



**STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH ACADEMIC UNDERPERFORMANCE IN
GRADE 12 IN THE FREE STATE.**

by

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DECLARATION

STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH ACADEMIC UNDERPERFORMANCE IN GRADE 12 IN THE FREE STATE.

I, **Sello Rubben Leepo**, do hereby declare that this research project submitted to Central University of Technology, Free State for the Degree Philosophae Doctor: Educationis (PhD Education) is my own independent work; and it complies with the Code of Academic Integrity, as well as other relevant policies, procedures, rules and regulations of the Central University of Technology, Free State and has not been submitted before to any institution by myself or any other person in fulfilment or partial fulfilment of the requirements for the attainment of any qualification

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DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this work to my late father. Even in his death he continues to inspire me to work hard to achieve my goals in life.

To my mother, for being there all by herself throughout the days of our lives.

To my loving wife, Nongaliphi without whom this would not have been possible.

To all my children Tokelo, Boitumelo, Bokang and Keratilwe who are the main reason for my continued endurance.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

APIP	: Academic Performance Improvement Plan
CAPS	: Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	: Department of Basic Education
DOE	: Department of Education
DSLAA	: District Strategy on Learner Attainment.
FET	: Further Education and Training
FS	: Free State province
GDE	: Gauteng Department of Basic Education
HOD	: Head of Department
HSRC	: Human Science Research Council
IBP	: Independent broadcasting programme
ICT	: Information, communication and technology
NEEDU	: National Education, Evaluation and Development Unit
NEPA	: National Education Policy Act
NSC	: National Senior Certificate
NSLA	: National Strategy on Learner Attainment
PIRLS	: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PSLA	: Provincial Strategy on Learner Attainment
SACMEQ	: The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SGB	: School Governing Body
SMGD	: School management and governance developer

SMT : School Management Team

SPSS : Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

TIMSS: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH ACADEMIC UNDERPERFORMANCE IN GRADE 12 IN THE FREE STATE.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the impact that the intervention strategies had on the academic performance of grade 12 learners in the Free State province. The grade 12 National Senior Certificate (NSC) results had been of poor quality over the years in the Free State province. This prompted the educational leadership at district and provincial level to develop and implement the various improvement strategies. The grade 12 learners in the underperforming schools were taken to camps during the school holidays. The other extra classes were held at the respective schools. The subject advisors were also involved in teaching at some of the centres. The performance targets were imposed on the schools. Different technologies were introduced into the classroom – HeyMath, ICITISE and the independent broadcasting programme. The districts conducted training on curriculum coverage, instructional leadership, subject content training, curriculum management and performance management. The grade 12 NSC results remained unimpressive despite the numerous intervention strategies implemented by the districts and the provincial department of education. This then led to the investigation on the possible reasons why the strategies did not yield the desired results.

As a point of departure this investigation looked into the causes of underperformance in the schools. If there is urgency about improving failing schools, more attention should be channelled on the causes of underperformance as well as the factors that contribute to continuous failure. Identifying schools as underperforming is contingent on a large number of circumstances: poor curriculum coverage, poor classroom management, total disregard for teaching and learning time, lack of teacher discipline and poor work ethics, teacher apathy, high rate of unaccounted absenteeism and inadequate resources – to mention just a few.

The empirical research was conducted using both the qualitative and quantitative methods. This was done in order to obtain triangulation. The grade 12 subject teachers completed the questionnaire while the principals of the underperforming schools and the school management and governance developers (circuit managers)

were interviewed. The SPSS version 23 was used to analyse the empirical research data. It was established that many intervention strategies were not suitably differentiated. Many of them did not take into account the contextual factors within the underperforming schools. It was further established that the intervention strategies were too many and therefore lacked the necessary focus. One critical finding relates to the fact that the strategies were not designed to enhance the internal skills and capabilities of the teachers in the underperforming schools. The academic results would drop as soon as the intervention strategies were suspended or withdrawn. The teachers lacked the capacity needed to sustain improved levels of performance. The investigation revealed that there were too many execution gaps in the implementation of the intervention strategies. The study found that the strategies had a noticeable but not a lasting or sustainable impact on the overall pass rate, but they had no noticeable impact on the bachelors' pass rate.

The integrated learner attainment model proposed in this study focuses on bridging the execution gaps and on implementing the intervention strategies in an organised and well structured manner. The model proposes the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the implementation process. There must be a well understood evaluation system that would be used to determine the impact of each strategy at regular intervals. Communication of the strategies must be improved in such a way that the circuit managers who are expected to monitor their effective implementation are on board at all times. The provincial department of education needs to invest in few strategies that are deemed as the most effective. The school management teams and the district officials must all be appraised on the salient features of the selected intervention strategies. The strategies must not be unreasonably imposed on the schools. The correct diagnosis of the problem must dictate the type of strategy to be implemented. The integrated learner attainment model proposes a systematic approach to the implementation of the intervention strategies.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTORY ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The poor quality of the grade 12 results is a cause for concern for the Department of Basic Education and the country as a whole. The Free State provincial department of education has come up with various intervention strategies in an attempt to improve the academic results. The grade 12 results and the quality thereof, remain unimpressive in some of the schools despite the many intervention strategies implemented. In many schools, the learning outcomes have either stagnated or regressed despite the huge investment on the intervention strategies. It is not known if the problem lies with the strategies or in how they get implemented in the schools. It is also not known if the strategies are well received by the schools. Poor performance in grade 12 indicates that there are systemic problems that need to be addressed.

According to Clarke (2007:203) the core function of the school is effective curriculum delivery. This implies that all schools must be characterised by quality teaching and learning processes. Despite this fact, some schools continue to reflect characteristics of a poor culture of teaching and learning defined by poor academic results and ill-discipline (Van Deventer & Kruger 2003:3). The Free State province bachelors' rate in grade 12 had been less than 30% between 2008 and 2011. This speaks volumes about the quality of passes over the years in the Free State province (DBE 2011:09). In 2014, there were 46 schools that obtained an overall pass rate of between 36.42 and 70% in the National Senior Certificate examination in the Free State province. Twenty six of those schools achieved between 36.42 and 60%. This implies that the quality of the results and the overall pass rate in many schools are a cause for concern for all stakeholders in education including the parent community.

Many South African teachers face the daily reality of teaching large classes, as well as coping with the added pressures of curriculum reform and high performance expectations, with limited resources and support (DBE and MIET 2010:17). Every year the country goes through the ritual of breast – beating about the national matric

pass rate, which is lamentable. The problem further manifests in the high dropout rate of learners and grade repetition throughout the schooling system. This observation affirms that underperformance in schools has reached unprecedented proportions.

According to the findings of the ministerial committee on National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU), it was established that the present system of accountability is weak, uneven and limited in scope because of a pervasive culture of resistance to strong measures of accountability within the schools (DoE 2009: 46 – 48). One may cite the general resistance towards classroom visits. The members of the school management team are not able to conduct meaningful evaluation of the quality of instruction. They have to rely on secondary evidence like the learners' books and lesson plans submitted by the teachers. In terms of the same report, teachers felt strong that teaching time was eroded by the distractions of countless policy changes. Principals and teachers also reported on time lost because of teacher absenteeism, incompetent principals and under - prepared district officials. The weak accountability system, poor school management and leadership and high rate of absenteeism are bound to have a negative effect on the quality of learning outcomes and on learner performance.

The Department of Basic Education in South Africa, upon realising the problems that beset learner performance, developed an intervention plan, as captured in the document titled National Strategy on Learner Attainment (NSLA). The document acknowledged that there is a need towards:

- Enhancing the proficiency in the language of instruction;
- Protecting teaching and quality of contact time;
- Effectively implementing credible assessment and examination and
- Increasing efforts on time on task (DoE 2005:4).

The Department of Basic Education's diagnostic report of 2011 revealed the following deficiencies as contributing to underperformance:

- A poor understanding of basic and foundational competencies taught in earlier grades, such as algebraic manipulation and factorisation;

- Solution of equations and inequalities;
- Lack of fundamental understanding of what a ration is and
- Overall poor performance in Accounting, Mathematics, Life sciences and Geography (DBE 2011:07).

The South African Education Laws Amendment Act 31 of 2007 describes an underperforming school as one in which there is a complete breakdown in the manner in which it is managed, and where the standard of performance of the learners is below the standard prescribed by the National Curriculum Statement and is likely to remain so unless the Head of Department exercises his or her powers in terms of the South African Schools Act. The below average learner performance means that learning outcomes are not achieved to the satisfactory levels, and the commitment of teachers towards the common goal is also not at the expected level. A school in the Free State province is regarded as underperforming if it obtains a pass rate of below 60% in the National Senior Certificate final examinations. The bachelors pass rate of below 40% indicates the poor quality of the results.

Van Deventer and Kruger (2003:04) identify the following as some of the most common observable features of a poor culture of teaching and learning that translate into poor results:

- Poor attendance of both teachers and learners;
- Teachers who do not have the desire to teach;
- Tensions between rival educator organizations;
- Weak leadership, management and administration; and
- General feelings of hopelessness and apathy among teachers.

The reasons for underperformance are multifaceted and interrelated thus compounding the problem of poor quality of the results. Accurate diagnoses of the reasons for academic underperformance are fundamental for constructing useful intervention strategies. This study focused on the strategies aimed at improving the academic results in the secondary schools in the five districts in the Free State province, the impact they have on the teaching and learning outcomes. An overview of the causes of underperformance was also done. The study investigated the

effectiveness of the intervention strategies towards improving the quality of the results.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The fundamental purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of the strategies that are implemented in the Free State schools on learner attainment in grade 12. There had been many intervention strategies over time that are aimed at improving academic performance. The results are however not commensurate with the strategies that had been implemented. According to Leithwood, Harris and Strauss (2010:25) many strategies that are aimed at raising the performance have in fact, served to disadvantage the schools further, largely by failing to take into account the school context and by locating the blame for failure squarely within the school. Malone (2013:109) corroborates the above view when he asserts that in too many instances the strategies and interventions designed to improve the results, fail to make any real, sustainable difference to learners and the learning outcomes. Malone further posits that many of the well meaning interventions and initiatives are disconnected from the classroom where change matters most. There are schools that had produced poor academic results in the face of these intervention programmes by the Department of Basic Education at both the district and the provincial levels. Some schools produce a high overall percentage pass rate in one year only to drop drastically in the following years. Some schools had been trapped in the underperformance bracket for three to five years. The quality of passes remains low even in schools that present high overall pass rates.

There are many questions that need to be answered about the strategies employed by the Free State Department of Basic Education to improve the academic results:

- Are the strategies well supported within the schools?
- Are there adequate resources to support and sustain the strategies?
- Is the external support of high quality?
- Are these strategies catering for ongoing, high quality professional development for teachers?

The problem as perceived by the researcher is that schools continue to produce poor quality results every year. Adapting learning and teaching strategies to meet the

needs of individual learners effectively, as well as creating and sustaining a stimulating and supportive teaching and learning environment in the underperforming schools remain a big challenge. This happens despite many interventions by the subject advisors and school management and governance developers (SMGDs) based at the education districts. In the Free State province alone there were 26 schools whose pass rate in the 2014 national senior certificate examinations ranged between 36.42% and 60%. There were also 20 more schools whose pass rate ranged between 60 and 70% in the same period (DBE 2015: 54). The grade 12 pass rates in the Free State province are discussed in detail in chapter 4. The study therefore delved into a deeper understanding of the causes of academic underperformance, the strategies employed to deal with the causes and a model towards improved learner attainment.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study attempts to highlight effective ways to deal with the causes of underperformance. Once identified, school management teams can craft relevant intervention strategies. The principals should be able to select leadership practices and strategies that are appropriate to their school contexts. This view is supported by Cunningham and Cordeiro (2006:208) who state that doing so will enhance the likelihood of sustainable initiatives and a positive impact on achievement. The study aims to provide insight into the strategies to improve learner performance in the national senior certificate examinations, why schools are not meeting the performance targets and how to ensure improved and sustainable quality learning outcomes.

The principals of the underperforming schools stand to benefit from the study. Innovative ways of dealing with poor performance as will be uncovered will assist in improving the quality of teaching and learning in the secondary schools. Improving the quality of teaching and learning processes is bound to improve the learning outcomes. School management teams that are central to ensuring that effective monitoring and control takes place in schools will also be strengthened in their duties.

If the causes of underperformance are well documented and known to the teachers in an underperforming school, it will not be difficult to craft the relevant intervention strategies. The teachers will be better placed to come up with the individualised support programmes for learners. The lesson plans and the teaching approaches would be used to address the different cognitive levels of learners in a classroom setting. The study should highlight the need that the strategies need to create an environment that is conducive for ongoing high quality professional development for teachers. Strategies must take into account the school context and be geared towards whole school development.

1.4 RESEARCH AIM

The study aims to investigate the impact of the intervention strategies on the academic performance of grade 12 learners in secondary schools in the Free State province. To realise this aim the following key areas will, inter alia, be explored: parental involvement, learner motivation, new curriculum developments, instructional leadership, turn around strategies, monitoring and control by school management teams. The role played by subject advisors and the use of information technology in the classroom will also be looked into.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It is obvious that the main objective is to improve results in the Free State schools, particularly at the exit point. The main research question would therefore be: What is the impact of the intervention strategies on academic performance of the grade 12 learners in secondary schools in the Free State province? The following research questions emerge from the above central research question:

- Which theories underlie the performance of secondary school learners in grade 12?
- What can be learned from schools that work or well performing schools?
- What are the causes of poor performance in grade 12 in the Free State province?
- What is the impact of the intervention strategies instituted by the Free State Department of Basic Education to improve learner academic performance?

- What are the views and experiences of the principals and teachers of secondary schools on improving the learner performance in grade 12 in the Free State province?
- How can a Learner Attainment Model be proposed for possible implementation in secondary schools, to strengthen the effectiveness of existing intervention strategies?

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The following objectives will lead to the actualisation of the aim:

- To explore the theories which underlie the performance of secondary school learners in grade 12.
- To explore the features of schools that work and well performing schools that can enhance academic performance of underperforming schools.
- To study the causes of poor learner performance in grade 12 in the Free State province.
- To establish the impact of the intervention strategies instituted by the Free State department of education to improve learner academic performance.
- To determine the views and experiences of principals and teachers of secondary schools on improving the learner performance in grade 12 in the Free State province.
- To propose an integrated Learner Attainment Model for possible implementation in schools that will strengthen the effectiveness of the existing intervention strategies.

1.7 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

It has been demonstrated that improvement in learner attainment requires the articulation of high achievement standards, transformation of those standards into rigorous assessment, and the enforcement of accountability for learner attainment as reflected in learners' examination and assessment scores (DBE 2013:5). The Times (2009:03) made a profound observation when it wrote that the South African classroom has become characterized by experimentation, guessing, trial and error as most of the teachers silently struggle with the national curriculum statement and its insurmountable obligations. Nobody is sure about anything. In 2012 alone there

were 1835 schools that obtained a pass rate of below 60% out of 6591 in South Africa (DBE 2013: 10). There were 318 schools with Grade 12 classes in the Free State Province, with 26 394 learners in Grade 12 in 2011 (DBE 2012:13). In the same year one education district in the Free State province registered eleven (11) schools whose grade 12 pass rate was below 60%, while the total number of such schools in the province was fifty one. The problem further manifests in the high learner dropout and grade repetition rates throughout the schooling system.

According to Clarke, Harris and Reynolds (2004:7) underperforming schools operate in extremely challenging circumstances, such as difficult economic and social challenges, poverty, poor social welfare and difficult intercultural relations. Schools are no longer safe havens solely used for educational purposes. Social forces such as the alarming increase in all kinds of crime and HIV/AIDS put pressure on the educational system (Van Deventer & Kruger 2003:38). Teaching and learning time is adversely affected in the process. This in turn has a negative effect on learning outcomes.

A study commissioned by Arkansas Department of Education in schools in academic distress revealed that there appears to be lack of follow – through and accountability in these underperforming schools, despite an abundance of data documenting their problems (Fetterman 2002:10). This lack of follow - through also applies to classroom decorum or management issues. In terms of that study problems concerning instruction were identified. They included an overemphasis on recall as compared with higher order reasoning activities, lack of instructions or explanations in the classroom, inadequate modelling or scaffolding, overemphasis on lecturing as a sole means of instruction, poor classroom management, inadequate or no closure at the end of the lesson, and some instructional strategies that overemphasize guessing rather than problem solving thus contributing to poor testing practices (Fetterman 2002:12).

Cruickshank, Jenkins and Metcalf (2009:70) affirmed that the causes of underperformance are many and include: lack of parental interest, support, and guidance, teachers' failure to recognize the learners' high potential or failure to challenge the learners sufficiently – and the learners' lack of interest or motivation.

Percival and Tranter (2004:1) observed that there is increasing indiscipline and decreasing parental support in many failing schools. This phenomenon is rife in underperforming schools. There are high levels of ill discipline, both among teachers and learners. These schools do not enjoy the necessary parental support.

The rate at which changes in education have been introduced also has a negative effect on the quality of teaching and learning. Bottery (2004:13) indicates that there is no adequate time to plan for provincially mandated changes as well as the number of curriculum changes mandated by the Department of Basic Education in South Africa.

As Popham (2006:9) states, teachers need to assume the role of instructional leaders making decisions about content scope and sequence, instructional strategies and enrichment or remediation. This is lacking among the current crop of teachers in South Africa. Principals would then assume the complementary role, supporting teachers in using data from assessment to effect changes in their teaching. Teachers have to master subject content and strategies to be employed towards improved learning outcomes.

Leithwood (2010:10) professed that learners in the underperforming schools are exposed to forms of instruction that are relatively less interactive, less task oriented, less academically oriented and cover less content because the pace of instruction is slower. According to Leithwood, the form of instruction in the underperforming schools is characterised by poorly designed lessons, lost instructional time, poor homework assignments, a less caring environment and lower quality of relationship with the teachers. This implies that the quality of teaching and learning in the underperforming schools is grossly compromised. This leads to curriculum that has a relatively low level of cognitive demand that places excessive focus on lower level skills. The poorly designed forms of instruction are bound to have a negative impact on curriculum coverage. Poor curriculum coverage leads to poor learner attainment.

It is the researcher's considered opinion that a lot of available literature is focused on the causes of underperformance and the concomitant intervention strategies. There is little or nothing about the impact of the strategies on the academic performance of the grade 12 learners.

1.8 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study focuses on causes of underperformance and the resultant improvement strategies in the five education districts in the Free State province. Only the schools that obtained bachelors pass rate of less than 40% with the overall pass rate of less than 60% or those with inconsistent performance over the last five years are covered in this study.

1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.9.1 Research Paradigm

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:87) emphasize that in planning a research design it is extremely important for the researcher to choose not only a viable research problem but also to consider the kinds of data that an investigation of a problem will require together with the feasible means of collecting and interpreting data. This research is therefore premised on the constructivist paradigm that uses the qualitative research method and the positivist paradigm that uses the quantitative research approach. According to Mertens (2010: 18 – 20) the constructivist says that people construct their own understanding of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. The positivist researcher maintains minimal interaction with the research participants and the study is based on facts (Wilson 2010:10). The positivist paradigm is naturalistic and is characterised by social reality, random sampling and standard questions during the research (Folkestad 2008:03). This is much so that independence of thought is maintained and there is less or no influence on the data. The integrated approach is preferred because it describes and analyses people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions. The approach should also focus on classifying and constructing statistical models and figures to explain what is observed.

1.9.2 Research Method

According to Creswell (2003:2010) the mixed methods research is both a method and a methodology for conducting research that involves collecting, analysing and integrating quantitative and qualitative research in a single study or a longitudinal

programme of inquiry. It incorporates multiple approaches in all stages of the study. The advantage of this research method is that both qualitative and quantitative researches in combination provide a better understanding of a research problem or issue than either research approach. The researcher used mixed method research design which includes both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The intention is to seek common understanding through triangulation. The mixed methods research has the ability to enrich and strengthen the research. In it one method compliments the other.

1.9.2.1 Qualitative approach

Qualitative research is method in focus and involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative research studies things in their natural setting to make sense of, or interpreting phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 2011:20). It can thus be asserted that qualitative research makes use of a wide range of interconnected methods with a view to getting a better understanding on the subject matter at hand.

For the purposes of this study, it is important to recognize that qualitative research seeks insights rather than statistical analysis. Furthermore according to Bassey (2001: 09), qualitative research focuses on complexities of the various aspects of the school and schooling, and takes into consideration the different objective experiences and subjective perspectives. As a result, qualitative research is capable of accommodating and accounting for the various differences and complexities that are involved in social settings such as schools.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:146) define an interview as a process through which individuals are asked specific questions but are allowed to respond in their own way. They further argue that the nature of questions and the context in which the study is undertaken will largely determine whether or not interviews will be used as a data collection instrument.

According to Cohen and Cabtree (2006:02) a semi – structured interview is a qualitative method of inquiry that combines a pre- determined set of open questions that prompt discussion with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore particular

themes or responses further. The interview questions used in this study were semi-structured in nature.

1.9.2.2 Quantitative approach

The **descriptive** research method will be pursued in this study. It is a method involving observing and describing the behaviour of a subject without influencing it in any way.

According to Cooper and Schindler (2002:03) quantitative research generally uses scientific methods, which can include:

- The generation of models, theories and hypotheses;
- The development of instruments and methods of measurement;
- Experimental control and manipulation of variables;
- Collection of empirical data;
- Modelling and analysis of data and
- Evaluation of results.

Quantitative research is often contrasted with qualitative research which is the examination, analysis and interpretation of observations for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships, including classifications of types of phenomena and entities, in a manner that does not involve mathematical models (Hunter and Leahey 2008:43). Polit and Hungler (1999:10) explain that the purpose of quantitative research is to observe, describe and document aspects of a situation as it naturally occurs. This involves the collection of data that will provide an account or description of individuals, groups or situations.

The instruments used to collect data in the descriptive studies include questionnaires, interviews with open ended questions and observations. Slavin (2007:188) describes a questionnaire as a set of written questions usually consisting of one or more scales, to which respondents make written responses. Questionnaires will assist in identifying the impact of the strategies on learner performance in the schools. Every questionnaire must have a purpose and it must draw from some underlying research questions about what are the important facts or opinions and even make some predictions about which facts may be relevant in

explaining the opinions expressed (Hannan, 2007:1). The researcher developed a questionnaire responded to by the grade 12 subject teachers.

The researcher had also constructed well phrased, open ended questions that allowed the respondents to state their opinions in ways that are not pre-selected by the researcher (Hannan 2007:1). A questionnaire with a five point rating, likert scale on a continuum of strongly agree to strongly disagree was used for statistical view of the outcomes.

1.9.2.3 Triangulation

According to Lacey and Luff (2009:27) triangulation is defined as the gathering and the analysing of data from more than one source to gain a fuller perspective on the situation that is being investigated. It is used when more than one method of data collection is used in the research. Using triangulation therefore enhances the likelihood of increased validity and reliability of the research findings. According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2005:362) conceptualisation of triangulation rests on a supposition that any bias inherent in a particular data source, investigator and method would be neutralised when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators and methods of research. It therefore means using more than one method to collect data on the same topic. The intention is to cross validate data and to capture the different dimensions of the manner of implementing the strategies. In this study triangulation would refer to the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods in the study of the impact of the intervention strategies on learner performance. It enables the researcher to check the extent to which conclusions based on qualitative research are supported by quantitative perspectives.

1.9.3 Research Population and Sample

1.9.3.1 Population

Population is described as a large group to which the results of a study involving a sub group are meant to apply (Slavin 2007:248). For the purpose of this study, the population will consist of all underperforming schools in the Free State province. At the beginning of the 2012 academic year there were 96 underperforming schools in

the Free State province. The population will thus include all the principals and the grade 12 subject teachers in all the underperforming schools.

In addition to the population, the school management and governance developers (SMGDs) would be part of the focus group from which information on the strategies will be obtained. SMGDs are departmental officials whose responsibility is to ensure that strategies are implemented in all underperforming schools.

1.9.3.2 Sample

Slavin (2007:248) defines a sample as a group of participants chosen from a larger group to which research findings are assumed to apply. From the 96 underperforming schools in the Free State, 18 schools were selected by means of a systematic sampling method, to form the research sample. This was done by selecting every fifth school from a list of 96 underperforming schools. The sample constituted 18.75% of the underperforming schools in the Free State province. All the grade 12 teachers of the 18 underperforming schools numbering 198 completed the questionnaire. From the 18 schools, 10 principals who were selected by means of a systematic sampling method were interviewed. The aim was to get their views on the intervention strategies since almost all of them were not teaching grade 12. They were however, involved in the implementation of the strategies as managers in their respective schools. The researcher decided to interview ten principals in order to avoid saturation and possible repetition of similar responses.

Brinkerhoff (2003: 124) suggests that all participants will be involved if the number is around fifty. The sample is credible enough since the teachers are the ones who directly implement the strategies in their schools. The principals are the champions of curriculum delivery and therefore are at the coal face of effective implementation of the strategies aimed improving learner performance.

The SMGDs are also close to the realisation of the improvement strategies in the schools. They are the principals' immediate supervisors who must ensure that all underperforming schools submit the improvement plans and that the very plans are implemented in schools allocated to them. The sample therefore included 10 SMGDs

from all the districts in the province who were also interviewed. All the 10 SMGDs allocated to the 18 underperforming schools were interviewed.

1.9.4 Administration of Questionnaires and Interviews

Christensen (2007:60) mentions such diverse data collection methods as an individual's account of a personal experience, introspective analysis, interviews with an individual, observation, written documents, photographs and historical information.

Interviews with principals were held at the schools in the principals' offices. All the interviews were conducted from around 14h30 in order to ensure that the principals' work schedules were not interfered with. It was necessary for the researcher to engage in active listening, to gain and maintain trust and to establish rapport with the participants in order to achieve rich data from the interviews (Silverman 2011:110). The researcher first explained the aim of the research and its significance to the principal. The interview questions were then explained one after the other, allowing the respondent to ask clarity seeking questions along the way. The researcher took detailed notes while the principals were responding to the interview questions. One interview session was done per day. The school management and governance developers (circuit managers) were also interviewed in their respective districts. Two interview sessions per day were held with the SMGDs.

The questionnaires were delivered to the sample schools by the researcher. The researcher explained the process of completing the questionnaire to the principals of the sample schools. It was important to explain the significance of the study to the principals who were in turn expected to convey the same information to the grade 12 subject teachers. The completed questionnaires were collected from the office of the principal after three days from the date of dispatch.

1.9.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis entails collecting data, looking for emerging themes and recurrent events, categorizing them and re-evaluating themes and categories (Leedy & Ormrod (2005:158). The questionnaires and interviews responses were gathered

and analysed for emerging patterns of the study and categorization. The researcher collected different kinds of data through interviews and questionnaires and got multiple and varying perspectives on any issue or event.

In analysing the data gleaned from the use of the questionnaire the researcher used the SPSS (statistical package for the social science) software (Landau & Everitt 2004:01). The data were put together using the likert scale with the responses coded as 1 for strongly agree, 2 for agree, 3 for undecided, 4 for disagree and 5 for strongly disagree. The likert scale is a psychometric response scale primarily used in questionnaires to obtain participants' preferences or degree of agreement or set of statement (Losby & Wetmore 2012:04). The questions with yes or no responses were also used in the questionnaire. The SPSS data analysis was used to determine the percentage of the respondents across the likert scale, graphical presentations and tables of different responses from the subject teachers.

In analysing the information and data from the interviews with the principals, the researcher grouped the responses under the strategies implemented in the Free State province. The information that had nothing to do with the strategies was not used in the interpretation of data. The other items that did not fall under the strategies used, but had an influence on learner performance were noted separately. The information from the interviews conducted with the SMGDs was also categorised under the available intervention strategies. Information about the use and the impact of the strategies on learner performance was also noted separately. According to Thomas (2003: 06) identifying the most important themes from the raw data involves initially reading through the data, identifying and labelling the specific segments of information to create categories, reducing the overlaps and redundancy among the categories and creating a model incorporating the most important categories.

1.10 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity of research refers to the extent to which the instruments used to collect data measure what they purport to measure. The questionnaire was therefore designed to

measure the extent to which the strategies aimed at improving learner performance are fulfilling the intended function. It measured what it was intended to measure.

Bryman (2009:275) refers to reliability as the consistency of measurement by the same instrument under different situations. Leedy and Omrod (2013:10) explain reliability as the consistency with which a measuring instrument yields consistent results when the entity being measured has not changed.

Validity and reliability were ensured through posing well structured questions for principals and school management and governance developers in the interviews. The questionnaire was thoroughly explained to the principals who in turn explained it to all the grade 12 subject teachers. The questionnaires were pre-tested on ten teachers from one of the well performing schools. The ten were not part of the sample. The participants were informed about the importance of providing the correct information. According to Tavakol and Dennick (2011:51) the Cronbach's alpha is most commonly used to determine the reliability of the scale that was used. The researcher used the multiple Likert scale questions.

1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2005:68) define ethics as a set of widely accepted moral principles that offer rules for, and moral behavioural expectations of the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, other researchers, assistants and students. According to Leedy and Ormord (2005:185) participants can respond to questions with the assurance that their responses will be anonymous. This would lead to them being more truthful than they would be in a personal interview, particularly when they are talking about controversial or sensitive issues. Ethical issues taken into consideration should be anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary participation of the respondents. According to Colantuono (2009:4) confidentiality is about not disclosing the identity of participants, and not attributing comments to individuals in ways that can permit the individuals or institutions which they are associated with to be recognized, unless they have expressly consented to being identified. All the participants were also informed that it was not compulsory for them to participate in the research.

The letters seeking permission to conduct research, interviews and copies of the survey questionnaires were sent to the Director: Quality Assurance of the Free State Department of Basic Education. The letters were also dispatched to the Principals and deputy principals of schools identified for permission to conduct interviews and administer the survey questionnaires. An undertaking was made to provide the Free State Department of Basic Education with a copy of the completed research.

Assurance in relation to confidentiality and anonymity was discussed with the principals and the participants. Participants therefore remained anonymous and information supplied by them was treated confidentially and not linked to their schools. The participants' right to withdraw from the research was also discussed.

It is important for the researcher to respect the rights, needs and values of the respondents. Ethical issues are the concerns and dilemmas that arise over the proper way to execute research, more specifically not to create harmful conditions for the subjects of inquiry – humans in the research process (Schurink 2005: 43). Participants must be protected and not coerced into taking part in the investigation.

1.12 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

The following terms and concepts used in the study are explained in this section: underperformance, school improvement, school management team, instructional leadership, quality of teaching, parental involvement and curriculum.

1.12.1 Underperformance

According to Percival and Tranter (2006:165) underperformance is experienced whenever teachers work to a standard that is below their capability. This is characterized by teachers not marking books according to the required standard, poor assessment results, uncharacteristically poor quality of work given to learners.

The Gauteng Department of Basic Education (GDE) defines underperforming schools as those that obtained a below 60% pass rate in the National Senior Certificate examinations and those whose pass rate dropped by more than 10% in a particular year. Their definition included those schools whose retention rate is high

(GDE 2009:01). The quality of passes in these schools is very low. There are few learners coming out of these underperforming schools who qualify to study at the university.

Leithwood (2010:11) explains that underperformance is discernible in lack of engagement in classroom instruction, lack of motivation by learners to succeed, culturally insensitive approaches to instruction and a school climate contributing to learners' disengagement. The teaching and learning culture is not conducive to quality learning. This type of underperformance is called academic underperformance or poor scholastic performance.

For the purpose of this study the above definitions will all be applicable, which will encompass schools that present poor learning outcomes, poor quality of results, weak school leadership and low expectations on learner performance in general.

1.12.2 School improvement

Cooke and Vanstone (2000:6) explain school improvement as a process through which schools set goals for improvement, and make decisions about how and when these goals will be achieved. They further explain that the ultimate goal of this process is to improve learner attainment levels by enhancing the way curriculum is delivered and by creating a positive environment for learning.

Reynolds (1998:4) explains school improvement as a vehicle for planned educational change that is concerned with raising learner attainment. It involves a systematic, sustained effort aimed at changing the learning conditions and other related conditions in schools with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively.

Both definitions by Reynolds, Cooke and Vanstone will apply in this study. The improvement envisaged here includes more than 60% overall pass rate with 40% bachelors or the minimum requirement to study at the university.

1.12.3 School management team (SMT)

The SMT is the school based management that empowers staff to create conditions in schools that facilitate improvement, innovation and continuous professional growth (Cunningham & Cordeiro 2006:185). Clarke (2007:52) refers to school management team as comprising of the principal, the deputies, heads of departments and those people with designated responsibilities for core functional areas.

The School Management Team should provide leadership, give proper instructions and guidelines for time tabling and placement of learners, read and refer all curriculum circulars to relevant departments in a school and ensure that all teachers have the necessary curriculum policy documents (Sacred Heart CRD 2003: 4). This team gives the principal and professional staff members the widest possible latitude in sustaining efforts to continuously improve the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. For the purpose of the study the most appropriate definition would contain all the elements explained above.

1.12.4 Quality teaching

Quality teaching is defined as the use of pre-planned behaviours, founded in learning principles and child development theory and directed towards both instructional delivery and classroom management that increases the probability of affecting a positive change in learner behaviour (Levin and Nolan 2009:06). This definition embraces proper classroom management and instructional delivery as key elements of quality teaching. The ultimate goal is to positively influence the learner behaviour.

According to Percival and Tranter (2006:167) quality teaching is best characterised by the following:

- Does the educator have the necessary knowledge and understanding of the subject and the topic to be taught in order to teach the class?
- Do the learners in class acquire new knowledge and skills? Do they understand what they are doing and why they are doing it?
- Is learner attainment of high quality?

- Do learners behave in a disciplined manner that adds to a conducive learning environment?

Hessel and Holloway (2002: 65) affirm that if a school is to be effective in its goal to provide quality education for all learners, the principal should be empowered and unencumbered to monitor and evaluate the process of teaching and learning daily.

Quality teaching is therefore best defined by the following elements:

- Outstanding and consistent performance in the teaching and learning sphere;
- High expectations for all learners;
- Teachers who systematically check learners' understanding throughout lessons;
- Where there is consistently high marking standards;
- Quality feedback given to learners; and
- When teaching in all the subjects – including English and Mathematics is consistently good. Teachers have high expectations as they plan and teach lessons that deepen learners' knowledge and understanding.

1.12.5 Instructional leadership

Instructional leadership focuses on teaching and learning and on the behaviour of teachers in working with learners (Bush 2003:16). It entails effective decision making by the school based leadership to ensure optimal achievement of learning outcomes. Loock (2003:42) explains instructional leadership as managing the technical core of the school that is its processes of teaching and learning, and embracing both the curriculum and human resource management.

Sacred Heart CRD (2003:3) describes instructional leadership as comprising of the following skills: interpersonal, decision making, goal setting, technical, conflict management or problem solving. A combination of these skills constitutes a sound leadership and management approach. For the purpose of this study Sacred Heart CRD provides the comprehensive definition of instructional leadership and therefore the most appropriate.

1.12.6 Parental involvement

Hessel and Holloway (2002: 32) explain parental involvement as the realization of the vision of the school and the full participation of the school community in related school improvements efforts.

Rogers (2007: 44) explains that parental involvement entails classroom meetings with parents that are important for enhancing the feeling of group solidarity, discussing a range of curriculum topics, planned excursions and particular problems that affect individual learners or a group of learners. Kyle and Rogien (2004:26) explain that parental involvement is about having parents on the side of teachers and the school to the extent that they say positive things to their children about the teachers, the school and about education in general. Rogers's definition of parental involvement is the most suitable for the purpose of this study.

1.12.7 Curriculum

Curriculum is generally described as what is learned and what is taught; how it is delivered (teaching and learning methods); how the work is assessed and the resources used (UNESCO 2004:13). The resources referred to here include books used to deliver and support teaching and learning.

According to Adams and Adams (2003:31– 32) the term curriculum refers specifically to a planned sequence of instructions that incorporates the planned interaction of learners with instructional content, materials, resources and processes for evaluating the attainment of educational objectives. Kelly (2009:55) defines curriculum as all the learning which is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, inside or outside the school. Cox (2005:420) adds that it is an agreement amongst the state, the educational professionals and communities on what learners should take on during specific periods of their lives. It defines the why, what, when, where and with whom to learn.

It is the researcher's considered opinion that the appropriate definition of curriculum embraces all the elements contained in the foregoing definitions. Curriculum refers to what the learners are expected to come across with, study, practice and master. It

entails taking decisions about what should be taught, how and when. Curriculum should address the teaching, learning, assessment as well as the effective use of the resources.

1.13 CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is the researcher's experience that the collapse of a culture of learning and teaching is more pronounced in secondary schools in the Free State. It has therefore been necessary to determine the root causes of such gross underperformance hence the corrective measures. Despite the flood of research having been done on the causes of underperformance in the schools, there is continued poor quality learning outcomes and high failure rate coming out of the schools.

There are also many well documented strategies aimed at improving the academic results. It was not clear as to why these strategies were not as effective as expected. The research sought to establish the reasons why the strategies did not yield the desired results and what is it that must be done differently in order to ensure that the schools produce quality results as envisaged. The other big issue relates to sustainability of the improved performance levels. Some schools produce high overall pass rate in one year only to falter and drop the results in the following years.

The corrective measures may bring about a positive school climate. Van Deventer and Kruger (2003:16) attest to the fact that establishing and maintaining a positive school climate are important aspects of school management for the benefit not only of effective teaching but also of effective learning. Practicing instructional leadership and maintaining a conducive environment for quality teaching and learning would require broad knowledge of the possible underlying causes of underperformance. Understanding such causes and their effects would help school management teams to develop relevant improvement or intervention strategies.

1.14 DIVISION OF CHAPTERS

Chapter One

This chapter discusses introduction and background to the research, significance of study, statement of the problem, aim of the study, research design, methodology, definition and elucidation of the different concepts used in the study.

Chapter Two

This chapter provides a broad overview of the academic performance theories and some other views on teaching and learning; indicating the grounded and known methods that have an impact on the academic results.

Chapter Three

This chapter deals with the literature study in which the causes of academic underperformance in the secondary schools in the Free State are discussed.

Chapter Four

In this chapter the attempts made by the Free State Department of Basic Education to improve academic performance in grade 12 are unpacked. This chapter deals with the strategies implemented by the Free State Department of Basic Education in an attempt to improve academic results in grade 12.

Chapter Five

This chapter contains the empirical research wherein the quantitative and qualitative research methods, the data collection, population and sample are discussed. The data analysis and interpretation are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Six

This chapter deals with the overview of the first five chapters. Findings, recommendations and conclusions are discussed.

Chapter Seven

A model for improving the situation of underperforming schools is developed and presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE THEORIES AND SOME OTHER VIEWS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Academic theories of performance provide a framework that can be used to explain performance and performance improvement. According to Elger (2014:04), to perform is to produce valued results. This can be achieved by an individual or a group of people engaging in a collaborative effort. For the purpose of this study this would refer to a school. According to Elger, the current level of performance in the school depends holistically on the level of knowledge, skills, identity and fixed or personal factors. The level of performance may also depend on environmental factors, the socio – economic factors, motivation and socialization.

The theory of performance informs the teaching and learning process in the classroom, workshops and the learning outcomes (Schunk 2007: 50). According to the author, learning is an enduring change in behaviour, or in the capacity to behave in a given fashion, which results from practice or other forms of experience. It shapes the quality of results, the capacity of the teachers, their level of knowledge, skills and motivation. The learning outcomes depend on how the institution of learning is organised and the performance of the learners depends on how the class is organised. These phenomena are explained in the theories of academic performance.

As teachers advance their own levels of performances, they are able to produce deeper levels of learning, improved levels of skill development, and more connection with the discipline for larger classes while spending less time doing this. As managers advance their levels of performances, they are able to organise people and resources more effectively and to get higher quality results in a shorter time.

Everyone aspires to be a high performer. Theories of performance teach us that by improving our performance we empower ourselves to help others to learn and grow. When people learn and grow they are empowered to create results that make a difference. Theories are there to guide and improve practice.

2.2 ACHIEVEMENT THEORIES IN EDUCATION

The following achievement theories will be dealt with briefly in this section: control theory of motivation, functional, curriculum, instructional, behaviourist, symbolic interaction, Jean Piaget's cognitive and the brain base learning theories.

2.2.1 The Control Theory of Motivation

As proposed by Glasser (1990:38), the theory contends that behaviour is never caused by a response to an outside stimulus. It is, instead, inspired by what a person wants most at any given time. Responding to complaints that today's learners are unmotivated, Glasser (1990) as cited by Allington and Cunningham (2007:258) attests that all living creatures control their behaviour to maximise the needed satisfaction. According to him, if learners are not motivated to do their school work, it is because they view it as irrelevant to their basic human needs. He identifies two types of teachers:

Boss teachers – who use rewards and punishment to coerce learners to comply with the rules and complete required assignments. He shows how a high percentage of learners recognise that the work they do, even when their teachers praise them, is of low level.

Lead teachers – who, on the other hand, avoid coercion, completely. They make the intrinsic rewards of doing the work clear to the learners, correlating the proposed assignment to the learners' basic needs. These teachers use grades as indicators of what has and has not been learned rather than a reward. They will fight to protect highly engaged, deeply motivated learners (who are doing quality work) from having to fulfil meaningless requirements.

The impact of the control theory of motivation on learning can be summed up as follows:

Curriculum – teachers negotiate both content and method with learners. Learners basic needs literally help shape how and what they are taught.

Instruction – teachers rely on cooperative, active learning techniques that enhance the power of the learners. Lead teachers ensure that the assignments meet some

degree of their learners' need satisfaction. This secures learners' loyalty, which carries the class through whatever relatively meaningless tasks might be necessary to satisfy official requirements.

Assessment – instructions only give good grade to certify quality work. Learners' assessment uses an absolute standard rather than relative curve.

What people need most in their lives inspires them to perform at their best. Learners who want a better and brighter future will work hard to and perform well in their school work. The school that tasted glory and pleasure that comes with attaining good results will ensure that a lot of time is invested in quality teaching and learning.

2.2.2 The functionalist theory

According to Andersen and Taylor (2009:50) the functionalist theory focuses on the ways that universal education serves the needs of the society. Functionalists see education in its manifest role as conveying the basic knowledge and skills to the next generation. It also deals with socialising the people into society's mainstream, transmission of core values and social control. They also advocate for individualism, sorting and separating the learners according to merit and levels of performance, by channelling the most capable together and those on the lower end of the spectrum aside, for individualised attention and support.

The functionalists approach supports the differentiated teaching and learning strategy. Learning that takes into account that learners are different and that they learn differently. This theory presupposes that all learners can learn and that the one size fits all approach to teaching them will be to the detriment of quality learning outcomes. It is essential for teachers to prepare for the below and above average learners in a way that everyone would cater for their different cognitive levels to a maximum.

2.2.3 The Constructionist theory (constructivism)

According to Tobias and Duffy (2009:15) the theory is premised on the fact that learning is the processing, storage and retrieval of information. It presupposes that

learning is simply the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences. It is based on the following guiding principles:

- Learning is a search for meaning. Therefore learning must start with the issues around which learners are actively trying to construct meaning.
- Meaning requires understanding the wholes as well as the parts. And the parts must be understood in the context of the wholes. Therefore the learning process focuses on primary concepts and not isolated facts. In order to teach well, teachers must understand the mental models that learners use to perceive the world and the assumptions they make to support the models.
- The purpose of learning is for the individual to construct his or her own meaning, not just memorise the right answers and regurgitate someone else's meaning. Since education is inherently interdisciplinary, the only valuable way to measure learning is to make assessment part of the learning process, ensuring that it provides learners with information on the quality of learning.

Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon (2008:76) affirm that a constructivist classroom is problem centred, flexible and webbed; it is characterised by the flow of big ideas; there is depth and open- ended discussion. The authors attest that there is active learning that includes self, peer and group assessment.

The impact of constructivism on learning manifests in the following:

Curriculum – it calls for the elimination of a standardised curriculum. It promotes curriculum that is customised to learners' prior knowledge. It also emphasises hands on problem solving.

Instruction – under this theory, teachers focus on making connections between facts and fostering new understanding in learners. Instructors tailor their teaching strategies to learners' responses and encourage the learners to analyse, interpret and predict information. Teachers also rely heavily on open – ended questions and promote extensive dialogue among learners.

Assessment – constructivism calls for the elimination of grades and standardised testing. Instead, assessment becomes an integral part of the learning process so that learners play a larger role in judging their own progress.

2.2.4 Curriculum theory

It describes or sets norms for conditions surrounding many of the concepts and constructs that describe curriculum. It includes both the historical analysis of curriculum and ways of viewing the current educational curriculum and policy decisions. According to Kliebard (2004:15) curriculum theory is about the teaching of grammar, literature and art, mathematics, geography and history. Dewey (2007:05) felt that the curriculum should be ultimately producing learners who would be able to deal with the modern world. He maintained that curriculum should not be presented as finished abstractions, but should include the child's perceptions and should incorporate how the child views his or her own world. Curriculum should build an orderly sense of the world where the child lives.

Curriculum theory can manifest in four ways:

- Curriculum as a body of knowledge;
- Curriculum as an attempt to achieve certain ends in learners (product);
- Curriculum as a process; and
- Curriculum as praxis (process by which a theory, lesson or skill is enacted, embodied or realised).

According to Pinar (2011:04) curriculum theory is an interdisciplinary field in which teacher education is conceived as the professionalization of intellectual freedom, fore-fronting teachers and learners individuality, their creativity and constantly engaging in ongoing if not complicated conversation, informed by a self-reflective, interdisciplinary erudition. He further argues that by tying curriculum to learners' performance on standardised test, teachers were forced to abandon their intellectual freedom to choose what they teach and how they assess learning. Failure to learn has been the result of separating the curriculum from the interest of learners and the passion of teachers.

2.2.5 Instructional theory

This theory focuses on the methods of instruction for teaching curricula. These include but are not limited to coyote learning (in which the educator inspires the learners to learn on their own until they are no longer dependent on the educator),

inquiry based instruction, lecture method, Socratic method, outcome based education and transformative learning.

According to Hunter (2014:03) instructional theory lessons are characterised by the following elements:

- Learning objectives: objectives are selected at the appropriate level of difficulty and complexity as determined through task analysis, diagnostic testing and congruence with Bloom's cognitive taxonomy;
- Anticipatory Set: motivate instruction by focusing on the learning task, its importance or the prior knowledge or experience of the learners;
- Stating the lesson objectives to the learners;
- Input: identify and teach main concepts and skills, emphasising clear explanations, frequent use of examples and or diagrams, and invite active learners' participation;
- Check for understanding: observe and interpret learners' reactions (active interest or boredom) by frequent formative evaluations with immediate feedback. Adjust instruction as needed and re-teach if necessary;
- Guided practice: following instruction, learners answer questions, discuss with one another, demonstrate skills, or solve problems. Give immediate feedback and re- teach if necessary and
- Independent practice: assign independent practice to solidify skills and knowledge when learners have demonstrated understanding.

2.2.6 Behaviourist theory

It is a theory of learning based upon the idea that all behaviours are acquired through conditioning. Conditioning occurs through interaction with the environment. It is a worldwide view that assumes that a learner is essentially passive, responding to environmental stimuli. The learner starts off as a clean slate (tabula rasa) and behaviour is shaped through positive or negative reinforcement. It implies that learning is defined as a change in the behaviour of a learner or the acquisition of new behaviour (Schunk, Pintrich and Meece 2014:25). Operant conditioning is an influential theory for motivation. Behaviourism is seen when teachers use the following methods:

- Teaching specific skills,
- More individual work than group learning and
- Using more positive reinforcements.

According to Ramsden (1992) as cited by Weimer (2009:02) effective teachers must learn how to teach and how to set high standards for their learners. They need only to be taught collective ways of teaching. The assumptions coming out of the behaviourist theory according to Skinner (1937) as cited by Grace (2015:02) state that the learner is essentially passive, responding to environmental stimuli, the behaviour is shaped by either positive or negative reinforcements. Reinforcement, whether positive or negative, increases the possibility of an event happening again and that punishment (both positive and negative) decreases the possibility of an event happening again. Behaviourism is a precursor to cognitive learning.

Behaviourism has the following impact on learning:

- The positive and negative reinforcement techniques of behaviourism can be very effective and
- Teachers use behaviourism when they reward or punish learner behaviour.

2.2.7 Symbolic interaction theory

The theorists limit their analysis to what they see or observe happening in the classroom (Andersen and Taylor 2009:63). The focus is on how teacher expectations influence learner performance, perceptions and attitudes. They believe that people rely on the symbolic meaning that they will develop and rely on the process of social interaction.

The interactionists theory according to Goffman (1983) as cited by Misztal (2001:313) is based on the following principles:

- Human beings possess the capacity for thought which is shaped by social interactions;
- People learn meaning and symbols through social interaction and
- People are able to modify or alter the meanings and symbols they use in interactions by interpreting the situations they are engaged in.

2.2.8 Jean Piaget's Cognitive theory

As cited by Mcleod (2003:08) the theory is based on the idea that a developing child builds cognitive structures, mental maps for understanding and responding to physical experiences, within the environment. Piaget proposed that a child's cognitive structure increases in sophistication with development, moving from a few innate reflexes such as crying and sucking to highly complex mental activities.

The Jean Piaget's Cognitive theory has the impact characterised by the fore-going on learning:

- Curriculum – teachers must plan a developmentally appropriate curriculum that enhances their learners' logical and conceptual growth and
- Instruction – teachers must emphasise the critical role that experiences or interactions with the surrounding environment play in the learning process, for example instructors have to take into account the role that fundamental concepts such as the permanence of objects play in establishing cognitive structures.

2.2.8 The Brain Based Learning Theory

It is based on the structure and function of the brain. As long as the brain is not prohibited from fulfilling its normal processes, learning will occur (Caine and Caine 1990:66-67). Traditional schooling often inhibits learning by discouraging; ignoring or punishing the brain's natural learning processes.

The theory has the following core principles:

- Learning is a parallel process, meaning that it can perform several activities at once;
- Learning engages the whole physiology;
- The search for meaning is innate;
- The brain processes wholes and parts simultaneously;
- Learning involves both focussed attention and peripheral perception;
- Learning involves both conscious and unconscious processes;
- There are two types of memory – spatial and rote;

- People understand best when facts are embedded in the natural, spatial memory and
- Learning is enhanced by challenge and is inhibited by threat.

The theory is premised on the following instructional techniques:

- Creating learning environments that fully immerse learners in an educational experience;
- Trying to eliminate fear in learners, while maintaining a highly challenging environment and
- Allowing learners to consolidate and internalise information by actively processing it.

The impact that the theory has on learning is explained as follows:

- Curriculum – teachers must design learning around learners' interests and make learning contextual;
- Instruction – teachers need to let the learners to learn in teams and use peripheral learning. Teachers structure learning around real problems, encouraging learners to also learn in settings outside the classroom and the school building; and
- Assessment – since all learners are learning, their assessment should allow them to understand their own learning styles and preferences. This way, learners monitor and enhance their own learning process.

Brain based learning is motivated by the general belief that learning can be accelerated and improved if teachers base how and what they teach on the science of learning, rather than on past educational practices, established conventions or assumptions about the learning process. It therefore suggests that learning effectively improves brain functioning, resiliency and working intelligence.

2.3 SCHOOLS THAT WORK

Schools that work exhibit strong inner capacities in terms of teaching and learning, supported by management and leadership, as well as a sense of urgency. According to Christie, Butler and Potterton (2007:5) schools that work are characterised by the following:

- All these schools are focused on their central tasks of teaching, learning and management with a sense of purpose, responsibility and commitment;
- All these schools carry out their tasks with competence and confidence;
- All have organisational cultures or mindsets that support a work ethic, expected achievement and acknowledged success; and
- All have strong internal accountability systems in place, which enable them to meet the demands of external accountability, particularly in terms of National Senior Certificate (grade 12) achievement.

Based upon a shared vision of effective teaching and learning, school leaders in the well performing schools establish a focus on learning, nurture a culture of continuous improvement, innovation and public practice, and monitor, evaluate and develop teacher performance to improve instruction. According to Rhodes, Stokes and Hampton (2004:11) schools that work or successful schools are always outward facing and committed to sharing best practices and seeking innovative thinking wherever they can find it.

2.4 DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF WELL PERFORMING SCHOOLS

The McKinsey report (2007: 10) describes well performing schools as those that employ the right people to become teachers, developing them into effective instructors and ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child.

The said report found that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers and that the only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction. Well performing schools are those that attract good teachers who are committed to the teaching and learning process and have a distinct focus on the quality of learning outcomes.

According to the Department of Basic Education, (DBE 2007:14), well performing schools have these building blocks:

- A culture of high expectations and caring for learners;
- A safe and disciplined environment;
- Parents as partners in learning;

- A principal who is a strong instructional leader;
- Hard working, committed and able teachers; and
- A curriculum focused on academic achievement that emphasises basic skills in all the subjects.

These building blocks are supported by the following practices:

- Increased instructional time,
- Ongoing diagnostic assessment,
- Parents as partners in learning,
- Professional development to improve learner attainment and
- Collaboration among teachers and staff.

According to Shannon and Bylsma (2007:10) well performing schools are characterised by a clear and shared focus, effective school leadership, high levels of collaboration and communication, frequent monitoring of learning and teaching, a supportive learning environment and high levels of community and family involvement. In these schools everybody knows where they are going and why. Everybody believes that all learners can learn. Teachers are positive about learners' capability and they are mostly focused on quality learning outcomes.

2.4.1 Quality learning outcomes

Marishane and Botha (2011: 03) argue that the quality of what learners achieve in a particular school setting is influenced by the quality of their learning experiences. The quality of their learning experiences in turn is influenced by the quality of their teachers' work and the quality of teaching is influenced by the quality of school leadership. Quality learning outcomes will follow in a school where the learning atmosphere is exciting, stimulating and success oriented and it affords the learners the opportunity to learn from their mistakes.

According to the Department for Schools, Children and Families (2008:07) the following characteristic features are key in well performing schools:

- Highly focused lesson design with sharp objectives;
- High demands of learner involvement and engagement with their learning;

- High levels of interaction for all learners;
- Appropriate use of teacher questioning, modelling and explaining;
- An emphasis on learning through dialogue, with regular opportunities for learners to talk individually and in groups;
- An expectation that learners will accept responsibility for their own learning and work independently and
- Regular use of encouragement and authentic praise to engage and motivate learners.

Clarke (2007:207) refers to quality teaching as the ability of the teacher to teach, in particular what the teacher does to promote learning inside the classroom. It includes creating a positive learning climate, selecting appropriate instructional goals and assessments, using the curriculum effectively and employing variable instructional behaviours that help learners to learn at higher levels. In a study by Kaplan and Owings as cited in Clarke (2007:27) the following list of factors linking teacher quality to increased learner attainment have been mentioned: the verbal ability of the teacher; content knowledge; education coursework on the teaching methods in their discipline; ongoing professional learning; enthusiasm for learning; class size; planning time; opportunities to work with colleagues and curricular resources – all these tilt the scales heavily towards quality learning outcomes.

