 from school A stated that they opt to use corporal punishment because it saves both his time and other students` time so that he continues with the teaching.

In the current study, Mboweni (2014) shows that the use of corporal punishment at schools increases learner absenteeism because they stay at home every time they are given feedback of the tests since they know that when they have failed they are going to be brutally beaten by teachers. Furthermore, the current study found that a part from corporal punishment, there are other forms of punishment such as cleaning school buildings like the school hall or cleaning the surroundings. Buka from School B stated that they work hard at home and at school as they clean the pigsty when they have missed some school days. To avoid this hard

Work, Buka said he sometimes decides to absent himself from school and hide in rented houses where his friends are staying. According to the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) (2005:41), 38% of South African learners were engaged in some form of household labor. At some schools, learners are made to clean their classrooms and in such schools the attendance rate is low compared to those who do not do such work at school.

5.2.2 TALKING TO LEARNERS

Another way of curbing learner absenteeism is found to be talking to learners. Teachers call absentees to find out from them what causes regular absenteeism. That measure was found to have minimal impact because many learners do not relate their stories thoroughly. For example, Ntho, a learner from School A, said they were afraid that teachers may beat them when they explain reasons for being absent. This makes them not to feel free and to be honest with their situation. They therefore withhold some information from teachers. It takes time for them to relax in front of their teachers and explain what really matters in their lives at home and at school.

Teacher 3 in School D showed that other absentees are sent to lay counsellors who are based within the area where the school is. Lay counsellors are doing better to assist learners overcome their problems. Mubi (2002) posits that counselling assists learners to understand teachers and also helps learners to reduce stress levels. The understanding and reduction of stress happen gradually during the counselling process. The more learners share their problems with the counsellor, the more they get relieved from their stressing issues.

5.2.3 CALLING PARENTS TO SCHOOL TO DISCUSS CHILDREN`S SCHOOL PROBLEMS WITH TEACHERS

The current study found that in all the four schools, teachers have found it important to call parents to school to discuss learners` problems. Many parents appear to appreciate the initiative taken by teachers to assist learners. In such parents-teachers` meetings, the two parties discuss the problems and find solutions that may benefit learners. On the other hand, it has also been found that much as it is important to talk to parents in solving learners` problems, some parents are not interested in such activity. Sheldon (2009) posits that teachers` cooperation and affiliation with families is an important factor to increase learners` school attendance. Both parties monitor students` whereabouts from where they are. Teachers at school monitor students and parents at home do likewise. The school informs parents when learners are not present at school

and in that way parents are able to communicate which ever information in relation to their children. In this way parents are given a chance to monitor and supervise their children`s school attendance

Teachers showed that it is true they call parents to school to share their children`s work and behavior but other parents seem to be against that approach. Such parents are unwilling to help their children to come to school regularly yet teachers understand that it is their duty to make parents understand their responsibility in the education of children. So they have to continue to communicate children`s matters with parents. Popkin (2002) states that the skill of facilitating important messages through effective communication within the team enables all members to unleash their full potential in pursuit of a common vision and mission of excellence in teaching and learning.

5.3 MEASURES TAKEN BY PARENTS IN CURBING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

From the collected data it has been found that parents` contribution in curbing learner absenteeism is noticeable in the school environment. Five parents out of eight agreed that they are responsible in the education of their children. They are not only supposed to pay school fees but they also have to help learners understand what is expected at school. They supported the idea of reporting the absence of learners from school to teachers. Parents are expected to participate actively in their children`s improvement of behaviour towards school work especially in helping them to understand that they are duty-bound to attend school on daily basis as it is stipulated in Lesotho Education Act 2010 and in the regulations of every school.

5.3.1 PARENTS TAKE THEIR CHILDREN TO SCHOOL

Out of eight parents participating in the current study, six explained that they opted to take children to school to avoid getting phone calls telling them about the absence of children from school. Even though taking children to school seemed strenuous, it is helpful to learners because they arrive on time and have much time to do their school work. Balfanz and Byrnes (2018) show that even among learners with extremely poor

attendance, academic measures and credit accumulation increase when attendance improves. The other two parents who claimed not to afford to take learners to school supported the idea and understood that it is their responsibility to assist learners to be responsible too in their education. Moulding responsible learners leads to building a responsible society which will make a strong nation. Learners mostly respond better to positive rather than to negative behavioral management practices. Learners whose parents use warm connected monitoring style improve better than their counter parts. Such learners are likely to learn from their experiences and demonstrate appropriate behaviors Roggman, Boyce & Innocentia (2008).

