Investigating mitigating strategies that SMT could use to enhance learners' academic performance in their final year of LGCSE: A case of Phokeng High School

by

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Declaration

I, undersigned, declare that this dissertation titled, **Investigating mitigating strategies that SMT could use to enhance learners' academic performance in their final year of LGCSE: A case of Phokeng High School,** is my own original work. I further declare that this dissertation has not been previously submitted at this or any other university and that all the quotes and sources used have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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May 2023

Certification

This is to certify that this dissertation has been read and approved as having met the requirements of the Faculty of Education, at the National University of Lesotho, for the award of a Master of Education (M. ED.) degree in Educational Management, Leadership and Policy Studies.

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I extend my sincere appreciation and gratitude to all the people who contributed towards the completion of this study.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Mona Mafereka, I will always love you Mofokeng for your support my dreams no matter how crazy they sound. When I started this journey, we had just lost our precious boy, and I needed a positive distraction. I enrolled with NUL to keep my mind busy, and without hesitation, you gave me your support. God bless you.

Abstract

Education is significant in the lives of human beings. Secondary education level is a bridge to accessing tertiary education, and is a key determinant of national development and individual liberation. Therefore, academic performance at secondary level is of great interest to the nation. However, Phokeng High School (PHS) persistently produces poor academic performance of learners. Therefore, the current study investigated the school-based contributory factors to poor academic performance of learners at PHS, and explored the mitigating strategies that the Senior Management Team (SMT) could employ to alleviate this poor academic performance. The current research used a qualitative approach, as it allows participants to express their experiences, and case study design to explore the views of different categories of role-players within PHS. Five members of the SMT, six teachers, three parents and four learners were purposively selected to participate in the study. The information was gathered through semi-structured interviews and analysed by thematic analysis technique. The study revealed contributory factors to poor learners' academic performance and the possible remedies to the problem. The study revealed the following as the contributory factors to the poor academic performance of PHS learners: breaching school policies, lack of learners' commitment to their studies, lack of teachers' commitment, limited learners' academic guidance, unfavourable working conditions, ineffective school board, bullying and banning of the use of cell phones or any gadgets on the school premises. Adherence to the school goals and policies, increased role-players' collaboration and increased support to the teaching and learning were revealed to be possible mitigation strategies. The study recommends that the SMT should at all times engage all the relevant role-players, particularly teachers and parents, while developing and implementing the school master plan. The study further recommends that the SMT, as the instructional leaders, should provide support to teachers as important role-players in the provision of quality education at PHS. This suggested support could be in the form of classroom observations and the provision of timely and constructive feedback, prioritising the teaching and learning materials and staff development programmes that will not only empower teachers with the recommended teaching approaches but further motivate them.

Keywords: academic performance, school-based factors, secondary school

Contents

List of figures and tables

List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
GoL	Government of Lesotho
HoD	Head of Department
ILT	Instructional Leadership Theory
LGCSE	Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training
PHS	Phokeng High School
SB	School Board
SMT	School Management Team
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations

Chapter 1: Orientation of study

1.1. Introduction

According to the United Nations (UN, 1948) through Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), education is a fundamental human right. This article is adopted and enacted in the constitutions of all countries that subscribe to the UN including Lesotho. The Lesotho Constitution (1993), Section 28, stipulates that education shall be accessible to all. As a consequence, Lesotho's education system is organised into three subdivisions: primary, secondary and tertiary education to develop different cognitive levels. Each subdivision serves a distinct but related purpose of fully developing a responsible and productive citizen. However, this study is grounded mainly on secondary education which serves as a bridge between primary and tertiary education. According to the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET, 2009), secondary education builds up from 10 years of basic education which runs from Grade 1 to 10. It takes two years and serves a pivotal role in guaranteeing entry into some vocational and tertiary institutions. However, it should be noted that secondary education is not only meant to prepare learners for tertiary education but also for the corporate world hence a nationwide interest in the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE) results. Secondary examination results are perceived as key determinants of national development and individual liberation (Namale et al., 2021). A learner who sits for school leaving examinations and scores below the minimum standard in secondary education is considered as showing low academic performance (Asikhia, 2010). Poor learners' academic performance results in disputes and despair amongst the stakeholders, especially parents, teachers and proprietors. Poor learners' academic performance does not only stress learners and their parents but also affects society at large because effective education is equated to societal development (Nghambi, 2014). These heated debates often lead to disagreements about who should be blamed for learners' poor academic performance. Thus, some blame the learners themselves, others the government while most of the blame is shifted to teachers (Mphale & Mhlauli, 2014). PHS is one of the worst performing schools in Lesotho and, as a concerned teacher, I became motivated to conduct this study because I am intrigued to explore in-depth school-based

contributory factors to poor academic performance of learners sitting for LGCSE. My motivation also speared the need to investigate the mitigating strategies that the SMT could employ to enhance the academic success of the learners. With the above in context, this chapter presents the background of the study, the research problem, research questions, research aim, research objectives, the significance of the study, theoretical stance of the study, research design and methodology, population, ethical considerations, the value of the study, the layout of this chapter and the conclusion.

1.2.   Background of the study

Learners' academic performance in Lesotho is measured by the grades each learner attains per subject during the final year of the LGCSE examinations. The grades are divided into three categories, higher grades (credits, A*-C), middle grades (pass, D - E), and low grades (ungraded, F-U). For learners to be admissible in institutions of higher learning, for example, they are expected to have obtained a minimum required credit average. With huge expenses incurred by parents, the Government of Lesotho (GoL) and other non-governmental organisations, schools find themselves under tremendous pressure to produce desired results (Lekhetho, 2003). Since there is much emphasis on the quality of learners produced in schools, the above, therefore, prompts different stakeholders to scrutinise individual school academic performance (Mphale & Mhlauli, 2014).

The concern noted by some stakeholders is that poor academic performance of learners in some Lesotho secondary schools constantly reoccurs despite the GoL's attempt to support the provision of education (Letsie, 2019). Irrespective of GoL spending estimated to be around 9.2 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), about 8% of learners who enrol in Grade 8 pass LGCSE, and very few qualify for university entry (government gazette, 2016). This is continuously happening regardless of studies conducted in Lesotho that attempted to intervene (Lekhetho 2003, 2021; Letsie, 2019), and PHS is not an exemption in this situation.

PHS is an Anglican church-owned school in one of the central districts in Lesotho. Its population is approximately five hundred and thirty-three (533). It is surrounded by other public and church-owned secondary schools. Among roughly 280 secondary schools

sitting for LGCSE in Lesotho, PHS is ranked amongst worst performing schools. From the year 2018 to 2020, PHS was ranked between 210 and 260 (Examination Council of Lesotho Performance Report, 2018-2021).

In the district where PHS is located, it is one of the lowest ranked schools. Among roughly 40 secondary schools in this district, from 2018 to 2020, PHS was ranked between 20 and 35 (Education Office Report, 2018-2021). PHS grades percentage compared with those of four neighbouring high schools: Bataung, Bakoena, Bakhatla, and Bakubung, shows that the majority of learners in PHS score low in high grades (A*-C). For instance, as shown in Table 1 below, in the years 2020, 2019, and 2018, PHS averaged only 8.46%, 23.86%, and 21.77% in grades A*-C, with most learners clustered in both middle and lower grades.

Table 1: Phokeng High School grades (%)

Year	U (%)	E (%)	D (%)	A*-C (%)
2020	23.2	42.01	26.33	8.46
2019	12.18	34.52	29.44	23.86
2018	17.98	34.7	25.55	21.77

Figure 1: Comparison of % grades over the years 2018, 2019 and 2020
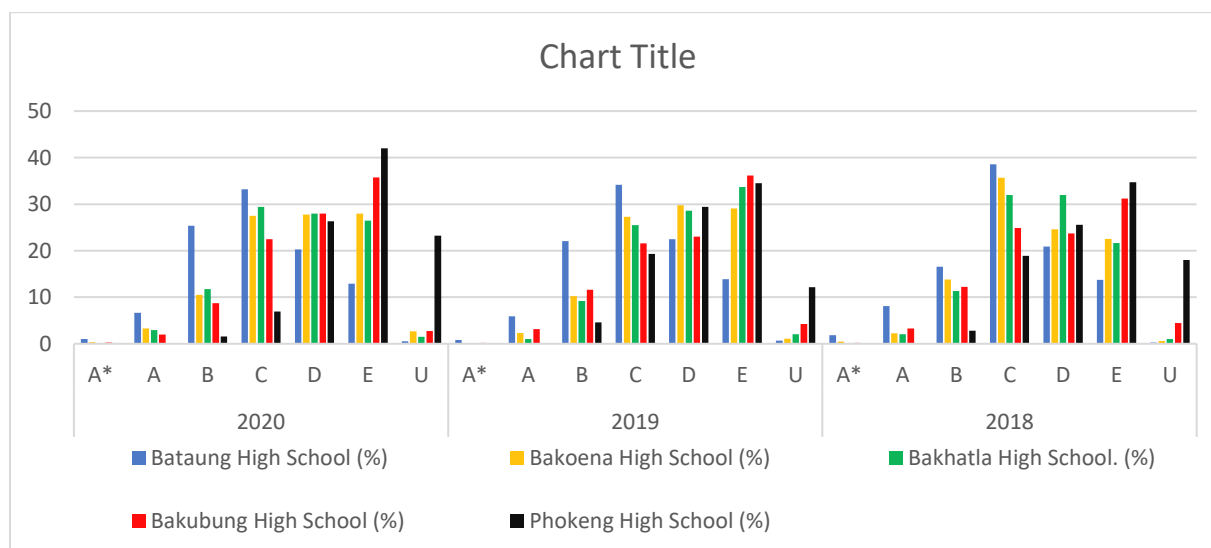
As demonstrated in Table 1 and Figure 1, PHS is one of the worst-performing compared with other neighbouring schools. Comparatively, the majority of learners score low grades. As illustrated in Figure 1 for the past three years, the majority of grades learners obtained are grades D-U.

Since it is undoubtedly vivid that there is chronic and consistent poor academic performance of learners at PHS, this study intends to investigate in-depth school-based factors that contribute to the reported poor academic performance and the mitigating strategies that SMT can employ to enhance the academic performance of the learners at PHS.

Despite the fact that in Lesotho the School Board (SB) is at the helm of school governance while the principal is responsible for the daily operations of the school (Government Gazette, 2010), the study mainly focuses on the SMT because, in the context of secondary education, they are designated with the oversight responsibility (Sultana, 2014). Their duties range from developing teachers to overseeing the entire teaching and learning processes (Sultana, 2014). PHS SMT consists of the principal, deputy principal and heads of departments (HoD). As depicted in Figure 2, the HoDs, according to Tlali and Matete (2020), assist the principals in monitoring daily academic activities of the schools. As such, they are responsible for the attainment of activities across their relevant sections that build up to attainment of their departmental objectives, which translate to realising the school vision and mission. As a result, the role of the SMT is to plan, organize, direct, co-ordinate and control the resources and the different processes within the school, including the decision-making and problem-solving processes (Firmina, 2015). The SMT is expected to interact with teachers, create new knowledge with experiences, and utilize and integrate knowledge created to enable the attainment of overall school success (Bargau, 2015). SMT, as a consequence, is at the core of school management and can immensely contribute towards creating and sustaining a competitive school culture to ensure attainment of the school objectives. For instance, as shown in the PHS organogram in Figure 2 below; the SB is at the top of the organisational structure, followed by the SMT consisting of the principal, deputy principal and HoDs

(mathematics and science, social-sciences, and commercial studies).Then the teachers, learners and parents complete the structure.

Figure 2: Phokeng High School's organogram
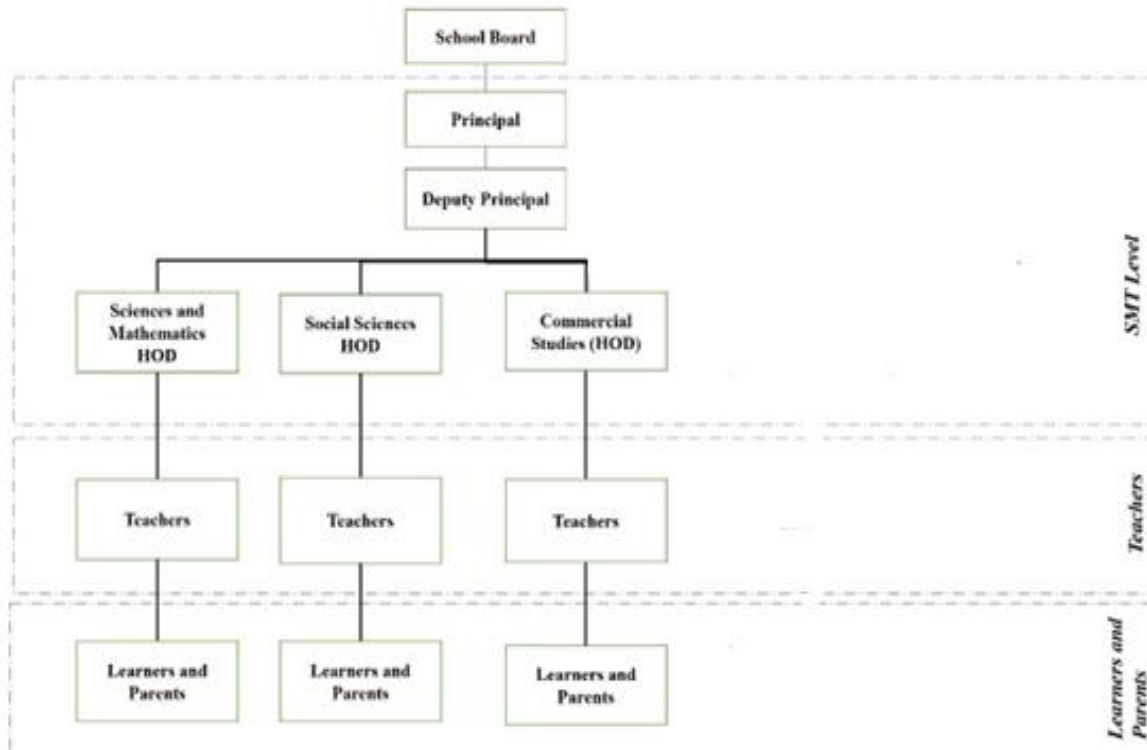
1.3. Problem statement

Different stakeholders are often troubled by learners' poor academic performance (Hlojeng & Makura, 2022; Lekhetho, 2003; 2021; Letsie, 2019), and the same is observed at PHS. There is a serious outcry amongst parents, learners, teachers and other stakeholders regarding the consistently poor academic performance of learners at PHS. This type of performance at PHS lowers the self-esteem of the learners and causes significant stress to teachers, parents, the proprietor and the district education office (DEO). This is evident because since I joined the teaching profession in 2008, and reside in one of the villages near PHS, teachers, learners and parents in PHS are demotivated due to the persistently poor academic performance of learners. Also, the district education office through its inspectorate personnel, are regular guests at PHS. This chronic and habitual low performance has escalated so much that PHS is no longer the school of

choice for Grade 8 learners. The study, as a consequence, attempts to establish the underlying school-based causes of poor learners' academic performance at PHS and suggest possible remedies that the SMT, as the pivotal body in school administration, could use to improve this worsening situation.

1.4. Research questions

The study attempts to answer the main overarching research question along with additional subsidiary questions as presented in the sections below.

1.4.1. Main research question

1. What are the school-based factors that contribute to the low academic performance of learners in PHS, and which are the mitigating strategies that the SMT can use to enhance the learners' academic performance?

1.4.2. Subsidiary research questions

1. Which factors does the SMT considers as the major causes of poor academic performance at PHS?
2. What factors do PHS teachers perceive as the major factors to poor academic performance compared to other neighbouring schools?
3. What factors do parents of PHS perceive as contributory factors to the poor academic performance?
4. Which are the major factors that PHS learners consider as contributors to the poor academic performance?
5. Which mitigating strategies might be used by SMT of PHS to enhance the learners' academic performance?

1.5. Study aim

The aim of this research is to investigate and document the opinions of SMT, teachers, parents and learners concerning school-based contributory factors to the poor academic performance of learners at PHS and to explore the mitigating strategies that the SMT could implement to alleviate this challenge.

1.5.1. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1.	To investigate the major factors that PHS learners consider as contributors to poor academic performance at their school.
2.	To explore factors that parents of PHS perceive as contributory factors to the poor academic performance of learners.
3.	To examine factors that PHS teachers perceive as the major factors contributing to the poor academic performance of learners.
4.	To examine factors that the SMT considers as the major causes of the poor academic performance at PHS.
5.	To assess mitigating strategies that might be used by SMT of PHS in enhancing learners' performance.

1.5.2. Significance of the study

A study of this magnitude is likely to impact on the practices related to the school-based factors that contribute to the poor academic performance of learners at PHS, and suggest the strategies that SMT can employ to enhance academic performance. It is hoped that if the recommendations emerging from the study could be implemented at PHS and school similar to PHS, a new culture could emerge leading to a significant turnaround in the schools' academic achievements.

### 1.6.	Summary of the Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Instructional Leadership Theory (ILT) which originated around the 1960s (Hallinger, 2007). It was introduced in school leadership around the 1970s but showed its prominence around the 1980s (Hallinger, 2007; Hassan et al., 2019). The theory became dominant around the 1980s as an intervention tool that was used in low-performing schools in the northern parts of America (Hallinger, 2007; Hassan et al., 2019; Hompashe, 2018). This theory was developed with the traditional notion that it is the core responsibility of the SMT to impact the learners' learning (Hallinger, 2007). ILT is characterised by Brolund (2016) as encompassing the daily activities of SMT, which

include, among others, the administrative roles, teaching, provision and allocation of instructional resources for efficient running of the school. Chabalala and Naidoo (2021) further define it as learning leadership because its main emphasis is on the academic performance of the learners. Through its lens, the researcher engaged with the SMT, teachers, parents and learners through face-to-face in-depth interviews in not only determining the core school-based factors that contribute to learners' poor academic performance at PHS but also assessing strategies that SMT may employ to address the challenge.

1.7. Brief preview of research design and methodology

This section involves a step-by-step explanation of how the current study was carried out. In this section, issues pertaining to the research paradigm, approach, design, data collection and analysis techniques are discussed.

1.7.1. Research paradigm: Interpretivism

According to Davies and Fisher (2018) and Kivunja and Kujini (2017), a paradigm is a basic set of beliefs that dictates how what is investigated should be studied. This study is anchored on the interpretivism paradigm. Unlike the positivism paradigm which is objective, the interpretivism paradigm is subjective and holds that there are multiple realities generated through human interactions and interpretations (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Interpretivism works towards comprehending the opinions of the role-players at PHS in relation to this persistently poor academic performance through asking questions with the aim of gathering their opinions and understanding their experiences (Rahman, 2017).

1.7.2. Research Approach

The study adopted a qualitative research approach over a quantitative research design. The qualitative research approach is an inductive process where a series of conversations are used to get to the core issues of the matter in question (Maxwell, 2013). Unlike quantitative research approach, the qualitative research approach seeks to understand a complex real-life problem in a given context. Hence the researcher created

the environment where the participants were able to express themselves regarding the complex nature of the contributory school-based factors to poor academic performance so that she could fully understand these complex issues and suggest a remedy (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research approach relies heavily on words and descriptions and includes data about participants' needs and behaviour patterns (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). It seems qualitative research design is a systematic way of understanding some complex issues in society from the participants' point of view and finding the solution to the problems through direct interaction with the specific participants.