2.4.2 Protecting Teaching and Learning Time

There is strong positive relationship between academic learning time and both learner attainment and attitudes. Increasing academic learning time is therefore the key to improving the performance and attitudes of the learners. Simply being in class is not enough. It is the time that is put to good use by both the teacher and the learners while in class that will yield positive learning outcomes. According to the HSRC Report (2005) schools that make better use of the teaching time and do the following are bound to improve learner attainment:

- Begin and end the lessons on time;
- Reduce transition between the tasks;

- Closely monitor the way the learners learn and their behaviour, including placing them in desk arrangements that allow teacher and learner to see one another well from different positions in the classroom;
- Establish and follow simple, consistent rules regarding learner behaviour in the classroom;
- Make sure that learners know what is expected of them and how to measure their accomplishments;
- Pay attention to the degree of match between the curriculum and testing;
- Reduce non instructional time activities whenever possible and
- Cover content as fully as possible.

There are four significant classroom management processes that promote time on task:

Room arrangement – well organised room arrangement promotes easy learner movement and good teacher - learner eye contact. Teachers whose classes are arranged so that they have a clear view of all their learners can easily monitor learner engagement and attend to their activities.

Rules and procedures – effective rules and procedures reduce the time spent on disruptions and disciplinary situations.

Transitions – efficient practised transitions help learners to move in and out of the classroom smoothly and get to work quickly at the beginning of the class or on the next learning activity.

Preparation and pacing – doing the hard work of pre- planning and preparing ample activities and materials allow teachers to focus on the lesson momentum. Good pacing reduces dead time and keeps learners involved on the task.

In the well performing schools high premium is placed on instructional time. The majority of non- teaching activities are done in the afternoons, after classes. The stakeholders understand the importance of protecting teaching and learning time. Learners respect school time, are often early for school and in their classes, getting ready for teaching to commence.

2.4.3 Articulation of high achievement standards

Kowalski (2010: 59 – 60) affirms that in schools that articulate high achievement standards, curriculum is coordinated and evaluated periodically to determine effectiveness. Modifications are based on evaluation outcomes; interventions are pervasive and intended to improve the performance of all teachers. Failure by learners is recognised and efforts are made to restructure curriculum and instructional approaches. Everyone is focused on the actual teaching and learning process. There is high premium on the high levels of performance.

The main focus is on ensuring that learners attain high academic standards in their school work. Articulation refers to teachers designing learning targets for their learners, clearly articulating that which the learners should know, understand and be able to do for each unit of study. It is further expected of teachers to differentiate by examining the strengths and needs of each learner and determine strategies to help all learners to meet or exceed the articulated standards. Communicating the results from time to time informs learners of how much work must still be done.

According Shannon (2010:05) schools that articulate high achievement standards display the following characteristics:

- Clear and shared focus - everybody knows where they are going and why. The vision is shared, everybody is involved and all understand their role in achieving the vision.
- High standards and expectations – the teachers and everybody in the school believe that all learners can learn and that they can teach all learners. There is recognition that some learners experience learning barriers but the barriers are not insurmountable. Learners are engaged in an ambitious and rigorous course of study.
- Effective school leadership – this is required to implement change processes in the school. Effective leaders advocate, nurture, and sustain a school culture and instructional programme conducive to effective learning and staff professional growth.
- High level of collaboration and communication – there is constant collaboration and communication among teachers of all grades. Everybody is

connected and involved including parents and members of the community to solve problems and create solutions.

- Curriculum, instruction and assessment aligned with standards – there is clear understanding of assessment system, what is measured in various assessments and how it is measured.
- Frequent monitoring of teaching and learning – teaching and learning are frequently adjusted based on frequent monitoring of learners' progress and needs. A variety of assessment procedures are used. The results of assessment are used to improve learner performance and also to improve the instructional programme.
- Focused professional development – professional development for all teachers is aligned with the school and the district's common focus, objectives, and high expectations. This is ongoing and based on high need areas.
- Supportive learning environment – the school has a safe, civil, healthy and intellectually stimulating learning environment. Learners feel respected and connected with the staff and are engaged in learning.
- High levels of community and parental involvement – there exists a sense that all stakeholders have a responsibility to educate learners, not just the teachers in the school.

2.4.4 Benchmarking or target setting

According to Taylor (2007:3) South Africa has a well established internal benchmark for learner performance at the top end of the school system. This is the matriculation examination (matric), the results of which are used to certify the National Senior Certificate at the end of Grade 12. The matric examination provides the most reliable information on school quality at high school level.

Targets are measures or indicators of what the individual school wants to achieve in terms of improvement in performance. They can cover a wide range of aspects of school performance such as disciplinary incidents, attendance, parental involvement or staff development. The targets must be clearly expressed and quantified; informed by an accurate evaluation of what is currently being achieved and time bound. If targets are to contribute to raising standards, they must be realistic, challenging,

achievable, focused on the school's key priorities and set in context of a plan for action by which they will be achieved (Bradley 2005:03).

When setting targets schools need to take into account the following range of factors:

- Trends in performance by the school over the previous years;
- The prior attainment of each year group;
- The context within which the school is operating and how it compares to schools in similar circumstances and
- The priorities set out in the School Improvement Plan.

Target setting focuses on improving performance and it is based on qualitative and quantitative evidence about what is working well and what needs attention. It should not be viewed as a compliance process carried out to satisfy statutory requirements. It is a key self- management process and one which will drive strategic planning across the school, class or cohort. It must be said that targets that are too easy lead to complacency and those that are too difficult can discourage rather than motivate. Targets should not be imposed on those who have to work, but need to be negotiated and agreed. Schools that work respect and honour their performance targets. They use these targets to guide them through the rigorous teaching and learning programme.

2.4.5 Instructional leadership

According to Swan (2014:02) instructional leadership is the dynamic delivery of the curriculum in the classroom through strategies based on reflection, assessment and evaluation to ensure optimum learning. It has to start with the teacher in the classroom, with the support of the principal.

The work of instructional leader is to ensure that every learner receives the highest quality instruction each day. Instructional leadership is learning focused and addresses the cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic and learning diversity in the school community. It also focuses on the effective management of resources and people, recruiting, hiring, developing, evaluating – particularly in changing environments.

Instructional leadership views the principal as the primary source of educational expertise in the school (Cuthrie and Schuermann 2010:42). According to the authors, instructional leaders focus on the leadership functions that are directly related to teaching and that contribute to learner attainment. It is a decision to focus efforts on supporting the achievement of learners and the ability of the teachers to teach.

According to the University of Washington (2014:02), centre of instructional leadership, instructional leadership has four dimensions:

Vision, mission and culture building: school leaders are expected to create a reflective equity- driven, achievement based culture of learning focused on academic success of every learner.

Improvement of instructional practice: based on shared vision of effective teaching and learning. School leaders establish a focus on learning. They nurture a culture of continuous improvement, innovation and public practice; monitor; evaluate and develop teacher performance to improve instruction.

Allocation of resources: school leaders use financial resources, time, facilities, technology and partnerships innovatively and equitably to accomplish the goal of powerful teaching and learning for all learners.

Management of people and processes: instructional leadership employ critical processes such as planning, implementing, advocating, supporting, communicating and monitoring to all leadership responsibilities including curriculum instruction and school improvement planning. They create supportive learning environments which include professional development opportunities, time and space for collaboration and access to professional learning communities.

Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008: 24) affirm that instructional leaders demonstrate such leadership when they:

- Focus on improving the effectiveness of instruction to increase the achievement of all learners;
- Know when and why to initiate and sustain instructional change; create a school widely inclusive of culture of high expectations for achievement, rigor, relevance and respect in the classroom;

- Ensure instructional practices are appropriate to the context and grounded in research and authentic assessment of the learning process and
- Are knowledgeable about and deeply involved in the implementation of the instructional programme of the school.

Good instructional leadership in schools is characterised by coherent planning and coordination, effective language policies and programmes, good time management, procurement and deployment of books, promoting high levels of writing, using assessment to improve teaching and learning and fostering professional development of teachers.

2.4.6 Mentorship

Mentorship is a personal developmental relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person (Metros and Yang 2006:06). The person in receipt of mentorship may be referred to as a protégé (male), a protégée (female), an apprentice or in recent years, a mentee. The broad objective is to provide information, support and guidance so as to enhance the less experienced member's chances of success in the organisation and beyond.

According to Metros and Yang (2006:08) effective mentoring is characterised by mutually beneficial relationship. Participants should be willing to candidly share what they expect to gain from the relationship and their vision for getting there. They need to be prepared to learn and listen to each other's viewpoints.

Mentorship is about facilitating change by providing a stable source of support throughout the relationship period. Through interaction with the mentor, mentees can rehearse their actions, clarify their thought and gain feedback. In this way the mentors provide emotional scaffolding for mentees struggling to bring about their own transformation (DoE 2008:09).

Rhodes, Stokes and Hampton (2004:15) point that mentoring implies an extended relationship involving additional behaviour such as counselling and professional friendship. It involves unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn, rather than teaching them.

In the well performing schools mentorship is valued highly. No new educator is left alone to fend for him or herself alone. There is a general belief that mentorship represents an individual commitment to seeking out, identifying and developing in a variety of ways, the leaders for the future. It is about producing people who have the creativity, the intellect, the conceptual skills and the personal qualities necessary to provide true transformational leadership in the dynamic teaching and learning milieu.

2.4.7 School leadership

The education field is finally embracing school leadership as an essential ingredient in reform, worthy of investment in its own right. Facing pressure to have all learners meet the high standards, provinces and districts are increasingly recognising that successful school reform depends on having principals who are well prepared to change schools and improve instruction, not just manage buildings and budgets (Taylor, Van der Berg and Mabogoane 2012: 25).

According to Clarke (2007: 03) the first step to creating an effective and well run school is planning. It is about setting up systems, policies, procedures and timetables necessary to make the school to work efficiently. It is also about assessing the physical, financial and human resources, and allocating them according to priority and need. Above all, it is about making certain that everyone knows what to do, how to do it, and by when to do it.

In a well performing school the principal more than anyone else, is in a position to ensure that excellent teaching and learning is part of every classroom. In fact, leadership is second only to teaching among school related factors as an influence on learning, according to a six year old study led by Leithwood, Louis, Wahlstrom and Anderson (2004:9). According to that study, to date, no single case of a school improving its learners' achievement record in the absence of talented leadership has been found. This view is supported by Sergiovanni (2009:131) when he asserts that in many ways the school principal is the most important and influential individual in any school. It is the principal's leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for learning, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers and the degree of concern for what the learners may or may not become.

In order for the school to produce quality results it must have quality leadership that is interactive, making systematic, frequent visits to the classrooms, being highly visible to teachers, learners and parents, and interacting frequently with each group (Kise and Russell 2010: 24 – 25). According to these authors the leadership that will produce results must:

- Learn from positive and negative results;
- Maintain school focus and monitoring strategy implementation;
- Set clear expectations and provide related feedback;
- Align curriculum and standards; and
- Use data, assessment and testing effectively.

In a well managed school there is good order, things happen on time, as planned, and to an agreed standard (Clarke 2007:05). The stability created by this sense of order and predictability establishes an environment which is conducive to effective teaching and learning. Teachers, learners and parents know how things function and what to expect. School leaders use financial resources, time, facilities, technology and partnerships innovatively and equitably to accomplish the goal of powerful teaching and learning for all learners.

2.4.8 Balanced assessment

Hoadley (2012:28) argues that learning, teaching and assessment are inextricably linked. She concludes that assessment has a developmental and monitoring function to fulfil. It is through assessment that the effectiveness of teaching and learning process can be evaluated. Feedback from assessment informs teaching and learning and allows for the critique of the outcomes, methodology and materials. Assessment practices can have profound impact on the process of teaching and learning in that they set standards that guide these activities.

In terms of Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), the main purposes of assessment include:

- To inform instructional planning,
- To inform instruction,
- To evaluate effectiveness of teaching for all learners,

- To assess learning,
- To identify learner needs and strengths and
- To evaluate learner attainment against predetermined criteria for the purposes of grading and reporting (DBE 2008: 19).

Effective schools understand the purpose of assessment and use it to inform multiple intervention strategies aimed at overall school improvement and quality learning outcomes. This understanding will help improve the quality of learning outcomes.

According to National Protocol on Assessment for schools in the General and Further Education and Training Band (Grade R -12), assessment should provide evidence of learner performance relative to learning outcomes and assessment standards. It should be used to provide feedback that supports and enhances their learning experience. The feedback given to parents and learners must be an accurate reflection of their performance relative to some external and objective benchmark (DBE 2011:05).

A balanced assessment system is a set of interacting assessments focused on serving the needs of different consumers of assessment information for the common purpose of improving education (Raymond 2006:3). It is a process whereby evidence is obtained through the outcome of specific questioning such as tests and surveys. She lists the following as important features of effective assessment:

- It evaluates the extent of learning that has taken place;
- It is essential part of the learning process for both teachers and learners;
- It acts as a systematic process of obtaining evidence;
- Promotes effectiveness when used correctly;
- Determines the next step needed to continue the process of teaching and learning;
- Assists teachers to deliver accurate and informative lessons and feedback; and
- Takes many forms, for example it can be verbal, written, collaborative, personal and spontaneous among other variations, depending on the circumstances.

Evidence obtained from the assessment process is thus used to determine what the learner can do at a particular point in time and what support does a learner need to progress to another level. Well performing schools enforce the use of assessment as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Teachers are held accountable for learner attainment.

Brookhart and Nikto (2008:34) emphasise that in a well performing school assessment is used in such a way that it matches the learning objectives. They assert that it emphasises what is taught and it represents the stated curriculum content that is worth learning. It must always be reliable, objective, consistent and fair to the learners and it must be geared towards supporting learning.

Assessment is used effectively to enhance the teaching and learning process and hence the quality of learning outcomes in schools that work. It has been observed that in well performing schools there are clearly worked out assessment plans for each grade, listing all the formal assessment plan for each grade and the plan is availed to the learners and their parents in the first week of the first term. This is to ensure that at the start of the school year, learners and parents know what will be assessed and how it will be assessed, for each subject.

2.4.9 Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning is a well structured process in which the success of the group depends on the true cooperation of its members. In a cooperative learning situation, hidden talents emerge and class members learn to value diversity and to be more accepting and supportive of their peers in general (Sullivan 2010:120). There exists positive interdependence where the efforts benefit the individual and the collective. There is no room for free riders as each member of the group is assigned a specific task or assignment. Everyone is accountable for the performance of the group.

According to Felder and Brent (2001:12) cooperative learning is an instruction that involves learners working in teams to accomplish a common goal under conditions that include the following elements:

Positive interdependence – wherein members are bound to rely on one another. If some members do not pull their weight that would result in the whole group failing;

Individual accountability – everyone remains accountable for taking up his share of the work and doing the best out of it;

Face to face promotive interaction – it is upon members of the team to provide feedback to others with challenging reasoning and conclusion. A platform is created for members to teach and encourage each other;

Appropriate use of collaborative skills – this approach inculcates trust among members, good leadership, decision making communication and conflict management skills; and

Group processing – members set group goals and periodically assess what they are doing well as a team and identify changes that they will make in order to function more effectively in the future.

According to Kishore (2012:4-5) cooperative learning in the classroom helps learners to interact with each other, generate alternative ideas, and to make informed inferences through discussion. It involves discussions, group discoveries, helping each other and sharing materials. Through cooperative learning, learners achieve the benefits of social participation and help one another to discover knowledge together.

In this approach the teachers play a facilitating role while learners work together and as a collective to complete the task at hand. Everyone succeeds as the group succeeds. This can work optimally in well performing schools with high level of discipline and focus on learner attainment.

2.4.10 Professional Learning Communities

Kise and Russell (2010:02) describe professional learning communities as a platform where teachers come together in teams to work collaboratively on goals designed to improve learner attainment. According to Blanchard (2009:37) professional learning communities have interactive teachers who get involved in interactive teaching that makes serious demands on clarity of thinking and resourcefulness. Working with other colleagues is important because together they share planning and teaching experiences and they encourage one another and solve problems together.

Rhodes, Stokes and Hampton (2004:07) state that the professional learning communities provide opportunities to learn from and with others in their own or other schools by:

- Observing colleagues teaching and discussing this; and
- Working together on real school improvement problems, drawing on best practices in developing solutions and taking part in coaching and mentoring.

Professional learning communities create a platform for teachers - particularly if they believe that it will benefit their learners, opportunities to understand the rationale behind new ideas and approaches such as theory demonstrated in practice and exposure to new expertise. Teachers are also afforded the chance to reflect on what they know and already do and on specific teaching and learning problems.

Turning professional learning communities into productive and sustainable teams that improve learning is a daunting and difficult task, according to Grossman (2001:991), as cited by Kise and Russell (2010:02). If well monitored these structures have a potential of improving the learning and teaching instruction and the confidence of the teachers in imparting knowledge to the learners and hence improve the quality of learning outcomes.

2.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

There has been a significant improvement in the educational attainment over the years. This improvement has, nevertheless, slowed down recently. Educational attainment and the grade 12 pass rates are also unevenly distributed across the educational region. Basic education results display low quality and high inequality. The rankings in international tests of learners' competencies in reading in 2006, called Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and in mathematics, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study in 2003 (TIMSS) have been dismal. Although the TIMSS 2011 show some marked improvement, South Africa still ranks at the bottom of the international spectrum (Martin and Mullis 2013:30 – 36). These findings underline the need for urgent and sustained intervention.

Education quality depends on the amount of resources injected into the education system as well as on the institutional settings that condition the efficient use of

available resources (Murtin 2013:12). Well resourced schools perform better than the poorly resourced schools. Allocation of resources must be strategically aimed at continuous improvement in learner attainment.

There is a direct link between how the school is managed and the learning outcomes. Schools that work are well managed, learner discipline is at a high and teachers are clearly focused on the job at hand.

In the light of the foregoing discussions it is clear that the majority of learners in the schools perform below the expected averages. This calls for a closer look at the existing strategies aimed at improving learner attainment. It is also necessary to look critically at how the achievement theories and the characteristic traits of well performing schools may be used to contribute towards improving the academic performance of the grade 12 learners. Principals need to insist that teachers must do the job that they are employed to do, which is to engage learners in the teaching and learning process for the full allocated classroom time each day.

According to Elger (2014:11 – 14) academic theories of performance inform learning in the classrooms, workshops and other venues that are associated with learning. The author further states that these theories involve actions that help people to pay attention to and learn from experiences. Examples include observing the present levels of performance, noting the accomplishments, analysing strengths and areas for improvement and improving levels of knowledge. Clearly therefore, the SMTs can use the academic theories of performance to increase the problem – solving skills. They can use the theories of performance to increase their ability to set realistic performance goals. Learning more about the theories of performance could help the teachers to take actions that integrate skills and knowledge to produce valued results.

Understanding more about well performing schools (or schools that work) and the conditions under which they achieve is likely to be valuable for the districts in their work with the underperforming schools. The SMGDs and the subject advisors need to ensure that the lessons learnt from these schools are used to stimulate better performance in the underperforming schools. These officials must provide guidance and mentorship to principals and SMTs of underperforming schools. They need to

ensure that the distinguishing features of well performing schools are incorporated into the intervention strategies in the underperforming schools.

The next chapter will look into the causes of underperformance in the schools in the Free State province.

CHAPTER THREE

CAUSES OF ACADEMIC UNDERPERFORMANCE IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE FREE STATE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter has exposed that there are model schools that take responsibility for their own improvement. These are schools that take pride in the high performance level of their learners. They are focused on quality learning outcomes and are consistent high performers. In this chapter particular focus will be on the causes of academic underperformance in the secondary schools in the Free State province.

Academic underperformance in the secondary schools may come from factors internal and external to the school. Internal factors include (but not limited to) poor quality of teaching, poor classroom instruction, inadequate teacher knowledge and skills, limited teacher experience, teachers assigned to subjects for which they are not trained, high teacher turnover, low teacher morale, ineffective leadership, and inadequate resources (Leithwood 2010:09). Research has also shown that learner attainment is affected by numerous factors, including the intrinsic motivation of the learner, the learner's attitude to learning, the learner's cognitive abilities, the socio-economic background of the learner, the family structure, parents' literacy levels, their involvement in the learner's schooling, the school type, the educator profile, the teaching and learning resources available, the climate at the school, how the school networks with other institutions in the society, the underpinning philosophy which guides the curriculum (Schultze and Steyn 2007:694).

Learner attainment, and in particular Grade 12 results, are normally perceived to reflect the general standard of teaching and learning, not only at a particular school, but also in South Africa. In this regard, one of the troubling issues in South Africa is the unsatisfactory level of learners' academic achievement, especially in black secondary schools (Christie, Butler and Potterton 2007: 55).

Many questions come to mind when considering the results obtained by many schools. Why do some schools perform better than others? Why are the strategies to improve results working well with some and not for other schools? The Human Science and Research Council Report on Teachers' Workload in South Africa established that an average of 16 hours per week is spent on teaching out of an expected range of between 22.5 and 27.5 hours per week and the remaining 25 hours is spent on administration and non administration related activities (HSRC 2005:03). It further found out that teachers spend progressively less time on teaching as the week progresses, with little teaching occurring on Fridays in many schools.

The fact that there are teachers who fail to meet their obligations in terms of teaching time and that there are principals and school management teams who do not only fail to deal effectively with this anomaly but in some instances are complicit in it, is unethical and inexcusable. This chapter explores some of the causes of underperformance in the identified schools in the Free State.

3.2 CAUSES OF ACADEMIC UNDERPERFORMANCE IN THE FREE STATE PROVINCE

Academic underperformance is experienced when schools exhibit levels of performance that are below standard. For the purpose of this study schools obtaining less than 60% overall pass rate and less than 40% bachelors in the Grade 12 end of the year examination results will be classified as underperforming. Schools presenting less than 40% bachelors pass rate are also deemed to have produced results of poor quality. Among others many of these schools are not well managed. Poor management prejudices the standard of performance of the learners in the school.

Cruickshank, Jenkins and Metcalf (2009:70) affirm that the causes of underperformance are many and include: lack of parental interest, support or guidance, teachers' failure to recognize the learner's high potential, failure to challenge the learner sufficiently and the learner's lack of interest or motivation. The following causes of underperformance will be discussed.

3.2.1 Lack of instructional leadership

Instructional leadership focuses on teaching and learning and on the behaviour of teachers in working with learners (Bush 2003:16). It entails effective decision making by the school based leadership to ensure optimal achievement of learning outcomes. Lack of instructional leadership is contributing to an increase in the number of underperforming schools. This notion is fully supported by Bottery (2004:12) when he says that a lot of ground is lost if the decrease in numbers of highly effective, satisfied principals is considered. There have been instances where the school leadership was changed in the Free State schools. This was motivated by the fact that the school leadership had failed to ensure that the schools were well managed. Horng and Loeb (2010:4) affirm that schools that improve learner attainment are more likely to have principals who are strong organisational managers than are schools with principals who spend more of their time observing classrooms or directly coaching teachers.

Effective schools require well selected individuals as principals together with management teams that understand and fulfil their roles as leaders of the curriculum, ensuring that an organised environment conducive to learning is present (Van der Berg, Taylor, Gustafsson, Spaul and Armstrong 2011: 03). Looking at the number of schools that produce results of poor quality and those that fail to obtain at least 70% overall pass rate in the Grade 12 results it can be argued that many schools do not satisfy the above finding by Van der Berg et al. Ineffective leadership does not inspire confidence in the teaching personnel. It does not create an environment that is conducive for effective teaching and learning. Poor leadership does not use data effectively to inform the intervention strategies in the underperforming schools. The visits to the underperforming schools established that there were no credible intervention programmes that were aimed at addressing the performance gaps. In certain instances the plans were available but there was no proof that they were being implemented. No proof of monitoring and control could be presented. All these reflect on the manner in which the schools are managed.

3.2.2 Poorly qualified teachers

According to the McKinsey report (2007:11) the quality of the school system cannot exceed the quality of its teaching force. This implies that the quality of the education system is determined by the quality of its teachers. Teachers who are appropriately qualified and display confidence, dedication and passion towards the profession are bound to influence the learning outcomes in a positive way. Low teacher effort is often considered as one of the most serious problems in schools in recent times. Weak content knowledge and poor pedagogical skills of the teacher account for a greater part of poor results coming out of schools (Van der Berg et al 2011:05). Teachers are expected to lead the teaching and learning process by providing credible information to the learners. If many of them are not well equipped to impart such information and knowledge to the learners, the quality of teaching is thus compromised. A comparison of the final examination results with continuous assessment scores in mathematics highlight the fact that teachers are not accurately assessing learners and that teachers' subject content knowledge is poor – impacting significantly and directly on learner performance (Van der Berg 2008: 08).

Leigh and Mead (2005:8) observed that there were major teacher quality disparities between poor and affluent schools. They warned that learners from disadvantaged societies, who are mostly in need of good teachers, are therefore often the least likely to have them. This is further supported by Christie et al (2007:20,55) who in their analysis of the 2006 Grade 12 results in South Africa, found strong evidence for disparate achievements of schools in terms of their socio- economic and politically historic position. It is, as a result, not unusual to find teachers offering subjects that they are not competent to teach in the schools that produce poor academic results. The National Framework for Teacher Education in South Africa (2005:7) clearly states that well qualified, committed and professional teachers are vital agents in the quality of schooling.

Taylor et al (2012: 06) affirm that there is a severe shortage of qualified teachers in South Africa. Teachers' knowledge of the subjects they teach has been questioned in both the regional tests (SACMEQ 2007) and in the national surveys. The Department of Basic Education's short courses do not seem to be particularly helpful (Taylor 2008:25). This view is further supported by Skinner, Garretton and Schultz

(2011:09) when they argue that the scarcity of qualified teachers exists in schools where teachers are often placed in classrooms where they are unprepared and have little or no experience in working with the learners. Teacher retention and teacher experience are an extreme challenge in these schools.

While it is acknowledged that there has been a significant improvement in the administrative qualification of teachers over the years, they have had no impact on the learning outcomes (DBE 2010a: 05). This assertion puts to doubt the value of these qualifications and the cognitive capacities of the teachers. Teachers often pursue qualifications that are not related to their specific subjects or area of specialisation. For instance, the educational management degree does not add much to the content knowledge of the Mathematics teacher. Many teachers aspire for management positions which are in fact promotional posts. These posts require the incumbents to have a management qualification hence the big number of teachers abandoning specialisation in the subjects that they teach and pursuing management qualifications.

It is not unusual to find teachers who have just graduated being allocated to teach the grade 12 classes. As Glickman, Gordon and Ross - Gordon (2010:25) state, teaching is the only profession in which novice teachers are expected to assume the same or more responsibilities at the same level of competence as experienced colleagues. Novice teachers do not often ask for help because they fear that a request for help will call into question their professional competence.

Darling – Hammond (2006:152) posits that poorly prepared teachers are unable to plan the curricular that meets learners' needs, are less able to implement a range of teaching strategies – especially those that support high order learning, and are less likely to know what to do when learners are experiencing difficulties. Teachers being allocated the subjects for which they did not receive any formal training result in low standards of teaching and learning. This further results into learners not being adequately prepared for the assessment tasks given during the year and ultimately at the end of the year. The schools in the rural areas also struggle to retain the teachers, especially those who are qualified to teach Mathematics, Physical Science and Accounting. This leads to these schools appointing the unqualified teachers from time to time. Frequent changes in the teaching personnel also have a negative

impact on the quality of teaching and learning process and on the learning outcomes in the end.

3.2.3 Low expectations for learner attainment

According to Dyson, Gallannaugh and Muijs (2007: 10) many underperforming schools do not have policies on grouping practices and differentiated approaches. There are no specific strategies to support low attaining- learners. There are not even visible resources allocated to support such learners in the low- attaining group. They also argue that learning material is not customised for these learners to enable them to perform maximally. The school ethos is not in such a way that it promotes mutual respect and a positive environment for learners to perform as expected. Many such learners in the low attainment category will therefore underperform. This will lead to underperformance in the school as a whole.

According to Mbugua, Kibet, Muthaa and Nkonke (2012:5) factors contributing towards poor learner attainment include but are not limited to: The teaching and learning material that is not user friendly; the sometimes hostile attitude of the learners towards the subject(s); the teaching methods and strategies employed by the teachers that sometimes tend to overlook the learners' cognitive levels.

In schools with low expectations for learner attainment, learners do not have access to a wide spectrum of academic and extracurricular experiences (Blankstein 2012: 96 – 97). The learners are scolded, told about how weak they are and that it will be a miracle if they can progress. The school climate does not engender any form of respect for the learners. Learners are afraid to express themselves freely. They tend to develop a very negative attitude towards their work and towards schooling in general. This leads to underachievement that leads to poor performance.

3.2.4 Rapid changes in education

There have been various changes in the curriculum and curriculum approaches in South Africa since 1994, from Curriculum 2005 to CAPS (Grobler 2003: 36). Teachers are expected to master the changes and still be able to impart quality and credible knowledge and information to the learners. There has not been any

significant training of teachers on the curriculum changes. It has always been workshops and meetings that would take place for a week during school holidays and for two to three hours after school. This brings into question the quality of teaching and learning in schools and the level of competence of teachers in implementing the new curriculum. Tshiredo (2013:59 - 60) argues that the changes had resulted in poor quality of instruction, high failure rate and low morale among the teachers. The teachers are often unprepared and therefore not able to be as productive as expected. The rate at which changes in education have been introduced also has a negative effect on the quality of teaching and learning. Bottery (2004:13) bemoans the adequacy of time to plan for provincially mandated changes as well as the number of curriculum changes mandated by the national department of education.

The changes in curriculum content and approach were heavily criticised in academic and professional circles for the following reasons:

- The use of highly inaccessible and complex language;
- The under-preparation of teachers for this complex curriculum;
- The large scale discrepancies in resources and capacity between the few privileged schools and the large mass of disadvantaged schools with respect to implementation;
- The power of existing curricula, teacher socialization, and the all pervasive system of examinations and control;
- The lack of competent and confident teachers to manage the curriculum and
- The critical lack of a solid learning materials base that supports the pedagogy and philosophy of this progressive curriculum (Jansen and Taylor 2003:38).

According to Cloud (2005:279 -280) teachers' practical knowledge base is gained when it is grounded in theory and principles and is informed by a knowledge base of effective language and content teaching appropriate to the stage of a programme and teachers development. The one day or two days content workshops would not adequately address the content knowledge gaps brought about by the changes in curriculum in various subjects. Many teachers found these one or two days workshops and seminars insubstantial and less helpful.

The rapid changes are a hindrance to organisational effectiveness. School leaders are often not ready for such changes because of lack of awareness around change theory; lack of understanding of the necessary precursors to change; comfort in continuing with the ways of the past, and no desire to push the envelope and the fact that they spent a lot of time on short term solutions (Blankstein 2012:15). The media statement made by Umalusi chairperson before the release of the 2014 national senior certificate results confirmed that there are practical challenges brought about by curriculum changes. The chairman indicated that Mathematics had undergone major changes in content. The inclusion of Euclidean geometry and probability together with increase in statistics and data handling algebra means that the CAPS mathematics curriculum would prove a challenge to the majority of learners. This was shown in the learner performance in that there is a significant increase in the failure rate compared with 2013. It was further indicated that in Physical science the CAPS curriculum represents a slight change in the format and structure but a significant increase in the depth of the content. The learners performed worse than in 2013 at all levels and so an upward adjustment became necessary (Umalusi 2014:04).

3.2.5 Poor learner discipline

One of the most prominent factors influencing the learning environment in South African Schools is the conduct of learners. In the education system that is struggling to create a culture of teaching and learning, ill disciplined behaviour obliterates all the well intended efforts to create or restore this culture (Rossouw 2003:413). There are instances where learners bunk classes while others do not do their homework as expected. Late coming is also rife among the learners.

The escalation of learner indiscipline cases in schools suggests failure by teachers to institute adequate alternative disciplinary measures after corporal punishment was outlawed in South African schools (Chisholm 2007: 12). According to Chisholm, the teachers revealed that learners do not fear or respect them because they know that nothing will happen to them. Although the teachers are aware of the alternative disciplinary measures, they view them as ineffective and time consuming.

Andrew and Taylor (1998) as cited by Rossouw (2003:01) assert that learners who misbehave tend to perform poorly in school and tend to be absent frequently from school. They affirm that discipline is correlated with absenteeism. Disruptive behaviour that significantly affects the fundamental rights of other learners to feel safe, to be treated with respect, to learn, disrespectful behaviour towards teachers, peer pressure, large numbers in the classrooms – are all the manifestations of poor discipline and causative factors.

According to Chapman and King (2008:39) learners tend to misbehave when they were never really exposed to the needed information during evaluation and assessment; when they did not have the opportunity to make meaningful, personal connections to the skill or topic transmitted. In some cases teachers expose learners to the skill, concept or information but it was not really understood or processed. The learning gaps thus formed tend to frustrate learners who are not high on motivation. This results in them not pushing hard enough to attain expected levels of performance.

3.2.6 Inadequate preparedness of candidates for the examination

The 2012 moderation of the grade 12 examination papers as captured in the technical report (DBE 2013:15) highlights the following areas of concern:

- A lack of linguistic skills required to express themselves in simple and proper paragraphs were evident in the responses of candidates across all subjects. Candidates displayed inadequacies regarding the skills of reading, comprehension, and analysing, evaluating and applying information to either make decisions or solve problems.
- Basic number operations, namely addition, subtraction, multiplication and division which include but not limited to fractions, equations, ratios, working with tables and graphs, analysis and synthesis of lots of information (texts and numerals) are lacking in mathematics and in all other subjects where such numerical skills were required.
- There were inadequacies observed with regards to foundational skills, basic concepts and principles. For instance candidates could not define terminology and concepts, were unable to display adequate understanding of the concepts

and were, therefore, unable to answer questions assessing high order thinking skills such as application, problem solving, critical thinking, analysis and evaluation.

- Inadequate preparedness in terms of mastery of the content was evident in the poor quality of answers provided by some candidates as well as the nature of the errors observed in the responses.

It is clear from the findings that the learners were not prepared adequately for the examination. This translates into poor examination results and underperformance.

3.2.7 Condonation Requirements

According to the National Education Policy Act (NEPA) 27 of 1996, paragraph 29, as amended, a learner may only be retained once in the Further Education and Training Phase (grade 10, 11 and 12) in order to prevent the learner from being retained in this phase for longer than four years (RSA 1996). This effectively means that if a learner fails Grade 10 for the first time in 2014, that learner will be automatically progressed through to Grade 11 in the following year and to Grade 12 the next year even if he or she fails the grades. This implies that there are many learners in grade 12 who have in fact failed grade 11. However the learner is expected to meet the requirements for promotion in order to pass Grade 12. This results in many learners failing Grade 12. It must be noted that the said progression requirement also applies to all the phases in the schooling system. A learner may thus reach the further education training band through being progressed in line with this requirement. The said act provides that these learners must receive the necessary support in order to progress to the next grade. Many schools do not have these dedicated programmes that are aimed at helping the multiple repeaters and those who have been progressed without necessarily meeting the promotion requirements.

It is the researcher's considered opinion that learners who know that they will be progressed at the end of the year will not exert themselves as expected. These learners are bound to loose focus and therefore manifest disciplinary behaviour that would also impact negatively on their performance. These learners may not be as committed as their counterparts in the same class or grade. At the beginning of the academic year progressed learners already have a backlog of the previous year's

work, thus making it difficult for such learners to deal effectively with the current curriculum concepts. The above cited policy on learner progression creates content gaps that will be too difficult to bridge.

The Free State Department of Basic Education had 3913 progressed learners in the grade 12 class in 2014. This constituted 14.8% of the total number of learners who sat for the end of the year National Senior Certificate examination (FS Examination Directorate 2014). It has been reported that 50.9% of these learners failed the National Senior Certificate. This is proof that the progression requirement contributes immensely to the poor quality of results in the province and added to the 4.6% drop in the overall pass rate in the Free State.

3.2.8 Changing of Subjects in the Grade 12 year

According to the NEPA, paragraph 35, learners are allowed to change subjects in the grade 12 year, before the end of January (RSA 1996). According to the act, the principal must give reasons for the intended change and the parents of the learner must also consent to the change. The subject teacher must give the programme outlining how the learner will be assisted in covering those aspects of the curriculum and assessment policy statements of the new subject for the previous grades that were not completed. This poses practical challenges to the learner and the teaching personnel. First the learner has lost out on the foundational knowledge in the subject from the previous grades. Then the learner has to grapple with completely new content in his or her grade 12 year. This leads to gross underperformance in the subject concerned and in the overall results. This also has a marked effect on the quality of the results since many learners would normally opt for the easier subjects like mathematical literacy and tourism that do not necessarily enable them to get quality passes.

3.2.9 Educator apathy

According to Perumal (2011:05) inadequate support from the management of the school, peers, subject advisors, parents and the community often result in low teacher morale. Lack of incentives for teachers also plays a part in teacher apathy.

The problem is further compounded by lack of professional development programmes for the teachers. Lack of improvement in the classroom management skills reduces teacher confidence.

The most obvious manifestation of educator apathy in schools occurs through time not being observed in five ways:

- High rate of educator absenteeism;
- Poor subject knowledge on the part of teachers;
- Acute late coming displayed by teachers in the underperforming schools;
- Not going to class according to the time table; and
- Taking part in non scheduled activities during teaching and learning time such as training, workshops, union meetings, memorial services and personal errands as captured in the NEEDU 2012 national report (DBE 2013:19 -20).

Davidson (2014:02) describes these teachers as those who experience burnout because of being overloaded; have about 40 classes to teach a week with little or no time to prepare adequately; work in overcrowded classrooms; the work environment is not conducive for effective teaching and learning. These teachers also have to endure the extremely poor benefits and the ever changing policies in education.

According to Douglas (2005:13) South African teachers who qualified through teacher training colleges learned to teach in a particular prescribed way, and their content knowledge was often not extended beyond the standards expected from learners. In many schools, especially those for black learners, many teachers who were trained to the level of matric plus two years (M+2) or (M+3) and unqualified teachers were common. Poor and uncritical training encouraged teachers to teach as they themselves were taught, often resulting in a mechanical and uncreative process.

According to Murtin (2013:17) the lack of strong teachers is primarily a long lasting consequence of the historical context, which has not been addressed adequately by the reform of teacher education. In terms of that publication, each year the number of teacher graduates is around 6000, well below the replacement needs of approximately 20 000. This critical situation is aggravated by the fact that about one fourth of newly qualified teachers plan to leave the profession.

Unmotivated teachers can kill the joy of a positive working space. They hold the bar too low for themselves and their learners. They are often willing to place the blame for poor results on everyone and everything outside themselves (Sackstein 2013:05). They often display poor work ethics and have excuses for whatever it is that gets undone. These are teachers who would have low expectations for learner attainment. They show little or no confidence in the ability of their learners to perform above average. Roussel (2008:10) affirms that learner absenteeism and the culture of poor quality in schools are compounded by teacher absenteeism. This leads to low levels of attainment by the learners in a school.

Teachers are under constant psychological pressure because of the expectations from the education authorities, the parents and the broader community. According to Glickman, Gordon and Ross – Gordon (2010: 23) the teacher feels or is made to feel that one's worth as a teacher will be judged by how much a class learns in a given period of time. The strong feeling that teachers have about the complexity of their tasks stems from the awareness that they are expected to bring their learners to a certain academic level by a time criterion in regard to which they have no say. Faced with numbers and diversity of children and the pressure to adhere to a time schedule presents the teacher with a very difficult task.

3.2.10 Poor understanding by some teachers of foundational competencies taught in lower grade

According to the NEEDU national report for 2012 it was established that learners displayed poor understanding of the work taught in the earlier grades such as algebraic manipulation, factorisation, solving equations and inequalities, lack of fundamental understanding of what a ration is and the overall poor performance in mathematics, economics, life science and geography (DBE 2013:30). This implies that the quality of teaching in the lower grades does little to assist learners when they reach grade 12. The learners are bound to struggle with the tasks that require higher cognitive level of thinking.

Selvaratman (2011: 107) conducted a research from 50 Dinaledi schools on intellectual strategies. Seventy three (73) Physical Science teachers were tested. The teachers were tested on clear presentation of the problem, identifying and

focusing on the goal; identification and use of relevant principles; use of equations for deductions and proceeding step by step with the solution. The study found that teachers' competence was poor in all the intellectual strategies that were tested. About 60% of teachers tested were unable to solve questions correctly. An important objective of curriculum is the development of critical thinking, scientific reasoning and strategies of learners. Achievement of this objective will be seriously handicapped because of lack of competence of teachers' intellectual strategies and foundational competencies. Lack of content knowledge does not help to improve the quality of the results.

3.2.11 Poor Foundation laid in lower grades

There is just too much focus on the Grade 12 results in the country. According to the Report on Annual National Assessment of 2014 results for the past three years indicate gross underperformance in Mathematics and English especially in grade 9 (DBE 2014: 60 - 93). In terms of that report the national pass rate in grade 9 in mathematics in 2012 was 13%, 14% in 2013 and 11% in 2014. In 2012 and 2013 only 2% of the learners who wrote mathematics achieved 50% and more. The pass rate (of learners who attained 50% and above) went up to only 3% in 2014. The performance in the Free State was also dismal. The average grade 9 percentage mark in Mathematics was 14% in 2012; 15.3% in 2013 and 13.8% in 2014. In terms of achievement, only 3.1% of learners obtained 50% and above in Mathematics in 2012; 4.1% in 2013 and meagre 5.1% in 2014. The performance in Grade 9 first additional language is also low with only 15.6% of learners achieving 50% and above in 2014.

There seems to be gross neglect of quality teaching and learning in the lower grades. The interventions are mainly focused on the grade 12 learners. In certain cases the teachers go out to teach in the camps and other classes at the expense of their allocated internal classes. The Grade 12 subject teachers also have other grades and subjects to teach in a school. These classes are left unattended when teachers leave for Matric camps and extra classes elsewhere. There is a push to up the pass rate in grade 12 at all costs. Very soon these learners get to Grade 12 and much work was not thoroughly dealt with in the lower grades. The 2013 technical

report on the reasons of poor performance in Mathematics, Physical Science and other subjects indicated that many learners lacked foundational competencies that they were supposed to have acquired in the lower grades (DBE 2013:19).

The lower grades suffer a huge neglect. The learners lose a lot of foundational knowledge and skills required in grade 12. There is always some stability in the teaching of grade 12 in the schools with too much movement of teachers in the lower grades. In certain instances the learners in the lower grades go without teachers for weeks. The too much focus on the grade 12 results causes the underperformance as the learners do not get the required foundational competencies, knowledge and skills at the most appropriate time. They are forced to acquire such competencies in the same year in which they have to grapple with the grade 12 workload.

3.2.12 Poor regard for teaching and learning time

The inefficient use of time is the most prominent feature of many South African schools, occurring at three levels: getting to school, getting to class and covering the curriculum efficiently when in class (Taylor 2011: 15). The author's argument is further supported by the national survey verified by case studies in 10 schools which state the following:

- Teachers worked an average of 41 hours per week, out of an expected minimum of 43 hours. In all, 41% of this time was spent on teaching, which translated into 3,4 hours a day;
- 14% was devoted to planning and preparation; and
- 14% was spent on assessment, evaluation, writing reports and record keeping (Chisholm, Hoadley and Wa Kivulu 2005:03).

The above gives a very lax picture of the situation in many schools. Instructional time is just too minimal for the prescribed work to be completed in time and for any meaningful revision to take place.

According to Allington and Cunningham (2007:138) there are several routine activities that encroach heavily on the teaching and learning time. These include but are not limited to snack time, bathroom, safety patrol, testing, holiday festivities, birthday celebrations, making announcements, taking attendance and a host of

others. In many instances the six and a half or seven hours in a school day offers only four hours of academic instructional time.

It has been observed that time-off granted to union members and officials also has a negative effect on the teaching and learning. This, together with the high rate of absenteeism in many schools, result in big loss of the teaching and learning time.

The most obvious manifestation of indiscipline in schools occurs through time not being observed in four ways: teachers and learners being absent from school frequently, coming to school late in the morning, not going to class according to the time table and taking part in non-scheduled activities during the school day such as training, workshops, union meetings and memorial services (DBE 2013:19). The said indiscipline results in loss of teaching and learning time. Learners fall behind and it subsequently becomes difficult to recover lost time.

The five education districts in the Free State embarked upon the following activities in the first term of the 2013 academic year. These activities are contained in the district strategy on learner attainment document. The meetings resulted in principals, school management team members and subject teachers leaving school earlier:

- Consultative meetings with school management teams where schools are called upon to do presentations on analysis of results and strategies to improve learner performance. About six to eight schools attend per session. This translates into not less than forty teachers leaving schools for at least four hours in a day.
- Start up curriculum workshops where subject teachers are to attend meetings convened to discuss year long programmes in specific subjects and the diagnostic reports from the national department of education. These meetings took place from eleven o'clock in the morning resulting in some schools knocking off four hours before the actual knock off time.
- The subject cluster meetings held from 14h00, causing teachers to leave at least an hour earlier in order for them to be on time.
- Inclusive education clusters where programmes affecting learners with special educational needs are discussed. These meetings took place from 10h00 until 16h00 (DSL 2013:05).

The cumulative effect of these activities becomes huge when considering that there are instances where district and provincial education officials go to schools and hold meetings when such are not even provided for in the district plan.

Marishane and Botha (2011:112) concur that when teachers are physically taken away from their classrooms or when their attention is diverted from the instructional programme, the teacher – learner interaction disintegrates, detracting from learner performance. They argue that the subsequent attempts at remedial “operation catch ups” seldom help to mend the broken relationships. The external and the internal interferences are so disruptive that teachers are forced to play catch up throughout the academic year. The intensive utilisation of the contact time is not wholly protected. Contact time refers to the time that the teachers spend in a qualitative teaching and learning relationship.

3.2.13 Poor learner motivation

The issue of learner motivation remains central to the debate in many schools. According to Levin and Nolan (2008:114) motivation refers to an inner drive that focuses on a particular goal or task and causes an individual to be persistent in trying to achieve the goal or complete a task successfully. Peer group pressure, underachievement and lack of perceived employment prospects are often cited as contributory factors to both truancy and exclusion from school (Blyth and Milner 2009:33).

Bumgarner (2010:01) argues that learners who are bored or inattentive or who put little effort to school work are unlikely to benefit from better standards, curriculum and instruction. This may be the case in a classroom where there are poor work ethics, unprepared educator with inadequate content knowledge and the teaching styles and methods that are not learner centred. He further states that learners who are academically demotivated are those who feel that they are not competent enough to complete a given task which does not have any value to them. Some are distracted by other priorities that compete for their time and attention, while others do not perceive the classroom climate as supportive.

Chapman and King (2008: 21 – 22) point out that unmotivated learners have had few successful experiences. This is the result of a lack of support and encouragement, inadequate role models, low expectations and negative learning experiences. These learners display the following behaviours in the classroom:

- Slouching in the seat, often with arms folded;
- Avoiding eye contact;
- Talking back with negative statements like “this is too hard” or “I can’t do this”;
- Lowering the head or
- Slow in following instructions or contributing.

According to Wright (2011:01) learners are unmotivated because:

- They cannot do the assigned work as they lack the essential skills required to do the work, for example, the academic enabling skills, cognitive strategies and basic academic skills;
- The response effort needed to complete the assigned work seems too great – although the learner has the requisite skills, he perceives the effort needed to be insurmountable;
- The classroom instruction does not engage – the classroom activities and learning are not sufficiently reinforcing to hold the learner’s attention;
- The learner fails to see adequate payoff for doing the assigned work;
- The low self- efficacy or the learner’s view of his or her abilities to carry out a particular task is too low. The learner lacks confidence that he or she can do the work or
- The learner does not relate well with the teacher.

Learner motivation is markedly affected by poor discipline, laziness on the part of the learner and lack of work ethics. The learners who disrespect their teachers and the school rules are bound to be low on motivation. They often absent themselves from school without valid reasons and they are prone to bunk classes and play truant while at school.

3.2.14 Poor mastery of the language of teaching and learning

Nel and Muller (2010:08) affirm that the impact of the teachers' limited English proficiency is a matter of great concern in South African schools in recent times. They argue that the teachers are mainly responsible for the inadequate language input due to their own limited English proficiency. This has a negative effect on learner attainment.

The traditionally black schools have high learner numbers. The majority of learners in these schools are doing English second language which is not necessarily their home language. These learners are bound to struggle if their teachers' English proficiency level is below par. Taylor (2008:68) affirms that children are severely disadvantaged when their home language and the language of instruction do not coincide. These learners are taught and assessed in English yet there is too little sustained and meaningful exposure to the language outside the classroom. This results in learners having to battle with language before dealing effectively with the content.

According to Monyai (2010: 29) poor English teaching is a big factor in the second language learners' poor proficiency in the language. She also argues that a limited culture of reading and a lack of environment of academic support contribute immensely to the poor language proficiency in the second language learners. The issue of language looms large in the South African schooling, given that the majority of children study in a second language (Taylor and Prinsloo 2005: 6). These learners are not only communicating in class in a second language, but also use it as a vehicle for learning in all their subjects. Learners are often ill prepared for the kind of conceptual tasks required by anything more than a superficial study of their other subjects.

Navsaria, Pascoe and Kathard (2011:19) state that failure to achieve the outcomes in linguistically diverse classrooms is as a result of the communication difficulties experienced by learners in these classrooms. The problem is also compounded by limited reading and writing opportunities; limited training and lack of support for teachers; large teacher: learner ratios and lack of school libraries.

3.2.15 High rate of absenteeism among teachers

Miller, Murnane and Willet (2007: 16) established that a significant portion of teacher absences is discretionary – encouraged by the generosity of the available leave policies. They also found that these absences have a nontrivial impact on productivity and that feasible policy changes could help reduce rates of absenteeism among teachers. According to Spaul (2013:04) low contact time with children or high absenteeism has been a recurrent problem in the schools. Many teachers are frequently absent on Fridays while others spent little time on site. According to the OECD (2008) report teachers spend only 46% of their time in teaching.

According to the HSRC Report (2010:06), public school system in South Africa has a leave rate somewhere between 10 and 20%, the wide margin of error indicating poor data systems for monitoring teachers leave. The report found that over three quarters of leave is of one or two days duration and does not therefore require a doctor's certificate. Leave, and in particular the abuse of sick leave by teachers, offers a gap for teachers to spend less time at school. Teachers are entitled to 36 days sick leave in a three year cycle, and it seems that teachers have come to see this as an entitlement which must be taken, rather than as a generous service benefit in case of serious illness (Taylor 2011:14). The number of sick leave days taken usually increase in the last year of the leave cycle. This shows that teachers are more inclined to ensure that the leave days per cycle are all used up before they expire.

Teachers' absenteeism has many disadvantages that lead to underperformance in general. Irregular absence of teachers compromises the smooth administration of the school. The classes without teachers cause a lot of noise that tends to disturb other classes. Contingency plans are needed to bridge the gap left by the absent teacher. There is also reduced instructional intensity and a creation of discontinuity of instruction in that regular routines are disrupted. Teacher absenteeism also leads to teachers not completing the syllabi in time. This absenteeism may also have an influence on learner attendance.

3.2.16 Poor governance in schools

Section 20(1)(a) of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (RSA 1996) states that the main function of the school governing body is to promote the best interest of the school and strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school. This effectively means that the governing body must prioritise activities and programmes that support the teaching and learning process. While greater decentralisation is a desirable objective, it was implemented too early in South Africa given the dysfunctioning of the many school governing bodies. It is widely recognised that school governing bodies have functioned unevenly due to skills gaps and unequal managing capacities between African and former white schools (DBE 2011b:171).

The capacity of school governing bodies in the traditionally black schools and the literacy level of the members have been widely debated in recent times. School governing bodies are often faced with a daunting task of deciding on who must be the principal, deputy principal or even a mathematics head. The act prescribes that they handle the recruitment and selection process despite their educational level, knowledge and information. The parents with primary school education often constitute shortlisting and interview panels for the appointment of teachers and school managers.

According to Payzant (2010:182) the typical tenure for school governing bodies of three years is not enough for them to serve long enough to see the systemic changes and improvement. It is also not enough for them to design and implement reform and improvement plan and see a significant improvement in learner attainment. Section 31(1) of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (RSA 1996) also affirms that the term of office of the school governing bodies may not exceed three years. By the time the members are adequately capacitated to understand their roles and responsibilities their term of office reaches an end. Those whose children are in Grade 12 cease to be members at the end of the year when their children leave school. This makes it very difficult for continuity and effective functioning of the school governing bodies. In the three year cycle there are many resignations and withdrawals from the governing bodies due to various reasons, including but not limited to:

- Changing the workplace by parents;
- Being parents of learners in the last grade in the school (grade 7 and 12);
- Conflict in the school governing body;
- Lack of further interest to serve in the governing body and
- Withdrawal of the functions of the governing body in line with the legislative prescripts.

It therefore becomes necessary to train the members of the governing bodies regularly. Such training does not happen as regularly as it is supposed to be. It is a huge challenge to build enough capacity among school governing body members for them to perform their duties as prescribed in sections 20 and 21 of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (RSA 1996). The school governing body is expected to lead the budgeting process, monitor and control expenditure, develop policies, determine the extra – curricular programme of the school. Above all, the governing body must promote the best interest of education in the school. These and many other functions stipulated in section 20 and 21 of the South African Schools Act cannot be realised if members of the governing body are not consistent in the three years as members.

3.2.17 Lack of parental involvement.

Reynolds (1998:20) argues that the most consistent predictors of children's academic achievement and social adjustment are parents' expectations of the child's academic attainment and satisfaction with their child's education at school. Parental involvement is therefore a critical factor in learner performance.

The challenge for teachers is how to involve parents in a meaningful way in the education of their children. Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansom and Van Voorhis (2002:13) developed a framework for defining the following six different types of parental involvement:

- Parenting – helping all families to establish home environments to support learning;
- Communicating – designing effective forms of school to home and home to school communications about school programmes and children's progress

(regular schedule of useful notes, memos, phone calls, newsletters and other communications);

- Volunteering – recruit and organise parent help and support (school and classroom volunteer programme to help teachers, administrators, learners and other parents);
- Learning at home – provide information and ideas to families about how to help learners at home with homework and other curriculum related activities, decisions and planning;
- Decision making – participating in school governing body structures and
- Collaborating with the community – identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices, learning and development for the learners.

For parental involvement to be meaningful, the school must provide opportunities for parents to be involved in a wide range of activities involving their children. In many instances parents are only called in for general parents meetings. These meetings focus mainly on financials and discipline issues, and devote very little or no attention to academic performance of learners and the improvement strategies. The meetings do not give guidance to the parents on how they can help their children to perform better in the school subjects.