5.3.2 MONITOR CHILDREN BY LIAISING WITH CLASS TEACHERS

Parents who participated in this study found it notable to improve means of communication with teachers in an effort to curb learner absenteeism. Parents are aware that having phone numbers of both class teachers and the principal is helpful so as to monitor learners` daily attendance. Three parents were concerned about their old fashioned cellular phones that they do not have modern phones which they see being used by young teachers and other young people. On the contrary, the other parents told them that what counts is being able to give the message not the model of phone. Being able to communicate with teachers is something worth-noting in the school situation.

Communication of parents and teachers could ease the work of all parties; parents, teachers and learners as well. Above all, phone calls are cheaper compared to travelling long distance to talk about what could have been communicated in a short time. As stated by Verma (2019), both parents and teachers are important role players in a child`s life. Furthermore, Clinton and Hattie (2013) emphasize the importance of parents` involvement in their children`s school work by making follow-ups and finding areas where learners meet challenges such as poor school attendance. Mesosystem comprises the link ages and processes taking place between two or more settings where the developing person is located; home and school. For example, what happens at school is influenced by the living conditions of a child at home. Parents of happy learners get

more information from their children because learners who are happy at home are even free to tell parents about parents` meetings to be held at their school.

Therefore, parents attending school conferences, meetings about learners` performance and school concerts are part of the mesosystem Bronfenbrenner & Morris (1998).

5.3.3 CO-WORKING WITH PARENTS NEAREST TO SCHOOL

The current study found that working harmoniously with other people is useful. Parents from far places appreciated that the parents can help them in many different activities which take place at school. All eight parents supported the idea of working together with parents in the nearby places to help learners to do their school work every day, especially attending school regularly and doing their assignments. One greatest challenge to children when they are far from their parents is to dodge their school work. In the absence of their parents, children have to know that there are other parents in the nearby places who are keeping a close eye on them to see whether they are doing their work or not. Learners need to be supervised every time in order to do their work perfectly. Those who are regularly absent from school are isolated and once they do not feel part of the school, their work deteriorates Modise, (2015). In such cases the nearby parents can help to find out what the learners` issues are and monitor not only their attendance but also their school work in general.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The study set out to address the following research objectives in relation to the factors that contribute to learner absenteeism in Lesotho secondary schools:

- Determining the categories of learners who are regularly absent from school;
- Investigating measures taken by schools to combat learner absenteeism; and
- Determining the role played by parents to curb learner absenteeism.

The following sections conclude the study in line with the study objectives. To begin with, categories of learners who are regularly absent from school will be presented.

5.4.1 CATEGORIES OF LEARNERS WHO ARE REGULARLY ABSENT FROM SCHOOL

The first objectives ought to investigate categories of learners who are regularly absent from school. The study revealed that categories of learners who regularly miss school are boys and girls doing different family activities, girls who stay in rented houses, learners from unhealthy neighborhoods, those from poverty-stricken families, ill-disciplined learners and orphans.

Both boys and girls who attend school are involved in many family activities which hinder their smooth school attendance. Learners are allocated a lot of work at home which does not allow them to do their school work well. This work includes looking after animals, collecting pension money for their grandparents and making preparations for family members' funerals. All learners have to attend school regularly for them to follow the structured work which is done at school. Teaching and learning are intertwined so well that when the link is broken, either the learner or instructor will be disturbed.

In the same vein, there are learners who originate from far places and stay in rented houses located closer to the school compound. Girls living in rented houses are not closely monitored because the landlords do not stay in the same compound with students. The landlords are not taking any responsibility of showing the girl learners the importance of doing their school work while staying in rented houses.

Another group of learners that regularly absent themselves are those living in unhealthy environments such as poverty-stricken neighborhoods. This group of learners does not do its school work successfully due to the situation around them. Learners from poverty-stricken families do not attend school regularly because they do not have needed school materials. In the absence of such learning materials, learners are asked to stay at home until they buy them. Ill-disciplined learners are also fond of absenting themselves from school. Teachers are aware of such kind of learners and how troublesome they are. In such situations, teachers and schools try hard to curb such behaviors but to no avail. Learners who are hard to discipline make teachers feel

discouraged when they try to apply disciplinary measures on them because they do not comply. In that way there is no improvement in their school life. The lack of improvement makes them decide to spend some days away from school, hence regular absence from school.

Orphaned learners are among groups of learners who often miss school. It is revealed in the study that most orphans stay with relatives such as grandparents and do many family chores before and after school. Being very tired from family and school work, orphaned children opt to miss some of the school days as a way of trying to get rest.