1.7.3. Research design: a case study

This study employed a case study research design. A case study is defined as a qualitative research design in which the researcher uses sources of information such as interviews to understand a particularly complex real-life current case (Green et al., 2022). In this case study, the researcher focused on the small scope, PHS, and interacted with different categories of participants; the SMT, parents, teachers and learners, to gather detailed information regarding the school-based factors contributing to the poor academic performance of learners, and the remedy that could help improve the learners' academic performance. As the result, the researcher attained detailed information which helped with the holistic understanding of the phenomena (Green et al., 2022).

1.7.4. Data generation tools

This study used face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews to generate detailed data. The face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interview technique, unlike structured with closed-ended questions, is open-ended, (Gill et al., 2008) and enabled the researcher to have a detailed conversation with the participants. The semi-structured interviews allowed the SMT, teachers, parents and learners to freely express themselves while answering the overarching research question (see 1.4.1). The SMT, teachers and learners' interviews were conducted in English whereas the parents' interviews were conducted in Sesotho.

1.6.1.1 Population

PHS has a population of approximately five hundred and thirty-three (533). This consists of about five hundred (500) learners, twenty-three (23) teachers (14 permanently employed while 9 are privately engaged), five (5) SMT members, and five other staff members (the secretary, 2 security guards, a cleaner and a gardener).

1.6.1.2 Participants selection

The study employed the purposive sampling technique to select the sample within the target population of five hundred and thirty-three (533). The decision concerning the selection of the sample was made by the researcher. The role-players who were considered in this study were those who were well articulated and had detailed information concerning the practices and activities within PHS that may contribute to the poor academic performance of learners. They were also able to articulate the strategies that the SMT could use to improve the academic performance (Gaganpreet, 2017; Palinkas et al., 2013) at the school. These participants included the members of the SMT, teachers, parents and Grade 10 and 11 learners (see Section 3.7. in Chapter 3).

1.7.5. Data Analysis

The thematic analysis technique was used to analyse information generated through semi-structured interviews. In this technique, the researcher thinks deeply about the information, interprets it and finds the significant meaning and implication of the patterns that are identified (Clarke & Braun, 2017). According to Vaismoradi et al. (2013), in the process of thematic analysis, information generated is broken down into themes to which descriptive treatment shall be applied.

1.8. Integrity of the study

Integrity of the research is about protecting and avoiding exploitation of the participants through observing the ethical and trustworthiness issues (Corea & Molligoda, 2017). Ethical considerations and trustworthiness issues were observed in this study, as explained below.

1.8.1. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations ensure that the researcher follows the procedural integrity that guides the research (Mwita, 2022). For this study I submitted the proposal to my supervisor, then I was given an introductory letter from the National University of Lesotho in the Department of Educational Foundations. Upon receipt of this letter, I attached my request letter and submitted the two letters to the education office which issued an endorsement letter which I then presented to PHS requesting permission to conduct the study. To ensure there was consent from the participants to take part in this research, I approached them in a respectful and professional manner, gave them a clear explanation of how informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity were to be observed. This is further discussed in Section 3.9.1. Additionally, the study was subjected to Turnitin for plagiarism check.

1.8.2. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness consists of the steps taken to proof to the readers that the findings of a study are legitimate (Dludla, 2020). The elements that complement trustworthiness include: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014).Thus, this study observed these elements of trustworthiness (see Section 3.9.2).

1.9.   Limitations of the study

This study lacks generalizability because data generation was confined to PHS only (Roller& Lavrakas, 2015; Mwita, 2022). As a result, only secondary schools that share similar characteristics with PHS can benefit from the findings. The other limitation of this study is that the data is obscured (Mwita, 2022), and the information was only generated from four categories of role-players (the SMT, teachers, parents and learners), leaving out the views and opinions of the SB and the DEO. The fact that face-to-face interviews were conducted could mean that some teachers withheld some information. In addition, the study used only one method of data generation, semi-structured interviews. The use of other techniques would have unleashed some of the information that may have been left out during the interviews.

1.10. Layout of Chapters

The study has a title page, acknowledgments page, abstract, table of contents, the main chapters, the references and the appendices.

1: Orientation of the study

This chapter outlines the introduction, the background of the study, the problem statement, the research questions, the study aim, the research objectives, the significance of the study, the theoretical framework, the research design and methodology, the limitations of the study, the layout of chapters and the summary of chapter one.

2: Theoretical framework and Literature review

The chapter presents the theoretical framework and the review of literature which presents the researched school-based factors that relate to the poor academic performance of learners in different contexts and the academic performance enhancing strategies.

3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter presents the introduction, research paradigm, research approach, research design, data tools, population, participants' selection, data analysis, integrity of the study, limitations of the study and layout of the chapters respectively.

4: Data analysis and results

Data is analysed in this chapter and the results are presented. This is done through the thematic data analysis technique.

5: Findings, recommendations and conclusion

This chapter summarises the major findings, which are categorized into SMT and teacher factors, learner factors and school environment factors. The chapter ends with the recommendations, implications for further research and the conclusion.

1.11. Chapter summary

Persistently poor academic performance of learners in secondary schools is a major concern as it denies learners entry to tertiary institutions as already stated, and it causes tremendous stress among different stakeholders. Persistently poor academic performance hampers the economic progress of the country hence hindering the development and liberation of a nation. It also gives the school a bad reputation, demotivates teachers and lowers learners' self-esteem.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1. Introduction

The factors contributing to the chronic poor academic performance of learners may be embedded within the daily practices and among the role-players in the schools hence the study aims to investigate the opinions of SMT, teachers, parents and learners concerning school-based factors that contribute to the poor academic performance of learners at Phokeng High School (PHS). This challenge of poor academic performance of the learners and possible strategies that could be used by the SMT to improve the learners' performance can be viewed from different perspectives; hence the theoretical framework has been used to guide the current study (Heale, 2019; Sinclair, 2007). The Instructional Leadership Theory (ILT) therefore underpins and guides the current study.

The discussion begins with a detailed description of the ILT as a theoretical lens for this study. It is viewed in terms of its definition, origin, objectives, justification and summary. Then a review of related literature follows. The literature review is divided into three main sections. The first section lists and defines the operational terms. The subsequent sections deal with the critical review of factors that contribute to learners' poor academic performance and the strategies that the SMT could employ to enhance the academic performance of the learners.

2.2. Theoretical framework

2.2.1. Instructional Leadership Theory

ILT is defined by Belliabas, et al. (2021) as the process that guides and influences the curriculum and all other teaching and learning processes. The SMT, who are the instructional leaders, should focus on incepting a positive school climate that will inform excellent teaching and learning processes (Belliabas et al., 2021). The implication is that SMT should work collaboratively with teachers and other relevant stakeholders to create an enabling environment for effective teaching and learning experiences (Hompashe, 2018). Since SMT as instructional leaders are the designers, evaluators, integrators and facilitators of desirable outcomes in the school context (Hompashe, 2018), they should at all times direct their full attention to the core school business (Shaked, 2020). Thus, they

are expected to perform an array of activities including visiting the classrooms for observations, provide constructive feedback and facilitate the procurement of necessary teaching and learning resources to enhance the instructional process. Taking classroom observations for example, in a study conducted in Turkey, it was revealed that observations are used to strengthen the individual teacher's pedagogical praxis in an effort to meet the diverse needs of learners (Belliabas et al., 2021). Drawing from the above arguments, ILT can be explained as the school-based daily activities performed by SMT that focus mainly on supporting and improving the teaching and learning processes for improved learners' academic performance.

According to Ng (2019), ILT could be divided into two notions; narrow and broad. The narrow concept is where the SMT actions are directly linked to teaching and learning, such as conducting classroom observations, while the broad concept includes all leadership activities that indirectly affect learners' learning such as the creation and nurturing of school culture and timetabling procedures (Ng, 2019). Since this study seeks to unearth the school-based factors that contribute to the persistently poor academic performance of the learners, and explore a possible remedy, a broad approach to ILT is used. ILT guides the researcher to look into activities within the school that have a direct and indirect impact on the learners' academic performance, and possible remedies.

2.2.2. Origins of the theory

ILT originated in the 1960s (Hallinger, 2007). It was introduced in school leadership in the 1970s but showed its prominence around the 1980s (Hallinger, 2007; Hassan et al., 2019). In the 1980s, many researchers revealed that the instructional leaders (SMTs) in most high-performing schools give more attention to the curriculum and instructional processes (Chabalala & Naidoo, 2021; Hompashe, 2018). This led to the popularity of ILT in the 1980s as an essential instrument to eradicate the exponentially dropping academic performance of learners in schools in the northern parts of America (Hallinger, 2007; Hassanet al., 2019; Hompashe, 2018).

2.2.3. Models of Instructional Leadership Theory

In the years 1985, 1990 and 1996, Hallinger and Murphy, Murphy and Weber respectively, developed and modified instructional leadership models with clear functions and roles (Hallinger, 2007; Hompashe, 2018).These are unpacked and discussed below.

Hallinger and Murphy's Instructional Leadership Model (1985)

The Hallinger and Murphy 1985 model has three main components explaining the three main SMT roles for realisation of school overall objectives (Hallinger, 2007; Hompashe, 2018; Shava et al., 2021). The Hallinger and Murphy, 1985 model is presented below.

Figure 3: Hallinger and Murphy's Instructional Leadership Model (1985) (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986)
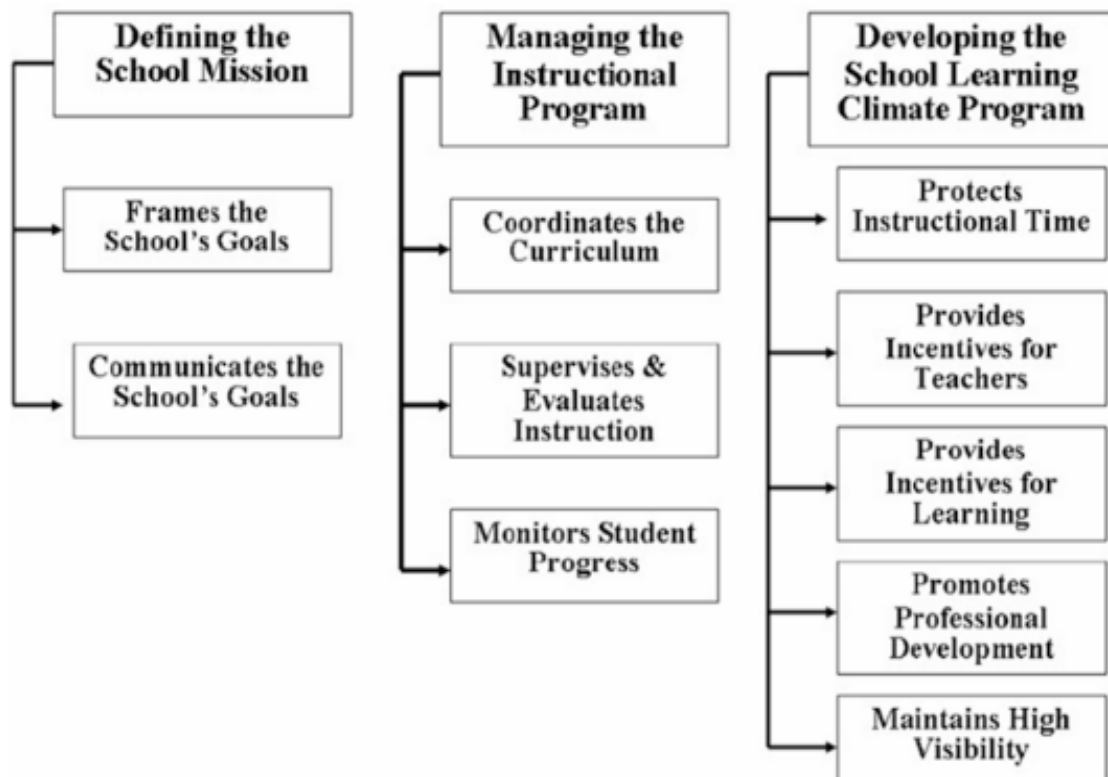
According to Hompashe (2018) and Shava et al. (2021), the first tasks pertain to *defining of the school mission*. Under this dimension, the SMT is required to communicate the school mission and all the supporting objectives clearly to all the role-players. Since the attainment of the school mission is highly dependent on the attainment of daily activities

and practices, the relevant stakeholders have to collaboratively understand the underlying principles for them to effectively implement during teaching and learning interactions (Shava et al., 2021).

The second dimension focuses on *managing of the instructional program.* This role requires the SMT to play an oversight role by not only supervising the instructional processes and managing the curriculum delivery but further facilitate the inception of an enabling school environment ideal for effective learning (Hassan et al., 2019; Shava et al., 2021). The SMT has to oversee that the school goals are aligned with daily activities. This includes classroom attendance, observations and instructional processes. The last dimension talks to *development of the school learning climate program*. Under this dimension, the SMT is required to promote a positive teaching and learning attitude so that lesson objectives could be attained effectively (Hompashe, 2018; Shava et al., 2021). The indicators of a positive school climate include punctuality and teacher recognition. The SMT is expected to innovatively work together with the teachers to develop support structures. This model requires the SMT to innovatively come up with strategies that are proficient in supporting and sustaining teaching and learning through processes such as the professional development plan, incentive policy and time management award to both the teachers and learners.

Murphy's Instructional Leadership Model (1990)

Murphy's Instructional Leadership model has four (4) dimensions and sixteen (16) sub-roles that the SMT should operationalise to enhance the learners' academic performance and overall school effectiveness (Hassan et al., 2019). Murphy's (1990) model is presented below.

Figure 4: Murphy's Instructional Leadership Model (1990) (Hassanet al., 2019)

Instructional Leadership Model	
Creating mission and goal	1. constructing school goal 2. spreading school goal
Learning management	1. promoting quality teaching 2. supervising and evaluating learning 3. allocating and protecting instructional period 4. coordinating curriculum 5. monitoring students' progress
Promoting academic learning climate	1. creating positive standards and hopes 2. maintaining high visibility 3. providing incentives for teachers and students 4. promoting professional development
Creating friendly and supportive school environment	1. creating safe and organized learning environment 2. providing opportunities for meaningful students' involvement 3. fostering cooperation and cohesiveness among staffs 4. outsourcing foreign sources to support school goal 5. forming relationship between homes and school

According to Hassan et al., (2019), the first dimension in Murphy's Instructional Leadership Model (1990) is ***creating a school mission and goals***. This dimension requires the STM to develop and clearly communicate the long and short objectives of the school to other stakeholders (Hassan et al., 2019). It also calls for the SMT to create an environment where the stakeholders know about the mission and goals of the school, so that they can own the daily tasks that attempt to achieve the developed roadmap.

The second dimension is ***learning management*** (Hassan et al., 2019). It is emphasized in this dimension that SMT should lead teaching and learning processes. These involve the promotion of quality teaching, supervision and evaluation of learners' learning, allocation and protection of teaching time, coordination of curriculum delivery, and monitoring of learners' progress (Hassan et al., 2019; Hompashe, 2018). These activities are aimed at improving both learners' academic success and school overall competitiveness.

The third dimension is about ***promoting the academic learning climate*** (Hassan, et al., 2019). In this dimension, the teachers, parents and learners are expected to have a positive attitude towards learners' learning (Hassan et al., 2019). The SMT in this dimension is expected to set standards and give hope to role-players. Also, SMT is not only expected to motivate teachers through various mechanisms including incentives, but further to check the teaching and learning processes.

The fourth dimension is ***creating a safe school environment*** (Hassan et al., 2019). In this dimension, the SMT should ensure that there are adequate resources that can adequately support the teaching and learning. These resources should be fairly and transparently allocated among teachers and within departments. In addition, the SMT's role is to instill cooperation by encouraging and coordinating a positive relationship between the role-players.

Weber's Instructional Leadership Model (1996)

Weber's Instructional Leadership Model of (1996) has four (5) dimensions that the SMT should execute to enhance the learners' academic performance (Ng, 2019). Weber's 1990 model is presented in below.

Figure 5: Weber's Instructional Leadership Model (1996) (Hassan, et al., 2019)
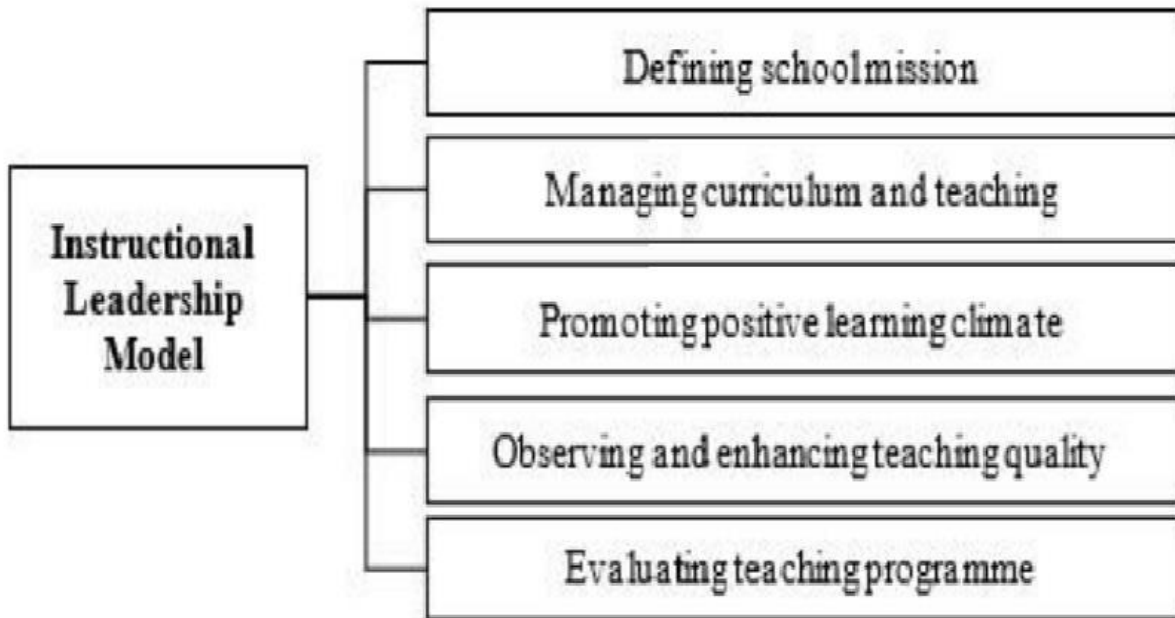
Hassan et al., (2019) indicates that Weber's Instructional Leadership Model of 1996 listed five (5) dimensions that the SMT must execute, and these are discussed in detail.

1. Defining school mission. This requires the SMT, in collaboration with teachers, parents and learners, to create a clear school vision and goals that align with learners' achievement (Ng, 2019; Zucker & O'shea, 2020). This dimension appears to require the SMT to develop, encourage and participate in practices and actions that promote a learning-focused culture as these seem to have a positive impact on the learners' academic achievement.

2. Managing curriculum and teaching. The SMT, who are instructional leaders, should align the curriculum delivery in accordance with the school mission (Hassan et al., 2019). The SMT should be capable of supporting teachers' development regarding best instructional techniques (Hassan et al., 2019; Ng, 2019). This can be practised through classroom visitation and provision of constructive feedback. According to Zucker & O'shea (2020), classroom visitation and feedback provision do not only ensure that the curriculum delivered is the one that the school intended to deliver and identify the aspects

of the teachers' pedagogical praxis that need to be developed, but they also help in boosting the teachers' confidence and self-esteem.