3.2.18 Lack of resources

The quality of education, as measured by the learners' average performance in test scores, depends on the amount of resources injected into the education system as well as on the educational settings that condition the efficient use of available resources (Murtin 2013:12). Lack of resources such as books has a negative effect on the learning outcomes. The statistics from SACMEQ (2007) database show that only 36% of learners had access to their own mathematics textbooks in South Africa. This results in learners not being allowed to take the books home. The learners are therefore unable to work, revise and practice at home.

The Eastern Cape research report (2006:05) on causes of underperformance highlights the following as found in the majority of the 46 schools visited: high rate of

absenteeism, acute shortage of textbooks, laboratory equipment and poor management controls. It goes without saying that the retrieval system in such schools is virtually nonexistent. The inventory and asset control is also nonexistent. The report also established that the governing bodies in the said schools are non-functional. These are structures that need to ensure that there are teaching and learning support devices and equipment and that they are well cared for. The findings of the report are also applicable to some schools in the Free State province.

3.2.19 Lack of understanding of diversity in the classroom

Managing diversity in the classroom embraces the fact that learners come with different abilities, skills and knowledge and socio- economic background. In order to respond to their diverse needs, teachers need to differentiate their teaching methods and strategies (DBE 2011:8). Barriers to learning impact negatively on educational access, retention and achievement. As specified in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy document these barriers are factors that lead to the system being unable to accommodate diversity. It is therefore these factors that in turn lead to a breakdown in learning, or prevent learners from accessing education. In all classrooms, learners have diverse learning needs. If teachers are not responsive to these needs and provide the necessary support, learners may experience barriers to learning that include the following:

- Learners who have difficulty in reading and writing;
- Learners with hearing, visual and coordination difficulties;
- Learners with health and emotional difficulties;
- Learners experiencing difficulties in remembering what has been taught to them and
- Learners who need assistive devices and adapted materials such as Braille (DBE 2011:10).

In many instances teachers are not adequately empowered to assist learners with barriers. This results in many learners being progressed indiscriminately through to the next grades up to Grade 12. Learners are not allowed to stay in the phase for more than four years. It effectively means that a learner may only fail once in a

phase from Grade 10 to grade 12 (DoE 2008). For example, if a learner fails grade 10, he or she will now progress to the next grades in the following years even if he or she fails. However, such learners are expected pass at the end of the matric year. These learners then fail to meet the minimum pass requirements at Grade 12 and therefore add to the underperformance at that level.

3.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Schools are no longer safe havens solely used for educational purposes any more. Social forces such as the alarming increase in all kinds of crime and HIV/AIDS put pressure on the educational system to help solve the problem (Van Deventer and Kruger (2003:38). Teaching and learning time is adversely affected in the process. This in turn has marked effect on learning outcomes. It is the researcher's considered opinion that underperforming schools experience high level of ill discipline, both among teachers and learners. These schools do not enjoy the necessary parental support. The views expressed are supported by Percival and Tranter (2004:1) who state that there is apparently increasing indiscipline within schools and decreasing parental support in many underperforming schools.

According to Collins (2009:06) there is a tendency for underperforming schools to externalise the reasons for their failure and attribute them to such causes as "too many tests, over pressured curriculum, too much administration". These attributes prevent them from grappling with the fundamental causes of their failure. According to Mji and Makgato (2006:254) outdated teaching practices and lack of basic content knowledge have resulted into poor teaching standards. They argue that these have been exacerbated by the number of under- qualified and unqualified teachers who teach in overcrowded and non- equipped classrooms. The teaching strategies do not lead learners to grasp the work at hand, the scanty content knowledge, little or no use of the laboratory and related teaching and learning equipment and in some quarters the non- completion of the syllabus – all result in learning outcomes of poor quality.

The foregoing discussion indicates that there is a general lack of systematic thinking and implementation capacity in many schools. The lack of adequate resources coupled with teachers who have weak knowledge base of the subjects that they

teach expose the flaws in the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Such flaws would lead to underperformance and poor quality results.

The training model adopted to capacitate, initiate and sustain changes in teacher practices - the cascade model, has been rather too short, information driven, removed from classroom contexts and realities and thin on substantive content. What is worse is that the education system does not differentiate between better and worse performing teachers (Taylor 2008:30). The pay system does not reward excellence and commitment. The system does not deal effectively with poor performance for reasons other than incapacity.

Causes of underperformance are many and serious to the extent that no quality learning outcomes can be expected without first dealing with them. From the researcher's point of view the general lack of accountability in the school, the lack of district support and the lack of school autonomy militate against the total elimination of the causes of underperformance in schools. It is the researcher's considered opinion that accurate diagnosis of the reasons and causes of underperformance are the fundamental starting points for constructing potentially useful and effective interventions.

There are many studies that had established the causes of underperformance in schools but fall short of coming up with elaborate intervention strategies that result into quality learning outcomes. Murphy and Meyers (2008:28) have added the following to the already long list of reasons for academic underperformance: different dimensions of poor teacher quality; poor classroom instruction; inadequate teacher knowledge and skills; limited teacher experience; teachers assigned to subjects for which they are not trained; high teacher turnover and inadequate resources. It is therefore important that this investigation delves into identifying the best practice examples of how to raise learner attainment. It also needs to identify barriers to school improvement and how these can be overcome.

CHAPTER FOUR

STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED BY THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN GRADE 12

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Academic underperformance is a concern for all stakeholders in education. This includes the education authorities, both at national and provincial level, the parents and the community at large. Many learners do not make it through to the universities due to the poor quality of results that are mainly due to the factors discussed in the previous chapter. It has become extremely important for the province, the districts and the schools to come up with strategies to turn the situation around in the underperforming schools.

The grade 12 results form the yardstick with which the performance of the school is measured. It is by no means suggested that it is the accurate gauge but it provides more information about the quality of teaching and learning in the school, the type of leadership provided by the school authority, the level of competence of teachers in their respective subjects and the teaching and learning environment at the school.

There are many stakeholders that need to shoulder the responsibility for the learning outcomes in the schools. The district officials in the mould of subject advisors are the first in the line of accountability, the management officials or inspector of schools who are the principals' immediate supervisors and who provide support and guidance on general management, the parents whose children are enrolled in the school, the school management team led by the Principal, the teachers and the governance structures in the school. Both the Provincial and the National Department of Basic Education also have a role to play in ensuring that the schools are well prepared to produce the required results. It became necessary for schools and the departmental officials to embark on various improvement strategies given that the overall performance has not been at the expected level.

This chapter will focus on the strategies implemented by the Free State Department of Basic Education in an attempt to improve the results. The general impact of these

strategies on the overall results will also be looked into. It is a requirement in terms of Section 58B (1) of the South African Schools Act No 84 of 1996 (RSA 1996) that all underperforming schools must develop and implement the improvement strategies. In terms of Section 58B (4) of the same act, the head of department must take all reasonable steps to assist an underperforming school to address the problem. The head of department is represented by the school management and governance developers (SMGDs) who are there to ensure that the improvement strategies are communicated to schools and they find effective application. These officials are there to hold principals accountable in the realisation of the improvement strategies. It therefore becomes a joint responsibility for the school and all tiers of the provincial department of education to address underperformance in the schools.

4.2 PROVINCIAL STRATEGY ON LEARNER ATTAINMENT

The provincial strategy on learner attainment (PSLA) is a document adapted from the National Strategy on learner attainment (NSLA) that guides the districts on how and what to do to ensure that there is an all round improvement in the results (DoE 2007:5-9). The Provinces use this national framework to develop their own intervention strategies and programmes.

NSLA has the following objectives:

- Sustained improvement in learner outcomes,
- Enhanced accountability at all levels,
- Greater focus on basic functionality of schools,
- Protecting teaching and learning time,
- Improved support for teaching and learning and
- Increased efforts on time on task.

The Free State Department of Basic Education thus adopted a document titled Provincial Strategy On Learner Attainment, (hereafter referred to as the PSLA). The districts developed their specific intervention programmes taking cue from both the national and the provincial document and called it the District Strategy on Learner Attainment (DSLAs). The strategy is reviewed on annual basis to accommodate varying trends and tendencies experienced by different schools. For example there

are schools that get trapped in the underperformance bracket and do not improve for three to five years in succession. The interventions discussed in this chapter are derived from DSLA of the five education districts in the Free State Province.

4.3 QUALITY OF RESULTS OVER THE LAST SIX YEARS IN THE FIVE DISTRICTS OF THE FREE STATE PROVINCE

According to the National Policy pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement for Grade R – 12, the requirements for the National Senior Certificate (NSC) are such that 25% constitutes the school based assessment while 75% is assessed externally. In terms of that protocol,

- A pass with Higher Certificate results from a rating of 2 (30 - 39%) in the language of learning and teaching;
- A pass with diploma is when a learner passes NSC with an achievement rating of 3 (40 - 49%) in four subjects and at least a level 2 (30%) for the language of learning and teaching. One of the four subjects passed at 40% must be at home language level; and
- A bachelor pass is when a learner has obtained an achievement rating of level 4 (50 – 59%) in four subjects and all the remaining subjects must be passed at level 3 (40 – 49%) provided that the Home Language is at 40% and the language of teaching and learning is at level 2 (DBE 2008).

The acceptable quality of passes, as stipulated in the PSLA, is when the school obtains 40% bachelors. The overall pass rate needs to be higher than 60%. In recent times the Free State raised the performance target to 75% pass rate with 40% bachelors. For the purpose of this study the school shall be deemed to have underperformed if it obtains an overall pass rate of 60% and less, with the bachelors' rate of less than 40%. The school is underperforming if both the requirements are not satisfied. Table 1 depicts the list of schools from the five education districts in the Free State province that had underperformed during the six year period. This is the period during which the improvement strategies had been implemented in the province.

Table 1: Pass rate (%) in underperforming schools since 2009 in the Free State

List of schools	PASS RATE					
	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
School A	58,9	88,9	68,0	47,5	55,2	70,7
School B	70,0	75,7	66,0	58,3	64,2	52,7
School C	84,7	93,2	60,8	59,2	49,2	45,3
School D	36,4	80,8	56,7	48,8	36,3	63,1
School E	69,6	75,4	63,1	62,6	51,5	47,5
School F	56,3	58,2	55,1	55,8	61,7	78,2
School G	64,8	79,8	49,5	58,7	56,5	54,9
School H	97,4	90,3	38,0	51,0	49,4	41,3
School I	80,0	95,7	59,2	17,06	42,2	49,3
School J	66,7	81,1	53,5	60,0	45,0	48,1
School K	100,0	77,8	47,0	30,7	57,1	50,0
School L	75,3	89,5	59,5	47,8	38,8	50,9
School M	67,1	66,4	65,2	77,8	50,4	56,6
School N	41,0	81,0	41,2	73,4	66,6	63,1
School O	62,1	59,6	65,6	42,9	52,4	70,2
School P	48,5	81,9	45,1	33,3	83,8	51,3
School Q	43,2	81,7	66,9	34,6	50,0	47,1
School R	58,0	71,7	37,2	68,1	69,0	34,4

(Department of Basic Education 2014:10).

The pass rate in these schools had been fluctuating over the past six years. Schools B and F have presented less than 40 learners in their Grade 12 classes from 2009 to 2014. It is only during the Home Language period when learner numbers equal 40 in a class. All the learners in these schools take one common Home Language as a subject. In all other subjects it is less than 40 learners as a result of the different subjects registration. For example, it may be that 25 learners do Mathematical Literacy while the 15 attend the Mathematics period or others do Accounting while the others attend the Physical Science period. The lower the number of learners in a class, the greater the chances for individualised attention. The benefits must be of such a nature that performance is enhanced and the average pass percentage is better. It is evident that there are challenges worth investigating if schools with few learners doing certain subjects cannot produce quality results.

Although School C obtained 93% at the end of the 2013 academic year, this does not necessarily prove that it is now a well performing school. The school has consistently underperformed in the past four years. The Department of Basic Education came up with intervention programmes to help lift up the pass rate in this school. The school went on to drop the results in 2014. School D achieved 80.8% pass in 2013 and dropped by 43.4% to 36.4% in 2014. School Q is the other one that experienced a big drop between 2013 and 2014 academic years. This school dropped the results by 39.5%. Schools N and P displayed similar trends between 2012 and 2014 academic years. These schools improved results from 41 and 45% (2012) respectively to 81% in 2013, only to drop them to 41 and 48% in 2014. The sudden improvement in the results in one year and the almost immediate decline in the following year brought into question the suitability and the sustainability of the intervention strategies. The table shows that a number of schools had been trapped in the underperformance bracket. The reasons for the drop and being unable to sustain the high performance of the previous year will be pursued in the following chapter.

School F obtained 78.2% in 2009 and continued to decline in the following years until it was down to 58.2% at the end of 2013. It could have been that the performance drops when the level of support is reduced and redirected to other underperforming schools or there may have been other factors. The above argument also applies to school E. This school has obtained a pass rate of above 70% only once in five years and failed to sustain it in the following years.

Statistics has also shown that performance is linked to the number of learners enrolled in a school in a particular year. Some schools battle and drop results when they experience an increase in learner numbers in Grade 12. The results improve drastically in those years where the learner numbers are reduced. School F had obtained a pass rate of below 60% between 2011 and 2013, with the learner numbers having increased from 34 to 55 in the same period. School A obtained 68.1% with 72 learners in 2012. The number of learners dropped to 54 in 2013 and the results went up to 88.9%. It must therefore be established whether the big improvement in the pass rate was motivated by the drop in the number of learners or not. These schools are battling with the strategies to sustain high levels of performance when there is an increase in the number of learners in Grade 12.

School H had 131 learners in 2011 with 51% pass rate, 141 learners in 2012 with 38% pass with the big improvement only experienced in 2013 when the number of learners dropped to 122 and the pass percentage was 90.3%. This phenomenon characterises many underperforming schools. The increase in the number of learners, the abrupt withdrawal of external support and the unstable teaching and learning environment may have led to inconsistent performance in these schools. The high pass rate attained after three or four years of languishing in the underperformance bracket cannot be misconstrued as qualifying the school as a reputable performer. The foregoing argument is also applicable to schools I, J, K and L. School I had 81 learners in 2012. The number dropped to 46 in 2013. The results improved by 36.5%. School J also experienced a drop in learner numbers from 71 to 48 and an improvement of 27.6%. The connection is clearer in school L that experienced a drop in numbers from 131 in 2012 to 95 in 2013 with the results improving from 59.5 to 89.5%. This school had 140 learners in 2011 and only obtained 47.8% pass rate then.

According to Taylor (2011:11) there is evidence that the pass rate improvement in 2010 is at least partly attributable to moving high risk candidates to part time registration and moving others to easier subjects at the expense of Mathematics, Physical Science and Accounting. The same report supports the assumption that there are gate keeping tendencies especially at the end of grade 11.

The 2014 National Senior Certificate results further illustrate that a sudden rise in the pass rate does not necessarily translate into a school graduating into the well performing bracket. All the schools in Table 1 had once or twice obtained a pass rate of between 70 and 85% but all of them had failed to sustain the improved performance except for school K which registered an improvement from 77% in 2013 to 100% in 2014. This school had never registered more than 40 learners in Grade 12 in the six years under review. Table 2 shows the results of schools that experienced a decline in the results between 2013 and 2014 academic years. Almost all these schools improved their overall pass rate in 2013.

Table 2: The results of the schools (in %) that experienced a decline from the list given above.

SCHOOL	2013	2014	DEVIATION
School A	88,9	58,9	30,0
School B	75,7	70,0	5,7
School D	80,8	36,4	43,4
School E	75,4	69,6	6,8
School F	58,2	56,3	2,1
School G	79,8	64,8	15,0
School I	95,7	80,0	15,7
School J	81,0	66,7	14,3
School L	89,5	75,3	14,3
School N	81,0	41,0	40,0
School P	81,0	48,0	33,0
School R	71,7	58,0	13,7
School Q	81,7	43,2	38,5

(Department of Basic Education 2015:52 – 60)

Schools A, D, N, P and Q registered a huge drop with school D at 43.4%. This school has in fact registered an improved performance only once in the six years period.

Table 3 shows that more than 30% of learners in grade 8 do not make it to grade 12 at national level. The assumption is that schools perform better with less number of learners in the exit grade. There had been allegations of gate-keeping at grade 11. The underperformance could be more pronounced with more learners in Grade 12.

Table 3: The number of learners in grades 8 to 12 between 2008 and 2010 in South Africa.

Years	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Decline 8 – 11	Decline 11 – 12
2008	926 603	902656	1076527	902752	595 216	16,2	34,1
2009	991 093	926531	1017341	881661	602 278	2,6	31,7
2010	1001 180	1009324	1039762	841815	579 384	3,9	31,2

(Department of Basic Education 2011b)

The decline in the number of learners between grade 11 and 12 in the three years averages 32.3%. This is indicative of the big number of learners who fall through the cracks between the two grades. Although it cannot be assumed that these learners fall behind due to gate – keeping only, evidence suggests that some schools

deliberately fail learners in grade 11 so as to keep the numbers low in grade 12 (DBE 2011b). Well performing schools are those that obtain a consistent pass rate of between 80 and 100%. The bachelors' rate in the well performing schools should be at 40% and above.

The central point is that schools are in a constant flux, but for the schools that are underperforming the flux is much bigger. The net falls and rises get more accentuated as the years go by. Collins (2009:10) would argue that every institution is vulnerable, no matter how great; no law of nature suggests that those who are at the top will remain there. The effective use of data would therefore alert school managers of the areas of decline and the need to craft the intervention strategies.

Well performing schools are those whose results are sustainably high over a period of time. Underperforming schools sometimes obtain a high pass rate but fail to sustain it for two or three consecutive years. Well performing schools do not struggle with learner performance and the results when there is an increase in the number of learners in the exit grade. Underperforming schools seem to be shocked by the sudden increase in the number of learners in grade 12. These schools do not plan for the increased numbers and do not have dedicated strategies that deal with the pressure. The improved pass rate in these schools does not translate into improved quality of passes. All the schools depicted above (A – Q) registered bachelors rate of below 25% in the 2013 NSC examinations, a further indication of the poor quality of the learning outcomes despite the high pass rate.

Table 4: Bachelors rate over the last six years

District	RATE OF BACHELORS (%) PER EDUCATION DISTRICT						Average Per District
	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	
District X	29,9	30,9	27,8	24,3	20,0	21,1	25,6
District Y	27,9	29,0	26,5	25,5	20,4	18,3	24,6
District Z	31,8	35,9	31,1	29,7	25,7	24,0	29,7
District U	31,4	34,7	28,2	24,3	18,3	15,9	25,4
District V	22,9	29,5	23,6	24,2	16,8	16,0	22,1
Averages	28,78	32,0	27,44	25,6	20,24	19,06	

(DBE 2014:12).

The bachelors' rate gives an indication of the quality of passes. This is the traditional university entrance requirement or exemption pass. Only learners with bachelors pass are allowed to further their studies at the Universities. The statistics given in table 4 above clearly show that the quality of passes across the districts is poor.

The Free State province has obtained 20.2% bachelors pass rate in 2009 and 33.1% in 2013. There is an observable upward trajectory over the past five years. This indicates an improvement of 12.9% in five years. This improvement is too low considering that it happened over a five year period. Table 4 shows that it took districts X and Z four years to notch the 30% bachelors' rate. District Y and V never reached a 30% bachelors pass rate in the period under review. The pass rate in district Z in 2012 was 81.1% and the bachelors' rate was 31.1%. Close to 70% of the candidates that passed in this district obtained a diploma or higher certificate. This is consistent with the assertion that the quality of results is very poor and needs urgent attention.

The average bachelors' rate for the five districts per year indicates that the highest that was ever achieved was 32% in 2013. There was a decline in the quality of results in 2014, as reflected in table 4. The average dropped to 28.7%. A high pass rate does not necessarily depict good overall performance. This must not be viewed in isolation from the bachelors passes, which indicate the quality of performance in the school, district, province and nationally. The averages per district over the six year period indicate that the quality produced had never in fact exceeded 30%. District Z shows affinity towards the 30% average percentage by notching 29.7% in the period under review. It is another just cause for the development of an improvement model in the quality of results in the Free State.

Table 5: The bachelors' rate in the Free State over the last five years.

Year	Total number of learners who wrote	% Bachelors
2010	27 586	21.4
2011	25 932	26.3
2012	24 265	28.6
2013	27 105	33.1
2014	26 440	30.2

(Free State Examination Directorate 2014).

The percentage bachelors is given against the total number of learners who actually wrote the examination in those years (DBE 2015:05). The quality of the results dropped by 2.9% between 2014 and 2013. Of all the learners who wrote the grade 12 examination, the highest percentage that ever qualified to study at the university is 33.1%. In 2014 this figure dropped to 30.2%.

4.4 STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

There are three levels in the development of the strategies to improve learner attainment in the province: the strategies outlined in the PSLA coming directly from the province; the ones in the district put together by the district management with the help of subject specialists and school management and governance developers and those developed by the underperforming schools. All these are put together to constitute the strategies to improve learner attainment that must be implemented by all schools, preferably those that underperform.

The schools that underperform are expected to develop the strategies to improve performance to above 60% overall pass rate and to at least 40% bachelors pass rate. It therefore becomes necessary for the school management teams to ensure effective implementation of the strategies developed to improve learner performance. The involvement of all the stakeholders attached to the school is critical in ensuring that quality results are attained in the school. It becomes critical for the district to set the realistic performance targets and put up mechanisms in place to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in the schools.

The strategies were applied in the five districts in the Free State Province, in line with the Provincial Strategy on Learner Attainment. It became compulsory for all the districts to implement the strategies as contained in the document.

The School Management and Governance Developers (SMGDs) are expected to ensure that the strategies are fully implemented in the schools allocated to them. As the immediate supervisors of the Principals, the SMGDs are expected to communicate the strategies to the Principals, their school management teams and the entire staff; monitor their effective implementation and see to it that follow - up is done on any issues raised by schools on the said strategies. The SMGDs must have

mechanisms in place to verify the impact of the strategies on learner performance on regular basis. They need to constantly check if the strategies are implemented, controlled and monitored in the schools and that progress reports are submitted to the department as required. They are an important link between the school and the Department of Basic Education, both at district and provincial levels.

4.4.1 Developing the academic performance improvement plans

The school academic performance improvement plan is a requirement prescribed by the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, section 58B, as amended (RSA 1996). According to this section, it is required that all underperforming schools must, after discussing the said plan with the governing body, parents and teachers in the school, submit it to the head of education. This is an official document that consists of the following:

The performance targets set by the school in general and in the subjects with low average performance. The provincial Department of Basic Education has determined that the acceptable average performance in the subjects is 40% and above. These averages are determined in line with those specified in the Action Plan to 2014, produced by the Department of Basic Education. The performance in the subjects is measured against the performance targets set by the district and the province.

The subject specific content challenges that resulted in the learners' poor performance. These are picked up through the item and error analysis. The consistent errors committed by learners when responding to questions are analysed by the teacher. The errors are picked up during the marking of the learners' work.

The intervention strategies that match the identified challenges. After identifying the items and errors committed, the teachers are expected to develop solutions that will assist the learners to comprehend the difficult work. These solutions are spelt out in a step by step fashion and in a more simplified manner that will enable the learners to understand.

The time frame within which the problems and challenges would have been addressed. The teachers and their supervisors must agree on the programme of

intervention or timetable to be followed and the interval during which monitoring will take place. The corrections must be done in a way that does not disturb the actual teaching and learning programme. The time – table must be such that the intervention happens after school or during the school holidays.

The official responsible for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategies. After re-assessment or re-teaching as shall be determined by the teacher and his or her supervisor, there must be progress report that must be handed over to the Principal. The progress report must also be submitted to the district office of the department of education. The subject advisors and the school management section must satisfy themselves that the challenging work has been completed and that the learners are able to master the work accordingly.

The plan is intended to help the management of the school to hold teachers accountable for their performance and that of the learners they teach. This also helps to track learner performance. Teachers are afforded the opportunity to strategise around concepts and topics that are somehow problematic to learners. Learners who experience serious challenges can be identified through the crafting of the school academic performance improvement plan and be assisted accordingly.

The schools are expected to consolidate the academic performance improvement plan at the end of every term in preparation for the following one. In this way the teachers are able to prepare lessons taking into account the content challenges experienced by their learners. All the underperforming schools must develop, submit and implement the academic performance improvement plan. The Principal and the school management and governance developer (SMGD) must ensure the effective implementation of the plan. The SMGD who is the district official and the immediate supervisor of the Principal monitors the effective implementation of the plan and reports regularly to the district leadership. The subject advisors are also responsible for ensuring that the improvement plans in their specific subjects are relevant and have measurable outcomes.

The schools have since got accustomed to developing the academic performance improvement plan as per the legal requirement. It has, however, degenerated into a document that is availed for the sake of compliance. It is not being used to track learner attainment as it should. It has been reduced to a document that can only be

presented when needed by departmental officials visiting schools. There is no quality monitoring of the implementation process. Principals are not doing enough to ensure that the intervention programme is followed through.

Some of the strategies in the plan are not specific and measurable. In one plan submitted from a school, the intervention on how to ensure that learners understand long method of division was extra classes. It is not clear as to how will the extra classes be used to solve the problem. In another scenario the educator said the solution for helping learners to master sequences and series in mathematics was to re-teach. If the problem was about the teaching approach one wonders as to how would re-teaching help the learners to master the concepts. This is a further indication that the plans cannot be viewed as credible enough to can assist the schools to improve learner attainment. The plans take a long time to put together. Teaching time is sacrificed. Teachers and members of the school management team leave classes for far too long in order to get the plan ready for submission to the district. Teaching and learning is negatively affected in the process.

4.4.2 Consultative meetings with school management teams

The district director and the district management team invite the school management teams to meetings where the quarterly results for Grade 12 are presented, intervention strategies are highlighted and corrective measures are put forward (District Strategy on Learner Attainment 2013). The school management team is composed of the principal, the deputy principal and the heads of departments. The subject teachers for Mathematics, English, Life Science, Economics, Accounting and Physical Science are often invited to these meetings. These are subjects where performance is always far below the acceptable average of 40%.

Best practices are shared in these meetings. These would include the different approaches to certain topics, the use of various teaching aids to simplify certain topics. The subject advisors also present their expert opinion on the most challenging topics. A platform is created for schools to learn from each other by exposing them to the different ways of dealing with a particular topic. There are five critical questions to be responded to in these meetings:

- What is it that the SMT wants all learners to learn?
- How will the teachers know when each learner has learned?
- Has the learner acquired knowledge, skills and dispositions deemed essential?
- How do you respond when learners experience difficulty in their work?
- How do you extend learning for learners who are already proficient?

The school management teams are given guidance on how to make teachers account for the learning outcomes in their respective subjects. Subject teachers must collate the results, analyse them and draw lessons that will improve the teaching and learning process. The district leadership helps the school management teams to respond to the following strategic questions:

- Relevance – do the objectives and goals match the problems or the needs that are being addressed?
- Efficiency – are the lessons delivered in a timely and productive manner?
- Effectiveness – to what extent does the intervention achieve its objectives? What are the obstacles? What are the supportive factors during implementation?
- Impact - were the results obtained intended or unintended?
- Sustainability – will there be lasting benefits after the interventions? Are they measurable?

The teachers are also advised on how to go about in making the content more accessible. This is done through differentiated instruction – responding to the fact that learners are not all the same and that the differences must be taken into account when the teacher plans, teaches and assesses the learners. This involves modifying, changing, adapting, extending and varying the teaching methodologies, teaching and assessment strategies.

The negative impact of this strategy is that it is time consuming. School management teams take a long time to prepare the presentation. This takes them out of classes for protracted periods of time. This is counter-productive since learners are then left unattended for long periods. Some principals use this strategy as a substitute for their direct involvement in the teaching and learning process. Instead of holding

teachers accountable for underperformance some principals leave it to the district management team's consultative meeting. More teaching and learning time is lost when the schools attend the presentation sessions that normally last for the whole day. Some schools whose presentations are not of acceptable standard are often asked to go and re – do them. This would effectively mean a further loss of teaching and learning time for them. Some members of the district panel are not knowledgeable enough to can make valuable inputs on the subject content that is presented.

4.4.3 Item and error analysis

According to Chapman and King (2008: 19) this strategy helps teachers to identify the errors and the incorrect action, describe how to correct the mistake or improve on the mistake or the inappropriate action and move swiftly to the crafting of the improvement plan. Error analysis is the examination or the investigation of errors that learners make and that have a negative impact on the process of learning. The error analysis informs the teachers about what the learners have already mastered and what they are struggling with.

Grade 12 subject teachers sample not less than 10% of the learners' scripts in the quarterly common tests or half yearly examinations; identify the errors that the learners consistently committed; analyse the errors before coming up with ways and means of solving them. The teacher then looks up for the most appropriate and simplified ways of ensuring that the learners master the concepts and are able to solve similar or related problems (DBE 2013:13). This helps the teacher to improve on the teaching methodologies. It also helps the teacher to employ the differentiated teaching approach according to the learners' cognitive levels.

The analysis of the errors and misconceptions empower teachers to understand the learners thinking processes. The errors may be as a result of a misunderstanding of what the teacher has taught or ineffective teaching methodologies used by the teacher. The errors committed by learners provide teachers with rich information that they can use to improve their teaching strategies and interventions. Attending to these errors immediately when they occur will prevent them from developing into misconceptions. The process leads to the development of the subject improvement

plan by the teacher. This document is then used to monitor the work of the teacher in helping learners who are at the risk of failing.

The unfortunate scenario is that many teachers are not keen to implement this strategy as expected. They allege that it consumes a lot of time for teaching and learning. The teachers seem not to understand the importance of the correct and timely analysis of the problems encountered by learners. The heads of department are also reluctant to use this strategy as a means to understand the quality of feedback given to learners. The item and error analysis is not used as it should in many schools. The subject improvement plans are either not credible enough to be used for monitoring or they are non-existent in some schools.

4.4.4 Capacity building workshops for school management teams

The school management teams of underperforming schools are made to attend the workshop for three or more days during the school holidays on various curriculum management topics. The topics include (amongst others) mentorship, curriculum management, assessment, time tabling, lesson planning and strategies to improve learner attainment. It is commonly held that the strong and decisive leadership can steer the school in the right direction. Effective school management provides the enabling environment for good teaching and learning.

The workshops are conducted annually. Procedure manuals and guidelines are developed for the attendees. The roles and responsibilities of the subject heads, departmental heads, deputy principals and principals are emphasised during these working sessions. Marishane and Botha (2011:04) attest that capacity building helps to create opportunities for people in the school to be actively engaged in programmes and activities designed for their own development and self reliance. Such development should improve the efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of various people and school based structures. This should lead to quality teaching and learning programmes and quality assessment and evaluation processes. This will help improve the learners' levels of performance.

Schools are often allowed to discuss the causes of underperformance in their respective institutions and the effective ways of dealing with them. This provides

many schools with the opportunity to learn from others about how best to deal with certain problems. The duration of these workshops is often three to five days. This time is too short when one considers the number of curriculum management topics that are handled. Training on mentorship, for example, may need the five days on its own, given its vastness and importance in building confidence in the novice teachers. It is against this background that these workshops are not producing the desired results in the underperforming schools.

Another problem with the workshops is that they do not involve participants (school management teams and subject teachers) in the planning, implementing and evaluation process. The districts make uninformed assumptions on the training needs of the participants. These workshops are therefore not based on school wide goals and do not involve long range planning and development.

4.4.5 Professional learning communities

These structures are established to create a platform for stakeholders in education to come together to discuss matters of educational interest. Teachers come together in teams to work collaboratively on goals designed to improve learner attainment (Kise and Russell 2010: 04). The professional learning communities provide a platform for teachers, particularly if they believe that it will benefit their learners – where development involves:

- A focus on specific teaching and learning problems;
- Opportunities for teachers to reflect on what they know and already do;
- Opportunities for teachers to understand the rationale behind new ideas and approaches, to see theory demonstrated in practice, and to be exposed to new expertise; and
- A collaborative culture, including shared beliefs, values, and vision, and atmosphere of trust and respect (Stoll and Louis 2007:31).

According to Blanchard (2009:37) professional learning communities have interactive teachers who get involved in interactive teaching that makes serious demands on clarity of thinking and resourcefulness. He emphasises that working with other

colleagues is important because teachers are able to share planning and teaching experiences and encourage one another and solve problems together.

The idea of professional learning communities is rife in all the districts yet it is not as productive as it is supposed to be. Turning the professional learning communities into productive, sustainable teams that improve learning is a daunting and difficult task. It is not easy to bring teachers from different schools with diverse cultures to work together without conflict and personality issues. It is a challenging task to ensure that teachers share collective responsibility by staying involved and informed about the children with whom they interact, appreciate diversity and are all committed to continuous improvement. The district officials need to facilitate the effective functioning of the professional learning communities. They are however not readily available to play an effective leading role. Many of these structures have fallen flat and are not functional.

4.4.6 Curriculum coverage working sessions

The district management embarked on working sessions to highlight the importance of curriculum coverage to school management teams. Principals were part of the sessions as they are viewed as champions of effective curriculum delivery. The curriculum coverage was explained as a plan developed for the teachers for usage in the classroom indicating what must be taught as prescribed in the policy documents and in the assessment guidelines. It includes the actual time slot within which certain topics must be handled. The time frame allocated is adequate for teaching, assessment, remediation and feedback to learners.

School managers were taken through the control and monitoring processes that would ensure effective completion of the syllabus. The common practice was for teachers not to complete the prescribed content or only deal with topics that they felt comfortable with and ignored the challenging ones. This often resulted in learners going to the examination unprepared (DBE 2012: 24). Strict monitoring of curriculum coverage would assist the school leadership in ensuring the quality of daily assessment and content.

Curriculum coverage report gives an indication of which topics have been treated, those that have not been dealt with, which corrective measures would be engaged to ensure that the teachers are on par with the work programme. Whoever lags behind needs to submit some form of a catch up programme that would indicate how and when the teacher will complete the outstanding work. The subject teacher reports to the head of department who in turn reports to the deputy principal. The consolidated report forms part of the discussion in all school management meetings. In that way the levels of accountability are heightened.

The Needu Report (DBE 2013:12) indicated that one of the main causes of underperformance in schools is poor curriculum coverage. There are many examinable topics that are not taught by teachers in the underperforming schools. Too much work remains untreated resulting in learners going to the examinations unprepared. Plewis (2010:01) has demonstrated that curriculum coverage is an important variable for explaining the learners' academic progress. He confirmed that the more Mathematics curriculum that is covered by the teachers, the greater the progress made by the learners. There is, therefore, a direct link between learning outcomes and the extent to which the curriculum is covered.

Curriculum reports submitted by schools are often not a true reflection of the actual situation in the school. Teachers avoid being held accountable by presenting a cosy picture about how far they are with the pace setters. Once the teachers fall behind with the work schedule they must submit catch up plans indicating how they are going to cover for the lost time. To avoid submitting the catch up plan, teachers often lie about their progress in curriculum coverage. Many of these reports are therefore not authentic and do not assist in improving learner attainment.

4.4.7 Residential training for subject teachers

To bridge the content knowledge gap created by changes in curriculum, local training on subject content is always done. The subject advisors arrange eight hours training sessions at the beginning of each year to deal with challenging topics in their respective subjects. The diagnostic reports issued by the national department of education also shed light on those concepts and topics in which the learners performed poorly in the Grade 12 external examinations.

There are also cluster meetings arranged from 14h00 in the afternoons. The subject advisors select lead teachers in their respective subjects who facilitate discussions on topics that present problems, teaching approaches and methodologies for various concepts.

The following items are handled in these meetings and workshops:

- The diagnostic reports on different subjects,
- The role of assessment in teaching and learning,
- How to set quality papers,
- Quality moderation process and
- Discussions on subject policy.

The cluster meetings are not well attended by the teachers. Many teachers have complained about the quality of presentations done during these workshops. Some teachers have complained about the timing of these workshops. Many of them have to leave their classes unattended in order to attend the cluster meetings. These working sessions are again conducted without a prior needs analysis to determine which areas are challenging to the teachers. The subject advisors employ a one size fits all approach by not tailor- making these workshops according to the diverse needs of the teachers. There are no inputs from the subject teachers on topics that must be treated during these workshops. Many teachers view the workshops as a sheer waste of time and resources. In many of these workshops not much subject content is dealt with. Focus is on the organisational aspects of the subjects like the arrangement of the teachers' portfolio according to the index provided and other unrelated matters like the subject policy.

4.4.8 The use of information, communication and technology (ICT) in teaching and learning

According to Mdlongwa (2012:03) the integration of ICT into the curriculum is of immense benefit to the learners. Firstly, exposure to ICT allows learners to develop skills that will give them an edge in an ever increasing technology- saturated work environment. Secondly the introduction of ICT into the curriculum allows learners to become creators of knowledge in their own right, for example, through conducting

research for a school project on the internet and then having to produce, say, PowerPoint presentation. Learners who continue to use ICT in doing their assignments and projects begin to cultivate a culture of personal information management, independent learning and working without supervision, communication skills, teamwork and research skills.

The department of education in the Free State has come up with innovative ways of enhancing the teaching of Mathematics, Physical Science, Accounting and Economics. The “hey math” programme offers mathematics teachers a variety of exercises with worked out solutions. The teachers are provided with laptops that they are able to carry along from class to class or allow the learners to work through the problems on their own.

The Independent Broadcasting Programme (IBP) done in collaboration with the University of the Free State is another useful tool used to enhance the teaching of challenging topics in the different subjects. The subject advisors and specialist teachers are made to record the lessons that are broadcast at scheduled times in schools where the mast has been installed. These lessons can also be downloaded and replayed to learners at the opportune time.

There are also such other programmes like ICITISE and Mindset that are similar to those described above. All these devices are aimed at strengthening the teaching and learning in the subjects and topics that are challenging for the teachers and learners.

According to Livingstone (2012:3-4) the use of ICT has a significant and positive impact on learner attainment, especially with knowledge, comprehension, practical skill and presentation skill in subjects such as mathematics, science and social study. Through the use of ICT, images can be used in teaching and improving the retentive memory of learners; teachers can easily explain complex instructions and thus ensure learners’ comprehension. Teachers are also able to create interactive classes and make the lessons more enjoyable, which could improve learner attendance and concentration.

The strategy had many teething problems in the province. Many schools did not use the IBP. The broadcasting schedules clashed with the teaching and learning time. In

other schools the equipment just did not work from the time it was installed. Connectivity is a problem in other schools. Affordability is a hindrance.

4.4.9 Engaging chief markers and moderators

Chief markers and moderators are the subject specialists who are directly involved with the assessment at the highest level. They are better placed to give insight into the key examinable issues, lessons learnt from the moderation processes and the marking of scripts. It is often highly beneficial for teachers to interact with these specialists for deeper understanding of the subject content and areas of emphasis.

There is no dedicated programme in the districts that is followed to ensure that there is open interaction between teachers, chief markers and moderators. There is not even a programme to indicate that these experts at least interact with the subject advisors who would then cascade information down to the subject teachers. The moderators reports sent to schools are not utilised effectively. The school improvement plans submitted by schools do not often reflect that the information from the moderators' reports gets incorporated into the intervention programmes. The technical report published in 2011 by the Department of Basic Education confirmed that moderation at school and district level was evident but lacked the insight and feedback necessary for the improvement of the school based assessment (DBE 2011:37). The same report revealed that there are no detailed moderation instruments at both the school and the district level. This resulted in the teachers not getting quality and constructive feedback from their subject heads or the HODs.

4.4.10 Deployment of subject advisors to the learning sites

Subject advisors are viewed as knowledgeable and well informed in the subjects that they lead. They constantly do research on current trends in the teaching methodologies and learning styles. They are also well informed about the new developments in the subjects that they lead. It has been a common practice in the many districts in the Free State for the subject advisors to offer lessons especially in

schools where their subjects underperform. This is done so as to show the local subject teachers how to go about in teaching certain topics and concepts.

The problem with this strategy is that the teachers are often reluctant to be part of the intervention programme. The subject advisors would teach the learners in the absence of the subject teacher. There is no transfer of skills and knowledge from the subject advisor to the teachers. The subject advisors sacrifice their programmes to be able to get involved in the intervention programme. Their actual work suffers in the process. This strategy is not sustainable in its current form as it does not bring the long lasting impact in the schools that underperform academically.

4.4.11 Delivery of supplementary tuition

The education districts have embarked on the following intervention programmes during the last five years:

School holiday classes - this happens for a week or two during the Easter, winter and spring holidays. These are performance enhancement classes aimed at dealing with challenging topics that learners struggled to comprehend and master during the normal teaching period. The performance in the quarterly tests and the half yearly examinations set the basis for these classes.

Learning centres - these classes continue throughout the year as a means to offer supplementary tuition to the learners, especially in the gateway subjects. Learners are often grouped into levels of performance, which is those attaining level one and two together. This would enable the teachers to provide individualised attention and support.

Incubation - under this programme learners from schools with low enrolment, who have underperformed in the previous academic year and in the quarterly assessments, are placed into well performing schools in the district. These learners would attend school where they are placed until the final examination is written. These learners would normally be accommodated at the hostel of the host school.

Matric camps - many schools would normally take their learners to the camps for two to three weeks for revision purposes. At the camps the learners would be taken

through the previous years' question papers and any other relevant work that would prepare them for the examination.

The camps, the extra classes, learning centres and holiday classes are used as a substitute for the actual teaching and learning time. Many schools would not fully engage the available instructional time to cover the curriculum knowing that such programmes would be available to them later in the year. The well performing schools, on the contrary, do not engage in these activities. They engage the available teaching and learning time maximally for quality results. These activities do not bring improved sustainable performance in the underperforming schools. Once these support activities are withdrawn the results drop again. Without the maximum participation of the teachers from the underperforming schools these activities would not help develop the teachers in those schools since they are focused on improving the results at all costs. Teachers from other schools and subject advisors are used to teach the learners in these camps and centres.

4.4.12 Twinning of schools

Well performing schools are often made to accommodate learners from underperforming schools. This is sometimes referred to as incubation. These learners will then be taught by the teachers in the hosting school. In some instances arrangements are even made for these learners to sit for their final examination at the host school.

In certain instances the teachers from the well performing schools are called upon to go and offer tuition in the underperforming schools, just as the subject advisors would be asked to. Twinning of schools also involves the availing of some teaching aids and resources to the under resourced schools. Twinning has taken place in various fields between the well performing and the underperforming schools: management and leadership; use of the facilities such as the science laboratory; exchanging the teaching lessons and notes and in the extracurricular programmes.

The benefits of twinning are enormous (Belgrade 2006: 04):

- It helps in capacity building as sharing of vital information and transfer of skills take place in the process;

- It helps in the identification of best practices since it creates an opportunity for the identification of new ideas, approaches, techniques and methods of teaching;
- It further helps to add value, improve the quality of learning outcomes and organisational effectiveness and
- It promotes networking and the mobility of learners and teachers.

Collaboration is a more powerful, more positive and motivating force than competition (Rhodes et al 2004:15). Networks are about schools working smarter together, rather than working harder alone, to enhance learning at every level of the education system. Strong twinning makes it easier to create and share knowledge about what works in the classroom, to learn from each other's experiences, to find solutions to common problems. By working together this way, networked schools are making professional practice visible and transferable.

Twinning is not that effective among the Free State schools. It is done haphazardly in an unplanned and uncoordinated manner. It tends to disturb the affluent schools that are expected to support the struggling and underperforming schools. Teachers from underperforming schools are often reluctant to cooperate with their counterparts from the well performing schools. The transfer of knowledge and skills becomes impractical. This strategy would not yield the desired results under the circumstances.

4.4.13 Dinaledi schools project

The Dinaledi schools Project was established in 2001 as a strategy aimed at improving on the quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics and Physical Science and in increasing the number and quality of learner passes in the said subjects at Grade 12 level by providing a cost effective way of channelling scarce resources in the context of competing priorities. The project had the following strategic objectives:

- To ensure that performance targets are set in all schools;
- To have a qualified and competent teacher in every classroom;
- To improve the language of teaching and learning;

- To identify and nurture talent and potential in the mathematics and science field and
- To introduce ICT and its effective use in schools.

Through the project, schools were provided with textbooks, mobile science laboratories, Mathematics kits, ICT laboratories, computer laboratories and a diagnostic tool to assess, measure and address the teaching and learning deficiencies in mathematics and physical science. The mathematics and science teachers from these schools attended training in content and teaching approaches as a form of additional support provided to these schools.

By 2008, there were 36 schools under the project. Out of the 2538 learners who were registered in Grade 12 in the Dinaledi schools in the Free State, 1551 passed in the 2011 National Senior Certificate examination. This amounts to a 61% pass (DBE 2012). Dinaledi schools do not perform according to expectations given the nature of support and the amount of resources provided to them. Some Dinaledi schools fall in the bracket of perennial underperformers. They have failed to break the shackles of underperformance over the past five years. Some have displayed inconsistent performance over the years, obtaining around 80% in one year and dropping down to below 60% in the following year.

4.4.14 Benchmarking

According to Stroud (2014:02) benchmarking is a way of discovering what is the best performance being achieved and using this information to identify the gaps in an organisation's processes in order to achieve a competitive advantage. Benchmarking focuses on the best practices and it strives for continuous improvement.

The Department of Basic Education's Action Plan to 2014 gives different benchmarks for different grades in the system (DBE 2009:10). All schools are expected to perform at 60% and above for them to be classified as performing schools when the Grade 12 results are considered. The average to be obtained per subject must not be less than 40%. The Free State province's performance targets are adapted from the nationally set ones and are generally equal or higher than them. This is to encourage improved levels of performance across the province.

In many instances the performance targets are not based on research and facts. They are often unrealistic and not supported by statistics gleaned from the performance trends in the actual teaching and learning situation. Benchmarking is done in an unscientific and unconventional way in that it is not informed by what has been achieved in the system. A school that attained a 36% pass rate in 2014 would be given a performance target of 80% for 2015, for example. This puts a lot of pressure on schools to produce quantity rather than quality as proven by the statistics given above. Some schools employ gate – keeping tendencies that would enable them to handle few learners in Grade 12. In this way the benchmarking process does not help the province to optimise structure and cross functional synergies.

4.5 THE IMPACT OF THE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE.

The primary aim of the interventions is to improve the overall pass rate and in particular the quality of results. It has been observed that the highest bachelors pass rate in the last six years in the Free State province is 33.1% (cf. table 4). This by all standards is too low, considering that the intervention strategies have been implemented in the schools during the period.

The intervention strategies were explained to the principals and school management teams during principals' road shows and during the consultative meetings. The teachers were also informed about the strategies in their respective schools by the school management and governance developers. It can thus be concluded that the intervention strategies contained in both the provincial and district strategy on learner attainment documents are known to the principals, school management teams and all teachers in the secondary schools.

Although the foregoing has been established about the effectiveness or not of the intervention strategies, an in-depth study of their impact on academic performance will be done in chapter five. The chapter will focus on whether the strategies provide ongoing high quality professional development for the teachers; whether there are resources to support and sustain the strategies or whether these strategies were supported within the school or not.

4.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

According to Malone (2013:109) in too many cases, strategies and interventions designed to improve learner attainment and schools management and leadership fail to make any real sustainable difference to learners and learning outcomes because of the following core reasons:

- Many approaches to education still remain top-down. They are often imposed on schools without sufficient or sustained attention to building the necessary capacity within the system to support and fully implement change. Teachers and schools are given little or no space to be creative and tap into their professional and academic background and knowledge to help improve their own teaching and learning environment. There is desperation for high pass rates at whatever costs.
- Too much focus on external accountability, standardisation and punitive measures. There is little meaningful and sustainable development initiatives.
- Many of the well meaning interventions, initiatives, innovations generated are disconnected from the classroom, where change matters most. Policy makers fail to take into account what is known about the most effective forms of instructional practice and discount the expertise of teachers who are best placed to share and advise on what works.

From the above it is clear that the province has embarked on a number of strategies aimed at improving the results throughout the system. It is also clear that the strategies are not yielding the desired improvement in the quality of the results. The bachelors' rate is still too low. In the majority of cases the interventions are not school based. Many of them are out of school kind of interventions that result into learners being removed from their schools into camps or to other schools other than their own. The teachers employed to teach at these camps and extra classes are not necessarily from the same schools with the learners. They are also taken from the well performing schools. For these reasons the impact of these interventions on whole school development is minimal. In many instances the results would improve, only to drop drastically in the subsequent years when the external intervention is reduced or removed.

Underperforming schools often lack the capacities needed to sustain the initial gains made with considerable external assistance. All these schools reach a crisis point when failure is visible above the waterline. They are helped through external intervention to stay afloat. But without the internal capacity or proficiency to continue unaided, it is only a matter of time before many of them start to sink again. Thirteen out of eighteen schools sampled in table 2, had dropped the overall pass rate at the end of the 2014 academic year. This translates into 72.2% of the schools as shown in table 2. The results of the schools were hovering between 70 and 80% in 2013, only to drop as shown in table 2 the following year.

The many interventions imposed on the schools produce short term benefits. Once they are withdrawn or moved to other schools, the schools results drop. In many instances these interventions are not geared towards sustainable and improved performance by the teachers. They are often learner centred. The subject teachers are often left out when their learners are taken to camps outside their schools or are being taught by subject advisors and teachers from well performing schools. In that way these teachers fail to observe innovative ways of imparting challenging topics to their learners.

Cyclical decline happens to the best and the most successful schools. Schools experience a dip or a downturn in performance, to varying degrees. Looking constantly into the causes of underperformance helps to stave off the decline before the downward spiral begins. The study will look into strategies that are more sustainable and mutually beneficial in a sense. While learner attainment improves on the one hand, teachers and school managers must be well equipped to sustain improved learner attainment, even after the withdrawal of external intervention.

CHAPTER FIVE

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of this thesis is to investigate the impact of the intervention strategies on the academic performance of grade 12 learners in secondary schools in the Free State province. As stated before, the research seeks to establish whether the strategies are being implemented or whether they are well supported within the schools. It will be interesting to establish whether there are resources available to sustain and support the strategies. It has been established that some schools continue to produce poor quality results despite the various improvement strategies that are being implemented. A deeper understanding of the causes of academic underperformance and the impact of the improvement strategies will lead to the design of a learner attainment model to be used by all the secondary schools in the Free State.

Flowing from the preceding chapters it is evident that the Grade 12 results are of poor quality and that many schools are not able to sustain improved outcomes for two or three consecutive years. There are in fact schools that had underperformed for five years in succession. It also became evident in the literature study that in several schools many intervention strategies employed are either not sustainable or are placed out of the school context with little or no impact on the quality of the teaching and learning process in the school. There is too much administrative work going into the crafting of other strategies. This often leads to teachers and school management team members abandoning their classes in order to complete some of the strategies, namely, the presentations for the consultative meetings or the consolidation of the academic performance improvement plan document. All these result into the strategies impacting negatively on the teaching and learning milieu and consequently on the overall performance of the schools.

In this chapter the researcher will recapitulate on the research design and the method of research. This will be followed by a brief description of the research

sample. The discussion of the procedure followed in collecting data will then follow. Once data has been collected it will be subjected to intense analysis, grouping together similar responses and discarding the irrelevant information and interpretation.

5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

5.2.1 Research method and design

Mouton (2001:55) defines research design as a blueprint of how one intends to conduct the research. According to Creswell (2010:03) research design is a plan and procedure for research. The method of this study is therefore planned in such a way that it uses both the qualitative and the quantitative approaches. As stated in chapter 1, the researcher opted for a mixed methods research that uses both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The idea behind the use of both is premised on the assumption that no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival causal factors (Patton 2001:180). The two approaches are used to obtain triangulation. Lacey and Luff (2009:27) define triangulation as the gathering and the analysing of data from more than one source to gain a fuller perspective on the situation that is being investigated. Each method reveals the different aspects of empirical reality.

Applying multiple methods which use different types of data could provide cross validity checks. In this study the researcher focused on understanding the respondents' perceptions, perspectives and understanding of a particular situation. Leedy and Omrod (2005: 87) emphasize that in planning a research design it is extremely important for the researcher to not only choose a viable research problem but also to consider the kinds of data that an investigation of a problem will require and feasible means of collecting and interpreting data.

The strategies aimed at improving learner attainment are well documented in the Free State province. These strategies are discussed in all the meetings that the education districts hold with the principals and schools management teams. There are schools that continue to perform poorly despite the elaborate strategies at their disposal. The study is focusing mainly on the reasons why these strategies are not

yielding positive results in the underperforming schools in the Free State province. It also looks into the alternative means that can be applied in making the strategies effective.

Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004:36) define the research method as the term used to describe the portfolio of data collection and data analysis techniques that is used to operationalise the particular research methodology. Collis and Hussey (2003:12) state that research methodology is the overall approach to the entire process from the theoretical underpinning to the collection and analysis of data. It is the framework of the research plan of action.

5.2.2 Qualitative approach

Qualitative research is the method in focus and it involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject. This implies that qualitative research studies things in their natural setting to make sense of their meaning (Denzin and Lincoln 2011:2). In this study the researcher makes use of the qualitative research method in order to get a wide range of interconnected methods with a view to get a better understanding of the strategies employed to deal with the causes of academic underperformance. It is important to note that this method is more on seeking insight than the statistical analysis.

5.2.3 Quantitative approach

Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006:20) define quantitative research as a collection and analysis of numerical data in order to explain, predict or control the phenomenon of interest. The key features of quantitative research are the hypotheses that predict the results of the research before the study begins; control of the contextual factors that might influence the study; collection of data from sufficient samples of participants and use of numerical statistical approaches to analyse the collected data. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, no hypothesis was formed. The research questions therefore serve as the basis of the hypothesis. Data gleaned from the underperforming schools will thus be quantified and the responses will be displayed in the five point Likert scale.

5.3 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

McMillan and Schumacher (2006:119) define population as a group of elements or cases, be it individuals, objects or events that conform to specific criteria and are intended to provide a suitable base for research. In this study the population will include all the principals and grade 12 subject teachers in all the underperforming secondary schools in the Free State province. All the secondary schools in the Free State province whose grade 12 results are below expected levels of performance make up the population of this study. The largest number of such schools in the period of the study was 96. This constitutes the population of this study.

According to Slavin (2007:248) a sample is defined as a group of participants chosen from a larger group to which research findings are assumed to apply. From the 96 underperforming schools in the Free State, 18 schools were selected by means of a systematic sampling method, to form the research sample. This was done by selecting every fifth school from a list of 96 underperforming schools. The sample constituted 18.75% of the underperforming schools in the Free State province. All the grade 12 teachers of the 18 underperforming schools numbering 198 completed the questionnaire. From the 18 schools, 10 principals who were selected by means of a systematic sampling method were interviewed. The aim was to get their views on the intervention strategies since almost all of them were not teaching grade 12. They were however, involved in the implementation of the strategies as managers in their respective schools. A larger sample was chosen because the schools did not have equal number of grade 12 teachers.

In addition to the sample 10 SMGDs were interviewed. These SMGDs based in the five education district offices, constitute another interest group that can contribute relevant information to the study. As immediate supervisors of principals the SMGDs are duty bound to ensure that schools, in particular those that underperform develop improvement strategies. These district officials must evaluate and assess the strategies. They are therefore better placed to comment on the strategies to improve learner performance. All the ten SMGDs attached to the underperforming schools across all the education districts in the province were interviewed.