5.4.2 MEASURES TAKEN BY SCHOOLS TO COMBAT LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

The second objective was to investigate measures taken by schools to combat learner absenteeism. The conclusion made includes use of punishment, talking to learners and calling parents to school. Teachers punish learners for regular absence from school. The administered punishments are in most cases those that humiliate learners. Punishments applied on learners are: making learners to squat, whipping them with a stick and kneeling on the floor, to mention but a few. Apart from punishing learners, teachers call learners to share their problems and find out why they miss school in such high rates. After talking to teachers, advice may be given to assist learners in their problems. Where possible, parents are called to school by teachers to discuss learners' school matters. Having shared the issue with other teachers, the principal is informed so as to allow teachers to call concerned parents to school for discussion. Parents are called either in groups or individually to find from them whether they are aware of their children's problem of missing school many times. It is from this kind of discussion where parents find the true pictures of their children's school attendance. The ideas shared will pave direction for all involved parties.

5.4.3 MEASURES TAKEN BY PARENTS TO CURB LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

On the last objective meant to investigate the role played by parents to curb learner absenteeism, it is concluded that some parents take their children to school every day to

ensure that they attend regularly. Closely related to the above, it is concluded that parents have phone numbers of class teachers to ease communication whenever there is a need. This helps learners to observe school regulations especially those related to regular school attendance when they know that their parents would be given a report on their attendance. There are parents who stay in far places where it is difficult for them to monitor learners to ensure regular school attendance and other school matters. It is therefore concluded that those parents from far places may seek assistance from the nearby parents for monitoring of learners.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, discussions and conclusions made in this study, there are some issues that need to be improved to aid learners' regular school attendance. The recommendations are made in relation to four groups, namely teachers, parents, learners and the Ministry of Education and Training.

5.5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS

The following recommendations are made in relations to teachers in the schools:

- Teachers should be faithful in the use of attendance registers as this helps to see how often learners attend school and classes.
- Teachers should strengthen their relations with parents as away to ease their work with learners. Smooth communication between parents and teachers could maintain
- Strong relations for the purpose of assisting learners to ensure they attend school more regularly.

5.5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS TO PARENTS

As parents are vital in ensuring their children acquire quality education, the following recommendations could assist them to play a more meaningful role in curbing absenteeism in school:

- Parents have to assume the irresponsibility by talking to their children to show them the importance of education more than it being their right.
- Parents should not wait to be reminded by teachers when they have been called to school to talk about learners' schoolwork. They should report at school at the earliest opportunity.
- Furthermore, parents should provide all the support children need for better education. They should also show interest in learners' work as a way of encouraging them to put more effort on their education.
- For better education and best results, parents should work cooperatively with teachers instead of looking at them as enemies of their children at school. The more they work harmoniously with the teachers, the more their children will learn from them and become more responsible citizens.

5.5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEARNERS

Learners have a responsibility to follow the rules which are meant to help them develop into responsible citizens who can contribute meaningfully to their nations. The following recommendations could ensure more regular attendance:

- Learners should look at their education in a positive way. Whenever their teachers give them school work to be done either at school or at home, learners must take every piece of work seriously. In that way they will work hard and find school work interesting. With interest in their school work, there would be no need for them to bunk school as the current study found that some learners absent themselves from school when they have not done their homework.

- Learners should consider their teachers as their best helpers who give them the best direction in the education field.

5.5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING (MOET)

The Ministry, as the main overseer of education in Lesotho, should also implement a few policies to deal with learner absenteeism. These recommendations could be helpful in achieving this:

- It is recommended that there should be clear school and national policies with regard to learner absenteeism in schools to avoid confusion of different measures which are used by individual teachers.
- Annual workshops for teachers should be organized by MOET where teachers will be refreshed and empowered to deal with different cases related to learner absenteeism.
- MOET has to see to it that every school has a social worker to reduce the load from teachers who double in teaching and counselling at the same time.