3. Promoting a positive learning climate. The school environment should be conducive for effective teaching and learning, and every role-player should have a clear understanding of the school goals (Ng, 2019). The SMT, teachers, parents and learners should know their daily roles, and also be equipped with tools and resources that will enable them to execute those roles. Role-players need instructional materials, communication platforms and clear goals in place so that they can be preoccupied with activities that work to realising the main objective of the school.

4. **Observing and enhancing teaching quality**. According to Zucker and O'shea (2020), observing teachers' teaching allows the SMT and observed teachers to build their instructional capacity to support the sustainable learning initiatives which may impact the learners' academic performance as they learn from each other. Hassan et al., (2019) further explain that this dimension allows room for the improvement of instructional processes as feedback and measures of improvement are issued post the observation process and this ultimately, and positively impacts learners' learning.

5. Evaluating the teaching programme. It is the responsibility of the SMT to ensure and focus directly on the enhancement of the instructional processes (Zucker & O'shea, 2020). In this dimension, it is SMT's responsibility to coordinate, supervise, monitor and continuously assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching practices (Hassan et al., 2019). This enables the teachers to improve their teaching pedagogies and in turn improves the learners' academic performance.

Out of these three instructional leadership models presented above, this study chose to adopt the lens of Hallinger and Murphy 1985 model. Unlike Murphy's 1990, and Weber's 1996 models which are developed based only on literature reviews (Hassan et al., 2019), Hallinger and Murphy model has been empirically tested. That is, it has been tested on different low-performing schools and has been proven to be effective as the schools showed improvement (Hassan et al., 2019; Ng, 2019; Shava et al., 2021). It has been practically created based on the data generated through questionnaires and deep observations in ten (10) different low-performing schools in North American schools

(Hassan et al., 2019). This model was found to be efficient and effective in relation to the positive academic performance of learners (Hassan et al., 2019; Ng, 2019).

In addition, the Hallinger and Murphy 1985 model, unlike the Murphy 1990 and Weber 1996 models, has been widely used as an intervention managerial and leadership tool to enhance the academic performance of learners (Hassan et al., 2019).

2.2.4. Assumptions and Objectives of Instructional Leadership (Hallinger and Murphy 1985)

ILT aims at supporting various school activities headed by SMT to enhance the academic success of learners (Hassan et al., 2019). This theory provides the framework that unpacks the daily functions and roles of the SMT which foster the idea of organisational learning and create a conducive environment for both teaching and learning activities in order to achieve the school goals (Brolund, 2016; Hompashe, 2018). The ILT assumes that to achieve excellent academic performance, the SMT should work in collaboration with all relevant role-players and clearly communicate each role-player's roles and responsibilities. Additionally, the ILT enables SMT to provide necessary guidance and support to all role-players to effectively and efficiently execute their roles which are aimed at bettering overall school efficacy.

2.2.5. Justification of choice

The current study seeks to explore school-based contributory factors to the poor academic performance of learners and to suggest the mitigating strategies that SMT could use to eradicate this persistent challenge faced by PHS. Accordingly, the adopted Hallinger and Murphy 1985 model is relevant to this study as it has been practically developed for and used successfully as an intervention tool in low-performing schools (Hassan et al., 2019). This theory outlines the daily roles and activities that the SMT should execute in order to influence effective achievement of the classroom objectives, the school goals and the overall school mission (Hassan et al., 2019). Thus, it lays out best practices that could be used to enhance learners' academic performance. This study, through ILT, acknowledges that there might be serious underlying school-based practices that play a role in the declining performance at PHS, and need an intervention (Mkhizel

et al., 2022). Hence, it is justifiable for the current study to explore the phenomenon using the instructional leadership theory lens.

2.2.6. Summary

The preceding section discussed ILT in terms of its definitions, origins, assumptions and objectives, and its justification as the adopted lens for this study. The discussion indicated that ILT generally outlines the support mechanisms that the SMT should provide to both teachers and learners to attain school objectives. Additionally, the discussion indicated that the ILT has been used in schools as an intervention tool in low-performing schools. The adopted philosophical stance aims at improving the academic performance of the learners by creating an enabling school environment that challenges the status quo.

The next section presents and defines the operational terms and unpacks literature on the issues pertaining to school-based factors that contribute to the poor academic performance of the learners, and the best practices that the SMT could adopt and use to improve the overall school efficacy.

2.3. Literature Review

In this section, the operational terms will be discussed and literature on the factors that contribute to the poor academic performance of learners and the strategies that the SMT could employ to improve academic performance are reviewed.

2.3.1. Definition of operational terms

The following are the operational terms that inform this study:

Academic performance

According to Ayeni and Ajasin (2020), academic performance is the education end product which is commonly measured by school leaving examination results to determine the extent to which learners have met the set educational outcomes. Lamas (2015) asserts that academic achievement is measured through learner attainment of set goals across various subjects assessed through summative assessment at the end of school

leaving year. Martin, et al., (2017) explain that the learners' sit for the final examination of which the results are used as determinants of academic performance.

In this study, as suggested by Adeyemi (2011) and Lekhetho (2021), academic performance is looked at as the extent to which the learner, teacher or school has attained curriculum learning outcomes, which are typically reflected by the results attained in the final academic year of secondary education in national standardized assessment. Academic performance is said to be poor when the learner does not meet the prescribed minimum standards, and is good or best if the learner meets the academic performance standards prescribed. Hence, the actions of the SMT, teachers, parents and learners within PHS, and the outcomes of learners, are investigated.

School-based factors

The daily activities happening in schools may affect the teaching and learning processes and, in turn, affect the learners' final LGCSE examination results. Thus, according to Ondieki and Orodho (2015), school-based factors are any activities or any elements within the school that could both directly and indirectly affect attainment of learning objectives and overall school aspirations. These elements in one way or the other, have a bearing on the academic performance of the learners (Mkhizel et al., 2022). The school-based factors include teachers' competencies, vicinity of the school, availability of teaching and learning materials and school infrastructure, to mention but a few (Igberadja, 2015; Mkhizel et al., 2022). With the above in mind, this study looks at the school-based factors as elements within the school that directly and indirectly influence the learners' academic success and school overall success.

Secondary school

The education system is structured such that there are primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Secondary education level is the middle schooling for learners between fourteen (14) and eighteen (18) years of age and serves as a bridge to tertiary education (Kapur, 2021). Globally, secondary education is seen as the stage that prepares individuals for liberation and prosperity (Jacob & Lenners, 2011; Kapur, 2021). The current study looks at secondary school as an organization, with many role-players of different categories

who interact daily and share resources to achieve successful academic performance of the learners.

2.3.2. The school-based factors that contribute to learners' poor academic performance

In recent years, there has been a growing interest among educational researchers to investigate the causes of poor academic performance of learners (Adeyemi, 2011; Amos et al., 2015; Blazar, 2016; Hompashe, 2018; Lekhetho, 2003; Liwane 2017; Munna & Kalam, 2021; Nghambi, 2014; Spicer, 2016). These cited scholars report that insufficient management and leadership capacity, negative school climate, learner classroom disruptions, poor classroom practices, unprofessionalism, overcrowding, teacher job satisfaction, low teacher morale and mismanagement of instructional time are the major causes of poor learners' academic performance. These factors are therefore unpacked below.

Insufficient management and leadership capacity

According to Lumby (2017), the term management is used in relation to those who are in authority and have the executive powers and more responsibilities than others in the organisation. Thus, those in managerial positions occupy higher positions in the hierarchy of an organisation (Mullins & Christie, 2016). The concept of school management is defined in relation to the functions of the SMT, which involve influencing the teachers, non-academic staff, learners, parents and others in schools to act in a particular way with the aim of fulfilling the school and entire educational aspirations (Mullins & Christie, 2016). Oyugi and Gogo (2018) further reveal that the SMTs in different secondary schools employ different management approaches hence the different academic performances of the learners.

There are many leadership styles that the SMT can use to effect the school's mandate. These approaches could be summarised as classical management approach and behavioural approaches that include the democratic leadership styles (Sultana, 2014). Some SMTs employ the classical management approach (Sultana, 2014) which is characterised by controlling subordinates, especially teachers, to the extent that they may

be left frustrated. This approach emphasises productivity (Augustine & Agu, 2013). Literature shows that some SMTs opt for a behavioural management approach (Sultana, 2014). This approach pays attention to human needs in the organizations, and is characterized by flexibility, freedom, and cohesion among role-players within an organisation (Sultana, 2014). This approach is people-oriented, where SMT strives to motivate and develop teachers and other stakeholders to increase their efficiency in producing desired organisational outcomes (Sultana, 2014). Behavioural management approach, compared to rigid classical management approach, is lenient on employees and caters for their needs for improved results.

It is presented in this study that despite the fact that there is no single best leadership approach, teachers and all other related stakeholders' reactions and performance normally reveal whether the leadership style adopted by the school principal and other members of the SMT is best or not (Spicer, 2016). The effectiveness of a good or bad leadership style is often based on the attainment of school objectives and stakeholders' (mainly teachers, learners, parents and proprietors) satisfaction. Having said that, the perceived poor SMT management strategies often leave stakeholders, in particular teachers, dissatisfied and demoralised to exert the required energy in their work. As a consequence, it is presented in this study that poor SMT management strategies may have a bearing on teachers' enthusiasm which may ultimately affect learners and overall school efficacy. For example, in a study conducted to explore the factors that influence the academic performance of learners in high-achieving secondary schools in Lesotho, Lekhetho (2021) found that SMT managerial efficiency affects the level of commitment in schools. Pont et al. (2008) further assert that the SMT is the important body within the school system and its effectiveness enhances the equity and efficiency of the processes that impact learners' academic performance.

In addition, Karadag (2019) analysed the correlation between the school leadership and the academic performance of learners, and the findings revealed that generally, school leadership affects the academic performance of the learners. In addition, in the study conducted to examine the relationship between leadership style and academic performance of learners in 60 schools in Asonomaso Nkwanta in the Kwabre district

Assembly of Ashanti region in Ghana, the findings revealed that the SMT leadership style creates the environment for teaching and learning to take place, which in turn impacts the academic achievement of learners (Gyasi et al., 2016). A negative environment results in poor academic performance, while a positive environment allows the processes of teaching and learning to unfold as expected and yield favourable results (Gyasi et al., 2016). It is however established that the SMT's lack of competence in leadership results in using trial and error approach which may impede school competitiveness (Gyasi et al., 2016). Consequently, Gyasi et al., (2016) recommend the adherence of SMT professional compulsory training on leadership and management.

In a similar vein, Firmina (2015) examined the impact of leadership and management on the academic performance of learners in different secondary schools in Iringa region, Tanzania. The findings revealed that the SMT failed to coordinate the teachers and learners hence the poor academic performance of the learners. Firmina (2015) therefore made the conclusion that SMT's failure to manage the role-players impacts not only learners' academic performance but also school effectiveness and competitiveness. Hence, on one hand, it is recommended that the SMT should employ the more participatory leadership approach to enhance overall school efficacy because participatory leadership approach has a positive impact on the academic progress of the learners (Firmina, 2015; Rasheed et al., 2021). Moreover, Wachira et al., (2017) examined the effects of the SMT leadership style on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in the Kieni West Sub-Country of Kenya. The findings revealed that more participative leadership practices enhance teachers' job performance which further enhances learners' academic achievement. Accordingly, the conclusion is that a leadership style that is democratic enhances the teachers' job performance and as a result learners and overall school effectiveness is enhanced (Wachira et al., 2017).

However, on the other hand, Oyugi and Gogo (2018) recommended a mixture of autocratic and democratic leadership styles. Thus, in their study, they argue that while laissez-faire influences the academic performance of learners negatively, when employed concurrently, autocratic and democratic styles may have a positive influence. As a consequence, Oyugi and Gogo (2018) recommends that the SMT should do away with

the laissez-faire approach and employ a moderate autocratic leadership style and a democratic leadership style to allow for free participation while making key decisions that may affect teaching and learning processes

In addition to the preceding, Makgato and Mudzanani (2018) similarly conducted a study to explore the relationship between the SMT leadership styles and the academic achievement of the learners in 10 high and low-performing secondary schools in Vhembe district, Limpopo, South Africa. They found that both the SMT of high- and low-performing secondary schools utilize the democratic and transformational leadership styles, but the SMT in the low-performing secondary school is more permissive toward the learners' behaviour. They accordingly conclude that the employment of both democratic and transformational leadership styles positively influences how learners perform. However, there should be no lenience and tolerance towards mischievous practices and actions. Against this background, it is evident that school management and leadership styles have a bearing on the academic performance of the learner. As a result, it is mandatory that the SMT should be professionally developed.

School Climate

There is convincing evidence that shows that a negative school climate contributes to the poor academic performance of the learners (Benbenishty et al., 2016; Gyasi et al., 2016; Lekhetho, 2003). The school climate is defined as the view the teachers and learners have about the daily life within the school environment, interactions, relationships and prevailing emotions among the role-players on daily basis, both in a formal and informal setting (Jackson, 2018; Spicer, 2016). In the current study, as asserted by Spicer (2016), it is argued that school climate plays an integral role in fostering good learners' academic performance, and the SMT is responsible for developing and nurturing a positive school climate. It revealed that in North Carolina, schools whose learners score good grades are perceived to have a positive school climate (Spicer, 2016).

In addition, in a study conducted in Israeli middle and high schools to examine the association between school climate, academic self-efficacy, and academic performance, the findings showed a positive association between school climate and self-efficacy, which in turn showed a positive correlation with the learners' academic performance

(Zysberg & Schwabsky, 2020). Similarly, findings of a study on Ghanaian high schools confirm that if a school environment is full of conflicts, learners perform poorly (Baafi, 2020).

Back et al. (2016) also disclosed in their survey that the school climate influences the academic performance of the learners. The same conclusions were made by O'Malley et al., (2014) that a positive school climate correlates with positive academic performance. With the above in context, Jackson (2018) proclaims that the SMT should manage the school climate cognisant of the impact it has on academic performance. That is, the SMT shall seek to create a school culture (guiding values) that influences good practices. The preceding arguments are put forth because if the school climate is negative, the academic performance of learners becomes poor as well (Jackson, 2018; Lekhetho, 2003; 2021; Spicer, 2016). A conducive school climate plays a significant role in the learners' academic performance; hence SMT should at all times strive to create a supportive positive school climate.

Disruptions

According to the literature, another school-based factor that contributes to the poor examination results of learners is attributed to learners' disruptive behaviour. Disruptive behaviours in schools are disturbances that bring about complications and hindrances in school processes (Douglaset al., 2016). Classroom disruption is ranked very highly as one of the serious obstacles to effective instructional processes (Munna & Kalam, 2021). Disruptive behaviour includes chronic lateness, violence among learners, engaging in an argument with the teacher, monopolizing class discussions, displaying active disinterest, eating, drinking or sleeping in class (Douglas et al., 2016; Munna& Kalam, 2021). Pedagogical problems, learning disabilities and peer influence were among the issues that were found to be sources of disruptive behaviour, and teachers take much of the instructional time managing these challenges (Ghaziet al., 2013; Munna& Kalam, 2021; Simpson, 2017). All these practices divert the attention of the teachers and learners and make them lose focus on the instructional processes, thus hindering the academic performance of the learners.

To illustrate the above claims, a comparative study conducted in Italy and Scotland with the aim of investigating in-classroom disruptive behaviour in schools revealed that despite learners' disruptive behaviours differing due to factors related to culture and geographical locations, disruptions negatively hamper learning and result in poor academic performance of the learners (Douglas et al., 2016). As a result, there commendations were made that teachers should be provided with the necessary support and development to equip them with the appropriate skills required to deal with different types of learners' disruptive behaviour.

Similarly, Blank and Shavit (2016) conducted a study in Jewish schools to examine the correlation between learner reports concerning disciplinary infractions to learners' academic performance with a significant focus on classroom disruptions. The findings revealed that classroom disturbance does not only negatively affect the academic performance of learners causing the disturbance but lowers the academic performance of the entire class (Blank & Shavit, 2016).

In light of the foregoing, it could be concluded that the commotions within the classrooms take too much teaching and learning time and deter the teachers and learners from teaching and learning processes hence they highly correlate with poor academic performance of the learners.

Overcrowding

According to Shah and Inamullah (2012) and Olaleyeet al. (2017), overcrowding is a situation where there is congestion in the classroom. A classroom is said to be crowded if it is filled with learners to such an extent that there is not enough space for the teacher's movement, no penetration of light into the classroom, and even the teaching and learning materials, infrastructure and human resources are not adequate for learners (Olaleye et al., 2017; Shah & Inamullah, 2012). Many scholars relate an overcrowded classroom with the number of learners in a classroom per teacher (Akech, 2016; Matsepe et al., 2019; Olaleye et al., 2017). However, the teacher-learner ratio differs from country to country and the public and private schools also have different ratios. For instance, the average learner-teacher ratio is around 15:1 in America (Brown, 2022), while it is 30:1 in public

schools across South Africa (Matsepe et al., 2019), and around 65:1 in secondary schools in Lesotho (UNESCO, 2023). If the number of learners in a classroom exceeds this standard number, the classroom is then said to be overcrowded (Matsepe, et al., 2019). Literature shows that overcrowded classrooms are responsible for learners' mass failure (Akech, 2016; Brown, 2022; Jehangir & Shah, 2012; Olaleye et al., 2017). In South Africa, it was found that one of the major contributory factors that lower academic performance is overcrowded classrooms (Matsepe et al. 2019). In a similar vein, in Nigeria, it was found that the major factor that contributes to the poor academic performance of learners in public schools in Lagos State is classroom overcrowding (Olaleye et al., 2017). The study reveals that overcrowded classrooms breed multiple factors that are not favourable to teaching and learning such as a shortage of infrastructure, negative attitude of the learner towards their learning, disruptive learner behaviours and a negative learning environment which ultimately hamper the academic performance of the learners (Olaleye et al., 2017). Similarly, a study conducted in Pakistan reveals overcrowded classrooms in Pakistan as the main factor that contributes to the poor academic performance of learners (Jehangir & Shah, 2012). It appears that unmonitored growth of the number of learners in a school negatively impact the academic success of the learners.

Instructional processes

Activities and practices that happen between the teachers and learners within the school, with the purpose of educating the learners, are collectively referred to as the instructional processes (Blazar, 2016; Shaked, 2020).The teaching process depends on the teacher's approach, which in turn dictates the teaching methods and strategies that the teacher implements in delivering taught curricula.

The instructional processes include the teaching and learning processes, and the assessment and evaluation processes. Many researchers raised the question of whether the teaching processes impact the academic performance of the learners (Amos et al., 2015; Blazar, 2016; 2020; Heck & Hallinger, 2014). With respect to this question, literature reveals that teaching processes impact the academic performance of learners (Chere-Masopha & Mothetsi-Mothiba, 2022; Wenglinsky, 2002). It is indicated that effective teaching and learning is fully facilitated by the quality of the school's instructional

environment and classroom-related practices (Heck & Hallinger, 2014). Similarly, it is attested that classroom-level factors, such as the quality of the teaching processes, have a significant impact on the learners' learning (Amos et al., 2015; Blazar, 2016; Chere-Masopha & Mothetsi-Mothiba, 2022; Dludla, 2019; Liwane, 2017; Munna & Kalam, 2021). As a result, teachers should be encouraged to use innovative and participative pedagogies as they positively predict the academic performance of the learner (Amos et al., 2015; Blazar, 2016). This could include the integration of technology which is found to enhance learners' participation and interest in their learning (Chere-Masopha, 2011; Harris et al., 2016). Liwane (2017) also attests that teacher pedagogical incompetency results in negative effects such as poor preparation for lessons, poor teaching processes and ultimately, the poor academic performance of learners.