The selection of the participants is based on the assumption that they are likely to generate useful data for the research. Included in the list of schools where the questionnaire and interviews were administered are the different categories of public schools like the combined institutions that are having both the primary and the secondary schools section, the technical schools and ordinary secondary schools that start from grade 8 and end with grade 12. This is a credible sample that covered the main group as targeted by the research.

5.4 DATA COLLECTION

Christensen (2006:60) mentions such diverse data collection methods as an individual's account of a personal experience, introspective experience, interviews with an individual, observation, written documents, photographs and historical information. In this study the following instruments were used for collecting data: questionnaires, interviews, and the data used in the literature study on the secondary schools in the Free State province.

5.4.1 Questionnaires

Slavin (2007:188) describes a questionnaire as a set of written questions usually consisting of one or more scales, to which respondents make written responses. It consists of a well designed list of questions that are used to obtain responses of particular kind of data from a selected group of participants. Salkind (2007:307) describes the questionnaires as sets of structured, focused questions that employ a self – reporting paper and pencil format. Questionnaires will assist in confirming the use of the strategies to improve learner performance in underperforming schools. The questions in the questionnaire used in the study were structured in such a way that they shed light on the strategies used to improve learner attainment. They also sought to determine if the strategies were indeed implemented and whether they were known to the grade 12 teachers in the schools.

Before the questionnaire was finalised it was pre-tested with ten (10) grade 12 subject teachers who were not part of the research sample. The questionnaire was found to be clear to the respondents and was therefore left unchanged.

Questionnaires with a rating scale on a continuum of strongly agree to strongly disagree have been used for statistical view of the outcomes. The first part of the questionnaire sought details about the teachers, their qualifications, experience in the teaching of the subject, their employment status in the school. It further sought to find out if the teachers were aware of the bachelors pass rate of the school for the previous year.

The second part of the questionnaire sought to establish the extent to which the strategies were applied by all stakeholders in the school. The final part presented the respondents with the opportunity to elaborate on any of the strategies used. The respondents were afforded the opportunity to expand on the contextual factors, the strengths and the weaknesses of one or any combination of the strategies.

The researcher used the questionnaire to establish close rapport with the principals of identified schools. This afforded the researcher with the opportunity to explain the significance of the study and how it would benefit the teaching and learning environment. The principals were further assured that no attempt will ever be made to reconcile the teachers' responses to the schools and that confidentiality was always guaranteed. The respondents were informed that they were free to discontinue their participation when they wished to.

These questionnaires were distributed physically to the sampled underperforming schools in the Free State province by the researcher. Principals of identified schools were asked to give the questionnaire to the grade 12 subject teachers. Each school was given enough copies of the questionnaire. A detailed explanation on how to complete the questionnaire and the expectations from the research participants were discussed with the principals of the identified schools. The said instructions also appeared on the top page of the questionnaire.

The questionnaires were collected after three days from the office of the Principal. It must be indicated that in many instances the researcher could not receive the questionnaires at the first agreed upon date and time. There were many excuses forwarded by the Principals in some of the schools. In some of the schools the researcher had to give the principal extra copies of the questionnaire as some teachers claimed to have misplaced the original copies. The researcher took time to check if all the questionnaires were fully and correctly completed. Out of the 225

copies of the questionnaires that were issued out to the schools 198 of them were returned, fully completed.

5.4.2 Interviews

According to McClure (2002: 203) interviews are basic fact finding interactions where one individual asks questions while another responds. By conducting interviews the researcher obtains a clearer understanding of an individual's background and experience. Knowledge of this experience helps the researcher to better understand the context for the individual's behaviour and decision making. Leedy and Ormord (2005:146) define an interview as a process through which individuals are asked specific questions but are allowed to respond in an unrestricted way or in their own way. The nature of questions and the context in which the study is undertaken may largely determine whether or not the interviews will be used as a data collection instrument.

The researcher opted for semi- structured interviews which involved one to one interaction and were organised to encourage the respondents to talk freely and to express their experiences and ideas on:

- Addressing the impact of the intervention strategies in a consistent and collaborative manner with all stakeholders;
- Finding effective ways of optimizing teaching and learning in underperforming schools and
- Determining the relevant improvement strategies.

In the semi – structured interviews, the interviewer has some discretion about the order in which questions are asked, but the questions are standardised and probes may be provided to ensure that the researcher covers the correct material (Harrell and Bradley 2009: 27). Semi – structured interviews are often used when the researcher wants to delve deeply into a topic and to understand thoroughly the answers provided.

Interviews must be conducted in such a way that they ask questions related to facts; people's beliefs and perspectives about the facts; feelings; motives; present and past behaviours; standards for behaviour or what people think should be done in certain

situations and conscious reasons for actions or feelings, for example, why people think that engaging in a particular behaviour is desirable or undesirable. The interviewees were asked questions and allowed to respond in their own way.

Semi - structured interviews are most appropriate for this study because they are more flexible and more likely to yield information that the researcher had not planned to ask for. The researcher was able to glean information from the respondents without much hesitation. Personal contact was maintained throughout the session. Ten Principals of the sampled schools were interviewed. All the principals were interviewed in their respective offices. They were informed that responding truthfully to the questions of the interview would broaden their view on the various strategies that are available to them. Responding honestly to the interview questions would also highlight areas of further intervention. The principals were also asked open ended questions that sought to corroborate or negate the teachers' responses in the questionnaire. Each interview session lasted for about an hour.

The school management and governance developers (SMGDs) - who are the principals' immediate supervisors were also subjected to short interview on the strategies intended to improve learner performance in the schools allocated to them. These district officials are expected to ensure that the improvement strategies are realised in the schools under their supervision. They are expected to monitor the implementation of the strategies and report on regular basis about any challenges to the district leadership. They are, therefore, the most appropriate officials to comment on the effectiveness or otherwise the weaknesses of the strategies. They were also assured that their responses would not be used to gauge their involvement in the implementation of the strategies in any particular school. They were further assured that the interview would assist them to figure out if a thorough impact analysis on the implementation of the strategies has been done or not. All the ten SMGDs servicing the eighteen identified schools were interviewed in the process. The officials were interviewed in their respective offices and each session lasted for close to forty five (45) minutes.

In both instances the researcher took the notes while the interviewees were responding to the questions. Immediately after each interview, the researcher went

through the notes to ensure that no meaning was lost and that the exact information provided by the respondents was captured correctly.

5.4.3 Limitations of interviews

In certain instances, the researcher may get different information from different people that it may be difficult to make comparisons or draw parallels among the interviewees. The nature of interviews is such that it cannot be conducted with a large number of participants because of the practical logistics of time and distance in this particular study. That would result in the research taking rather too long and cannot be completed within a reasonable time frame.

5.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data analysis entails the collecting of data, looking for emerging trends and recurrent events, categorising them and re- evaluating themes and categories. According to Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2009: 28 -29) it is the researcher's responsibility to do inductive data analysis in a naturalistic manner that would lead to the identification of the facts contained therein. It is important for the researcher to ensure that what has been documented during the investigation responds to the research questions. The researcher had used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) data analysis software to perform data entry and analysis to create tables and graphs. SPSS is a package of programmes for manipulating, analysing and presenting data (Landau & Everitt 2004:01).

As mentioned before (cf 1.9.5) the central task during data analysis in a qualitative research is: to identify the common categories in people's description of their experiences by separating relevant from irrelevant information and breaking it into small segments or phrases that reflect a single or a specific thought; grouping the segments into categories that reflect the various aspects or meanings of the phenomenon as it is experienced; look into the different ways in which different people experience the phenomenon; and lastly use the different meanings identified to develop an overall description of the phenomenon as has been typically experienced by people (Thomas 2003:06). Ryan (2006:98) emphasises that the first

step in analysing data is called coding – reading your data and developing a set of categories or basic organising ideas. The final result is a general description of the phenomenon as seen through the eyes of the people who experienced it firsthand (Leedy and Ormrod 2005: 140). The next section deals first with quantitative data analysis and then the qualitative data analysis.

5.5.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis techniques were used to analyse data collected through the questionnaires. Out of the 225 questionnaires distributed to schools by the researcher, 198 were received back. This constitutes a return of 88.0%. This section provides statistical descriptions gleaned from all the questionnaires that were received. The items measured included biographical data and the questions based on the following strategies:

- The use of credible academic performance improvement plan;
- The consultative meetings with the school management teams;
- The use of item and error analysis approach;
- The professional learning communities;
- The role of subject advisors in the actual teaching and learning process;
- The setting of performance targets;
- The twinning of schools project;
- The Dinaledi schools project;
- Grade 12 camps or holiday classes;
- Strategies to assist progressed learners;
- Use of diagnostic reports;
- The extent to which ICT is integrated into the classroom;
- Curriculum coverage and
- Curriculum management.

As explained in chapter one of this thesis, a descriptive quantitative research method has been pursued. Shuttleworth (2008:02) defines the descriptive research design as a scientific method which involves observing and describing the behaviour of a subject without influencing it in any way. The process as pursued in this study

involves using graphs, tables and percentages to explain the situation in the schools regarding the implementation of the strategies aimed at improving learner performance. Data analysis and interpretation which succeed hereafter are based on the grade 12 teachers' questionnaire.

According to Tavakol and Dennick (2011:51) the Cronbach's alpha is most commonly used to determine the reliability of the scale that was used. The researcher used the multiple Likert scale questions. The Cronbach's alpha of .950 on 81 items was found. This suggests that the items have relatively high internal consistency. It can therefore be concluded that the Likert scale yielded reliable results.

5.5.1.1 Biographical Data Analysis

Table 6: Gender profile of the grade 12 subject teachers

Gender	Number of Teachers	Valid Percentage
Male	95	49.2
Female	98	50.8
Total	193	100

Missing frequency is 5.

There were 49.2% of males who participated in the research with 50.8% of them were females. The difference in gender is so small that it can be considered as insignificant. Approximately the same number of males and females participated in the research.

Table 7: Profile of teachers' experience in the profession

Year of experience	Number of teachers	Valid %
0 - 2	13	6.7
3 - 5	28	14.4
6 – 9	40	20.5
10 +	114	58.5
Total	195	100

Missing frequency is 3.

Notable here is that most of the grade 12 subject teachers command huge experience in the field, with 58.5% of the respondents having been in the profession for ten and more years and 20.5% having worked for more than five years but less

than ten years. Only 6.7% of the participants were actually novice teachers with less than three years teaching experience.

Table 8: Cross tabulation: Comparison between the subjects taught in grade 12 with teachers' experience

		3. Grade 12 Subject * 4. Experience Cross tabulation				
		4. Experience				Total
		0-2 years	3-5 years	6-9 years	10 years and above	
3.Subjects	Mathematics	0	3	1	9	13
	English	1	0	5	12	18
	Accounting	0	2	2	9	13
	Life Science	2	3	2	12	19
	Physical Science	1	2	6	10	19
	Geography	1	1	1	7	10
	Economics	0	4	5	4	13
	Business Studies	1	1	2	8	12
	Vernacular	2	0	1	12	15
	Maths Lit	2	3	3	6	14
	Life Orientation	2	3	3	3	11
	Agric Science	0	1	1	1	3
	History	0	0	1	5	6
	Tourism	0	2	1	1	4
	Technical Subjects	1	0	0	2	3
Other	0	2	3	8	13	
Total		13	27	37	109	186

The majority of teachers have been teaching various subjects in grade 12 for more than ten years. For example there were 9 teachers for Mathematics, 12 for English, 10 in Physical Science and 9 in Accounting who had more than ten years teaching experience in their respective subjects. There is an uneven spread of the number of teachers across the experience range, with 13 of them having between 0 and 2 years teaching experience in English, Mathematics, Physical Science, Geography, Life Science, Economics and Business Studies and 27 of the them have between 3 and 5 years teaching experience in the same subjects. These are the big enrolment subjects. High failure rate in these subjects may result in the big drop in the quality of the results and in the overall performance of the school.

Table 9: Teachers Qualifications Profile

Qualification	Number of teachers	Valid %
M + 2	2	1.0
M + 3	31	16.0
M + 4	108	55.7
M + 5	53	27.3
Total	194	100

Missing frequency is 4.

The profile on qualifications shows that the teachers offering grade 12 are highly qualified with 83% of the respondents being beyond the minimum requirement of matric plus three years. Only a single percent of the respondents is under qualified, with grade 12 plus two years education qualification. There are 31 teachers with the minimum teaching qualification. This constitutes 16% of the respondents. The investigation did not look into the teachers' fields of specialisation. Research has established that a significant number of teachers have deviated from their major subjects and decided to pursue management courses that do not enhance their content knowledge.

Table 10: The responses divided according to the ranks

Rank	Number	Valid %
Principal	5	2.6
Deputy Principal	9	4.6
HOD	47	24.0
Post level 1 teachers	135	68.9
Total	196	100

Missing frequency is 2.

The majority of grade 12 teachers (68.9%) are on post level one. It is noted that there is only 24% of the HODs as members of the school management team that offer some subjects in the grade 12. Few principals and deputy principals are also teaching grade 12. This implies that 31.2% of the respondents have school management responsibilities. They are also in contact with the teachers on daily basis.

Table 11: Range of bachelors pass rate in 2014 according to the respondents

% Range	Number of teachers	Valid percentage
0 – 19	61	38.9
20 – 29	55	35.0
30 – 39	31	19.7
40 +	10	6.4
Total	157	100

Missing frequency is 41.

The missing frequency in this question is 41. That constitutes 20.7% of the respondents who did not attempt to respond to this question. This could imply that the subject teachers do not focus on the quality of the results. It could also imply that the respondents simply did not know what the bachelors pass rate for their schools were for the 2014 academic year. The bachelors pass rate of 40% and beyond makes only 6.4% of the responses. The first two ranges, from 0 to 19 and from 20 to 29 constitute the majority of cases with the first representing 38.9% and the last 35% of the respondents. A large majority of the respondents (93.6%) indicated that the range of the quality of results is between 0% and 39 %. Implicit in the data is that the schools are not focusing on the quality of the results.

5.5.1.2 Part Two of the Questionnaire

Questions 7 to 80 (sections A to M) were answered by all teachers who offered subjects in grade 12 irrespective of their ranks. Questions 81 to 87 (section N) were meant for the grade 12 teachers who were also members of the SMT. According to the statistics provided in table 10, there were 61 SMT members who participated in the investigation. The highest number of respondents for section N was 97. The difference in the number of SMT members (61) and the respondents (97) could be attributed to the fact that curriculum management workshops were also open to non – SMT members. It could also be linked to the fact that in some schools senior teachers are part of the SMT. The last two questions of the questionnaire (88 and 89) would be dealt with under qualitative analysis.

1. Section A

The use of credible academic performance improvement plan

Section A questions deal with the usage and credibility of the academic performance improvement plan. This section is made out of questions 7 – 12. The academic performance improvement plan is made out of the following subheadings: the performance targets per subject, the subject specific content challenges, the strategies that match the subject content challenges, the time frame within which the challenges would be addressed and officials responsible for addressing the challenges. The individual items are probed in this section.

Question 7: Academic performance improvement plan gives credible information on the extent to which interventions are realised in the school.

Table 12: Credibility of the academic performance improvement plans

Scale	Number of teachers	Valid %
Strongly agree	34	17.3
Agree	93	47.2
Undecided	25	12.7
Disagree	40	20.3
Strongly disagree	5	2.5
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

Of the respondents, 64.5% agreed that the academic performance improvement plan provided credible information on the extent to which the interventions were realised in the school. Those who disagreed constituted 22.8% of the respondents while 12.7% were uncertain about the credibility of the improvement plans. The results confirm that the academic performance improvement plan was viewed by the majority (64.5%) of teachers as an instrument that gave credible and trustworthy information on the implementation of the strategies to improve learner performance.

Question 8: Your school has set the performance targets for the grade 12 subjects with low performance.

Table 13: Setting performance targets in low performing subjects

Scale	No of teachers	Valid %
Strongly agree	30	15.4
Agree	41	21.0
Undecided	18	9.2
Disagree	67	34.4
Strongly disagree	39	20.0
Total	195	100

Missing frequency is 3.

Of the respondents, 54.4% did not agree that the schools set the performance targets in the subjects with low performance rate. Those who agreed made 36.4% of the respondents. Assuming that those who were undecided (9.2%) did not actually notice the effect of the performance targets, the total effect of this strategy is therefore put in serious doubt. It can be accepted that the setting of the performance targets in the low performing subjects was not done as it should or did not bring the desired effect.

Question 9: Your school has identified subject specific content challenges that resulted in poor learner performance.

Table 14: Identifying subject content challenges

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	55	27.9
Agree	93	47.2
Undecided	15	7.6
Disagree	30	15.2
Strongly Disagree	4	2.0
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

Of the respondents, 75.1% agreed that they identified the subject specific content challenges that resulted in poor learner performance. Only 17.2 % of the respondents did not agree with the statement. This could imply that there were teachers who did not identify the subject content challenges as expected. It can

therefore be assumed that the group that gave the undecided response (7.6%) did not identify the subject content challenges as required. The results indicate that the majority of teachers in the sample schools did identify the subject specific content challenges that led to poor learner performance.

Question 10: Your school has developed solutions to address the identified challenges.

Table 15: Solutions to address the subject content challenges

Scale	Number of teachers	Valid %
Agree Strongly	34	17.3
Agree	93	47.2
Undecided	25	12.7
Disagree	40	20.3
Disagree Strongly	5	2.5
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

The majority (64.5%) of teachers agreed that their schools had developed solutions to address the problems that caused the schools to underperform. Only 12.7% were undecided and a total of 22.8% disagreed. The results imply that those who were undecided and those who disagreed may not have developed the solutions that would help them to address the challenges in their respective subjects. This would have a negative impact on the strategies to assist the learners who were at risk of failing. It would also have affected the quality of feedback given to learners. The strategy, therefore, had a marked effect on learner performance. Implicit in the results is that the majority (64.5%) of the teachers in the sample schools developed the solutions that helped them to address the challenges identified in their subjects.

Question 11: Your school has compiled a progress report on how to address the identified challenges.

Table 16: Progress report on how to address the challenges.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	22	11.4
Agree	82	42.7
Undecided	36	18.8
Disagree	46	24.0
Strongly Disagree	6	3.1
Total	192	100

Missing frequency is 6.

Of the respondents, 54.1% agreed that the school compiled a report as informed by the academic performance improvement plan and 27.1% of the respondents disagreed with the statement. This confirms that there were instances where schools did not compile the reports as required. Only 18.8% of the respondents were not certain about the accomplishment of this activity. The fact that some teachers were undecided demonstrates that the consolidated report was never returned to the teachers for final ratification and editing. It can also imply that the final product was never presented to the stakeholders as it should. The progress report must be owned by everybody in the school, the SMT, the SGB and the entire staff.

Question 12: A credible academic performance improvement plan helps to improve learner performance.

Table 17: Credible academic performance improvement plans and learner performance.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	40	20.5
Agree	98	50.3
Undecided	36	18.5
Disagree	19	9.7
Strongly Disagree	2	1.0
Total	195	100

Missing frequency is 3.

Of the respondents, 70.8% agreed that the credible academic performance improvement plan helped in improving learner performance. Those who were

undecided made 18.5% of respondents while 10.7% disagreed completely. The results imply that the strategy helped in improving learner performance as confirmed by the majority (70.8%) of the respondents in the sample schools.

Table 18: Cross Tabulation comparing credibility of academic performance improvement plan and its use in the school.

12. A credible academic performance improvement plan helps to improve learner performance * 7. Academic performance improvement plan gives credible information on the extent to which interventions are realised in your school. Crosstabulation								
			Question 7.					Total
			Agree strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Disagree strongly	
12. A credible academic performance improvement plan helps to improve learner performance	Agree strongly	Count	12	18	5	4	0	39
		% within 7.	42.9%	17.6%	17.9%	13.8%	0.0%	20.3%
	Agree	Count	11	66	13	4	3	97
		% within 7.	39.3%	64.7%	46.4%	13.8%	60.0%	50.5%
	Undecided	Count	4	14	6	10	1	35
		% within 7. .	14.3%	13.7%	21.4%	34.5%	20.0%	18.2%
	Disagree	Count	1	4	4	9	1	19
		% within 7.	3.6%	3.9%	14.3%	31.0%	20.0%	9.9%
	Disagree strongly	Count	0	0	0	2	0	2
		% within 7. .	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.9%	0.0%	1.0%
	Total	Count	28	102	28	29	5	192
		% within 7. .	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The assumption is if the academic performance improvement plan is said to provide credible information on the extent to which the interventions are realised in the school, it is then bound to help in the efforts to improve learner performance. It has been demonstrated that 42.9% of the respondents agreed strongly that the credible academic performance improvement plan gave reliable information on the extent to which interventions were realised in their respective schools and that the plan helped to improve learner performance. A further 39.3% of the respondents also agreed to both while 50.5% of the respondents disagreed strongly that the academic performance improvement plan provided credible information on the extent to which

interventions were realised in the school, although they agreed that a credible plan did help in improving learner performance. This suggests that those who disagreed on the credibility of the plans and agreed that the plan can help in improving learner performance did not have credible plans in their schools. The data also show that 18.2% of the respondents were undecided on both statements. This group doubted the credibility of the plan as well as its effect on learner attainment. Implicit in the above comparison, is that the majority of the respondents believed in the academic performance improvement plan as a strategy that gives credible information on the extent to which interventions are realised in the school but not on improving learner performance.

2. Section B

The consultative meetings with School Management Teams

Section B questions tackle the value of the district management team’s consultative meetings with the school management teams on the academic performance improvement plan. The assumption is that the consultative meetings assist the SMT and the teachers in improving their performance. These meetings also help to improve the levels of accountability among the SMT members and the subject teachers and are used by schools to give trustworthy information on the extent to which the strategies are realised in the school. This section looks into whether this strategy has an influence on learner performance or not. The section deals with questions 13 – 19.

Question 13: Your SMT is invited each term to the meetings where quarterly results of grade 12 are discussed.

Table 19: Invitations to consultative meetings with school management teams

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	54	27.4
Agree	93	47.2
Undecided	31	15.7
Disagree	18	9.1
Strongly Disagree	1	0.5
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

There was consensus amongst the respondents on the invitations to the consultative meetings called by the district management and arranged for the school management teams. Table 19 above shows that 74.6% of the respondents confirmed that the school management teams were indeed invited to meetings where learner performance was discussed. Only 9.6% of the respondents disagreed. Those who were undecided (15.7%) did not have any significant impact on the results.

Question 14: Teachers are guided on how to account for the learning outcomes in their subjects.

Table 20: Guiding teachers on how to account for learning outcomes

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	16	8.1
Agree	75	38.1
Undecided	24	12.2
Disagree	61	30.9
Strongly Disagree	21	10.7
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

Table 20 above indicates that 41.6% of the respondents disagreed that the consultative meetings guided the teachers on how to account for the learning outcomes while 46.2% of the respondents agreed. Those who were undecided made 12.2% of the respondents. The 41.6% of those who disagreed is also significant and cannot be brushed aside. Guiding teachers on how to account for the learning outcomes is supposed to be the primary objective of the consultative meetings – to increase the level of accountability in the subjects. It implies that the strategy would be deemed to have failed if it does not achieve the main objective which was the case in this instance.

Question 15: Consultative meetings assist teachers in improving their performance.

Table 21: Consultative meetings assist teachers in improving their performance.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	26	13.2
Agree	76	38.6
Undecided	36	18.3
Disagree	42	21.3
Strongly Disagree	17	8.6
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

Table 21 shows that 51.8% of the respondents agreed that the strategy helped the teachers to improve their performance while 29.9% of the participants disagreed that the strategy was indeed helpful to the teachers. Those who were undecided made 18.3% of the respondents. Those who disagreed accounted for 29.9% of the total participants. Thus, a small majority of the respondents agreed that the strategy was helpful towards improving the teachers' performance.

Question 16 seeks to establish if the consultative meetings result in the loss of teaching and learning time.

Table 22: Consultative meetings v/s teaching and learning time.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	43	22.1
Agree	65	33.3
Undecided	26	13.3
Disagree	44	22.6
Strongly Disagree	17	8.7
Total	195	100

Missing frequency is 3

The majority of the respondents, at 55.4%, agreed that the consultative meetings resulted in the loss of teaching and learning time, while 31.3% disagreed. Those who were undecided made 13.3% of the respondents. This implies that the preparations before the actual meetings drew teachers away from their core duties and that the strategy did not yield the expected outcomes. With the majority of the respondents indicating that the consultative meetings resulted in the loss of teaching and learning

time, there is an element of doubt on the usefulness of the strategy in helping the teachers to improve their performance and in it being a reliable guide to teachers on how to account for the learning outcomes in their subjects.

Question 17 seeks to establish whether the consultative meetings help the SMT to improve their monitoring and control functions.

Table 23: Impact of consultative meetings on SMT control and monitoring functions

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	25	12.7
Agree	93	47.2
Undecided	42	21.3
Disagree	32	16.2
Strongly Disagree	5	2.5
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

The above table depicts that 59.9% of the respondents agreed that the consultative meetings helped the SMTs to improve their monitoring and control functions. A further 21.3% were undecided and 18.7% of the respondents disagreed that the meetings helped the SMTs to improve the monitoring and control functions. For 21.3% of the respondents to express doubt on the impact of the meetings on the functionality of the HODs, says a lot about the effectiveness of the strategy. The results imply that the consultative meetings are in fact helping the SMTs to improve on their monitoring and control functions as confirmed by the majority (59.9%) of the respondents in the sample sc

Question 18: The presentations done during the consultative meetings are a true reflection of what happens in a school.

Table 24: Quality of presentations done during consultative meetings.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	19	9.6
Agree	70	35.4
Undecided	59	29.8
Disagree	39	19.7
Strongly Disagree	11	5.5
Total	198	100

The above table shows that 45% of the respondents agreed that the presentations gave a true reflection of what happened in a school. A significant number of the respondents (29.8%) were undecided and those who disagreed were 25.2% in total. It is therefore logical to conclude that the presentations done during the consultative meetings are not providing a true reflection of what happens in the school in terms of the identification of the subject specific content challenges and the resultant intervention strategies. The results confirm that the presentations offered by the SMTs to the district were not a true reflection of the teaching and learning situation that prevailed in the school at the time.

Question 19: The SMT uses the consultative meetings to hold teachers accountable in their respective subjects.

Table 25: Holding teachers accountable through the consultative meetings

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	19	9.8
Agree	78	40.2
Undecided	41	21.1
Disagree	51	26.3
Strongly Disagree	5	2.6
Total	194	100

Missing frequency is 4.

Of the respondents, 59.8% agreed that the SMT used the consultative meetings to hold the teachers accountable. The respondents who disagreed constituted 28.9%.

Those who were undecided made 21.1% of the respondents. Based on the foregoing statistics it can be stated that the strategy is effective when it comes to holding teachers accountable.

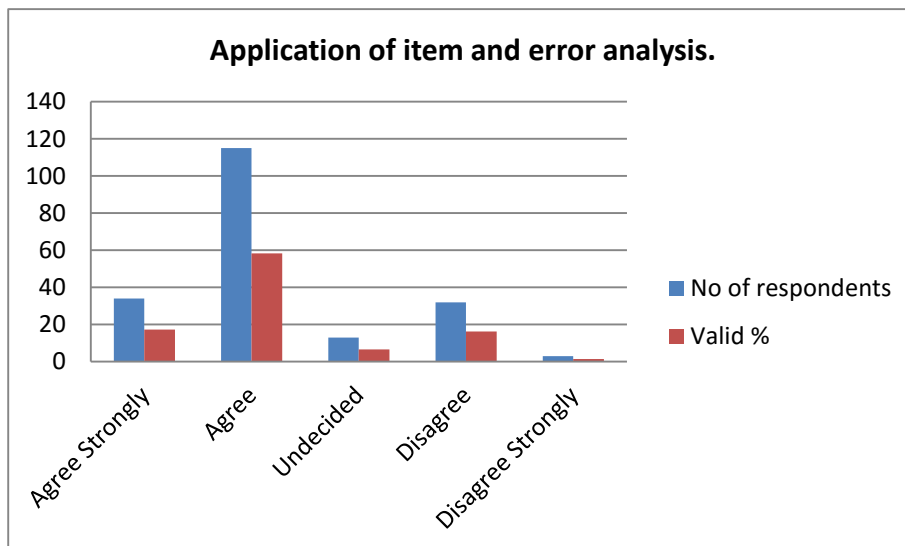
3. Section C

The use of item and error analysis approach

Section C deals with the usefulness of the item and error analysis on improving the quality of learning outcomes. This section was intended to verify the extent to which this strategy is understood and used in the schools. It also sought to establish if item and error analysis has any influence on the quality of the assessment tasks given to learners or not. A credible academic performance improvement plan is based on the correct application of the item and error analysis. It was therefore necessary to find out if the strategy is used to determine the relevant intervention strategies. The strategy can also be used to inform the teachers' lesson plan and preparations. For this strategy the analysis of data is represented graphically in figures 1 - 4.

Question 20: Your school identifies common errors that learners commit in the tests and examinations.

Figure 1: Application of the item and error analysis in identifying common errors committed by learners

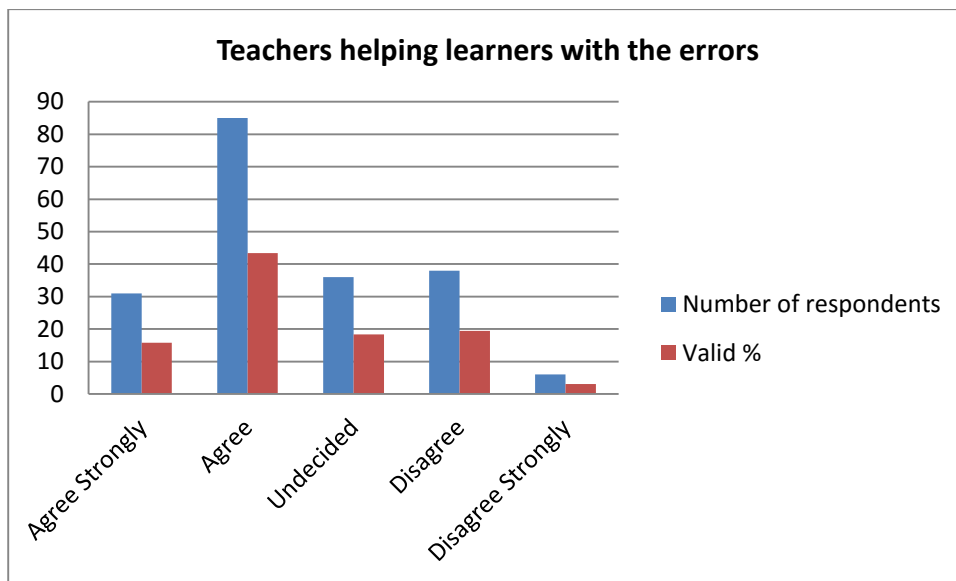


The above figure shows the extent to which the item and error analysis was applied in the schools. The majority of respondents (58%) agreed that they identified the common errors that learners committed in their tests and examinations. From the

figure it is clear that those who disagreed were in the minority (17.7%). Those who were undecided made 6.6% of the respondents. This implies that the teachers identified the common errors committed by the learners in the tests and examinations. The teachers applied the item and error analysis as expected.

Question 21: Teachers look for ways of ensuring that the learners do not commit the errors again.

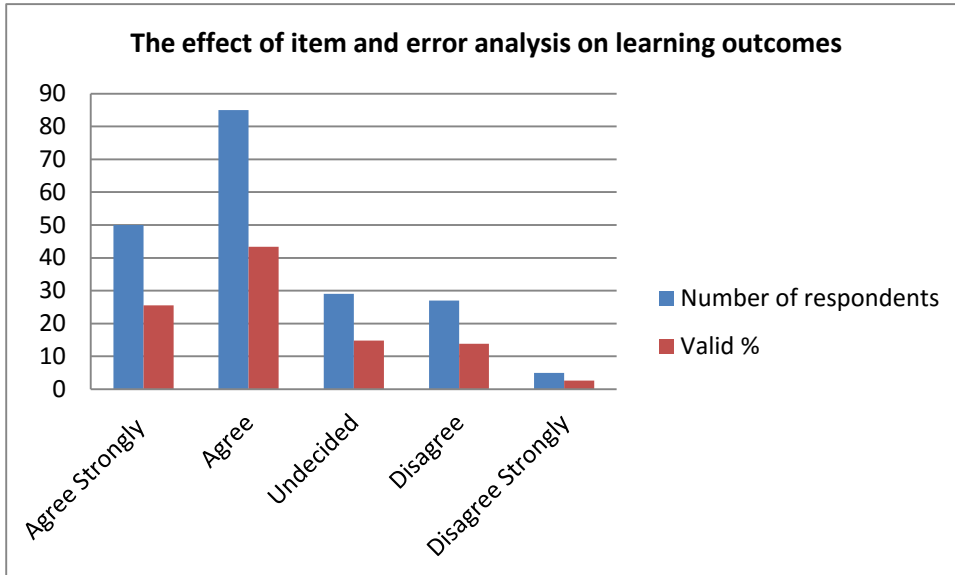
Figure 2: The extent to which teachers assist the learners not to repeat common errors



The above figure shows that the majority of teachers helped the learners with the errors that they committed when writing the assessment tasks. The assistance came from the identification of those errors during the evaluation or marking of the learners scripts. From the figure it is also clear that 43.4% of the respondents agreed that they ensured that the learners understood the work they were assessed on and that they also dealt effectively with the errors committed. The results indicate that 22.5% of the respondents disagreed and 18.4% were undecided. This implies that the item and error analysis was not used effectively in helping the learners to deal with errors that they committed during the tests and examinations.

Question 22: Item and error analysis is a useful tool for improving the quality of learning outcomes.

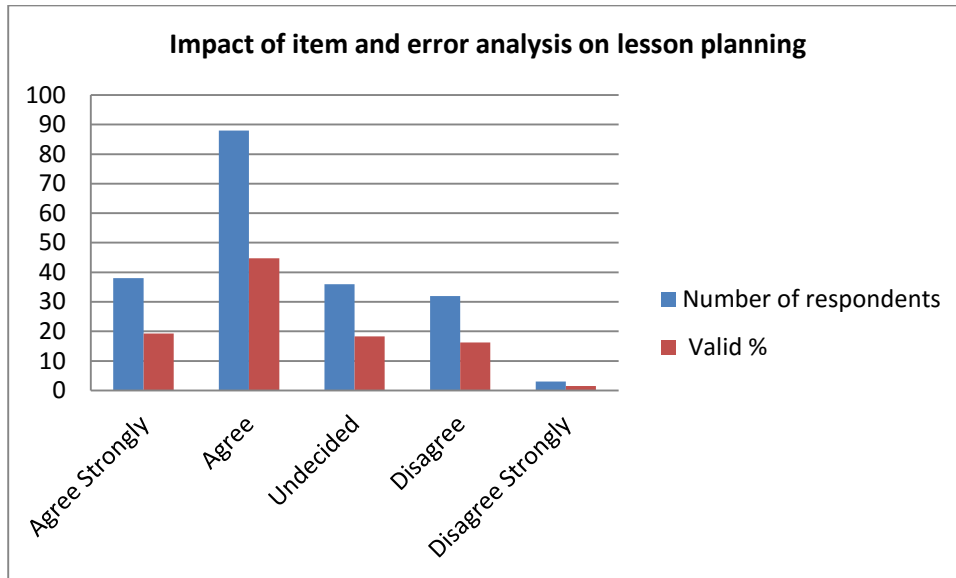
Figure 3: The effectiveness of item and error analysis in improving the quality of learning outcomes.



The above figure depicts the extent to which the item and error analysis influenced the learning outcomes. It is clear that the majority of the respondents agreed that item and error analysis had an influence on the learning outcomes. Those who agreed strongly (25.5%) together with those who agreed (43.4%) added up to 68.9% of the respondents. Those who were undecided made 14.8% of the respondents. A total of 16.4% of the respondents disagreed. It implies that the strategy is directly linked to the actual performance of the learners in various subjects and as a result constitutes a reliable measure of how they performed in those subjects.

Question 23: Item and error analysis informs the teachers lesson planning and preparation.

Figure 4: The link between item and error analysis and lesson planning and preparation.



The figure above illustrates the relationship between the item and error analysis and the planning of the lessons. The large majority (64%) agreed that there was a positive relationship between the item and error analysis and lesson planning while only 18.3% disagreed. Only 17.7% were undecided. Teachers must take into account the errors that learners commit during formal and informal tasks and incorporate them in their lesson plans. They must also prepare their teaching approaches around those errors. The majority (64%) of the respondents therefore affirmed that they did consider the errors during the planning of lessons and during the actual presentation in the classroom.

Question 24: Item and error analysis can be used to determine the relevant intervention strategies.

Table 26: The link between item and error analysis and the intervention strategies.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	50	25.8
Agree	89	45.9
Undecided	27	13.9
Disagree	26	13.4
Strongly Disagree	2	1.0
Total	194	100

The majority of the respondents (71.7%) agreed that the item and error analysis is a useful strategy for improving the quality of learning outcomes, informing the teachers' lesson plans and for determining the relevant improvement strategies. Those who did not agree made 14.4% of the respondents. Those who were undecided made 13.9% of the respondents. This is one of the few strategies that deal directly with teaching and learning content. It is also about the assessment tasks given to learners and the errors that they commit when responding to the questions. Doing the item and error analysis correctly would result into credible intervention strategies that would lead to improved learner performance.

4. Section D

The professional learning communities

Section D interrogates the functionality of the professional learning communities in the schools.

Question 25: Teachers form part of the professional learning communities

Table 27: Teacher participation in the professional learning communities

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	32	16.4
Agree	91	46.7
Undecided	26	13.3
Disagree	32	16.4
Disagree Strongly	14	7.2
Total	195	100

Missing frequency is 3.

The majority of the respondents (63.1%) agreed that the teachers formed part of the professional learning communities while 23.6% disagreed. Those who were undecided constituted 13.3% of the respondents. This implies that the majority of the sample schools formed part of the professional learning communities.

Question 26: The professional learning communities help you to share planning and teaching experiences with teachers from other schools.

Table 28: The professional learning communities and planning and teaching experience

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	28	14.3
Agree	90	45.9
Undecided	32	16.3
Disagree	39	19.9
Disagree Strongly	7	3.6
Total	196	100

Missing frequency is 2.

The majority of the respondents (60.2%) agreed that the professional learning communities helped the teachers to share their plans and teaching experiences with their colleagues from other schools while 23.5% of them disagreed. Those who were undecided made 16.3% of the respondents. This implies that in the majority of the sample schools the professional learning communities were used to create a platform for the teachers to share their plans and teaching experiences.

Question 27: The professional learning communities contribute to the good quality of teaching and learning.

Table 29: The professional learning communities and the quality of teaching and learning.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	25	12.8
Agree	85	43.4
Undecided	52	26.5
Disagree	32	16.3
Disagree Strongly	2	1.0
Total	196	100

Missing frequency is 2.

The majority of the respondents (56.2%) agreed that the professional learning communities contributed to the good quality of teaching and learning and only 17.3% disagreed. Those who were undecided made 26.5% of the respondents. This intimates that the strategy is viewed by the majority of the respondents as contributing positively to the quality of teaching and learning.

Question 28: The professional learning communities meetings are well coordinated

Table 30: Coordination of the professional learning communities meetings.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	9	4.6
Agree	45	23.1
Undecided	55	28.2
Disagree	68	34.9
Disagree Strongly	18	9.2
Total	195	100

Missing frequency is 3.

The above table shows that 27.7% of the respondents agreed that the professional learning communities meetings were well coordinated. The number of undecided respondents (28.2%) was more than those who agreed with the assertion. Of the respondents, 44.1% disagreed that the professional learning communities meetings were well coordinated. The results imply that the meetings are not well planned for.

Question 29: Teachers understand the importance of the professional learning communities

Table 31: Teachers' understanding of the importance of the professional learning communities

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	15	7.7
Agree	78	40.0
Undecided	57	29.2
Disagree	37	19.0
Disagree Strongly	8	4.1
Total	195	100

Missing frequency is 3.

The table shows that 47.7% of the respondents agreed that the teachers understood the importance of the professional learning communities while 23.1% did not agree. The number of respondents who were undecided (29.2%) is too big to be ignored. This implies that the majority of teachers did not understand the importance of the professional learning communities.

5. Section E

The role of the subject advisors in the actual teaching and learning process.

Section E probes the roles and responsibilities of the subject advisors in the teaching of learners in underperforming schools and on the development of teachers in their respective subjects. The development of the teachers remains the main responsibility of the subject advisors.

Question 30: Subject advisors introduce current trends in the teaching methodologies and learning styles

Table 32: Current trends in the teaching and learning styles

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	28	14.2
Agree	76	38.6
Undecided	31	15.7
Disagree	40	20.3
Strongly Disagree	22	11.2
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1

The table shows that 52.8% of the respondents agreed that subject advisors introduced current trends in the teaching methodologies and learning styles and 31.5% disagreed with the statement. This implies that 31.5% of the respondents felt that the subject advisors were not bringing in new knowledge in the teaching methodologies and learning styles. Those who were undecided made 15.7% of the respondents. The results imply that the majority of teachers in the sample schools agreed that the subject advisors introduced current trends in the teaching methodologies and learning styles.

Question 31 probes whether the subject advisors help with the teaching of learners as a way of showing the teachers how to go about.

Table 33: Involvement of subject advisors in the actual teaching of learners

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	21	10.7
Agree	61	31.0
Undecided	21	10.7
Disagree	63	32.0
Strongly Disagree	31	15.7
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1

It is demonstrated in table above that 47.7% of the respondents disagreed that subject advisors were involved with the teaching of the learners and 41.7% agreed that they did teach learners and therefore showed the teachers the most appropriate ways of teaching. Those who were undecided made 10.7%. This implies that the subject advisors were not directly involved in the actual teaching of the learners. It further implies that they were not showing the teachers the teaching and learning styles required to improve the results.

Question 32: The academic results improve when subject advisors teach in the school.

Table 34: Teaching by subject advisors v/s academic results

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	13	6.6
Agree	32	16.2
Undecided	71	36.0
Disagree	53	26.9
Strongly Disagree	28	14.2
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1

Of the respondents, 41.1% disagreed that the results improved when subject advisors taught in the schools. Only 22.8% agreed that the results did improve when subject advisors were involved in their schools. Those who were undecided made 36% of the respondents. This figure is rather too big to be ignored. The majority of

the respondents (41.1%) thus agreed that the interaction of the subject advisors with the learners was rather too minimal. They were not directly involved in the teaching and learning process for them to can have an influence on learner performance. The majority of the respondents affirmed that the results did not improve as a result of the subject advisors teaching in the schools

Question 33: Subject advisors are highly skilled and knowledgeable in their subjects.

Table 35: Subject advisors and their subject knowledge and skills

Scale	Number of Respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	32	16.2
Agree	76	38.4
Undecided	44	22.2
Disagree	32	16.2
Disagree Strongly	14	7.0
Total	198	100

The majority of the respondents (54.6%) agreed that the subject advisors are highly skilled and knowledgeable in their subjects while 23.2% disagreed. Those who were undecided constituted 22.2% of the respondents. This implies that the subject advisors are indeed skilled and knowledgeable in their subjects.

6. Section F

The setting of performance targets

Section F looks into target setting against the improvement of learner attainment.

Question 34: Your school has set performance target for grade 12 pass rate.

Table 36: Setting of grade 12 performance targets

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	57	28.8
Agree	113	57.1
Undecided	6	3.0
Disagree	14	7.1
Disagree Strongly	8	4.0
Total	198	100

The majority of the respondents (85.9%) agreed that their schools set the performance targets for the pass rate in grade 12. Only 11.1% did not agree with the statement. Those who were undecided made 3% of the respondents. This demonstrates that the schools did set the performance targets for the pass rate in grade 12.

Question 35: The set targets are based on known levels of performance and are realistic.

Table 37: Setting of targets and the known levels of performance

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	20	10.1
Agree	83	41.9
Undecided	42	21.2
Disagree	41	20.7
Disagree Strongly	12	6.1
Total	198	100

The table shows that 52% of the respondents agreed that the targets that were set were based on known levels of performance and were realistic while 26.8% disagreed. Those who were undecided made 21.2% of the respondents. This demonstrates that the majority of schools did set the targets that were realistic and were also based on the known levels of performance.

Question 36: The performance targets are well explained to all staff members and learners

Table 38: Explaining of the targets to all staff members

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	29	14.7
Agree	96	48.7
Undecided	31	15.7
Disagree	32	16.2
Disagree Strongly	9	4.6
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

The majority of the respondents (63.4%) agreed that the performance targets were well explained to all staff members and learners and 20.8% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 15.7% of the respondents. This implies that the performance targets were explained to the majority of teachers and the learners in the school.

Question 37: Performance targets improve learner attainment.

Table 39: Performance targets v/s learner attainment

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	14	7.3
Agree	92	47.9
Undecided	58	30.2
Disagree	22	11.5
Strongly Disagree	6	3.1
Total	192	100

Missing frequency is 6

Of the respondents, 55.2% agreed that performance targets helped with the improvement of learner performance and 14.6% of the respondents did not subscribe to the notion that the performance targets can help improve learner attainment. Those who were undecided made 30.2% of the respondents. This implies that the setting of the performance targets inspired learners and teachers to double their efforts in an attempt to reach those targets.

7. Section G

The Dinaledi schools project

Section G looks into whether schools participating in the Dinaledi schools project produce quality results than other schools.

Question 38: Your school participates in the Dinaledi Schools project

Table 40: Participation in the Dinaledi schools project

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	13	6.5
Agree	35	17.8
Undecided	25	12.7
Disagree	74	37.6
Disagree Strongly	50	25.4
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

The majority of the respondents (63%) disagreed that their schools participated in the Dinaledi schools project and 24.3% agreed. Those who were undecided made 12.7% of the respondents. This implies that the majority of the sample schools did not participate in the project.

Question 39: Your mathematics and science teachers have attended training sessions organised by the project.

Table 41: The mathematics and science teachers who attended training sessions arranged by the Dinaledi schools project.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	11	5.6
Agree	34	17.3
Undecided	44	22.5
Disagree	69	35.2
Disagree Strongly	38	19.4
Total	196	100

Missing frequency is 2.

The majority of the respondents (54.6%) disagreed that the schools' Mathematics and Science teachers had attended the training sessions organised by the project and 22.9% agreed. Those who were undecided made 22.5% of the respondents. This goes on to show that the majority of teachers in the sample schools did not attend the training sessions for Mathematics and Science arranged by the project.

Question 40: The Dinaledi Schools project has helped to improve the performance of grade 12 learners

Table 42: Dinaledi schools project v/s learner performance.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	9	4.6
Agree	24	12.2
Undecided	68	34.7
Disagree	58	29.6
Strongly Disagree	37	18.9
Total	196	100

Of the respondents, 48.5% felt that the Dinaledi schools project did not benefit their schools in any way. Only 16.8% of the respondents felt that their schools benefited from the Dinaledi schools project. Those who were undecided made 34.7% of the respondents. This implies that the project is not an effective strategy to improve learner performance.

8. Section H

The twinning of schools project

Section H aims to establish the link between twinning of schools programme and learner performance.

Question 41: Your school has participated in the twinning of schools project

Table 43: Participation in the twinning of schools project

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	8	4.1
Agree	60	30.5
Undecided	32	16.2
Disagree	70	35.5
Disagree Strongly	27	13.7
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

The table shows that 34.6% of the respondents agreed that their schools had participated in the twinning of schools project while 49.2% disagreed. Those who

were undecided made 16.2% of the respondents. This implies that the majority of schools did not participate in the twinning of schools project.

Question 42: Teachers of well performing schools sometimes offer lessons to your learners

Table 44: Teachers from well performing schools offering lessons

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	7	3.5
Agree	61	30.8
Undecided	15	7.6
Disagree	69	34.9
Disagree Strongly	46	23.2
Total	198	100

The majority of the respondents (58.1%) disagreed that the teachers from well performing schools sometimes offered lessons to their learners while 34.3% of them agreed. Those who were undecided made 7.6% of the respondents. Implicit in the results is that in the majority of the sample schools teachers from well performing schools did not offer lessons to the learners.

Question 43: Your school has received some teaching and learning resources from the well performing schools.

Table 45: Teaching and learning resources received from the well performing schools

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	3	1.5
Agree	25	12.6
Undecided	29	14.7
Disagree	83	41.9
Disagree Strongly	58	29.3
Total	198	100

The majority of the respondents (71.2%) disagreed that their schools received some teaching and learning resources from the well performing schools and 14.1% agreed that they did. Those who were undecided made 14.7% of the respondents. This implies that the majority of sample schools did not receive teaching and learning resources from the well performing schools.

Question 44: Your grade 12 learners have benefitted from the twinning of schools project

Table 46: Learner performance v/s twinning of schools programme.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	4	2.0
Agree	38	19.3
Undecided	42	21.3
Disagree	69	35.0
Strongly Disagree	44	22.3
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1

Of the respondents, 57.3% indicated that their learners did not benefit from the twinning of schools project. Only 21.3% agreed that their learners benefited from the twinning of schools project. Those who were undecided made 21.3% of the respondents. The majority of sample schools did not benefit from the twinning of schools project.

9. Section I

The grade 12 camps or holiday classes

Section I questions investigate the effect of attending holiday classes and camps on the grade 12 results. This section also deals briefly with the progressed learners in the grade 12 class.

Question 45: Your grade 12 learners receive tuition during the school holidays

Table 47: Learners receiving tuition during the school holidays

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	104	52.5
Agree	84	42.4
Undecided	4	2.0
Disagree	3	1.5
Disagree Strongly	3	1.5
Total	198	100

The majority of the respondents (94.9%) agreed that their learners received tuition during the school holidays while only 3% disagreed. Those who were undecided

made 2% of the respondents. It is clear from the results that the majority of schools offered tuition during the school holidays.

Question 46: Your grade 12 learners also attend the matric camps

Table 48: Grade 12 learners attending matric camps.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	94	47.7
Agree	74	37.6
Undecided	5	2.5
Disagree	19	9.6
Disagree Strongly	5	2.5
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1

The majority of the respondents (85.3%) agreed that their grade 12 learners attended the matric camps while only 12.1% disagreed. Those who were undecided made 2.5% of the respondents. This implies that the majority of the sample schools took their grade 12 learners to the camps.

Question 47: At the camps the previous grade 12 final examination papers are revised

Table 49: Revision of the previous grade 12 final examination papers at the camps.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	56	28.6
Agree	64	32.6
Undecided	55	28.1
Disagree	17	8.7
Disagree Strongly	4	2.0
Total	196	100

Missing frequency is 2.

The table shows that the majority of the respondents (61.2%) agreed that the previous grade 12 final examination papers were revised at the camps and 10.7% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 28.1% of the respondents. This demonstrates that the previous examination papers were dealt with at the camps.

Question 48: Matric camps are useful in improving the grade 12 results

Table 50: The usefulness of matric camps in improving the grade 12 results

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	53	26.9
Agree	76	38.6
Undecided	46	23.4
Disagree	16	8.1
Disagree Strongly	6	3.0
Total	198	100

The majority of the respondents (65.5%) agreed that the camps were useful in improving the grade 12 results and only 11.1% did not agree that they did. Those who were undecided made 23.4% of the respondents. This suggests that the matric camps are useful in improving the grade 12.

Question 49: Your school is not disturbed when teachers leave with grade 12 learners to the camp.

Table 51: Participation of teachers in matric camps

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	21	10.6
Agree	41	20.7
Undecided	36	18.2
Disagree	82	41.4
Strongly Disagree	18	9.1
Total	198	100

The results show that 31.3% of the respondents agreed that schools were not disturbed when the teachers left for camps while 50.5% of the respondents confirmed that indeed the schools were disrupted when teachers left for the camps. Those who were undecided made 18.2% of the respondents. This confirms that the schools were indeed disrupted when teachers left for the matric camps.

10. Section J

Strategies to assist progressed learners

Question 50: Your school has progressed learners in the grade 12 class

Table 52: Progressed learners in the grade 12 class

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	113	57.4
Agree	80	40.6
Undecided	1	0.5
Disagree	1	0.5
Disagree Strongly	2	1.0
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

The majority of the respondents (98%) agreed that there were progressed learners in grade 12 in their schools and 1.5% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 0.5% of the respondents. It implies that almost all the sample schools have progressed learners in their grade 12 classes.

Question 51: Your school has specific intervention programmes to assist the progressed learners.

Table 53: Programmes to assist the progressed learners

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	28	14.3
Agree	86	43.9
Undecided	26	13.3
Disagree	44	22.4
Disagree Strongly	12	6.1
Total	196	100

Missing frequency is 2.

The majority of the respondents (58.2%) agreed that the schools had specific intervention programmes to assist the progressed learners while 28.5% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 13.3% of the respondents. The majority of schools therefore have specific intervention programmes to assist progressed learners.

11. Section K

The use of the diagnostic reports

Section K compares the use of examiners and moderation reports with learner attainment and teacher preparedness.

Question 52: Your school receives grade 12 examiners and moderators reports

Table 54: Examiners and moderators reports.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	60	30.3
Agree	105	53.0
Undecided	13	6.6
Disagree	20	10.1
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	198	100

The majority of the respondents (83.3%) agreed to having received the examiners and moderators reports. Only 10.1% claimed not to have received the reports. Those who were undecided made 6.6% of the respondents. This implies that the examiners and moderators reports are available in the majority of the sample schools.

Question 53: The grade 12 teachers make use of the reports to prepare their lessons

Table 55: Use of the examiners and moderators reports in preparing lessons

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	30	15.2
Agree	94	47.5
Undecided	45	22.7
Disagree	27	13.6
Disagree Strongly	2	1.0
Total	198	100

The majority of the respondents (62.7%) agreed that the grade 12 subject teachers made use of the reports to prepare their lessons while 14.6% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 22.7% of the respondents. This implies that despite the large majority having confirmed that they did use the reports as expected, there are those teachers who did not use them in the sample schools.

Question 54: The teachers use the reports to set the assessment tasks.

Table 56: Use of the examiners and moderators reports in setting assessment tasks

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	28	14.2
Agree	90	45.7
Undecided	53	26.9
Disagree	24	12.2
Disagree Strongly	2	1.0
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

Of the respondents, 59.9% agreed to have received the reports while 13.2% of them indicated that they never received the reports. Those who were undecided made 26.9% of the respondents. The results show that the examiners and moderators reports were used by the majority of the teachers in the sample schools in setting the assessment tasks.

Question 55: The use of the reports leads to improved levels of performance.

Table 57: Use of the examiners and moderators reports v/s learning outcomes

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	24	12.2
Agree	91	46.0
Undecided	63	32.0
Disagree	16	8.1
Disagree Strongly	3	1.5
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

Of the respondents, 58.2% agreed that the use of the reports led to improved levels of performance while only 9.6% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 32% of the respondents. The majority of the respondents therefore agreed that the use of the reports led to improved levels of performance.