5.5.5 SUMMARY

Chapter five presented a discussion of the findings and drew conclusions based on the entire study. Lastly, recommendations for parents, learners, teachers and the Ministry of Education and Training were made. The key findings show that learners do not go to school regularly due to different reasons such as being involved in different activities at home, being punished at school and having no support from parents. It has been found that parents do not fully honour their responsibilities and obligations in ensuring quality education for their children. Some parents appear to lack interest in their children's education hence offer less support. Teachers are not left behind as it was found that they contribute to learner absenteeism by administering punishment to learners. As a result, MOET and schools need to draw policies in relation to learner absenteeism since regular school attendance is vital for children's educational development.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FOCUS-GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1. Please say which categories of learners are regularly absent from school?
2. Would you please share with me why learner absenteeism is a problem for schools?
3. How can the problem of learner absenteeism from school be described?
4. May you please say which measures are taken by your school to combat absenteeism?
5. What would you suggest be done by schools to curb absenteeism?
6. What could be the role of parents in curbing learner absenteeism?
7. Please describe what parents do to curb learners' absenteeism.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. To what extent is learner absenteeism a problem in your school?
2. In your observation which categories of learners are regularly absent from school?
3. Please explain to me factors that make learners to be absent from school?
4. Why is learner absenteeism my problem?
4. Please describe school policies on learner absenteeism.
5. Please explain measures used by your school to curb learner absenteeism.
6. In your opinion how effective are the measures used to curb learner absenteeism in your school?
7. Could you say what role is played by parents to curb learner absenteeism?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

1. Please discuss the issues that surround your child`s absenteeism from school.
2. Would you please say why do you think your child is regularly away from school?
3. Please say your perceptions on learner absenteeism.
4. May you please say what you do when you realize that your child is regularly absent from school?
5. As a parent, would you say how you think you can help your child to attend school regularly?

APPENDIX D

REQUEST LETTER FROM THE RESEARCHER TO THE PARENTS

I, Johanna Mokhorro, am conducting a study research on Learner absenteeism from school. The main aim of my study is to investigate factors which contribute to learners` absenteeism from schools. I am, therefore, writing a letter requesting you and your child to participate in this study.

You are assured that the information that you will give will be treated confidentially. Names of participants will not berevealed in the reports and descriptions will bed one in such a way that they will not reveal your identity.

You are then required to sign below if you agree to participate in this study.

Yours faithfully

Johanna Mokhorro

Participant`s name and surname.....

Signature

APPENDIX E

CONSENT FOR M

I, Johanna M. Mokhorro, am conducting a study on Learners` absenteeism from schools. The purpose of this study is to determine factors that contribute to learners` absenteeismin Lesotho secondary schools. This study is in partial fulfilment of the Master`s degree requirements. You are therefore requested to voluntarily participate in this study by responding to set interview questions.

The researcher will ensure that your responses will only be used for the purpose of the study andwill not put you in any harm and your identity will be kept strictly secure.

You may not benefit directly from participating in this particular study. However, this study may assist us to better understand the impact of learner absenteeism from schools with regard to both learning and teaching.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign on the space provided below.

Participant`s signature

Date

APPENDIX F

LETTER OF REQUEST TO PRINCIPALS

SemonkongHighSchool
P.O. Box 42
Semonkong120

DearSir/Madam

LETTER OF REQUEST FROM THE RESEARCHER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

I wish to apply for permission to be allowed to carryout a research at your school. I am Johanna Mokhorro, a part-time Masters student at the National University of Lesotho (NUL) under the supervision of Dr. Matheolane who is a lecturer in the Department of Educational Foundations. My supervis or and I request the participation of teachers at your school in the study titled: Factors which contribute to learner absenteeismin Lesotho schools.

The aim of the study is to investigate factors which contribute to learner absenteeism from schools. We believe that responses from your school will be of great significance in this particular study. The interview may last for at least forty minutes. Furthermore, the study will help the Ministry of Education and Training to review the curriculum offered to teachers in colleges and find out to what extent the current curriculum equips teachers to deal with learners of different characters and personalities.

Yours faithfully

JOHANNA MOKHORRO

APPENDIX G

LETTER OF REQUEST TO PARENTS

LETTER OF REQUEST FROM THE RESEARCHER TO PARENTS

I wish to make a humble request to be allowed to carry out a research at your child's school. I am Johanna Mokhorro, a part-time Masters student at the National University of Lesotho (NUL) under the supervision of Dr. Matheolane who is a lecturer in the Department of Educational Foundations. My supervisor and I request for participation of some children at your child's school in the study titled: Factors which contribute to learner absenteeism in Lesotho schools.

The aim of the study is to investigate factors which contribute to learner absenteeism from schools. We believe that responses from the children will be of great significance in this particular study. The interview may last for at least forty minutes. Furthermore, the study will help the Ministry of Education and Training to review the curriculum which is offered to teachers in colleges and find out to what extent the current curriculum equips teachers to deal with learners of different characters and personalities.

Yours faithfully

JOHANNA MOKHORRO