Another study conducted in the three school districts on the East Coast of the United States by (Blazar, 2016) found that the inquiry-oriented instruction process positively predicts the academic performance of the learners. The same was echoed by Wenglinsky (2002) who found that teaching processes highly correlate with the academic performance of learners. As such, continuous teacher professional development is recommended so that the teachers can be equipped with requisite skills enabling them to utilize the learner-centred teaching approach (Amos et al., 2015; Blazar, 2016; Munna & Kalam, 2021).

Among other factors, Liwane (2017) found that the majority of South African teachers lack the necessary competencies such as specialized knowledge of the pedagogical skills and content of the subject matter. If the teacher is incompetent, such teacher is bound to avoid using some teaching methods, and skip or avoid teaching some topics. Mabena et al., (2021) say this reduces coverage of the curriculum thus, the poor academic performance of the learners. For effective teaching and learning process to take place, teachers have to have the knowledge of pedagogy and in-depth knowledge of the content of their subject (Kingoina et al., 2015). Pedagogical knowledge and subject matter, therefore, are significant and positively correlate with performance of learners.

MoET, through the Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP,2009), encourages the instructional processes that are learner-centred and involve task-oriented, problem-

solving, project-based, portfolios and formative assessments as they do not only help improve the academic performance of the learners but equip them with the skills required in life. However, Chere-Masopha & Mothetsi-Mothiba (2022) found that although some teachers seem to have some understanding of some of these best instructional processes such as portfolio for teaching, learning and assessment, most were observed to lack confidence in their claim of knowledge to the extent that few teachers seemed to link portfolio with their teaching and learning processes. Additionally, assessment is viewed by many researchers as an element of the teaching process that highly correlates with examination results of the learners (Amos et al., 2015; Lekhetho, 2021; Wenglinsky, 2002). Lekhetho (2021) asserts that during or after the lesson, the continuous assessment identifies learners who need help, and provides the necessary support. Thus, assessment for learning when used effectively, improves learners' performance (Deng et al., 2022; de Vries et al., 2022). According to Wenglinsky (2002), using portfolios and projects as sole assessments for learning tools is insufficient and must be varied with other tools for best results. Additionally, Munna & Kalama (2021) reveal that giving learners a positive, adequate, formative and developmental feedback, and using role-play strategies boost learners' confidence and self-esteem. This highly correlates with learners' academic performance.

In their study, Amos et al. (2015) found participative and innovative methods and strategies on lesson facilitation to be effective. However, they found that teachers in Nigeria use the teaching pedagogies that are conventional in nature, such as explaining and lecturing since most are not trained in the use of learner-centred approaches such as dramatization and problem-solving. It seems that to produce relevant learners' for today's global community, teachers have to move from the traditional instructional approaches, which are teacher-centred to the constructivism approaches which are more learner-centred.

Instructional time

There seems to be a huge debate amongst researchers on the issue of instructional time as a contributing factor to the poor academic performance of learners (Ayeni & Ajasin, 2020; Andersen et al., 2016; Lekhetho, 2003, 2021; Lopez-Agudo & Marcenaro-

Gutierrez, 2022; Wedel, 2021). Instructional time is explained by Lekhetho (2003) as the actual hours allocated to class for teaching and learning within the number of working school days in a year. Time determines how much content is covered per year in the school setting, and there are factors that are time wasters such as learners learning in overcrowded classrooms, shortage of instructional materials, lack of prioritization of school activities, getting to class late and not sticking to the curriculum while in class (Ayeni et al., 2020). These elements may emanate from mismanagement of instructional time. Ayeni et al., (2020) and Lekhetho (2003) see these mentioned elements as the failure of the SMT to control and protect the time allocated for actual teaching and learning, and this hampers the academic performance of the learners as it may affect the depth or amount of content delivered, and the rate at which learners are assessed.

Lekhetho (2003) argues that time mismanagement encompasses numerous extracurricular activities such as time taken while training for sports and unplanned series of tests that take teaching and learning time. According to Lekhetho these consume a lot of instructional time and are barriers to covering the curriculum within the set time-frame. Reinforcing Lekhetho's argument, one learner participant attests that one of the reasons he transferred from his previous low-performing school to the current high-performing school is that at his initial school, sports were given more attention than the core business: teaching and learning (Lekhetho, 2021). It appears that the learner participant assumes that prioritising sport over teaching and learning contributes to the poor academic performance of the learners.

Contrary to the above, Lopez-Agudo & Marcenaro-Gutierrez (2018) investigated whether the academic performance of learners is affected by instructional time. The findings revealed that instructional time does not increase the academic performance of Spanish children.

The same conclusion was made by Barshay (2021) who reported that additional school time, either by hours, months or years, has a small positive effect. The preceding however challenges Wedel's (2021) argument that increased instructional time could be of great significance if the increased instructional time is used effectively and efficiently.

Despite the arguments of whether instructional time contributes to learners' academic achievement, one could argue that instructional time is crucial when used on teaching and learning effectively and proficiently.

Teachers' absenteeism

Absenteeism is another factor that is attributed to the poor academic performance of learners (Liwane, 2017; Msosa, 2020). Failure of teachers to show up at school and or in the classroom where they are scheduled is referred to as absenteeism (Asiyai, 2017; Msosa, 2020). Teachers may stay away from school and or classroom because they are preoccupied with personal errands or other school-related activities. Regardless of whether the teacher's absenteeism is granted by the SMT or self-granted, it negatively affects the academic performance of the learners (Msosa, 2020).

Liwane (2017) reports that there is a high level of unprofessionalism in public schools in South Africa which contributes to the poor academic performance of learners. Among them is teachers' misconduct. The findings reveal habitual absenteeism from school and or the classroom which stems from abuse of sick leaves and time-off by teachers who are union office bearers and site stewards (Liwane, 2017). In a similar fashion, Msosa (2020) reveals that South Africa has the highest rate of teacher absenteeism in the South African Development Community (SADC) region where every school day about ten percent (10%) of teachers do not show up at schools.

Moreover, Asiyai (2017) carried out a study to explore the effect of teacher absenteeism in public secondary schools in the west and east of Nigeria. The findings revealed that among other causes of teacher absenteeism are teachers' family issues, sickness, job overload and low levels of instructional competence. As a result, in schools where teachers are constantly absent, effective learning does not take place (Asiyai, 2017; Msosa, 2020). Likewise, Lekhetho (2021) reveals that when learners are left alone with no work when the teacher is absent, or decides not to attend class, their performance is negatively affected. Learners easily dodge school when they learn that their teachers are always absent resulting in the poor academic performance of the learners (Asiyai, 2017).

Teacher absenteeism is an issue because according to Asiyai (2017) and Obiro et al. (2017), teachers' frequent classroom attendance increases the teacher-learner relationship and in turn triggers learners' motivation towards learning which can ultimately result in the enhanced academic achievement of the learners. As a result, Asiyai (2017) recommends that SMT should develop a tight school attendance policy and closely monitor the teachers to curb the rate of absenteeism. In summary, these studies indicate that this behaviour of teachers absenting themselves from schools negatively affects the academic performance of the learners as it cuts on the instructional time, and weakens the teacher-learner relationship, promoting a negative school climate.

Teacher satisfaction

According to Spicer (2016), teachers' satisfaction correlates with the academic performance of the learners. Thus, Jackson (2018) relates that the following factors contribute to teachers' satisfaction: level of communication, workload, salary, administrative support, absenteeism, learner success, collegial relations, collaboration, community engagement and teachers' attrition. As a consequence, the ability of the SMT to effectively coordinate these factors creates a positive school environment, where teachers are satisfied with their daily duties, hence yielding high productivity (Spicer, 2016).

A study conducted by Dludla (2019) in South Africa in the rural areas of Durban to explore rural-based teachers' experiences regarding their job satisfaction revealed that teachers were least satisfied due to various reasons including workloads, lack of cooperation from learners, lack of resources, inadequate training for new curriculum implementation and lack of appropriate safety and security in their working environment. As a consequence, the teaching and learning processes are negatively affected. Mgaiwa (2021) cautions that warranting teachers' job satisfaction is crucial in fostering productivity, innovation and creativity in schools since teachers' job satisfaction directly correlates with their commitment, decreases job burnout and reduces turnover. The findings discussed here seem to point towards lack of teachers' job satisfaction as a contributory factor to the poor academic performance of the learners. Collectively, these studies also outline the critical

factors that contribute to teachers' job satisfaction, and overall, these studies highlight the need for the SMT to manage and lead the school cognisant of these critical factors.

Teacher morale

Another factor that influences learners' poor academic performance is teachers' low morale. Lambersky (2016) describes teacher morale as the professional interest and enthusiasm the teachers possess and display toward the achievement of both lesson objectives and school goals. Sehlapelo (2015) similarly sees teacher morale as the drive and curiosity that influences and sustains the desired teacher behaviour. With above in mind, Lambersky (2016) posits that teacher morale or motivation is the key aspect that influences the academic performance of the learners, and if teacher morale is low, the academic performance of the learners is negatively affected. Lambersky (2016) reiterates that teachers' morale, either positive or negative, and self-efficacy are highly influenced by SMT conduct. Thus, stress stemming from a lack of administrative support causes low teacher morale (Heysket & Emekako, 2020). Similarly, Shulhan (2018) suggests that inadequate management competence causes teachers to have a negative attitude towards their instructional duties.

In support of the above claims, many studies suggest that low teacher morale is a contributing factor to the poor academic performance of learners (Abazaoglul & Aztekin, 2016; Kingoina et al., 2015; Nwakasi & Cummins, 2018). Thus, a study conducted to examine the relationship between the academic performance of learners and teacher morale in Singapore, Japan, Finland and Turkey found that teacher morale is among the variables with the highest effect on the academic performance of the learners (Abazaoglul & Aztekin, 2016). In addition, Kingoina et al. (2015) also found that when teachers have a negative attitude towards their instructional duties, the academic performance of learners is negatively affected. They further found that low teacher morale stems from teachers feeling unappreciated and excluded from school activities hence concluding that there is a strong correlation between the academic performance of the learners and teacher morale.

Moreover, Nwakasi & Cummins (2018) also revealed that low teacher motivation in Nigerian schools among other factors emanates from weak administrative management,

lack of instructional material and lack of administrative support. All these may result in unmotivated teachers, thus, threatening the academic success of learners (Nwakasi & Cummins, 2018).

Resources

Many studies link the poor academic performance of the school with the inadequacy of resources ranging from laboratories to instructional materials (Liwane, 2017; Masakale et al., 2016). Since teachers' instruction is made more effective with the use of teaching aids and adequate infrastructure (Olaleye, 2017), their inadequacy forces teachers to use more teacher-centred approaches than those encouraging discovery. As a consequence, this situation certainly hinders the progress of learners since they receive information only from a teacher (Olaleye et al., 2017). Despite the above arguments, Lekhetho (2003) argues that quality facilities and resources alone cannot influence the academic performance of the learners, but certain conditions such as a strong supportive SMT and a high level of commitment from teachers are more important. That is, the SMT needs to make provision of the instructional resources a priority, and teachers as well have to put effort to use the resources in a productive manner.

2.3.3. Academic performance enhancing strategies

Training of SMT on good school leadership ethos

According to Brolund (2016), Lekhetho (2021), Liwane (2017) and Mafuwane (2011), the failure of the SMT to effectively synchronize different components, support teachers through professional development and protect the instructional time crumbles the entire system. Hence Kaphe (2017) and Mullins & Christie (2016) suggest that in order for the SMT to be efficient, they should have a high level of knowledge of how to take care of all the elements within the schools, especially the human element. This seems to require SMTs to constantly engage in professional training programmes.

Align practices to learning organisations approach (Innovative Management)

According to Sitthisomjinet al. (2020), organisational learning has a direct influence on school performances and it enables innovative school leadership. Organisational learning

involves the SMT using their experience to create new knowledge, and learn new strategies to improve the academic performance of the learners (Zhan et al., 2020). Organisational learning requires management that is always vigilant to various possible areas of knowledge that may be analysed and synthesised into meaningful knowledge of which performance may consistently be improved. Knowledge gained from different role-players' perceptions on causes of poor performance and possible mitigation strategies can be coined to devise strategies to improve learners' academic performance (Tan & Olaore, 2022; Zhan et al., 2020). Tan & Olaore's 2022 study on how knowledge accumulation and utilisation in an organisation may help improve performance reveal that there is a positive correlation that results in employee's productivity and increased performance, and influences effectiveness. Therefore, strategies developed from organisational learning are inclusive and have a high chance of being effective.

As far as empirical literature is concerned, there is a lot more required to effectively run the school apart from knowledge alone (Tsuut, 2015; Zahari & Abd Latif, 2016). Hence, to run the school productively, the SMT needs to accept the challenge of change, accommodate other teachers' contributions in goal-setting and free decision-making process (Tsuut, 2015). Thus, Anastasiou & Garametsi (2020) assert that collective decision-making and goal-setting are the most significant priorities. SMT should be prepared to work in collaboration with other role-players. In that way, both parties are not only likely to effectively learn from one another, but will further support one another during implementation stage.

Monitoring of teacher attendance

Lekhetho (2021) found that in high-performing schools, teachers are often present in the classroom, and in cases where the teacher is absent, the teacher's colleague fills up for them or delivers some work to the learners. Lekhetho (2021) also reveals in his findings that one strategy that the SMT in high-performing schools uses to curb the rate of school and classroom absenteeism is the close monitoring of teacher attendance. The study discloses that high-performing schools use log books and classroom attendance register sheets. It appears that the learners in high-performing schools are always engaged with schoolwork while in class (Lekhetho, 2021). It was also revealed in the findings that the

SMTs in high-performing schools in Lesotho is highly devoted to their job. They maintain a high level of visibility around the school compound, and they work alongside the teachers to monitor the studies (Lekhetho, 2021).

The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA, 2010) on the other hand found the managerial strategies for monitoring teacher absenteeism that include the learners keeping teacher class attendance register, and the log book kept by the SMT, where the teachers register in the morning and after work questionable. Hence for the effective and efficient management of the teacher absenteeism phenomenon, ADEA (2010) acknowledges the integration of innovative and community involvement strategies. The ADEA (2010) findings reveal that there is a significant decline in teacher absenteeism rates in some African countries that use innovative (bio-swipe cards and mobile phone technology) and community involvement strategies to curb teacher absenteeism. For instance; some schools in South Africa, Western Cape, use the Human Capital Leave Management System (HCLMS), where electronic devices are used to capture teacher attendance, where the teacher and the SMT confirm the digital data and safely send it to the district education department; in Gambia, SMTs use mobile platforms to capture data on teacher absenteeism and send the data to the computer server making the information available and accessible. In regard to community involvement as a strategy to monitor teacher absenteeism, ADEA (2010) found it successful in Ghana and Somalia. The teachers and parents collaborate through the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and Community Education Committee (CEC) respectively making both teachers and parents liable (ADEA, 2010).

2.4.   Chapter summary

This chapter unpacked and explained the Instructional Leadership Theory (ILT) as it is the theoretical stance of the current study. The operational terms; academic performance, school-based factors and secondary school, were also defined and put into the study context. The study further reviewed the literature on the school-based issues that contribute to the poor academic performance of learners and the strategies that SMT can use to enhance the academic performance of learners. Literature points out that the following school-based factors contribute to the poor academic performance of learners:

insufficient management and leadership capacity, school climate, disruptions, overcrowding, instructional processes, instructional time, teachers' absenteeism, teacher satisfaction, teacher morale and resources. Furthermore, literature discussed the following as the academic performance enhancing strategies: training of SMT on good school leadership ethos, aligning practices to learning organisations approach (Innovative Management), and monitoring of teacher attendance.

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter details the research paradigm, research approach, research design, research methodology, the integrity of the study and research limitations respectively. The research paradigm that underpins this study, interpretivism, is discussed in detail, followed by detailed discussions of the qualitative approach and the case study design adopted. Then the methods and techniques of selecting participants, data generation and analysis are discussed. The chapter concludes with the measures taken to maintain the integrity of the study, and also discusses the limitations of the study.

3.2. Research paradigm

Paradigm is a basic set of beliefs that dictate how the matter in question should be studied (Davies & Fisher, 2018; Kivunja & Kujini, 2017). To understand what really contributes to the persistently poor academic performance of learners at Phokeng High School (PHS), and what could be done to mitigate this problem, the interpretivism paradigm underpins this study. The paradigm is concerned with interpreting participants' opinions and experiences with the aim to attach meaning to the phenomenon understudy (Rahman, 2017). The interpretivism paradigm allowed the data to be interpreted and to draw conclusions. To enable proper interpretation of the factors that contribute to learners' poor academic performance at PHS, the researcher interacted with participants through interviews to establish their opinions and experiences. This technique allowed the participants affected by the problem to provide detailed descriptions on the core issues perpetuating learners' poor academic performance.

3.2.1. Ontological stance

Ontology is concerned with the nature of truth, the perception of the researcher about what is there, and how it is (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Sefotho & Du Plessis, 2019). Ontology is concerned with what exists, whether what exists is unitary or multiple, and whether what exists can be related to the general institution praxis or not (Aspers, 2015). The interactions with some PHS stakeholders revealed that there is a perennially poor

academic performance of learners at PHS which has gradually relegated the school from being competitive to not being a school of choice for most Grade 8 learners.

3.2.2. Epistemological viewpoint

Epistemology refers to the study of the generation and scope of knowledge (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Sefotho & Du Plessis, 2019). Rehman et al., (2016) further write that epistemology is the theory of knowledge useful for evaluating the context and institutions around us. Epistemology is concerned with what can be accepted as being truthful and how the preconceived can be validated to ensure its repeatability and applicability in different but related contexts (Sefotho et al., 2019). Epistemology is concerned with how we know what we know and how we know that what we know is true.

Since there are multiple realities surrounding the study in question, this study is guided by the epistemological assumption that knowledge is acquired through social negotiations and interpretation of the participant's own experiences, understandings and meanings (Rahi, 2017). In the case of the current study, the researcher is a teacher by profession and has colleagues at PHS hence she knows that there is persistently poor academic performance by the learners. There are also conversations between learners and teachers where teachers discover the information that the learners do not like this school, and only opted for this school as the last option. Additionally, in the community where the school is located, the district education office (DEO) and the church as the proprietor regularly complain to teachers about the poor academic results. As a consequence, the current study through the contributions of SMT, teachers, parents, and learners, could help in salvaging the worsening academic performance at PHS.

3.3.   Research Approach

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. This approach is inductive and flexible in nature (Maxwell, 2013). It uses a dialogue to gain in-depth comprehension of the matter in question, rather than following a strict sequence like quantitative research (Maxwell, 2013). Creswell (2009), Maxwell (2013) and Roller & Lavrakas (2015) add that, unlike the quantitative research approach, the qualitative research approach seeks to understand a complex real-life problem in a given context from participants' point of view

and finding the solution to the existing challenge of chronic LGCSE results in general, and PHS particularly. This is done through direct interaction with the specific participants (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Additionally, Roller & Lavrakas (2015) point out that qualitative research approach relies heavily on words and descriptions, and includes data about participants' needs and behavioural patterns. As a result, the qualitative research design suits the current study as it allows the researcher to delve deep into the complex issue perpetuating poor LGCSE results at PHS.