12. Section L

The extent to which ICT is integrated into the classroom

Section L investigates whether the use of ICT in the classroom translates into improved quality of results.

Question 56: Your school has the ICITISE programme

Table 58: Availability of the ICITISE programme

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	6	3.1
Agree	25	13.0
Undecided	54	28.0
Disagree	71	36.7
Strongly Disagree	37	19.2
Total	193	100

Missing frequency is 5

Of the respondents 55.9% confirmed that they did not have nor use the ICITISE programme in their schools. Those who agreed that the programme is available in their schools constituted 16.1% of the respondents. Those who were undecided made 28% of the respondents. This implies that the majority of sample schools did not have the ICITISE programme in their schools.

Question 57: Your school uses the mindset programme

Table 59: Availability of the Mindset programme

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	8	4.1
Agree	47	24.0
Undecided	41	20.9
Disagree	69	35.2
Strongly Disagree	31	15.8
Total	196	100

Missing frequency is 2

The mindset programme was available in 28.1% of the respondents' schools while 51% of the respondents knew nothing about mindset. Those who were undecided made 20.9% of the respondents. The majority of the sample schools did not use the mindset programme.

Question 58: Your school uses the HeyMath programme

Table 60: Availability of the HeyMath programme

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	20	10.2
Agree	70	35.5
Undecided	39	19.8
Disagree	44	22.3
Strongly Disagree	24	12.2
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1

Of the respondents, 34.5% did not know about the HeyMath programme and 45.7% affirmed that the programme was available in their schools. Those who were undecided made 19.8% of the respondents.

Question 59: The programme helps to improve the quality of results

Table 61: The use of ICT in the classroom

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	23	11.7
Agree	53	27.0
Undecided	84	42.9
Disagree	27	13.8
Strongly Disagree	9	4.6
Total	196	100

Missing frequency is 2

The above table shows that 38.7% of the respondents agreed that the use of the programme helped to improve the quality of results, while 18.1% disagreed. The percentage of the respondents who were undecided (42.9%) that the use of ICT helped to improve the quality of the results is too big to be ignored. It implies that ICT is not used effectively in improving the quality of the results.

Questions 60 – 63 look into the relevance of training and development programmes by subject advisors. These questions are a continuation of section E that deals with the role of subject advisors in the actual teaching and learning process.

Question 60: You attend training sessions conducted by the subject advisors each year

Table 62: Training sessions conducted by subject advisors

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	86	43.4
Agree	103	52.0
Undecided	2	1.0
Disagree	7	3.5
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	198	100

Training sessions conducted by subject advisors seemed to be well attended with 95.4% of the respondents having confirmed that they did attend. Only 3.5% indicated that they did not attend. Those who were undecided made 1% of the respondents.

Question 61: Teachers are consulted on their training and development needs

Table 63: Consulting teachers on training and development needs

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	51	25.9
Agree	70	35.5
Undecided	10	5.1
Disagree	41	20.8
Disagree Strongly	25	12.7
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

The majority of the respondents (61.4%) agreed that the teachers were consulted on their training and development needs and 33.5% disagreed. Those who were undecided made 5.1% of the respondents. This implies that the majority of teachers were consulted on the areas or topics on which they required training and development.

Question 62: Training sessions are conducted after school

Table 64: Training sessions and the time at which they are conducted.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	21	10.6
Agree	87	43.9
Undecided	19	9.6
Disagree	64	32.3
Disagree Strongly	7	3.5
Total	198	100

Of the respondents, 54.5% agreed that the training sessions were conducted after school while 35.8% disagreed. Those who were undecided made 9.6% of the respondents. It implies that the majority of the training sessions were conducted after school.

Question 63: You have received training from the subject advisors on how to set question papers of good quality

Table 65: Subject advisors training on setting quality question papers

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	28	14.2
Agree	73	37.1
Undecided	17	8.6
Disagree	47	23.9
Disagree Strongly	32	16.2
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

Of the respondents, 51.3% agreed that they had received training from the subject advisors on how to set question papers of good quality while 40.1% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 8.6% of the respondents. The results confirm that the majority of teachers in the sample schools were indeed trained on how to set question papers of good quality by the subject advisors.

13. Section M

Curriculum coverage

Section M puts emphasis on curriculum coverage, its application, monitoring and control. The value of assessment in the quality of results and the effect of subject changes on the performance of the learners are also dealt with in this section.

Question 64: You attended a workshop on the importance of curriculum coverage.

Table 66: Attendance of curriculum coverage workshops

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	40	20.2
Agree	76	38.3
Undecided	10	5.1
Disagree	52	26.3
Strongly Disagree	20	10.1
Total	198	100

The above table shows that 58.5% of the respondents indicated that they were invited to the curriculum coverage workshops arranged by the district while 36.4% were never invited to the workshop. Those who were undecided made 5.1% of the respondents. The results prove that the majority of teachers in the sample schools did attend the curriculum coverage workshops.

Question 65: You complete the syllabus in your subject every year

Table 67: Completion of the syllabus

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	66	33.5
Agree	86	43.7
Undecided	13	6.6
Disagree	30	15.2
Disagree Strongly	2	1.0
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

The table shows that 77.2% of the respondents agreed that they completed the syllabus in their subjects every year while 16.2% disagreed. Those who were undecided made 6.6% of the respondents. This implies that although the majority of teachers did complete the syllabus in their subjects, there is a significant percentage of the teachers in the sample schools who did not complete the syllabus in their subjects every year.

Question 66: You teach all the topics in your subject every year

Table 68: Teaching of all the topics in the subject.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	72	36.4
Agree	82	41.4
Undecided	13	6.6
Disagree	30	15.1
Disagree Strongly	1	0.5
Total	198	100

The above table shows that 77.8% of the respondents agreed that they taught all the topics in their subjects every year while 15.6% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 6.6% of the respondents. This implies that although the majority of the subject teachers confirmed that they did teach all the prescribed topics, there is a significant number of teachers in the sample schools who did not teach all the prescribed topics in their subjects every year.

Question 67: Your HOD checks your work to ensure that you complete all the sections of the curriculum each year.

Table 69: Checking of work by HODs to ensure curriculum completion.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	49	25.0
Agree	76	38.8
Undecided	13	6.6
Disagree	42	21.4
Disagree Strongly	16	8.2
Total	196	100

Missing frequency is 2

Of the respondents, 63.8% agreed that their HODs check their work to ensure that they completed all the sections of the curriculum each year while 29.6% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 6.6% of the respondents. It implies that the majority of the respondents had their work checked by the HODs to ensure that all the sections of the curriculum were completed annually.

Question 68: There are still sections of the curriculum of the subject you teach that you find difficult to teach

Table 70: Teaching of difficult sections of the curriculum

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	19	9.6
Agree	81	41.1
Undecided	9	4.6
Disagree	63	32.0
Strongly Disagree	25	12.7
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1

The table shows that 50.7% of the respondents confirmed that there were those sections of the curriculum in their subjects that they found difficult to teach while 44.7% said that they did not find any section of the curriculum difficult to teach. Those who were undecided made 4.6% of the respondents. This implies that there is a significant percentage of the teachers in the sample schools who found certain sections of the curriculum difficult to teach. This significant finding reflects on the quality of the teachers and on the quality of instruction. It also has a bearing on the suitability of the teachers in teaching the subjects allocated to them.

Question 69: There are those sections of the subject that you do not teach

Table 71: Sections of the subject that are not taught

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	5	2.5
Agree	26	13.2
Undecided	13	6.6
Disagree	108	54.8
Disagree Strongly	45	22.8
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

Of the respondents 15.7% agreed that there were those sections of the subject that they did not teach and 77.6% disagreed with the statement. Those who were undecided made 6.6% of the respondents. This implies that there were teachers in the sample schools who did not teach certain sections of their subjects.

Question 70: You still fall behind with the teaching of the sections of the curriculum of your subject.

Table 72: Teachers falling behind with the teaching of certain sections of the curriculum.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	8	4.1
Agree	60	30.4
Undecided	19	9.6
Disagree	73	37.1
Disagree Strongly	37	18.8
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

The table above shows that 34.5% of the respondents agreed that they still fell behind with the teaching of certain sections of the curriculum in their subjects and 55.9% disagreed that they fell behind. Those who were undecided made 9.6% of the respondents. This implies that quite a significant number of the teachers in the sample schools fell behind with the teaching of the sections of the curriculum in their subjects.

Question 71: You have submitted a catch up plan when you were behind with the curriculum of the subject that you teach.

Table 73: Submission of catch up plans

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	12	6.1
Agree	70	35.9
Undecided	37	19.0
Disagree	62	31.8
Strongly Disagree	14	7.2
Total	195	100

Missing frequency is 3

Of the respondents, 39% disagreed that they had submitted the catch up plans when they were behind with the curriculum of the subjects that they taught and 42% of the respondents agreed that they indeed submitted. Those who were undecided made 19% of the respondents. This implies that the majority of the teachers in the sample

schools submitted the catch up plans on how to deal with the work that they lagged behind with.

Question 72: There is close monitoring of the catch up programme by your HOD.

Table 74: Monitoring the catch up plans by the HODs.

Scale	No of Respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	15	7.7
Agree	64	33.0
Undecided	37	19.1
Disagree	61	31.4
Disagree Strongly	17	8.8
Total	194	100

Missing frequency is 4.

Of the respondents, 40.7% agreed that there was close monitoring of the catch up programme by the HODs and 40.2% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 19.1% of the respondents. The results suggest that there was no close monitoring of the catch up programmes submitted by the subject teachers when they fell behind with their work. Poor monitoring is a manifestation of lack of instructional leadership. Poorly managed schools are bound to underperform.

Question 73: You complete the prescribed work well ahead of the examination.

Table 75: Completing the prescribed work well ahead of the examination

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	31	15.6
Agree	92	46.5
Undecided	20	10.1
Disagree	52	26.3
Disagree Strongly	3	1.5
Total	198	100

The above table shows that 62.1% of the respondents agreed that they completed the prescribed work well ahead of the examination while 27.8% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 10.1% of the respondents. This implies that a significant percentage of the teachers in the sample schools did not complete the prescribed work in time before the commencement of the examination.

Question 74: There is always enough time for thorough revision before the final examination

Table 76: Time for thorough revision before the final examination

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	31	15.6
Agree	61	30.8
Undecided	22	11.1
Disagree	70	35.4
Disagree Strongly	14	7.1
Total	198	100

Of the respondents, 46.4% agreed that there was always enough time for thorough revision before the final examination while 42.5% did not agree that there was enough time. Those who were undecided made 11.1% of the respondents. It is clear from the results that there was not enough time for thorough revision before the final examination. It implies that the subject teachers did not do thorough revision with the learners before they wrote their final examinations.

Question 75: Quality feedback on all assessment tasks is always given to the learners

Table 77: Giving quality feedback on all assessment tasks to the learners.

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	52	26.3
Agree	116	58.6
Undecided	17	8.6
Disagree	11	5.5
Disagree Strongly	2	1.0
Total	198	100

The majority of the respondents (84.9%) agreed that they gave the learners quality feedback on all the assessment tasks while only 6.5% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 8.6% of the respondents. This suggests that learners in the sample schools received quality feedback from the teachers on all the assessment tasks.

Question 76: Learners often use the feedback provided to prepare for the examination

Table 78: Using the feedback provided to prepare for the examination

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	23	11.7
Agree	74	37.6
Undecided	57	28.9
Disagree	30	15.2
Disagree Strongly	13	6.6
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

Of the respondents 49.3% agreed that learners often used the feedback provided to prepare for the examination and 21.8% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 28.9% of the respondents. Implicit in the foregoing data is the fact that the majority of the subject teachers were convinced that the learners did use feedback provided to prepare for the final examinations.

Question 77: Learners are allowed to do completely new subjects in grade 12

Table 79: Changing of subjects in the grade 12 year

Scale	Number of respondents	Valid %
Strongly Agree	52	26.4
Agree	68	34.5
Undecided	22	11.2
Disagree	36	18.3
Strongly Disagree	19	9.6
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1

The above table shows that 60.9% of the respondents agreed that the learners are allowed to do new subjects in the year in which they do grade 12. Only 27.9% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 11.2% of the respondents. This confirms that there are deficiencies in the schools life orientation programmes. Learners must be guided on the subject choices as early as in grade 9. This must be done considering their performance in the different subjects or a combination of subjects. The data also highlights the gaps in the departmental career guidance programmes.

The choice of subjects is informed by career choices. The change of subjects in the grade 12 year is a common occurrence if the results of the investigation are considered.

Question 78: Changing of subjects in grade 12 benefits the learners.

Table 80: Changing of subjects v/s learner performance.

Scale	No of respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	20	10.1
Agree	46	23.4
Undecided	62	31.5
Disagree	43	21.8
Disagree Strongly	26	13.2
Total	197	100

Missing frequency is 1.

Of the respondents, 33.5% agreed that the changing of subjects in grade 12 would benefit the learners while 35% disagreed. Those who were undecided made 31.5% of the respondents. The results imply that the changing of subjects was not beneficial to the learners.

Question 79: Teachers help learners to deal with the previous years' work.

Table 81: Teachers helping learners to deal with the previous years' work

Scale	Number of Respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	22	11.1
Agree	107	54.0
Undecided	41	20.7
Disagree	27	13.6
Disagree Strongly	1	0.5
Total	198	100

The above table shows that 65.1% of the respondents agreed that the teachers helped learners with the previous year's work while 14.1% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 20.7% of the respondents. This implies the majority of teachers in the sampled schools did help the learners with the previous years' work. Learners doing new subjects for the first time in grade 12 had missed on

foundational knowledge acquired in the lower grades. It would be difficult for these learners to cope on their own without additional support from the subject teachers.

Question 80: Changing of subjects in the grade 12 year helps to improve the quality of the results.

Table 82: Changing of subject v/s quality of results

Scale	No of Respondents	Valid %
Agree Strongly	15	7.7
Agree	42	21.6
Undecided	52	26.8
Disagree	59	30.4
Disagree Strongly	26	13.4
Total	194	100

Missing frequency is 4.

Of the respondents, 29.3% agreed that the changing of subjects in the grade 12 year of the learner, helped to improve the quality of the results while 43.8% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 26.8% of the respondents. The results imply that the changing of the subjects in the grade 12 year of the learner did not have a noticeable impact on the quality of the results. One may only assume that the said change is not motivated by the desire to improve the quality of the results but by the desperate attempt to improve the overall pass percentage.

14. Section N

Curriculum management

Section N was made out of question 81 – 87 which were meant for members of the schools management teams who are teaching grade 12.

Question 81: You have attended workshops on curriculum management during school holidays each year.

Table 83: Number of teachers and attendance of the curriculum management workshops

Scale	Number of teachers	Valid %
Agree strongly	9	9.3
Agree	33	34.0
Undecided	15	15.5
Disagree	34	35.0
Disagree strongly	6	6.2
Total	97	100

Only 43.3% of the SMT members agreed to have attended the curriculum management workshops on an annual basis and 41.2% totally disagreed that they attended the curriculum management workshops. Those who were undecided made 15.5% of the respondents. Those who did not attend the curriculum management workshops were therefore in the majority, especially if it assumed that the undecided group did not attend.

Question 82: The curriculum management topics discussed at the workshops are important for the SMTs.

Table 84: Importance of curriculum management workshop topics to the SMT

Scale	Number of SMT members	Valid %
Agree Strongly	11	11.7
Agree	46	48.9
Undecided	24	25.5
Disagree	9	9.6
Disagree Strongly	4	4.3
Total	94	100

Of the respondents, 60.6% agreed that the topics that were discussed at the curriculum management workshops were important for the SMT members to function effectively. Those who were undecided made 25.5% of the respondents. This implies that they could not confirm whether these workshops were important for the SMTs to function effectively. The table shows that 13.9% of the respondents

disagreed with the statement. It can thus be assumed that the topics presented in the workshops were valuable to the SMT members.

Question 83: The roles and responsibilities of the SMT members with regard to curriculum management are discussed at the workshop.

Table 85: Workshop on roles and responsibilities of the SMT

Scale	Number of SMT members	Valid %
Agree Strongly	7	7.5
Agree	43	46.2
Undecided	31	33.3
Disagree	10	10.8
Disagree Strongly	2	2.2
Total	93	100

The above table shows that 53.7% of the respondents agreed that the workshops unpacked the roles and responsibilities of the SMT members while 13.0% of them felt that the workshops did not touch on the roles and responsibilities of the school management teams. Those who were undecided made 33.3% of the respondents. The majority of the respondents (53.7%) therefore agreed that the workshops capacitated the SMT members on their roles and responsibilities.

Question 84: The workshop improves the SMT's ability to manage curriculum.

Table 86: Impact of curriculum management workshop on SMT's ability to manage curriculum.

Scale	Number of SMT members	Valid %
Agree Strongly	9	9.6
Agree	40	42.5
Undecided	31	33.0
Disagree	13	13.8
Disagree Strongly	1	1.1
Total	94	100

The above table shows that 52.1% of the respondents agreed that the curriculum management workshops helped to improve the ability of the SMTs to manage the curriculum while 14.9% did not agree. Those who were undecided made 33% of the respondents. This implies that the majority of the members of the SMT in the sample

schools agreed that the workshops helped to improve their ability to manage curriculum.

Question 85: SMTs are asked to submit topics on which they require training and development before the actual workshops.

Table 87: Submission of topics for the workshops

Scale	Number of SMT members	Valid %
Agree Strongly	5	5.5
Agree	19	20.8
Undecided	21	23.1
Disagree	31	34.1
Disagree Strongly	15	16.5
Total	91	100

The table shows that 50.6% of the respondents disagreed that SMTs were consulted on their training and development needs. Those who agreed made a total of 26.3%. Those who were undecided made 23.1% of the respondents. The majority of the respondents therefore disagreed that the SMTs were first consulted on the submission of the topics on which they needed to be developed.

Question 86: The school has crafted intervention programmes to assist progressed learners.

Table 88: Strategies to assist progressed learners.

Scale	Number of SMT members	Valid %
Agree Strongly	12	12.8
Agree	46	48.9
Undecided	9	9.6
Disagree	24	25.5
Disagree Strongly	3	3.2
Total	94	100

The above table shows that 61.7% of the respondents agreed that the schools crafted the intervention programmes for helping progressed learners. In the same breath, 28.7% of the respondents disagreed that there were such intervention plans in their schools. Those who were undecided made 9.6% of the respondents. It

implies that the majority of the teachers in the sample schools developed the intervention programmes for helping the progressed learners.

Question 87: Progressed learners contribute to the high failure rate in grade 12.

Table 89: Progressed learners and the failure rate

Scale	Number of SMT members	Valid %
Agree Strongly	42	45.6
Agree	31	33.7
Undecided	11	12.0
Disagree	6	6.5
Disagree Strongly	2	2.2
Total	92	100

The above table shows that 79.3% of the respondents agreed that progressed learners contributed to the high failure rate in grade 12. Those who disagreed made 8.7% of the respondents. Those who were undecided made 12% of the respondents. This effectively means that progressed learners are a big factor in the pass and failure rate in the schools. It is interesting to note that in table 88 above, 61.7% of the respondents had affirmed that their schools had crafted the strategies to assist progressed learners. The majority of the respondents (79.3%) also admitted that the progressed learners contributed to the high failure rate in the grade 12 national senior certificate examinations.

5.5.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

This section deals with the analysis of data gleaned from the interviews conducted with the principals and the SMGDs. It is also based on the last two questions of the questionnaire (no 88 and 89) that all the grade 12 subject teachers were asked to respond to. The interview questions for the principals were based on the fourteen strategies that are also contained in the questionnaire that was completed by the grade 12 subject teachers. Each section will be dealt with in detail here.

The raw data from the transcripts of individual interviews was read repeatedly in order to identify the categories. By repeatedly reading the raw data and linking those with the research objectives helped the researcher to formulate the strategies. The

process involved preparing and organising the text first, followed by close and repeated reading, and the creation of categories. Out of the interviews conducted the following strategies were established:

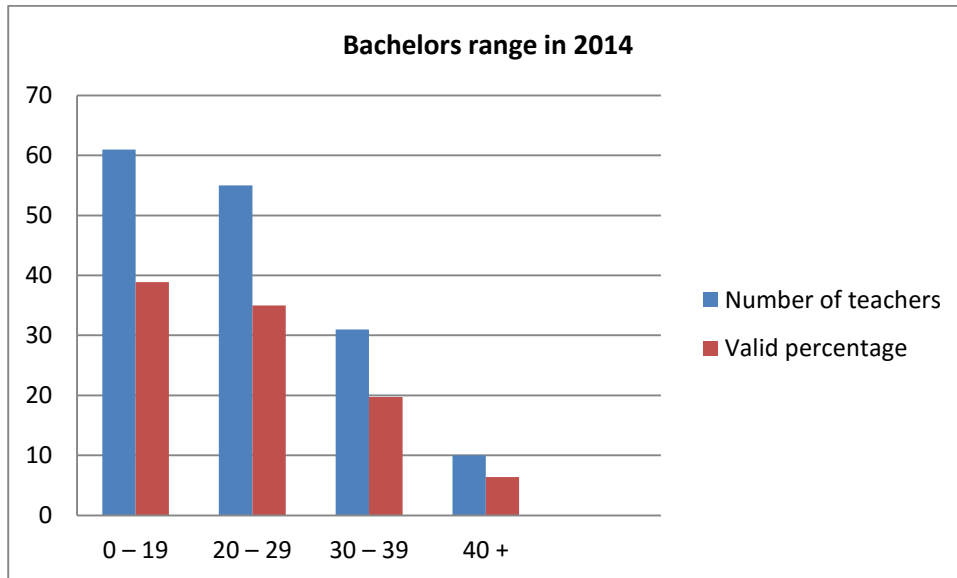
- The use of credible academic performance improvement plan;
- The consultative meetings with the school management teams;
- The use of item and error analysis approach;
- The professional learning communities;
- The role of subject advisors in the actual teaching and learning process;
- The setting of performance targets;
- The twinning of schools project;
- The Dinaledi schools project;
- Grade 12 camps or holiday classes;
- Strategies to assist progressed learners;
- Use of diagnostic reports;
- The extent to which ICT is integrated into the classroom;
- Curriculum coverage and
- Curriculum management.

The responses to the interview questions follow hereunder. Each response will be preceded by a brief explanation of what the question was about. The principals' responses will be dealt with first. They will be followed by the responses of the SMGDs. It became necessary to first ask a general question on whether all the principals understood the rationale for the introduction and implementation of the strategies by the Free State department of Education. The principals' response on this general question will be dealt with first.

This question wanted to determine if all the participants understood the reasons why the Free State department of education introduced the strategies. The literature study in the previous chapters revealed that many schools were exhibiting levels of performance that were below standard. There were too many schools that failed to obtain at least 70% overall pass rate and 30% bachelors pass rate. As seen in table 1 in chapter 4, there were too many schools whose results improved in one year and dropped drastically in the other year between the 2009 and 2014 academic years. The biographical data also revealed that 38.9% of the respondents indicated that the

bachelors pass rate in their schools ranged between 0 and 19% while 35.0% indicated that theirs ranged between 20 and 29%. Only 6.4% of the respondents indicated that bachelors pass rate in their schools was 40% and above. This demonstrates that the quality of the results has been very low as indicated below.

Figure 5: The range of bachelors as obtained by schools in 2014 according to the respondents



From the figure above it is clear that many schools obtained the bachelors pass in the range between 0% and 29% (cf. table 11). As explained there were very few schools that obtained 40% bachelors. Some principals thought that the competition among the provinces led to the barrage of strategies to improve the results. Others felt that despite the exponential increase in the pass rate, the quality remained poor. One principal mentioned that the improvement in the grade 12 results in most of the township schools could not be sustained over two to three years without taking a serious dip. Some believed that too much focus on the grade 12 results put pressure on education authorities to embark on the various improvement strategies. One interviewee even remarked that little attention is paid to the high failure rate in the lower grades. The other principal commented that there were just too many learners in grade 12 who actually do not deserve to be there. These learners are there by default since they were progressed and never really passed on their own.

There was a general consensus that the results in many schools were dropping to unacceptable levels and that there were schools that continued to underperform despite the many attempts by the department of education in the Free State to

improve. The same goes for the poor quality of the results. The provincial strategy on learner attainment as discussed under literature review (chapter 4) aptly spells out the reasons why the improvement strategies were introduced. Many of the reasons advanced by the literature study match with those that are mentioned in the provincial strategy on learner attainment document.

The following interview questions were based on the intervention strategies used by the Free State department of education to improve academic performance in grade 12:

5.5.2.1 The use of credible Academic Performance Improvement Plan (APIP).

This interview question focused on the use of academic performance improvement plan as a strategy to improve learner performance. It was necessary to establish if all the underperforming schools submitted the plan as required by law, how they used the plan to improve the results and whether benchmarking in the subjects was embraced by the teachers and the school management teams. Submission of the academic performance improvement plan is viewed as very important by the Free State department of education. It is therefore expected that all the underperforming schools must submit the plan in line with the South African Schools Act, section 58B (RSA 1996).

On whether the schools submitted the academic performance improvement plan to the head of the department, six principals indicated that they did. Many of them emphasised that they submitted because it was a requirement in the South African Schools Act and that it was in fact of no value to them. One interviewee commented, *“The plan was submitted. It is only for compliance. Not that it helps. A lot of time goes into doing this improvement plan”*. The other one complained about the too many documents that get submitted to the department whose value they do not come to see. The other principal remarked that the plan was submitted even though there had been no formal feedback obtained from the department. *“We do not know whether the plan is acceptable or whether we must make some amendments,”* remarked the principal. All the principals who were interviewed agreed that they had submitted the plan for the sake of compliance.

The principals were further asked about the usefulness of the academic performance improvement plan to learner attainment. This plan sheds light on the school's performance targets per subject, the overall benchmark the school is expected to achieve, the subject specific content challenges, the matching intervention strategies and the timeframe in which the problems shall have been addressed.

There was a general agreement among all the interviewees that the academic performance improvement plan is not so useful in helping schools to improve learner performance. They agreed that there is not enough time to do it and that it encroaches on the teaching and learning time. They viewed the plan as just a record of what was not treated and what had to be done for the results to improve but in reality there was no time to do all those things. All the principals confirmed that they received no feedback on the issues that they had raised in the plan. They were not assisted on the challenges that they raised in the plans. All the ten principals interviewed emphasised that if used properly the plan might help teachers to organise their work accordingly and plan well for the underperforming learners.

One principal indicated that the plan was not used properly in the school and it thus became a time waster. This principal agreed that when used properly it had the potential to help with improving learner performance. If the plan was used as it should, the teachers would know which sections of the work would be prioritised and within how many days or weeks. The other interviewee indicated that it took too long to put the plan together and in many instances teachers were withdrawn from their classes yet there were no official inputs from the district. The need to submit is no longer urgent and nothing motivates the schools to continue with this strategy.

Some of the verbatim responses are given hereunder:

“The department does not give us feedback on what to correct in the plan, whether the plan meets their expectations or not”.

“The academic performance improvement plan cannot be directly linked to learner attainment, teachers must teach, HODs must control and monitor the work of teachers, the plan may or may not be there. If it is there and it is done correctly, it may help with the organising of information and not with the results”.

“Many times the plan focuses on the work that has already been completed. The teachers work tirelessly under pressure in order to complete the syllabus. Nobody wants to waste time on last term’s work when there is too much to deal with in the present”.

“It is an administrative document that we do because the department wants us to submit. We believe that learners must be taught in the classroom. These documents do not even reflect the factual situation. How does one reconcile the diagnostic report done with the grade 12 learners of the previous year with the current learners? Teachers must teach, make corrections after evaluating the learners’ work and continue with the work”.

The foregoing arguments presented by the majority of the participants are consistent with the results obtained under quantitative analysis on the credibility of the academic performance improvement plan. It can thus be concluded that the plan is not useful in helping schools to improve learner performance.

5.5.2.2 The consultative meetings with the School Management Teams.

This interview question was aimed at establishing whether the consultative meetings arranged by the district management team were worth the time or not. As explained earlier (cf. 4.4.2), in these meetings, the SMTs were expected to present the analysis of the term results, subject content challenges identified whilst the teachers were marking, the matching intervention strategies and the time within which the challenges would be addressed. The interviewer was looking for the usefulness of this intervention strategy by first looking into how schools prepared for the meetings and then on the views of the school leadership about the strategy.

Three out of ten principals who were interviewed rated the strategy highly, indicating that it really helped to keep the teachers and the SMT members on their toes. They worked hard to address the challenges experienced by learners knowing very well that they would be expected to account to the district leadership on the reasons for underperformance and what they did to remedy the situation. This finding implies that principals were satisfied that the district leadership was in fact doing what they as managers were supposed to be doing at all times. It is their responsibility to hold

the teachers accountable for their performance. Principals are duty bound to ensure that the learning outcomes are maximised at any particular point in the school.

The large majority of the interviewees cast doubt on the usefulness of the strategy. They felt that members of the district management team were not subject specialists and would therefore not comment appropriately on subjects' specific issues. A big part of the presentation dealt with subject specific content challenges that resulted in the low levels of performance. They felt that subject advisors would have been the most relevant officials to lead the consultative meetings. They also said that these meetings did more harm than good to the teachers' and principals' self esteem and integrity. Principals were told in the presence of their colleagues when their presentations were out of line. What is worse was that principals were also admonished in the presence of their down line staff, teachers and HODs. Teachers were also exposed on the weak knowledge of the subject when their shortcomings were pronounced in that public platform. There was a mutual feeling amongst the principals that the corrections and the comments had to be written down and be sent to the respective schools. They also felt that nothing was done to ensure that the recommendations were followed in the schools. The exercise became a sheer waste of time and resources. There was public admonishing of the teachers and the SMT members and it ended in the said meetings. There were no officials that were tasked to ensure that the recommendations were implemented. One principal argued:

“Apart from exposing the weaknesses of others in full view of others, putting a lot of pressure on the teachers and the HODs and causing a waste of teaching and learning time, these meetings added too little to the results. They are surely not that helpful.”

What was really missing in the responses on how the schools prepared for the consultative meetings was the ownership of the final product by all the stakeholders in the school. All the respondents indicated that first the subject teachers did the subjects improvement plans that were then submitted to the SMT for consolidation. From there they were taken to the consultative meetings. It was critical for the final product to be taken back to the team for editing and final inputs. Many of the presentations were not quality assured and lacked professional appeal. In many instances the principals found themselves having to present concepts that they knew

nothing about and were in some instances even unable to pronounce correctly or even correct the spelling mistakes. It implies that the principals did not necessarily engage the teachers on the content challenges and their suggested solutions except when they were called to do so by the district management. This strategy was not adopted in the schools.

The above findings from the principals are corroborated by the quantitative analysis in tables 20 - 25 above. It has been shown that 41.6% of the respondents did not believe that the consultative meetings were helpful in guiding the teachers on how to account for the learning outcomes. It has also been demonstrated that 29.9% of the respondents disagreed that these meetings helped in improving the performance of the teachers. The overwhelming majority (55.4%) of the grade 12 subject teachers indicated that the consultative meetings resulted in the loss of teaching and learning time. This was also found in the literature study that it became necessary to withdraw the teachers from the classes to come and complete the templates needed for the presentations. Only 45.0% of the respondents agreed that the very presentations were a true reflection of what happened in the school. This implies that the teachers believed that the information assimilated for presentation to the district leadership was flawed and did not necessarily portray what actually happened with the strategies to assist learners at risk. Given the foregoing arguments, the consultative meetings in their current format cannot be considered an appropriate strategy to help improve learner performance.

5.5.2.3 The use of item and error analysis approach

As pointed out in chapter 4 (cf.4.4.3), item and error analysis is a strategy that was used to help teachers to identify the errors and the incorrect action. It describes how to correct the mistake or improve on the mistake or the inappropriate action and moves swiftly to the crafting of the improvement plan. Error analysis is the examination or the investigation of errors that learners commit and which have a negative impact on the process of learning. The error analysis informs the teachers about what the learners have already mastered and what they are struggling with. It is expected of all teachers to do the item and error analysis spontaneously during the evaluation of the learners work. The subject specific content challenges picked up

through the item and error analysis go into the academic performance improvement plan.

The researcher had established that the majority (58.5%) of teachers who participated in this investigation were highly experienced in the teaching of grade 12 as shown in table 7. It has also been established that 83% of the respondents had grade 12 plus a four year qualification, proving that most of the teachers were highly qualified. Given the above it would not be too much of a problem for the teachers to identify the subject content challenges and do a proper item and error analysis. Only 17.2% of the respondents could not identify the subject content challenges as depicted in table 14. From the preceding analysis it can be assumed that item and error analysis would not pose a problem to the grade 12 teachers.

The responses from the principals gave a different picture. All the principals felt that item and error analysis was the sole responsibility of the subject teachers. The correct implementation of the strategy rested between the subject teachers and the respective heads of departments. The responses of eight principals indicated that they were too reliant on the HODs to ensure that teachers identified the errors and put up the relevant intervention strategies. One principal indicated that teachers still did not do it correctly while one claimed that teachers attended to the errors during the extra classes. In the other response the principal only indicated that teachers had to submit plans with details on how to address the errors that were identified. One of the principals oversimplified the strategy by comparing it to the mistakes committed by learners that were dealt with when teachers provided them with the corrections. It never really occurred to this principal that there were vast differences between the errors and the mistakes committed by the learners.

5.5.2.4 The Professional Learning Communities

As pointed out under the literature study, the professional learning communities provide a platform for teachers, particularly if they believe that it will benefit their learners – where development involves the following: a focus on specific teaching and learning problems; opportunities for teachers to reflect on what they know and already do; opportunities for teachers to understand the rationale behind new ideas and approaches; to see theory demonstrated in practice; and to be exposed to new expertise; a collaborative culture, including shared beliefs, values, and vision, and

atmosphere of trust and respect. Teachers and other professionals who have interest in education come together to discuss teaching and learning strategies, subject content challenges and the learning environment. These professionals then decide on how to assist learners.

The large majority (9 out of 10) of the principals defined the professional learning communities as structures in which teachers come together to discuss subject content challenges, setting question papers and planning of the lessons. Only one interviewee had indicated that the structure must in fact include professionals like nurses, or other health professionals and any other professionals or academics who have interest in the education of the children. It is expected of these professionals to bring in their practical knowledge and skills that will enhance understanding in the different subjects. The bank manager would, for example shed light on what a cash flow statement is and the medical doctor would better describe the human anatomy or physiology.

All the interviewees were agreeable that their respective schools did not participate in the professional learning communities. They all agreed that there were no well structured and organised professional learning communities in their districts. The principals indicated that their grade 12 teachers were too busy to participate in the PLCs. They were involved in other programmes like extra classes and holiday classes that took most of their time. All of them also raised the problem of poor coordination and organisation. It seemed to them that the districts did not view the PLCs as important contributors to learner attainment. The districts left the structures to the lead teachers to arrange. This view was also captured in the literature study when it was stated that the subject advisors selected lead- teachers in their respective subjects who facilitated discussions on topics that presented problems, teaching approaches and methodologies for various concepts. This caused poor attendance to the PLCs meetings.

5.5.2.5 The role of subject advisors in the actual teaching and learning process.

The district strategy on learner attainment has specified that the subject advisors must organise start - up meetings in the beginning of the academic year to issue out the diagnostic reports in various subjects and to discuss the programme that shall ensue in the current academic year. There are also cluster meetings that focus on

the diagnostic reports on different subjects, the role of assessment in teaching and learning, how to set quality papers, quality moderation process and on subject policy discussions.

The questionnaire included several questions that were aimed at establishing whether the subject advisors were playing a decisive role in the improvement of learner performance. The teachers were asked if the subject advisors were ever involved in the actual teaching process, whether their involvement resulted in the improvement of the grade 12 results or not, or whether they trained teachers on setting quality assessment tasks. The investigation wanted to establish if the workshops conducted by the subject advisors were of benefit to the teachers and the school as a whole. The investigative results proved that the workshops arranged by the subject advisors were well attended with 95.4% of the respondents having agreed that they did attend (cf. table 62). The results also showed that the majority of teachers were in fact trained on how to set quality assessment tasks. Of the respondents, 58.4%, however, disagreed that the subject advisors were ever involved in the actual teaching of the learners. There were teachers who also felt that the subject advisors did not communicate new trends in the subject and in the teaching and learning methodologies as they were expected to. That made about 31.5% of the respondents (cf. table 32).

Subject advisors are considered as curriculum specialists who need to ensure that teachers are well capacitated on various aspects of the curriculum. They are expected to ensure that novice teachers are well capacitated in the teaching and learning methods, are able to set quality papers and are also able to deliver quality lessons to the learners. Subject advisors are also expected to communicate every new development in the subject policy and content to the subject teachers. It is therefore required of the subject advisors to regularly train and develop teachers in their respective subjects.

Whilst the majority of the teachers had indicated that they have attended training and workshops arranged by the subject advisors, all the principals interviewed affirmed that the workshops disrupted teaching and learning in their schools. One principal indicated that he had to release about five teachers all at once, two hours before the knock off time for three consecutive days to attend the workshops. The other

principal indicated that he also had to release the learners one and a half hour earlier in order to avail the classrooms for the subject advisors' workshops with the teachers. All the principals confirmed that, although well intended, the training and workshop sessions conducted in the afternoon encroach on the teaching and learning time. It was also confirmed in chapter 3, (cf. 3.3.11) that the inefficient use of time was the most prominent feature of many schools in South Africa. This is therefore also a feature of the district offices.

All the principals agree that the impact of training must be discernible in the quality of the assessment tasks given to learners. Teachers who are well trained must be able to set the assessment tasks of high cognitive demand inclusive of all the levels of the taxonomies. Quality assessment is necessary to enhance the quality of teaching and learning process. It is evident from the literature study that those trainings did not impart the necessary skills that teachers required to set quality assessment tasks. Learners found it difficult to respond to questions of high cognitive level (cf. 3.3.6) although the responses from the questionnaire indicated that 95.5% of the teachers in the sample schools claimed to have attended the workshops on the use of the diagnostic reports in assessment and on how to set quality question papers. It can be concluded from the foregoing discussion that the training and workshops arranged by the subject advisors did not produce the desired effect despite being attended by the majority of teachers from the sample schools.

All the principals who were interviewed indicated that the subject advisors did not play any significant role in the teaching of their grade 12 learners. Eight out of ten principals further intimated that the subject advisors did a lot of administration during their visits to the schools. They were said to be looking a lot more into the subject portfolios, the policy documents and the number of written activities. These principals felt that the subject advisors did not help to address the current problems experienced in the subject. One principal commented on the number of subject advisors in their education district: "*Subject advisors are too few to make any visible impact, for example there are two Mathematics subject advisors for the FET band that I know. With so many schools and so many problems it is just too much to ask from them. We see one subject advisor once in a while at our school*". Their emphasis on the administration led to the improvement in the organisational aspect

of the subject. Teachers had well arranged files with indices and all the requisite subject documents.

Half of the principals felt that there was somehow duplication of roles in that whatever the subject advisors came in to check was the HODs primary responsibility. The HODs had to check on the number of written tasks, the quality of the tasks and whether the learners work had been marked or not and then take appropriate action. In one instance the report left by the subject advisor was not in tandem with that of the head of the department. In this case the teacher was commended for the up to date work by the subject advisor. The HOD's findings were the exact opposite, with the teacher having fallen behind with the work. Three interviewees mentioned that the most helpful subject advisors in their schools were those of Mathematics. They helped with the teaching of learners and their visits were regular. The interviewees were agreeable that the subject advisors were not working at the same level, with few of them having a pronounced impact in the actual teaching and learning process. One principal remarked: *"Many of the subject advisors did not really visit the school for the past year and in the first five months of the current academic year"*. One other principal indicated that the subject advisors did not have the same impact and they did not work in concert. It appeared as if they came from different supervisory offices.

The majority of the principals felt that the subject advisors were not helpful in teaching and could not therefore be directly linked to learner attainment. Most of the principals indicated that subject advisors did not visit the schools regularly and when they did, they focused mainly on the administration of the subject. The findings of the ministerial task team on moderation of school based assessment also found that assessment tasks in most cases were based on past question papers, which indicated a lack of confidence in setting their own tasks (DBE 2011:37). It further established that the assessment tasks set by teachers focused mainly on recall and did not address the higher cognitive level. These would not happen on a large scale if there was proper training on how to set quality and standardised assessment tasks. It is therefore clear from the above findings that the role played by the subject advisors needs to be redefined.

5.5.2.6 The setting of performance targets

The schools set the performance targets in the different subjects. The motive is to encourage teachers and learners to raise their levels of performance. As pointed out in chapter two (cf. 2.4.4), South Africa has a well established internal benchmark for learner performance at the top end of the school system. These are measures or indicators of what the individual school wants to achieve in terms of improvement in performance. The schools are given the minimum targets by the districts. They are then expected to set their individual schools targets taking utmost care that they should never set anything lower than what has been mooted.

The researcher established that 54.4% of the respondents affirmed that they never really set the targets in their subjects (cf. table 13). Eight out of ten principals interviewed were also not positive about target setting in general. They indicated that the link between the learner performance and the targets was not so discernible. They felt that the targets had been set but the results did not improve.

One interviewee raised the point that teachers often chased the targets and neglected other important aspects of the teaching and learning process, like the extent to which learners grasped the learning content and the quality of the assessment tasks given to learners. Much more work was given to learners with no due regard of whether they understood or not. The teachers became desperate to complete the syllabus, trying by all means to avoid being admonished for lagging behind. The interviewee contended that some teachers lowered the quality of assessment tasks thus making it easier for learners to score high marks and only to be embarrassed by the high standard of the external papers in the end. One interviewee said that the targets were in fact imposed on the schools by the district. This was done without due regard for the contextual factors in the school. The available human resources, the number of learners, the availability of learning and teaching support material and the infrastructural needs of the school were often ignored when the targets were imposed by the district. In the other instance the interviewee disclosed that one teacher went on a long incapacity leave and they struggled to get a substitute and learners were not taught. There was no possibility of internal reshuffling as there was no one who could teach the subject in the school at the time. In that case, the school was still expected to achieve the set

performance target. The other interviewee agreed that the targets were important as they were a good reminder of how the teachers were doing in their subjects. Without the targets, the teachers would relax, so said the respondent.

The following is a verbatim response on setting the performance targets in low performing subjects:

“Targets are set regularly and the results do not improve. There are no consequences if targets are not met. There is in fact an incentive for not meeting the targets – one teacher from this school was recruited to go and teach at the camp during the school holidays and received a stipend yet the teacher failed learners at the school”.

One principal acknowledged that the targets helped them to raise their game. This principal confirmed that half the time the targets were not realistic and that the schools struggled to reach them. The credibility of the strategy was brought into disrepute by the allegation that teachers who did not meet the targets at their own schools were elevated and sent to the district organised classes to offer the lessons. One principal remarked about the origin and the ultimate use of the targets:

“The district sets the targets and prescribes them to us. The targets must actually be set from within the school, taking into account the contextual factors. Yes, during the analysis of results, the SMT reflects on the set targets. We work towards them. There is no other importance except to gauge our performance against them”.

There was consensus among the interviewees that schools must be allowed to set their own performance targets considering their individual circumstances. It is not necessary for the district to impose the targets on the schools. Schools must be held accountable on the targets they set on their own as one principal alluded to the fact that there are no consequences when the targets are not met.

5.5.2.7 The twinning of schools project

Twinning is about making it easier for the teachers to create and share knowledge about what works in the classroom, to learn from each other’s experiences and to find solutions to common problems. It is also about sharing good management and leadership practices. Twinning is important for the districts as it inculcates the spirit

of working together and it reduces unhealthy competition amongst schools. However 57.3% of the respondents in the questionnaire indicated that their learners did not benefit from the twinning of schools project and it did not, therefore, contribute to the learning outcomes (cf. table 46).

All the principals who were interviewed agreed that there was no twinning in the districts. All of them understood what twinning was all about. One principal explained that real twinning had an agreed upon schedule that included interchanging of teachers, sharing of expertise in curricular and extra – curricular activities and sharing of educational facilities for the benefit of the participating schools. There was a mutually beneficial relationship between the participating schools. The other principal mentioned that the only time that they were with other schools in a joint programme was at the learning centre or at the camps organised by the district. The other principal pointed out that the district had never communicated their expectations in so far as twinning was considered. It is therefore, a concept that is not clearly understood by the SMTs. This strategy is not effectively used in the Free State department of education. Principals were agreeable that twinning would result in the sharing of good practices and resources that would benefit many schools in the process. The practice would surely lead to improved performance all round.

5.5.2.8 The Dinaledi schools project.

As pointed out in the literature study in Chapter 4 (cf. 4.4.13), the Dinaledi schools Project was established in 2001 as a strategy aimed at improving on the quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics and Physical Science and in increasing the number and quality of learner passes in the said subjects at Grade 12 level by providing a cost effective way of channelling scarce resources in the context of competing priorities. These schools are in a better position to produce quality results than those without the resources. The teachers were asked if they were aware of the project taking place in their schools and what was its overall impact on the learning outcomes. The interview with the principals wanted to verify the same information as above. The responses to the questionnaire showed that 48.5% of the teachers who participated in the study indicated that the Dinaledi schools project was of no benefit to their schools. They indicated that the project did not help improve learner attainment. Only 16.8% of the respondents affirmed that it had been useful in their

schools (cf. table 42). It was expected of the Dinaledi schools to also act as resource centres to their neighbouring schools with learners from underprivileged background.

Four out of ten principals who were interviewed indicated that their schools were not participating in the Dinaledi schools project and they were not even aware which schools were participating in the project. Six of the respondents confirmed that their schools were participating in the project. They further indicated that their schools received teaching and learning equipment in the form of science kits as a result of being in the programme. Teachers in the schools were therefore able to conduct the experiments and made their lessons interesting for learners. One participant indicated that the Mathematics and Physical Science end of the year results had improved significantly over the years. One principal indicated that although the equipment was supplied, the teachers were not trained on how to use it. This implied that the equipment gathered dust and had not been used to the benefit of the learners at the school. One principal indicated that they were never asked to assist any other school with equipment. No other school had ever asked to use their laboratory nor borrowed anything from them. The general feeling amongst the six was that the project was helpful and had the potential to improve the quality of the results once all the resources were put to good use.

5.5.2.9 The grade 12 camps or holiday classes

The holiday classes and the camps are the most preferred intervention strategies in the districts. Learners are ferried to the schools with hostel accommodation and they stay there for two to three weeks. The subject advisors and teachers from the well performing schools or the best teachers in the subjects are recruited to go and teach at these camps. The learning centres, where learners from different schools are also made to attend at one chosen school as day scholars, are also run during the school holidays. There are at the same time, schools that hold their own holiday classes at their schools or at a camp that they shall have organised on their own. The camps led and arranged by the districts are funded by the provincial department. The same goes for the learning centres.

The principals were asked if their schools were part of the camps or the holiday classes, what exactly happened during those classes and what were the advantages and the shortcomings of this strategy in particular. All the principals indicated that

their learners did attend the holiday classes, whether they were school based or the camps that they did on their own or those arranged by the department. They further indicated that the classes were aimed at revision, treating previous years question papers, continuation and preparing learners for the examinations.

There were more responses on the shortcomings of the strategy than on the advantages. One principal commented that there were too many subjects that were done at the camps to the extent that they did not look different from the normal school day. The respondent went further to say that sometimes some learners were not taught because of the subject combinations that clashed. These were subject splits in the time table that differed from one school to the other depending on the subject streams. One other principal explained that their learners were taken to a learning centre which did not have a full complement of teachers. There were periods when there were no teachers and learners were left on their own. In the other subject there were just too many learners. Some of the teachers were not the best as promised. Learners were taught things that they already did at their school, because the other schools were not there yet. This principal suggested that better coordination and communication would help. The other principal commented on the hectic nature of the extra classes programme. The fact that learners had to attend throughout the school holidays, during weekends and in the afternoons was very exhausting for them. This left the learners with no time to study on their own or do a self evaluation to determine how much of the work had been grasped. The principals professed that the teachers chased the syllabus more than teaching in such a way that the learners acquired the requisite knowledge. The main focus became that of preparing the learners for the examination.

Two of the principals remarked about poor learner attendance and the availability of the teachers. The teachers abandoned their learners and went to the centres where they were paid a stipend. This left their own learners without teachers or left the holiday classes at their respective schools in disarray. One principal expressed concern about the department's reluctance to allow the schools to arrange their own holiday classes. This principal felt that schools had to be supported on their own initiatives. The learning centres got too overcrowded; some teachers were not really the best that one could get. The feeling was that schools had to be allowed to do the

classes on their own so that they could concentrate on the challenges that their learners experienced during the previous term.

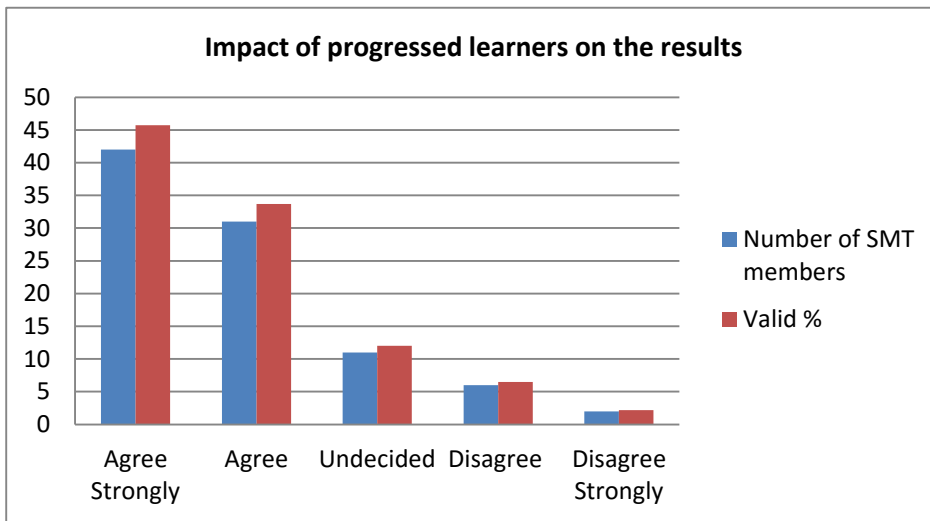
There was consensus among the principals that the holiday classes and the camps arranged by the districts had too many teething problems including, but not limited to, overcrowded classrooms, too many subjects manifesting in time tabling problems, shortage of teachers, poor performing teachers being recruited and discipline problems presented by learners from other schools. It would therefore be advisable to allow schools to do their own arrangements. All the schools needed financial assistance, close monitoring and support from the districts.

5.5.2.10 Strategies to assist progressed learners

The recent phenomenon that had a huge impact on the grade 12 national senior certificate results is the progressed learners in the FET band. In terms of the national policy pertaining to the progression and promotion requirement of the national curriculum statement for grade R – 12 (DoE 2001), a learner is allowed to fail once in a phase. A learner who shall have failed grade 10, for example, may get through to grade 12 without passing either grade 10 or 11. This learner is allowed to fail grade 10 and 11 but will be progressed to the next grade as he or she is prohibited from doing more than four years in a phase. In recent times many such learners found themselves in grade 12. In this grade the progressed learners are expected to pass the examination.

With the resurgence of the policy on progression, especially in the FET band, the teachers were left wanting. They have not been capacitated to deal with the big number of progressed learners, especially in grade 12. The number of progressed learners who participated in the National Senior Certificate examination in the Free State province in 2014 stood at 3913. This made up 14.8% of the total number of candidates who sat for the final examination (FS DBE 2015). About 50.9% of these learners failed their national senior certificate examination. This resulted in more than 5% drop in the Free State pass rate in 2014. It effectively means that the cumulative effect of the progressed learners on the pass rate and on the quality of passes cannot be ignored. There needs to be dedicated strategies to assist these learners.

Figure 6: The impact of progressed learners on academic results



The figure above illustrates that the majority of the respondents agreed that progressed learners pulled the results down. The principals were asked if they had strategies that were specifically aimed at helping the progressed learners. It was also important to establish if those strategies had an impact on the results. The problems posed by the progressed learners came out in the majority of responses from the interviews with the principals. Others mentioned that the progressed learners made up a big part of the numbers in the grade 12 class. If the teachers were not capacitated to deal with increased numbers in grade 12, the problem was compounded by the fact that the majority of those learners did not necessarily meet the minimum promotion requirements. They were there by default. They struggled to master the learning content in the previous grades hence they got progressed.

Progressed learners posed a different challenge to the grade 12 teachers and the SMT. They experienced knowledge gaps along the way up to grade 12. They therefore lacked foundational competences required in the grade 12 class. They needed special individualised attention and monitoring. The teachers were unable to provide such specialised support because of the limitations of time and the scope of work that they had to handle in grade 12. These learners also posed discipline problems since they struggled to cope with academic content. Some of the principals indicated that many of these learners did not attend the extra classes and did not cooperate with the teachers as they should.

All the principals indicated that the department had never capacitated the schools on how to deal with the progressed learners. The schools were expected to develop intervention strategies to help these learners on their own. The principals also indicated that training on curriculum differentiation and on alternative methods of assessment would help the teachers to better deal with the progressed learners. The big problem would become the big number of learners in the classrooms. These strategies need classes with smaller number of learners. Unfortunately most of the teachers had not been trained on these strategies. As things stand, there are no clearly defined strategies to help progressed learners to achieve acceptable learning outcomes. This accounts for the negative impact on the national senior certificate examination results.

5.5.2.11 The use of the diagnostic reports.

In 2010 the Department of Basic Education, for the first time, published a diagnostic subject report which evaluated the performance of learners in the key subjects, highlighting the areas of weakness, with suggestions for improvement with regard to teaching and learning (DBE 2011:39). These diagnostic reports produce appropriate feedback necessary for the schools, district and the provincial offices. It therefore becomes mandatory for the teachers to use the reports when doing their lesson plans, assessment tasks and strategies to improve learner performance. The information can also be used to compile the subject improvement plans.

All the principals interviewed agreed that they received the diagnostic reports from the district officials and from the department of basic education website. They all agreed that if used properly and regularly the reports could help the teachers to prepare quality lessons and to set assessment tasks of high cognitive level. They also agreed that the use of the reports may lead to improved learner performance when they were integrated into the subject improvement plan and were used consistently throughout the academic year. Three of the principals interviewed indicated that the reports were given to the teachers to prepare their lessons and plan for struggling learners. It implied that the principals did not have systems in place to track the use of the reports. One principal admitted that it could not be told if the reports were in fact being used as they should. Everything depended on the

teachers and their HODs. Nothing in the school was there to show that the reports were being used.

A large majority of the respondents (83.3%) agreed that they had received the diagnostic reports from the districts and 62.7% confirmed that they used the said reports to prepare lessons. Out of the 83.3% who agreed to have received the reports, 58.2% of them also agreed that the use of the reports led to improved levels of learner performance (cf. tables 54, 55 and 57). The research conducted by the ministerial task team on school based assessment established that most of the assessment was based on the past years question papers. That also brought into question their confidence in setting their own assessment tasks. The literature study also discovered that the assessment tasks set by teachers were based on recall and were not of high cognitive level. The above corroborates the admission by the principals that there were no internal control measures to track the use of the diagnostic reports. It implies that the reports were not really used as it was purported by the teachers.