3.3.1. Justification of choice

The qualitative research approach answers questions about the complex nature of life situations by enabling participants to express their opinions and points of view while providing useful data (Creswell, 2009; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Accordingly, qualitative approach is ideal for this study since it allows for a close interaction between the researcher and these important stakeholders who are directly affected by the problem (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). The close relationship between participants and researcher not only enables unearthing of the practices and attitudes that contribute to poor learners' academic performance at PHS but further permits the study to seek best practices to mitigate the problem. As a consequence, without having adopted a qualitative approach, the researcher would not be able to capture core issues perpetuating the poor academic performance of learners at PHS and explore the possible remedial strategies.

3.4. Research design

The study employed case study research design. A case study is a qualitative research design where the researcher focuses on a small specific group and uses sources of information such as interviews to enhance understanding of the complicated matter in question and develop new knowledge (Green et al., 2022). This study focused on PHS, and different categories of participants were interviewed to gather information. These categories were the members of SMT, teachers, parents and learners. The case study research design provides detailed information which helps with the holistic understanding of the phenomena (Greenet al., 2022).

3.4.1. Justification of choice

PHS is an educational institution and a case study is designed to examine the effectiveness of institutions among other things (Green et al., 2022). The issue of contributory factors to the poor academic performance of learners is a complex phenomenon that needs to be thoroughly explored. As such, the researcher employed the case study research as it is designed to understand the complex issues within the institutions and to suggest possible remedies (Green et al., 2022). With the above in perspective, the case study research design suits this study as it enabled the researcher to interact with various stakeholders to solicit information with regard to the contributory factors to the perennial failure of PHS learners at LGCSE level and concurrently provide the necessary conditions for intervention (Green et al., 2022).

3.5.   Data generation tools

According to Arifin (2018), data generation methods highly influence the results of the study. Data may be generated by various methods; however, in this study semi-structured interviews were used. The face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interview technique, unlike those structured with closed-ended questions, has open-ended questions that permit participants to provide detailed and rich information (Gill et al., 2008). That is, semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to probe participants in an effort to solicit detailed responses (Gill et al., 2008; Arifin, 2018).

With the above in context, the researcher constructed open-ended questions (see Appendixes F, H, G and I) that correlate with the research questions and objectives. These interview questions enabled participants to express themselves freely without being directed. Further, the questions allowed the conversations to be managed with ease since they were prearranged but not rigid (Gill et al., 2008). Consequently, the semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with qualitative, holistic and first-hand information.

3.6.   Population

The population of the study constitutes the following role-players at PHS: members of the SMT, teachers, learners and the parents. These role-players amount to five hundred

and thirty-three (533). SMT is composed of the acting principal, deputy principal and three (3) HoDs, while there are about twenty-three (23) teachers composed of private teachers and those with government grants. From Grade 8-11, there are about five hundred (500) learners. There is also a secretary, two (2) security personnel and a cleaner.

3.7. Participants selection

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants. It is a form of non-probable sampling technique in which the researcher studies the population, and chooses the representative participants guided by the needs of the study being undertaken (Gaganpreet, 2017). The selection criterion was based on the position held, number of years spent at PHS (exclusively for learners), the individual's ability to reflectively articulate their views (exclusively for learners), and above all, the willingness of an individual to participate (Gaganpreet, 2017; Palinkas et al., 2013). That is, in applying the purposive technique, I studied the population and identified participants who were familiar with the phenomena under study, hence I choose all members of the SMT, experienced teachers and parents. Also, (apart for the SMT, teachers and parents) I targeted leaner participants who could and were able to express themselves in a clear manner (Palinkas et al., 2013). As a result, I choose learners who had spent at least two years or more (Grade 10 and 11).

Out of the sample frame that includes members of SMT, teachers, Grade 10 and 11 learners, and the leaners' parents, the researcher used the maximum variation sampling. Maximum variation is a method of purposive sampling where the researcher searches for individuals who cover the spectrum of positions and perspectives in relation to the phenomenon in question (Gaganpreet, 2017). The maximum variation sampling, which focuses on particular people, with certain characteristics across the sample frame, enabled the researcher to select the individuals with substance. Thus, the selection of the SMT (principal, deputy principal, and three (3) HoDs) was based on the fact that they are tasked to positively influence teaching and learning activities so that educational goals could be achieved (Brolund, 2016; Lekhetho, 2021; Liwane, 2017; Mafuwane, 2011). Also, purposive maximum variation sampling was used to select a total of six (6) teachers with two or more years of experience. These teachers were assumed to have been part

of the system for a long time and were well-informed about the day-to-day activities that may contribute to the poor academic performance of PHS, as well as the possible mitigating strategies that the SMT could use to enhance the academic performance of the learners.

Also, critical case sampling was employed when choosing Grade 10 and 11 learners. Critical case sampling is where the researcher chooses people who are highly likely to provide the information the researcher is looking for (Palinkaset et al., 2013). Concurrently, the researcher selected four (4) learners in Grades 10 and 11(two (2) from each grade) and three (3) parents of these learners. Unlike Grades 8 and 9 learners who were newcomers and were young, Grades 10 and 11 learners were older, communicative and had a lot of information about PHS because they had been at the school for more than two years. The researcher also did not consider transferred Grade 10 and 11 learners as they were also newcomers arriving from other schools.

The total sample of this study is eighteen (18) participants, from four (4) different categories which were adequate to help the researcher obtain detailed information on the case-oriented analysis of a qualitative research approach (Tutelmem & Webster, 2020). Purposive sampling best suits the current study as it aided in achieving the objective of the study by allowing the researcher to use her judgment to recruit people who had adequate knowledge about the matter under study, such as the experienced SMT and teachers, the parents, and older articulate learners within PHS. Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 below present the biographical information of the different categories of participants (SMT, teachers, parents and learners) who participated in this study.

Table 2: PHS SMT participants Biographic information

Participants	Pseudonyms	Gender	Service /Experience (Years)
Principal	Mrs. Mapalesa	Female	22 years
Deputy Principal	Mr. Seitlheko	Male	34 years
SMT Social-sciences	Mrs. Molemo	Female	28 years
SMT Science & Mathematics	Mrs. Chabeli	Female	32 years
SMT Commercial Studies	Mr. Latela	Male	22 years

Table 3: PHS teacher participants Biographic information

Participants	Pseudonyms	Gender	Service/experience
Science-teacher A	Mrs. Moeketsi	Female	30 years
Science-teacher B	Mr. Seabata	Male	10 years
Sesotho-teacher C	Mr. Thabo	Male	12 years
English-teacher D	Mr. Kabi	Male	18 years
Development Studies-teacher E	Mrs. Ramahloli	Female	15 years
Religious Studies-teacher F	Mrs. Mamosele	Female	7 years

Table 4: PHS parent participants Biographic information

Participants	Pseudonyms	Gender	Service/experience
Parent A	Mrs. Mamokhantso	Female	6 years
Parent B	Mrs. Maneo	Female	3 years
Parent C	Mrs. Maliteboho	Female	2 years

Table 5: PHS learner participants Biographic information

Participants	Pseudonyms	Gender	Number of years at PHS
Grade 10 learner A	Thato	Female	6 years
Grade 10 learner B	Lehakoe	Female	3 years
Grade 11 learner A	Tlhalefo	Male	4 years
Grade 11 learner B	Naleli	Female	4 years

3.8. Data Analysis

The thematic analysis technique was employed when analyzing the information gathered through the semi-structured interviews in this study. Thematic analysis is an analytic examination of narrative materials from life interviews by breaking the data into relatively small units of content and subjecting them to descriptive treatment (Karlsen et al., 2017; Lehtomaki et al., 2016; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Vaismoradi & Turunen, 2013). Similarly, Clarke & Braun (2017) define thematic analysis as the method that classifies and analyses similar sub-topics within the qualitative data.

I followed Clarke & Braun (2017) who break the thematic analysis procedure into six steps. The first step is familiarisation with data generated. In this stage the researcher reads and rereads the information. Accordingly, I thoroughly read the information gathered from the semi-structured interviews on several different occasions in order to have a clear comprehension of the responses. The second step is generating initial codes. Here the researcher collates the information with similarities forming initial codes. Similarly, I organised the information and grouped similar responses together to form initial codes. The third step is searching for themes. In this step the initial codes with similar meaning are merged. Consequently, I merged the initial codes with similar meaning. The fourth step is reviewing themes. Here each category of codes is defined and given a unifying theme. At this stage, I defined each category and gave them general names. The fifth step is defining and naming themes. In this step the researcher refines the themes and generates clear names for each theme. I therefore reviewed each theme

and created the final themes. The final step is producing the report. This is the final analysis step where the researcher relates the themes to the research objectives and literature. Therefore, my last step was to analyse the themes in line with the research objectives and the literature.

3.9. Integrity of the study

The integrity of the study was upheld by protecting and avoiding exploitation of the participants through observing the ethical and trustworthiness issues which are discussed in the sections below.

3.9.1. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are concerned with ensuring that the procedural integrity guiding the research is followed (Mwita, 2022). A number of steps were taken in this study to observe the ethical considerations. I submitted the current study to the National University of Lesotho in the Department of Educational Foundations for approval and received the introductory letter from my supervisor (see Appendix A). Upon receipt of this letter, I wrote to the district education office (DEO) in the teaching service department (TSD) requesting permission to generate data from one of the high schools in the central district of Lesotho (see the copy on Appendix B) and attached it to the introductory letter from my supervisor. Upon receiving the endorsement letter from the DEO (see Appendix C), I arranged and agreed with the SMT at PHS to conduct the interviews at a convenient time which would not interfere with the teaching and learning.

I then approached the participants in a respectful and professional manner to gain their consent to take part in this research. I explained in detail the aim of the study, and the rights of the participants. They were made aware that the interview was voluntary and they were not expected to respond to questions they felt uncomfortable with. In addition, they were made aware of their right to withdraw from participating in the study if they no longer felt comfortable (Govil, 2014). I also assured the participants that I would maintain a high level of confidentially, that is, I would not write anything that could implicate them in any way.

The request letters with consent forms attached were issued to each participant (see Appendixes D & E). The participants were given a week each, to read the request letters and ask questions. The parent participants were those who had children in Grade 10 and 11, not necessarily parents of the learners invited. The Grade 10 and 11 learners were all above 18 years of age, however they were given a week to discuss the request letters with their parents. All participants volunteered and gave signed consent to be interviewed. Some of the participants believed that it was high time those issues were addressed but insisted that confidentiality be maintained. I therefore used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the school and the participants. Additionally, I ignored information that might implicate the participants. Furthermore, I ran the study through the Turnitin application for plagiarism (see Appendix K).

3.9.2. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the steps that the researcher takes to prove the legitimacy of the research findings (Dludla, 2020). The elements that complement trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014).

3.9.2.1. Credibility

The credibility of the study reflects whether the researcher has carefully and accurately correlated the representation of the participants' views and the study conclusion (Gunawan, 2015). To ensure credibility, each category of the participants had more than one participant asked the same set of interview questions enabling the researcher to verify the responses of each participant against other participants' responses. Also, when there was a need, each interview question was rephrased during the interviews as a way of bringing clarity to the participants and to enhance study's credibility.

3.9.2.2. Transferability

Transferability is concerned with the application of the research findings to similar issues (Gunawan, 2015). To ensure that secondary schools similar to PHS may use the findings of this study, I clearly and thoroughly described PHS in terms of its location, size of the

population and its composition. In addition, the participants selected were described in terms of their age, gender, occupation and years of experience as Dludla (2020) posits this to be important for ease of transferability.

3.9.2.3. Dependability

Dependability is an element of trustworthiness concerned with finding similar research interpretations, findings and conclusions if the same procedure of data analysis is repeated on the same data (Gunawan, 2015; Nowell et al., 2017). Observing dependability ensures that the findings are not misleading. Six steps of thematic analysis were adopted (see Section 3.8.) to ensure the dependability of this study. Furthermore, I repeated the same procedures of thematic analysis twice on the same data; immediately after data gathering and a week later.

3.9.2.4. Confirmability

Confirmability is a trustworthiness criterion concerned with information interpretation being free from the biases of the interviewer (Nowell et al., 2017). As the researcher is a human being, the researcher is bound to be biased (Dludla, 2020). Hence, I shared the transcriptions with the participants for them to confirm that the message they intended to convey had been captured accurately. Also, direct quotes were used in this study to reinforce the level of accuracy. Additionally, to increase the level of objectivity, I ensured that the research findings of this study are reinforced by the studies that already exist. The findings have been substantiated with existing literature.

3.10. Limitations of the study

The study investigated the school-based factors that contribute to poor academic performance of learners, and explored the mitigating strategies that SMT can use to enhance the academic performance of PHS learners. The investigation focused on PHS only. As a result, the research findings cannot be generalized to other high schools, especially those that differ from PHS in terms of characteristics. Further studies may increase their scope to other schools different from PHS. The other limitation is that the data is obscured in the following manner: 1. The information was generated from only four categories of role-players (SMT, teachers, parents and learners) and left out the

school board (SB) and the district education office (DEO). Each category works towards ensuring the learners' academic success, although they have different roles. Therefore, the SB and DEO could have added valuable information from different perspectives regarding the matter in question and possible remedies. 2. The study used only one method of data generation, semi-structured interviews. Using questionnaires and focus groups would have unleashed some of the information that may have been left out during the interviews.

3.11. Chapter summary

This chapter provided details on the research methods employed in this study. The chapter explained the methodology, paradigm, approach, design, data generation tool, population, sample and sampling technique, and the data analysis technique applied. Also, the measures taken to observe trustworthiness and ethical considerations are explained in detail. The chapter concludes with the limitations of the study. The next chapters present the results which lead to a detailed analysis of the data.

Chapter 4: Data Presentation

4.1.   Introduction

The chapter presents the qualitative data generated from the semi-structured interviews, where the SMT, teachers, parents and learners from PHS were asked to comment on the factors that contribute to learners' poor academic performance and suggest the mitigating strategies that SMT could use to improve the persistently poor academic performance. The interviews took twenty (20) to fifty (50) minutes at different places depending on the convenience and comfort of the participants. Some meetings were held in the car, the participants' homes, the staffroom, and the principal's offices. All participants volunteered and gave signed consent to be interviewed.

This chapter presents data organised into themes and subsequent sub-themes. The themes and subsequent sub-themes are categorised into two main sub-sections: (1) **Factors perpetuating learners' poor academic performance**; (2) **Mitigating strategies**.

4.2.   Themes and subsequent sub-themes

Table 6: Matrix of themes and subsequent sub-themes

Factors perpetuating learners' poor academic performance	
Theme 1: Breaching school policies	(a) admission policy
	(b) promotion policy
	(c) textbooks rental scheme
	(d) not prioritizing allotted teaching and learning hours
	(e) teachers' award policy
Theme 2: Lack of learners' commitment to their studies	(a) cheating on the assignments
	(b) increased learner absenteeism
	(c) learners' lack of participation in classroom activities
	(d) bad study habits
Theme 3: Lack of teachers' commitment	(a) a high rate of teacher absenteeism
	(b) teachers' drug abuse during working hours

	(c) lack of learner support from the teachers
Theme 4: Limited learners' academic guidance	(a) lack of parental support
Theme 5: Unfavourable working conditions	(a) lack of teaching and learning resources
	(b) lack of collaboration
	(c) teachers' welfare
Theme 6: Ineffective School Board	(a) lack of capacity in managerial roles
Theme 7: Bullying	(a) inconsistencies in teachers' treatment
	(b) gangsterism among learners
Theme 8: Banning the use of cell phones or any gadgets on school premises	
Mitigating strategies that could enhance learners' academic performance	
Theme 9: Adherence to the school goals and policies with collaboration	(a) engagement of all role-players in school matters
Theme 10: Supporting the teaching and learning	(a) teacher development
	(b) provision of teaching and learning materials
	(c)internal examination moderation and regular learners' assessment
	(d) motivation for teachers and learners
	(e) capacitate the SB

4.3. Factors perpetuating learners' poor academic performance

4.3.1. Breaching school policies

Participants are of the view that non-adherence to school policies is the root source of poor academic performance of learners at PHS. Further scrutiny of the data led to the emergence of the following five sub-themes: (a) *admission policy*, (b) *promotion policy, (c) textbooks rental scheme, (d) not prioritizing allotted teaching and learning hours, and (e) teachers' award policy.* These sub-themes are presented in detail below.

4.3.1.1. Admission policy

The participants hold the view that breaching the admission policy is one of the major contributors to the poor academic performance of learners at PHS. Participants articulated that the learners' admissions are supposed to be processed within the first two weeks at the beginning of the academic year, but PHS admits learners throughout the year in any grade.Thus, according to them, learners are admitted in any grade, at any time without necessarily being screened to ensure that they qualify to be in the classes they claim to be in.Thus, they cited as follows:

> *We do not even hold interviews to assess whether they qualify for the grades they are admitted into. We just admit any learner in any grade until the second quarter. This is done to maintain the learners' roll* (*Mr Seitlheko, deputy principal*).

> *… the SMT just take the parents' word concerning the reasons why the learner is leaving the initial school and the class they are supposed to be in (Mr Thabo, a teacher).*

4.3.1.2. Promotion policy

Participants further disclosed that lowering the promotion criterion negatively impacts the academic performance of the learners in the long run. According to the participants, learners are promoted to the next grade yet they obtained below minimum average scores. They stated that:

… against our promotion policy which states that learners should pass five subjects including English Language with 50%,we promote learners with an aggregate of 25%, 30% or 35% to the next grade. These aggregates are very low and affect these learners negatively in the LGCSE final year results (Mrs Molemo HOD of social-sciences).

… some of these promoted learners are often not willing to put extra effort to catch up with average performers (Mrs Ramahloli a teacher).

4.3.1.3. Textbooks Rental Scheme

Research participants also associated the poor academic performance of the learners with SMT's non-adherence to the rental book policy. They mentioned that the school does not buy textbooks for learners though it has been agreed between the school and parents that this would be case. They divulged that:

… parents pay book fees, the school does not buy books, so, learners do not have textbooks because parents are reluctant to buy textbooks (Mr Thabo, a teacher).

…rather my daughter tells me every time that parents are required to buy certain textbooks yet the initial arrangement was that I should only buy exercises books and other related stationery ('Mamokhantso, a parent).

… When I demand that learners bring their textbooks to class, learners tell me that their parents refuse to buy textbooks claiming that they have already paid for textbooks at school (Mrs Chabeli, HOD of science and mathematics).

4.3.1.4. Not prioritizing allotted teaching and learning hours

The teachers and parents revealed that the SMT waste too much time for teaching and learning by dismissing the learners before the actual knock-off time. Also, the SMT gives extra-mural activities too much attention while compromising the core school business. They revealed that the SMT prioritise more entertainment and sporting activities over the teaching and learning processes. They explained that:

… I cannot remind you of the number of entertainment activities that took place here this year alone. Just this year alone we had the following events besides educational trips and sporting activities, which still disrupt the teaching and learning process: miss PHS event, talent show, and different career day's trip. (Mr Kabi, a teacher).

… when it is heavily raining the learners are dismissed (Mrs Seabata, a teacher).

… parents' meetings and staff meetings are also held during school days and learners are left unattended the whole day when there is a meeting (Mr Thabo ,a teacher).