5.5.2.12 The extent to which ICT is integrated into the classroom

The introduction of ICT in the classroom is creating new ways for learners and teachers to engage in information selection, gathering, sorting and analysis. ICT also has the potential to enhance the management and administrative capacity of the school. As stated in the White Paper on e – Education the primary goal is to ensure that every South African learner in the general and further education and training bands will be able to use ICTs confidently and creatively to help develop the skills and knowledge they need to achieve personal goals and to be full participants in the global community by 2013 (DoE 2004: 12). The investigation sought to find out if the use of ICT in schools was helping to improve the learning outcomes and learner performance in general.

All the principals who were interviewed confirmed that the use of ICT in their schools did not take centre stage. The schools were not yet at a reasonable state of readiness and awareness for the effective use of ICT. The schools did not have proper infrastructure. The level of security at the schools was also not adequate, hence one principal indicated that the HeyMath laptops were stolen and were never recovered. The other two principals referred to the Mindset equipment that was

installed long ago and still was not functional. There was a problem of networking that affected few schools. Tablets were delivered and were not being used because of networking problems. Principals also mentioned the lack of technical and pedagogical knowledge and expertise that would otherwise delay the effective use of the technologies in their respective schools.

The statistics gleaned from quantitative analysis data also confirmed that the majority of teachers did not readily use ICT in the teaching and learning process. The majority of the respondents did not know about ICITISE (55.9%), Mindset (51.0%) and HeyMath programme (34.5%), while 18.1% of them indicating that the use of ICT did not help to improve the quality of the results (cf. tables 58 – 61). This emanates from the fact that these technologies were either nonexistent in their schools or they were not used for their intended purpose. It could also be that they were not capable of using ICTs. It could also be that those who were able to use it, could do so just to replicate the traditional mode of teaching, hence lacking innovation that could enhance learning and engage learners creatively.

All the principals were however alive to the fact that when used properly, ICT could have huge benefits for the learners and teachers alike. They all agreed that it could help increase the level of motivation among learners and their active participation in the learning process. The effective use of ICT encourages creativity among learners. The principals also agreed that learners using the technologies more often would acquire knowledge and skills. The learners' self esteem and responsibility could be improved by regular use of ICT in their schools. There was a general agreement among the principals that their teachers needed intensive technical and pedagogical development on the use of ICT in the classroom. They also indicated that they would need considerable financial backing since internet connectivity and telecommunication costs were just too exorbitant. It was their considered opinion that at that time, the use of ICT was not yet well integrated into the teaching and learning situation.

5.5.2.13 Curriculum coverage

Curriculum coverage refers to what a learner is required to encounter, study, practice and master. It entails taking decisions about what should be taught, how it should be taught and when it should be taught. The SMT plays a major role in monitoring the

effective implementation process. The members of the SMT must ensure that the teachers they supervise follow the work programme, adhere to the due dates, give assessment tasks, mark the tasks and give quality feedback to the learners. They need to further ensure that should a teacher fall behind with the pace setter, a catch up plan is developed, submitted and implemented (cf. 4.4.6).

The investigative questions on curriculum coverage sought to establish whether teachers attended training on the importance of curriculum coverage; whether attending the said training had an impact on the ability of the HODs to monitor and control the curriculum. It further sought to determine if the teachers were able to handle difficult sections of the curriculum after attending the development workshops on curriculum coverage. It also sought to determine whether training had capacitated the teachers and HODs to keep abreast with the work programme and do the catch - up plan should they fall behind for whatever reason.

Eight out of ten principals who were interviewed agreed that their teachers did complete the syllabus. Only two of them indicated that every year there were at least one or two instances where the teachers had fallen behind had occurred. One principal indicated that the previous year, the Mathematics teacher at their school was appointed to act as a principal and then had to attend a number of meetings and also did a lot of administration work. The teaching and learning time was compromised in the process. The principal described the Mathematics results as disastrous. It is those results that led the school to obtain about 40% overall pass rate in the grade 12 results. The responses submitted by the principal on the amount of work covered contradicted the finding by the ministerial task team that established that in many schools the teachers had too much work that was actually not covered and that led to poor learner performance (cf. 4.4.6).

The quantitative analysis data indicated that 58.5% of the respondents attended the curriculum coverage workshops while 50.7% of them agreed that they did find certain sections of the curriculum difficult to teach (cf. table 66 and 70 respectively). Finding some of the sections of the curriculum difficult to teach may lead to the delay in completing the syllabus. This significant finding also had a direct bearing on the quality of instruction, the quality of learning assessment and learning outcomes. This would call for external intervention from the subject advisors. The investigation has,

however, revealed that the subject advisors did not also service the schools in the manner that they should and that they did not visit the schools regularly. It has also been established that too big a number of subject advisors did not keep abreast with the developing trends in teaching methodologies and learning styles, yet they were expected to impart such knowledge and skills to the teachers. The data also revealed that 39% of the teachers agreed that they never submitted the catch up plans when they fell behind with their work (cf. table 73). This could imply that there were instances where the teachers would not complete the syllabus and they did not report about it. It would then be unknown to the principal and the management team. This also reflected on the type of management in the schools. It demonstrated that monitoring and control was not up to scratch. It can also be seen from table 74 that 40.2% of the respondents confirmed that their HODs did not do effective monitoring of the teachers' catch up plans. With serious lack of effective monitoring and control in the school, and with teachers not submitting the catch- plans when they drop behind with their work there are likely to be many instances where the required amount of work is not covered before the learners sit for the final examination.

There was over reliance on the HODs to ensure that the curriculum was covered in schools. All the principals indicated that it was the responsibility of the HODs. None of them had indicated that there were alternative control and verification measures. The HODs were not monitored closely by the principal and the deputy principals. Whilst some principals referred to the curriculum monitoring tool provided by the department, there were no defined internal control systems upon which the top management of the school would intervene. It implies that the data that are always submitted to the district on curriculum coverage cannot be relied upon. Table 24 confirms that 29.8% of the teachers who participated in the research indicated that they could not confirm that the presentations done during the consultative meetings were a true reflection of what actually happened in a school. The data on curriculum coverage was also presented in those meetings. The data also revealed that 25.2% of the respondents actually indicated that the information presented was not a true reflection of what happens in the school.

The above discussion cast doubt over curriculum coverage in the schools. Literature study has confirmed that the examination results were bound to improve with most of the curriculum being covered. One principal remarked that the curriculum is covered

once the learners have grasped and mastered all the concepts. In that way it cannot be said that completing the syllabus is synonymous to curriculum coverage. The best way to verify if curriculum was indeed covered is to look at the assessment results at the end of each term and at the end of the academic year. With the results and the levels of performance it can be concluded if curriculum was covered effectively or not.

5.5.2.14 Curriculum management

There are four most important elements of curriculum management that the SMTs need to look closely at: teaching, learning, assessment and resources. The school managers must ensure that teaching is prioritised by all in the school and the environment is conducive for learners to learn maximally. It is critical that the learners must be assessed regularly and be given quality feedback throughout the teaching and learning process. It is important for the SMT to ensure that there are adequate quality assurance protocols for all assessment processes in the school. The curriculum management process also entails the provision of teaching and learning resources by the SMT. Curriculum management process also entails the provision of skills development training for the teachers. This must be needs- driven and be relevant to the teachers development needs.

The principals were asked to confirm if their HODs attended training and development workshops regularly and if they were well capacitated to handle various curriculum management functions. Five out of ten principals confirmed that their SMTs did not attend any workshops in the last three or four years. Only two affirmed that their SMTs did attend the workshop recently, and the workshop dealt with curriculum coverage, aspects of monitoring and control, roles and responsibilities of SMT members and assessment for learning. Those whose SMTs never attended were of the view that it would have been beneficial to the school if they did. The way they organised their departments and how they monitored and controlled the work of the teachers would have improved. One principal remarked that it was highly regrettable that training and development of the SMTs was not prioritised in their district.

The foregoing arguments corroborate the findings under quantitative research. Table 83 shows that 41.2% of the SMT members who responded to the questionnaire,

either did not attend or were not invited to the workshops on curriculum management. These are SMT members from the underperforming schools who supposedly needed to be capacitated more on their roles and responsibilities. Whilst 60.6% of the respondents felt that the workshops were important for the SMTs, only 13.9% disagreed and 25.5% of them were undecided (cf. table 84). As depicted in table 86, the majority of the respondents (52.1%) agreed that the workshops helped to improve the ability of the SMTs to manage curriculum. Despite the relevance of the workshops to the SMTs, as revealed by the empirical data from the investigation, table 87 shows that 50.6% of the respondents claimed that they were not consulted nor asked to submit topics on which they needed training. Implied in this situation is that the workshops may be irrelevant in content and approach since they are not customised according to the training needs of the participants. It is the schools and the management teams who know the areas in which they need to be developed.

There was a general agreement among the principals that the curriculum management workshops are really necessary. The frequency of monitoring and control increases after the workshops. This is something that the SMTs can actually build on. The effect of lack of training and development is discernible on the way the schools are managed. It has been clearly stated in the literature study that poorly managed schools underperform at many levels.

5.5.3 Other views of principals emanating from the interviews

A lot of research on the causes of underperformance and inefficient intervention strategies pointed to inadequate curriculum coverage, the exponential increase in the number of progressed learners, lack of innovative ways of dealing with increased learner numbers in grade 12, and the changing of subjects in the year in which the learners are doing grade 12 as discussed in chapter three (cf. 3.2.6 to 3.2.12). Many principals raised questions about some intervention strategies and the nature and level of support provided by the districts. All the principals inadvertently referred to the above aspects when they responded to the interview questions. Their responses therefore strengthened the findings and discussions on the intervention strategies. Beneath follows a closer look at the responses provided on: the nature of district support, the impact of changing of the subjects in the year in which the learner is doing grade 12, the impact of the intervention strategies on the results and the

impact of increased learner numbers in grade 12. These were the responses to the concluding questions that the researcher resorted to when wrapping up interviews with the principals.

5.5.3.1 Support provided by the district towards learner attainment

The districts are guided by the provincial and the district strategy on learner attainment and the operational plan. Strategies to improve learner attainment are well explained in the documents mentioned above that are available in every district. The districts are expected to ensure that all underperforming schools implement learner improvement strategies.

District support entails school visits by the subject advisors, school management and governance developers (SMGDs), IQMS officials who focus on performance management and inclusive education officials who specialise on care and support for learners with special educational needs. The human resource must ensure that the schools are staffed correctly and the teacher development centre must cater for the training needs of teachers and must act as a hub for educational resources that schools may lend out when needed. The district is expected to assist schools with funds for catering of learners during the extra classes. Teachers' transport also needs to be catered for. The department has also incentivised teachers who participated in their extra classes programmes, a precedent that sometimes become unaffordable.

There were so many divergent views provided by the interviewees on the nature of support that the districts needed to provide to schools. The different views expressed are unpacked in this section. One principal indicated that the school survives very much on its own, without much support from the district. The school is said to be experiencing acute shortage of CAPS textbooks. The principal indicated that they received only 50% of their requisition. This shortage resulted in learners sharing some of the textbooks. It can, therefore, affect the overall performance of the school. Three out of the ten principals who were interviewed affirmed that there were just too many meetings that were arranged by the district. Some of the meetings took place during teaching and learning time. The quantitative analysis revealed that 2.6% of the principals were involved in the actual teaching and therefore had subjects that they offered. A small number of the respondents (4.6%) were deputy principals who

were also offering subjects at grade 12 level. The principals and the deputy principals interchangeably attended meetings called by the district at the expense of teaching and learning time. The districts advocated for the prioritisation of the teaching and learning time. The interviewees affirmed that that became a slogan with little significance especially when one looked at the number of times that principals were called out to meetings during teaching and learning time.

The other interviewee chose to comment about the too many interventions that one district in particular embarked upon in an attempt to improve the grade 12 results. This respondent argued that too many interventions reduced focus. The problem became the means of verification of the effectiveness of the strategies. It was the principals' concern that there were too many strategies that were not implemented to their final conclusion. Some were abandoned along the way even before their success rate could be determined. One principal suggested that it would best serve the schools if the districts could focus on few strategies, monitor their implementation, measure their impact and review them.

The other respondent indicated that the district imposed the strategies on the school without taking into consideration the circumstances peculiar to the school. If the school was taken to a camp, there had to be a thorough situation analysis to determine the real needs of the school for example which subjects needed to be taught and why; which parts of the work had to be treated; the subject combinations; the number of learners involved and their levels of performance and what will happen to the group that would not be taken to the camp. Because there were many schools attending a camp simultaneously, it would have been necessary to combine all the different needs submitted by the schools and find the middle ground. For example if one school had treated a topic and the other had not, it would be wise to ensure that both schools were accommodated in a way that would not waste time for the others. When one school was doing revision the other was taken through the outstanding lesson. The interviewees felt strong that the district support would be most appropriate if the strategies were discussed first and the inputs of the school were considered. Some felt that funding for the interventions was given to other schools and others in similar situations did not get it. They argued that there was no explicit formula that was used to divide the funds among the schools in an equitable manner. In that way the district support was viewed as disproportionate. There was a

strong feeling among the principals that the district must ensure that subject advisors visited schools regularly and that they should focus on the subject content. The funding and resources provided for the camps and learning centres should be provided equally to the struggling schools. The principals wish that the learning and teaching support material should be delivered in good time.

5.5.3.2 The impact of changing of subjects on the grade 12 end of year results.

As pointed out in the literature study (cf. 3.2.8) learners are allowed to change to new subjects in the year in which they are doing grade 12. The pertinent question is whether would such a change improve the learner's performance, or better still, would such a change improve the quality of the results of either the learner or the school?

The majority (90%) of the interviewees indicated that the strategy did not have any significant impact on quality of the results. They indicated that learners opted for the easier subjects like mathematical literacy and tourism that did not necessarily improve the quality of their results. The principals agreed that the changing of subjects in the year in which learners do grade 12 was not such a good practice and it had to be discouraged. They felt that it would benefit the learner and the school if it could be done in the year in which the learner was doing grade 11. By that time the learners would have an idea about their performance in, say Mathematics, Physical Science or Accounting.

The results of the interviews are supported by data gleaned from the questionnaire completed by grade 12 subject teachers (cf. question 77, table 79). Although 60.9% of the respondents agreed that the practice did happen in their schools, they were not necessarily in support of it. Of the respondents, 35% felt that the practice was not good for the learners (cf. table 80). Only 29.3% of the respondents agreed that changing the subjects in grade 12 had a positive impact on the quality of the results while 43.8% disagreed (cf. table 82). It implies that the teachers did not see the quality of the results improving as a result of the learners changing to new subjects in the grade 12 year. One principal remarked that although that was a policy directive they did not allow it at their school. Learners were properly guided on subject choices in grade 9 and were allowed to reconsider at the beginning of their grade 11

year. The results proved that changing the subjects in the year in which the learner is doing grade 12 does not bring any significant impact on the quality of the results.

5.5.3.3 The impact of the intervention strategies on grade 12 results.

The principals were asked to comment on the impact of the intervention strategies on learner performance and on the shortcomings and the strong points of the strategies. The responses indicated the different views that the principals had on the general impact of the strategies. Each response will be dealt with below. This is so because the respondents chose to respond on different intervention strategies. The principals' responses are summarised as follows:

- The impact has been tentative. The results have definitely improved although not as expected. The strategies must be according to the challenges experienced. For example, if the causes of underperformance are the teachers who are often absent from school or bunk classes, the strategic intervention must be aimed at dealing with the teachers in terms of the disciplinary code of procedures of the department, not taking the learners to camps to be taught by other teachers. In all likelihood, teaching learners for or on behalf of the teachers who are not committed to their work is not sustainable. If the causes of underperformance are considered and the intervention is provided based on the problem, the impact could be determined with some amount of precision.
- It is what is done during the interventions that would have an impact on the results. If teachers continue with normal teaching, which they do, the impact would be minimal. It implies that the extra classes are not necessarily used for performance enhancement but for continuation of teaching and for pushing the syllabus. The pressure put by the department on the schools and teachers result in them not teaching for understanding but for completing the prescribed work. The focus is mainly on covering the curriculum than on learning. The other principal pointed out that the extra classes are in fact not necessary unless the teacher was absent from school and needed to do some catch up.

- The strategies must be properly discussed and understood by whoever is expected to implement them. Strategies decided by the district and imposed on schools have many challenges. For example the teachers who are recruited at the camps do not necessarily produce good results at their schools, there is overcrowding at the camps, teachers are leaving their own schools to go and teach at the camps thus making it impossible for the schools to manage their own programme. Sometimes the stipend paid out to the teachers at the camps is more appealing than what they would get at their own schools. The eminent lack of buy-in from the school weakens the strategies.
- There had been a steady improvement in the results although the targets were not met. The benchmarks must not be imposed on the schools. The schools must be allowed to set their own targets. The setting of the targets must take into account the school's contextual factors. The learner discipline and commitment must also be taken into account as well as the experience of the teaching personnel and the previous years' results. The districts must endeavour to hold the schools accountable on the targets that are set. They must support the schools with the funds and allow them to follow their own programmes. Benchmarking is an internal process that takes into account the contextual factors found in the school. It is not about chasing numbers. The targets cannot be set solely on the expectations external to the school. The setting of the targets does not necessarily have an impact on the results.
- There are just too many interventions and they are being implemented and get abandoned half way through most of the time. Schools are not able to go through with one specific intervention whose impact can be readily measured. It is important to know which of the strategies are more effective than the others. It is also important to know which of the strategies are not too costly but are the most effective. Currently it is difficult to say which strategy is working better than others.
- Teachers must be trained on how to do item and error analysis in their subjects. This is a very good strategy, but teachers do not do it correctly. Others do not do it during the marking of learners' scripts. They wait until the end of the marking process. Teachers tend to confuse the mistakes

conducted by learners and the errors. Mistakes are often once off but the errors are those that learners commit consistently in their responses to questions. It is the errors that need to be analysed so that the intervention strategies can be developed.

- The learning centres and the extra classes are now replacing effective teaching and learning. Teachers do not do what they are supposed to do during the normal school hours. They carry the work over to the afternoons and to the weekends. This enabled the teachers to earn some extra cash. The focus must be on respecting the instructional teaching time than on the strategies. Teachers must be held accountable for the poor performance in their subjects. Coming up with the subject improvement plan must be mandatory for all the underperforming subjects.
- Twinning and professional learning communities need to be well defined and planned for. That is if they are going to be of any value to learner performance. Not in their present form. They are not well structured. They are left with schools to organise and lead. Teachers are overwhelmed and are kept busy at all times. The districts must take over the running of the programmes.
- The camps organised and arranged by the school have been very useful. The school governing body and the SMT are able to regulate the environment and ensure maximum involvement of the teachers and learners. When many schools are taken to the camp by the district, there are too many logistics involved like transport, recruitment of teachers, catering, learners' discipline, and different curriculum coverage levels. Under these conditions they are not at all helpful. Schools must submit their programmes to the department. The department must then monitor the implementation very closely.
- The interventions done by the school have had a positive impact since the amount of work done can be measured and verified. It has been extremely difficult to get reports from the district on the work covered at the camps and on whether learners have understood the work or not. Without the reports the teachers do not have the basis on which to continue. They are unable to build the momentum on what was taught at the camps. They are forced to continue with new work without evaluating the progress attained from the learning

centres or the camps. The teachers indicated that the writing of the reports requires a lot of time which they do not have.

- The strategies are too exhausting and the results are not forthcoming. Learners are spoon-fed to the level that they find it difficult to work on their own. Learners are not taught on how to set personal targets and work hard to attain them. The learners must be taught good study skills. They must be motivated to study hard on their own. They must be encouraged to use the library and the technologies at their disposal.
- When the district took the learners to the camp, the results improved only to drop the following year when that support was withdrawn. The camp really helped the school to improve and the district was supposed to have continued the following year. This implies that the school is heavily reliant on the external form of support. The internal capacity of the school to succeed on its own is not very effective.
- The strategies must not be used to make up for teachers' lack of commitment, teacher absenteeism or even for the learners' lack of commitment. They must be aimed at sustainable improvement of the results and quality learning outcomes.

5.5.3.4 Dealing with increased learner numbers in grade 12

The last interview question to the principals was on the impact of the increase in the learner numbers on the final examination results. All the principals agreed that there was a link between the results and the learner numbers. Classroom management became a challenge. There were more learners to handle in the class, making the individualised attention more challenging.

One principal remarked that when their learners were 175 their results dropped to 67%. The other one indicated that the school got 60% with 167 learners and the results improved to 70% when the learner numbers dropped. It is because the teachers struggled to handle the classes with big learner numbers. Learner discipline also becomes a factor. Too many learners in a class pose discipline problems which take more time to handle. The other principal explained that the reason would not necessarily be in the numbers but in the teaching styles and in classroom management. Teachers are not empowered to deal with the increased numbers, let

alone the varying of the teaching styles to suit the overcrowded classes. The numbers affect the interventions.

One principal commented that the increase resulted in too many learners in the subject groupings but it did not result in the increase in the resources. Too big classes do not allow the teachers to do differentiated teaching, hence the drop in the results. In many instances the huge increase came as a result of the increase in the number of progressed learners. These are learners who experienced knowledge gaps along the way. These learners struggled to cope with the rigorous grade 12 programme. They did not necessarily meet the promotion requirements in their previous grades. This makes the increase in numbers too difficult to handle.

5.5.4 The last two questions in the questionnaire

The grade 12 subject teachers were requested to respond to the two questions on the overall impact of the intervention strategies on the performance of the grade 12 learners and on the strong points or the shortcomings of any of the intervention strategies. The majority of the teachers felt that the strategies had a minimal impact on the results. They indicated that the strategies did not have an impact on the quality of the results. Many of the teachers felt that the learners were not committed to their work. It seemed as if many of them were forced to attend school. There was also a strong feeling that the strategies would not be needed if the teachers were fully engaged with effective teaching in their respective subjects. This strongly suggests that there are teachers who do not teach as expected.

Many teachers felt that twinning with well performing schools in an organised and controlled manner would help improve the results. They agreed that the sharing of subject information and teaching and learning resources will go a long way in terms of helping schools out of the underperformance bracket.

Most of the teachers also felt that the camps based at the school are more beneficial than those that take learners out of their schools. It is easier to measure the impact when the camp is school based than when learners are taken away. The teachers know the strength and the weaknesses of the learners and are able to address them

as the need arises. Learner discipline is dealt with effectively and immediately than when learners are away in the absence of their own teachers.

Many teachers commented more on the shortcomings of the strategies than on the strong points. The shortcomings of the different strategies are listed below:

- Most of the strategies are not school based. Learners are often taken away to camps and the learning centres, sometimes without the teachers from their own schools. The strategy does not take into account the contextual factors and the circumstances in the school. In that sense the strategy may be misplaced.
- There is no thorough situation analysis to determine the causes of failure and the areas that need attention. The subjects in which learners underperform in a particular school are not identified prior to taking the learners to the camp or the learning centre. This approach leaves the school poorer than before. The teachers are not developed on their areas of weakness. Their teaching approaches are not improved. Their content knowledge is not developed. The out of school strategies do very little to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school. In many instances the improvement attained as a result of such interventions would therefore not be sustainable. The results are bound to drop as soon as the support is withdrawn. This is due to lack of internal capacity to sustain the momentum created by the external interventions. Hence the popular outcry among the teachers that the schools must be involved when planning for external intervention is done.
- The subject advisors are said to have changed focus completely. They have deviated from their main responsibility of training and developing the subject teachers. They need to ensure that the teachers are appraised on the new developments in the subject, the new teaching and learning content and on the current developments in the subject. The development of the teachers would ensure that quality teaching and learning takes place. This would further ensure that learner performance improves. The fact that subject advisors are more interested in the administration of their subjects over and above the capacitating of the teachers weakens their strategic intervention. The teachers also pointed out that the subject advisors did not visit the

schools regularly. One teacher revealed that the subject advisor visited their school once in the previous year, during the moderation of the school based assessment marks.

- It is alleged that not all teachers who are recruited to teach at the camps are the best in the subjects. Some of them perform poorly in their subjects at their schools. There seems to be a tussle for teachers during the school holidays. Some schools want to hold on to their teachers for their own internally arranged classes, whilst on the other hand, the district would want the best performing teachers to join the camps and the learning centres. In the end some teachers look for the best paying option. This tussle ends up with some undeserving teachers being recruited as a stop gap measure.
- The SMTs are not always given feedback after the interventions by the district. There is no continuity in this approach. The learners attend the classes arranged elsewhere and return to their schools after two or three weeks. The schools would then continue with the teaching and learning process without considering whatever that was done at the camps. This is viewed as counterproductive by the teachers.
- Good strategies are rendered ineffective and less useful by the attitude of the learners. Many teachers indicated that most of the learners in whose name the strategies are implemented would not even attend the classes. Some of these learners are in fact those who were progressed to grade 12. In many instances there are no consequences for those who absent themselves regularly from the extra classes. One teacher commented that learners who need help the most do not pitch up. Teachers complained about lack of parental involvement in assisting the school by ensuring that their children honour all the programmes organised towards the attainment of the targets.
- Academic performance improvement plan creates a lot of paperwork for the teachers. As a result more time is wasted on paperwork than on teaching and learning. Teachers indicated that this plan is mostly done for the sake of compliance and it does not help to improve learner performance. The foregoing is supported by one teacher who wrote:

“The intervention strategies are always outlined, but they are not implemented in schools. Forms are just filled in and submitted to the district office. There is

no follow up from both the school and the district. it is actually a waste of time and it consumes a lot of time for teaching and learning. It is unnecessary paperwork.”

The popular view amongst the teachers is that the academic performance improvement plan is not done correctly and the content challenges are not always correct. The solutions provided do not always address the identified challenges. The consultative meetings can also be viewed along the same lines. These meetings are said to take a lot of time to prepare for. They tend to withdraw teachers out of the classes. Teaching and learning time is severely compromised in the process.

- Teachers take a lot of strain trying to ensure that the strategies are realised. Some of them have to supervise the learners until very late in the night. They are expected to mark the learners’ scripts, prepare the lessons for the following day and also do the interventions. This leads to teacher burnout.
- There is more emphasis on the extra classes than on effective teaching and learning during the prescribed notional time. One respondent commented on the many consultations and meetings that encroached on the teaching and learning time. This resulted in the actual teaching being relegated to the afternoon classes, weekends and holidays. Teachers are also beginning to have a feeling of entitlement. Some of them feel neglected when their schools are not included in the school holiday camps. One teacher wrote:
“The most devastating shortcoming with regard to the camps organised by the district is that our school (X Secondary) has not benefitted for the past four years. The learners have never been to a camp that is professionally run.”
- There are no specific instructions on how to assist the progressed learners from the department. Teachers have even suggested that the policy must be scrapped, especially in the FET band. It is difficult to employ the differentiated teaching approach in overcrowded classrooms. Many progressed learners display unacceptable attitude towards their work. They are not motivated to succeed.
- Item and error analysis is dubbed as one of the best intervention strategy. The problem raised by several respondents is that it is not well understood by many teachers. There is no intense monitoring and control of the strategy by

the departmental officials, especially the subject advisors. That was where they needed to focus on more than on the files and policies, so remarked one teacher.

- Many teachers pointed out that the time to implement the strategies is very limited. There are just too many topics to deal with. The introduction of CAPS has also put a lot of strain on the teachers. They need to master the changes and the additions so that they teach them well. There are too many subject content challenges experienced by learners. It is often expected that the challenges picked up in the first term be addressed in the second term. The very second term has its own new challenges. There is just no definite time to address the challenges. Focusing on the challenges lead to the teacher falling behind with the pace setter. There is not even enough time to see that the strategies are indeed working or not.
- The new teachers are never inducted. There are those who arrive for the first time and are allocated the grade 12 classes. There is no internal programme to induct the newly appointed teachers. The district does not also have such a programme. New teachers must fend for themselves.
- Strategies do not improve the learners' long term memory. The teachers are often desperate to complete the amount of work prescribed for the period. There is no focus on understanding of the work. The teachers are under pressure from the districts to complete the work before the end of August. Most of the subjects have their work schedules stretching up to the beginning of the last term. The extra classes are used for teaching. Learners are taught right into the examination period. In certain occasions the learners are even taught a day before they sit for the examination. They do not necessarily have time to reflect and do self evaluation. They do not know how much of the work they have actually grasped until they write the final examination. Learners are not allowed time and space to work according to their strength and pace. One teacher retorted that learners did get time to work independently or did some research on the topics that were taught. This over teaching tends to undermine the learners self esteem and self confidence.
- Grade 12 teachers who are made to go and teach at the camps are also made to neglect their own learners. It must be noted that the system does not

have teachers specifically for grade 12 only. The very same teachers are also responsible for teaching other grades and classes in the school. Many holiday classes do overlap into the third term in certain instances. The internal classes suffer in the process. This creates a further backlog in the content that will be carried over to grade 12. The schools also engage in this self defeating practice. In this way, the interventions will always be there.

- Without proper follow up good strategies go to waste. There are no measures in place to determine the impact of the strategies except for the final examination results. There are no checks and balances along the way. It is not known as to how one measures the impact of the academic performance improvement plan or even the consultative meetings conducted by the district management team.
- There is no proper asset control in the schools. The HeyMath laptops were reported missing in some schools and they were not recovered. The electronic devices in many schools are not functioning, with problems ranging from networking to cabling.
- Introducing new subjects in grade 12 does not always work in the best interest of either the school or the learner. In one particular case, the learners changed from Physical Science to Business Studies. The change was disastrous. Business Studies was not as easy as it appeared to be. The learners failed the subject at the end of the year. This change had a negative effect on the overall pass rate of the school.

5.5.5 Responses from interviews with the SMGDs (Circuit Managers)

Ten school management and governance developers (or the circuit managers as there was a title change in 2015), were interviewed in an attempt to get an overview on the impact of the strategies in the schools. The officials were asked three questions:

- What are the challenges experienced during the implementation of the strategies intended to improve the result;
- What strategies can be considered to be the most effective in supporting schools to improve learner performance and

- What measures are in place to evaluate the impact of the strategies on learner performance?

As pointed out under literature study the SMGDs have a responsibility to ensure that the strategies are developed and implemented in the schools. They are expected to monitor the effective implementation of the strategies in the schools and help them to develop credible improvement strategies with feasible and measurable outputs. The SMGDs are also expected to report to the district leadership on the challenges experienced by the schools when implementing the strategies. It is also their responsibility to assist in solving the problems related to all the strategies. This discussion explains why it was critical to elicit their views on the overall impact of the strategies. They form an important link between the department of education and the schools in many fronts. The three questions will be unpacked below.

5.5.5.1 Challenges experienced during the implementation of the strategies

About 50% of the participants referred to the fact that the strategies were too costly for the schools to bear, especially when the district instructed schools to go to a camp and it was not funding the transport, stipend for teachers and catering. This is what took place in the first term of 2015. It would have saved the costs for schools if the classes were held locally. In certain instances the schools did not receive funding from the district. In other cases some schools would be funded when others would not.

Four of the SMGDs interviewed explained that the learning centres were too often not well arranged. They were poorly coordinated with some subjects being without teachers at some points. Different schools being at different levels with the work programme made it difficult to synchronise and it was often left with the teachers to decide where to start. It was a bit challenging to prepare for four or five schools at one place, especially if the district did not do background check in advance. It became impractical to treat the learners as individuals and respect each learner for whom he or she is. The learning centres fell short of creating opportunities for all learners to participate in the activities. They often got too messy, with too many learners from many schools in one centre, making differentiated teaching improbable. Overcrowding weakened the effective teacher – learner interactions.

There are too many experienced teachers exiting the system and the new incumbents find it difficult to cope. There are no mentoring programmes in schools to help the novice teachers. There is, therefore, a limited pool of teachers to choose from hence in some cases the districts resort to incompetent teachers without a good track record or who produce mediocre results in their schools.

Three of the SMGDs revealed that the strategies were not discussed with them to the extent that they were able to make inputs. They often came in at a point where they had to monitor the implementation. It became a challenge to defend some of these strategies to the stakeholders in education and to the parents. It is a fact that some of the strategies are debatable and cannot just be imposed on the schools.

The schools are no longer allowed to employ their initiatives. They must participate in the strategies imposed by the district and they are expected to just comply. One SMGD commented that there were too many strategies that were being bandied about and imposed on schools.

The teaching and learning time is not used maximally with too many district activities undermining the instructional time. There are just too many factors that cause schools not to respect the teaching and learning time as they should. Teachers attend the subjects cluster meetings that are always scheduled for 14h00. The official knock off time in many schools is 14h30. The cluster meetings are not always held in the same town as the school. It becomes necessary for the teachers to leave an hour earlier for them to be on time for the meetings. This leads to many of them having to leave their classes unattended. One principal had indicated that there was a day when eight teachers had left earlier to attend a subject cluster meeting. With eight teachers having left earlier for the cluster meeting and four who were absent on that day, there was literally no effective teaching and learning going on in the school.

Because the teachers have not been capacitated on differentiated teaching strategies, schools are struggling with grouping of learners according to their levels of performance. Teachers also struggle with curriculum differentiation that takes the diverse learning styles and needs of learners into consideration. Training on curriculum differentiation would enable the teachers to modify the teaching methodologies, teaching strategies, assessment strategies and the learning content

in order to accommodate the learners. Modifying these elements of curriculum differentiation requires training.

Strategies are not developmental in nature. Teachers from other schools teach learners in the absence of their own teachers. The learners return to their schools at the end of the camps or the learning centres. It then becomes business as usual for the school and the teachers. The sharing of expertise and appropriate teaching and learning approaches do not take place. The teachers whose learners are taken to camps tend to relax knowing that someone will help teach their learners.

Learners are not given enough space and time to work on their own, practice and internalise whatever is learned. Afternoon classes or holiday classes focus on ordinary teaching, the same as during the normal teaching time. They do not focus on the challenging work where learners did not perform well. There is a rush to complete the syllabus without due consideration on whether the learners have understood or mastered the concepts that had been taught. The primary goal of the extra classes has been to teach to cover the syllabus. The focus is no more on the gaining of knowledge and acquiring of the skills but on literally preparing learners for the examination.

Learner discipline becomes a factor, especially when many learners from different schools are brought together. It sometimes happens that some schools do not even send teachers who would easily identify the ill disciplined learners and deal with them accordingly.

5.5.5.2 The most effective intervention strategies.

There is a general agreement among the SMGDs that the schools must be allowed to arrange their own intervention strategies. The common feeling is that the schools must discuss the planned strategies with the teachers, the school governing bodies and the parents. They must then cost them and submit to the department. The *costed* plans must include all the finer details about which subjects will be focused on and why, where are the classes going to be held, which teachers and how they were selected, which content will be treated and why, the tools to be used to measure the impact and the reporting template. The districts must evaluate the plans, check affordability and make recommendations and inputs and return to

schools for finalisation. The districts must then design the monitoring programme. The SMGDs feel strong about the schools taking the lead in doing own intervention strategies. The principals must be held accountable on the success or failure of the intervention programmes in their schools. The overriding principle must to first support the schools and hold the principals accountable.

Item and error analysis needs to be emphasised. Teachers must be well trained to do it. There must be strict monitoring and control of the strategy by the SMT and the subject advisors. The item and error analysis must form the basis for the interaction between the subject teachers and the subject advisors. This sheds light on the subject content challenges and the areas on which teachers need to be developed.

Nothing supersedes the effective teaching in the classroom by all the teachers. This must be the main focus. The things that take teachers out of the classrooms must be done away with. Teaching and learning time must not be disrupted by meetings and workshops. A seamless approach must be adopted to infuse strategies with normal teaching. Most of the school holidays must in fact be used for teacher development programmes. The districts must invest in the training of teachers on how to use the diagnostic reports to the maximum benefit of the learners.

Teachers must also be trained on the use of different technologies to enhance teaching and learning. Technologies such as the use of HeyMath programmes and Mindset must be integrated into the normal teaching process. All the strategies must be used to enhance effective teaching. The teachers must use the teaching and learning time to give quality assessment tasks and regular and immediate feedback to the learners. It is also important for the SMTs to be trained on the management of the strategies.

The camps must be organised for the most critical schools that had been trapped in the underperformance web for three to four years. These schools must be kept under the programme for two to three years. During that time, the necessary capacity must be built in the school. The schools must be able to continue after the withdrawal of the intervention programme. It must be compulsory for the teachers of such schools to attend the camps with their learners. Disciplinary steps must be taken against the SMT of the schools and the teachers if they fail to sustain

improved performance after being supported and developed for two to three years. The department must also consider changing the management of such institutions.

There must be effective and supervised afternoon studies where learners are allowed to form study groups and also study on their own. The schools must invest in teaching the learners good study skills. The learners must also be motivated regularly and self confidence must be instilled in them. The learners must also be guided on drafting their own study time tables.

5.5.5.3 What measures are in place to evaluate the impact of the intervention strategies on learner performance?

There is a general agreement among the SMGDs that there is no definite measuring instrument that has been used to date. The only reasonable thing to look at is the end of the year results. That, however, is also not a reliable measuring tool since it measures the cumulative impact of all the strategies plus the actual teaching and learning process. One SMGD suggested that the learners must be tested on the scope of work to be handled during the camps and the learning centres just before the commencement of the classes and immediately at the conclusion of the programme. A comparative analysis must be done to see if there had been a positive or negative impact. It would have been easier to measure the impact if the strategies were integrated into the normal teaching and learning process. In that case the formal assessment results at the end of every term would be used as a yardstick to determine the impact of the interventions. One SMGD commented that largely this important aspect of management had only been spoken about without really developing measures to evaluate the impact. This becomes the initiative of the individuals.

There are those strategies whose impact on the results is almost immediate. The teachers need to identify the consistent errors committed by learners in the formal and informal assessment tasks. They must be honest in crafting the matching solutions to address the errors. They also need to develop an intervention programme that gives details on how and when are they going to address the problems. It is important for that programme to be followed to the letter. An assessment to determine whether the learners have now grasped the challenging

task or not, must follow. In this case feedback on the impact of the intervention is immediate. Waiting for the term results or the final examination results would never give a realistic measure of the impact of the interventions.

5.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has identified both qualitative and quantitative research methods as followed in this study. The two data collection methods were then mixed one after the other during analysis and interpretation. The two methods were used to obtain triangulation. The whole idea was to obtain information rich data from the research participants. The questionnaires were delivered and collected on different days from those on which interviews were conducted. The researcher wanted to ensure that his own personal views and experience did not dominate the investigation and possibly influence the outcomes.

The causes of underperformance in the secondary schools and the concomitant intervention strategies were dealt with in the literature study in the previous chapters. In order to respond to the research questions an empirical investigation was launched to establish whether the intervention strategies yielded the desired results or not; whether these strategies are embraced by all those who must ensure their effective implementation and whether they are sustainable or not.

The data collected from the three groups will be instrumental in determining if the strategies are indeed helping to improve the quality of the results and the performance of the learners in the Free State schools. The principals took time to reflect on the strategies as they applied to their respective schools. It was also time for the SMGDs to evaluate their input in the effectiveness of the strategies. It was interesting to note that all the SMGDs agreed that it was difficult to measure the impact of the strategies on learner attainment. They simply agreed that there were no instruments to measure or verify the impact of the strategies on learner performance except at the very end of the academic year when results are released. They were also agreeable that relying on the end of the year results was a rather speculative way of measuring the impact. It would suggest that only the interventions had resulted in the results obtained. That would be misleading since there had also been teaching and learning during the normal schooling.

The next chapter deals with the findings from the literature study and empirical research. The researcher will do cross verification of the findings from the qualitative and quantitative methods used in this investigation in order to obtain triangulation. The resultant gaps in the implementation and effect of the intervention strategies call for the development of an integrated learner attainment model. It is envisaged that this model would help to optimise the effect of the selected intervention strategies. The researcher will therefore draw conclusions from the findings and make resultant recommendations.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of this study is to look closely at the impact that the strategies have on learner performance. A critical analysis of the strategies aimed at improving learner performance should lead to a better understanding of the causes of underperformance and the effective ways of dealing with them. The appropriate application of the intervention strategies should lead to improved levels of performance. In this chapter the researcher gives the gist of the main findings, the conclusions and the recommendations. It will be necessary to recapitulate briefly on the statement of the problem, the research questions and on the significance of the study in order to enhance the understanding of the fundamental objectives of the research.

A summary of the findings from the literature study will enable the researcher to elaborate on the lessons learnt from the academic theories of performance that can contribute to the effective functionality of the strategies to improve learner performance. A brief look at the salient features of the well performing schools discussed in the academic theories of performance will also add impetus to the main objective of this study. This will be followed by a brief overview of the strategies employed by the Free State department of education in their endeavour to improve the results. The chapter will be concluded with a summary of the main findings as derived from the empirical research, the conclusions drawn from the research findings and the recommendations on how to improve academic performance in schools. Possible topics for future research are given in the end.

6.1.1 Statement of the problem

The manifestation of the problem is in the poor grade12 academic results coming out of the schools in the face of the many intervention strategies employed by the districts and the schools. Many schools produce high overall pass rate without quality. The rate of bachelors pass is below 30% in many schools in the Free State.

It is apparent that there is a discord between the academic results produced by the schools and the improvement strategies. Many schools fail to sustain improved levels of performance for two or three consecutive years. Other schools experience a drop in the results soon after the interventions are withdrawn. The strategies are falling short of effectively addressing the causes of underperformance in the schools. It is for this reason that the schools continue to perform poorly and produce results of poor quality despite these strategies.

6.1.2 Research questions

The foregoing argument brings about the following research questions:

- Which theories underlie the performance of secondary school learners in grade 12?
- What can be learned from schools that work and well performing schools?
- What are the causes of poor performance in grade 12 in the Free State province?
- What is the impact of the intervention strategies instituted by the Free State department of education to improve learner academic performance?
- What are the views and experiences of the principals and teachers of secondary schools on improving the learner performance in grade 12 in the Free State province?
- How can a Learner Attainment Model be proposed for possible implementation in secondary schools, to strengthen the effectiveness of existing intervention strategies?

6.1.3 Significance of the study

It is critical to establish the reasons behind the ineffectiveness of some of the strategies. The study needs to find out what is it that must be done differently to ensure that the results and the quality of the results do improve. It also seeks to determine the most effective strategies that would ensure that improved levels of performance are sustainable. The strategies do not produce the desired results partly because they are not known and applied by all stakeholders. There is no common understanding of the strategies among the colleagues.

The study has valuable significance to the department of education, the districts, the schools, the SMT and the teachers. The provincial department and the districts would know which intervention strategies to apply in certain situations. The study is destined to shed more light on why some strategies are more effective than others. The schools would learn more about what is expected from the principals, the SMT and the teachers in the implementation of the strategies. The schools would be better placed to make informed decisions on which strategies to pursue when addressing certain causes of underperformance.

6.2 FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE STUDY

The following findings are based on theories of performance, characteristics of well performing schools, causes of underperformance and the strategies employed by the Free State department of education to address underperformance.

6.2.1 Theories of Performance

Academic theories of performance are there to guide and improve performance. They provide a framework that can be used to explain performance and performance improvement. The theories inform the teaching and learning process in the classroom and the learning outcomes (cf. 2.1). The learning outcomes depend on how the institution of learning is organised and the performance of learners depends on how the class is organised. The following lessons were taken from the academic theories of performance as discussed in chapter 2 (cf. 2.2) of this study:

- Motivation is key in the learning process (cf. 2.2.1). Learners who want a better and bright future will be motivated to work hard and to perform well in their school work.
- Learning must take into account that learners are different and that they learn differently (cf. 2.2.2). It is therefore essential for teachers to prepare differently for the diverse group of learners in their classroom.
- Learning is a search for meaning (cf. 2.2.3). The purpose of learning is for the individual to construct his or her meaning and not just memorise the right answers and regurgitate someone else's meaning.

- Curriculum should not be presented as finished abstractions, but should include the child's perceptions and should incorporate how the child views his or her own world (cf. 2.2.4). Curriculum should build an orderly sense of the world where the child lives.
- People learn meaning and symbols through social interaction and people are able to modify or alter the meanings and symbols they use in interactions by interpreting the situations they are engaged in (cf. 2.2.7).
- Learning can be accelerated and improved if teachers base how and what they teach on the science of learning, rather than on past educational practices, established conventions or assumptions about the learning process (cf. 2.2.9). It therefore suggests that learning effectively improves brain functioning, resiliency and working intelligence.

The academic theories of performance can be used to strengthen the intervention strategies. There is a close connection between use of item and error analysis and the instructional theory of performance. After identifying the errors committed by learners the teachers must develop appropriate methods of instruction to address the problems. The teachers must therefore select learning objectives at the appropriate level and teach the main concepts and skills by using relevant examples and diagrams. The teachers must also invite active learner participation (cf. 2.2.5 and 5.5.2.3).

A similar relationship can be forged between the use of item and error analysis and the functionalist theory of performance. As stated in the literature study, the functionalist approach supports the differentiated teaching and learning strategy. This is the learning that takes into account that learners are different and that they therefore learn differently. The item and error analysis approach would inform the teachers of the content challenges experienced by individual learners. This would enable the teachers to prepare for the learners in a way that would cater for their different cognitive levels (cf. 2.2.2 and 5.5.2.3).

6.2.2 Characteristics of Well Performing Schools

Well performing schools are focused on the central task of teaching, learning and management with a sense of purpose, responsibility and commitment. They have

strong internal accountability systems in place that enable them to confront poor performance and ensure that everyone performs as expected.

Underperforming schools can take the following lessons from these model schools:

- They exhibit a culture of high expectations and caring for learners;
- They have hard working and committed teachers;
- They work in a learning environment that is exciting, stimulating and success oriented;
- The learning atmosphere affords the learners the opportunity to learn from their mistakes;
- Teachers and learners believe that simply being in class is not enough, it is the time that is put to good use by both the learners and the teachers while in class that will yield positive learning outcomes;
- Teachers recognise that learners experience learning barriers but those barriers are not insurmountable; and
- Teachers use assessment to enhance the teaching and learning process, hence the quality of learning outcomes.

According to the literature study, the above lessons are a total contrast from what is happening in the underperforming schools. In contrast, underperforming schools are characterised by high rate of absenteeism among the teachers, poor subject knowledge, low expectations for learner attainment and lack of competent and confident teachers to manage curriculum – to mention just a few (cf. 3.2). It is the researcher's considered opinion that underperforming schools must start with a thorough situation analysis when developing the turnaround strategy. Correct identification of the causes of underperformance would lead to the relevant intervention strategies. It must be mandatory for the underperforming schools to collaborate with the well performing schools in their area. The twinning of schools strategy can be used as a platform for sharing of best practices. Well performing schools are effectively managed, teachers are focused, learners are motivated to learn and there are high expectations on all aspects of performance (cf. 3.2 and 5.5.2.7).

6.2.3 Causes of Underperformance

It is important for the underperforming schools to acknowledge the factors that cause them to underperform. That would be the starting point of decisive and purposeful intervention. Sincere identification of the problems that beset attempts to improve would lead to the employment of the relevant intervention strategies. The causes of underperformance have been well researched. It is only appropriate for the schools to identify which of those are applicable in their own situation. Below is a list of the causes of underperformance as discussed in chapter three (cf. 3.2) of this study:

- Lack of instructional leadership,
- Poorly qualified teachers,
- Low expectations for learner attainment,
- Rapid changes in education,
- Poor learner discipline,
- Candidates' inadequate preparedness for the examination,
- Progression requirements,
- Changing of subjects in the year in which the learner is doing grade12,
- Teacher apathy,
- Poor understanding of foundational competencies taught in lower grade,
- Poor foundation laid in lower grades,
- Poor regard for teaching and learning time,
- Poor learner motivation,
- Poor mastery of the language of teaching and learning,
- High rate of absenteeism amongst teachers,
- Poor governance in the schools,
- Lack of parental involvement,
- Lack of resources,
- Lack of understanding diversity in the classroom,
- Poor classroom management and
- Low curriculum coverage.

Looking at the above list it is clear that underperforming schools do not have certain distinct features that characterise schools that work or well performing schools.

Sharing of best practices through the twinning of schools project and professional learning communities would help the underperforming schools to acquire and implement some of the elements that characterise the schools that work. The same can be said about the academic theories of performance (cf. 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4)

Other causes are external to the school and need to be addressed by the districts and the department of education at provincial and national level. There are those that are internal and need the SMT to tackle them head on. When addressing the causes of underperformance, the SMT must at all times involve the curriculum structures available in the school, including the school governing body.

6.2.4 Strategies implemented by the Free State department of education to improve academic performance in grade 12.

The Free State department of education has invested a lot of time and resources into the strategies to improve learner attainment. It has developed the blueprint in the form of the Provincial Strategy on Learner Attainment. The education districts have adapted the PSLA to meet the challenges peculiar to each district. There is a dedicated personnel assigned to drive the implementation of the strategies on learner attainment in the province and in each district. The districts are at the coal face of the implementation of the strategies. Chapter 4 of this study discussed in detail the attempts by the Free State department of education to improve the grade 12 results. The following intervention strategies were implemented in the underperforming schools across the five education districts of the Free State province:

- The use of credible academic performance improvement plan,
- Consultative meetings with SMTs,
- The use of item and error analysis approach,
- The professional learning communities,
- The role of subject advisors in the actual teaching and learning process,
- The setting of performance targets,
- The twinning of schools project,
- The Dinaledi schools project,
- The grade 12 camps/ holiday classes,

- Strategies to assist progressed learners,
- The use of the diagnostic reports,
- The extent to which ICT is integrated into the classroom,
- The curriculum coverage and
- Curriculum management.

The effectiveness of the strategies was put to rigorous empirical research and the findings will be discussed in the following section. The following remarks on the findings were extracted from the discussions in chapter four of this thesis:

- There is a general finding that the strategies focus a lot on the exit grade. The strong feeling is that the interventions must commence at the beginning of the FET band.
- The focus must not be too much on the strategies but on quality teaching and learning within the available instructional time. In that way the interventions will serve the intended purpose. They shall then be used when the need arises.
- It was further established that many of the strategies are not schools based. It implies that many strategies find application out of the school context. Learners are taken away from their own schools into the camps or the learning centres with few or none of their own teachers. The approach does little or nothing to capacitate the teachers in a particular school. The results would improve but the school would not have the internal capacity needed to sustain the improved performance. The strategies are more problem centred and focus less on imparting the requisite knowledge and skills to the teachers.
- Another finding about the strategies relates to lack of proper consultation on the causes of poor performance before being implemented in the schools. The causes of underperformance are not taken into consideration when deciding on the intervention strategies. Taking learners to another school because their own teachers do not teach them as expected, are always lagging behind and absent themselves regularly does not address these poor performance issues. Schools that are badly managed are destined to underperform. The strategies are not differentiated. There is a one size fits all approach with minimal impact on the status quo.

6.3 FINDINGS FROM THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The empirical research was conducted using the semi structured interviews and the questionnaire. The grade 12 subject teachers responded to the questionnaire and principals and the school management and governance developers (now called the circuit managers) were subjected to interviews. The instruments used (annexed hereto) provided data from which the findings were derived. The findings are discussed below.

6.3.1 Findings From The Quantitative Research

The following findings are based on the intervention strategies introduced by the Free State department of education in order to improve learner performance in the underperforming schools:

6.3.1.1 Academic Performance Improvement Plan

Although not all the aspects of this strategy were equally implemented, up to 64.5% of the respondents implemented the strategy at their schools and 22.8% of the respondents did not. The majority (70.8%) of the respondents claimed that this strategy helped to improve learner performance while 10.7% disagreed. Thus, the majority of the respondents implemented the strategy and found that it improved learner performance (cf. tables 12 &17).

6.3.1.2 Consultative meetings with SMTs

Although not all the aspects of this strategy were implemented equally in the schools, it was established that 59.9% of the respondents agreed and 18.7% did not agree that it helped the SMTs to improve their monitoring and control functions (cf. table 23). It was also found that 51.8% agreed while 29.9% disagreed that the strategy assisted teachers to improve their performance (cf. table 21). It was further found that 55.4% of the respondents had indicated that the strategy resulted in the loss of teaching and learning time while 31.3% disagreed (cf. table 22). It was also found that 46.2% of the respondents agreed that the consultative meetings helped to guide the teachers on how to account for the learning outcomes in their subjects (cf.

table 20). The majority of the teachers indicated that the strategy resulted in the loss of teaching time. With less than 50% of the respondents claiming that the strategy provided no guidance on how the teachers could account for the learning outcomes, it can thus be concluded that, according to the respondents, the consultative meetings were not helpful in improving learner performance.

6.3.1.3 The use of item and error analysis

Although not all the aspects of this strategy were implemented equally, the majority of the respondents had agreed with all the items of this strategy with 58.0% having affirmed that they used the strategy to identify the common errors that learners committed in the tests and examinations while 17.7% did not agree (cf. figure 1). The strategy was a useful tool for improving the quality of learning outcomes as agreed by 68.9% of the respondents (cf. figure 3). The majority (64%) also agreed that item and error analysis informed the teachers lesson planning and preparation (cf. figure 4) while 71.7% also confirmed that it helped to determine the relevant intervention strategies (cf. table 26). It is clear that according to the respondents the strategy was helpful in improving learner performance.

6.3.1.4 The Professional Learning Communities

Although the aspects of this strategy were not implemented equally, up to 63.1% of the respondents participated in the professional learning communities while 23.6% did not (cf. table 27), and 60.2% indicated that through the PLCs the teachers were afforded the opportunity to share their teaching experiences while 23.5% did not agree (cf. table 28). The majority (56.2%) also agreed that the PLCs contributed to the good quality of teaching and learning (cf. table 29). Despite the majority of the respondents being positive about the contribution of the PLCs to quality teaching and learning, 44.1% indicated that the PLCs meetings were not well coordinated with 27.7% agreed that they were (cf. table 30). It can be concluded that although the professional learning communities meetings were not well coordinated, the respondents affirmed that the strategy could contribute positively towards improving learner performance.

6.3.1.5 The role of subject advisors in the actual teaching and learning process

Notwithstanding the fact that the items of this strategy were not implemented equally, 52.8% of the respondents affirmed that the subject advisors introduced the current trends in teaching methodologies and learning styles while 31.5% did not agree (cf. table 32). A further 54.6% of the respondents felt that subject advisors are highly skilled and knowledgeable in their subjects (cf. table 35). Only 22.8% of the respondents confirmed that the results improved when the subject advisors taught in the schools while 41.1% disagreed (cf. table 34). Although the subject advisors are highly skilled, knowledgeable and introduce new teaching methods they were not directly linked to the learning and teaching process and they did not get maximally involved in the actual teaching of the learners.