4.3.1.5. Teachers' award policy

The participants reported that the school teachers' award policy is biased, and is implemented occasionally. The teachers explained that the teachers' award policy is erratically applied and does not apply to all deserving teachers. They added that:

…imagine when you have learners who attained good grades and you are ready to receive your award, but then the SMT ignores you instead (Mr Seabata, a teacher).

…even though the policy is developed to motivate the teachers, it does not serve the purpose anymore (Mr Kabi, a teacher).

… teachers' hard work is not recognized (Mrs Mamosele, a teacher).

4.3.2. Lack of learners' commitment to their studies

The participants pointed to learners' lack of passion to learn as another contributing factor to the poor academic performance. The following were cited as indicators of learners' lack of commitment: (a) *cheating on the assignments*, (b) *increased learner absenteeism, (c) learners' lack of participation in classroom activities, and (d) bad study habits.*

4.3.2.1. Cheating the assignments

Drawing from participants' opinions, the majority of learners cheat on their assignments. Participants labeled this behaviour as a lack of enthusiasm. Participants stated that the

assignments administered often fail to serve their purpose of supporting learning and developing discovery competencies as the learners take them for granted. They explained that:

> *… when I mark the assignment, I always find that the answers are duplicated (Mrs Ramahloli, a teacher).*

> *… when I ask some of the learners to explain what they have written or to take me through the steps in their answers, they fail dismally (Mr Kabi, a teacher).*

> *… learners do not pay attention to any work that requires them to go an extra mile to find information, they ignore such details as drawings (Mrs Moeketsi, a teacher).*

> *… most of us do our assignments in the mornings under pressure to submit. We copy from a few learners who did the assignment at home (Thato, a learner).*

4.3.2.2. Increased learner absenteeism

The participants revealed that learners miss classes on a regular basis, and pointed this as one of the major contributors to the poor academic performance of learners. To underscore the fact that learner absenteeism negatively affects the academic performance of learners. They stated that:

> *… it is difficult to teach a pupil who would disappear in the middle of the topic and reappear several days later. When they reappear, they do not even make the initiative to catch up on what they have missed (Mr Latela, HOD of commercial-studies).*

> *… learners fulfil parental duties such as babysitting during school days(Mrs Mamosele, a teacher).*

> *… the same group of learners who are not being attentive are repeatedly sent home due to fees owed. As a result, they miss a lot, and even learners who seem to have potential sometimes do not seem to pick up when they come back (Mr Seabata, a deputy principal).*

… the children stay for a long time out of school because of school fees, close to a month or so. I doubt that there are even arrangements in place to help these learners to catch up (Mrs 'Maneo, a parent).

… they ignore some questions and claim that they do not answer some questions because they were not present when the particular topic was taught (Mrs Ramahloli, a teacher).

4.3.2.3. Learners' lack of participation in the classroom activities

According to the participants, learners attain poor grades in external examinations because they are passive in the classroom. The participants explained that they get irritated if they are forced to participate. They added that:

… the learners pass some cursing words reflecting disgust when I assign tasks designed to foster critical thinking skills (Mrs Moeketsi, a teacher).

… when I allocate group work, I usually group learners in fours. However, when learners are to present their group work, I find reports from each group that some of the learners did not participate at all (Mrs Ramahloli, a teacher).

4.3.2.4. Bad study habits

Poor study habits were cited by the participants as one of the factors that contribute to poor academic performance at PHS. The participants stated that some learners are always late for the morning study. These are some of the responses:

… the sound of the latecomers' footsteps, the door opening and even when they pull their chairs from the tables constantly distracts learners who are already seated in the classroom(Mrs Mamosele, a teacher).

… during the revision week, instead of reading, some learners prepare materials that they will copy from in the examination room (Lehakoe, a learner).

4.3.3. Lack of teachers' commitment

The participants hold the view that teachers are not serious about their job. The following sub-themes are related to lack of teachers' commitment: *(a) a high rate of teacher absenteeism, (b) teachers' drug abuse during working hours, and (c) the lack of learner support from the teachers.* These four sub-themes that emerged from the data are elaborated in the following sections.

4.3.3.1. High rate of teacher absenteeism

The participants are of the view that teacher absenteeism and irregular class attendance are major contributors to the poor academic performance of learners. They indicated that some teachers do not show up for work for weeks and relate this to lack of motivation. They divulged that:

> …*some make excuses related to sports and debate clubs. Sometimes when they come to class, they make jokes and that will be it for the day* (*Tlhalefo, a learner).*

> … *we already know that during a certain subject, we have to fetch notes from the subject teacher's desk and write notes on the chalkboard. Some teachers do come to class however discuss irrelevant matters, like politics and family matters. The whole 80 minutes! Some do not come at all, for weeks* (*Naleli, a learner).*

> … *sometimes some learners in certain classes spend the whole day without a teacher. Some teachers show up at work, register their names on the log book and disappear before the school is out* (*Mr Latela, HOD of commercial-studies).*

> … *they are always absent, busy with their family matter*(*Mrs Mapalesa, a principal).*

> *teachers go bare-handed, without the teaching resources (Mr Seitlheko, a deputy principal).*

> … *they do not even notice when the learners in their class are absent. I remember one incident where the teacher did not notice that the learner had been absent for four months. We came to realise this when the parent returned the books and*

explained that the kid has decided that he is going to a cultural school (Mr Latela, HOD of commercial-studies)

4.3.3.2. Teachers' drug abuse during working hours

According to the participants, some teachers seem depressed to the extent that some abuse alcohol and other drugs. The participants explained their concern that the learners' performance is bound to be poor because teachers who are under substance abuse are not fit for work. They remarked that:

…they disappear to the bar during working hours and come back to school drunk or do not come back at all (Mr Seitlheko, a deputy principal).

…PHS teachers spend the whole day at the bars and in this sports betting facility. The learners are also complaining that they are lagging behind because their teachers are slow and most of the time absent from school (Mrs Malitebo, a parent).

4.3.3.3. Lack of learner support from the teachers

Some participants expressed their frustration with the assertion that teachers are not supportive of learners' education as the teachers do not provide feedback. They voiced this as follows:

… I gathered from my daughter that their class work or assignment stays too long in the staffroom, sometimes when they are given their books back, the books are not marked, and there is no explanation (Mrs 'Mamokhantso, a parent).

… some teachers mock us in front of the whole class when we ask for clarification. For example, instead of answering our questions, they ask whether we are stupid or we are playing stupid. This makes us hesitant to ask even when we do not understand (Naleli, a learner).

… we are scared of our teachers so much that we are afraid to ask questions where we need clarification (Tlhalefo, a learner).

… the use of the lecture method enables us, teachers, to cover the syllabus. Also, the lecture method does not require a lot of preparation effort. This encourages little or no participation from learners, as a result, it denies learners the opportunity to sharpen their critical thinking abilities (Mr Thabo, a teacher).

… teachers, while already at school, one finds them sitting in the staffroom yet they are supposed to be in class(Mrs Mapalesa, a principal).

4.3.4. Limited learners' academic guidance

The participants were of the view that learners were not getting enough support on their academic journey from both the school and the parents. The following sub-theme emerged from this theme: *(a) lack of parental support.* The sub-theme is discussed below.

4.3.4.1. Lack of parental support

The participants were also of the view that the parents do not care for their children's education. It was revealed that parents do not check their children's school work. These were some of the views:

… parents fail to recognize that their children have been missing classes because they do not pay attention to their children's schoolwork (Mr Seabata, a teacher).

…how does one engage learners when among 40 learners in the classroom, only one learner has a calculator or a graph book? In this case, I feel obliged to lecture and make a few examples on the chalkboard (Mrs Chabeli, HOD of mathematics and science).

… parents do not show up for parents' meetings (Mr Thabo, a teacher).

… they come up with excuses all the time instead of paying school fees, and we are left with no choice but to send learners home (Mrs Mapalesa, a principal).

…when it comes to my education, I am on my own (Naleli, a learner).

4.3.5. Unfavourable working conditions

The participants expressed their frustration that the prevailing working conditions are not supporting effective teaching and learning processes. Probed on what makes the working conditions bad, they cited the following issues as evidence that the working environment is unfavourable: (a) *lack of teaching and learning resources*; (b) *lack of collaboration*; and (c) *teachers' welfare.* These sub-themes are presented in detail below.

4.3.5.1. Lack of teaching and learning resources

The participants explained that PHS does not have adequate resources such as equipped laboratories and access to the Internet to support learning. They mentioned that the state of the learning facilities within the school is deteriorating. They explained that:

> *… the basic apparatus and chemicals required in the laboratories are not there. The laboratories are becoming useless. Science teachers just teach. Science teachers do not do experiments any more, as a result it is difficult for learners to understand some of the concepts (Mrs Chabeli, HOD of mathematics and science).*

> *… since the science laboratory is not functional, if the computer laboratory is useful, it would be an advantage for learners to use computers to watch some of the experiments (Mr Seabata, a teacher).*

4.3.5.2. Lack of collaboration

Gathering on the participants' responses, there is no teamwork at PHS. The participants said that there are two groups of teachers treated differently; those who are favoured by some SMT members and those who are not in the good books of some SMT members. They explained that:

> *… when the teachers who are favoured by the principal come late to work, the principal does not take disciplinary measures against them, but when the teachers who are not on the good side of the principal are late to work are not subjected to the same treatment, the principal verbally attacks them (Mrs Molemo, HOD of social-sciences).*

… I avoid some of the topics I am supposed to teach if I feel incompetent about the content since I cannot approach my colleagues and ask for assistance because we are not on talking terms (Mrs Ramahloli, a teacher).

… I wonder how these teachers work together when they are not fond of each other (Mrs 'Maneo, a parent).

4.3.5.3. Teachers' welfare

The participants shared their experiences about how they are deprived of their basic needs required for a teacher to co-exist within the environment such as water and warmth. They explained that sometimes there is no heating in the staffroom during winter and as a result, it is difficult to do the work because it is very cold. They explained that:

… I sit outside in the sun because it is cold in the staffroom. I therefore feel like in winter I do not do much work as there are no tables outside. Sometimes, I do not mark learners' work as much as I do in the summer. This hinders the progress of the teaching and learning process (Mrs Mosele, a teacher).

… it is difficult to plan for the next lesson in a cold staffroom hence I barely plan for classes in winter. I really feel disorganized during winter, and I lose focus on my work (Mrs Moeketsi, a teacher).

4.3.6. Ineffective School Board

The participants were adamant that the other contributing factor to the poor academic performance of learners is that there are very few knowledgeable people on the SB. The responses revealed that the SB fails to execute lawful duties such as addressing disputes among the teachers and that brings chaos to the school environment. The participants said that the SB is ineffective because it *(a) lacks capacity in managerial roles.* This sub-theme is presented below.

4.3.6.1. Lack capacity in managerial roles

The information generated from the people I interviewed showed that the SB seems to be in the dark when it comes to matters concerning conflict management and other

managerial matters. They indicated that the SB members neglect the teachers' issues that are brought to their attention even when the matters need to be attended to urgently. Mrs Molemo explained that:

> *… some SMT members and some teachers lodged their grievances to the SB regarding, among other issues, the unfair treatment they get from other members of the SMT. Instead of addressing the issues, the SB picked one teacher who submitted the grievance letter and threatened and bullied her. The SB failed to intervene objectively, as a result, the problems escalated and continued to cause chaos within the school environment (Mrs Molemo, HOD of social-sciences).*

> *… the SB is not part of the decision makers; they are just told of the decisions that have already been made. Rampant hiring and dismissing of teachers disturb the whole school system negatively including the allocation of work, timetabling and learners' adaptation skills. However, it seems the SB is not aware of this negative impact (Mr Thabo, a teacher).*

> *… for three years the SB have never received an audited report yet one of their responsibilities is to guide the school finances. The teachers' representative raised the issue, but no other member of the SB supported the idea of a financial report hence the idea died a natural death (Mr Seabata, a teacher).*

4.3.7. Bullying

Some responses revealed that some persecution takes place within the school environment among learners, teachers, and between the teachers and the SMT. This theme is divided into two sub-themes namely: *(a) inconsistencies in teachers' treatment; and (b) gangsterism amongst learners.*

4.3.7.1. Inconsistencies in teachers' treatment

The participants revealed that some teachers are treated badly by the SMT. They pointed to the presence of threats, discrimination and office bullying at the school. They explained that all these make the teaching and learning environment hostile. They stated that:

… these two different groups of teachers are subjected to different forms of disciplinary measure, while their offences are similar. For example, some are given a form to sign and explain why they were absent, while the other group on the other hand is not given a form (Mr Kabi, a teacher).

*… some teachers can be absent without authorisation, and nobody asks them anything, but if other teachers do the same, they are reprimanded and threatened, which often results in chaos (*Mrs Chabeli, HOD of science and mathematics).

… confidential information which was shared in confidence with the SMT spreads across the school campus. For example, sensitive information such as teachers' illnesses, marital conflicts and the financial status of teachers (Mrs Moeketsi, a teacher).

… lately, I have discovered that some teachers earn their freedom by passing gossip from the teachers to the administration. These gossips contribute to disputes among the teachers and promote divisions among the role-players (Mrs Ramahloli, a teacher).

… some SMT members terrorise the teachers by, among other things, throwing comments such as: "I will report to the school board", or "I will recommend your transfer" (Mr Thabo, a teacher).

… this school environment is more like a concentration camp, and it is disturbing because we are colleagues and we are supposed to share the space, and the resources (Mrs Mamosele, a teacher.)

4.3.7.2. Gangsterism amongst learners

The participants shared their experiences regarding bullying among learners. In their responses, the participants explained that gangsterism within the village extends to learners within the school, and in turn contributes to absenteeism and learners dodging the classes.

The participants explained that some of the learners are identified to be members of the gangs given their truancy, even though they deny it. They pointed out that:

… Other learners associated with gangs were taken by police here at school. Some of these learners were convicted of murder or attempted murder. Some were taken by soldiers during the operation that they did which was meant to rehabilitate the children who were involved in gangs (Mr Seitlheko, a deputy principal).

… a lot of learners are members of the different village gangs and they fight and threaten each other to the extent that some learners dodge school (Mr Latela, HOD of commercial-studies).

… these learners disappear to the nearest hills and forests in the village where we assume they are recruited and trained to do dirty and illegal practices. The school also has reports of our learners and some dropout learners threatening other learners. There is also this one time, when a male teacher was ambushed by learners who were assumed to be our dropout learners at knife point, and they took his phone (Mrs Mapalesa, principal).

… there is this one incident where one learner wanted to leave school early because he received a death threat from other learners and other dropout learners who are members of the village gang (Mr Seabata, a teacher).

… when the teacher enquires about the absent learners, we are bullied into keeping our mouths shut by some of the learners. For example, they make gestures with their eyes, and fingers to threaten the rest of the class to keep the facts to themselves (Tlhalefo, a learner).

4.3.8. Banning the use cell phones or any gadgets on school premises

Issues relating to cell phones and other devices were also raised. The participants were of the view that the school administration was acting as a barrier to technological integration in the classroom by not allowing learners to bring cell phones and other technological gadgets to school. Some commented that the devices have many applications such as Google and YouTube with a lot of academic content and the learners are too attached to these devices as a result they may as well be helped to use the devices to their academic advantage. They say resisting the use of technology delimits learners' education. They shared their opinions:

… there is a shift in education where teachers flip lessons and learners are required to research before the classroom discussions. The learners would be more inclined to do their research if they are using technological devices than textbooks as they seem inseparable from their phones (Mrs Moeketsi, a teacher).

… I think denying learners the opportunity to own and bring cell phones and laptops to school is disarming them. There is a lot of valuable up-to-date academic information on the cell phone and multiple approaches to many concepts are well demonstrated on the internet (Mr Seabata, a teacher).

… if only the school administration can consider permitting the use of cell phones, iPads or laptops. The learners must be supervised to use them as supplementary to the learning material (Mr Kabi, a teacher)

4.4. Mitigating strategies that could enhance learners' academic performance

4.4.1. Adherence to the school goals and policies with collaboration

The participants were adamant that unity is key to improving the learners' academic performance. The sub-theme that emerged here is *(a) engagement of all role-players in school matters.* This sub-theme is presented in detail below.

4.4.1.1. Engagement of all role-players in school matters

The responses indicated that the SMT should involve the teachers, parents and learners in constructing what the school wants to achieve. The participants said this could bring a pool of quality ideas to the table, and also minimize misunderstandings among the role-players. They commented as follows:

What do we want to achieve by being here? This is one question that the SMT should ask all the role-players that include the members of the SMT, teachers, parents and learners and use their answers to build the school goal (Mr Thabo, a teacher).

… each category of role-players should also discuss their roles in line with the set goals and this should be done frequently each academic year (Mrs Ramahloli, a teacher).

How do we achieve what we want to achieve? This is another important question that the SMT can ask the role-players. Each category of stakeholders should be allowed to lay down their suggestions regarding the daily actions and roles they believe can build towards achieving the school goal (Mrs Moeketsi, a teacher).

… experience has taught me that collaboration works wonders (Mr Thabo, a teacher).

… the school policies can be reviewed from time to time and be aligned with the school goals, but this should also be done in collaboration. We are not trying to surprise each other as role-players, but we are working hand in hand to achieve a particular school goal (Mr Seabata, a teacher).

… working as a team as colleagues, in general, is a mandatory requirement for the good academic performance of the learners (Mr Kabi, a teacher).

4.4.2. Supporting the teaching and learning

The data revealed that equipping teachers with the requisite tools for instructional processes is another strategy that can enhance the academic performance of the learners. Under this theme, further scrutiny of data led to the emergence of the following sub-themes: *(a) teacher development, (b) provision of teaching and learning materials, (c) internal examination moderation and regular learners' assessment, (d) motivation for teachers and learners, and (e) capacitate the SB.*

4.4.2.1. Teacher development

The participants said that the SMT should prioritise training workshops, practical lesson observations with constructive feedback to build the teachers professionally and strengthen their confidence, and in turn enhance the academic performance of the learners. They explained that:

… encouraging the teachers' professional development and workshop attendance will equip the teachers with new recommended teaching skills. For instance, the SMT should encourage teachers to enroll for short courses, and participate in marking the external examinations to gain requisite experience (Mrs Ramahloli, a teacher).

The teachers who participated in the professional development programs should share their new knowledge with other teachers through workshops (Mrs Moeketsi, a teacher).

… each teacher has one or two strategies she/he employs to tackle the issues of classroom management and build a constructive teacher-learner relation. As a result, sharing ideas should be encouraged (Mrs Mamosele a teacher).

4.4.2.2. Provision of teaching and learning materials

The participants had the opinion that making teaching and learning material a priority is one of the strategies that could enhance the academic performance of the learners. They explained that teaching and learning are the core of the teaching and learning process and, as a result, should be prioritized at all costs. They emphasized that:

… teaching and learning resources should be prioritized (Mrs Ramahloli, a teacher).

… we should be given teaching materials on time... when school reopens teachers should have teaching materials, and the teaching and learning process should begin (Mrs Moeketsi, a teacher).

… teachers' notes are summaries of the topics we are taught; the notes are not adequate. I think the textbooks can supplement my notes and help me understand better (Naleli, a learner).

4.4.2.3. Internal examination moderation and regular learners' assessment

The participants were of the view that internal moderation of examinations and assessing learners frequently are some of the strategies that may enhance learners' academic performance. They pointed out that for effective and proficient assessment, the SMT has to assemble a representative team of teachers to moderate internal examination papers. They explained that:

> *… under the topic 'trade,' I taught learners, the definition, types and patterns. The question I constructed was "What challenges are faced by countries that depend highly on primary products?" The content I covered did not reveal the problems faced by different trade patterns. This shows how unfair the examination was. With the moderation of internal examinations, I think these kinds of mistakes can be minimized (Mrs Ramahloli, a teacher).*

> *... constructive testing of learners should be done regularly. It should not be just throwing a test to learners just because the SMT requires the marks, the test should be planned and have clear objectives (Mrs Mamosele, a teacher).*

> *… I see learners' feedback as a teacher's way of communicating with learners. Feedbacks show the learners where they are wrong, where they are right, and the way forward. I have since noticed that feedbacks even motivate the learners to do more (Mrs Mamokhantso, a parent).*

4.4.2.4. Motivation for teachers and learners

The participants' responses revealed that motivating both the teachers and learners would help in improving learners' academic performance. They pointed out that emotionally stable role-players perform better, thus teachers and learners need to be motivated to boost their mental fitness. They argued that:

> *… some teachers go through emotionally damaging personal situations. … short courses, motivational speakers, and team-building activities may be of assistance (Mrs Moeketsi, a teacher).*

… SMT must implement varying motivational activities for both teachers and learners to ensure constant determination and enthusiasm to help improve commitment and diligence.… I believe this would help with improving the performance of learners and teachers (Mr Seabata, a teacher).

… I think we can recognise and award things such as good school attendance, good classroom participation and many others (Mrs Mapalesa, a principal).

… sometimes I forget to do my assignments and focus more on house chores, and television programmes, and I think a little talk about my school day would reawaken my thoughts regarding the assignments (Tlhalefo, a learner).

4.4.2.5. Capacitate the SB

The participants believe that capacity building of the SB is of utmost importance to the good running of the school towards attainment of key objectives, subsequently supporting all role-players. They pointed out conflict management as an area that needs to be improved for stability within the school environment. They suggested that:

… varying pieces of training can help alleviate and as such build SB capacity towards addressing outstanding issues such as conflicts that might negatively impact the school's overall effectiveness and efficiency (Mr Seitlheko, a deputy principal).

… being an SB member means holding a pivotal position within the school system where strategic plans are made. This means that an SB member should be in a position to bring forth ideas that align with the school goals, listen to other role-players' ideas, analyse the ideas, create the school policies, and approve school policies that align with the school's goal and mission (Mr Thabo, a teacher).

4.5. Chapter summary

This chapter presented the findings based on the semi-structured interviews which took place in different locations such as the homes of the participants, the office and the staffroom at PHS and the car depending on the convenience and comfort of the participants and the varying times when the interviews took place. The main aim of this

study was to investigate the experiences and perceptions of the SMT, teachers, parents and learners concerning the school-based contributory factors to the poor academic performance of the learners and explore the mitigating strategies that the SMT could use to alleviate this challenge. The findings presented in this chapter are summarized, interpreted and discussed in the next chapter, and will help me to draw informed conclusions and make recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, conclusion, limitations and recommendations

5.1.   Introduction

The catalyst for this study was the persistently poor academic performance of learners at PHS, particularly observed over the years. Hence this study sought to investigate the causes of the poor academic performance of learners at this school and it also explores the mitigating strategies that SMT could employ to enhance the academic performance of learners. While the previous chapter presented the findings from the responses of the SMT, teachers, parents and learners, this chapter focuses on discussion based on the data, theoretical framework and the literature review. The chapter concludes with the research limitations and the suggested recommendations.

5.2.   Overview of the study

Chapter One among other things described the problem and detailed the purpose of the study. Their search questions and objectives were also presented. The chapter also described the significance of the study. The theoretical framework, research design and methodology, issues of trustworthiness, ethical considerations and limitations of the study were introduced.

Chapter Two described the underpinning theoretical framework, which is the Instructional Leadership Theory, where Hallinger and Murphy, 1985 model was adopted since it has been scientifically tested and proven to improve the academic performance of learners. Moreover, the operational terms were defined, and the literature relating the causes of learners' poor academic performance and the mitigating strategies that SMTs could implement to improve the performance was reviewed.

Chapter Three articulated the study's research methodology, where the research paradigm, interpretivism, anchoring the study was described. Furthermore, the chapter described the qualitative research approach which was adopted for the study. Qualitative approach is best suited when dealing with complicated issues of life. Research design, data generation tools, population, participant selection, data analysis, ethical considerations, measures of trustworthiness, and limitations were discussed.

Chapter Four presented the research findings informed by the participants' responses. The key participants were the SMT, teachers, parents and learners. The findings were analysed and categorised into themes and sub-themes to answer the overarching research question and the subsidiary questions.

5.3. A brief description of the research questions and the purpose and objectives of the study

The overarching research question was *what are the contributory factors to the poor academic performance of the learners and which are the mitigating strategies that SMT could employ to enhance the academic performance of the learners?*

The subsidiary research questions were:

(1) *Which factors does the SMT consider as the major causes of poor academic performance at PHS?*

(2) *What factors do PHS teachers perceive as the major factors contributing to learners' poor academic performance compared to other neighbouring schools?*

(3) *What factors do parents of PHS perceive as contributory factors to the poor academic performance of learners?*

(4) *Which are the major factors that PHS learners consider as contributors to the poor academic performance of learners?*

(5) Which mitigating strategies might be used by SMT of PHS to enhance the learners' academic performance?

5.4. Major findings and their discussion

The overarching question consists of two thematic areas: 1) *contributory factors towards poor academic performance of the learners; 2 the mitigating strategies to enhance the academic performance of the learners.* In an attempt to respond to these important themes, the presentation is divided into two main sections: factors perpetuating the learners' poor academic performance and strategies that could enhance the learners' academic performance.

5.4.1. Causes of the poor academic performance of learners

Participants had opinions on possible causes of poor academic performance of learners at PHS. They pointed to breaching of the school policies, lack of learners' commitment to their studies, lack of teachers' commitment, limited learners' academic guidance, unfavorable working conditions, ineffective SB, bullying and resistance towards the current technological modes. These findings are discussed below.

Breaching the school policy

The school is an organization consisting of different role-players who share the resources and the environment (Kapur, 2021). Each role-player has different roles and activities that all build towards the same goal; learners' achievement. There are frameworks within the school that serve as guidelines to maintain order and bring synergy to the daily activities of these role-players, that when mishandled, crumble the entire school system (Brolund, 2016; Liwane, 2017). In accordance with this norm, it is vivid that all role-players have to work orderly to execute their roles and act in line with the set school policies to help learners improve their academic performance. However, it is deduced from the findings that there is no order at PHS. The policies meant to govern daily school activities are not adhered to.

The findings show that those at the helm of school administration and management continually breach the admission policy, promotion policy, textbook rental scheme, teachers' award policy and do not prioritize the allotted teaching and learning hours. These practices disrupt the effective execution of the core school business, eventually resulting in the learners' poor academic performance. Taking the admission and promotion policies for example, participants, especially teachers, revealed that while most of the learners already admitted are below average, the problem is further compounded by the promotion criteria. Thus, according to them, learners are promoted to the next classes with a very low aggregate contrary to the one stipulated in the school promotion policy. These findings are consistent with those of Lekhetho (2003) who argued that an open admission policy in low-performing schools contributes to the poor academic performance of learners. This irregular practice will continually translate into poor LGCSE

results. This breaching of school policies goes against the basic principle of promoting and nurturing a sustainable teaching and learning culture as advocated by the ILT (Hassanet al., 2019).

Participants further pointed out that the school violates the rental book policy and does not prioritize the allotted teaching and learning hours. Thus, learners do not have textbooks and enough time for learning. This could mean that it is not easy for learners to independently read since they solely rely on teachers' notes which may not be elaborative enough. This also implies that the learners 'sit for their final examinations with inadequate content that limits their answers in the examination resulting in learners scoring low marks. The minimum instructional time set for Lesotho secondary schools is one hundred and eighty (180) days per year (Government Gazette, 2023). As a result, the syllabus of each grade is supposedly designed to fit in this standard instructional time. Rampant haphazard cutting of the instructional time negatively interferes with the amount and depth of the content delivered. This says that learners sit for examination with inadequate content. Thus, they might fail to attempt other examination questions that require them to use the content they were not taught. This implication resonates well with literature that if the instructional time is not proactively managed, the instructional processes are negatively impacted thus the poor academic performance of the learners (Ayeni et al., 2020; Lekhetho, 2003). Ultimately, this reflects negatively on the competencies of the school administration team and their will to support effective learning. This irregular practice at PHS counters the very basic ILT principle that urges school administrative bodies to guarantee the provision of quality teaching and learning experiences (Hompashe, 2018).

The other contributing factor which emerged from the findings in this study is the inconsistency in the teachers' award policy which appears to create dissatisfaction. The teachers feel that the award policy is discriminatory as it is unreliably implemented. This finding is consistent with the finding of Dludla (2019) who found that when teachers are least satisfied, the academic performance of learners is negatively affected. This could mean that teachers who are not awarded do not feel obligated to go the extra mile in their

instruction duties and or perform their duties diligently hence the poor academic performance of the learners.

With reference to the above, SMT practices and actions at PHS seem to challenge best practices advocated by the ILT that for successful academic performance, the SMT who are the instructional leaders should focus on incepting a positive school climate (Belliabas et al., 2021). Also, these practices seem to be against literature that says that it is the responsibility of the SMT to create conducive working conditions including the creation of clearly articulated school goals with clear policies, and the implementation plan for efficient and effective running of the school (Belliabas et al., 2020; Mafuwane, 2011). These purported practices derail the school from performing its core activities with efficacy.

Lack of learners' commitment to their studies

One interesting finding is the lack of learners' commitment to their academic work. In this regard, the participants pointed to cheating assignments, lack of learners' participation in the classroom, learner absenteeism and learners studying without a proper study plan, as indicators of learners' lack of commitment. In explaining this finding, the participants indicated that learners do not take the assignments meant to support their learning seriously. They duplicate assignments just to get the teachers off their backs. This above-mentioned factor negatively affects learners' academic performance as the assignment fails to fulfil the objective it was meant to achieve.

The participants also talked about learner absenteeism as one of the indicators of learners' lack of commitment to their studies. When learners bunk classes, they miss a lot of significant content, which they need to attempt some of the external examination questions. Consequently, failure to answer the examination questions results in poor academic performance of learners. This seems to be perpetuated by the fact that the learners are left alone and unmonitored most of the time in the classroom, as a result, they do not feel like they are missing a lot of content (Asiyai, 2017). It seems that the PHS SMT does not do rounds within the school compound hence learners find it easy to buck classes. The SMT's negligence differs with the ILT principle which suggests that the SMT

should maintain high visibility to control things such as punctuality and classroom attendance of both the teachers and the learners for enhanced learners' academic performance (Shava et al., 2021).

Lack of teachers' commitment

Literature cited that the habitual absenteeism emanates from, among other things, the abuse of sick leave, time-off by teachers who are union office bears and site stewards, job overload, low level of instructional competence and teachers who live far from their homes (Asiyai, 2017; Liwane, 2017). In this study it was found that the teachers 'rampant absenteeism stems from among other factors, drinking and gambling. The reported teacher absenteeism contributes immensely to high learners' failure. This behaviour is not only against the Codes of Good Practices of 2011 but also affects the provision of quality education. This revelation is consistent with literature which argues that frequent absenteeism breaks the teacher-learner bond that is meant to trigger learners' motivation towards learning (Asiyai, 2017; Obiro, et al., 2017). With the above in context, the participants' views resonate with Asiyai (2017), Msosa (2020), and Obiro et al. (2017) who argue that regardless of whether the teachers' absenteeism is granted by the SMT or self-granted, it negatively affects the academic performance of the learners. Since this high rate of teachers' absenteeism contravenes the very basic principle of the ILT of managing the instructional programme that includes the teachers' classroom attendance (Shava et al., 2021), it is suggested in this study that SMT should apply the educational laws to eradicate this unfortunate behavior by teachers which compromises effective teaching and learning.

Limited learners' academic guidance

This study found that the parents refuse to procure the learning materials required to aid learners with content assimilation for full classroom participation. As such, the teacher participants cited that they teach theory and skip the practical lessons as the parents do not buy the learning tools such as calculators, instruments and exercise books. In addition, the study found that assessing the learners while most of them do not have calculators, textbooks, and exercise books propels the learners to ignore the assessment task or copy from others resulting in the failure of assessment to serve its objective of

enhancing comprehension of the subject matter. These revelations are consistent with Liwane (2017) and Olaleye et al. (2017) findings that learning materials are mandatory in the learning process as they facilitate the creation of a positive environment where teachers are not the sole providers of knowledge, but facilitate learning.

Unfavourable working conditions

In this regard, the current study found that inequalities that breed divisions among teachers, limited teaching and learning resources, unhealthy working conditions in the staffroom interfere with the processes of teaching and learning, and negatively impact the academic performance of the learners. Similarly, findings of the study conducted on high schools in Ghana confirm that a negative school climate is contributory to the poor academic performance of the learners (Baafi, 2020). The teacher participants at PHS explicated that due to the coldness in the staffroom during winter, the teachers do not mark the learners' exercise books and lesson preparations are not done adequately as most of the teachers busk in the sun. This could mean that content and assessment coverage is negatively affected due to an unfavourable working environment. Munna & Kalama (2021) reveal that giving learners adequate formative and developmental feedback highly correlates with their academic performance. This finding corroborates the findings of Dludla (2019) and Mgaiwa (2021) that poor working conditions are detrimental to learners' academic performance. The unfavourable working conditions at PHS contradict the conditions that influence the successful academic achievement of learners, cohesion among the role-players and a conducive school environment that supports the proactive teaching and learning that the ILT supports (Hompashe, 2018).

Ineffective School Board

Another important finding is that the SB fails to execute its roles efficiently and effectively, and this in turn negatively affects the academic performance of the learners. The participants said that the SB fails to bring order in the school hence they concluded that SB does not have the requisite competence to execute their role proactively. They explained that in cases where there are conflicts between the SMT and the teachers, the SB of PHS fails to intervene because its members lack conflict management skills. This finding is consistent with the literature that lack of a powerful school management is a

major cause of the poor academic performance of the learners (Hompashe, 2018; Liwane 2017; Munna & Kalam, 2021; Spicer, 2016). The participants exclaimed that this prolongs the chaos resulting in a negative school environment which negatively affects the teaching and learning processes. This finding is contrary to one of the principles of the ILT that suggests that for successful academic achievement of learners, the SMTs who are instructional leaders should promote a positive school climate for effective instructional processes (Hompashe, 2018; Shava et al., 2021).

Bullying

There are some elements of harassment and victimisation within the school environment that are found to be contributory factors to the poor academic performance of the learners. This victimization is said to be perpetuated by some of the SMT members, teachers and learners. Some teachers reported being bullied by some SMT members. Some learners reported being bullied by some teachers and other learners who are members of gangs, including those who dropped out of the school.

The teachers said they feel trapped because they are not to be seen with certain teachers yet they are all colleagues and have to share the resources. The learners on the other hand said they cannot discuss the absenteeism of other learners who are assumed to be members of the gangs with the teachers because by doing so they subject themselves to threats. The conflicts and bullying at PHS do contribute to the poor performance of learners. This finding confirms Baafi (2020), Jackson (2018), Lekhetho (2003), (2021), and Spicer (2016) that learners who are in a school environment full of conflicts perform poorly.

Resistance towards the current technological modes

Despite the massive shift in every aspect of life from traditional ways to technological practices, it is found that PHS is lagging behind by denying learners access to technology, thereby limiting diversification in learning hence the learners persistently perform poorly. Even though the teacher and learner participants are aware it is inevitable to live without technology as it makes complex tasks seamless and efficient (Al-Bataineh & Al-Bataineh, 2016), at PHS technological gadgets are still forbidden. It is vivid that the learners at PHS

do not get to see different methods and perspectives that aid with the comprehension and assimilation of concepts taught in the classroom which are enshrined in the use of technological learning modes hence the poor academic performance of the learners. Contrary to the finding, literature advocates for the integration of technology in teaching and learning for enhancement of learners' academic performance as the use of phones and laptops in the teaching and learning processes is found to stimulate learners' participation and interest in their learning (Chere-Masopha, 2013; Harris et al., 2016).

5.4.2. Mitigating strategies that SMT could implement

Adherence to the school goals and policies with collaboration

Although the participants had many opinions regarding the misalignment of practice with school goals and policies, the most important suggestions said the SMT should focus on the school implementation plan, collaborative efforts and harmony, a strategies to achieving learners' success. This finding is consistent with one of the instructional theory principles that the academic achievement of the learners depends on the collaborative effort of stakeholders and the attainment of lesson objectives daily (Shava et al., 2021). The role-players' daily objectives and activities should revolve around the enhancement of the academic performance of the learners. Teachers and SMT participants suggested that school implementation plans should be in line with the school goals and policies, and should consider and incorporate all role-players' ideas that are relevant and consistent with realising the school goals and mission. They suggested that the discrepancies and loopholes in the school policies that may distract the school implementation plan should be communicated and reviewed by all the stakeholders. These suggestions agree with Tsuut (2015) and Zahari & Abd Latif (2016) that running a school effectively requires a guiding framework that encourages participation and inclusivity, and collective decision-making.

Supporting the teaching and learning

In general, the findings suggest holistic support for effective and efficient teaching and learning processes for the enhancement of the learners' academic performance. The participants point to SMT paving the way for a conducive school environment that

includes the provision of the teaching and learning materials, protecting the teaching and learning time, capacitating role-players, safety for role-players within the school environment, fairness, cohesion among the stakeholders, and communication that fosters proactive teaching and learning. It seems it is mandatory that the SMT should support and attend with care to all aspects within the school that work towards realising the school goals. Thus, the laboratories should be maintained and equipped with necessary tools, and parents should be cautioned about the importance of procuring the learning materials for the learners. With these in place, the teachers should be trained so that they can facilitate the instructional processes diligently and effectively. Also, the teachers should be treated equally and unity among them should be encouraged through team building courses and games so that there could be a strong link that is requisite to successful academic performance by the learners. In accordance with these findings, the ILT maintains that for improved learners' academic performance, the SMT should facilitate the inception of an enabling school environment ideal for effective teaching and learning. These findings also corroborate those of Back, et al., (2016), Lekhetho (2021) and Zysberg & Schwabsky (2020) that a conducive school climate plays a significant role in the learners' academic performance. As a consequence, SMT at all times strive to create a supportive and positive school climate. The role-players should engage in compulsory training relevant to their daily roles that will keep them proactive in their roles to ensure improvement to learners' academic performance (Gyasi et al., 2016).

Synergy in all school activities towards adequate support to teaching and learning is a requisite managerial skill which SMT needs in running the school in order to support teaching and learning (Firmina, 2015). PHS needs to coordinate all school activities and as such help with adequate support for teaching and learning. Instructional time can only be protected with the schools' activities being all coordinated and accordingly positioned. This way, there will be no extra-curricular activities, such as entertainment, that eat into instructional time, and frequent and unplanned half days that SMT and teacher participants pointed out as contributory factors to the poor academic performance of learners at PHS.