The majority of the teachers (95.4%) attended the training sessions arranged by the subject advisors while only 3.5% did not (cf. table 62). The majority (54.5%) of the respondents also affirmed that subject advisors conducted training after school and that they trained teachers on how to set quality assessment tasks (cf. table 64). With 61.4% of the respondents having agreed that teachers were consulted on their training and development needs (cf. table 63), it can thus be confirmed that the subject advisors conducted needs driven training sessions that assisted teachers to set quality assessment tasks.

6.3.1.6 The setting of performance targets

Although not all the aspects of the strategy were equally implemented, up to 85.9% of the respondents set the performance targets in their schools while 11.1% of the respondents did not (cf. table 36). The majority (55.2%) of the respondents claimed that this strategy improved learner performance while 14.6% disagreed (cf. table 39). Thus the majority of the respondents implemented the strategy and found that it did help in improving learner performance.

6.3.1.7 The twinning of schools project

Although not all the items of this strategy were uniformly implemented, 49.2% of the respondents did not implement the strategy in their schools and only 34.6% did (cf. table 43). The majority of the respondents (57.3%) disagreed that the strategy

benefited the learners in their schools while 21.3% agreed that it did (cf. table 46). It can thus be concluded that twinning is not used effectively as a strategy to enhance learner performance.

6.3.1.8 The Dinaledi schools project

Although not all the aspects of this strategy were implemented equally, the majority of the respondents (63%) indicated that their schools did not participate in the Dinaledi project, while 24.3% agreed that their schools did participate (cf. table 40). Only 22.9% agreed that the Mathematics and Science teachers were trained as a result of participating in the project while 54.6% disagreed (cf. table 41). It was established that only 16.8% claimed that the strategy helped to improve the performance of the grade 12 learners while 48.5% disagreed (cf. table 42). Thus the strategy was not implemented in the majority of schools and obviously did not help to maximise the grade 12 learners' performance.

6.3.1.9 The grade 12 camps or Holiday classes

Although not all the aspects of this strategy were implemented equally, 50.5% of the respondents claimed that the classes were disrupted when teachers left for the camps and the learning centres and 31.3% disagreed (cf. table 51). The majority of the respondents (65.5%) indicated that the camps were useful in improving the grade 12 results while only 11.1% disagreed (cf. table 50). It can thus be affirmed that the camps and the learning centres were useful in improving learner attainment. This is said to be the case despite slightly more than half of the respondents having confirmed that the strategy led to the disruption of the classes.

6.3.1.10 Strategies to assist progressed learners

The majority of the respondents (98%) agreed that there were progressed learners in their grade 12 classes and only 1.5% disagreed (cf. table 52). The respondents also revealed that 58.2% of the respondents claimed to have developed the strategies to assist the progressed learners and 28.5% did not agree (cf. table 53). The majority of the respondents (79.3%) claimed that progressed learners contributed to the high failure rate in grade 12. It can thus be concluded that the strategies to assist the

progressed learners were not effective and that a high number of the progressed learners contributed to high failure rate.

6.3.1.11 The use of the diagnostic reports

Although the aspects of this strategy were not implemented equally, 83.3% of the respondents did receive the examiners' and moderators' reports while 10.1% did not (cf. table 54). About 59.9% of the respondents made use of the reports to set quality assessment tasks while 13.2% did not use them (cf. table 56). The majority of the respondents (58.2%) claimed that the use of the reports led to improved levels of performance (cf. table 57). Thus the strategy was useful in improving the quality of the results.

6.3.1.12 The extent to which ICT is integrated into the classroom

The majority of the respondents (55.9%) indicated that they did not use ICITISE with only 16.1% having agreed to have used the technology in the teaching and learning process (cf. table 58). About 45.7% of the respondents agreed that they have used the HeyMath programme while 34.5% did not agree (cf. table 60). Only 38.7% of the respondents agreed that ICT helped to improve learner performance, hence the quality of the results and 18.1% did not (cf. table 61). It can thus be concluded that the majority of the respondents were not using information, communication and technology to improve the quality of performance.

6.3.1.13 Curriculum coverage

Although the aspects of the strategy were not implemented equally, 77.2% of the respondents completed the syllabus as expected while 16.2% did not (cf. table 67), and 77.8% taught all the topics while 15.6% did not (cf. table 68). It can be concluded that while the majority of the teachers in the sample schools completed the syllabus and taught all the topics as required, there were those who did not.

Of the respondents, 77.6% indicated that they taught all the sections of the prescribed work while 15.7% did not (cf. table 71). Of the respondents, 50.7% indicated that there were sections of the curriculum that they found difficult to teach while 44.7% disagreed (cf. table 70). This implies that the majority of the teachers in

the sample schools taught all the sections. It also implies that the majority of the subject teachers found certain sections of the curriculum too difficult to teach. The finding that 50.8% of the respondents found certain sections of the syllabus difficult to teach is significant and is a matter of grave concern.

The majority of the respondents (63.8%) agreed that the HODs checked the work of the teachers to ensure that they completed all the sections of the curriculum each year and 29.6% claimed that the work was not checked (cf. table 69). Only 42.0% agreed to have submitted the catch up plans when they fell behind with the curriculum of the subjects that they taught and 39% claimed to have not submitted the plans as required (cf. table 73). Of the respondents, 40.7% agreed that the HODs closely monitored the implementation of the catch up plans while 40.2% disagreed (cf. table 74). It is clear that there was no effective monitoring and control of curriculum coverage and of the catch up plans.

Although the majority (62.1%) of the respondents indicated that they completed the prescribed work well ahead of the final examination with 27.8% disagreeing (cf. table 75), it is only 46.5% of the respondents who claimed to have enough time for revision while 42.5% indicated that there was never enough time for revision (cf. table 76). It can be concluded that the curriculum was not covered effectively to the extent that not enough time was available for thorough revision well ahead of the final examination. The percentage (27.8%) of the subject teachers who did not complete the prescribed work well ahead of the examination is too big to be ignored. This would have a negative impact on the degree to which learners were prepared for the final examination.

With 60.9% of the respondents having agreed that learners were allowed to do completely new subjects in the year in which they did grade 12 only 33.5% agreed that the change benefited the learners while 35% disagreed (cf. tables 79 and 80). Only 29.3% of the respondents agreed that changing the subjects helped to improve the quality of learning outcomes while 43.8% did not agree (cf. table 82). It can be concluded that changing of the subjects in the year in which the learners do grade 12 has a negative effect on curriculum coverage and on the quality of the results

6.3.1.14 Curriculum management

Only 43.3% of the respondents indicated that they attended the curriculum management workshops while 41.2% disagreed (cf. table 83) and only 26.3% confirmed that SMTs were indeed consulted on the topics that they required to be trained on with 50.6% having denied being consulted (cf. table 87). The majority of the respondents (60.6%) claimed that workshops dealt with the topics that were important for the SMTs (cf. table 84) and 52.1% agreed that the workshops helped to improve the SMTs ability to manage curriculum while 14.9% disagreed (cf. table 86). The strategy is therefore deemed necessary for effective SMTs who are able to manage curriculum yet it is not implemented as expected.

6.3.2 Findings From Qualitative Research

The findings discussed below are based on the interviews conducted with the principals and the SMGDs.

6.3.2.1 The use of credible Academic Performance Improvement Plan

The academic performance improvement plan is a plan that all underperforming schools must craft and submit to the department of education. It is used to consolidate the performance targets, subject content challenges, the intervention strategies, the time frames within which to address the content challenges and all the monitoring and evaluation processes.

From the principals' point of view, the academic performance improvement plan was viewed as an instrument that provided the districts with credible information on the extent to which the interventions were realised in the school. The majority of the interviewees asserted adamantly that the plan was in fact creating additional administrative work for teachers. According to the principals the plan was not used as an instrument that guided the effective implementation of the improvement strategies in the school. They did not regard it as having any direct link to learner performance. All the principals interviewed further claimed that the districts did not use the plan to good effect. They did not provide the schools with quality feedback after submission of the plan. Plans that were submitted to the districts did not inform the intervention strategies employed in the schools. Thus the majority of the

principals interviewed did not regard the academic performance improvement plan as a strategy that had an impact on learner performance.

6.3.2.2 The Consultative meetings with SMTs

The district management team composed of the district director, the supervisors in curriculum and management and governance constituted the district panel that convened meetings with the SMTs of underperforming schools. The SMTs were expected to present their schools academic performance improvement plans to the panel. There were many views that opposed the use of the strategy. All the principals who were interviewed concurred that this strategy was regarded as a huge time waster. It was presumed to cause the withdrawal of teachers from the classes, hence the overwhelming response of the interviewees that it resulted in the loss of teaching and learning time. The principals confirmed that the consultative meetings led to the withdrawal of teachers from their classes. The development of the academic performance improvement plan also caused the SMT members and teachers to abandon their classes at one point or the other. There were too many activities that undermined the teaching and learning time.

According to the principals who were interviewed, members of the district panel who led the consultative meetings (the district director and the chief education specialists for curriculum, management and governance) were not subjects' specialists and did not, therefore, provide any valuable inputs that could lead to improvement in the subject. The principals did not believe that the consultative meetings assisted the teachers to improve their performance nor did it help to improve the learning outcomes. The subject teachers also believed that the presentations did not give a true reflection of what happened in the school. It can thus be concluded that the consultative meetings with the SMTs did not come through as a reliable strategy that could be used to improve the quality of the results.

6.3.2.3 The use of Item and Error Analysis Approach

As explained in chapter four (cf. 4.4.3), this strategy helps teachers to identify the errors (and the incorrect action), describe how to correct the mistake or improve on the mistake (or the inappropriate action) and move swiftly to the crafting of the improvement plan. All the principals who were interviewed expressed a high degree

of confidence in this strategy. Item and error analysis was viewed as a very important strategy that was directly linked to the teaching and learning content. It dealt with the subject matter and the actual problems that the learners experienced in the subject. The teachers identified the errors that the learners committed and developed the strategies to solve the problems. It has, however, not been established if the correct errors were identified or not. It has also not been identified if the matching solutions were identified correctly.

The majority of the interviewees agreed that the strategy was a useful tool for improving the quality of learning outcomes. It can be concluded that when implemented correctly, the strategy is destined to inform the teachers' lesson plans. Item and error analysis is a valuable intervention strategy that deals directly with what takes place in the classroom. Indications are that it was not implemented correctly and that some teachers were not well capacitated to do it as it should. The principals did not refer to the means of verification of the effectiveness of this strategy. The principals revealed that the subject advisors were not looking into the implementation of the strategy during their visits to schools. It is enough to conclude from the above that even though the strategy was not implemented equally in the schools, it is viewed as the most effective tool in improving learner performance since it is directly linked to learning content and learner assessment

6.3.2.4 Professional Learning Communities

The PLCs are structures in which teachers doing the same subject get together and work collaboratively on goals designed to improve learner attainment. The PLCs provide opportunities for teachers to learn from and with others in their own or other schools, working together on real school improvement problems and drawing on best practices in developing solutions.

According to the principals, the districts and schools treated the professional learning communities in the similar way in which they dealt with the twinning of schools programme. The only difference between the two was that with the PLCs the districts had attempted to sell the concept out to schools through the road shows with the principals. This implies that schools did have the necessary information on the PLCs. The majority of the principals had indicated that they understood the

importance of the PLCs. Both the schools and the districts did not use the available literature on the effective professional learning structures. The districts did not take the required leadership to ensure that the PLCs were established, appropriately constituted and therefore contributed to the good quality of teaching and learning. Thus the ineffectiveness of the professional learning communities proves that the strategy was not useful in the improvement of learner performance.

6.3.2.5 The role of subject advisors in the actual teaching and learning process

The subject advisors are education specialists who must monitor and support the implementation of curriculum in the classroom, provide and source relevant learning and teaching support material to improve performance in the subject, support teachers in effectively delivering curriculum in the classroom and in strengthening their content knowledge. The subject advisors must also moderate the school based assessment.

The empirical research data derived from the interviews with the principals had demonstrated that subject advisors were not visiting schools on regular basis. It had also revealed that the focus of the visits by the subject advisors was more on the subject administration than on the subject content. According to the principals, the visits took a lot of time looking into the teachers' organisational aspects – focusing on the subject file, the policy and the related subjects' documents. The subject advisors were seldom involved in the actual teaching of the subject. They did little or no training on the subject content and on the concomitant challenges. They did not inspire confidence in the teachers by demonstrating new teaching methodologies and learning styles. The interviewed principals indicated that the subject advisors did not conduct training and workshops based on the challenges experienced by the teachers. Teachers were seldom consulted about the topics that they wished to be capacitated on.

6.3.2.6 The setting of the performance targets

The strategy is often utilized to determine the gap between the current and the past performance, to track the performance from the present to the future. The

department of education both at provincial and district levels, would communicate the performance targets to all the schools.

It is clear from the data accumulated from the interviews conducted with the principals that the setting of the performance targets was not used effectively as a strategy to improve learner performance. The principals displayed low levels of understanding on what target setting was about and how it could be used to encourage the attainment of high academic standards. It was also clear from the interviews with the principals that the manner in which targets were bandied about by the districts was not acceptable to the schools. The interview results showed that the schools and the districts were not agreeable on how target setting was supposed to be used as a learner performance improvement strategy. Many principals felt that it was inappropriate for the districts to impose the targets on the schools without due consideration of the contextual factors peculiar to each school.

6.3.2.7 The twinning of schools project

The strategy is about schools working together to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Schools collaborate on various fields including (but not limited to) management and leadership; use of the facilities (such as the science laboratory) and the extracurricular programmes.

The majority of the principals interviewed confirmed that their schools did not participate in the twinning programme. The principals displayed low levels of understanding of what twinning of schools was all about. The majority of schools indicated that their learners had never benefited from the twinning programme. It is evident that the districts were not investing time on the functionality of the twinning of schools strategy. The concept of twinning of schools was not embraced as it should because of poor understanding amongst the teachers and SMTs. It can thus be concluded that the twinning of schools had not been useful in improving learner performance in the province.

6.3.2.8 The Dinaledi schools project

The strategy involves selecting the secondary schools that have demonstrated their potential for increasing participation and performance in Mathematics and Physical

Science, and in providing them with the resources and support to improve the teaching and learning of these subjects. The project is beneficial to the schools especially in Physical Science and Mathematics.

The principals in the schools where the project was running confirmed that the results had picked up in Mathematics and Physical Science. According to the principals the regrettable thing was that the project schools were too few to have a significant impact on the overall results. The schools were however not helping others to have access to the equipment supplied to them. The strategy is viewed as helpful towards improving learner attainment in the participating schools.

6.3.2.9 The grade 12 camps or Holiday classes

The underperforming schools are taken to the camps during the school holidays by the district and the provincial department of education. Schools that do not go to the camps hold their extra classes locally while others attend the learning centres. The majority of the principals who were interviewed claimed that in too many instances the camps and the learning centres led by the districts were not well organised. The camps were marred by too many logistic problems that included (but not limited to): subject combinations and time tabling; too many learners; learner discipline; some teachers who did not necessarily had a good track record in producing quality results; and poor communication between the schools and the districts on learning content to be taught at the camps or the learning centres. The fact that this strategy had been imposed on the schools did not sit well with the principals. The popular belief among principals was that the camps organised by the schools themselves were more productive than those imposed by the districts. It can thus be concluded that the strategy in its present format is not viewed as contributing maximally to learner performance.

6.3.2.10 Strategies to assist progressed learners

Progressed learners are multiple repeaters who did not meet the promotion requirements of the previous grade and were only progressed on the basis of the number of years in the phase. The learner may only fail once between grade 10 and 11. The progressed learners in grade 12 may not have passed grade 11.

The interview results indicated that the secondary schools did not have functional school based support teams that were designated to assist vulnerable learners, including those that experience scholastic problems. All schools were supposed to screen and identify the learners experiencing barriers to learning in the early grades. The schools had to develop the individualised support plans for the learners. The principals interviewed indicated that there was no early identification and support offered to the learners. As a result these learners were progressed up to grade 12. The schools and the districts struggled to help these learners to perform when they were in grade 12. There were no clearly defined intervention strategies for the progressed learners in many schools as evident in the responses from the principals who were interviewed.

The principals had indicated that too few teachers were available to assist progressed learners to perform better. According to the majority of the principals interviewed many teachers struggled with increased learner numbers. Classroom management and learner discipline became a big factor when there was a big increase in the number of learners. The principals also acknowledged that their grade 12 results had dropped every time the learner numbers increased and that there had been no large scale training for teachers on curriculum differentiation. The schools did not apply for concessions for the deserving learners. It is the principals' assertion that the teachers were not confident enough to consider different approaches, methodologies and strategies when teaching learners from whatever background in their classrooms. They did not create enough opportunities for all learners to participate in the classroom activities. Thus the strategies to assist progressed learners were not effective in improving the learning outcomes.

6.3.2.11 The use of the diagnostic reports

The diagnostic report contains the qualitative analysis of the subject performance based on the analysis of the learners' responses from the national senior certificate examination answer scripts. The use of the diagnostic reports provides the subject teachers with extracts of the subject that should constitute the focus for interventions in the following academic year.

The principals confirmed that their schools had received the diagnostic reports from the subject advisors. Others had gone further to download the applications from the

department of basic education website. Only two principals had claimed that their schools did not have the reports and did not even download them from the departmental website. There was however no clear indication from the principals on how the use of the reports in teaching and learning and in setting the assessment tasks was controlled and monitored. There were no clear cut monitoring and control measures in place to ensure the effective and regular use of the subjects diagnostic reports.

6.3.2.12 The extent to which ICT is integrated into the classroom

The integration of ICT into the curriculum of learners has huge benefits. Learners get to conduct research on their own and thus get involved in independent learning. It helps learners to work effectively without supervision. The findings confirm that the use of the different technologies in the teaching and learning process is not at the expected level.

The majority of the principals revealed that they could not afford connectivity costs while three of them having indicated that the technological devices were available but were not in use because of various problems. The principals indicated that some of their schools had electricity problems while others did not have sound asset management and control systems in place. In four schools the laptops were stolen and were never replaced. According to the principals the use of ICT in the classroom had not been incorporated into the teaching and learning plans. It had also not been incorporated into lesson planning. The learners were not encouraged to do independent research through the use of the different technologies. The principals also confirmed that the teachers had not been adequately capacitated on the effective use of the various technologies. The teacher development centres were not yet ready to roll out effective training on the use of ICT in the classroom. The findings therefore prove that the use of ICT in the classroom is not at the level that it can be considered helpful in improving learner performance.

6.3.2.13 Curriculum coverage

Curriculum coverage is an integrated tracking tool for the school management team. It focuses on planned activities, activities that have been completed, list of topics not yet done and the planned interventions. All the principals interviewed conceded that

their schools were never trained on the use of curriculum coverage monitoring tool. These schools missed very important information on the importance of effective curriculum coverage, the need to develop internal control systems in curriculum implementation and how to craft the catch up plans in an event the teacher did not keep pace with the work programme.

The majority of the principals who were interviewed confirmed that they had teachers who did not complete the syllabus in their subjects every year. There were three principals who also affirmed that they had teachers who did not teach all the topics in their subjects. Others also indicated that their teachers often fell behind with the teaching of certain parts of the curriculum. All these point to poorly managed curriculum coverage. It is a reflection of lack of reliable internal control measures. It does not augur well for quality results.

Two principals indicated that they had novice teachers who confirmed that there were still sections of the curriculum that they found difficult to teach. This proves that there were teachers who struggled with subject content knowledge. It would be too challenging for these teachers to cover the curriculum effectively. Such teachers did not inspire confidence in their learners. That would have undesirable effect on quality of learning and on learner performance.

All the principals interviewed had explained that there was not enough time for revision before the learners sat for their final examinations. This could only mean that the learners were not fully prepared for the examinations. They were not exposed to the previous years' question papers as much as they would have preferred to.

There were many gaps that had been picked up in the management and control of curriculum coverage strategy. These gaps led to the conclusion that the strategy is not fully implemented in the majority of the sample schools.

6.3.2.14 Curriculum management

Curriculum management entails supervising the taught curriculum at classroom level, monitoring and evaluating the curriculum implementation, providing support and resources to the teachers and quality assuring the assessment for learning.

Underperforming schools have the SMTs that do not carry out their roles and responsibilities diligently. Consistent training and development for the SMTs of the underperforming schools is therefore essential. It is disconcerting to establish that such training had not been forthcoming for half of the schools in dire need.

There was a popular belief among the principals that the training improved the ability of the SMTs to manage curriculum. Another big problem related to the kind of training offered by the districts. The Principals felt strong that the training offered did not necessarily address the challenges experienced by the members of the SMTs. The districts did not make an effort to determine the areas in which the SMTs needed to be developed. The SMTs were never consulted on the topics on which they needed to be developed. Although the majority of the principals felt that the curriculum management workshops could help improve the performance of the SMTs and by implication, learner performance, it was established that the strategy was not used effectively by the districts.

6.3.3 Triangulation

Lacey and Luff (2009:27) define triangulation as the gathering and the analysing of data from more than one source to gain a fuller perspective on the situation that is being investigated. Using triangulation therefore enhances the likelihood of increased validity and reliability of the research findings. According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2005:362) conceptualisation of triangulation rests on a supposition that any bias inherent in a particular data source, investigator and method, would be neutralised when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators and methods of research. It therefore means using more than one method to collect data on the same topic. The intention is to cross validate data and to capture the different dimensions of the manner of implementing the strategies. In this study triangulation would refer to the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods in the study of the impact of the intervention strategies on learner performance. Its primary aim would be to check information or data collected through different methods for consistency. Through triangulation the researcher would be able to check the extent to which conclusions based on qualitative research are supported by quantitative perspectives. The following paragraphs outline the

summary of findings as articulated in the empirical data from qualitative and quantitative results and in the literature study.

There is an agreement from both the principals and the subject teachers on the implementation of the academic performance improvement plan in the schools. The main differences come from the effect of the strategy in improving learner performance, with the principals refuting the claim that it does, while the subject teachers had agreed that the plans help improve learner performance. Although the majority of the grade 12 subject teachers (70.8%) are in support of the view that the strategy helps to improve learner performance (cf. table 17), it is the principals who have a better view of its effectiveness (cf. 6.3.1.1 and 6.3.2.1). Principals exercise oversight and management role and therefore have a better view of whether the plans are having any impact on the learning outcomes or not. They need to ensure that the subject improvement plans are consolidated; a comprehensive plan is done and submitted to the district. They also have to ensure that the plan is implemented in the school and that HODs monitor its effective implementation. Principals had indicated that they do not receive any quality feedback from the districts on the submission made. It is also the view of other subject teachers that the plan is actually submitted for the sake of compliance. With so many problems resulting from the implementation of the academic performance improvement plan, it cannot be regarded as a credible strategy that improves learner performance (cf. 5.5.2.1).

There is a general agreement among the principals and teachers that their schools had been subjected to the consultative meetings with the district management team. They both agreed that this strategy leads to the loss of teaching and learning time and there is a lot of administrative work for the teachers and the SMTs (cf. 5.5.2.2 and table 22). Protecting teaching and learning time is the key to improving the performance and attitude of learners (cf. 2.4.2). The teachers and principals also agreed that the strategy helps to improve the ability of the SMTs to monitor and control the work of the teachers. The principals added that feedback received from the district management is not that helpful since they are not subject specialists and are therefore not well placed to comment on subject specific challenges contained in the schools presentations. With the majority of the respondents indicating that the strategy results into the loss of teaching and learning time and that it does not give guidance to the teachers on how to account for the learning outcomes in their

subjects and with the principals not being positive about the strategy, it can thus be concluded that the consultative meetings are not contributing to learner performance as expected.

There is a general agreement between the subject teachers and the principals in the sample schools that item and error analysis is an important learner attainment strategy (cf. figure 3). The fundamental problem with the strategy is that it is not implemented as expected in the schools. Even though it is considered as a useful strategy that is directly linked to learner performance, it is not yet clearly understood by the subject teachers (cf. 5.5.2.3) There is a general feeling among the principals that the subject advisors need to focus on the implementation of this strategy during their visits to schools. The respondents agreed that this strategy is linked to the learning content, the quality of assessment tasks and therefore to the learning outcomes. Effective implementation of the strategy would enable teachers to select the learning objectives at the appropriate level of difficulty and complexity as determined through tasks analysis, diagnostic testing and congruence with Bloom's cognitive taxonomy (cf. 2.2.5). The findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data complement each other about this strategy.

There is an agreement between the subject teachers and the principals that the professional learning communities constitute an important learner attainment strategy. Both parties agreed that the professional learning communities meetings are not well coordinated (cf. 5.5.2.4 and table 30). Both the schools and the districts do not use the available resources and literature to establish functional professional learning communities. There is an agreement that this strategy can contribute immensely to improve learning outcomes should it be used as expected. The principals support the findings from the quantitative research in this regard.

There is an agreement between the subject teachers and the principals that the subject advisors are not focusing on the subject content problems that the teachers encounter in their daily teaching experience. Although the subject advisors are highly skilled and knowledgeable in their subjects, they cannot be directly linked to the teaching and learning process and they do not get maximally involved in the actual teaching of the learners (cf. 5.5.2.5). This finding is supported by the teachers when they disagreed that the academic results improved when subject advisors taught in

their schools (cf. table 34). They are also not visiting schools regularly and they spend too much time focussing on subject administration matters than on content challenges. The findings from both methods are complementary in this instance.

There is an agreement between the principals and the subject teachers that the Dinaledi schools project is implemented in few schools in the province and that it helps to improve the results in Mathematics and Physical Science in those schools. The respondents felt that the project must be extended to other schools and that the resources must be availed to the schools that are very close to the project schools. The views expressed by the principals were well supported by the subject teachers (cf. 5.5.2.8 and table 42).

There is a general agreement between principals and subject teachers that the learners did not benefit from the twinning of schools project. This strategy is not effectively implemented in the Free State Department of Education. It has been demonstrated that the districts and the schools do not use the strategy to improve the levels of performance (cf. 5.5.2.7 and table 46). Twinning with schools that work and those that exhibit the features pointed out in the literature study would enhance the functionality of the underperforming schools (cf. 2.3 and 2.4).

There is an agreement between the principals and the subject teachers that the camps and the learning centres are useful strategies for improving the academic results and hence learner performance (cf. table 50). The literature study revealed that the organisation of this strategy is marred by various logistical problems (cf. 4.4.11). As a result of the related problems the principals and subject teachers prefer that schools be allowed to arrange their own camps while the districts provide the financial support and monitoring functions. The view was strongly supported by the majority of the SMGDs who were interviewed (cf. 5.5.5.1 and 5.5.2.9).

There is an agreement among the principals, the subject teachers and the SMGDs that the schools have progressed learners in grade 12. While the majority of teachers indicated that their schools have developed the strategies to assist progressed learners, they also confirmed that these learners contribute to the high failure rate in grade 12 (cf. table 89). This suggests that the strategies do not address the problems presented by progressed learners. The respondents have affirmed that the schools do not have functional structures like the school based

support team that can help the progressed learners to attain the expected levels of performance. There are no legible strategies in place to assist the progressed learners to perform (cf. 5.5.2.10).

There is an agreement between the subject teachers and the principals that schools have received the examiners and the moderators' reports. The subject teachers and the principals do not, however, agree on the use of the reports in setting the assessment tasks and whether the use of the reports leads to improved levels of performance or not. Principals cited the lack of control measures to determine if the reports have been used and if their usage led to improved levels of performance. This implies that there is lack of the monitoring and control instruments. It also implies that the SMTs are not executing their reporting role as expected. The HODs must moderate the assessment tasks submitted by the teachers. In that way they could determine if the diagnostic reports have been used in the setting of the tasks. They would report to the SMT meeting if that had been the case or not. It can thus be concluded that although the reports are available in the schools it could not be ascertained if they are used as expected or not. This is so because of lack of monitoring and control measures and apparent lack of SMTs reports on the usage of the diagnostic reports (cf. 5.5.2.11 and tables 55 -57).

There is a general agreement between the subject teachers and the principals that the schools are not using ICT to enhance the teaching and learning process. The respondents agreed that the effective use of ICT is hindered by many problems, including but not limited to, budgetary constraints, connectivity problems, lack of capacity among the teachers and failure to incorporate it into the teaching and learning plans. The respondents were agreeable that schools are not using ICT to improve the quality of teaching and learning outcomes (cf. 5.5.2.12 and table 61).

There is an agreement between the subject teachers and the principals that curriculum coverage is a very important strategy that helps improve the academic results. The majority of teachers in the sample schools claimed that they complete the syllabus every year and that they teach all the sections and topics of the subjects as expected. There are, however, those who agreed that they do not complete the syllabus, they find certain sections of the subject too difficult to teach, they do not have enough time for revision before the final examinations and that they fall behind

with the work and do not do the catch up plans as expected. These findings were corroborated by the majority of the principals in the sampled schools who confirmed that curriculum coverage is in fact poorly managed in the schools. Learners doing new subjects in grade 12 are already at a disadvantage with curriculum coverage as the previous year’s work is left behind. The results can only prove that curriculum coverage is not followed up positively in the schools. In that way it does not contribute positively to learner attainment (cf. 5.5.2.13 and tables 67, 68, 70).

Effective curriculum coverage is central to improved levels of performance. It has been established in the literature study that there is a direct proportion between learner performance and completion of the curriculum (cf. 2.4). It effectively implies that learners who are exposed to all the prescribed topics in the subjects are likely to perform better than those whose teachers never complete the syllabus. The figure below illustrates the factors that hindered effective curriculum coverage and the percentage of the respondents who actually confirmed that they did not necessarily comply with curriculum coverage. These factors were taken from the NEEDU report cited in chapter three and were confirmed by the responses of the subject teachers to the questionnaire (cf. 3.2.9 – 3.2.10).

Table 90: Factors that obstruct effective curriculum coverage

The factors impacting negatively on curriculum coverage	Percentage of the respondents who do not comply
Non Completion of the syllabus	16.2
Not Teaching all the prescribed topics	15.7
Leaving out certain sections of the subject	15.7
Falling behind with the syllabus	34.6
Not completing the work well ahead of the examination	27.8

Of the respondents, 16.2% indicated that they did not always complete the syllabus (cf. table 67). This translates into learners going into the examination not knowing all the work that they were examined on. This is similar to leaving out certain sections of the subject. Leaving out certain sections of the subject has the same impact as the first two points mentioned above. It implies that the teacher may be wasting time on other sections of the subject or may not be focusing on the work at hand. It may also

suggest that the learners are struggling with certain sections of the work hence too much time is spent on it at the expense of others. Falling behind with the syllabus and not completing the work well ahead of the examination only mean that there will be unprecedented rush towards the end of the year, just before the final examination. The teachers would be under immense pressure to complete the work. This is bound to affect the assessment standards and the feedback given to the learners. The learners would, at the time, be grappling with examination anxiety. That would cause them not to prepare as expected.

Rushing over the work, not teaching certain sections of the subject and not completing the syllabus all amount to poor curriculum coverage. This leads to poor learner performance and therefore low levels of performance. This is compounded by the earlier finding that 50.7% of the teachers did find certain sections of the work too difficult to teach (cf. question 68, table 70).

The majority (80%) of the principals who were interviewed alluded to the pressure placed on schools to perform and meet the districts and provincial targets. They referred to the congested nature of the teaching and learning programme that was exacerbated by the many intervention programmes introduced by the districts. One principal remarked:

“There is too much teaching going on these days. The teachers and the learners are all overwhelmed. The teachers are expected to teach during the day, in the afternoons, during the weekend and during the school holidays. I am no longer certain about these interventions. Whether they benefit the learners remains a question. We seem to be teaching for the results and not for the acquisition of knowledge and skills needed for survival in the outside world.”

One principal commented on the quality and the quantity of the written work that the teachers gave to the learners. There were not enough informal assessment tasks given. Those that were given were not marked. The focus was on teaching more than on assessing the learners to find out if the learning outcomes had been achieved or not. If the work given to learners was not marked it could not be known if they had acquired the necessary knowledge in the subject. It would be difficult to determine if the curriculum had been covered effectively. Curriculum is covered only when there had been effective learning that had taken place, not when the sections

of the work had all been taught. All the principals interviewed affirmed that the strategies sought to ensure that the curriculum was covered and that all the topics were taught.

There is an agreement between the principals and the subject teachers that the curriculum management workshops are not held regularly in the schools. The SMTs of underperforming schools are therefore denied the opportunity for development on their roles and responsibilities. The SMTs are not consulted on their training and development needs. There is consensus that the curriculum management workshops for the SMTs can lead to improved levels of performance yet they are not being used effectively as a strategy to improve the academic results (cf. 5.5.2.14 and tables 85, 86, 87).

6.4 CONCLUSIONS

The following final conclusions have been drawn from the study, within the limitations of the research conducted and the data available for analysis and interpretation.

Underperforming schools have weak leadership and are less focused on prioritising key issues like the attainment of high academic standards, quality results and complete engagement of learners. Not all schools are capable of successfully identifying key priorities and develop plans to eradicate underperformance.

The use of assessment to track learner performance and inform the teaching and learning process is weak in the underperforming schools. The quality of feedback in some schools is very low. Learners are given many tasks but are not marked and corrections are not given. This brings into question the level and quality of teaching in those schools.

There are novice teachers who are teaching grade 12 in some schools. These teachers deserve to be strongly capacitated in classroom management, setting assessment tasks of acceptable standard, strategies to deal with underperformance and how to develop a credible subject improvement plan. There is no evidence of such development programmes in the schools. The principals indicated that the development of the novice teachers is left with the HODs. The principals could not

confidently indicate that the teachers are mentored as they should. The districts and schools do not have a dedicated programme aimed at inducting new teachers.

It needs experience and good classroom management skills to be able to handle overcrowded classes. Novice teachers would find it difficult to teach in an overcrowded classroom. Despite the experience and good classroom management skills, having too many learners in a classroom is not ideal for effective teaching and learning. The teachers are unable to offer individualised attention as promptly as required. Not many teachers are able to vary their teaching styles and learning content to accommodate the many learners in the classroom. It is also not easy to vary such learning environment in a way that would advantage the learners, especially if no such training has been offered. Teachers find it difficult to take into consideration the unique needs of learners when designing the learning programmes and lessons.

It has been established from the literature study that in some schools there are teachers of poor quality who have poor classroom instruction and inadequate knowledge and skills. It has also been established that there are teachers with limited experience in the subjects that they teach. Others are assigned to teach subjects for which they are not trained. All the foregoing lead to assessment of poor quality, that has a low level of cognitive demand and that places excessive focus on lower level skills. Assessment in some schools is not used to track learner performance. It is not also used to inform the multiple intervention strategies. Flowing from the above it can be concluded that assessment in the underperforming schools is of poor quality.

In schools with low attainment levels, there are poor systems to track the progress of learners and to evaluate the impact of the interventions. The analysis of results does not provide the schools with valuable data that can be used to improve the curriculum management practices in the school. The schools do not know how to use data towards self development.

The underperforming schools try too little to ensure effective curriculum coverage. There are teachers who do not complete the syllabus as expected and there seems to be no repercussions for not complying. Too many teachers do not submit the catch up plans indicating how to make up for lost time. The teachers do not create

enough time for effective and meaningful revision. There is reluctance on the part of the school management to implement the documented disciplinary procedures to curb unaccounted absenteeism and general disrespect for the authority.

There are subject teachers who indicated that they do find certain sections of the curriculum too difficult to teach. This finding brings into question the ability of such teachers to impart knowledge in the best way possible to all learners. Learners differ in their learning styles, needs, strengths and abilities. This calls for subject teachers to adapt classroom activities to meet the differences. It would be challenging for a teacher who finds certain sections of the subject too difficult to teach to modify the teaching content, methodologies, assessment and learning environment in order to accommodate all the learners in the classroom.

The researcher subscribes to the mantra that curriculum is for learning and not for covering. There seems to be unprecedented rush to complete the syllabus at the expense of real learning. The strategies are implemented at a fast pace through the school holidays, during the weekends and in the afternoons. Learners are stretched to the extent that they no longer find time to relax or even process all the work that they have been pumped up with. Teachers are made to neglect their families and related responsibilities when they are expected to teach all the time. Many of the teachers suffer burnout in the process. It is at that point that the learners and teachers experience mental exhaustion, fatigue and restlessness to the extent that they continue working not because they are passionate about it, but because they have to.

The districts are trying to improve too many things all at once. This results into little or no progress being made. It has been established that the many strategies that are aimed at improving the results have in fact served to further disadvantage the schools. Taking learners and teachers to camps has a negative impact on those that remain at school. Not all schools have teachers that are allocated to teach grade 12 classes only.

The strategies employed by the districts and the provincial department to improve the results are ad hoc in nature. The school that finds itself included in the intervention programme is left out immediately the results improve. This leads to the same school dropping the results in the following academic year. The strategies

were intended to address the results and no other related problems. The strategies do not strengthen the internal capacities needed to sustain improved levels of performance.

There are no attempts to identify the causes of underperformance that are specific to each school before initiating the turnaround strategies. The causes of underperformance specific to each school must be well diagnosed before initiating the intervention strategies. The academic performance improvement plans are not used to provide schools - specific data on the causes of underperformance. The same goes for data derived from the curriculum coverage reports and from the schools visits reports submitted by the circuit managers and the subject advisors.

The district support needs to be improved. There are inadequate school visits by the subject advisors. The circuit managers are not focused on developing the school management teams on curriculum management. The schools that really deserve to be taken to the camps are overlooked. The strategies aimed at improving learner attainment are not properly discussed with the participating schools. The districts do not provide regular and quality feedback on the submissions made by the schools. Schools are not assisted on the challenges they report on in the academic performance improvement plans, during the consultative meetings with the districts and in the curriculum coverage reports. The districts are not dealing with teachers' discipline cases with speed. The support rendered by the districts is viewed as inadequate by many respondents.

The empirical research undertaken in this study has provided reasonable data from which it can be concluded that there are too many strategies that are used by the department of education in the Free State. There are no clear cut verification measures that are used to evaluate the impact of the strategies or of each strategy on learner performance. There is no scientific evidence that can be used to validate the effect of some of the intervention strategies on learner attainment. Many of the strategies are not informed by the nature of problems and challenges experienced by the schools. The overriding principle in implementing the strategies is based on the grade 12 results. A school experiencing a sudden dip in the results as a result of increased learner numbers will find itself attending the camps arranged by the department or being grouped with the schools that had underperformed over a

particular period. There will be no attempt to capacitate the school in the weakness that led to underperformance.

The research aim as explained in chapter one was to investigate the impact of the intervention strategies on learner performance. This has led to the investigation of the causes of underperformance despite the many intervention strategies that are implemented in the schools. It was apparent that the academic results and the quality of learner performance had been erratic over a period of time despite the numerous attempts by the department of education in the Free State province to effect results of high quality. This study has provided sufficient information on the reasons why some of the strategies did not yield the expected results. It has also provided the researcher with more solutions on how to address the execution gaps inherent in some of the strategies. The study has also provided answers to the aim of the research and the research questions mentioned in chapter one of this thesis.

Emanating from the foregoing arguments it is clear that there is a need for the revision of the strategies and the manner in which they are realised in the schools. The study found that the strategies had a noticeable but not a lasting or sustainable impact on the overall pass rate, because the results kept fluctuating. The study also found that the strategies had no noticeable impact on the bachelors pass rate (quality of the results). It is thus necessary to design a model for improving the academic results that would take into account all the challenges exposed in this study.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The academic performance improvement plan must be done at a specified time at the end of each term. It must be done in the afternoon. The districts must set up different panels composed of the circuit managers, subject advisors, and inclusive education officials that will look into the plans submitted by the schools. The panel must suggest further corrective measures, make the necessary corrections and sign the plan off before returning it to school. The district must develop a monitoring tool to be used by the designated office based educators when visiting the schools.

2. The consultative meetings must be led by the curriculum section. The subject advisors must play a leading and decisive role. The district management team must play the supporting role. Only schools whose academic performance improvement plans have been rejected by the panel must be invited to the consultative meetings. This will eliminate duplication of the strategies on the same set of schools. The inputs must be constructive and must not in any way undermine the character of the principal, the HODs and the teachers. The consultative meetings must follow soon after the results of the term have been released. Calling a meeting in May for the work of the first term may be a futile exercise.

3. Item and error analysis is a valuable strategy that is directly linked to how the subject is managed. Training of the SMTs and teachers on the effective implementation of the strategy is critical. Teachers must do item and error analysis as part of their evaluation and assessment process. It must not be viewed as additional administrative work. For the teachers to gain full insight into the diverse educational needs of the learners, they must analyse the errors and develop the relevant intervention strategies. It must become the subject advisors' primary responsibility to monitor and ensure the effective use of the strategy.

4. Mentoring and coaching is critical for the novice teachers and those whose subjects underperform. It is the responsibility of the school management team to develop guidelines on mentoring and coaching in the school. The more experienced teachers and members of the management team must establish a candid relationship with the novice teachers. The novice teachers must be taken through practical examples of quality assessment tasks, effective classroom management, subject improvement plans, item and error analysis to name but few. Mentoring and coaching must be well planned. It must be a well known and established programme in the school.

5. Curriculum coverage is an important management function. It must not be done for the sake of complying with the districts directives to submit on monthly basis. The districts must train the teachers on the use and the importance of the curriculum coverage tool. The school visits by the district management officials must look into the curriculum coverage reports. The visits must look for evidence of what has been done to deal with challenges raised and if the catch up plans were submitted and

implemented. The subject advisors must scrutinise the curriculum coverage reports and develop school visits programmes informed by which schools are struggling to cope the most. Factors retarding effective curriculum coverage must be identified and addressed.

6. Subject advisors need to focus less on subjects' administration issues. They need to concentrate more on training, development, mentoring and coaching of the subject teachers. They need to look more into item and error analysis, subject improvement plans and quality assessment tasks. They also need to be more engaged with the subject content. Their interventions must be informed by the results in their subjects, the content challenges raised and training and development needs as submitted by the schools. They may teach the learners as a way of influencing the teachers' teaching methodologies and styles and simplifying the challenging topics for both the teachers and the learners.

7. The Free State department of education needs to invest in the training and development of teachers on the use of the technologies to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. They also need to invest on the upgrading of the technical devices, maintenance, installation of new technologies and connectivity. The teachers must learn how to incorporate the technologies into the planning of the lessons. They need to be able to use technologies to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the schools. The schools must improve the asset control measures. The technological devices are too costly not to be insured and looked well after.

8. Matric camps are important in ensuring that learners are well prepared for the examination. The strategy must not replace the normal classes held at schools. They must offer more than what other similar strategies may offer in terms of organisation, learning content, learning and teaching support material and the teaching personnel. The strategy must be saved for the most critical schools in the districts. It must be mandatory for the teachers of the underperforming schools to attend the camps with their learners. These teachers must be allocated soft duties like handling the discipline of the learners, managing the extra curricular programme, duplication of documents and marking of the learners work. They must attend the classes where their subjects are taught. In this way they shall be able to continue coherently when the learners return to their respective schools. The schools selected to attend the

camps must be allowed to participate for at least three years, even if they improve the results in their first or second year of participation. The schools must be made to sign an agreement with the department that at the end of the intervention programme they will be expected to perform at a specified level for maybe another three years or so. The districts must not compromise on the quality of the teachers who are recruited to teach at the camps. It must only be those with a good track record. The camps must be held during the school holidays.

9. Holiday classes and the extra classes must not replace the normal teaching process. These classes must be used to enhance learner performance. The classes must cater for the learners at risk and for the well performing learners. The learners at risk must be grouped according to their levels of performance and be taught by teachers who understand the differentiated teaching methods and the alternative methods of assessment. The classes must also be used to accommodate the gifted learners by ensuring that their performance is enhanced. The schools must identify the learners with barriers to learning early and develop the extra teaching programmes for them. It would best serve the school and the learners if the interventions commence when those learners are doing grade 10.

10. Curriculum management is critical for the effective implementation of curriculum in schools. The districts must invest in the regular capacity building programmes for the school management teams. The districts must make a deliberate effort to investigate the training needs of members of the SMTs before they decide on the training programme. Training must be customised to address the challenges faced by the school managers in curriculum management. The designated district officials must measure the impact of the training during the school visits. This they must do by asking pertinent questions related to curriculum management.

11. The effective use of the diagnostic reports leads to improved quality of assessment. This in turn leads to improved levels of performance. The subject advisors must develop monitoring and control measures that would ensure that the diagnostic reports are incorporated into the teachers' lesson plans. They must also ensure that the reports are used when assessment tasks are set. The teachers must be trained on the use of the reports in improving the quality of teaching. The HODs

must also be empowered on how to monitor the effective use of the diagnostic reports.

12. Professional learning communities must be established in each sub district. The districts must create a professional platform where intricate subject content matters are discussed, new strategies are developed and the current developments in the subjects are entertained. The districts must also campaign strongly for the establishment of these structures. They need to provide guidelines on the functionality and management of the PLCs. They must also endeavour to explain the concept thoroughly to the teachers. The subject specialists in each district must ensure that their subjects have established such forums. The monitoring of the structures would go a long way towards ensuring that they contribute significantly to learner attainment. The academic theories of learning provide important literature that may be used to improve the quality of teaching and learning outcomes. The professional learning communities, if used effectively, could provide a platform where the academic theories are explored.

13. Progressed learners contribute to poor academic results. For as long as the policy is in place, the system will experience the negative effects that these learners have on the quality of the results and on the overall pass rates. The districts must hold seminars on the strategies to assist progressed learners. The inclusive education section must develop concept papers on the care and support for the progressed learners. The district based support team must first be capacitated on care and support for the progressed learners. The school based support teams must receive the same training. Indiscriminate learner progression should be not be allowed.

14. There is a need to train the officials and the teachers on curriculum differentiation, SIAS policy, alternative methods of assessment and the assessment accommodations. These would go a long way in helping the teachers to assist progressed learners long before they reach grade 12. Curriculum differentiation is a key strategy for responding to the needs of learners with diverse learning styles and needs. It involves modifying, changing, adapting, extending and varying the teaching methodologies, teaching strategies, assessment strategies and the curriculum content. This would also result into a better classroom management by the teachers.

15. Target setting is not well understood in many schools and it is not even used properly by the districts. There is a need to explain the meaning and the importance of target setting to the officials in the districts and to the SMTs and the teachers in the schools. The districts must communicate the minimum levels of performance and allow the schools to set their own targets with the minimum levels as their point of reference. Schools must be aware that their targets must not be below the minimum set by the province or the district. The schools will set the realistic and reasonable performance targets given their contextual factors. It is important for the districts to hold the schools accountable on the attainment or non- attainment of the targets.

16. The school is said to underperform when there is a breakdown in the manner in which it is managed. Many schools lack instructional leadership. The districts must invest time on training SMTs on instructional leadership. That would include training on effective communication, decision making, effective management and leadership and curriculum management. The districts must construct a monitoring tool on key instructional leadership functions.

17. Content training for underperforming subjects is essential for improvement. The analysis of results, the subject improvement plans and the item and error analysis must indicate to the subject advisors if their subjects are doing well or not. The subject advisors should minimise their visits to schools whose subjects are performing well and focus on those that struggle to meet the performance targets. Teachers from the struggling schools can be trained individually during the school visits or as a group in the afternoons or during the holidays. The system must first ensure that the teachers master the subject content knowledge before skipping to other things.

18. Protecting teaching and learning time has become a cliché in the districts. It is being mentioned despite the contradictory practices that continue unabated in the districts. Principals are called to meetings during the teaching and learning time. Some of the district officials are oblivious to the fact that some of the principals are subject teachers. SMT members and teachers are also expected to attend meetings and workshops during the teaching and learning time. It is about time that workshops and training should be taken to the weekends and to the school holidays. If these are scheduled in the afternoons, the travelling time must be factored in when the starting

time is determined. The main focus must be on the effective use of the prescribed teaching and learning time. The staff meetings must also be held after school.

19. Dealing with increased learner numbers in grade 12 has proven to be a challenge to many schools. Schools with big increases in learner numbers in the exit grade must receive special attention from the district. The teachers must be subjected to a workshop on effective classroom management and on the different teaching and learning styles. The school must be advised on the relevant intervention strategies. That would include the grouping of learners according to their levels of performance and the varying of the teaching methods to accommodate the big diverse group.

20. Changing of subjects in the year in which the learner is doing grade 12 does not bring about any significant impact on the quality of the results. It does not add value to the aspirations of the learners beyond grade 12. Its sole purpose is to enable the learner to obtain an ordinary pass and therefore improve the quantity of passes for the school. This policy needs to be revised and implemented in the year in which the learner is doing grade 11. That would provide the learner with at least two years to close the knowledge gaps in the new subject. Subject choices must be motivated by the learners' career choices. The schools must improve on their career guidance offered to the learners in the lower grades. The changing of subjects in the year in which the learners are in grade 12 must be discouraged. Some schools do not implement this policy.

21. Dinaledi Schools project is a valuable project that assists the participating schools to improve learner performance in Mathematics and Physical Science. There is a need to increase the number of participating schools in the project. It is also necessary for the participating schools to use the equipment supplied to enhance the teaching of Mathematics and Physical Science. The districts must develop a monitoring tool to determine which equipment has been supplied and how often does it get used. Schools that are closer to the Dinaledi school must be allowed access to use the equipment in the best interest of the learners. There must be a well coordinated and controlled programme for that activity.

22. Twinning of schools must be encouraged if unhealthy competition among the schools is to be eliminated. Twinning must be mutually beneficial with both schools

volunteering their expertise in a way that helps the learners from the participating schools. The districts must embark on the advocacy programme to explain the concept to the schools and advise them on how to twin. The project scope must be well defined in advance and the districts must entrust the designated officials, preferably the circuit managers to monitor its effective implementation. Twinning has a number of benefits including but not limited to: capacity building, identification of best practices, broadening the horizons, networking and relationship building. Twinning of schools project is a relevant platform for sharing of good practices. That would include those activities that enhance the quality of learning outcomes in the well performing schools or schools that work as defined in the literature study.

23. The principal, the SMT and all the teachers must articulate high learning standards by ensuring that learners attain high academic standards. They need to ensure that the results are issued out on time; there is close collaboration and communication with the parents; and assessment programmes are available. The learning environment must be supportive and safe for both the learners and the teachers

24. Balanced Assessment must be the order of the day. The SMTs must ensure that assessment informs instructional planning. Assessment must be used to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching for all the learners. The districts must ensure that schools use assessment to inform multiple intervention strategies that are aimed at overall school improvement and quality learning outcomes.

25. Cooperative learning entails learners working in teams to accomplish a common goal. In the classroom learners are allowed to interact with each other, discuss the subject matter freely and make group discoveries together. In cooperative learning there exists positive interdependence and individual accountability. Schools must encourage learners to work in groups. The groups must be monitored closely by the subject teachers in order to curb parasitic situations before they emerge.

26. Learner motivation plays an important role in the teaching and learning process. The school must invest on acquiring the services of skilled motivational speakers to frequently encourage the learners to work hard. The districts must not be reluctant to pursue a motivational programme for learners by using some of the officials who had displayed the requisite skills over time.

27. The language of teaching and learning has a potential to cause a drop in the academic results if it is not prioritised. The districts must lead the debates and speech contests to help uplift the level of the language of teaching and learning in schools. Schools must emphasise that reading is essential if learners want to understand the language. The department must invest in the school libraries and the schools must incorporate the reading period in the daily schedule.

28. The school governing bodies of underperforming schools do not perform their duties in terms of the legislative prescripts. The SGBs in the former model C schools and those in the traditional black schools are not operating at the same level. The SGBs in the traditional black schools seem to lack the expertise and the technical knowledge required to sustain improved levels of performance. When the SGBs are not rigorous in challenging underperformance and setting high expectations, they are not fulfilling their duties as stipulated in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996. The department must invest in the training and development of the school governing bodies. The SGBs must be trained on how to help the schools to improve the results.

29. The high rate of absenteeism among the teachers and learners impacts negatively on the quality of teaching and learning and on the overall results. The principal must act decisively against the established patterns of absenteeism and those who absent themselves without permission. Teachers who absent themselves for whatever reason must submit a catch up plan indicating how they will make up for the lost time and the work that lagged behind.

30. There is a significant number of individual strategies for turning around underperforming schools. These strategies need to be treated as a menu of solutions, in following a careful diagnosis of the problems at a specific school. The districts must endeavour to identify the actual causes of underperformance in a school and not jump to conclusions. The holiday classes and camps cannot be a panacea for all the causes of underperformance. Each cause of underperformance ought to become a goal for problem solving. The intervention strategy must specifically address the identified problem.

31. School visits must be aligned to monitor the effective implementation of the strategies. The visits must be undertaken by the cross sectional teams that include specialists in management, curriculum, inclusive education and monitoring and

evaluation officials. The team must develop the relevant monitoring tools to be used during the visits. The tool must have the section for narrative details of the prevailing situation in the school and the yes and no part where the officials can tick whichever is applicable.

32. The support rendered by the districts to the underperforming schools must be needs driven. It must focus on strengthening the internal capabilities that are needed to sustain improved levels of performance within the schools. Schools must continue to perform even after the withdrawal of the district support. Many of the strategies were focusing a lot on the results than on enhancing the skills of the teachers in such a way that they would carry on long after the withdrawal of the strategies.

6.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Since education has become a societal issue with poor learner performance and the poor quality of the results being the most topical issues among educationists today, it will be worthy to suggest the following topics for future research:

- The role of the school governing bodies from the traditionally black schools in learner performance.
- The impact of performance targeting on learner attainment.
- The impact of curriculum differentiation on learner attainment in the further education and training band.
- The extent to which information, communication and technology (ICT) is used in the classroom in an attempt to improve learner performance.

6.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The objective of this research has been to look critically at the strategies that the schools, the districts and the provincial department of education have been employing in an attempt to improve, both the results and the quality thereof. It would not have been logical to analyse the strategies before looking at the causes of underperformance in the schools. It was also essential to look into what happens in the schools that produce results of high quality consistently. The aim was to broaden the understanding of the strategies aimed at improving learner performance. The

research has provided enough evidence to prove that the strategies have a great potential of turning around the schools if many of the shortcomings highlighted here can be attended to.

The researcher is positive that the school management teams are instrumental in creating a learning environment that enables the learners and the teachers to achieve quality learning outcomes. The SMTs must therefore take decisive leadership in the implementation of the strategies aimed at improving learner performance. This important management structure in the school must be at the forefront of effective curriculum management and implementation and the realisation of the initiatives towards the development and capacitating of the teachers. There is a dire need for instructional leadership in the schools.

The researcher is optimistic that improved and prompt communication between the schools and the districts on the relevant strategies, the timing of the implementation and all the related logistics can go a long way in ensuring effective implementation and hence improved learning outcomes. The involvement of the SMTs of the underperforming schools in the planning process is essential for the successful realisation of the intervention strategies. The commitment of the teachers who are being assisted will also go a long way in ensuring that the strategies are not implemented in a vacuum. There would be continuity at the end of the interventions and beyond.

It is the researcher's considered opinion that the empirical research has provided the schools, the districts and the province with sufficient information that will assist in reviewing and reconstructing some of the intervention strategies. The districts will be in a position to close some of the execution gaps. With the correct implementation and with the buy in from the principals, SMTs and the subject teachers, the strategies are bound to lead to improved levels of performance. With the positive involvement of the district officials especially the subject advisors and the circuit managers, curriculum management and implementation can be improved. With the positive deployment of the inclusive education officials, care and support for progressed and vulnerable learners can be improved. Effective and meaningful implementation of the strategies to improve learner performance is a collective effort.

The gaps observed in the implementation of the strategies call for the immediate revision of the way in which the districts go about in realising the intervention plans. Many of the strategies are implemented without any impact analysis measures. Other strategies are implemented on a very small scale due to lack of capacity among the teachers while others are imposed on the schools without due regard of the inhibiting factors that may render them obsolete. The study has provided concrete basis on which a learner attainment model must be formulated. The next chapter will therefore unpack the envisaged learner attainment model.

CHAPTER 7

INTEGRATED LEARNER ATTAINMENT MODEL

7.1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Strategy is defined as a high level plan designed to bring about the desired future or to achieve one or more goals under conditions of uncertainty, usually over a long period of time. The primary aim of the study was to investigate the impact that the strategies dealing with underperformance had on academic performance of grade 12 learners in the secondary schools in the Free State province. Those strategies would be used to develop a learner attainment model. The findings, conclusions derived from literature study, empirical research conducted and the recommendations drawn from the conclusions will help shape the envisaged integrated learner attainment model. The study found that the strategies had a noticeable but not a lasting and sustainable impact on the overall pass rate, but they had no noticeable impact on the quality of the results.

The integrated model is envisioned because there seems to be disharmony among the key role players on the implementation of the strategies and the strategies did not have a significant impact on learner performance. It has been a common course for the districts to employ the intervention strategies in schools on the basis of the overall pass percentage only, without looking holistically on the primary causes of underperformance. This is done without first establishing the actual causes of poor results in each school. This symptomatic approach often results in the strategies being ineffective. The use of the integrated learner attainment model would attempt to bring about a coherent and cohesive response in the way that the strategies are communicated in the districts and with the schools. It is the researcher's considered opinion that the model will help the Free State department of education to close the execution gaps. It should also help the schools to improve learner performance. It is also the researcher's strong belief that the model will go a long way in adding to the body of knowledge in so far as the implementation of the strategies aimed at improving learner performance are concerned.

The main objective is to develop an integrated learner attainment model that encapsulates the academic improvement strategies that are:

- developmental in nature,
- cost effective and affordable,
- providing good value for money and
- not only results oriented but are also mindful of the quality of the results.

For the strategies to be successful they must embrace collaboration and team work. The districts must make a deliberate effort to engage all the stakeholders in the planning and implementation processes. The effective implementation of the strategies involves the art and science of marshalling the resources for their most efficient and effective use.

In this chapter the researcher will start off by briefly explaining the reasons and the rationale behind the introduction of the integrated learner attainment model; the salient features of the model; the different roles played by district officials and the schools; the implementation programme and the instruments to be used to measure the overall effect of the strategies aimed at improving learner performance.

7.2 WHAT DOES THE INTEGRATED LEARNER ATTAINMENT MODEL ENTAIL?

The model must begin with the acknowledgement of a problem of underperformance by the school and the district. The problem must be well defined and understood by different role players. One cannot develop the strategies for the unknown or the wrongly identified problem. It is also a common course that school systems are constantly changing, so what worked a few years ago might well have little relevance today. Schools must therefore be assisted by the designated district officials to do a thorough situation analysis before using any of the strategies aimed at improving learner performance. Equally, the districts must investigate the actual causes of underperformance before deciding on the appropriate intervention strategy. Accurate diagnoses of the reasons for underperformance are fundamental starting points for constructing potentially useful intervention strategies. The intervention strategies must focus broadly on the teaching and learning process by identifying and addressing the learners, teachers and school needs.

The essential feature of any intervention programme is whether it achieves the intended results or not. The intervention strategies must therefore be designed in such a way that they would produce feasible and measurable outcomes. The integrated learner attainment model must entail relevant monitoring and evaluation instruments that would assist the districts to do impact analysis and strategy review. The stakeholders must create time to discuss the possible solutions to the problem, the methods of implementation and the evaluation process. Stakeholders include the district officials, the schools represented by the Principals and their SMTs and the parents represented by the school governing bodies.

The model seeks to ensure that the strategies are implemented in the identified schools over a specified period of time, preferably spanning over at least two academic years. It seeks to respond to the following questions:

- What exactly is going to be done (objective)?
- How is it going to be done (strategy)?
- Why must it be done (importance)?
- When must it be completed (time line)?
- Who is going to do what (responsibility)?
- How will it be known that change has occurred (outcomes) and
- Can the outcomes be measured (data)?

This is to ensure that the academic results improve and that the much needed skills and capabilities to ensure that the improvement is sustained are enhanced. The withdrawal of the intervention strategies must not result in the drop in the results. The model must enable the SMTs to develop relevant intervention strategies, implement them with minimal support from the districts and be able to adapt them depending on the type of challenges experienced in the schools. The integrated learner attainment model entails a holistic approach that represents a plan of action through which the districts focus on improving learner performance and school effectiveness through the use of relevant intervention strategies.

7.3 THEORETICAL SUPPORT FOR THE LEARNER ATTAINMENT MODEL

The learner attainment model strongly advocates for the strong internal accountability, organisational culture that supports strong work ethics and focus on the central task of teaching, learning and management with a sense of purpose, responsibility and commitment (cf. 2.3). The model espouses a culture in which all the stakeholders play a decisive role in ensuring that learner performance improves. All the stakeholders must communicate readily and with ease on all issues that have an impact on the implementation of the intervention strategies.

The functionalist theory as discussed in chapter two (cf. 2.2.2) advocates for sorting and separating the learners according to merit or levels of performance by channelling the most capable together and those on the lower end of the spectrum aside, for individualised attention and support. The proposed integrated learner attainment model emphasises that the intervention strategies must be suitably differentiated. Learning must take into account that learners are different and that they learn differently.

7.4 THE RATIONALE FOR THE INTEGRATED LEARNER ATTAINMENT MODEL

The empirical research has shown that there are many execution gaps in the implementation of the intervention strategies. It has also been established that some of the strategies are simply imposed on the schools without proper communication and consultation. The primary objective of introducing the integrated learner attainment model is therefore to close all these gaps and thus ensure that the intervention strategies produce the desired effect. It is envisaged that the model will help intensify the support for teachers to improve on their subject content knowledge and classroom practices. It is further envisaged that it will assist the teachers to present content knowledge in an accessible and comprehensible manner. The model must also help in ensuring that staff development programmes address the teachers' needs. It is important for the SMTs and the district officials to take note of the factors discussed below in order to ensure the effective implementation of the proposed model.

There must be regular communication between the school and the district on the plans and the logistics involved in the implementation process. When learners are to be taken to the camp or the learning centre, the following facts must be established first:

- Which subjects will be offered at the camp or at the learning centre? This will ensure that each participating school is able to submit information to the coordinators on the subject content challenges their learners experienced. The schools will also provide information about how far they would have gone in the subjects. The focus must be on the subjects that pose a challenge to the teachers and the learners. Depending on the average percentage pass in those subjects, the following are suggested as core – Mathematics, Physical Science, Life Sciences, Accounting, Economics and Geography.
- How many learners are enrolled in those subjects from each participating school? This would assist the centre manager to divide the learners into the classes and to determine the number of teachers needed per subject.
- What are the subjects streams and combinations offered by each participating school? A properly worked out timetable is necessary for the effective running of the centre. The information on subjects combinations would assist with ensuring that all learners are attended to at all times.
- How many schools will be involved at a particular centre or at the camp? Too many learners render the centre ineffective. That also results into learner discipline issues.
- Which teachers will accompany the learners from the participating schools? Teachers from the participating schools must assist with learner discipline and control, administrative duties, marking of the formal and informal tasks. They must observe the teaching process. In that way they would copy the best practices as displayed by the model teachers who have been recruited to teach at the centres.
- Which teachers will be recruited to teach at the camp? This must be done in good time, at least a month before the commencement of the classes. The names of the teachers appointed to teach at the centres must be made known to the participating schools.

- Have the necessary reference checks been done on the recruited teachers' record of performance? This is to ensure that only teachers with good track record and experience in teaching grade 12 are appointed at the special centres. The department must determine the minimum requirements needed for teaching at these centres. For argument sake, teachers who qualify must have taught the subject in grade 12 for at least five years and must have obtained a pass rate of not less than 60% over the five year period.
- What would be the duration of the camps or the learning centres, in each term? The classes may be conducted for five days in March and September school holidays and for ten days in the winter holidays. The time allocation for each subject must also be determined before the commencement of the classes. A well worked out time table will assist the teachers to plan their lessons, teaching approaches and assessment tasks in advance. Each period must not be shorter than one and a half hours in a day.
- What would be the teaching content for each subject that will be taught at the camp? Those who have been recruited to teach at these centres must have enough time to prepare their lessons and the assessment tasks. They must find time to incorporate the subject content challenges into their lesson plans.
- How many assessment tasks will be given per subject? It must be known that learners will be subjected to a specified minimum number of the assessment tasks. The results must be recorded and form the basis on which the impact of the strategy will be verified.
- Who will be responsible for setting the tasks? The subject advisors must set the common tasks for all the centres. Communal marking must be practised to minimise bias. The results must be analysed and availed to the participating schools. The schools will be able to build further momentum on the gains made at the centres.
- How soon will the results and the analysis of the results be sent to the participating schools? The results must be released to the principals and the SMTs of the participating schools immediately after the conclusion of the camps or the centres. The schools must craft the interventions to deal with the problems identified at the camps and the centres. The principle of continuity

must be upheld. The camps and the learning centres must work closely with the schools.

When the academic performance improvement plan and the consultative meetings with the SMTs are the strategies to be pursued, the district management team must establish the panels that will look into the two strategies. The panels must communicate the following:

- The reporting template for the academic performance improvement plan and any relevant additional information.
- The list of documents to be used when crafting the academic performance improvement plan. That would include the diagnostic reports, subjects improvement plans and the subjects work programmes.
- The cut off date for the submission of the academic performance improvement plans to the district.
- The rubric to be used when evaluating and assessing the APIPs from the schools.
- The dates for the feedback sessions must be communicated to the schools. Feedback sessions must be held in the afternoons to avoid the disruption of classes.
- The plans must be grouped into two categories: those that have met the minimum standards and have provided reasonable information that can be used to formulate an opinion about the extent to which interventions are realised in the school; and those whose plans do not satisfy the minimum standards and cannot be effectively used to formulate an opinion on the functionality of the school and the effectiveness of the strategies intended to improve learner performance.
- Only the non-complying group must be invited to the consultative meetings with the district management team.
- The schools whose plans were of acceptable standard must be given written feedback on what to add or correct in their plans.
- The panel must prepare a presentation on the summary of the findings that must be presented to the district management and thereafter to the principals and SMTs of the schools that would be invited to the consultative meetings.

- The dates on which the panel would do follow up team visits to determine if the schools had attained progress on the implementation of the recommendations from the districts.

When the districts contemplate on holding the workshops and training for the teachers, SMTs and the principals, the teacher development centres must establish the following information:

- Specific training and developmental needs of the subject teachers in their respective subjects.
- Specific training and developmental needs of the SMTs.
- Priority list of the training needs derived from those submitted by the schools.
- A comprehensive training programme that includes the training dates, the topics on which training will be conducted, the schools that must attend and the venue.
- Part of the school holidays must be set aside for the trainings. The districts must schedule these training sessions prior to the commencement of the holiday camps or learning centres. Knowledge acquired from the training would be of benefit to the learners.
- The teacher development leadership must initiate and lead the process of developing the training manuals.
- The teacher development centre must line up the training facilitators well ahead of time.

When the districts envisage using the professional learning communities, twinning of schools and mentoring as the strategies to improve the results, the following must be pursued:

- The supervisors of curriculum, management and education support must develop the standard presentations on the definition of the concepts, the salient features of these curriculum enhancement structures, their relevance and importance towards learner attainment.
- The district management team must coordinate the information sessions on the three items.

- The target group must be the principals and the deputy principals of the underperforming schools.
- The sessions must be held in the afternoons to avoid encroaching on the teaching and learning time.
- Full training must be scheduled for the school holidays and be given to the teacher development to coordinate.

The subject advisors must include the monitoring of the functionality of the PLCs in their school visits programmes and the circuit managers must also capture the twinning of schools and mentorship programmes in their operational plans. This will facilitate constant monitoring of the said strategies. The twinning of schools and the professional learning communities would not therefore be dealt with as intervention strategies but as an integral part of the work schedule for the subject advisors.

7.5 OUTLINING THE ROLE OF DIFFERENT SECTIONS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTEGRATED LEARNER ATTAINMENT MODEL.

The model places emphasis on a coherent response to the problems that obstruct the schools from performing at their best. The different sections must contribute towards the solution of the problem. It must be recognised that for learners to perform at a higher level, they need more than the subject matter. The learners' psycho – social being must also be considered. They need good study skills and the high levels of extrinsic motivation that would raise their desire to achieve. Teachers also need to be capacitated in various fields that would empower them to have a better understanding of the management of learner diversity in the classroom. The following discussion outlines the different roles played by the different sections towards the effective implementation of the integrated learner attainment model.

7.5.1 Teacher Development Centre

The teacher development centre must be the hub for training and development for the teachers, SMTs and the district officials. The centre must be prepared to address the contemporary management and curriculum issues. It must therefore keep pace with the developments in the teaching and learning milieu. The centre must also be aware of the strategies that are being employed to improve learner performance.

The centre must move swiftly to capacitate the SMTs and the relevant district officials on the strategies used to improve learner performance. The table below lists the intervention strategies that had been implemented in the schools in recent times. It is the responsibility of the teacher development officials to establish the extent to which the strategies are being implemented in the schools. It is also expected that the teacher development officials must keep in touch with the offices responsible for the different strategies, find out what may be the possible challenges that obstruct effective implementation of the strategies and write about them in the district newsletter. They must also prepare a circular for the office of the district director, which highlights the challenges and the possible solutions to be sent out to the schools.

Table 91: Strategies and those responsible for implementation

The strategy	The target group	The responsible section
Curriculum Differentiation	Subject teachers & SMTs	Inclusive Education
Care and support for vulnerable learners	School Based Support Teams	
SIAS Policy	District based support team	
Mentoring and coaching	SMTs	Circuit managers
Instructional leadership	SMTs	
Item and Error Analysis	Subject Teachers & SMTs	Subject Advisors
Subject Content Training	Subject Teachers	
Curriculum Coverage Using the diagnostic reports	SMT and Subject teachers	Circuit managers & Subject Advisors
Use of ICT in the classroom	Subject Teachers & SMTs	Teacher Development & Subject Advisors

The officials in the teacher development centre must coordinate the training and development programme for the different sections in the district. The following steps are necessary for the effective implementation of any workshop or training programme:

- Start by giving the teachers the opportunity to choose which topics they need to be trained on from the list provided. Teachers must be asked to indicate their first, second and third choices.
- Prioritise training programme according to the responses from the SMTs and subject teachers.

- Develop a training programme that is spread equitably throughout the school holidays, for a week during the Easter recess and another during the winter holidays.
- Liaise with the relevant officials to prepare and submit the training material.
- Ask the schools to submit the names of teachers or SMT members who will attend the training at the scheduled dates.
- Conduct the training.
- Trainees must complete the evaluation forms after each presentation, aimed at establishing if the content presented was relevant and useful to the trainees.
- At the end of the academic year consolidate data from all the training sessions conducted throughout the year.

7.5.2 Curriculum

The subject advisors must prioritise their school visit programme to accommodate the improvement strategies. They need to look at the following:

- Item and error analysis,
- Curriculum coverage,
- Analysis of the subject results,
- Subject improvement plan,
- Quantity and quality of the assessment tasks and
- Areas in which the teachers need to be capacitated.

7.5.3 Management and Governance

The management and governance section must prioritise and provide guidance on the following:

- The importance of instructional leadership,
- Importance of governance in schools,
- Importance of protecting teaching and learning time,
- Effectiveness of monitoring and control by the SMT,

- Ensuring that SMTs and principals account regularly for the performance of their schools and
- Analysis of the results per term.

7.5.4 Inclusive Education

The officials in the inclusive education must prioritise the learner support programmes that deal with emotional and behavioural problems experienced by the learners when they are taken through the strategies aimed at improving learner performance. They must also prioritise learner motivation. The strategies require that learners must be focused and must attend the classes maximally. The officials must prioritise the following:

- Care and support for vulnerable and progressed learners,
- Early identification of learners at risk and progressed learners and
- Curriculum differentiation.

The following table gives the list of activities to be done by each section in order to realise the effective implementation of the strategies.

Table 92: List of activities needed for implementing the strategies

Responsible Section	Action Strategies
Teacher Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of topics for training • Coordinating the development of training manuals • Crafting the training programme informed by the responses from the teachers and SMTs • Arrange the training and taking care of the logistics
Curriculum Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School visits programme for Subject Advisors • Monitoring tool on the strategies • Analysis of reports on strategies • Action plan to address the strategies
Management and Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead panels to evaluate and assess the

	<p>APIPs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the programmes for panel discussions, feedback sessions, consultative meetings with SMTs of schools • Monitoring tool on management, monitoring and control
Inclusive Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of progressed learners in the FET band • Strategies to deal with progressed learners • Data on applications for concessions in the FET band
District Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme for panel discussions on the strategies • Programme for the principals and deputy principals on the strategies • Report back meetings on the activities of teacher development, curriculum, inclusive education and management and governance

7.6 THE INTEGRATED LEARNER ATTAINMENT MODEL

The proposition of this model is based on a systematic process of selection, analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation of programmes to most cost effectively influence the intervention strategies and learner performance (Van Tiem, Mosely and Dessinger 2004:03). It is a systematic combination of three fundamental processes: performance analysis, cause analysis, and intervention selection and can be applied to individuals, small groups and large organisations. The integrated learner attainment model is premised on the five operational stages: performance analysis, cause analysis, selection of intervention strategies, implementation phase and finally the evaluation stage. The five stages are discussed below.

The model begins with the **performance analysis** that looks at the situation as it is at present, the current levels of performance, the overall pass rate, quality of passes,

how the school is managed and governed, the general work ethics of the teachers, attitude towards work and the discipline of both the teachers and the learners. The main focus of performance analysis is to establish the gaps in the performance by comparing the actual performance levels with the desired or the anticipated results. The desired performance level is defined by the performance targets set by the school and endorsed by the district. The actual performance level is that which is below the overall benchmarks set by the school and the district.

The next activity would be the **cause analysis** step that focuses on the causes of underperformance. This will look into the subjects that did not meet the minimum performance standards, the impact of the teaching and learning resources on the learning outcomes, the effect of school management and leadership on the results and the impact of the work environment on the teaching and learning process. The cause analysis will determine if the reasons for underperformance emanate from poor quality of instruction by the teachers, the inability of the SMT to provide instructional leadership, poor learner discipline or lack of parental support.

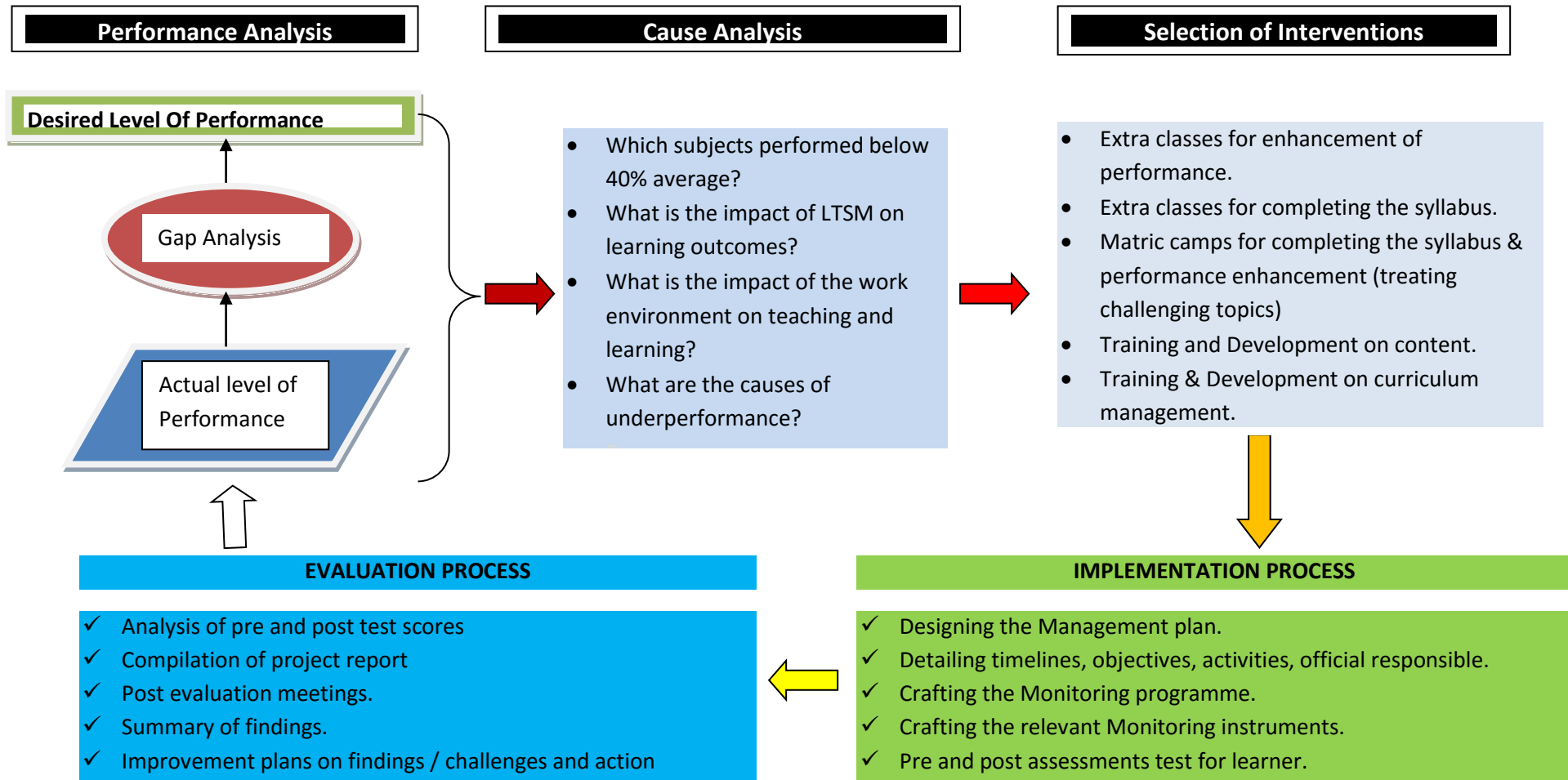
After the cause analysis the **selection of the interventions** must be done. This would include the design and the development of the intervention strategies that are aimed at addressing the causes of underperformance. The selection process will consider the timing and the schedule of the interventions, their feasibility, resources required and the methods to monitor the implementation of the strategies. The district will be informed of the choice made by the school by completing the strategy identification tool in collaboration with the circuit manager.

The interventions will be followed by the **implementation process**. This will focus on the means of communication, the tools and the feedback mechanisms. The process will also factor in the manner in which the deviations from the plan will be handled. The human resource needed for the effective implementation process will also be allocated accordingly. The district will dispatch members of the multifunctional teams to monitor the implementation process. The multifunctional teams are transversal teams composed of officials from different sections in the district. A specially designed monitoring tool will be completed.

The implementation of the integrated learner attainment model will culminate with the **evaluation process**. At this point the learning outcomes will be scrutinised. The

quality of the learning outcomes will also be looked into. It will also be necessary to determine the cost effectiveness of the strategy and whether the returns are equivalent to the inputs made throughout the life cycle of the strategy. Below is a schematic presentation of the integrated learner attainment model. As depicted the process begins with the analysis of the performance which when found wanting would lead to finding the causes of underperformance. This will then be followed by the selection of the relevant intervention strategy, the implementation process and finally, the evaluation process.

TABLE 93: The integrated learner attainment model



Source: Adapted from Van Tiem, Mosely and Dessinger (2004:03).

7.7 THE IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMME

The implementation programme assumes the three pronged approach. The district must initiate the intervention by applying the relevant legislation. Section 58B of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 dictates that the Head of Department must identify the underperforming schools, issue a written notice after satisfying him/herself that there is a serious breakdown in the manner in which the schools are managed which is prejudicing the standards of performance and that the standard of performance of learners is below the standards prescribed by the National Curriculum Statement and is likely to remain so unless the Head of Department intervenes in terms of the said act. The schools are expected to take serious steps to remedy the situation by implementing the intervention strategies prescribed by the districts and those that they initiate. The school governing bodies must avail the necessary resources towards the effective realisation of the strategies. Finally, the districts must play monitoring and oversight role in ensuring that the strategies are realised in the schools and that there is good value for money. Below follows a stepwise description of the three levels of implementation.

Step One – District Level

The District must perform the following tasks:

1. The district defines underperformance,
2. Communicate the performance standards in writing to all the schools,
3. Identifies the schools that have underperformed in terms of section 58B of SASA,
4. Issue out letters to the Principal, the SMT, the staff and the SGB informing them that the school has been declared as underperforming in terms of the legislation cited in the paragraph above and
5. Inform to the Circuit Managers, Subject Advisors, Inclusive Education officials and Teacher Development Section about the situation.

Step Two – School Level

The school must perform the following tasks:

1. Schools must acknowledge receipt of the letter indicating that they are underperforming;
2. The principal must communicate the content of the letter to the SMT, teachers, SGB, the parents and the learners;
3. The school must then commence with performance analysis and the cause analysis;
4. Decide on the possible steps to be taken to deal with underperformance;
5. Develop the academic performance improvement plan that clearly spells out the academic reasons of underperformance (relating to which subjects have underperformed and what are the subject content challenges) and other reasons (that relate to management, discipline, leadership, learner support, labour training) needs;
6. Outline the nature of support required from the district;
7. Share the final product with all internal stakeholders before submitting to the district and
8. Submit all to the district.

Step Three – District Level

The district must perform the following tasks after the schools:

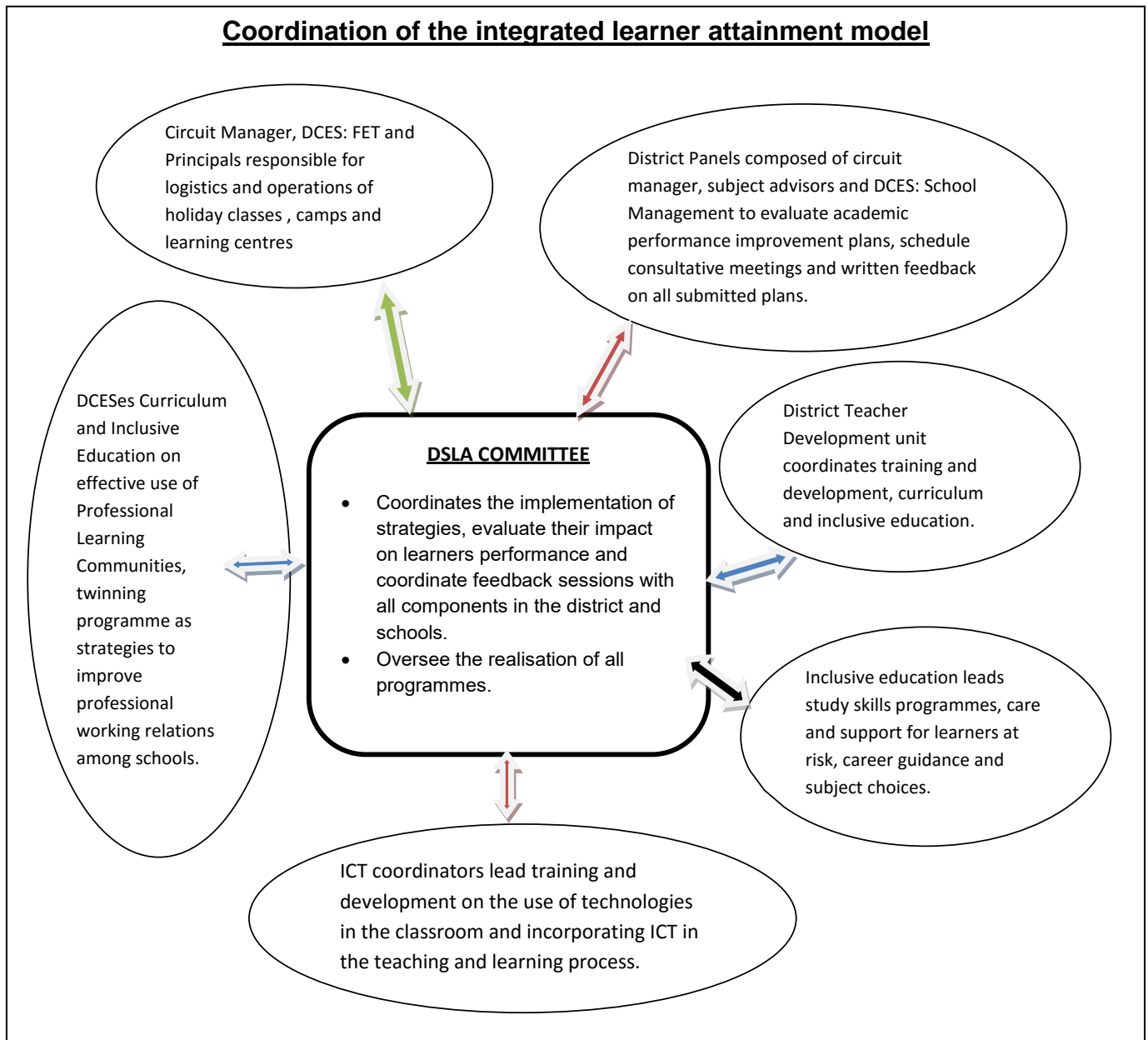
1. DMT must schedule meetings of the panels according to the circuits in which the schools are situated. Depending on the subjects identified the subject advisors will be the roving members of the panels.
2. The circuit managers must critically look into the academic performance improvement plans submitted. They must look for compliance to the format of the report. They must also look into which subjects have been identified as poor performing so that the relevant subject advisors can be invited.
3. Circuit managers must convene the meetings for the panels by inviting the relevant district officials as informed by their preliminary analysis of the plans. They must invite the DCES for management, relevant subject advisors, inclusive education officials and teacher development section representative.
4. The panel must critically look into the plans, categorise the problems and develop an implementation plan.

5. Circuit managers must prepare presentations on their findings, recommendations and corrective measures for the attention of the DMT.
6. The district must prepare a roll out programme which must be communicated to all the affected schools.
7. The panel must provide written comments and inputs to the schools whose plans were acceptable to the panel.
8. The district must arrange consultative meetings with the SMTs of schools whose plans were not acceptable to the panel.
9. Follow up visit programme by the DMT, panel members to the schools to check out implementation.
10. The final verification by means of the report by the circuit managers to the intersectional meeting must be done.

Table 94 below shows how the integrated learner attainment model must be coordinated between the schools and the districts. In the diagram the district strategy on learner attainment committee (DSLAC committee) is placed at the centre of the implementation process. There is a need to centralise the coordination of the intervention strategies given the fact that different sections are involved in the implementation process. The district strategy on learner attainment committee (DSLAC Committee) will therefore coordinate the implementation of the strategies, evaluate their impact on learner performance and coordinate feedback sessions with all the components in the district and schools.

It will be expected of all the components to submit their plans, programmes, training packages and presentations to the DSLAC committee. This is to ensure that the implementation process is streamlined. The committee must ensure that the strategies are not only results focused but must also help in developing the skills and competencies needed to sustain improved levels of performance. This committee must thus ensure that the strategies are not disconnected from the actual teaching and learning environment. The district panels that are established to look into the quality of the academic performance improvement plans must also consolidate their findings and reports for the attention of the DSLAC committee. The committee is responsible for packaging the intervention strategies for the district officials and the schools.

Table 94: Coordination of the integrated learner attainment model



7.8 MONITORING INSTRUMENTS

When designing a monitoring system, the researcher seeks to ensure that there exists a system that will provide useful information on an ongoing basis, that will shed light on what needs to be improved and how it must be done. The monitoring instruments designed in this chapter provide more information on the suitability of the selected implementation strategies. The instruments must be used in conjunction

with the available policies and tools for monitoring organisational effectiveness. The said tools and instruments are provided by the provincial department of education.

The **performance analysis** instrument provides background information on the performance of the school in the previous end of the year national senior certificate examination. This information must be taken into consideration when deciding on the relevant intervention strategy. The **cause analysis tool** provides the school and the district with information on the possible causes of underperformance and **the monitoring tool** looks into how any of the strategies are implemented. The two are provided hereafter. As indicated earlier all the completed tools must be submitted to the duly established panel for analysis and further recommendations. The panel will then submit to the DSLA committee. This committee will convene the feedback meetings and coordinate the actualisation of all programmes.

7.8.1 Performance Analysis Instrument

1. What was the previous year's overall pass percentage?
2. What was the previous year's overall bachelors pass percentage?
3. Which subjects obtained less than 40% average?
4. How many progressed learners were enrolled in grade 12 last year?
5. What percentage of the total grade 12 enrolment were the progressed learners?
6. What was the pass percentage of the progressed learners?
7. What was the bachelors pass percentage of the progressed learners?
8. How many learners changed to new subjects in grade 12 last year?
9. What is the average rate of grade 12 teacher absenteeism per week?
10. What is the average rate of grade 12 teacher absenteeism per term?

12. What is the average experience in years of the grade 12 subject teachers?
13. Does the school apply learner attendance policy prescribed by the department of education?

7.8.2 Cause Analysis Instrument

1. Academic Performance Improvement Plan

Is there evidence of the following documents at the school? (YES/NO)	
Subject improvement plans	
Item and error analysis	
Completed mark schedules	
Moderation reports	

2. Instructional Leadership

Is there evidence of the following (YES/NO)	
Agenda and notices of staff and SMT meetings	
Approved minutes of SMT and staff meetings	
Approved minutes of SGB and parents meetings	
Leave control measures	
Development workshops for each subject to assist on content gaps	

3. Curriculum Management

Is there evidence of the following curriculum management instruments? (YES/NO)	
Diagnostic reports	
Correct time tables	
Academic performance improvement plan	
Assessment programme	
Analysis of results	

4. Curriculum coverage

Is there evidence of the following curriculum coverage tools (YES/NO)	
Curriculum coverage monitoring tools	
Catch up plans	
Work schedule monitoring plan	
Assessment plan	

5. Quality of teaching and learning

Is there evidence of the following? (YES/NO)	
Quality lesson plans	
Moderation reports	
Formal and informal assessment tasks	

6. Inclusive Education Approach

Is there evidence of the following (YES/NO)	
SBST functionality	
Applications for concessions individualised support plans for learners at risk	
SIAS policy	

7. Performance enhancement classes

Is there evidence of (YES/NO)	
Time table for extra classes	
Plans for holiday classes	
Budget for the extra classes	
Designated learning content for the extra classes	

7.8.3 Monitoring Instrument For Performance Enhancement Classes (Extra classes, learning centres, camps)

ACTIVITIES/ ITEMS	RESPONSES/ COMMENTS
Number of schools involved	

Number of learners involved	
The subjects offered	
Number of learners for each subject offered	
Pre tests average marks per subject	
Functional time table in place	
Time allocation per subject	
Supervised studies	
Study skills programme	
Extra curricular activities programme	
Scope of work covered	
Lesson plans to be presented	
Learner attendance registers	
Period registers	

7.9 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The researcher focused on the reasons why the strategies did not yield the desired academic results. The strategies provided more contact time with the learners yet the results were not improving as expected. The findings proved that there were many execution gaps in the implementation of the strategies that needed to be addressed. The researcher is optimistic that dealing with the problems raised with the strategies or implementing the integrated learner attainment model would lead to improved levels of performance.

This final chapter had unpacked the integrated learner attainment model by first explaining the rationale for such a model, followed by the five stages of implementation and the key personnel responsible for ensuring that the activities are realised. The critical part of the model is the coordination of the programmes by the DSLA committee. This committee is placed in the centre of all the initiatives aimed at improving learner performance in order to ensure that relevant and appropriate strategies are implemented in the identified schools. The implementation process must be monitored and the impact analysis must be done. The model will help to ensure that the implemented strategies are both developmental and results oriented.

The successful implementation of the model depends on the cooperation of all the stakeholders. It is therefore critical for the district management team to ensure that the relevant officials in the district are fully involved. The schools must not be left out of the planning phase. Strategies that are simply imposed on the schools without proper consultation often fail to produce sustainable and quality outcomes. Strategies that are applied out of school context do not help to bring sustainable improvement in the schools. It is important for schools to continue on an upward trajectory even after the suspension or withdrawal of the intervention programmes. The strategies must help build the internal capacity needed to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the school.

The integrated learner attainment model puts great emphasis on the evaluation process. It must be possible to measure the overall effect of any strategy on learner performance and on learning outcomes. It therefore becomes essential for the circuit managers, the subject advisors and all other relevant district officials to exercise their monitoring and control functions diligently. It is also crucial for the DSLA committee to closely look into the reports and feedback submitted during the meetings and act on them as soon as they have been received. Schools would appreciate any form of feedback on any report that they submit to the district or after any fact finding visit undertaken by the district officials.

The proposed model seeks to limit the number of intervention strategies used by the Free State department of education. It poses many logistical challenges to effectively monitor too many strategies. Some of the strategies may be incorporated into the normal operational plans of the districts and be monitored during the ordinary school visits by the district officials. The subject advisors must enforce the effective application of the item and error analysis and the functional professional learning communities. The inclusive education officials must ensure that the progressed learners are catered for through the effective implementation of the SIAS policy. The SMTs together with the circuit managers should ensure effective twinning of schools and the efficient utilisation of the equipment provided to the schools in the Dinaledi project. In that way the integrated learner attainment model would focus on the arrangement of performance enhancement classes, the academic performance improvement plan, consultative meetings with SMTs and training of subject teachers on subject content and SMTs on curriculum management topics.

The researcher is optimistic that the use of the model will help enhance the effect of the strategies aimed at improving learner performance. Once the strategies are well understood and received by the schools, they are sure to bring about the desired outcomes.

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Central University of
Technology, Free State

ASSESSMENT & GRADUATION UNIT – WELKOM CAMPUS
057 910 3665 (W) 057 910 3677 (FAX)

2012-09-05

210090537
Mr. SR Leepo
14 Artemis Street
Riebeeckstad
9469

Dear Mr. Leepo

APPROVAL OF THE TITLE OF A PROPOSED RESEARCH PROJECT:

PhD: Philosophiae Doctoral Degree

TITLE: "Strategies to deal with underperformance in Grade 12 in the Free State schools."

It is my pleasure to inform you that the Central Research Committee of the CUT approved the above research project title on the 23rd of August 2012.

Yours faithfully


EM KRUGER
ASSISTANT ASSESSMENT OFFICER
WELKOM CAMPUS
Tel: 057 910 3665
Fax: 057 910 3677
E-mail: ekruger@cut.ac.za

Copies to:	Dr. SN Matoti	(Director: School of Teacher Education)
	Prof. A Shumba	(Chairperson: FRC)
	Prof. LOK Lategan	(Chairperson: CRC)
	Prof. D Ngidi	(Executive Dean: Faculty of Humanities)
	Mr. J Kabamba	(Director: Library and Information Centre)
	Mr. MR Nthoroane	(Welkom Campus Librarian)

ANNEXURE B

14 Artemis Street
RIEBEECKSTAD
9459
E-Mail address:
leeposr@webmail.co.za

02 March 2015

The Director : Quality Assurance
Room 401 Syfrets Building
Free State Department of Education
Private Bag X20565
BLOEMFONTEIN
9300

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST TO CONDUCT ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN THE IDENTIFIED SCHOOLS IN THE FIVE DISTRICTS IN THE PROVINCE

I, the undersigned hereby seek permission to conduct research in the five education districts towards the completion of a doctoral degree.

My personal particulars are detailed below :

Surname and Initials	: S R Leepo
Place of work	: Lejweleputswa District
Section	: Education, Development and Support
Field of Study (degree)	: PhD
Promoter	: Professor M G Masitsa
Title of thesis	: Strategies to deal with academic underperformance in grade 12 in the Free State

Institution : **Central University of Technology (Welkom)**

THE RESEARCH OVERVIEW :

The study is aimed at in-depth analysis of the causes of academic under performance in the secondary schools in the Free State Province. A closer look at the interventions and their impact and suggest further improvement strategies (in a form of an improvement model).

The population for the study consists of Principals, HOD's for Mathematics and Physical Science,
Grade 12 subject teachers in the underperforming schools in the province.

THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Questionnaires and interviews will be used in this research.

There will be no encroachment on districts activities. Please note that the study involves no invasion of individual rights or privacy, nor will it apply any procedures that may be ethically objectionable. Under no circumstances will the personal information of the participants be made known.

Yours faithfully

S R LEEPO

ANNEXURE C

Enquiries: Dr MC Liphapang
Reference: Research Approval
Tel: 051 404-9290
Fax: 0866929092
E-mail: maphokal@edu.fs.gov.za



Mr Leepo

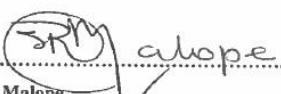
RE: APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION;

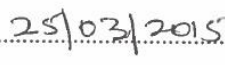
This letter serves as an acknowledgement of receipt of your request to conduct research in the Free State Department of Education.

1. Research topic: **Strategies to deal with academic underperformance in grade 12 in the Free State**
2. Approval is granted for you to conduct research in the Free State Department of Education for the period **April to June 2015**
3. Should you fall behind your schedule by three months to complete your research project in the requested period, you will need to apply for an extension.
4. This approval is subject to the following conditions:-
 - 4.1 The collection of data should not interfere with the normal tuition time or teaching process.
 - 4.2 A bound copy of the research document should be submitted to the Free State Department of Education (Old CNA Building, Room 301, Charlotte Maxeke Street, Bloemfontein).
 - 4.3 You will be expected, on completion of your research study, to make a presentation to the relevant stakeholders in the Department.
 - 4.4 The attached ethics document must be adhered to in the discourse of your study in our department.
5. Please note that the costs relating to all the conditions mentioned above are your own responsibility.
6. This letter should be shown to all participants.

Thank you for choosing to research with us. We wish you every success with your study.

Yours faithfully,


.....
RS Malope
HOD: FS Department of Education.


.....
Date

Directorate: Strategic Planning, Policy Development & Research - Private Bag X20555, Bloemfontein, 9300 – Room 301, Old CNA building,
Charlotte Maxeke, Bloemfontein 9300 - Tel: 051 404 9290/58/59/ Fax: 086 6229092 E-mail: maphokal@edu.fs.gov.za

www.education.gov.za

QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is meant for grade 12 subject teachers. It is based on the strategies introduced by the Free State Department of Education and used by the grade 12 teachers and SMTs to improve the learners’ academic performance. The questionnaire is divided into part 1 and part 2. Part 2 is further divided into sections A to N which are based on the strategies used.

PART ONE

- Kindly complete the questionnaire as honestly as you possibly can.
- Complete the questionnaire according to instructions, and answer all the questions.
- Make a cross (X) in the appropriate box and complete other details as required.
- The anonymity of your responses is guaranteed and no attempt will be made to reconcile respondents to responses.

1. Qualifications (M stands for matric))

M + 2 years	1	M + 3 years	2	M + 4 years	3	M + 5 years	4
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2. Gender

Male	1	Female	2
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3. The subject you are teaching in Grade 12

Mathematics	1	English	2	Accounting	3	Life Science	4
Physical Sc	5	Geography	6	Economics	7	Business Studies	8
Vernacular	9	Maths Lit	10	Life Orientation	11	Agric Science	12
History	13	Tourism	14	Technical subjects	15	Other	16

4. Experience in the teaching of the subject

0 – 2 years	1	3 – 5 years	2	6 – 9 years	3	10 years and above	4
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5. Your position at the school

Principal	1	Deputy principal	2	HOD	3	PL 1 Educator	4
-----------	---	------------------	---	-----	---	---------------	---

6. What is the percentage bachelors pass rate in 2014 National Senior Certificate in your school?

0 – 19	1	20 – 29	2	30 – 39	3	40 and above	4
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PART TWO

Answer the following questions by choosing one of the following options:

1. Agree strongly. 2. Agree. 3. Undecided. 4. Disagree. 5. Disagree Strongly.

Remember to make a cross (X) on the number of the appropriate answer.

	Agree strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
SECTION A	1	2	3	4	5
7. Academic performance improvement plan gives credible information on the extent to which interventions are realised in your school	1	2	3	4	5
8. Your school has set the performance targets for the grade 12 subjects with low average performance	1	2	3	4	5
9. Your school has identified subjects specific content challenges that resulted in the learners poor performance	1	2	3	4	5
10. Your school has developed solutions to address the identified challenges.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Your school has compiled a progress report on how to address the challenges indentified.	1	2	3	4	5
12. A Credible academic performance improvement plan helps to improve learner performance	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION B	1	2	3	4	5
13. Your SMT is invited each term to the meetings where quarterly results of grade 12 are discussed	1	2	3	4	5
14. Teachers are guided on how to account for the learning outcomes of their subjects	1	2	3	4	5
15. Consultative meetings assist the teachers in improving their performance.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Consultative meetings result in the loss of teaching and learning time	1	2	3	4	5
17. Consultative meetings help the SMT to improve their monitoring and control functions	1	2	3	4	5
18. The presentations done during the consultative meetings are a true reflection of what happens in a school.	1	2	3	4	5

	Agree strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
19. The SMT uses the consultative meetings to hold teachers accountable in their subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION C	1	2	3	4	5
20. Your school identifies common errors that learners commit in the tests and examinations	1	2	3	4	5
21. Teachers look for ways of ensuring that learners do not commit these errors again	1	2	3	4	5
22. Item and error analysis is a useful tool for improving the quality of learning outcomes	1	2	3	4	5
23. Item and error analysis informs the teacher's lesson planning and preparation.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Item and error analysis can be used to determine the relevant intervention strategies	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION D	1	2	3	4	5
25. Teachers form part of the professional learning communities	1	2	3	4	5
26. The professional learning communities help you to share planning and teaching experiences with teachers from other schools.	1	2	3	4	5
27. The professional learning communities contribute to the good quality of teaching and learning	1	2	3	4	5
28. The professional learning communities meetings are well coordinated.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Teachers understand the importance of the professional learning communities	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION E	1	2	3	4	5
30. Subject advisors introduce current trends in the teaching methodologies and learning styles.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Subject advisors help with the teaching of learners as a way of showing you how to do it.	1	2	3	4	5
32. The academic results improve when subject advisors teach in the school	1	2	3	4	5
33. Subject advisors are highly skilled and knowledgeable in their subjects.	1	2	3	4	5

	Agree strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
SECTION F	1	2	3	4	5
34. Your school has set performance target for grade 12 pass rate	1	2	3	4	5
35. The set targets are based on known levels of performance and are realistic	1	2	3	4	5
36. The performance targets are well explained to all staff members and learners	1	2	3	4	5
37. Performance targets improve learner attainment	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION G	1	2	3	4	5
38. Your school participates in the Dinaledi schools project	1	2	3	4	5
39. Your mathematics and science teachers have attended training sessions organised by the project	1	2	3	4	5
40. The project has helped to improve the performance of the grade 12 learners	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION H	1	2	3	4	5
41. Your school has participated in the twinning of schools project	1	2	3	4	5
42. Teachers of well performing schools sometimes offer lessons to your learners	1	2	3	4	5
43. Your school has received some teaching and learning resources from the well performing schools	1	2	3	4	5
44. Your grade 12 learners have benefitted from the twinning of schools project	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION I	1	2	3	4	5
45. Your grade 12 learners receive tuition during the school holidays	1	2	3	4	5
46. Your grade 12 learners also attend the matric camps	1	2	3	4	5
47. At the camps the previous grade 12 final examination papers are revised	1	2	3	4	5

	Agree strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
48. Matric camps are useful in improving the grade 12 results	1	2	3	4	5
49. Your school is not disturbed when teachers leave with grade 12 learners to the camp.	1	2	3	4	5
50. Your school has progressed learners in the grade 12 class.	1	2	3	4	5
51. Your school has specific intervention programmes to assist the progressed learners.	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION J	1	2	3	4	5
52. Your school receives grade 12 examiners and moderators reports	1	2	3	4	5
53. The grade 12 teachers make use of the reports to prepare their lessons	1	2	3	4	5
54. The teachers use the reports to set the assessment tasks	1	2	3	4	5
55. The use of the reports leads to improved levels of performance	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION K	1	2	3	4	5
56. Your school uses the ICITISE programme	1	2	3	4	5
57. Your school uses the Mindset programme	1	2	3	4	5
58. Your school uses the HeyMath programme	1	2	3	4	5
59. The programmes help to improve the quality of results	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION L	1	2	3	4	5
60. You attend training sessions conducted by the subject advisors each year	1	2	3	4	5
61. Teachers are consulted on their training and development needs	1	2	3	4	5
62. Training sessions are conducted after school.	1	2	3	4	5
63. You have received training from the subject advisors on how to set question papers of good	1	2	3	4	5

	Agree strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
quality					
SECTION M	1	2	3	4	5
64. You attended a workshop on the importance of curriculum coverage	1	2	3	4	5
65. You complete the syllabus in your subject every year.	1	2	3	4	5
66. You teach all the topics of the curriculum	1	2	3	4	5
67. Your HOD checks your work to ensure that you complete all the sections of the curriculum each year.	1	2	3	4	5
68. There are still sections of the curriculum of the subject you teach that you find difficult.	1	2	3	4	5
69. There are those sections of the subject that you do not teach	1	2	3	4	5
70. You still fall behind with the teaching of the sections of the curriculum of your subject.	1	2	3	4	5
71. You have submitted a catch up plan when you were behind with the curriculum of the subject that you teach.	1	2	3	4	5
72. There is close monitoring of the catch up programme by your HOD.	1	2	3	4	5
73. You complete the prescribed work well ahead of the examination	1	2	3	4	5
74. There is always enough time for thorough revision before the final examination	1	2	3	4	5
75. Quality feedback on all assessment tasks is always given to the learners	1	2	3	4	5
76. Learners often use the feedback provided to prepare for the examination.	1	2	3	4	5
77. Learners are allowed to do completely new subjects in Grade 12	1	2	3	4	5
78. Changing of subjects in Grade 12 benefits the learners	1	2	3	4	5
79. Teachers help the learners to deal with the previous years' work	1	2	3	4	5

	Agree strongly	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
80. Changing of subjects in the Grade 12 year helps to improve the quality of the results	1	2	3	4	5
SECTION N (for Grade 12 teachers who are SMT members only)	1	2	3	4	5
81. You have attended workshops on curriculum management during school holidays each year.	1	2	3	4	5
82. The curriculum management topics discussed at the workshop are important for the SMTs.	1	2	3	4	5
83. The roles and responsibilities of the SMT members with regard to curriculum management are discussed at the workshop	1	2	3	4	5
84. The workshop improves the SMTs' ability to manage curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5
85. SMTs are asked to submit topics on which they require training and development before the actual workshops	1	2	3	4	5
86. The school has crafted intervention programmes to assist progressed learners	1	2	3	4	5
87. Progressed learners contribute to the high failure rate in Grade 12	1	2	3	4	5

88. In general what has been the overall impact of the intervention strategies on the performance of your grade 12 learners?

.....

89. What would you regard as the strong points or the shortcomings of any of the strategies used?

.....

Thank You For Your Cooperation.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS

General Question

- For what reasons did the Free State department of education introduce the intervention strategies in the secondary schools whose grade 12 results were poor?

Section A

- Did your school submit an academic performance improvement plan to the head of education?
- How useful is the academic performance improvement plan to learner attainment?
- Did the school set the performance targets for grade 12 subjects with low average performance and what changes if any, did this help bring about?

Section B

- Were the SMT members of your school invited to the consultative meeting called by the district management team?
- How do you prepare for these consultative meetings?
- What would you regard as the significance of the consultative meetings?

Section C

- Did the grade 12 teachers identify the common errors that the learners committed during the examination?
- If yes, can you describe what was done about those errors?

Section D

- What do you understand by professional learning communities?
- Do your grade 12 teachers participate in these communities?

Section E

- What role have the subject advisors played at your school with regard to improving the performance of the grade 12 learners?
- What benefits did the school derive from the role they played?
- Comment on the support provided by the district towards improving learner attainment

Section F

- Does your school have a benchmark for the performance of grade 12 learners?
- If yes, what is the benchmark? Is it realistic?
- Who set the benchmark?
- What is the impact of benchmarking on the quality of the results?

Section G

- Does the school participate in the Dinaledi project which is intended to assist mathematics and physical science learners?
- If yes, of what significance is the project to your learners and teachers?

Section H

- Does your school participate in the project called “twinning of schools?”
- If yes, can you describe the project and indicate its significance if any.

Section I

- Do your grade 12 learners participate in the supplementary tuition that takes place during the school holidays?
- How often do they participate and what exactly happens during the sessions?
- What would you regard as the advantages and the shortcomings of this project?

Section J

- Does your school ever receive or use the grade 12 examination reports from the chief markers and moderators?
- If yes, what do you do with these reports?

- Of what significance are these reports to your school?

Section K

- The Free State department of education has introduced the use of ICT in teaching and learning. Has this been introduced in your school?
- If yes, indicate its significance to the teachers and learners.
- Are there any specific challenges related to this strategy?

Section L

- Have the subject advisors ever trained your teachers on how to set quality and balanced questions for tests and examinations?
- Are the subject advisors providing you with quality feedback after checking and assessing the teachers work?
- Have the subject advisors ever offered lessons to the grade 12 learners in your school?

Section M

- Do your grade 12 teachers cover the curriculum for all the subjects each year?
- How do you verify that this is done or ensure that it is done?
- What do you do when a teacher falls behind with the curriculum?
- What measures do you employ to ensure that the curriculum is fully covered?

Section N

- Have your SMT ever attended a workshop on curriculum management?
- What did the workshop entail?
- Did the workshop improve the SMT's ability to manage the school curricular?

Concluding Questions

- In general what has been the overall impact of the intervention strategies on the performance of your grade 12 learners?
- Does the increase in the learner numbers in Grade 12 have an impact on the final examination results? Elaborate.

- What impact does the changing of subjects in the grade 12 year have on the results?
- What would you regard as the strong points or the shortcomings of any of the strategies used?

ANNEXURE F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SMGDS (CIRCUIT MANAGERS)

The questions I am going to ask you are based on the strategies introduced by the Free State department of education that are used by the Grade 12 teachers and the School Management Teams (SMTs) to improve the learners' academic performance.

Answer the questions as fully as possible.

90. What are the challenges experienced during the implementation of the strategies intended to improve the grade 12 results.

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91. In your view what strategies can be considered to be the most effective in supporting schools to improve learner performance?

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92. What measures are in place to evaluate the impact of the intervention strategies on learner performance?

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