5.5.   Summary

Factors that contribute to learners' poor academic performance

The purpose of this case study as articulated in the aim, was to *investigate the experiences and perceptions of SMT, teachers, parents and learners concerning school-based contributory factors to the poor academic performance of learners at Phokeng High School and to explore the mitigating strategies that the SMT could implement to alleviate this challenge*. The study investigated the stakeholders' perspectives, views and experiences regarding the contributory factors to the poor academic performance of learners, and explored the possible mitigating strategies that the SMT could use to curb the declining academic performance of learners. Several causes were discovered and articulated in the study, as well as the possible mitigating strategies that PHS can implement to improve learners' academic performance.

Poor academic performance by learners at PHS can be attributed to several factors that seem to have relegated the school to a dysfunctional entity. The SMT violates school policies, much so without proper communication and coordinated strategies to mitigate possible effects of such violation. Non adherence to policies such as admission policy where the learners are admitted throughout the year in every grade without considering the fact that they may be lagging behind others in terms of the content taught.

The promotion policy is also ignored. The learners are promoted to the next grade despite obtaining a lower average aggregate than the one prescribed on the promotion policy. The non-adherence to the textbooks rental policy makes teaching and learning activities very difficult and prone to time-consuming and inefficient improvisation from both teachers and learners. The SMT also cut the standard teaching and learning hours by many unplanned activities and time-offs which reduce the time for content delivery.

In addition, there are inconsistencies in the implementation of the teachers' award policy and this creates unhappiness and demotivation among staff. In conclusion, the violation of school policies creates discrepancies and inefficiencies within the school system hence the poor academic performance of the learners. The practices of the SMT members within PHS are against the best practices of instructional leaders as suggested in Hallinger and

Murphy's Instructional Leadership Model of 1985 which have been proven to enhance the academic performance of the learners. These functions are: defining of the school mission, managing of the instructional program and developing the school learning climate program (Hompashe, 2018; Shava et al., 2021).

Learners' commitment at PHS is very low and characterized by cheating on their assignments by duplicating one assignment, rampant learner absenteeism, passive learners in classes and very bad study habits. Also, the teachers were found not to be committed to their work as they are frequently absent, use drugs during working hours, are not supportive of the learners' learning and lack motivation. The lack of teachers' commitment could be due to the unfavorable working conditions the teachers experience daily.

Parents as well were found to contribute to the learners' poor academic performance as they neither motivate the learners nor procure necessary learning material. These practices of the role-players hamper the instructional processes and, as a result, hinder the learners' academic performance.It could therefore be concluded that PHS SMT needs to make initiatives to revive the role-players through various strategies that could help save the school from further deterioration in academic performance. According to Mullins and Christie (2016), the SMT has the responsibility to influence the teachers, non-academic staff, learners and parents within the schools to act in a particular way with the aim to ensure learners achieve academic success.

Mitigating strategies that the SMT could employ

This section summarises the opinions of the participants regarding the mitigating strategies that the SMT could employ to enhance the academic performance of learners at PHS.

The participants hold the opinion that adherence to the school goals and policies with collaboration is one strategy that the SMT could adopt to enhance the academic performance of learners at PHS. Setting and creating teaching and learning activities meant to realise the school goals needs to be done engagingly and inclusively, where all role-players' participation is encouraged. Equally important is to collaboratively

communicate and review the discrepancies in the school policies that seem to obstruct the school implementation plan, for example, the banning of technological gadgets at school. In this way, the study found that teachers, parents and learners will have a deeper understanding of what the school intends to achieve. Tsuut (2015) found that to achieve learners' academic success, the SMT needs to accept other stakeholders' contributions in goal-setting and allow free decision-making processes. This participants' idea aligns with the best practice suggested in the ILT that for learners to achieve good academic performance, the SMT, teachers, parents and learners shouldcollaboratively understand the underlying principles for them to effectively implement during teaching and learning interactions (Shava et al., 2021).

The teaching and learning process needs to be supported at all costs. Activities such as capacity building, provision of teaching and learning materials, teachers' and learners' motivation, regular learners' assessments and internal examinations moderation need to be given full attention for improved academic performance. This practice is also suggested as the one of the best principles of the ILT that all the efforts and resources should be focused on the activities that are meant to enhance the academic performance of the learners (Heystek & Chasara, 2021).

5.6.   Limitations of the study

The study is qualitative in nature with the aim to investigate the experiences and perceptions of SMT, teachers, parents and learners concerning school-based contributory factors to the poor academic performance of learners at PHS and to explore the mitigating strategies that the SMT could implement to alleviate this challenge.

This study lacks generalizability as data generation focused on PHS only (Mwita, 2022; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). As a result, the findings are not generalizable to other secondary schools that differ from PHS in terms of characteristics such as size of the population and location of the school. Accordingly, further studies may increase their scope to other cases in the district and nationally. The other limitation of this study is that the data is obscured (Mwita, 2022). The information is only gathered from four categories of role-players: the SMT, teachers, parents and learners, leaving out the views and opinions of the SB and DEO. Each category works towards realising the learners'

academic achievement, although they play different roles. Hence the SB and DEO could have added valuable data from different perspectives regarding the phenomenon in study and suggest possible remedies. Furthermore, the fact that I interviewed participants face-to-face made some teachers hesitant to talk about factors that relate to SMT and other teachers. They rather chose to provide more data related to school-based factors that contribute to the poor performance of the learners, and are perpetuated by the learners. Likewise, the study used only one method of data generation, semi-structured interviews. Perhaps the use of questionnaires and focus groups would have uncovered some of the data that may have been left out during the semi- structured face-to-face interviews.

5.7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn based on the findings of this study:

5.7.1. Recommendations for capacity building for role-players

- It is recommended that SMT should engage the teachers, parents and learners while developing a detailed school implementation plan. The plan should break down the roles in the school policies into daily activities with timelines that will serve as a daily guide. The SMT, teachers, learners and parents in these different categories should meet for reflections and continuous improvement every weekend or fortnightly. This will foster focus, collaboration, collective decision-making among the role-players, and positive school climate as role-players' deviation from the plan and discrepancies in the plan will quickly be corrected and amended with collaborative efforts through weekly reflections. Ultimately, this could lead to learners' academic success.

5.7.2. Supporting teaching and learning

Teaching and learning at PHS need to be prioritised and at all times must be supported. As a consequence, it is recommended that:

- The school should review its policy on the use of technological gadgets at school. There appears to be a shift from the traditional ways to the modern technological ways of teaching and learning in the education sector, where information on almost

every concept is available on the internet, and materials are easily accessible. PHS may as well gradually integrate technology into its instructional processes as a way to enhance the learners' academic performance. The school should also devise ways that do not require sending learners home to collect fees. This may include formulating a school fees contract that is between the school and the parents. This could help curb learner absenteeism.

- Teachers need constant refresher courses. Such courses will not only assist them with teaching and learning methods that resonate well with the type of learners and the constraints that PHS may be going through at a given time but will also motivate teachers. This could lead to academic success at the school.

- Parents need to be constantly sensitised and engaged so that they can be in a better position to offer requisite support to learners. This is because some parents may genuinely not be aware of the type of support they may offer to their children. As a result, PHS needs to constantly keep a vigilant communication channel open for engaging with parents.

5.8. Chapter summary

The study investigated the experiences and perceptions of SMT, teachers, parents and learners concerning school-based contributory factors to the poor academic performance of learners at Phokeng High School and explored the mitigating strategies that the SMT could implement to alleviate this challenge. This chapter discussed the findings presented in Chapter Four, and the conclusions were drawn from the findings. The recommendations and limitations have also been presented. The causes of poor academic performance of learners at PHS and mitigation strategies have been well articulated, and as such, could be used to help improve the academic performance of learners at the school.

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Annex

Annex 1: PHS grades compared with four (4) neighboring schools

Year	Grade	Bataung High School	Bataung High School (%)	Bakoena High School	Bakoena High School (%)	Bakhatla High School	Bakhatla High School (%)	Bakubung High School	Bakubung High School (%)	Phokeng High School	Phokeng High School (%)
2020	A*	10	1.01	2	0.31	0	0.00	1	0.25	0	0.00
	A	66	6.67	21	3.30	2	2.94	8	2	0	0.00
	B	251	25.35	67	10.52	8	11.76	35	8.75	5	1.57
	C	329	33.23	175	27.47	20	29.41	90	22.5	22	6.90
	D	201	20.30	177	27.79	19	27.94	112	28	84	26.33
	E	128	12.93	178	27.94	18	26.47	143	35.75	134	42.01
	U	5	0.51	17	2.67	1	1.47	11	2.75	74	23.20
2019	A*	8	0.81	1	0.14	0	0.00	1	0.21	0	0.00
	A	58	5.88	17	2.32	1	1.02	15	3.17	0	0.00
	B	218	22.09	75	10.25	9	9.18	55	11.63	9	4.57
	C	337	34.14	200	27.32	25	25.51	102	21.56	38	19.29
	D	222	22.49	218	29.78	28	28.57	109	23.04	58	29.44
	E	137	13.88	213	29.10	33	33.67	171	36.15	68	34.52
	U	7	0.71	8	1.09	2	2.04	20	4.23	24	12.18
2018	A*	20	1.87	3	0.48	0	0.00	1	0.23	0	0.00
	A	87	8.12	14	2.25	2	2.06	14	3.29	0	0.00
	B	177	16.53	86	13.83	11	11.34	52	12.21	9	2.84
	C	413	38.56	222	35.69	31	31.96	106	24.88	60	18.93
	D	224	20.92	153	24.60	31	31.96	101	23.71	81	25.55
	E	147	13.73	140	22.51	21	21.65	133	31.22	110	34.70
	U	3	0.28	4	0.64	1	1.03	19	4.46	57	17.98

Annex 2: Totals on absent candidates, candidates registered, and total grades for PHSand four (4) neighboring schools

	Bataung H.S.	Bakoena H.S.	Bakhatla H.S.	Bakubung H.S.	PHS
2020 Absent candidates (X)	0	24	0	7	6
2019 Absent candidates (X)	2	0	0	22	3
2018 Absent candidates (X)	7	9	0	2	9
Total Candidates 2020	145	109	10	86	87
Total Candidates 2019	145	115	18	100	44
Total Candidates 2018	156	95	13	86	81
Total grades in 2020	990	637	68	400	319
Total grades in 2019	987	732	98	473	197
Total grades in 2018	1071	622	97	426	317

Appendices

Appendix A: Introductory letter

The National University of Lesotho

Telephone: +266 22340601

http://www.nul.ls

P.O. Roma 180

Lesotho

Africa

15th November, 2021

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Education office

Maseru 100

Re: Request for ECOL Data in Relation to LGCSE Results

This serves to confirm that Ms Retsepile Lekola is a Masters student in the Department of Educational Foundations, National University of Lesotho. She is currently undertaking an inquiry investigating factors that may contribute to learners' poor performance and explores the possible mitigating strategies. As a result, please assist her with the data she may require from your noble office.

I will appreciate your assistance in this regard

Sincerely

Sepiriti Sepiriti (PhD)

Appendix B: Letter of application to Teaching Service Department (TSD)

National University of Lesotho

Department of Educational Foundations

16 August 2022

The manager

Teaching Service Department

Dear sir/madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I Lekola, R., (Mamaphutseng Mafereka) a teacher, and a student in the Nation University of Lesotho hereby request permission to conduct research in one of the High schools. I am exploring the following topic: *Investigating mitigating strategies that Phokeng high school SMT could use to enhance learners' academic performance in their LGSCE final year: A case of Phokeng high school.*

My study involves the phase whereby I will be interviewing the individuals from different groups within the school, School Management Team, parents of the learners, teachers, and learners. The interviews will be face-to-face.

I would like to assure your office that my research activities will not disturb the teaching and learning activities within the school. I will make sure that upon completion of this study, your office receives a copy of my thesis.

Yours sincerely,

Retsepile Lekola (Mamaphutseng Mafereka)

tsepimphu@gmail.com

56808049

Appendix C: Letter of application to the SMT to conduct research

National University of Lesotho

Department of Educational Foundations

17 August 2022

The School Management Team

Dear sir/madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I Lekola, R., (Mamaphutseng Mafereka) a teacher, and a student in the Nation University of Lesotho hereby request permission to conduct research in one of the high schools. I am exploring the following topic: *Investigating the mitigating strategies that SMT can use to improve the academic performance of learners.*

My study involves the phase whereby I will be interviewing individuals from different groups within the school, School Management Team, parents of the learners, teachers, and learners. The interviews will be face-to-face.

I would like to assure your office that my research activities will not disturb the teaching and learning activities within the school. I will make sure that upon completion of this study, your office receives a copy of my thesis.

Yours sincerely,

Retsepile Lekola (Mamaphutseng Mafereka)

tsepimphu@gmail.com

56808049

Appendix D: Participant information sheet

National University of Lesotho

Department of Educational Foundations

October 2022

The participant

INFORMED CONSENT

RESEARCH TOPIC: *Investigating mitigating strategies that SMT could use to enhance learners' academic performance in their LGSCE final year: A case of Phokeng High School.*

DATE: ……………………………………

Dear participant

My name is Retsepile Lekola and I am doing research with Dr Sepiriti Sepiriti (PhD) as my supervisor, and a lecture in the Department of Educational Foundations at the National University of Lesotho. We are inviting you to participate in a study aiming at investigating the experiences and perceptions of the SMT, parents, teachers and learners concerning school-based factors that contribute to the poor academic performance of learners at Phokeng High School and explore the strategies that the SMT needs to alleviate the issues.

If you participate in this study, confidentiality and anonymity will be upheld throughout the research, and may decide to withdraw at any stage should you feel the need to. You will not be asked to reveal the information that will allow your identity to be revealed. Note that the interviews will be noted on paper for the purpose of data computing.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign a letter as a declaration of your consent.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I …………………………………………………hereby consent that I participated in this study voluntarily. The researcher explained to me the aim of the study and assured me that my right to confidentiality will be preserved. I acknowledge that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study solely and not for commercial purposes and thereby give consent to the research to use this information.

Participant's signature …………………………. Date …………………

Researcher's signature ………………………….Date ………………….

Supervisor's signature ……………………………Date………………….

Appendix E: Informed consent to take in the study – parents

National University of Lesotho

Department of Educational Foundations

October 2022

The participant

TUMELLANO

RESEARCH TOPIC: *Investigating mitigating strategies that Phokeng High School SMT can use to enhance learners' academic performance in their LGSCE final year: A case of Phokeng High School. (Liphuputso tsamaoa a ka sebelisoang ke baokameli ba sekolo se phahameng saA ho akofisa tsebetso ea baithuti e bonahalang e nyehlile ea lihahlobo tsa makhaola khang tsa LGCSE.)*

DATE: …………………………………………

Parent

Motsoali

Ka lebitso ke Retsepile Lekola. Ke tichere hape moithuti ka sekolong seseholo saSechaba. Ke ntse ke etsa liphuputso mabapi le litaba tseo ke seng ke li boletse ka holimo ka tataiso ea Dr Sepiriti Sepiriti (PhD) e le morupeli hona ka sekolong ka moo. Re u memela ho nka karolo liphuputsong tsena ka ho hlahisa maikutlo malebana le tsebetso ena ea bana le maoa a u nahanang hore a ka thusa baokameli ho akofisa tsebetso ena ea sekolo se phahameng saPhokeng.

Ha u ka nka karolo boithutong bona, re u tsepisa hore re tla u bolokela lekunutu ka litsela tsohle. Mohlala, re sebelisa mabitso ao re iqapelang ona kahona, mabitso a hao akeke a hlahella liphuputsong tsena. Le litaba tsa mofuta o fe kapa o fe tse ka utloahalang eka li amana le uena katloloho re qoba ho lihlahisa liphuputsong tsena.

Re kopa ha u lumela ho nka karolo lipatlisisong tsena u tekene tokomane ena e re lumellang ho sebelisa maikutlo ana a hao.

Boitlamo

'na …………………………………………….. ke lamella bafuputsi ba boletsoeng ka holimo ho sebelisa maikutlo ana aka. Ke hlaloselitsoe ka botlalo sepheo sa liphuputso, ke tiiselitsoe hore ke tla bolokeloa lekunutu ka litsela tsohle. Ke fana ka tumello hore maikutlo aka a sebelisoe molemong oa liphuputso tsena feela.

Boitekeno ba motsoali …………………………… Date …………………

Boitekeno ba mofuputsi ………………………….. Date …………………

Boitekeno ba motataisi…………………………….Date………………….

Appendix F: Interview schedule for SMT

This research seeks to unveil the elements within the school that cause poor academic performance and ways to enhance academic performance.

Personal information

    A. Sex: …………………………………………………

    B. Job title: ……………………………………..

    C. Years of experience: ………………………………..

Job-related information

    1. How would describe the performance of PHSin relation to the neighboring schools?

    2. If you think they are performing differently, what do you think is the source of these different performances?

    3. What support do you think you can render to teachers and learners to enhance academic performance at PHS?

Appendix G: Interview schedule for teachers

This research seeks to unveil the elements within the school that cause poor academic performance and ways to enhance academic performance.

Personal information

    A. Sex: ………………………………………………….

    B. Job title: …………………………………

    C. Years of experience: ……………………………

Job-related information

1. How would describe the performance of PHSschool in relation to the neighboring schools?

2. If you think they are performing differently, what do you think is the source of these different performances?

3. What kind of support do you need as a teacher to perform at your best?

4. What can be done by the SMT to enhance your performance and that of your school in general?

Appendix H: Interview schedule for learners

This research seeks to unveil the elements within the school that cause poor academic performance and ways to enhance academic performance.

Personal information

      A.   Sex: ………………………………………………….

      B.   Date of birth: …………………………………………

      C.   Grade: ………………… (straight pass/promotion/repeat)

School-related information

1. How would describe performance in PHSschool in relation to other neighboring schools?

2. If you think they are performing differently, what do you think is the source of these different performances?

3. Do you feel well supported? If yes! What kind of support are you getting? If no! what kind of support would you like to get?

Appendix I: Interview schedule for learners

This research seeks to unveil the elements within the school that cause poor academic performance and ways to enhance academic performance.

Personal information

    A.   Sex: ………………………………………………….

    B.   Date of birth: …………………………………………

    C.   Grade: ………………… (straight pass/promotion/repeat)

School-related information

1.   How would describe performance in PHSin relation to other neighboring schools? (*Papisong le likolo tse potileng sekolo se phahameng saA, u ka re sekolo see sa A se sebetsa joang?*)

2.   If you think they are performing differently, what do you think is the source of these different performances? (*U nahana ke mabaka a fe a susumeletsang tsebetso ee eo u e bolelang?*)

3.   Do you feel that your child is well supported? If yes! What kind of support is she/he getting? If no! What kind of support would you like her/him to get? (U kare ngoana oa hao o fumana tsehetso eohle e hlokoang hore a ithute? Haeba ho joalo, ke tsehetso ea mofuta o fe? Haeba ha ho joalo, u nahana hore o hloka tsehetso e joang?)

Appendix J: Editor Certificate

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Lesotho

Southern Africa

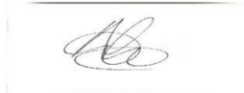## FACULTY OF EDUCATION

19th June 2023

The Supervisor
Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education
NUL

Dear Supervisor

Re: proof of language editing

This letter proves that I read and edited Retšepile Lekola's dissertation titled: *Investigating mitigating strategies that SMT could use to enhance learners' academic performance in their final year of LGCSE: A case of Phokeng High School.*

Sincerely,

_____
Mahao Mahao (PhD)
Department of Language and Social Education
Faculty of Education, National University of Lesotho

Appendix K: Turnitin report

R.Lekola (200400613) Final Dissertation

ORIGINALITY REPORT

14%	12%	3%	5%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS