

**DETERMINANTS OF SCHOOL SUCCESS IN THE DISADVANTAGED
COMMUNITIES: MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PRINCIPALS OF HIGH-
POVERTY SCHOOLS.**

by

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“ I declare that **DETERMINANTS OF SCHOOL SUCCESS IN THE DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES: MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PRINCIPALS OF HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS** is my own work and that all the sources that I have utilised or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.”

(Koalepe L.J)

Signature:.....

Date: 14/10/2013

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this study to my late parents, **LAWRENCE and ANNA KOALEPE**, who always supported me and ensured that I pursued my goals and dreams in life despite the circumstances when I grew up.

ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the challenges facing principals of high-poverty schools in the Lejweleputswa Education District in the Free State. This study moreover deals with the strategies employed by principals of high-poverty school in addressing these challenges. It further profiles the leadership qualities as exhibited by the principals of high-performing, high-poverty schools. An in-depth literature review which covered typical problems faced by such schools and the leadership styles generally employed when managing them, was conducted. An empirical investigation using a qualitative research design was conducted and data was gathered through interviews with the principals and focus group discussions with teachers of the five selected schools. In the final analysis, findings and recommendations were made to officials in the Department of Education, teachers and the principals of high-poverty schools on how to confront challenges in the disadvantaged communities while at the same time moving towards maintaining academic excellence.

KEY WORDS

High-poverty schools, socio-economic status, truancy, high dropout rate, unemployment, gangsterism, poverty, teacher development, at-risk learners, accountability.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Advanced Certificate in Education
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CHH	Child-Headed Families
ELRC	Education Labour Relations Council
IAQ	Indoor Air Quality
NSNP	National School Nutrition Programme
NPDE	National Professional Diploma
LTSM	Learning & Teaching Support Material
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers Union
SAOU	Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie
SES	Socio-Economic Status
PD	Professional Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WSE	Whole School Evaluation

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND, PROBLEM FORMULATION AND AIMS OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

“A tiny band of schools situated in the poorest communities provide some of the highest quality education. They are performing heroic deeds under difficult conditions, and serve as role models for the rest of the system” (Taylor 2006:73).

Academic underachievement is a problem facing many South African schools, especially those found in the poverty-stricken communities. The socio-economic environments in which these schools are located add to the problem of underachievement. However, there are certain schools found in the same circumstances but whose academic performance is exceptional and which continue to produce excellent results regardless of these circumstances.

According to Kamper (2008:3) it is not surprising that “struggling” and “sinking” schools (Stoll & Fink, 1996: 86 in Kamper 2008) are found mostly in impoverished areas (Glidden 1999: 21-22 in Kamper 2008). The school leadership challenges implicit to high-poverty schools are alarming. As Kamper (2008:3) points out:

“Essentially these leadership challenges imply a radical turnabout for the school, embracing a reformation as regards vision, standards, expectations, culture, service delivery, resources and communication, and with quality education as a target and overarching criterion. In practical terms, the leadership challenges can best be phrased as a question: How can the poverty-related backlogs and issues regarding learners, parents, teachers, resources and facilities be overcome, and a happy and effective learning environment be created in a high-poverty school?”

The true impact of poverty on the provision of education is indeed perturbing. Learners are often hungry and ill; do not have proper clothing; lack study facilities, parental support, study motivation, self-esteem and language

proficiency; and move frequently from school to school (Cole-Henderson 2000:84; Acker-Hocevar & Touchton 2002a:112-117). The *teachers* are mostly beginners; are often under-qualified; have low self-esteem, low work motivation and low learner expectations; show a lack of respect for learners and their parents, practice “drill and kill teaching” (“poverty pedagogics”); often work in rundown classrooms; and have to cope without proper tuition resources (Cole-Henderson 2000:86; Haberman1999:3-5,11; Acker-Hocevar & Touchton 2002c: 335-341). *Parents* are often in need of health or other social care; have low educational qualifications or are illiterate; have an intense distrust, even hatred, of school (resulting from own childhood school experiences); and are often single or act as substitute parents (Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) 2006:10; Acker-Hocevar & Touchton 2002b:271,274; Shanklin, Kozleski, Meagher, Sands, Joseph & Wyman 2003:368; Jesse, Davis & Pokorny 2004:27). The *school environment* is typically characterised by unkept school premises, rundown buildings, damaged and inadequate furniture, no waste collection facilities, substandard toilet facilities and physical danger points (such as those due to faulty electrical wiring) (Shanklin et al. 2003:357; Acker-Hocevar & Touchton 2002c:335,343). The challenges presented by this state of affairs to school management and leadership are quite understandable, and there are much to be learnt from the principals and teaching staff of schools which are succeeding against the odds.

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is of critical importance to establish the factors contributing to and impacting on the success of high-poverty schools. This could serve as a clear pointer to the myriad of schools countrywide facing the same sociological and socio-economic challenges and it would assist to alleviate the noticeable obstacles it present to the South African education system in general.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problems presented by socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, HIV/Aids, child-headed families, socio-economic decline, lack of resources and

infrastructure have a noticeable impact on learners from the township areas, and particularly those from informal settlements whose environments lack cognitive stimulation. Already in 1981 Curtis and Blutchford (in De Witt & Booysen, 1995:122) highlighted the fact that it is generally accepted that socially handicapped children are those who, despite their intellectual ability, may find it difficult to benefit our educational system because of their socio-cultural background. The impact this has on schools goes without saying.

Academic achievement has for many years been used as a yardstick to measure the competency and worthiness of schools in South Africa. Secondary schools, in particular, have therefore found themselves under tremendous pressure to outperform one another in an attempt to remain amongst the best schools in the country and in their respective provinces. Some have succeeded for many consecutive years while others have failed to reach the expected standards. They subsequently failed to qualify for incentives made available by their respective educational authorities for “top achieving” schools in the provinces.

Over the past years, the South African Department of Education has implemented a rating system on district and provincial level according to which secondary schools are categorised as either functional or dysfunctional, based on their Grade 12 pass rates. Table 1 indicates the Grade 12 results obtained by selected secondary schools in the Lejweleputswa District in the Free State province between 2008 and 2012. The selection of schools was made on the assumption that economic and geographic variables (socio-economic level, exposure to a multicultural setting, township environment and informal settlement) might influence the academic achievement of learners. Subsequently the choice fell on two multicultural secondary schools in rather affluent areas, four township schools situated in lower to middle-income areas and three schools situated in the centre of informal settlements in urban Virginia and Hennenman (low income areas). The selection of these schools was purely based on numerical considerations, i.e. to obtain a sufficient number of affluent, middle-income and lower-income schools respectively in areas geographically accessible to the researcher.

Table 1.1 Grade 12 results of selected functional and dysfunctional schools 2008 – 2012 (Unsourced document: Lejweleputswa Education District)

SCHOOL	TOWN	TYPE	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
School A	Virginia	A1	94,85	84,82	90,85	91,93	97,04
School B	Hennenman	A1	90,45	86,67	84,40	78,91	87,14
School C	Virginia	A2	99,07	95,41	99,07	94,69	92,56
School D	Virginia	A2	93,18	83,33	77,45	80,21	82,80
School E	Hennenman	A3	82,28	63,16	36,36	48,89	56,78
School F	Virginia	A3	95,16	71,17	80,00	86,02	93,46
School G	Virginia	A3	57,14	58,95	60,00	64,00	81,01
School H	Ventersburg	A3	69,57	47,54	51,52	62,60	63,12
School I	Virginia	A1	46,90	71,69	95,20	91,89	94,49

The Department of Education's interpretation of the information in table 1 can be summarised as follows:

- Despite the fact that schools labelled as **A1's** are termed functional and achieving, they are regarded as high-poverty schools since they are located in the centre of informal settlements; most of their learners are drawn from low socio-economic backgrounds.
- The **A2** schools are termed by the department as achieving, functional schools located within affluent communities – the so-called former Model C schools.
- The last type categorised as **A3** schools are high-risk schools which could be regarded as either functional or dysfunctional due to their inconsistent Grade 12 results. These schools are located in the average to below average-income (township) communities.

Based on the criteria laid down by the Department of Education, a school with a pass rate below 60% would be categorised as a dysfunctional school for that year and multidisciplinary intervention strategies would be implemented by educational

authorities from district and provincial level in an attempt to assist and support the school.

A careful scrutiny of the information rendered in table 1 paints an interesting and somewhat unexpected picture. Particularly noteworthy is the rating of the A1 schools which, despite their location in poverty-stricken areas, maintained a consistently high pass rate for five years consecutively. The example of School A in Virginia serves as a point in case: a “shack school” constructed from corrugated iron sheets and located in the middle of an informal settlement, has time and again produced excellent Grade 12 results despite its unfavourable socio-economic circumstances. In the same vicinity an A3 school, located in an average to below average-income township area, has been struggling to produce results and has consequently been classified as dysfunctional for four out of five years rated.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Against this background, the overarching question of this study can be formulated as follows:

Given the overwhelming evidence that confirms the negative effect of poor socio-economic circumstances on the academic success of learners from poverty-stricken areas, how do some schools in these areas manage to excel academically despite their poor living conditions, and which elements constitute a profile of effective leadership in high-poverty schools?

Secondary research questions emanating from the above include the following:

- Why do certain “shack schools” render good or even outstanding academic results regardless of the socio-economic environments in which they operate?
- Which variables play a role in the outstanding performance of these achieving schools?
- Do poor socio-economic factors necessarily determine academic underachievement?

- What role is played by the environment on the academic achievement of learners?

1.5 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is twofold: first, to determine the reasons for the academic success of selected 'at risk' schools situated in poverty-stricken areas (the so-called A1 schools) and second, to propose different solutions that can be implemented to alleviate the poverty-related backlogs and issues regarding learners, parents, teachers, resources and facilities so as to ensure a happy and effective learning environment in high-poverty schools. In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives need to be realised by this study:

- To verify to which extent socio-economic factors influence academic performance in secondary schools;
- To determine why certain high-poverty schools ('shack schools') render good or even outstanding academic results despite the socio-economic environments in which they operate;
- To establish which variables play a role in the outstanding performance of these schools;
- To establish the roles played by school managers in school success and academic achievement.

1.6 OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following important concepts will recur in the course of the study. These definitions serve as a mere introductory clarification of concepts and will be elaborated on fully in ensuing chapters of the dissertation.

1.6.1 High-poverty schools

High-poverty schools in this study refer to schools which are found in poverty stricken communities which, as a result, lack the resources necessary for effective learning and teaching. Stoll & Fink (in Kamper 2008) and Taylor (2006) refer to these

schools as “struggling and sinking” schools found mostly in impoverished areas. In these schools, learners are often hungry and ill; do not have proper clothing; lack study facilities, parental support, study motivation, self-esteem and language proficiency, and move from school to school (Cole-Henderson 2004:84; Acker-Hocevar & Touchton 2002a: 112-117).

1.6.2 Socio-economic factors

Foxcroft & Roodt (2001:332) define socio-economic factors as the broader indices of a person or family’s social standing. The major indicators are education, occupation and income. A person’s socio-economic status determines the type of facilities that are available (such as schools, libraries, clinics and other social services), the opportunities available, and the attitude generally exercised by others in the same socio-economic group. These may also include aspects such as poverty, health, unemployment and physical surroundings.

1.6.3 Environmental deprivation

According to Pretorius (as cited in De Witt & Booysen 1995:122-123) environmental deprivation refers to social groupings that are caught in the spiral of poverty deprivation and cultural stagnation caused by the environmental deficiencies and psycho-social backlogs. As a result, they experience serious limitations in terms of self-actualisation, improvement of the opportunities in life and achievement of a satisfactory standard of living.

1.6.4 Academic underachievement

Peters and Van Boxtel (in Masitsa 2004:215) define academic underachievement as the discrepancy between ability and achievement, or between what a learner is capable of achieving and what he is in fact achieving. Already in 1993 and 1999 Ford and Shaughnessy (in Masitsa 2004:215) summarised the characteristics of underachieving learners as follows:

- They have an external locus of control, which means that they lack a sense of control over factors influencing their lives and attribute success to forces outside themselves.
- They may fail to implement adequate problem-solving strategies.
- They suffer from emotional disturbances such as a lack of task persistence and reflectiveness, and are often impulsive and anxious, leading to a negative school attitude.

1.6.5 Dysfunctional schools

According to the classification system used by the National Department of Education, these are schools which obtain less than 60% in their Grade 12 results both nationally and provincially. Due to these poor results, such schools are closely monitored throughout the succeeding years so as to improve learners' performance.

1.6.6 Effective school leadership

For the purpose of this study, Stoll and Fink's (1996) exposition of invitational leadership, as quoted in Kamper (2008:4), is used as a conceptual framework for studying school leadership in high-poverty contexts because it has a direct link with the identified values and principles (with key notions of relationships and respect) in poverty alleviation. They point out how the concept of leadership has evolved gradually from managerial approaches (with the focus on results), via transactional approaches (with the focus on staff efficiency), to transformational approaches (with the focus on attitudinal change) (*ibid.*4) : "Effective school leaders attend to structure and culture, continuity and change; they are both managers and learners; they are both transactional and transformational. It would appear that no single leadership model adequately describes the expectations and reality for contemporary school leaders."

1.7 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Academic performance has received much attention from researchers in the past, and it still continues to be a very topical issue due to the ever-increasing need for highly skilled people in all sectors of the labour market throughout the world. It is a world-wide phenomenon that socio-economic factors have a bearing on academic performance.

Hijazi and Naqvi (2006:1) assert that the measuring of academic performance of learners is challenging since learner performance is a product of socio-economic, psychological and environmental factors – this is why the scope of research is always to find out which factors affect the performance of the learner. Walters and Soyibo (in Hijazi & Nqvi 2006:2) found that high school learners' level of performance is, with statistically significant differences, linked to their gender, grade level, school location, school type and socio-economic background (SEB).

Due to its political past, South Africa is facing huge challenges brought on by factors such as poverty, unemployment, social inequality and general socio-economic decline. Various studies consistently report on the apparent relationship between academic achievement and a range of socio-economic variables as discussed below.

Home variables

Ho & Willms (1996:306) believe that the most enduring finding in the sociology of education is that schooling outcomes are related to the socio-economic status of the child's parents. Already in 1981, Bloom (1981:27) expressed the significance of the relationship between the home background and the school as follows: when the home and the school have congruent learning emphases, the child has little difficulty in his later schooling. However, when the home and the school have very divergent approaches to life and to learning, the child is likely to be penalised severely by the school. Bloom (1981:27) further pointed out that learning in the school is related to the education and occupation of the parents, to the social class and socio-economic

status of the parents, and to their membership of particular ethnic groups and races. Sociological studies of socio-economic status (which include parents' education and income level) consistently revealed the significant correlation between such indices and measures of school achievement. Wang, Hartel and Walberg (in Coleman 1998:155) confirm the link between home background and scholastic achievement when they conclude that proximal factors such as family influence (and the learner characteristics closely related to them) are virtually the only strong and reliable influence upon learner commitment and achievement.

Family characteristics also seem to be a major source of disparity in learners' educational outcomes. Adequate family financial resources, which are associated with parents' occupation and educational attainment, often imply increased learning opportunities both at home and in school. Better educated parents can contribute to their children's learning through their day-to-day interaction with their children and by involving themselves in their children's school work. With their knowledge of social norms, better-educated parents – who often have better jobs – also tend to be able to offer more educational and career options to their children which contribute to their motivation to learn (OECD 2003a: 164).

A factor closely associated with the negative effects of home background and family characteristics is *parental involvement* or the lack thereof, and its influence on learners' academic performance. Steinberg et al (in Mji & Makgato 2006:263) have reported a positive relationship between perceived parental involvement and learners' achievement. According to a study by Mji & Makgato (2006:263), parents have a distinct advantage over everyone else in that they can provide a more stable and continued positive influence which could enhance and complement what the school fosters in their children. The type of parent involvement that makes the biggest difference in learner performance at secondary school level is when parents are actually drawn into the school physically, e.g. when they attend school programmes (sadly, more than 40% never attend). Low expectations are a problem too. Nearly one-sixth of all learners believe that their parents don't even care if they earn good grades. More than half of all learners say they could bring home low grades without their parents getting upset (Mji & Makgato 2006:263).

Poverty

According to Wilson & Ramphela (1989:145-146) a major obstacle faced by many Black children is the problem of hunger whilst trying to learn. In addition to hunger and discouraging circumstances at many schools, another reason for the poor performance and high drop-out rate amongst secondary school learners is, amongst others, the high cost of education from the families' point of view. Fees and levies are a problem, especially for those living below the breadline and costly uniforms are also often required. The issue of school fees remains an ever-recurring problem despite the Department of Education's introduction of non-fee paying schools (Quintile 1 schools). It seems that parents still take their children to schools which they prefer, irrespective of whether they could afford high school fees. School Governing Bodies continue to charge school fees and in many cases decline the non-fee paying status declared by the department.

Lack of resources

Legotlo, Maaga & Sebegu (2002:115) refer to the lack of resources at schools as a major cause of poor performance in Grade 12. They report that very few secondary schools they visited were well-equipped with electricity, libraries, laboratories, water or toilets. In some schools learners attended in classrooms without chairs, chalkboards, doors, or windows. Le Roux (in Masitsa 2004:224) also found out that owing to overcrowding, conditions in many Black schools are poor particularly in rural areas. There is a shortage of desks; classes are very large, and there is not much opportunity for individual attention from overworked educators. The situations in these schools leave learners constantly at risk of underachievement. Vink (in Masitsa 2004:224) claims that there is a causal relationship between the number of learners per educator and the quality of education received. Inadequate classrooms lead to congestion and discomfort which hamper academic activity. Overcrowded classes increase the workload of the teacher, makes classroom management difficult, inhibits interaction between the teacher and the learner, and militates against giving learners individual attention.

Poor attendance

Poor attendance has been identified as another factor that results in academic underachievement. Certain factors contribute to absenteeism in schools such as unemployed parents and the resultant poverty that stems from it. Some children prefer to stay at home rather than to go to school hungry. "It hampers teachers' endeavours to complete their work programme because they are all too often forced to repeat work already done, and do not have a clear picture of how their classes are performing. Learners who do not complete their work programme are at risk of underachievement." (Masitsa 2004:230). Hyland (in Masitsa 2004:229) highlights the importance of school attendance by pointing out that learner interaction with educators and other learners in class helps to enhance the academic learning experience and provides a basis on which learners can demonstrate mastery of the subject matter.

It is quite clear from the above that if stakeholders in education are to win the battle against low academic performance, they should address the multifold impact of socio-economic and social factors.

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.8.1 Research design and method

The research design followed in this study was qualitative in nature with a preceding in-depth literature study to inform the nature and extent of the empirical investigation. Qualitative research focuses on people acting in natural settings and describes their world in their own words (Cozby 2006:109). This research design facilitates an understanding of a social situation from the participants' perspectives (phenomenology). Leedy and Ormrod (2005:133) point out that qualitative approaches focus on phenomena that occur in natural settings, i.e. in the real world and they involve studying those phenomena in all their complexity.

In this study, the research method that the researcher has focussed on as a strategy of inquiry was the case study method. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:24) note that

case study examines a *bounded system*, or a case, over time in-depth, employing multiple sources of data found in the setting. The case may be a programme, an event, an activity, or a set of individuals bounded in time and place. Gay, Mills and Airasian (2009:14) concur and add that case study research is an all-encompassing method covering design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis.

1.8.2 Data collection

The instruments used for data collection were in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, open-ended questionnaires and observation schedules.

1.8.1.1 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted in a non-scheduled, but structured manner, enabling the researcher to formulate precise questions, but also having the freedom to ask other questions as judged appropriate for the given situation. (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee 2006:114-155).

1.8.1.2 Focus group discussions

Focus-group interviews served the purpose of verification and elucidation of information obtained from the in-depth interviews. Focus group discussions are especially suitable where one is particularly interested in complexity or process, or where an issue is controversial or personal (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport 2005:296). Focus group interviews typically follow a qualitative, in-depth approach to collecting data and as such they provide a wealth of information since they involve homogeneous groups that, by nature, encourage discussion (Johnson & Christensen 2004:185). The major characteristic of focus groups is therefore the insight and data that is produced by the interaction between participants. This yields the type of information that is relevant and necessary in order to really understand the topic under investigation (Grabin 2007:10).

The disadvantages of focus group interviews are, according to Gay, Mills and Airasian.(2009:388), that the researcher has less control over proceedings, data is difficult to analyse and organising and recording are time consuming. According to Steward, Shamdasani & Rook (2007:16) focus group interaction allows respondents to react to and build upon the responses of other group members, thereby creating a 'synergistic effect'. In this study the members of the School-based Support Team of the selected primary schools were engaged and their group discussion recorded. The data was then transcribed and analysed using conventional techniques for qualitative data analysis. The researcher conducted three focus group interviews consisting of five educators per focus group.

1.8.1.3 Open-ended questionnaires

Open-ended questionnaires with simple instructions were administered to teachers participating in the focus group discussions as an additional form of data collection and as corroboration of the findings of the focus group discussions. The main advantage of a questionnaire is that it is depersonalised and responses can be completely anonymous, allowing potentially embarrassing questions to be set with a fair chance of eliciting true replies (Gay et al. 2009:389). Open-ended questions were used as they allow the respondents to qualify and clarify their answers in as much detail as they wished, although it may lead to the collecting of worthless and irrelevant information.

1.8.1.4 Observation schedules

A simple observation strategy (also referred to as *non-participant observation*) was followed as a secondary data collection method (Bless et al. 2006:115). This technique typically involves the recording of events, circumstances and/or physical aspects in addition to the primary method of data collection (in this case in-depth interviews and focus group discussions) in order to shed more light upon and add insight to the phenomenon under discussion (Du Plooy 2001:147).

1.8.3 Triangulation

According to Creswell (2012:536) triangulation is widely considered as a process which uses multiple perceptions to clarify meaning and verify the repeatability of an observation or interpretation. There are different types of triangulation. Triangulation of data collection methods which refers to the interpretation of findings from both the focus group interviews and the individual interviews was used in this study. This approach facilitated the verification and validation of the findings.

1.8.4 Quality criteria

Trustworthiness

According to Gay et al. (2009:392) the term trustworthiness refers to the way in which the inquirer is able to persuade the audience that the findings in the study are worth paying attention to and that the research is of high quality. In the present study the researcher aimed to achieve these goals by employing member checking. After data analysis and before findings were drawn, participants and respondents were furnished with interpreted results to verify the correctness of the interpretations.

Credibility

The researcher established credibility by applying triangulation to the methods of data collection and data analysis. In so doing, he determined whether there are any discrepancies in the findings. He strived to produce findings that are convincing, including presenting inconsistent and negative findings in order to add to the credibility of the study.

1.8.5 Selection of participants

Three principals from selected high-poverty schools in the Lejweleputswa Education District of the Free State province were selected to participate in this study. In addition, five post level 1 educators from each school were selected purposively to

participate in the focus-group discussions. Questions focused on management strategies and styles as well as management challenges specific to these schools, including the extent to which external factors – such as poverty and social circumstances – impact on school management and leadership and subsequently on learner achievement. The assumption was that successful principals possess very unique and specific leadership qualities that impact on the performance of the learners in their respective schools, irrespective of their (the learners’) family backgrounds.

1.8.6 Data analysis

The researcher immersed himself in the data in order to become familiar with the information. A content analysis was performed, i.e. the data gathered from the focus group interviews and questionnaires was organised, transcribed (in case of the focus group interviews), segmented and coded. From the various codes, themes or categories were established inductively to facilitate interpretation and presentation of the findings.

1.9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Social research and other forms of research which study people and their relationships to each other and to the world, need to be particularly sensitive about issues of ethical behaviour (Walliman 2005:340). In research certain actions can be referred to as unethical and others as ethically acceptable. The ethical measures below were taken into account during the research.

1.9.1 Professional ethics

According to Creswell (2012:277) professional ethics refers to the moral commitment that scientists are required to make in order to acquire objective and accurate data about real phenomena. This research was conducted ethically for the following reasons:

- The researcher endeavoured to be objective in reviewing literature and obtaining data.

- The researcher endeavoured to refrain from falsification and/or fabrication of data.
- The researcher in all cases endeavoured to describe the methodology used to obtain data.

1.9.2 Publishing ethics

Auricombe and Mouton (2007) state that one of the key ethical principles of scientific publication is that one must acknowledge sources. This research was done in compliance with publishing ethics:

- Quotes of all authors used in this document were properly acknowledged in a list of references.
- All other written work was free of plagiarism and flowed from the researcher's pen.

1.9.3 Accountability

The research and its results were conducted in an open and transparent manner and results were accessible. This was achieved in the following manner:

- Full permission from the Free State Department of Education was gained to conduct the research at selected primary schools in the Lejweleputswa district.
- Research results were open and available to all.

1.9.4 Relationship with subjects

Respondents have the right to privacy and anonymity at all times. McMillan and Shumacher (2010:338) explain privacy and anonymity as the individual's right to decide when, where, and to whom and to what extent his or her attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour will be revealed. The following measures were taken in this study:

- The anonymity and privacy of respondents were respected at all times. Subjects had the right to have their viewpoints expressed.
- A summary of the rationale of the research project was explained to respondents at the beginning of the focus group interviews as well as in the cover letter to the questionnaire.

1.9.5 Publication of results

The findings of the study will be introduced to the reading public in written form to be of value and to be viewed as research (De Vos et al. 2005: 65).

- The report written as a result of this investigation is clear and unambiguous to ensure that whoever uses it, can rely on it.
- A shortened version of this research will be submitted as a journal article to an accredited publisher.

1.10 POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is important to note that there are limitations to the qualitative research design, one which is that **research** quality is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher and one is more easily influenced. Hinckley (2005) adds that it may also be time-consuming and the research might generate large quantities of data which the researcher may find hard to analyse. Even though this is often characteristic of interpretivist studies, it was not the case with this study.

1.11 DELIMITATION OF STUDY

This study focused entirely on three carefully selected high-poverty schools in the Lejweleputswa District to make data gathering and interpretation more manageable.

1.12 CHAPTER DIVISION

In **chapter one** the problem and the aim of the study were demarcated. The rest of the research evolved as follows:

In **chapter two** an account of challenges facing high-poverty schools are presented, as well as methods that, according to literature findings, could be employed to deal with these challenges.

Chapter three provides an explanation of the research methodology and design used to conduct the investigation.

In **chapter four**, based on the data collected, the findings are presented and an analysis and interpretation of the data is discussed.

In **chapter five** a summary of the findings and conclusions are given. Some recommendations are offered on ways in which the specific challenges faced by principals of high-poverty schools, can be dealt with. Characteristics of these principals are presented.

1.13 SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the background to the problem, which is the observation that there are certain high-poverty schools that render excellent Grade 12 results despite the socio-economic circumstances in which they function. Consequently, the chapter also provided a problem statement in the form of research questions, the objectives, the methodology to be followed and the limitations of the study.

A literature review which provides a conceptual framework for the study is conducted in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: SCHOOL LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The theory underpinning this study about high-poverty schools is underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. One of the well-known scholars in the field of developmental psychology, Urie Bronfenbrenner, developed the *ecological systems theory* (Santrock, 2007). This theory defines four types of environmental systems which contain roles, norms and rules that powerfully shape psychological development and how different systems in a community influence one another. He identifies the *microsystem* (such as the family or classroom), the *mesosystem* (which is two microsystems in interaction), the *exosystem* (external environment which indirectly influences development, e.g., parental workplace) and the *macrosystem* (the larger socio-cultural context). He later added a fifth system called the *chronosystem* (the evolution of the external systems over time). Santrock (2007:12) outlines the systems contained in the Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory as follows:

- **Microsystem:** The family, peer group and classrooms or neighbourhoods are called the microsystem which is the primary unit around a child influencing its development directly. Berk (2000:23) reports that this layer is the closest to the child and contains the structures with which the child has direct contact and it furthermore encompasses the relationships and interactions a child has with his/her immediate environments.
- **Mesosystem** refers to relations between microsystems or connections between contexts. Examples are the relation of family experiences to school experiences, school experiences to church experiences, and family experiences to peer experiences. For example, children from poor families may find it difficult to develop academically and will be prone to underachievement .

- **Exosystem:** This system involves links between a social setting in which the individual does not have an active role and the individual's immediate context. For example a child's experience at home may be influenced by a mother's experiences at work, or schools can be influenced by the socio-economic circumstances of the child.
- **Macrosystem:** This system describes the culture in which individuals live. Cultural contexts include developing and industrialised countries, socio-economic status, poverty, and ethnicity. A child, his or her parent, his or her school, and his or her parent's workplace are all part of a large cultural context. Members of a cultural group share a common identity, heritage and values. The macrosystem evolves over time because each successive generation may change the macrosystem, leading to their development in a unique macrosystem.
- **Chronosystem:** The patterning of environmental events and transitions over the life course as well as socio-historical circumstances (divorce, for example, is one type of transition).

The ecological model of Bronfenbrenner's theory attempts to explain the differences in an individual's knowledge, development and competencies through the support, guidance and structure of the society in which they live. This theory looks at a child's development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment. Bronfenbrenner helps us to understand that we all exist within a context that influences both who we are and how we respond to life situations. Bronfenbrenner believes that the interaction between a number of overlapping ecosystems affects a person significantly.

According to Phelan (2004:253) the usefulness of this theory, like other systemic viewpoints, is that we often try to understand people in isolation from the factors that create both reinforcement for behaviour and patterns of interaction. This view clouds our judgment about what is happening with another person quite significantly.

Whilst acknowledging the impact that socio-economic and societal factors might have on the academic performance of secondary school learners, there are schools

in poor communities which, despite their circumstances, have managed to raise their performance, thereby setting an example to underperforming schools. Carter (2005:1) points out that, over the past decades, researchers have investigated these schools to determine what characteristics they share. Lessons learned from high-performing, high-poverty schools could bolster efforts by school leaders and educators to strengthen low-performing schools.

Research conducted by Carr (2006:1) points to the following factors that improve learner achievement: increasing learner attendance, increasing the proportion of teachers who are rated as “highly qualified”, increasing instructional spending, and reducing learner mobility. To these Heckman (2006:3) adds that the best way to improve schools is to improve learners sent to them. A substantial benefit of early interventions is improvement of the performance of disadvantaged children in schools.

According to the National Commission on Education (1996:3) in the USA, disadvantage limits access to educational opportunities and reduces the ability of learners to benefit from schooling. The link between disadvantage and educational performance has so far proved too difficult to break for policy-makers at a national level. Children who live in poverty often attend the lowest performing schools. State and national assessments consistently show poor children lagging behind in performance. Poor communities face many difficulties. Children, families, and the schools that serve them face a host of challenges. For schools, these challenges include children who start school without skills like early literacy. There is often a high rate of absenteeism within the low socioeconomic communities. Along with all of these challenges comes the absenteeism difficulty when attempting to attract experienced teachers (Stiefel, Schwartc & Rubenstein 1999:12).

2.2. SOCIETAL FACTORS POSING LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES WITH REGARD TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Many social problems contribute to the lack of school success in disadvantaged areas, but, particularly in South Africa, HIV/AIDS and poverty-related factors are believed to be crucial in this regard.

2.2.1. HIV/AIDS (including child-headed families compounded by the prevalence of HIV/AIDS)

HIV/AIDS is a major problem affecting the safety, security and well-being of both learners and educators in South Africa. HIV infection is significant among school-children. Motala (2007:10) reports that HIV prevalence in children aged between two and eighteen is around 5.4%. School attendance may be disrupted by illness among children and their care-givers.

HIV/AIDS is one of the most serious challenges currently faced by the education systems of developing countries. Efforts to educate young people in these countries are hampered by the nature of the epidemic. In South Africa, the damaging effect that HIV/AIDS has on schools also aggravates the epidemic itself in a vicious cycle (HIV, AIDS & Schools 2008:1):

- Teacher deaths increase, teaching quality declines, orphans and out of school youth increase
- Illiteracy increases, the skilled work force shrinks, and the quality of human capital deteriorates
- Countries' ability to compete in knowledge economy suffers
- Economic growth declines
- Public budget for health and education declines
- HIV prevalence increases

Furthermore, the findings of a study on National HIV Incidence Measures (2007: 194-199) have shown the following estimated new infections per year :

2-14 years – 571 000

15-49 years – 500 000

When the study was done, HIV incidence in the black race group was nine times higher than the incidence found in other race groups, while HIV incidence among females were more than six times the incidence found in males in the age group 15 – 49 years .

Many studies attest to the atrocious conditions in households affected by HIV/AIDS and how this impacts on scholastic achievement. Ayieko (2008:1) reports that children in child-headed families are deprived of their childhood and the opportunity to go to school. Economic hardships compel them to look for means of subsistence which increase their vulnerability to HIV infection, substance abuse, child labour, sex work and delinquency. Under adverse conditions created by the cycle of poverty as a result of HIV/AIDS, money is often a scarce commodity and children are therefore exposed to danger in an attempt to meet the needs of the family. Landsberg (2005:31) confirms this when she points out that these children seldom have any other option but to sell themselves as prostitutes or partake in criminal activities such as theft in order to get money to buy food for themselves and their siblings. They are so traumatised because of too much responsibility and exhaustion as a result of their own basic needs being unmet, that they lose all interest in learning. They have little hope of achieving academically and no hope of a prosperous future.

Many of the orphans do not attend school due to the heavy domestic duties most of them have to carry out before going to school. Attending school is not a high priority in those families and many orphans choose to quit school. For those who remain in school, many display poor academic performance due to low class attendance, lack of school materials, poor diet and appalling living conditions.

According to the findings reached in a study done on HIV and AIDS in 2008 (HIV, AIDS & Schools 2008:2), about 15.2 million children worldwide had been orphaned as a result of AIDS by the end of 2005. Upon the deaths of their parents, a child may be forced to move house and/or be affected by emotional stress and poverty which can disrupt their education and lead them to drop out of school. If they have younger siblings, they may also be forced to leave school to look after them and act as the head of the household.

In many of the areas that have been hit hardest by AIDS, the majority of children are likely to be “affected” by the epidemic in that they probably have close friends or relatives who are living with HIV or have died from AIDS. In such areas, it is likely that some children will take time off school to care for others living with HIV, or to take care of household duties that those people would otherwise have done (HIV,

AIDS & Schools 2008:1).

It is clear that children who have lost one or both parents to AIDS need a lot of support. They have to deal with grief as well as survival. Most of these orphans are supported by relatives. These are usually older women and are often unemployed or on pension. The family will become poorer and will need food and financial support. A large number of orphans are left alone in the family home when their parents die. Older children look after young ones and try to find ways to survive (South Africa Education Training Unit, 2002:37).

Gilligan and Rajbhandari (2004:8) further report that, according to UNICEF, children suffer profoundly when their households become vulnerable as parents fall sick and die of HIV/AIDS. This suffering includes:

- *Psychosocial distress*, worsened by the pervasive stigma and shame.
- *Economic hardship*: children are forced to take on the frightening adult responsibility of supporting a family.
- *Withdrawal from school*, even while their parents are still alive. The pressures to abandon schooling intensify when parents die.
- *Malnutrition and Illness*: They are more likely to be malnourished or to fall ill and less likely to get the medical care they need.
- *Loss of Inheritance*: They are regularly cheated out of their inheritance.
- *Fear and Isolation*: They are often forced out to unfamiliar and hostile places.
- *Increased Abuse and Increased Risk of HIV*: Impoverished and without parents to educate and protect them, orphans and affected children face every kind of abuse and risk, including HIV infection. Many are forced into exploitative work including exchanging sex for money, food, protection or shelter. These findings indicate that children affected or infected by HIV/AIDS find it difficult to perform well at school and they grow up to become independent and better adults than their parents.

HIV, AIDS & School (2008:1) maintains that "...without education, AIDS will continue its rampant spread. With AIDS out of control, education will be out of reach." The most obvious way in which AIDS can affect a learner is when the individual

concerned is living with HIV, but a child's education is also likely to be seriously disrupted if one or more of his family members are infected. These learners also bear their burden at school because their attention span and academic performance are affected. Gilligan and Rajbhandari (2004:10) note that learners could still experience secondary abuse if those who know about their or their parents' status, discriminate against them in class or at school. It is therefore apparent that education policies, such as the National Education Policy on HIV/AIDS (South Africa Government Gazette, 1999:4) for learners and educators in public schools and Further Education and Training institutions, are efficiently applied so that individual schools are better equipped to deal with such problems and protect the infected or affected learners.

Given the current HIV/AIDS situation in South Africa and the rest of the world, it can be assumed that the following outcomes are likely over the coming years:

- Increasing numbers of children will enter the labour force as a result of HIV infected parents who are sick or have died
- Increasing numbers of children will leave school due to family impoverishment caused by HIV and the requirement to earn a living, as well as increasing levels of stigma and discrimination
- Increasing numbers of child-headed households (CHH)
- A disproportionate burden of care for ill parents and younger siblings will be placed on girls

2.2.2. Poverty and poverty-related factors as predictors of academic achievement

Children are dependent on their parents for financial support. In poverty-stricken households, children are poor by virtue of their parents' economic limitations and they are harshly affected at times by this set of circumstances. Children from poor families consistently fare worse than other children (Burtless & Smeeding 2001:11). Conway (2007: 13) points out that families living in poverty are often headed by young single mothers or parents with lower levels of educational attainment who are unemployed or underemployed, and who may render inconsistent, poor quality child care.

Research consistently reports the link between poverty and academic achievement. Stiefel, Schwartz and Rubenstein (2005:1) argue that children who live in poverty often attend the lowest performing schools. According to Hoff (1999:72) very poor communities face many hardships, where children, families, and the schools that serve them face a host of challenges. For schools, these challenges include children who start school without early literacy skills, high rates of absenteeism and transience and difficulty attracting experienced teachers. Lee, Hamlin and Hildebrand (2007:1) add to this by pointing out that low-income learners have a higher probability of lower achievement than learners from a higher socio-economic status background, and that these lower-income learners may very well continue into the cycle of poverty. Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor and Wheeler (2006:18) report similar findings: “Low-income learners come to school less ready to learn and with weaker educational support at home than those from more advantaged backgrounds....teachers may well perceive that schools with large proportions of learners from poor families offer harsher working environments than those in schools serving more advantaged learners.” Too many people growing up in poverty prematurely end their formal education, and thus they do not escape the socio-economic difficulties associated with low-income living (Conway, 2007:17). According to Hoff (1999:72) “...a child’s family background and the school’s socio-economic make-up are the best predictors of academic success”.

Impact of poverty on education provision

Pieterse (2001:40) is of the opinion that the provision of education to the poor should be concerned primarily with counteracting the suction power of poverty, which is strikingly reflected in the metaphors *ratchet* and *trap*. Many studies have clearly revealed the central role of increased education levels in limiting poverty (*ibid.*).

The socioeconomic and sociological problems associated with poverty give rise to specific challenges concerning the orderly, effective and equal provision of education. These challenges have to be met because poor learners and poor schools are principally and constitutionally entitled to high-quality education and resources. Consequently, South African schools are categorised in five quintiles of 20 % each, ranging from very poor to affluent, and funded accordingly on a sliding scale (Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC), 2003:B52). The identification of

poor schools is based on the relative poverty of the community in terms of average income (Western Cape Education Department, 2006:1). Related criteria apply to determine exemption from school fees and to ensure that poor learners can attend more affluent schools (ELRC, 2003, p. B46). The scope of poverty-based school funding is evident from statistics on the percentages of learners per province in “no fee” schools (i.e. schools in the first two quintiles): Eastern Cape - 56,4 %; Free State - 45,7 %; Gauteng - 21,9 %; KwaZulu-Natal - 42,9 %; Limpopo - 56,3 %; Mpumalanga - 36,9 %; Northern Cape - 44 %; North West Province - 37,9 %, and Western Cape - 14,7 % (South Africa. Department of Education, 2007:3).

Kamper (2008:2, 3) provides a detailed outline of the impact of poverty on schools:

- Learners are often hungry and ill. They don't have proper clothing; they are exposed to physical danger; they have no study facilities, and they lack parental support and positive role models. They don't have access to informal education from books, newspapers and the Internet and consequently lack study motivation. They also have low self-esteem; lack language proficiency; challenge authority; and they tend to move from school to school, resulting in a lack of continuity in their education. This is affirmed by Cole-Henderson (2000:84) as well as Acker-Hocevar and Touchton (2002:112-117, in Kamper, 2008:1).
- Teachers are frequently inexperienced; often under-qualified and are prone to high mobility (better qualified teachers look for more favourable work environments). They tend to have low self-esteem and low work motivation; lack initiative; are often absent from work; suffer from burnout and have low learner expectations. They often show no respect for learners and their parents; practise inappropriate teaching methods (“poverty pedagogies”); lack loyalty towards their schools; work in poorly-resourced, dilapidated classrooms and experience physical danger due to learner aggression and neighbourhood crime (Cole-Henderson, 2000; Haberman, 1999, Acker-Hocevar & Touchton, 2002, in Kamper, 2008:2).
- Parents are in need of health or other societal care; have low educational qualifications or are illiterate; have intense distrust, even hatred towards school (due to own school experiences as child); and are single or act as substitute parents (caregivers).

- The school environment seems uninviting and unpleasant. The school premises (buildings, furniture and other facilities) are neglected, unkempt and damaged. There is poor waste collection and the school environment in general reflects the poor state of buildings in the community.

Given the above state of affairs, it is to be expected that high-poverty schools are generally low-achieving schools. As Kamper (2008:2) points out: "Schools faced by these leadership challenges essentially need a radical turn-about consisting of the transformation of their vision, standards, expectations, culture, service delivery, resources and communication. High-quality education becomes the main target and criterion."

The link between nutrition and academic achievement

There are other predictors of academic failure which are related to poverty, and nutrition has been documented to be playing a significant role in the academic achievement of many children from high-poverty schools. The high prevalence of malnutrition among infants, young children and adolescents has serious developmental implications because these age periods are critical in the growth and development of children. To this Conway (2007:13) adds that poverty has been correlated with lack of educational opportunity, poor quality child care, residential and neighbourhood hazards, deficient health care, and nutritional concerns.

According to Laitsch (2005:1) research has long documented the link between learner poverty, malnutrition and low general academic performance. The link is so well-established that a myth has risen around it: learners in poverty are destined for low academic achievement. Quendler (2002:1) cites numerous studies which demonstrate that malnutrition affects intelligence and academic performance. Learners with the lowest amount of protein in their diet had the lowest achievement scores, and those with iron deficiency demonstrated shortened attention span, irritability, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating (*ibid.*).

It is clear that adequate levels of academic achievement may be the product of improved nutrition that promotes better concentration in school among these

children. The Department of Education seems to realize the importance of nutrition for school children. They believe that access to good nutrition for children is crucial in ensuring universal primary education. This is evident from the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) which is seen as an important means of ensuring that the impact of poverty on children is minimalised. This programme endeavours to promote good health by addressing certain micronutrient deficiencies, and it strives to have an impact on learning by enhancing children's active learning capacity, alleviating short-term hunger and providing an incentive for children to attend school regularly (DoE, 2008:10). Despite positive interventions like these, it remains an unfortunate fact that the extent of prevailing high-poverty circumstances is of such a nature that additional and extensive programmes need to be implemented to address the plight of high-poverty schools effectively.

Inadequacies in the education system

Haycock (2001:10) notes that poor and minority learners often encounter a weaker curriculum and an unconstructive environment. According to Lazaro (2005:66) the structural paradigms within educational institutions affect educational opportunity for low-income learners and learners of colour by creating barriers to upward mobility causing academic failure and low academic performance (*ibid.*:10). Moreover, Verdugo (2002:50) argues that school policies frequently disengage low-income learners and learners of colour. On the whole, such learners are marginalised and subject to negative stigmatisation which increases the likelihood of poor educational experiences.

Anderson (2000:22) points out that until family, community and education problems associated with poverty and welfare are solved, reading problems would continue to aggravate socio-economically disadvantaged learners. Among the explanations for the lack of success of socio-economically disadvantaged learners are "...low expectations, archaic decision making structures, ill-prepared teachers and administrators, lack of co-ordination among schools, parents and communities on behalf of children, negative self-image, peer group pressure, and poverty (Reyer, 1999:10).

2.3. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES WITH REFERENCE TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

2.3.1. Ineffective school management

The previous section highlighted the grim circumstances and expectations of learners prone to poverty. It follows that these pose tremendous challenges to the leadership of schools in such poverty-stricken areas. If these major challenges are not dealt with, their effect could have far reaching consequences for the general performance of schools. School managers are furthermore faced with the challenge of creating a climate of achievement similar to that which characterises high-performing schools according to the former Model-C mode. Garson (2000:4) states that "...the restoration of the culture of teaching and learning is currently one of the most important endeavours aimed at improving the quality of education in South African schools". According to Padron, Waxman, and Rivera (2002:10) factors associated with underachievement include a lack of qualified teachers, inappropriate teaching practices and at-risk school environments (poorly maintained buildings). They argue that schools, rather than the individual learner, should be considered as at-risk.

One of the main problems facing schools in South Africa is inadequate management capacity. A lack of management skills invariably leads to incompetent handling of management tasks and problems. The creation of an effective school, or an achieving school, depends to a large degree on schools being well-managed. Consequently, for principals to achieve success at their respective schools, they need to receive appropriate management training that will enable them to manage their schools effectively (Masitsa et al 2004:222; Engelbrecht 2009:3). The poor performance of some schools is a grave concern for both the national and provincial departments of education, and in recent times more measures have been taken to ensure success at all levels, including replacing poor performing principals with their performing counterparts from other schools. In his annual budget speech of 2002, the MEC for Education in the Free State announced that his department would introduce a "Holistic Intervention Strategy" to help "turn around" those schools whose performance was consistently poor, i.e. schools which had obtained a pass rate of

40% or less for more than three years prior to 2002 (Makwela 2003:14). The strategy involved appointing mentors from the best schools in the province for a period of nine months to support the principals of poorly-performing schools in the management and day-to-day administration of their schools. The strategy would be deemed successful if performance at those schools improved markedly, and if the improvement was sustained once the mentors had left. A total of twenty mentors were appointed to assist forty-nine school principals. Five mentors assisted one principal each, while fifteen assisted more than one. Of these mentors, fourteen were based at the schools where they were acting as mentors, while six were based at their own schools but visited the schools where they were acting as mentors on a regular basis (Makwela 2003: 4). This rather radical intervention by the Department of Education indicates the acute need for effective school management and leadership. As Management Problems (2004:224) point out: the ultimate goal of school management is to ensure and improve school success. Without effective school management, consistent academic success is not possible.

Though the mentorship programme achieved some significant successes in certain schools in terms of leadership and school performance, the programme was suspended as some mentored principals opposed it through legal actions levelled against provincial departments of education. For that reason, the Department of Education has since 2007 embarked on a new strategy to compel principals and deputy principals to acquire leadership skills by awarding them bursaries to enrol for an Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership course in order to improve their management skills.

2.3.2 Lack of parental involvement

Learning does not begin at school, and the background of a child who learns more at home can lay a better foundation for future learning at school. The support, or lack of support, at home plays a significant role in the child's learning. It is for this reason that parents need to be actively involved in their children's education. Rowatt (2001:125) points out that a lack of family support is a critical issue in underachievement. According to Von Secker (2004:37) low achievement is attributed to the paucity of resources available to persons with low income, which results from

low levels of parental education, low-status parental occupation, large family size, and the absence of one parent. Parents who are poorer tend to have lower levels of education, and thus they lack the verbal skills for more enriched dialogue with their children. Unfortunately, this process can easily become a self-perpetuating cycle in that children of low socio-economic status' (SES) parents become adults with low educational levels and low ability to improve their children's verbal development (Miller 2008:8). Powell (2004:1) refers to these children as learners "at-risk for learning". In research conducted by him, many learners had parents who did not complete high school. A large number of the second language learners had parents who were illiterate in their primary language and could not speak English at all. He points out that such learners often lack the background experiences that could help them become successful learners. It is very likely that many of them will drop out of school before completing high school.

The positive relationship between parents, educators and all stakeholders in the school community is crucial to enhance learner performance. If the school cannot be seen as inviting, parents will not feel welcome and thus their involvement will also diminish. Landsberg (2005:85) argues that past experiences of parents, who may perceive educators as being evaluative, often lead to parents being hesitant to approach educators to discuss issues of mutual concern. She cites studies indicating that some educators make it difficult for parents to be involved in the education of their own children, and as a result the much needed partnership is compromised to the detriment of learner performance. This is apparently a world-wide problem and not confined to South African schools.

Epstein and Sanders (2006:82) also found that most teachers and administrators "...still think of themselves as individual leaders of classrooms, schools, or districts with little attention to the importance of teamwork and collaboration with parents and community partners". Many parents in South Africa work in urban areas to earn money for the household, leaving parenting to siblings or members of the extended family. Parents therefore often have little time and energy to be involved in their children's learning at home or at school (Landsberg 2005:221).

Christenson and Sheridan (2001:83) reports that parents' attitudes, guidance and

expectations of education, quality of verbal interaction, participation in cultural and learning related activities and overall stability in the home had a greater impact on learners' success than socio-economic status as a single variable. Parents of low socio-economic status (SES) are found to be less involved in the teaching of new learning skills and cognitive-intellectual activities such as preparations for examinations (Landsberg 2005:221). This is echoed by Achievement Gap (2008:1) which reports that learners who lack middle-class cultural capital and have limited parental involvement are likely to have lower academic achievement than their resourceful peers. Many studies have confirmed the role of parents as significant in ensuring that children perform well at school (*ibid.*:1). Children need as much moral support as they can get from their parents or other adults to boost their fragile self-image. Studies show that when learners have assistance from a parent with homework, they do much better in school.

Unfortunately parents of secondary school learners are no longer motivated to participate in school activities such as meetings, sports and fund-raising (Management Problems 2004:237). The situation is exacerbated by the fact that some pupils do not live with their parents while others live with a single parent. As a result of parental apathy, schools cannot discuss matters with parents essential to the education of their children, or enlist their support in combating truancy and neglect of school work which are rife in schools and which cause underachievement and failure (*ibid.*:237).

2.3.3. Lack of resources

The quality of teaching and learning depends on people and structural and technical resources which are influenced by community context and the policies and programmes of other external role players (King & Newman 2001:88). They may include human and social resources such as parent support; resources such as family income and school funding, technical resources such as equipment, material and technology, organisational structures, time for educators to plan, and school bureaucracy (Steyn 2004:221).

Harris and Chrispeels (2006:13) note that many urban schools serving large

populations and low-income and diverse learners fail because of lack of resources (adequate facilities, materials, time and highly qualified teachers), lack of technical knowledge (curriculum expertise) and unstable operating environments (high leadership, staff, and learner turnover as well as missing leadership skills and collaborative time). These schools are not able to create high quality learning environments without considerable outside support and assistance.

In a study conducted by Management Problems (2004:224) on the impact of *inadequate facilities* on academic performance, it was found that approximately 70% of the studied schools lacked laboratories for Science or Biology, libraries and sports facilities. In all schools furniture was often stolen or simply vandalised. The security fences of many schools were broken, turning schoolyards into thoroughfares for pedestrians. Schools did not have night-watchmen to ensure their security. The staffrooms of half the participating schools were too small to accommodate all their staff. The majority of the buildings were old and needed renovation. The pupils' toilets were inadequate and many were in need of repair. Therefore, principals faced problems not only with the management of facilities and resources, but also problems resulting from the lack of sufficient facilities and resources.

A shortage of basic *instructional aids* such as textbooks can lead to complex problems of low morale and lack of commitment from both teachers and learners (Legotlo, Maaga, & Sebege 2002: 114). Therefore, principals are seriously hampered in the management of their schools by inadequate facilities and resources since these are essential not only for school management, but also for educator and learner performance. Research indicates that there is a link between inadequate facilities and resources, and poor academic performance.

Overcrowding of classes is another factor that is evident in low-performing high-poverty schools, and which has a bearing on academic performance. "Overcrowding due to shortages of classrooms and teachers militates against effective teaching and, in particular, against individual attention to pupils." (Management Problems 2004:227). Some researchers attribute overcrowding to the poor planning by education departments regarding allocation of teaching posts to some schools. According to Legotlo *et al.* (2002:115) principals and mentors agree that many secondary schools have inadequate teaching posts. In view of this, some educators

are forced to teach subjects they are not qualified to teach, resulting in poor teaching which has a negative impact on the academic performance of learners. Management Problems (2004:228) further note that principals claim that the Morkel-model used to allocate teaching posts to schools, is flawed because it allocates more teaching posts to technical schools and fewer to academic schools. The rationale for this step is apparently that technical subjects require more individual attention than academic subjects. Due to this scenario, principals are left with the option of squeezing more learners into few classes to avoid exposing them to under-qualified teachers, and this subsequently leads to overcrowding. Overcrowded classes affect individual attention and make educators lose their enthusiasm for teaching, their motivation and their morale. This adds up to ineffective teaching and poor academic performance by learners.

Research indicates that inadequate or undesirable workloads, a negative spin-off of overcrowding, is a deterrent to the effective functioning of educators because it poses a threat not only to effective teaching, but also to effective and prompt feedback (Landsberg 2005:23). It seems that revision of work also becomes almost impossible under these circumstances. Inadequate posts also impede the smooth management of schools by increasing a principal's management problems which has a negative impact on academic performance (Management Problems 2004:229).

A lack of resources is not limited to finance, books or laboratory equipment. There are other types of resources that also play a major role in academic underachievement. The nature of widespread *physical deficiencies* of many school buildings and equipment in the United States, for example, has compelled those in school planning and design to see this as an opportunity to enhance academic outcomes by creating better learning environments (Schneider 2002:1). It is noteworthy that there seems to be a growing body of work which link educational achievement and learner performance to the quality of air that they breathe in schools. Schneider (2002:1) reports that poor indoor air quality (IAQ) is widespread, and its effects are too important to ignore. The IAQ symptoms identified include irritated eyes, nose and throat, upper respiratory infections, nausea, dizziness, headaches and fatigue, or sleepiness which have collectively been referred to as "sick building syndrome" (*ibid*: 1).

Schools with a track record of poor academic performance which are located in disadvantaged communities seem to suffer from poor resources. Laitsch (2005:1) reports that although some advocacy organizations have identified successful high-poverty schools as an argument that such schools don't need additional resources to overcome the effects of poverty, more careful scholarship has found that resources do indeed matter, and that increased support appropriately targeted can significantly improve learning (*ibid.*:1). Alleksaht and Hart (2001:77), for example, point out that school resources are critical in schools serving poverty stricken children because resources affect class size, professional development, technology, curriculum, and recruitment and retention of high quality teachers. *School funding* by the state has also been found to have an influence on learner achievement. According to Lee, Hamlin and Hildebrand (2007:47) support for instructional interventions may be lacking and increased overall funding may produce increased achievement results. The above findings by Lee et al. (2007) seem to coincide with the current Free State Department of Education's heavily funded "Dinaledi" (Stars) Schools Project. This project was initiated by the MEC of Education and it is aimed at providing more resources such as teaching and learning materials, laboratory and library equipment and resources, funds as well as additional teachers (especially in the Mathematics and Science stream) to the best achieving schools. The aim is to ensure that these schools (high-performing high-poverty schools) receive extra continued support to sustain their high achievement. However, such support which is clearly more needed in low-performing, high-poverty schools, is not provided as they are often told that they have to earn it by achieving better results. Unfortunately the performance gap between the low-performing and high-performing schools in the Lejweleputswa District in particular, is consequently only widened. Furthermore, the critical point about the schools with the "Dinaledi" status is that they lose the status and the additional support should their academic performance drop to below 75% in their matric results.

2.3.4. Poor attendance

One of the factors that characterises poor performing schools is the problem of poor school attendance, which also presents a major challenge to principals. According to Petrosinelli (2003:1) poor attendance not only hinders academic achievement, but

also promotes a poorly educated society which subsequently leads to many negative social issues.

Some educational experts argue that learners who have not established the link between academic content and life experiences do not feel that good school attendance is relevant to their future (Collins 2001:13). This is in contrast with the finding in 1990 by Bouffard-Bouchard which is that learners with high self-efficacy seem to be more successful in maintaining consistent attendance (Petrosinelli 2003:1). Youngsters in urban areas are affected by many social risk factors that contribute to their absence from school. Some of these risk factors include living in densely populated communities, in high crime neighbourhoods, or in poverty. Other factors include nutrition deficits, negative peer and media influences, prejudice and unequal opportunities, family stress, physical and/or mental illness, and learners' inability to be resilient in their development. As a result, learners from the township often lack the determination to be successful and they lose motivation to stay at school. With these overwhelming risk factors, learners are dropping out at an alarming rate each year (Etsey 2005:1-35).

Petrosinelli (2003:2) aptly argues that "...learners who do not attend school on a regular basis are less equipped to succeed in the world". They often spend most of the academic year at home and avail themselves mostly on the eve of examinations without being properly prepared, thereby contributing to the poor academic performance of schools in disadvantaged communities. In most cases, these learners manipulate the education policy. Policy states that learners can only be deregistered at schools if they absent themselves from school for fourteen consecutive days without official report by the parents or guardians (DoE 2009). They therefore apply what is termed 'guerrilla tactics', absenting themselves from school and only surfacing just before the fourteenth day to avoid being officially removed from the school's register (after which they will stop attending again).

2.3.5. Dropping out of school

Two important factors in the success of any educational system are the rates at which young people drop out of, or complete high school each year (USDoE, 2003).

Learners' efforts and devotion to their studies and the choices they make throughout their schooling years contribute to their academic success or lack thereof. Learners' attendance, interest, and attention to their studies affect how well they perform at each level, and which could also be determinant factors in their school completion. According to Wirt (2002:35) levels of learner effort can be illustrated by how often they are absent from school, how interested they are in their schoolwork, whether they try to do their best, whether they complete their assignments, and how much time they spend on homework and other activities such as work or watching television.

According to Ma (2003:30) a sense of belonging to school can be directly related to dropping out of school. Additionally, it has been reported that learners who are identified as at-risk and whose teachers emphasize a sense of belonging in their classrooms and schools, tended to accept those values and remained in school. Various factors can influence a learner's decision to drop out of school. Cousins (2004:36) singles out parental support/supervision at home, school attendance, role models, gang involvement and self-esteem as particularly important issues for children dropping out.

Prevention activities which were successful for dropouts were reported as increasing motivation, notifying parents of a late or absent learners, providing emotional support, and a lower learner/teacher ratio (*ibid.*:2004:36). It was also noted that learners who earn low grades, who don't participate in school activities, who have poor attendance, and who receive little support and encouragement to stay in school are at a greater risk of dropping out (*ibid.* 2004:36).

Bergeson (2003:4) points out that poor school attendance eventually results in school dropout and that educational institutions also contribute significantly to the drop out problem. He lists the following school-related factors of dropping out:

- Conflict between home and school culture
- Ineffective discipline system
- Lack of adequate counselling
- Negative school climate

- Lack of relevant curriculum
- Passive instructional strategies
- Disregard of learners' learning styles
- Retentions/ suspensions
- Low expectations
- Lack of language instruction.

Other factors that have been linked to learner decisions to drop out are school policies and practices (i.e. discipline and attendance procedures, promotion and retention policies, tracking), curriculum content, and learner engagement and school membership (Bergeson 2003:21). Learners may feel that dropping out is an escape from a hostile, uncaring, or boring school. Leaving school may give them a sense of control in their lives.

2.3.6. Truancy

Frequent truancy is also an indicator of potential schooling problems. Truants typically show little connection with school, exhibit low academic motivation, and consequently show poor school performance (Hallfors & Godette 2002:37). Reid (2003:39) advises that in order to combat truancy and absenteeism within some schools, it may be necessary to change pupils, parents and teachers' attitudes towards these schools and the process of schooling. In some schools, teachers do not come prepared to class, some exhibit poor behavioural patterns, learners are largely disengaged in classrooms, which all may contribute to the negative image of the school and eventually cause a problem of poor scholastic attendance by the learners.

The problem of absenteeism due to truancy is not confined to South Africa. According to Zehr (2003:3) the dropout rate of Hispanic learners in the USA is twice that of blacks and four times that of non-Hispanic whites. According to him learners miss school for different reasons, depending on the age and circumstances of each learner. Studies have shown that in 2003, about 5 % of learners in grade 9 through 12 skipped school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school.

The causes of truancy are as different and as diverse as the students who make up our schools. There is not a clear cut and easily identifiable cause of truancy. Instead, there are many different factors and combinations of factors that lead to truancy. These factors include the operations of a school, such as a school's enforcement of its truancy policies, a learner's family life and living environment, and the student's own personal and developmental factors (Reid 2005).

2.3.7. Unqualified and under-qualified educators

In terms of educator qualifications - one of the measures of quality - approximately 8.3% of South African teachers were regarded as under-qualified in 2005. However, major initiatives have been put in place to improve the qualifications of teachers, including the National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) and Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) programmes. Since 2008 the Department of Education has funded 1 600 teachers per year for Mathematics, Science and Technology ACE programmes, and a further 3000 teachers for NPDE programmes at various universities (DoE, 2008:16).

A number of research studies have highlighted how the learners and their own families have contributed to their underperformance. Johnson (2002:25), on the other hand, has disputed this notion and provided the following alternative explanation: "The primary problem lies not in the way economically disadvantaged learners and learners of colour view education, but in the way they are taught" (*ibid.*: 25). This view brings into picture the fact that teachers play a critical role in the performance of learners. They can either help to improve or lower learner performance based on their approaches and teaching skills. Berman, Chambliss and Guerra (1999:53) note that efforts to raise achievement are hindered by school districts' and educators' tendencies to place the problem within the learner (and family) or within the school, without examining the links between the school practices and learner outcomes.

Lankford, Loeb and Wyckoff (in Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigder 2006:3) found that learners attending high poverty schools have access to teachers with weaker qualifications than their counterparts attending schools serving more advantaged learners. Cortese

and Von Zastrow (2006:1) likewise point out that teachers in high-poverty, low performing schools are about two-thirds more likely than teachers in other schools to lack certification, and almost twice as likely to have only a few years of experience. They further point out that high-poverty schools fight a constant uphill battle to recruit and retain teachers and principals (*ibid.*:1). They have more trouble attracting enough experienced applicants, they lose staff at a much higher rate (over one in five teachers every year) and must consequently fill vacancies repeatedly with less-qualified candidates. A study conducted by Legotlo et al. (2002:115) in high-poverty township secondary schools revealed that there was a high shortage of experienced and effective educators in learning areas such as Biology and Mathematics.

It seems that the cycle of inadequately qualified educators teaching high-need populations resulting in low learner achievement, persists in low-performing schools (Lankford et al. 2002:3). Reynolds et al. (cited in Management Problems 2004:228) found in their study of effective and ineffective schools that successful principals take educator recruitment seriously and ensure that they appoint good educators, whereas principals of ineffective schools take on any educator sent to them. If the principal cannot select appropriately qualified educators for his/her school because he/she has to make do with redundant educators from other schools, he/she cannot be expected to acquire good educators to teach effectively and ensure good academic performance.

It is clear that the problem of unqualified and under-qualified teachers needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Neagley and Evans (in Etsey 2005:2) hold the view that effective supervision of instruction can improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom, whilst Etsey (2005:2) believes that academic performance tends to be better in private schools than public schools because of more effective supervision of work. Motivation on the part of educators has also been cited as one of the causes of poor service delivery by the teaching corps. Those who are highly motivated will perform much better than their less motivated colleagues. Lockheed (1991) indicates that a lack of motivation and professional commitment produce poor attendance and unprofessional attitudes towards learners which in turn affect the academic performance of learners.

Furthermore, the efficient and effective use of learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) could go a long way in producing better performance by teachers and better learning by learners. According to Broom (1973), the creative use of a variety of media increases the probability that the learner would learn more, retain better what they learn and improve their performance on the skills that they are expected to develop.

It is therefore paramount for teachers to learn new skills and methodologies so as to better teach their learning areas of expertise. Policies and approaches in education keep changing, and so teachers, like their learners need to be life-long learners if academic achievements are to be improved. It seems that there is a wider gap between what teachers learnt at institutions of higher learning and what is required of them with the inception of the new curriculum (The curriculum and assessment policy statement or CAPS). To keep up to date, teachers need to be retrained and equipped for the approaches of the changed curriculum. It is for this reason that the Skills Development and Skills Development Levies Acts were passed in 1998 and 1999 respectively to address the problem of under-qualified and unqualified teachers in schools across the country. According to Mahanyana (2003:128) the SETA Education, Training and Development Practices, known by the acronym ETDP SETA is responsible for promoting and facilitating the delivery of education, training and development. The ETDP SETA can play an important role in investigating ways to get the large numbers of under-qualified and unqualified educators enrolled in courses to upgrade their qualifications, and in identifying skills required in the sector, including those of school managers, governors and educators.

2.4. CHARACTERISTICS OF PERFORMING SCHOOLS

High-performing schools seem to exhibit a number of common traits that differ significantly from practices in lower-performing, schools. These include a school wide ethic of high expectations: caring, respectful relations between stakeholders, a strong academic and instructional focus, regular assessment of individual learners, collaborative decision-making structures and a non-authoritarian principal, strong faculty morale and work ethics and coordinated staffing strategies (Laitsch, 2005:3).

Researchers further agree that high-performing schools engage in a number of different activities or factors that cause them to remain outstanding in their performances. Cawelti (2005:2) refers to these factors as “sustained focus on multiple factors,” that is, schools do not achieve high performance by doing one or two things differently. They must do a number of things differently, and all at the same time, to begin to achieve the critical mass that will make a difference in learner outcomes. In other words, high-poverty schools that achieve gains in learner performance engage in systemic change.

2.4.1. Effective leadership

A professional school principal is the educational leader and manager of a school, and is therefore responsible for the work performance of all the people in the school, i.e. both staff and learners. People are the human resources of schools. They use material resources (such as finances, information equipment, and facilities) to produce a "product", namely the educated learner. One of the principal's jobs (the so-called principalship) is to help the school achieve a high level of performance through the utilisation of all its human and material resources. This is done through effective, and ultimately excellence in, leadership. In simple terms: a principal's job is to get things done by working with and through other people (Botha 2004:239).

The need for the school principal to change focus is key to increasing performance in schools. According to Lazaro (2005:46) under the old input-oriented accountability system, the principal was primarily a manager of order and efficiency who handled learner discipline, made sure the heating worked and the building got cleaned, and dealt with parent complaints. In short, the principal ensured all proper procedures and processes were followed correctly. Sklra, Scheurich and Johnson (2000:46) observe in their study that the principal is now primarily an instructional leader whose main focus is teaching. Motivating and helping teachers to be academically successful with all learners is pivotal. The principals work closely with teachers on improving the instruction and learning process. A requirement for this new principal role is a sound knowledge-base on how to assist teachers in being successful with all learners at equally high academic levels. School principals should have a sense of direction and invite others to follow the desired path. Powell (2004:12) as well as

Sebring and Bryk (2000:12) concur that successful principals have a vision for the schools and the ability to articulate the vision to staff, parents and learners. These principals know what they expect from the school and learners and are able to infect others with that dream, a positive and beneficial contagion.

Principals of secondary schools in townships are experiencing increasing management problems. Research indicates that principals with insufficient or non-existent school management skills may encounter management problems which impede academic success. The effectiveness of a principal's management is probably the most important factor contributing to improved academic performance (Management Problems 2004: 173).

Leadership is a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. Successful leaders develop a vision for their schools based on their personal and professional values. They articulate this vision at every opportunity and influence their staff and other stakeholders to share the vision. The philosophy, structures and activities of the school are geared towards the achievement of this shared vision (Bush & Glover 2003:8).

According to Gulbin (2008:2) actions of leaders determine the success or failure of an organisation. At the school level, the principal's actions determine whether or not effective change happens. This premise by Gulbin clearly indicates that the success of the school lies mostly with the leadership qualities of the principal as the head of an institution, and whether or not the principal effectively utilises the skills of individuals in his school. The significance of establishing the quality and effectiveness of both competent school principals and qualified educators in all schools, lies with the belief that no school should be left under the care and guidance of poor performing principals and teachers without giving support and training. This will have a bearing on the type of education the learners are exposed to as well as the output of such learners and their competency in the job market.

Literature abounds with characteristics and leadership qualities necessary for schools to be successful. Although many commonalities are identified, researchers seem to discuss effective leadership from a variety of perspectives.

Granke (2008:1-2) summarises the following leadership qualities of successful principals. They:

- demonstrate flexibility in dealing with change and have a willingness to experiment.
- make decisions so as to attain the most positive results for learners, rather than adhering to or maintaining an established system.
- analyse disaggregated data from multiple sources and use it to inform decisions.
- use technology effectively to lessen the load of routine tasks and to provide more effective communications.
- recognise individual differences in staff and learners and provide opportunities to meet their needs.
- facilitate and build consensus that guides, rather than mandates.
- use a blend of top-down and bottom-up decision-making processes.
- inspire, persuade, and influence others by their own actions and attitudes.
- stay current on educational research and trends and provides the same information to stakeholders.
- respond to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners and their families.
- maintain a focus on the possibilities and opportunities instead of the barriers.
- cultivate support for the school and its mission among all segments of the community, school board, district personnel, and other concerned individuals and groups.

One of the characteristics of principals of high-performing schools is the type of leadership style or approach that they possess, and “distributive leadership” and “collaborative leadership” are common features amongst effective school principals. Distributed leadership is best understood as a “...practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation (which) incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals” (Harris 2008:2). Where teachers and other staff are working together to solve particular sets of pedagogical problems, they will occupy a leadership “space” within the school and will engage in leadership practice (*ibid.*:2). Harris (2008:3) further explains that distributed leadership is a model of leadership that implies broad

based involvement in the practice of leadership, involving teachers and other professionals, learners, parents and the wider community in decision-making. Frank (in Harris 2008:4) notes that in the long term, the key to success lies in the ability to create and manage effective teams, to stimulate an environment in which innovation and knowledge sharing are not just lip service, and to communicate complex concepts to a wider stakeholder group in order to strategise comprehensibly.

It is interesting to note that some scholars of effective school leadership are of the opinion that no particular leadership style or approach can be said to be solely appropriate to enhancing academic improvement in schools characterised by low performance. According to Hallinger and Heck (in Harris & Chapman 2002:1) principals who manage change in schools in difficult circumstances are far from uniform in their leadership style. In view of this notion, change in schools need to be effected irrespective of a particular leadership style assumed by the principals. Rather, what could be common amongst them, will be the characteristics they possess. Harris and Chapman (2002:4) summarise these characteristics of principals of high-performing schools as follows:

- They make decisions that motivate both staff and learners and place an emphasis upon learner achievement.
- They set high expectations for learners, provide clear rules about behaviour and stress discipline.
- Their approach is one of empowerment through caring and through generating a culture within the school where all learners are motivated to succeed.
- They communicate their personal vision and belief systems by direction, words and deeds.
- They share a belief and an optimism that people have untapped potential for growth and development.
- A consistent and shared vision is an inherent part of their leadership approach.
- They use a number of strategies for bringing out the best in staff. In addition to formal development opportunities, these strategies include the power of praise, involving others in decision-making and giving professional autonomy.

In the commitment to improve performance in schools, it seems that the role of the school principal has changed tremendously. Nowadays more than ever is expected of the principal to bring about expected and sustainable changes. The principal is expected to lead in the design of a curriculum that meets the learning needs of all learners and is aligned with state and local standards, to know what constitutes good instructional practice, and to coach and otherwise guide teachers in the continual improvement of their educational knowledge and practice (The School Leadership Challenge 2001:1). The need for the school principal to change focus is primary to increasing performance in high poverty schools. According to Lazaro (2005:46) under the old input-oriented accountability system, the principal was primarily a manager of order and efficiency who handled learner discipline, made sure the heating worked and the building got cleaned, and dealt with parent complaints. In short, the principal ensured all proper procedures and processes were followed correctly. Sklra, Scheurich & Johnson (2000:46) observe in their study that the principal is now primarily an instructional leader whose main focus is teaching. Motivating and helping teachers to be academically successful with all learners is pivotal. The principals work closely with teachers on improving the instruction and learning process.

Collaboration is another key characteristic of successful schools. Successful school principals empower staff through collaboration and shared leadership. They encourage risk taking and problem solving. Shared leadership is an integral part of how these schools conduct business. The staff can be trusted to make academic and instructional decisions. (Davenport & Anderson 2002:18)

In line with this, Marzano (2000:174) advocate leadership teams for successful schools. He maintains that "...leadership for change is most effective when carried out by a small group of educators with the principal serving as a strong cohesive force". Marzano's view clearly shows that other principals fail in their task simply because they do not delegate responsibilities, they do not trust members of their staff to take the school to new heights, and in a way they directly contribute to poor academic performance in their own schools.

Successful school principals also have excellent management of resources, time,

and discipline in addition to the management of instruction. Principals who cannot hire the most competent staff, cannot schedule and protect time for teaching, and cannot create a climate where the learners are well-disciplined and recognisant of school goals, cannot be successful (Powell 2004:19). Although tremendous challenges are posed for school leaders, it is not something unattainable – it forms part and parcel of effective management.

In a study of high achieving schools that serve at-risk learners, Cawelti (1999:21) refers to the leadership of the principal with community involvement as one of the variables for school success. In successful schools, principals are not fixtures in the front office. They are involved in the instructional programme of the school. They know what is going on instructionally because they are visible in every classroom. They make frequent classroom visitations, almost daily (Davenport & Anderson 2002:16).

2.4.2. Teaching staff

The staff of high-performing schools distinguish themselves in different ways from their counterparts in low-performing schools which include being competent or exceptional in carrying out their tasks. Competent teachers are defined as those having both content knowledge and a compassionate way of relating to the learners and their families while also maintaining a high degree of flexibility in managing the school day (Grayson 2004: 2).

- ***Professional development***

There are various definitions of staff or professional development. It may involve one or more of the following: improving qualifications, improving the ability to do the job, promotion, improving personal capacities (such as time management, writing proposals, learning a computer programme, managing and co-operating with other people), and so on (Ruth 2001:202).

According to Moloi, Grobler and Gravett (2002:1) successful schools have educators who are committed to personal and professional development. This is echoed by Steyn (2004:217) who points out that professional development (PD) of educators is

seen as an essential ingredient for promoting the delivery of education and training and improving learners' performance. Empowered educators will succeed and their success will enable them to innovate their teaching and learning practices because only individuals with these attributes will survive (Moloi et al. 2002:3). Schmoker (in Moloi et al. 2002: 3) asserts that the most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is building the capacity of school personnel to function as a professional learning community. Their strategic capacity should enable them to focus on the core of their work, that is, to improve the quality of teaching for learner success.

Several studies indicate that the National Department of Education takes teacher development as a key strategy to ensure excellence in academic performance, and has therefore put measures in place to develop educators throughout the country. Amongst other strategies for development, the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) was passed as a development policy in 2000 to monitor and improve schools. The aims of WSE policy are as follows:

- to inform the national government, provinces, parents and society in general about the performance of schools and the standards of learners' achievements measured against nationally agreed criteria;
- to provide substantiated judgements about the quality of education to inform decision-making, policies and planning within the provinces and at national level;
- to identify key factors that if developed, will improve school effectiveness;
- to provide a basis for school improvement through a process of internal and external evaluation and the identification of good and problematic practices (*South Africa, Government Gazette* 2009:21).

School districts where learning gains are made tend to focus on two types of professional development: intensive long-term development of instructional leaders, especially principals or head teachers, and district-wide job-embedded professional development for teachers (Anderson 2003:14). Honig and Hatch (2004:21) add that an emerging aspect of job-embedded professional development is the creation of professional learning communities both within and across schools. Communities of teachers in schools help teachers make sense of multiple messages about

instruction, not only from districts, but from professional associations as well. In the Lejweleputsa Districts and other districts in the Free State, these professional learning communities are referred to as Professional Working Groups (PWGs) and are basically established during learning area meetings (cluster meetings) initiated by the senior learning area specialists (SEs). Teachers can, however, meet on their own on a regular basis to identify and solve common learning area (subject) or teaching challenges. Furthermore, teacher associations like the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) and the Suid Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie (SAOU) organise developmental workshops facilitated by renowned publishers to empower educators across the districts.

Professional development (PD) of educators is seen as an essential ingredient for creating effective schools, promoting the delivery and development of education, and improving learners' performance (Rhodes & Houghton-Hill 2000:424). Since educators have the most direct contact with learners as well as considerable control over what is taught and how it is taught, it can be assumed that enhancing educators' knowledge, skills and attitudes is a critical step in improving learner performance (King & Newman 2001:87).

Shaw (2003:39) warns that "...it is necessary to realise that educators cannot hope to use the most sophisticated approach to learning unless they have both the skills and the desire to implement it. Effective professional development means maximising staff interaction through small-group discussions that could stimulate their learning and provide motivation. By collaborating with professionals within and outside their schools in order to gain expertise from research, educators' learning experiences are enhanced (Robinson & Carrington 2002:240).

- ***Driven by a common purpose***

In studying the characteristics of performing schools, researchers in the field have discovered that the staff in such schools is driven by a common purpose which makes them strive for the same goal: excellent learner achievement. Lee and Holland as well as Chubb and Moe (in Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert & Sobel 2004) note that learners perform better in schools that have high academic expectations.

As opposed to some practices in low performing schools where staff tends to focus on a learner's background and where a learner suffers continued ridicule due to his/her past mistakes and performance, Picucci et al. (2004:2) stress that equity is an important part of a common purpose in high performing schools. These schools make sure that learners from low income backgrounds receive the same standard of education as other learners. A learner's background and prior academic performance do not pass as reasons for lower expectations.

In the South African context, schools are still categorised according to mainstream and special schools where learning is not provided equally. Special schools still deal with learners with mild to severe barriers in learning while the mainstream schools focus on learners with no mental or physical problems. Picucci et al. (2004:3) argue that equity at high performing schools implies attention to all learners. In the USA, staff make an effort to include learners receiving special education services in mainstream classes and hold them to the same state standards other learners are held to.

- ***Common planning time (collaboration)***

Lein, Johnson and Ragland (1997:4) found that the staffs of successful high-poverty schools spend a considerable amount of time collaborating around instructional issues. Often teachers use this time to plan lessons that address the same concepts across disciplines so that learners gain exposure to material through different teachers and in different contexts. Through common planning, teachers also attend to learners' developmental needs based on collective knowledge (Picucci et al. 2004:4). In this regard, Kannapel and Clements (2005:5) report that several researchers have identified collaboration and teamwork among school staff as a feature typical of high-performing schools, in that they regularly communicate across teaching areas and programmes and are eager to learn from each other. District encouraged collaboration among teachers within their schools and across the district help to develop and sustain goal consensus, foster shared beliefs and increase commitment to reform (Anderson 2003:15).

Furthermore, it seems that collaboration among teachers on the same team promotes information sharing, discussion on pedagogical practices and interdisciplinary work. It also instills a sense of collective responsibility with regard to students' progress (Erb, 2000; Moles, 2003).

Educator collaboration and support are required in order for professional development to be effective in high-performing schools. Unfortunately the traditional culture of educator isolation in many low-performing, high-poverty schools and the limited time available for interaction within schools, have not encouraged educators to cooperate as colleagues (Collison & Ono 2001:267). Professional development should provide opportunities for educators to discuss their achievements and problems in employing new strategies (Robinson & Carrington 2002:240). In this way, the collaboration will contribute towards the development of a positive school culture that is committed to change and the creation of better learning opportunities for all (*ibid.*:240).

Additional time provided to learners in high-performing schools place these learners at a better position to get help when they really need it compared to their counterparts in the low-performing schools. According to Barth, Haycock and Jackson (1999:4) high-performing schools offer longer instructional periods and ensure that the time spent in schools is "on task" and not wasted. At some of these schools, creative routes are found to expanding the school day, such as bringing in teams of business or senior volunteers, for example, to provide extra tutoring. They also increase instructional time by arranging for extra support aides, parents, and even older learners. Some offer intensive reading periods during which every adult in the school, teachers, aides, and principals provide reading assistance.

- ***Individual attention***

According to Picucci et al. (2004:5) a consistent feature in each of the high performing poverty schools they studied is their commitment to holding learners to high standards and helping them meet these standards by attending to them on an individual basis. These schools have systems to identify learners who are in danger of failing so that additional support can be provided. Learners have opportunities to

attend after-school programmes that are both academically and non-academically oriented and to attain additional academic instruction in areas of need. These schools recognise that for them to achieve their goal of each child attaining academic success, they have to provide learners with additional resources, typically in the form of services extending beyond the regular school day. This support is formal and consistent rather than haphazard.

Studies tend to indicate that establishing these small learning communities has a positive impact on both teachers and students (Erb, 2000; Felner, Jackson & Kasak, 1997; Moles, 2003). In particular, they allow teachers to get to know their students better and to provide more individualised support, which may have a positive impact on students' commitment and success (Moles, 2003).

- ***A culture of high expectations and caring***

As mentioned earlier, successful schools differ from low performing schools in that they have high academic expectations for all learners. Granke (2008:1-2) maintains that successful schools have high academic standards which:

- expect that all learners will achieve at high levels;
- link to local, state, and national standards;
- establish measurable performance indicators and benchmarks for all learners;
- emphasise conceptual understanding and the application of knowledge, skills, and processes;
- communicate learning expectations to learners and parents;
- serve as the basis for a culturally inclusive curriculum: methodology, resources, and assessment measures for evaluation criteria;
- are used by teachers to guide instructional planning and implementation for diverse learners;
- guide assessment strategies which inform learners, parents, teachers, and other community members about learner achievement.

Barth et al. (1999:2) also discovered that it is fundamental to high-performing schools that the culture of high expectations is shared by the school's principal,

teachers, staff, and learners. Central to this culture is the conviction that all children can achieve and succeed academically. Kannapel and Clements (2005:2) further note that the culture of high expectations is embedded in a caring and nurturing environment, where adults and young people alike treat each other with respect. Haberman (1999:2) identified the ability of teachers to forge relationships with children in poverty and connect with them, as the key factor in high-performing schools.

The focal point of the transformation required by teachers is to provide a caring environment in which learners are viewed as the most valuable resources of the school, and in such "...a culture of caring, teachers do not expect learners to repress their own background knowledge" (Kannapel & Clements 2005:2). Thus, rather than forcing learners to respond to questions or activities that fit into the traditional framework of the classroom, teachers are willing to design their curriculum and classroom agendas to correspond with the knowledge and understanding of the learners they serve (Reyes, Scribner & Scribner 1999:201). Goldstein (1999:118) argues that caring and supportive teacher interactions maximise learners' motivation and engagement. Johnson (2002:2) observes that "...it also requires teachers who use culturally relevant approaches to create meaningful experiences for learners". This approach to instruction builds on, rather than "tears down" or devalues a learner's background and experiences.

According to Reyes et al. (1999:36), a culturally responsive educator believes that every aspect of the individual has value and worth, and refuses to categorise or label learners as low-achieving or lacking in ability.

Team teaching in a high-performing school is another method viewed as a necessary ingredient to high performance, while at low-performing schools teachers are afraid to invite their peers into their own classrooms in fear of their weaknesses being exposed. In a high-performing school teachers create disciplined dialogues on subject matter. They critique and help each other to become better teachers and they conduct research and question their teaching practices whilst keeping in mind the constant improving of learner learning (Reyes et al. 1999:200).

According to Lazaro (2005:38) the importance of attitudes and beliefs of teachers has been well-documented in the educational arena. Research and professional literature emphasise that "...genuine caring conveys a sense of value and worth to the learners and can lead to increased learning". He also emphasises that it is critical to the achievement of economically disadvantaged learners and learners of colour to function in a setting of high expectations (*ibid.*:38).

2.5.3. Curriculum and assessment practices

Black and William (1998) broadly define assessment to include all activities that teachers and learners undertake to get information that can be used diagnostically to alter teaching and learning. By this definition, assessment encompasses teacher observation, classroom discussion, and analysis of learner work, including homework and tests. Assessment become formative when the information is used to adapt teaching and learning to meet learner needs. From this definition it becomes evident that assessment practices in all schools play a crucial role in determining success for every learner, and should therefore be well conducted to produce the expected outcomes in an education setting. Moreover, how well assessment is utilised, sets high-performing and low-performing schools apart.

It appears that high-performing schools adopt a curriculum as well as assessment practices that ensure that all learners achieve and are fully equipped for the challenges of the outside world. Barth et al. (1999:3-4) found that these schools consistently emphasise academic achievement and instruction. Many purchase commercial instructional packages or curricula. Many use state standards as the basis for curriculum design and assessment. Barth et al. (1999:4) further note that most high-performing schools adopt curricula that emphasise basic skills in Reading and Mathematics. The philosophy is simply that children who have not mastered the basic skills will not effectively progress in their education. Some encourage early childhood education programmes in the school and community.

Burris, Herbuert and Levin (2004:44) cite that all learners can reach high levels of achievement if they receive high-quality instruction and follow a high-quality curriculum. Many high-performing schools welcome external testing because it

provides a baseline upon which to assess their performance against an external standard. The fundamental purpose of testing at high-performing schools is to diagnose and guide the instruction of individual learners. Teachers use this assessment data to identify where learners should improve and adjust their teaching strategies accordingly (Barth et al. 1999:4).

Comparatively speaking, assessment practices in low-performing schools have been found to be wanting, thereby confirming the belief that learners in such schools are not properly prepared for the set assessments which eventually determine their progress to the next classes or grades. These schools are characterised by few assessment opportunities often confined to quarterly tests, while learners in the high-performing schools are rigorously assessed on a continuous basis.

The above view was confirmed by the investigation conducted by a popular Sunday newspaper, City Press, which made a shocking discovery less than a week before the South African matriculants could sit for their final 2008 examinations. Their investigation found that a township matriculant coming from a low-performing school had very little preparation for his matric compared to a pupil at a former Model C school (Chuenyane 2008:6). The investigation indicated the following scenario:

Table 2.1: NUMBER OF WRITTEN EXERCISES AT EACH SCHOOL PER YEAR

Learner at former Model C school	Learner at a township school
Mathematics & Geometry: 126	Mathematics: 25
Physical Science: 52	Physical Science: 26
Life Sciences: 37	Life Sciences: 16

The above scenario clearly shows the varied preparedness of learners from a high-achieving and a low-performing school, as well as the teacher commitment at those schools. Simply put, the investigation confirmed the notion that thorough assessment practices could go further in assisting learners to accelerate their academic

performance because they would have enough exposure and practice before the actual examination.

Higuchi (in Winking 1997:2) argues that at all levels, educators are turning to alternative, performance-based assessments that are backed by criterion-referenced standards. These assessments help educators to gain a deeper understanding of learners' learning and they enable them to communicate evidence of that learning to parents, employers, and the community at large. These alternative assessments and standards have been heralded as the answer to a whole host of education ills, including the apparent or real gap in performance between learners of different ethnic, socio-economic, and language backgrounds.

In the USA, the National Centre for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Learner Testing suggests that an assessment system made up of multiple assessments (including norm-referenced or criterion-referenced assessments, alternative assessments, and classroom assessments) can produce "...comprehensive, credible, dependable information upon which important decisions can be made about learners, schools, districts, or states" (Winking 1997:3).

Jones (in Winking 1997:3-4) notes that in the low-stakes classroom-based assessment, where the primary purpose is determining content coverage and conceptual understanding or diagnosing learning styles, teachers are able to take into account the learner's culture, prior knowledge, experiences, and language differences. When preparing and administering assessments, teachers can follow guidelines for equitable assessment in the classroom and make use of accommodations and adaptations to the assessment to ensure that all learners have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and achievement.

Many high-performing, high-poverty schools include learners whose skills are significantly below grade level in academic achievement when they enter the school. The consistent message of these schools is that learner performance that is less than proficient is followed by multiple opportunities to improve performance. Most of these schools conduct weekly assessments of learner progress (Reeves 2000:4).

The manner in which learners view assessments also seems to have a bearing on their performance. Reeves (2000:5) reports that when learners know that there are no additional opportunities to succeed, they frequently take the teachers' feedback on their performance and stuff it into desks, back packs and wastebaskets. These learners are happy with a "D" and unmotivated by an "F". They think that there is nothing that they can do about their deficient performance anyway. However, in classroom assessment scenarios in which there are multiple opportunities to improve, the consequence of poor performance is not a bad mark and discouragement, but more work, improved performance, and respect for teacher feedback (*ibid.*:5)

It is important for teachers to consider that over the course of a year, they can create many opportunities to assess how learners are learning and then use this information to make beneficial changes in instruction. Boston (2002:1) advises that when teachers know how learners are progressing and where they are having trouble, they can use assessment to make the necessary instructional adjustments, such as re-teaching, trying alternative instructional approaches, or offering more opportunities for practice. These activities can lead to improved learner success.

2.5.4. Learning environment

Learning environment plays a significant role in academic achievement. Environments may be too dull for learning to occur or conducive to effective learning and teaching. Learning environment or school climate has many definitions. McEvoy (2000:158) states that school climate refers to the attitudes, beliefs, values and norms that underlie the instructional practices and the operation of the school.

Research has shown that the tone of the educational setting can have a profound effect on student performance. Cold, threatening climates are likely to hinder the academic performance of ethnically diverse students, while warm, supportive climates have been found to be a contributing factor in the success of students of colour (Gay 2002)

According to Hoy, Smith and Sweetland (2002:39) a healthy school climate is

imbued with positive learner and teacher relationships. Teachers like their colleagues, their school, their job and their learners and they are driven by a quest for academic excellence. They believe in themselves and their learners and set high, but achievable goals. Learners work hard and respect others who do well academically. Principal behaviour is also positive. Principals have high expectations for teachers and go out of their way to help them.

Emory, Caughy, Harris and Franzini (2008:895) argue that school climate is a key factor in a child's psychosocial development and academic success. Positive school climate characteristics such as teacher support from administration, classroom resources including computers and textbooks, and increased adult volunteers for individual learner tutoring enhance and increase learner success.

Discipline also plays a pivotal role in a good learning environment. According to Joubert, De Waal and Rossouw (2004:78) discipline at school has two very important goals, namely to ensure the safety of staff and learners, and to create an environment conducive to learning and teaching. If certain learners are too scared to attend school because they constantly feel threatened or the behaviour of learners in a school disrupts the normal teaching and learning process, it has a serious impact on learners' access to equal educational opportunities.

Principals in effective schools provide support to teachers as they deal with those discipline issues that arise in the classroom. This element of management also manifests itself in control of public spaces in school buildings. The principal's attention to disciplinary concerns wherever they may occur, helps to minimise their occurrence and results in the structural learning environment that is characteristic of a successful school (Klinginsmith 2007:28).

Discipline as well as an environment that is safe for schooling, are major attractions for parents to enrol their children in particular schools and not in other schools. It is therefore very crucial that the principals and other stakeholders in schools ensure that there is always a safe environment for effective teaching and learning to take place. A school that exhibits a safer environment and a culture of high discipline is associated with a high-performing school, whereas those schools with disciplinary

problems and unsafe environments are characteristic of low-performing schools.

Advocates of education contend that young adolescents are more successful at schools which are developmentally appropriate, socially equitable, and academically excellent (National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, 2002: 2). Charles, Geiser, Jackson and Mayer (in Picucci et al. 2004:23) share the same notion since they argue that successful schools share a belief in excellence and equity for all; a challenging curriculum with high expectations and the provision of expert instructional methods that prepare all learners to achieve at higher levels; a collaborative school environment that shares a developmentally and intellectually appropriate purpose; and a partnership involving parents and the larger community in supporting learners' learning.

According to Mertens and Flowers (2002:4) environments that are conducive to effective teaching and learning are those that maintain high levels of academic rigor, have a curriculum that is meaningful, relevant, and connects subject matter, provide opportunities for active learning, goes beyond the boundaries of the team and classroom into the community, and foster a positive climate that stems from mutual respect and beneficial interaction. "In order to really make learning a relevant, creative and vibrant experience for learners, the surrounding classroom environment or milieu should be built in such a way that it can support relevant, creative and vibrant teaching." (Davidoff & Lazarus 2002:6). Studies have shown that adolescents who feel good in the school environment are less likely to suffer from emotional problems and more likely to partake in activities and commit to school related issues (Kristjansson, Sigfusdottir, Allegrante, & Helgason 2009:71).

It has thus far been consistently argued that there are a number of social or environmental factors which impact negatively on learning and teaching in many South African schools, and poverty plays a major role (see 2.2.2). According to Landsberg (2005:28) education in the poverty-stricken communities of South Africa is hampered by a lack of order in the communal structures, a culture of vandalism, a short term orientation towards time, a powerful and negative peer group influence, a non-stimulating milieu, insecurity, language deficiencies and poor orientation of the family and school. The result is a negative academic self-concept, relatively low

levels of drives, accumulated scholastic backlogs, and discomfort in the school situation. These factors contribute to failure in school and the frequency of early school leaving (*ibid*: 28). Surveys of schools in disadvantaged urban or rural areas indicate that across the education system as a whole, the residents of poverty-stricken areas are poorly served by the education system. Learners have only a slim chance of receiving sufficiently challenging and rewarding teaching throughout their educational career (Mouton 2001:5). However, it is possible for a school from a disadvantaged area to succeed against the odds, and this requires collaborated efforts from all stakeholders in all schools.

According to Kapp (2000:126) educators must be able to detect symptoms of environmentally deprived learners so that they may not assume that their performance is poor because of low ability. Learners can be intelligent and capable, but may be deprived because of the environment. There are symptoms educators must observe and follow up to give the required assistance. These are:

- Poor self-confidence
- Little motivation resulting from poorly directed pedagogical intervention
- Perceptual deficiencies caused by inability to pay sufficient attention to looking and listening to what is relevant
- Poor creativity because of limited channels for participation in creative activities

High-performing poverty schools boast what is termed “productive classroom climates” that are necessary to foster learner commitment and involvement in school. According to Bergeson (2003:44) positive classrooms reflect characteristics such as:

- A positive atmosphere and supportive peer culture
- A discipline system that is both fair and effective
- Person-oriented rather than rule-oriented classes
- Decision-making opportunities for learners
- Opportunities to develop self-esteem and self-confidence
- Instruction and opportunities to help learners develop a commitment to social and life values
- Opportunities to orient learners to the broader world outside school,

showing the correlation between education and work

- Parents and community volunteers as mentors
- Instructional methods that involve tactile, kinaesthetic, and auditory perceptions
- Peer teaching and cooperative learning techniques

Research has however indicated that for professional development to be effective in high-poverty, high-performing schools, the school environment must also be conducive for teachers to be developed. Bernauer (2002:89) goes further and says “...quality leadership is required for effective professional development. It provides an orderly and nurturing environment that supports educators and stimulates their efforts.”

2.4.5. Parent and caregiver involvement (also refer to 2.3.2)

Parents of learners in performing schools share the common trait of supporting their children in various forms of their schooling activities. Rowatt (2001:125) maintains that by showing an interest, such as checking regularly about grades and inquiring about school issues, a parent can nurture the adolescent’s school functioning. Also showing an interest in special projects and performances demonstrates parental support and generates energy for better work. Landsberg (2005:224) points out that research evidence suggests that an open climate where parents and other family members are welcome in the physical and psychological environment of the school, is a prerequisite for family involvement. A school’s climate can therefore inhibit or facilitate parental involvement, and parental involvement on the other hand can enhance school climate.

However, parents should monitor their support so that it should not have a damaging effect to their children and that children should not view it as pressure, rather than support and care. Rowatt (2001:125) also warns that in certain subcultures, too much family involvement can also be a problem. For instance, in some Asian families the pressure to succeed academically is so great that adolescents suffer low self-esteem and depression out of proportion to their peers (*ibid.*:125)

The importance of parental involvement seems to be a crucial issue, as is evident from studies conducted by various researchers in the field. A synopsis of findings is given below:

- Moloi et al. (2002:4) emphasise that when a school interacts with the parent community, it becomes possible to create an affirming and enabling environment in which parents and educators can bring their values, attitudes and perceptions about their roles and responsibilities closer together. A major responsibility of those outside the school (parents and the school community) is to help provide the conditions for deep learning for those inside the school by supporting efforts to make schooling enjoyable for learners. The collective effort of those inside and outside the school should be harnessed to transform schools into learning organisations (*ibid.*:14)
- Hill & Blank (2004:1) found that parental involvement in schooling affects achievement which in turn influences career and educational aspirations. They further established that parental socio-economic status and ethnicity both directly and indirectly influenced parental involvement in schooling and their children's progress.
- The significance of parental involvement as a predictor of academic success is highly supported by Marcon (1999:5) who found that (a) the more child centred the approach, the greater the parental involvement, and (b) the greater the parental involvement, the higher the grades/ scores regardless of level of income. Also, the more active the parental involvement, the greater the effect on academic achievement.
- Henderson and Mapp (2002:60) found that parental involvement (PI) maximises learner achievement. They listed the benefits of PI as "higher grades and test scores, long-term academic achievement, positive attitudes and behaviour, more successful programmes, and more effective schools."
- According to Lazar and Slostad (1999:15) parental collaborations increases

teaching effectiveness by enlisting parents as part of the team, and also gains much needed information about the learners through parent contacts. Schools should however ensure that the teachers are more skilled to engage parents in the learning of their children. This is necessary as parents should feel welcomed and needed, and more so to be able to assist their children in their school work. Moon and Callahan (2001:315) concur that "...teachers need high quality staff development in order to increase direct involvement of the parents in the educational process".

- Anderson (2000:22) points out that parental involvement is a necessary part of the education process during the 18 years of school and the years prior to enrolment in school. The parent involvement factor is an important variable factor for the low SES learner. The family must be positively involved in the learner education. Furthermore, the family involvement must be specific in nature to the extent that the family is supportive of specific educational activities and learning tasks (Lee 2007:48-49).
- Sklra et al. (2000:48) found that in each of the highly successful school districts, cultivated leadership, both at the district level and at the school level, persistently sought the participation of their communities. Through the active participation of parents and the community in a variety of programmes and initiatives, a shared belief began to emerge - a school community united can deliver equitable learning for all children.

In high-performing schools, parents seem to be an essential part of the formula for success. Harris and Chrispeels (2006:45) report that a Family Support Team (FST- which consists of a parent liaison, deputy principal, counsellor, facilitator, and any other appropriate staff works in such schools, serving to make families feel comfortable in the school and to become active supporters of their child's education as well as providing specific services (*ibid.*). The FST first works toward establishing and maintaining good relations with parents and increasing parental involvement in the schools. The FST also intervenes to solve problems. For example, team members may contact parents whose children are frequently absent to see what

resources can be provided to assist the family in getting their child to school. The FST, teachers and parents work together to solve school behaviour problems. Moreover, family support staff is called on to provide assistance when learners seem to be working at less than their full potential because of problems at home (Harris & Chrispeels 2006:45).

Schools on the path to meaningful inclusion of families recognise parents (and grandparents or guardians) to be engaged in their children's educational experiences when they provide for their child's basic physical and psychological needs, promote the child's learning at home, volunteer in the classroom, advocate on behalf of the child with teachers, participate on decision-making committees, become active in community organisations that promote the work of schools and the welfare of all children, or some combination of these factors (Muscott, Szczechuil & Berk 2008:9). High-performing, high-poverty schools therefore create an environment that is inviting to parents to play significant roles in the education of their children through structures such as the School Governing Bodies (SGBs). It also takes place during parents' general meetings or through parents' grade meetings where they consult with learning area educators on particular evenings to discuss the progress of learners and come up with strategies to assist such learners.

When schools view parents as partners and engage them in decision-making processes that are mutually respectful, they realise higher levels of learner achievement and greater public support (Muscott et al. 2008:13). They further note that educators in high-performing schools are working diligently to create safe, successful, and satisfying teaching and learning climates that support learners' social competence and academic achievement. They purposefully work on establishing trusting relationships with families that form the basis for a wide range of engagement practices.

2.5.6. Conclusion

Academic achievement is an important aspect in all countries, and it becomes the schools' paramount objective and mission to ensure that all learners achieve at an expected level. The success and failure of each school is measured by its academic

outputs, thus calling on all school leadership and the entire school population to strive towards the common goal of academic excellence. All the factors influencing academic achievement in high-poverty, high performing schools as discussed deserve to be taken seriously by all school leadership teams who want to make a success of their schools.

Barth et al. (1999:3) point out that for learners to achieve academically, they must have a safe and a disciplined environment in which to do so. This clearly highlights the importance of a conducive environment for effective learning to occur, and it remains the task of the principal in each school to ensure that the foundation of a 'conducive environment' is laid. However, principals cannot be expected to perform all these necessary tasks on their own, but they need committed members of the School Management Teams, competent educators, supportive parents and focused learners to ensure that academic excellence is achieved in all schools, irrespective of the learners' backgrounds.

In the increasingly complex world of education the work of leadership will require diverse and new demands. There is a growing recognition that the old organisational structures of schooling simply do not fit the requirements of learning in the twenty-first century. New models of schooling are emerging based on collaboration networking and multi-agency working (federations, partnerships, networked learning communities, extended schools, etc.). These new and more complex forms of schooling require new and more responsive leadership approaches. New leadership approaches are needed to traverse a very different organisational landscape (Harris 2008:31).

It is imperative that principals and their SMTs provide effective leadership if their schools are to meet the challenge of producing high-performing learners in the high-poverty environments. If low-performing, high-poverty schools are to escape their situations, they strongly need, amongst others, to change their leadership approaches.

Many schools have restructured their leadership teams and created new roles to meet the needs of workforce remodelling. As schools reposition and redefine

themselves, distributed, extended and shared leadership practices are more prevalent. As schools engage with complex collaborative arrangements, distributed forms of leadership will be required to 'cross multiple types of boundaries and to share ideas and insights' (Wenger et al., 2002: 123).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In chapter two, the literature review dealt with the managerial challenges experienced by the principals of high-poverty schools as well as a host of challenges faced by the secondary school learners as a result of their socio-economic backgrounds. The literature review further looked into the so-called high-performing, high-poverty schools so as to have a clearer picture of how those schools continue to produce excellent Grade 12 results despite the poor backgrounds of the majority of their learners.

The high-performing, high-poverty schools were investigated to ascertain which managerial skills the principals in those schools possessed to be able to direct them towards academic excellence, despite the challenges they faced. This chapter is therefore aimed at presenting the framework for data-collection using a qualitative investigation. It also deals with the method of investigation and includes data-gathering techniques and the design of the research.

In this chapter the researcher will provide the research design where the procedure of conducting the study is explained. The research design will therefore incorporate the statement of subjectivity, the selection of research participants, data transcription, data analysis, reliability and validity of the study and the ethical measures considered during the research proceedings.

It was critical to collect valuable information so as to assess the views held by the participants (teachers and principals) with regard to the challenges faced by the school principals of high-performing, high-poverty schools. The information was gathered through individual interviews with the school principals and through focus group interviews with the teachers in the selected schools that matched the profile as determined by the researcher. Moreover, the main research question upon which this study is based, and the main objectives of the study are also stated.

3.2. THE RATIONALE FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The researcher has been a teacher in the Lejweleputswa Education District in the Free State for the past 14 years. He has been challenged through teaching in four different schools during that period by the disparities in academic performance in various schools - certain schools were continuously able to sustain and improve their performance on a yearly basis despite a host of socio-economic challenges faced by the learners, and other schools were not making any significant impact in their academic performance.

3.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THE AIM

In this chapter the researcher answered the overarching research question set out in chapter 1 which reads as follows:

Given the overwhelming evidence that confirms the negative effect of poor socio-economic circumstances on the academic success of learners from poverty-stricken areas, how do some schools in these areas manage to excel academically despite their poor living conditions, and which elements constitute a profile of leadership in high-poverty school?

The aim of this study was twofold:

- To determine the reasons for the academic success of the selected “at risk schools” situated in poverty-stricken areas(the so-called A1 schools),
- To propose different solutions that can be employed to alleviate the poverty-related backlogs and issues regarding learners, parents, teachers, resources and facilities so as to ensure a happy and effective learning environment in high-poverty schools.

3.4. RESEARCH DESIGN

McMillan & Schumacher (2010) define research design as a plan and structure of the investigation used to obtain evidence to answer research questions. A research design describes the procedures for conducting the study, including when, from whom, and under what conditions the data will be obtained. The research design, therefore, indicates the general plan: how the research is set up, what happens to

the subjects, and what methods of data collection are used (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:20).

The researcher chose a qualitative research design in order to conduct this empirical investigation because this approach gives a clear understanding of the participants' views and experiences, and it captures participants' perceptions as they occur naturally (Wiersma & Jurs 2009:232), and in their actual words (Johnson & Christensen 2011:18). Qualitative research is by definition exploratory as well as explanatory, and it is used when we don't know what to expect, to define the problem or develop an approach to the problem. It is used to go deeper into issues of interest and explore nuances related to the problem at hand (Mora 2010:1).

Leedy and Ormrod (2010:135) concur and further argue that qualitative research methodologies focus on phenomena that occur in natural settings, i.e. in the "real world". Secondly, they involve studying those phenomena in all their complexity. Qualitative researchers rarely try to simplify what they observe. Instead, they recognise that the issue they are studying has many dimensions and layers, and so they try to portray the issue in its multifaceted form. Richie and Lewis (2003:212) also add that qualitative research is an approach in which researchers are concerned with understanding the meaning which people attach to their experiences or phenomena within their society.

According to Flick (2006:129) the qualitative approach puts emphasis on the knowledge and practice that are studied at the local level. Mouton (2005:53), trying to emphasise the value of individuals' experiences of their environment, notes that qualitative researchers have always been interested in:

- describing the actions of the research participants in great depth; and then
- attempting to understand these actions in terms of the actors' own beliefs, history and context.

For this study, the qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it would accurately provide the required information to achieve the objectives of the research,

being to investigate the managerial challenges as confronted by the principals of high-poverty, high-performing schools in the Lejweleputswa Education District in the Free State. Shank (2002:5) defines qualitative research as "...a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning...". By *systematic* he means "planned, ordered and public", following rules agreed upon by members of the qualitative research community. By *empirical* he means that this type of inquiry is grounded in the world of experience. *Inquiry into meaning* means that researchers try to understand how others make sense of their experience. Researchers can use qualitative research approaches for a number of specific reasons so as to:

- Develop an initial understanding of an issue or problem
- Look for a range of ideas and feelings about something
- Understand different perspectives between groups and categories of people
- Uncover underlying motivations and factors that influence decision making and opinions
- Provide information needed to design a quantitative study
- Explain findings from a quantitative study (Mora 2010:2)

In this study, the research design that the researcher has focussed on as a strategy of inquiry was the case study method. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:24) note that case study examines a *bounded system*, or a case, over time in depth, employing multiple sources of data found in the setting. The case may be a programme, an event, an activity, or a set of individuals bounded in time and place. Gay et al. (2009: 14) agree and add that case study research is an all-encompassing method covering design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis.

The researcher should therefore choose the specific type of a case study relevant to his particular research study. Mark (in De Vos et al. 2005:273) refers to three types of case study, all with different purposes:

- *The intrinsic case study* is solely focused on the aim of gaining a better understanding of the individual case. The purpose is not to understand a broad social issue, but merely to describe the case being studied.
- *The instrumental case study* is used to elaborate on a theory or to gain a better understanding of a social issue. The case study merely serves the

purpose of facilitating the researcher's gaining of knowledge about the social issue.

- *The collective case study* furthers the understanding of the researcher about a social issue or population being studied. The interest in the individual case is secondary to the researcher's interest in a group of cases. Cases are chosen so that comparisons can be made between cases and concepts and so that theories can be extended and validated. For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused more on the collective case study. Principals and teachers from three purposively selected schools were involved to validate the theory around managerial challenges faced by principals of high-poverty, high-performing schools in the Lejweleputswa district.

The most important question that a researcher might ask himself is under which circumstances a case study method can be utilised. According to Yin (in Baxter & Jack 2008:545) a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context.

3.4.1. The role of the researcher

It is of the utmost importance to clearly define the role of the researcher in this particular study. The researcher first asked for permission to visit sites of research from the relevant authorities, in this case the District Director (Lejweleputswa District) and principals of identified schools, before interviews could be conducted. First and foremost, the researcher directly contacted the Provincial Head of Education (Research and Development Directorate) to ask for permission to conduct the interviews as they had to be conducted during the normal school hours - though caution had to be taken not to disturb learning and teaching in any way.

According to De Vos et al. (2002:59), in qualitative research, the researcher is directly involved in the setting, interacts with people, and is the "instrument". Leedy and Ormrod (2010:147) add that qualitative researchers believe that the researcher's

ability to interpret and make sense of what he or she sees is critical for understanding any social phenomenon. Thus, the researcher is an instrument much the same way that a sociogram, rating scale or intelligence test is an instrument. The researcher therefore talked to the principals, teachers (post level 1's), observed, studied and read documents as well as recorded the interviews with all participants. The researcher went as far as personally collecting all the responses and analysing them. That was done with the understanding that the researcher had to be totally prepared and skilled so as to conduct the investigation and avoid researcher bias by not engaging in selective observations and selective recording of information (Johnson & Christensen 2011:264). In an attempt to ensure competency and avoid researcher bias, the researcher undertook to:

- observe the ethical code of conduct required when undertaking this empirical investigation.
- pay attention to the participants' own words and to transcribe the interviews verbatim.
- remain sensitive to the needs, emotions and feelings of the participants at all times since the sample being studied came from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and varying age groups, experiences and ideologies.
- avoid bias and subjectivity with regard to achieving rapport with the participants and interpretation of their data by maintaining a neutral stance during the entire interview process.
- maintain objectivity with reference to the participants at all times by not influencing their perceptions and not making value judgements that might bias the research findings.
- familiarise himself with the interview guide (wording, format, recording procedures and allowable probes).
- train himself to conduct the interview in a courteous and professional manner throughout the interview process (Creswell 2009: 221).

In addition, the purpose of avoiding researcher bias was very important to the researcher so that the information collected could be as reliable and valid as possible so that the research findings could be equally authentic. When qualitative researchers speak of validity they are concerned primarily with credibility,

transferability, and trustworthiness (Lasch, Marquis, Virneux, Abetz, Arnould, Bayliss, Crawford & Rosa 2010:44).

In order to gain access to deeper levels, the researcher needs to develop a certain rapport with the subjects of the study and win their trust (Woods 2006: 4). It is this rapport that will determine the authenticity, validity and quality of the data collected and offered by the participants. Woods (2006:4) further adds that the qualitative researcher seeks to discover the meanings that participants attach to their behaviours, how they interpret situations, and what their perspectives are on particular issues. According to Patton (2001:39) qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand a phenomenon in a context-specific setting, such as a "...real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest".

3.5. RESEARCH METHODS

3.5.1. Selection of participants

The central focus of qualitative research is to provide an understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants (Gay et al. 2009:12). The two key characteristics of qualitative research include the collection of narrative and visual data over a period of time in a natural, non-manipulated setting, as well as the following characteristics:

- First, qualitative research includes individual, person-to-person interactions. The researcher strives to describe the meaning of the findings from the perspective of the research participants. To achieve this focus, the researcher gathers data directly from the participants.
- Qualitative researchers spend a great deal of time with participants and are immersed in the research setting. The detailed recording of the processes occurring in the natural setting provides the basis for understanding the setting, the participants and their interactions. Without this immersion, the search for understanding would elude the qualitative researcher.

- Thirdly, qualitative researchers avoid making premature decisions or assumptions about the study and remain open to alternative explanations. They typically wait until they are in the research context before making tentative decisions based on initial data analysis (*ibid.* 2009:14).

Hoberg (1999:58) adds that in qualitative research, a small, distinct group of participants should be investigated to enable the researcher to understand the problem in-depth. For the purpose of this study, purposeful sampling was applied in selecting the participants. In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon (Creswell 2012:206).

Three principals from selected high-poverty schools in the Lejweleputswa Education District of the Free State Province were selected to participate in this study. In addition, five post level 1 teachers from each school were selected purposively to participate in the focus-group discussions. Questions focused on management strategies and styles as well as management challenges specific to these schools and the extent to which external factors such as poverty and social circumstances impact on school management and leadership and subsequently on learner achievement. The assumption is that successful principals possess very unique and specific leadership qualities that impact on the performance of the learners in their respective schools, irrespective of their (the learners') family backgrounds. The selection of the schools was based on the Grade 12 results of the previous five years. The participants were selected based on the criteria as outlined below:

Principals had to:

- be the principal of the same school for at least five years or above.
- be willing participants so as to honestly provide the valuable data necessary for the research.
- be willing to give the researcher access to documentary data if needed.

The post level one teachers had to:

- be at the identified schools for more than three years.

- be willing to freely and honestly give information through focus group discussions.

The roles of the selected participants above cannot be underestimated as their participation was deemed critical by the researcher so as to gain the much needed data about their respective schools.

3.5.2. Data collection techniques

The data collection phase involved identifying and selecting individuals for study, obtaining their permission to be studied and gathering information by administering instruments, by asking them questions or observing their behavior (Creswell 2012: 204). The researcher therefore used data collection instruments such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and open-ended observation schedules in order to collect data. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:329), the qualitative phases of data collection and analysis are interwoven and occur in overlapping cycles.

The five research phases are outlined as follows:

- Phase 1: Planning

The researcher analyses the problem statement and the initial research questions inform the type of setting or interviewees to be utilised that would logically be informative. Furthermore, in this phase, the researcher locates and gains permission to use the site or network of persons.

- Phase 2: Beginning data collection

This phase includes the first days in the field during which the researcher establishes rapport, trust, and reciprocal relations with the individuals and groups to be observed. The researchers obtain data primarily to become oriented and to gain a sense of the totality for purposeful sampling. Researchers also adjust their interviewing and recording procedures to the site or persons involved.

- Phase 3: Basic data collection

In this phase, the inquirer begins to *hear* and *see* what is occurring, which goes beyond just *listening* and *looking*. Choices of data collection strategies and informants continue to be made. Tentative data analysis begins as the researcher mentally processes ideas and facts while collecting data. Initial descriptions are summarised and identified for later corroboration.

- Phase 4: Closing data collection

In this phase, the researcher “leaves the field”, or conduct the last interview. More attention is given to possible interpretations and verification of the emergent findings with key informants, remaining interviews and documents. The researcher concludes that further data collection will not yield more data relevant to the research problem.

- Phase 5: Completion

Completion of active data collection blends into formal data analysis and construction of meaningful ways to present the data. The researcher reconstructs initial diagrams, time charts, network diagrams, frequency lists, process figures and other graphics to gain a holistic view of the totality and the relationship of parts of the whole.

3.5.2.1. *In-depth interviews*

In-depth interviews have been conducted in a semi-structured manner, enabling the researcher to formulate precise questions whilst having the freedom to ask other questions as judged appropriate for the given situation (Bless et al. 2006:114-115). DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006:315) add that semi-structured interviews are usually scheduled in advance at a designated time and location outside of everyday events. They are generally organised around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee/s.

De Vos et al. (2005:296) concur and further add that researchers use semi-structured interviews in order to gain a detailed picture of a participant's beliefs

about, or perceptions or accounts of, a particular topic. The method gives the researcher and participant much more flexibility. Semi-structured interviews are especially suitable where one is particularly interested in complexity or process, or where an issue is controversial or personal (ibid. 2005:296).

In this study, the researcher conducted one-to-one interviews with the principals of the high-poverty performing schools, and focus group interviews with teachers of the same schools so as to confirm the responses collected from the principals and have a second opinion of what transpires at those schools. The purpose of conducting those interviews was to capture the different perspectives of how the principals, despite being confronted with various managerial challenges at those schools, were still able to produce excellent results. The researcher utilised open-ended and semi-structured questions to provide the interviewees with the opportunity to freely describe and narrate the situations at their different schools as they experience them on a daily basis. The respondents' actual words were then analysed and used as data to inform the research findings.

3.5.2.2. *Focus group discussions*

A focus group is a planned, relaxed, naturalistic dialogue among a small group of people on a specific topic. The advantage of focus groups over one-to-one interviews is twofold. First, information can be obtained more quickly because only one interview must be scheduled for a group, rather than one for each person. More importantly, the group setting allows individuals to use the ideas of others as cues to more fully elicit their own views (Israel & Galindo-Gonzalez 2011:2).

Focus group interviews have served the purpose of verification and elucidation of information obtained from the in-depth interviews (De Vos et al. 2005:296). According to Johnson and Christensen (2011:185), focus group interviews typically follow a qualitative, in-depth approach to collecting data and as such they provide a wealth of information since they involve homogenous groups that, by nature, encourage discussions.

The hallmark of focus group interviews is the explicit use of group interaction as

data to explore insights that would otherwise remain hidden. Typically, groups of between five and ten people gather together to voice their opinions and perceptions about a study topic in a non-threatening and comfortable environment. Interaction is based on a carefully planned series of discussion topics set up by the researcher who also acts as a moderator during the group interaction (Australian Review of Applied Linguistics 2006:2).

According to Kruger and Casey (2000:299) participants are selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the focus group. The group is “focused” in that it involves some kind of collective activity. The researcher creates a tolerant environment in the focus group that encourages participants to share perceptions, points of view, experiences, wishes and concerns without pressurising participants to vote or reach consensus.

The researcher selected the group of teachers at the identified schools with the help of the principals after being formally introduced to the staff in the morning briefings and the purpose of the visit being explained to the teachers. It must be noted that the interviews in all schools were conducted in the staff rooms with a group of teachers, five from each school during break time, so as to not interfere with teaching and learning and to protect the contact time with the learners. These focus group discussions were recorded using the modernised audio-recorder after the participants were informed of the process. Creswell (2012:218) maintain that focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information and interviewees are similar to and cooperative with each other. They are also useful when the time to collect information is limited and individuals are hesitant to provide information.

The researcher began by giving the full explanation of the purpose and the procedures to be followed at the beginning of the interviews, and also that questionnaires would be distributed to be completed by each participant. The teachers were cordially requested to complete the questionnaires with honesty, and they were additionally informed that the recordings on the audio-recorder would not at any stage be revealed to the principals and therefore they had to feel free to give any information that they might think to be relevant to the study without fear of

exposure. It must however be noted that the questionnaires were not immediately collected so as to afford the participants enough time to complete the questionnaires at their convenience and allow for further elaboration on the points of discussions. The researcher made an arrangement with the school principals to collect the questionnaires at a later stage.

It was a worthwhile and rewarding experience for the researcher to be in the midst of principals and teachers talking about their experiences, challenges and efforts to transform and improve education in the best interest of the learners and their communities respectively. The researcher was amazed by the passion oozing from some principals, while at the same time listening to supporting or contradicting views from the teachers. Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, Garnier, Helsing, Howell and Rasmussen (2006:134-135) state that seeing the faces and hearing the stories, hopes and opinions of those in education in our community moves us (researchers) emotionally, reminds us of the imperative behind our work and enables us to see the information as living in three dimensions instead of just one. The stories, the faces and the voices of the participants remain with the researchers with an insistency that numbers can rarely inspire.

3.5.2.3. *Observation schedules*

A simple observation strategy (also referred to as non-participant observation) was followed as a secondary data collection method (Bless et al. 2006:115). This technique typically involves recording of events, circumstances and/or physical aspects in addition to the primary method of data collection (in this case in-depth interviews and focus group discussions) in order to shed light upon, and adding insight to the phenomenon under discussion (Du Plooy 2001:147;De Vos et al. 2005:105).

According to Creswell (2012:214), in non-participant observation, the researcher (observer) visits a site and records notes without becoming involved in the activities of the participants. The non-participant observer is an “outsider” who sits on the periphery or some advantageous place (e.g. the back of the classroom) to watch and record the phenomenon under study. The researcher, while visiting research sites

(selected schools) ensured that he always went before the scheduled time for the interviews so that he could have ample time to observe the site, have a close up view of what was happening at the school on a daily basis and even, where possible, gain access to documents at schools. The researcher witnessed how the school began in the morning, the roles of different stakeholders at the school, visited libraries, science laboratories, sporting grounds and even the surrounding areas within the schools.

3.6. Data Processing

3.6.1. Transcribing the data

There are essentially three kinds of data in qualitative studies - notes taken during observation and interviewing, audio-taped recorded interviews, and visual images. Transcription is the process of taking these notes and other information and converting them into a format that will facilitate analysis (McMillan & Schumacher (2010:370). Bazeley (2007:44) adds that transcribing involves translating from an oral language, with its own set of rules, to a written language with another set of rules.

Transcripts are not copies or representation of some original reality; they are interpretative constructions that are useful tools for given purposes. All the tape-recorded interviews with participants were transcribed by the researcher verbatim immediately after the interviews had been conducted. The purpose of the transcription was to ensure that data remained in the true form and style as presented by the participants.

McLellan, MacQueen and Neidig (2003:64) maintain that although there is no universal transcription format that would be adequate for all types of qualitative data collection approaches, settings, or theoretical frameworks, some practical considerations can help researchers prepare transcripts. They warn that transcription guidelines should help researchers systematically organise and then analyse textual data, regardless of the analytical techniques and tools used. They should not impose constraints on the data collected, but rather accommodate an iterative process.

Bazeley (2007:45) provides suggestions which could be kept in mind when transcribing the data:

- A full transcript will include all “ums”, “mms”, repetitions and the like. Repetition communicates something about the thinking or emotion of the interviewee.
- In the same vein, do not correct incomplete sentences or poor grammar: it is important to capture the form and styles of the participant’s expression.
- Note events which create interruptions to the flow of the interview, for example, tape off or telephone rings. Note also other things that happen which may influence interpretation of the text.
- Record nonverbal and emotional elements of the conversation, such as (pause), (laughter), (very emotional at this point). Emotional tone and the use of rhetoric are important to record. For example, something said sarcastically, if simply recorded verbatim, may convey the opposite of the meaning intended.
- If one of the speakers (or interviewer) is providing a non-intrusive affirmation of what another is saying, one option is to record that affirmation simply by placing it in parentheses or square brackets within the flow of text [Int:mms], rather than beginning a new paragraph and unnecessarily breaking up the text flow.
- Digressions from the topic of the interview is a controversial issue. The decision about whether or not to include that text centres around whether there is any meaning in the digression. Unless there clearly is significance in what was said, it is usually sufficient to skip the detail of that part of the conversation.

The researcher carefully went through the above suggestions and utilised most of them during the interview process with the teachers.

3.6.2. Analysis and interpretation of data

Data analysis in qualitative research involves summarising data in a dependable and accurate manner which leads to the presentation of study findings in a manner that

has an air of undeniability (Gay et al. 2009:448). According to De Vos et al. (2005:340-341) data analysis is a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data.

Qualitative data analysis requires that the researcher be patient and reflective in a process that strives to make sense of multiple data sources, including field notes from observations and interviews, questionnaires, maps, pictures, audiotape transcripts, and videotaped observations. On the other hand, data interpretation is an attempt by the researcher to find meaning in the data and to answer the “so what?” question in terms of implications of the findings (Gay et al. 2009:448).

It was the role of the researcher to listen to all recordings of the interviews and subsequently confirm the accuracy of the transcriptions. The responses from the semi-structured, open-ended questionnaires were collated and compared with responses from the interview and focus group discussions. The researcher was able to note the similarities between the recording and responses from the interviews.

The researcher also perused data to look for regularities, patterns and topics in the data and subsequently wrote words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. The data was then divided into manageable topics or categories, thereby highlighting and foregrounding most recurrent patterns or topics.

3.7. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

In qualitative research, validity is the degree to which qualitative data accurately gauges what the researcher was trying to measure (Gay et al. 2009:375). McMillan and Schumacher (2006:324) describe validity of qualitative designs as the degree to which the interpretations and concepts have mutual meaning for the participants and the researcher; the researcher and the participants should agree on the descriptions and meanings of different events.

Joppe (in Golafshani:2003:598) defines reliability as the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under

study, and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable.

Gay et al. (2009:375) add that two terms used to describe validity in qualitative research are trustworthiness and understanding. Qualitative researchers can establish the **trustworthiness** of their research by addressing the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of their studies and findings:

- First, a researcher must take into account all the complexities in the study and address problems that are not easily explained (i.e., *credibility*).
- The researcher should also include descriptive, context-relevant statements so that someone hearing about or reading a report of the study can identify with the setting (i.e., *transferability*).
- The researcher should also address the stability of the data collected (i.e., *dependability*) and the neutrality and objectivity of the data (i.e. *confirmability*).

In order to ensure reliability and validity of the study, the researcher took notes while recording all interview sessions for the purpose of comparing and corroboration of the information from participants. The data from the recordings were also written verbatim after the recording had been played over and over again so that no information could be lost, but transcribed in its original form. All questionnaires were personally collected by the researcher so as to be compared with notes taken during the interviews. Furthermore, a follow up session was also made with the participants in order to check if there was anything more that the participants wanted to share beyond the interviews and responses provided on the questionnaires.

Creswell (2012:259) further notes that qualitative research inquirers triangulate among different sources to enhance the accuracy of the study. *Triangulation* is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals (e.g. a principal and learner), types of data (e.g. observational field notes and interviews), or methods of data collection (e.g. documents and interviews) in descriptions and themes in qualitative research. The inquirer examines each information source and finds evidence to support a theme. This ensures that the study will be accurate because the information draws on multiple sources of information, individuals, or processes.

In this way, it encourages the researcher to develop a report that is both accurate and credible.

3.8. ETHICAL MEASURES

Ethical considerations play a role in all research studies, and all researchers must be aware of and attend to the ethical considerations related to their studies (Gay et al. 2009:19). Perhaps the most basic and important ethical issues in research are concerned with protection of participants, broadly defined, which requires that research participants not be harmed in any way (i.e. physically, mentally, or socially) and that they participate only if they freely agree to do so (i.e. give informed consent) (*ibid.* 2009:22). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:334) these guidelines (ethical issues) include informed consent, avoiding deception, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, avoiding harm to subjects, and respecting privacy.

In subjecting himself to the above ethical guidelines, the researcher requested permission to conduct his research from the District Director, the provincial Head of Education, the school principals and the teachers from the selected schools. In the request, the purpose and processes of the study were clearly explained. All participants were provided with consent forms in which they were guaranteed the safeguarding of their confidentiality and anonymity and that the data will solely be used for research purposes. The participants were also informed that their school will be issued with a complete copy of the study after completion.

3.9. SUMMARY

In this chapter the focus was on research methodology and design. It covered the use of the qualitative research approach and described the methods used to collect data, such as semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and observation schedules. The aspects of reliability and validity in the qualitative research were explained thoroughly. Ethical considerations and the researcher's role as a research instrument were clearly articulated. In the next chapter (chapter 4) the focus will be on the analysis and interpretation of data collected through interviews, as well as the presentation of the results and findings.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter the use of a qualitative approach to research was explained, in which the design and methodology of the research study were presented. This was done in accordance with data collection and data processing, sampling, and trustworthiness.

Chapter 4 presents the data gathered during the in-depth individual interviews with the three principals of the selected schools, the focus groups interviews with five teachers from each of the three schools and the data collected through observation schedules during the visits to the same identified schools. The data are presented and discussed based on the research aims (see 3.3.). The main research aim of this study was to investigate the managerial challenges facing the principals of high-poverty schools in the Lejweleputswa Education District in the Free State Province, as well as the best practices that they can learn from their counterparts in the high-performing, high-poverty schools which continue to produce excellent academic results despite the challenges they are confronted with.

This chapter further explains the processes that the researcher followed during the research activities. These processes comprised the following: how the schools (research sites) and research subjects were sampled and selected, the rationale for the selection, the type of interviews schedules utilised, and the ethical procedures followed during the research processes. Moreover, the findings are presented through the formulation of themes and categories according to the following themes: managerial challenges facing principals of high-poverty schools; the strategies to deal with those managerial challenges; and the specific qualities possessed by principals of high-performing, high-poverty schools.

4.2. RESEARCH PROCESS

For the purpose of the study three schools were purposefully selected. These schools matched the profile of participants as set out initially by the researcher, since they are all found within disadvantaged communities. This implies that they draw the majority of their learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. Furthermore, these schools were able to consistently produce very good Grade 12 results (above 80%) for the past five years consecutively. All three schools are Quintile 1 schools (“no fee” paying schools) which are funded by the Department of Education.

First and foremost, the researcher sought permission from the Provincial Head of Education (Research and Development Directorate) and the District Director of the Lejweleputswa Education District to conduct the research (see Appendix A). Secondly, the researcher selected three principals of three different schools, and five teachers from each identified school. The selection of research subjects was based on the following criteria as outlined below (see 3.5.1):

Principals had to be:

- in the position of principal of the same school for at least five years or longer.
- willing participants so as to honestly provide valuable data necessary for the research.
- willing to give the researcher access to documents and other relative data if needed.

The post level one teachers had to be:

- at the identified schools for more than three years.
- willing to provide information freely and honestly through focus group discussions.

The researcher did not experience any challenges to secure appointments with the participants at the schools, but the actual visit to the schools in order to conduct the interviews had to be postponed at least three times before they finally took place.

The reasons for those setbacks were due to the fact that the principals were not available on agreed dates due to other commitments.

The researcher utilised four research tools for this study, namely: in-depth interviews (see Appendix D), focus group discussions (see Appendix E) followed up by open-ended questionnaires, as well as an observation schedule (see Appendix F). The questionnaire became very useful for the study as it provided both the principals and the teachers the opportunity beforehand to consider the three themes that emanated from the study, namely the impact of socio-economic background on learning; managerial challenges for principals of high-poverty, high-performing schools; and the lessons that underperforming schools could learn from their counterparts (high-performing schools). The teachers were afforded the opportunity to interact fully prepared with one another through the focus group discussion. The open-ended questionnaire which was provided before the focus group interviews, focussed their minds on the important issues for discussion and they could elaborate on these with ease. After comparing the responses to the questionnaires and group discussions, the researcher found them to be quite similar.

In their responses, the teachers from School A (highly commended by the District for good performance) indicated that their principal was not necessarily a good leader, but his approach to management made him a respected person and therefore teachers listened to him without reservation. The teachers of School B regarded their principal as a very good leader which was also the case at School C. Apart from the questionnaires, the observation schedules seemed very helpful in that they assisted the researcher to collect additional information about the school to help the research process. The research went exceptionally well and there was a considerable amount of information collected by the researcher which he initially thought would not be easy to access. It must also be noted that the researcher discovered that there was much going on in schools which remain hidden to the public eye, and it is only through the lenses of a researcher that such information could be uncovered.

Table 4.1: Participating schools

SCHOOLS	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
Location	Urban (surrounded by informal settlement)	Urban (in the middle of township)	Urban (surrounded by an informal settlement)
Enrolment 2013	1562	1400	940
Number of teachers	63	57	38
Financial Status of school	Section 21	Section 21	Section 21
Functionality of laboratories	Functional & well resourced	Functional & well resourced	Functional & well resourced
Functionality of school library	Functional & well resourced	Functional & well resourced	Functional & well resourced
Availability of computer centre(s)	Available - one centre	Available - one centre	Available - two centres
Frequency of SMT meetings	Very irregular	Regular	regular
Recent (2012) Grade 12 performance	97,04%	94,75%	87,14%

Table 4.1 indicates that all the schools mainly cater for learners from the very low socio-economic backgrounds but are well resourced.

School A and School B are located in the same township and because of the consistent academic performance and discipline maintained at the two schools, the parents prefer to enrol their children at these schools. This may account for the high number of learner enrolment for the 2013 academic year. Of the two secondary schools in the Hennenman township, School C has a higher learner enrolment due to the parents' preference – also as a result of the school's consistent academic performance. Moreover, all the three schools were found to be well resourced as

they all had functional libraries, science laboratories and computer centres. The researcher further discovered that although School A was a well performing school, unlike Schools B and C, the School Management Team (SMT) meetings were not regularly held but that did not have a serious impact on the consistent performance of School A.

4.3. DATA ANALYSIS

4.3.1. Biographical data

4.3.1.1. The school principals

The researcher deemed it necessary to draw up and tabulate biographical information of the three principals who participated in this research study. The data collected is necessary to understand the quality of the school leadership which may influence the way in which they lead schools and impact on the general climate of teaching and learning.

Table 4.2: Principal data

PRINCIPALS	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
Gender	Male	Male	Male
Age	54	58	53
Academic qualifications	BComEd(Hons)	BAEd; B.Ed(Hons)	BA; HED; (Hons)
Acquisition of leadership and management qualification	Yes	Yes	Yes
Experience as a principal	14 years	7 years	8 years

Table 4.2 shows that all three principals are well-qualified. They have all been appointed for more than 7 years in a principal position, indicating a vast experience

in their positions as school leaders. They have all acquired an ACE: School Leadership and Management course on top of the Instructional Leadership training they attend annually. This training is offered by the Lejweleputswa Education District as a way of developing the school leadership and reminding them of the District targets for each academic year.

4.3.1.2 The teachers

The researcher further conducted focus group discussions with five (5) teachers from each school, which gave an overall total of fifteen (15) teachers. Though a specific profile for the teachers is not provided as in the case of the principals, the teachers had to have at least three years teaching experience at the same school and had to be willing to provide information as honestly as they could. To avoid mixing their responses and to make identification easy, they were coded as follows: School A (T1-T5), School B (T1-5) and School C (T1-T5). The principals were also identified as the principal of School A, the principal of School B and the principal of School C.

Table 4.3: Teacher data

SCHOOL	TEACHERS (T) FOCUS INTERVIEW	GROUP	NUMBER OF TEACHER PARTICIPANTS
A	T1 T2 T3 T4 T5		5
B	T1 T2 T3 T4 T5		5
C	T1 T2 T3 T4 T5		5

4.3.2. Analysis of procedure: interview data

The researcher carefully read all the transcripts so as to make sense of the body of data gathered through the research process. Qualitative data analysis requires that the researcher be patient and reflective in a process that strives to make sense of multiple data sources, including field notes from observations and interviews, questionnaires, maps, pictures, audiotape transcripts, and videotaped observations (Gay et al. 2009:448).

The next critical step for the researcher was to classify data into an organised unit or category. According to Gay *et al.* (2009:450) qualitative data analysis is a process of breaking down data into smaller units, determining their importance, and putting the pertinent units together in a more general analytical form. Qualitative data is typically broken down through the process of classifying or coding, the pieces of data are then categorised. A category is a classification of ideas or concepts; categorisation then, is grouping the data into themes. When concepts in the data are examined and compared to one another and connections are made, categories are formed.

In this study the data was not organised by a computer system, but was manually managed using predetermined categories. The researcher used codes for all units identified and organised them into major categories which were later grouped into themes. As a result of that process, three major themes were established from the interviews, namely the managerial challenges facing principals of high-poverty schools, strategies to deal with those challenges, and leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty schools that equip them to deal with these challenges.

4.4. DATA INTERPRETATION

The researcher vigorously read the transcripts from the interviews repeatedly and three major themes emerged from the interviews.

Table 4.4. Themes and categories

MAJOR THEMES	CATEGORIES
1. Managerial challenges facing principals of high-poverty schools	1.1. Impact of socio-economic factors 1.2. Impact of school factors
2. Strategies to deal with those challenges.	2.1. Stakeholder involvement 2.2. Functional School-Based Support Team 2.3. Effective monitoring systems 2.4. Management by walking-around 2.5. Motivation 2.6. Instructional and collaborative leadership styles
3. Qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty schools	3.1. Empathetic 3.2. Motivator 3.3. Team player/collaborative 3.4. Transparent 3.5. Compassionate 3.6. Key values

4.4.1. Managerial challenges facing principals of high-poverty schools

Schools are regarded as both closed and open systems, and are therefore influenced by external and internal factors which affect their daily administration and management by school principals. Problems that emanate from society can have a direct influence on the performance of learners and how school principals manage schools. The socio-economic and demographic backgrounds of children are among the main factors behind disparities in school progress among population groups (Jukuda 2011:2). Marla, Sanders, Heselden and Dixon (2010:1) report that "...schools with high concentration of children living in poverty face significant school

improvement challenges...” ,and they therefore conclude that leading high-poverty schools require a different set of knowledge and skills, as the challenges faced at these schools differ considerable from those of more affluent schools.

The interviews conducted with teachers (focus group) and principals of the identified schools A, B and C also show that many of the challenges confronted by the principals of high-poverty schools, emanate from socio-economic challenges that are experienced by secondary school learners.

Following the process of interviews, coding was done by the researcher to categorise these challenges into socio-economic and in-school effects.

4.4.1.1. Socio-economic factors

School A

The principal from school A cited gangsterism and burglary as serious challenges that the school is facing. School A is located within an informal settlement which is also a spot for notorious gangs. This problem has persisted for many years without successful interventions from the authorities. To show the rifestness of this problem the principal commented:

“We have adopted a cop who visits the school on a regular basis. We invite correctional services and SAPS to address learners on the danger of drugs and gangsterism.”

The focus group of teachers from school A highlighted other social issues that impact on performance. They indicated that some learners who are poor only come to school to secure grants provided by the government and they do not necessarily have an interest in learning:

“We have a case of learners who are coming to school only because they are recipients of grants. Should such learners leave school, they could forfeit the grants. They do not have the purpose for coming to school; they spend most

of their time in the school toilets. They are amongst the group that teachers run after in most of the time as they are dodging classes, they just add numbers.”

Moreover, teachers further complained that high incidences of gangsterism affect the smooth running of the school as the school is located amidst a community infested with many gang-related cases which spill over to the school. One teacher commented:

“Gangsterism renders the school ineffective by impacting negatively on the performance of learners.... and teachers alike. It leads to absenteeism and poor discipline which is chaotic for the institution.”

School B

The principal from school B has realised that before they could achieve as a functional and quality school, there are serious challenges faced by the learners which need to be addressed before they could be expected to perform well in classes.

He commented that:

“We have agreed as a school that before we could satisfy learner needs, the first need which needs to be taken care of is the physiological and social needs. Because some of these learners when they come to school they come with serious physiological and social problems. Now, for us to be able to achieve academically with such learners, we have agreed as a school that such learners need to be identified and measures have to be put in place to address their needs.”

The focus group from school B also noted various challenges that they face on a regular basis at their school. They highlighted aspects like teenage pregnancy, child-headed families and gangsterism as impacting on learning and eventually posing a huge challenge to the management of the school. As T2 from school B noted:

“Most of the learners are brought up by single parents and some learners are heading families, so there are lots of behavioural problems.”

School C

The principal from school C was challenged mostly by the high rate of learner absenteeism which he believes can be related mostly to problems arising from the home and the broader society. School C, as is the case with school A, is located in the middle of an informal settlement where most of the parents are not working and are unable, in most instances, to meet the educational needs of their children. These learners are therefore easily caught up in other activities that disturb their regular school attendance.

The focus group from school C alluded to the effects of poverty, the main challenge affecting the majority of their learners, which impacts on their academic performance. One teacher elaborated and stated:

“Some of them [learners] come in shabby state in terms of appearance, and as a result when they are confronted by other learners, their confidence become so low that they have a negative connotation as far as the results are concerned.”

According to the information provided by the focus group of school C, tough measures are taken against learners who do not adhere to the school's uniform requirements, however, special arrangements are made for learners from very poor family backgrounds:

“The uniform committee through the School-Based Support Team (SBST) has a list of learners whose poverty status is severe, and as a result cannot afford to put on proper school uniform. Those learners are allowed to come to school and are therefore beneficiaries of donated old school uniforms from former learners, and are given whatever is left from the feeding scheme at the end of school day so that they could eat something when they get home and be able to study as studying on an empty stomach is difficult.”

One female teacher from the focus group of school C was a member of the SBST and revealed that at times they handle serious cases where female learners, because of their poor backgrounds, end up being victims of sexual abuse in the township as older people take advantage of their conditions. She commented:

“We had an incident where one female learner who was very brilliant while in Grade 11 registered a sharp drop in performance during the first quarter of her Grade 12 studies. After several contact sessions with her, it was discovered that she has been abused by a close relative who assisted the family with some cash and groceries on a regular basis. Even though the mother of this learner knew about the incident, she kept quiet for fear of losing the support from that close relative until the child could not take it anymore and disclosed to us, and we had to intervene and assist her.”

The focus group from school C further related that the number of high incidences of teenage pregnancy at the school and broader community are related to poverty as girls at time allow themselves to be pregnant so as to access the state grant.

“During open discussions in Life Orientation classes, some girls will reveal that they depended on the grant to make end meets, therefore, pregnancy was a part of the bigger plan to get the support from the state. They engage in unprotected sexual practices being aware of the results. There is more that needs to be done to help these children.”

Discussion: Socio-economic factors

From the interview questions, the respondents were able to share with the researcher a host of challenges faced by the school principals of high-poverty schools brought about by the learners in secondary schools. Principals have to deal with challenges such as absenteeism, truant learners, teenage pregnancy, gang-related incidences and other effects of poverty. The responses from all participants, principals and teachers (focus groups) verified the fact that socio-economic factors affect the academic performance of learners, and that, for the principals to be able to steer their schools towards improved performance, they have to acknowledge the existence of these challenges and employ necessary strategies to address them.

These findings are in keeping with similar findings reported in Chapter 2, where Hoff (1999:72) indicated that very poor communities face many hardships, where children, families, and the schools that serve them confront a host of challenges. For schools, these challenges include children who start school without early literacy skills, high rates of absenteeism and transience and difficulty attracting experienced teachers. Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor and Wheeler (2006:18) comment: “Low-income learners come to school less ready to learn and with weaker educational support at home than those from more advantaged backgrounds....teachers may well perceive that schools with large proportions of learners from poor families offer harsher working environments than those in schools serving more advantaged learners.”

The school leadership challenges which are implied by conditions in high-poverty schools are indeed formidable. Essentially these leadership challenges imply a radical turnabout for the school, embracing a reformation as regards vision, standards, expectations, culture, service delivery, resources and communication, and with quality education as a target and overarching criterion (Kemper 2008:3).

4.4.1.2. The effects of in-school factors

School A

The principal of school A indicated that a lack of parental involvement at school also poses a great challenge for the school as parents are not actively involved. He elaborated:

“Parents and guardians need to play a major role if society is to get rid of drugs, and gangsterism at school. Some parents...uhmm...some of them think that it is enough to send a child to school without their involvement. The child’s education starts at home before it is formalised at school.”

The focus group of teachers from school A explained that although parents show up for parents’ meetings, their involvement outside that domain is minimal. Parents mostly come to school at the end of the year to query why their children have not

passed, whereas they have never bothered to get involved with their children's' performance throughout the year. One commented:

“Parents are not fully involved, there used to be grade meetings which were held quarterly for different grades so that parents could have interaction with the teachers around their children's performance and discipline. Such meetings have since being abandoned due to poor parental attendance. Many parents cannot even show up when called urgently if there are cases of ill-discipline, they always indicate that they cannot attend because of work, this is despite the fact that letters of requests are issued out by the school to the employers for parents to be granted permission to attend these meetings”.

The focus group from school A further elaborated on a strategy that was employed to force parents to be involved in the education of their children:

“We have opted to issue the quarterly report cards to the parents, not the learners as a way of forcing parents to come to school, you know. This seemed successful at first, but recently we have noticed the trend of parents sending other people on their behalf, or learners picking anyone else in the street to collect their reports and that has limited the impact of the strategy because those who are sent may not necessarily share the same home with the learners, and we cannot rely on them for support whenever we need it from parents or guardians.”

The teachers further see the direct link between gangsterism (a social issue) and absenteeism (which is an in-school issue) which eventually affect the performance of learners.

“Gangsterism hinders progress. If there are many cases of gangsterism at school, there are also a lot of absenteeism and they affect the performance of both teachers and learnersas a result it impacts negatively on the issue of results.”

School B

The principal of school B related some challenges emanating from some members of the School Management Team (SMT) who tend to be populists and do not support some of the decisions collectively taken in management meetings:

“There are those individuals who would not normally pull as the team pulls, from time to time, we will have those managers who will decide to take a different direction than the one the team is following. To cite an example, we would sit in a meeting as managers, decide on a particular issue and strategise around it, even before we share that with other staff members, you will find that few staff members have already being informed by some of the managers.”

The focus group of teachers from School B highlighted issues such as overcrowding, pregnancy, lack of discipline and worn out school buildings as some internal factors that need serious attention from the management of the school. They commented

“There is a problem of overcrowding at our school. This problem has a negative bearing on education delivery. Firstly, learner discipline goes down as a result of teachers not being able to reach all learners. Ill-discipline leads to poor performance in class. It takes more time to bring learners into uniform behaviour. Learners cannot submit their tasks on time, fighting break out every time when the teacher leaves the class. Overcrowding has affected allocation of furniture and LTSM. Every year we have to buy desks because learner enrolment keeps going up. There has to be special desks or tables since too many learners in class make it impossible to use conventional seating. Teaching material cannot reach to everyone and learners have to share books. Money allocated to schools does not come as expected, and as a result we cannot spend for everyone.”

School C

The principal of school C explained that the biggest challenge facing his school is the absenteeism rate which is escalating:

“There is high rate of absenteeism on the side of learners. We normally call their parents to find out why these children absent themselves from school and we apply the learner attendance policy to the latter.”

The focus group of teachers from school C indicated absenteeism on the side of learners and teachers, the high-rate of teenage pregnancy and lack of parental involvement as some challenges that management has to deal with on a large scale. They also confirmed that all these in-school factors have a detrimental effect on the performance of the learners if they are not curbed.

Discussion: In-school factors

The internal factors affecting the management of the school cannot be separated from external factors mentioned earlier as there is an interconnection between them. Gangsterism, for example, is an external factor affecting the school which can at the same time lead to a high rate of absenteeism on the side of learners. It can further affect the safety of both learners and teachers (internal factors), thus impacting on the school’s general performance. One teacher from school A (T3) indicated the link between gangsterism, overcrowding and ill-discipline. He commented that:

*“There is a particular case of a learner here, **David** (not his real name); he gets suspended, but he keeps on coming back. He does not change, is problematic for every teacher. The fact that we are unable to deal with these cases, it goes back to the problem of overcrowding.”*

Unity at school also plays a very significant role. If members of the School Management Teams (SMTs) are not united in decision-making processes, the entire staff can be badly affected and all collaboration efforts necessary to make schools succeed can be compromised. This finding resonates with previous studies (cited in

chapter 2) in which it was argued that collaboration is a key characteristic of successful schools. Successful school principals empower staff through collaboration and shared leadership (Davenport & Anderson 2002:18). In line with this, Marzano (2000:174) advocate leadership teams for successful schools. He maintains that "...leadership for change is most effective when carried out by a small group of educators with the principal serving as a strong cohesive force."

As far as parental involvement is concerned, it was also noted in the literature review that parents of secondary school pupils are no longer motivated to participate in school activities such as meetings, sports and fund-raising (Management Problems 2004:237). The situation is exacerbated by the fact that some pupils do not live with their parents while others live with a single parent. As a result of parental apathy, schools cannot discuss with parents matters essential to the education of their children, or enlist their support in combating the truancy and neglect of school work which are rife in schools and cause underachievement and failure (ibid.:237)

4.4.2. Strategies to deal with challenges confronting principals

School A

The principal from school A highlighted the significance of *involving all stakeholders* in an attempt to address the challenges facing the school:

"All stakeholders have been involved in trying to put heads together to find solutions to issues like gangsterism. There are on-going discussions and engagement with these stakeholders."

The focus group of teachers from school A further indicated that in an attempt to get everybody involved in confronting the challenges experienced at school, the police patrol around the school and crime intelligence is available to bring normality at school.

In addressing the issue of learners who cannot afford to buy proper school uniforms, it transpired that some teachers buy school uniforms out of their own pockets so as

to assist learners who are vulnerable. It has been a culture of school A to enforce maximum participation in sporting activities as another way of winning the battle against the ills of society:

“Normally the school engages learners into extra-mural activities to keep them busy. The more they take part in sport, the more they refrain from derailing activities like gangsterism. A healthy mind needs a healthy body.”

School B

The principal from school B identified the following management strategies employed at the school:

- The bursary scheme has been established by teachers to assist poor but performing Grade 12 learners. This is meant to assist these learners to register at tertiary institutions.
- The school has a functional *School Based Support Team (SBST)*. The SBST, amongst others, identifies struggling learners and provide necessary support to those learners. Moreover, the SBST also identifies parents of struggling learners who are not working. In such cases, these parents are enlisted to work as food handlers in the school’s nutrition programme and are given a stipend of R840 per month over a period of six month, thus helping to alleviate poverty at home.
- Learners are asked to donate R1 a week towards a programme meant to assist needy learners at school.

The principal cited an example of a case of a former Grade 12 learner who was accepted at the University of Pretoria but did not have the required R 3000 for registration. The deputy principal collected the contributions from teachers and the money was deposited into the university’s account the next Monday to enable the learner to register.

Relating to *effective monitoring systems* to ensure effective teaching and learning, the principal of school B reported to the researcher that:

“There are definitely proper control and monitoring systems and effective period monitoring systems at school used by all managers.”

According to the principal, each block is under the supervision of a head of department (HOD), alternatively referred to as block supervisor, who controls all period registers in his block and give a weekly survey of attendance in the block. If there are culprits of non-attendance on the side of teachers or learners, the block supervisor intervenes, and if the trend is persistent, the culprit, if it is a teacher, is referred to the principal, and if it is a learner, parents are called to school so that the behaviour of that learner could be discouraged.

The focus group of teachers from school B reported other measures taken to address the challenges at school. Teacher 3 explained:

“In the case of overcrowding, the department has provided mobile classes. For the learners who are heading the families, the school provides food parcels and some get food after school from the school kitchen (feeding scheme). The school organises trips to correctional services for boys to see the life in prison. The correctional officers, police, nurses and social workers are invited to school to address learners on issues concerning them.”

Moreover, the focus group from school B mentioned that the principal monitors the progress on teaching on a weekly basis, offering support to teachers where needs arise. Learner outcomes are used to evaluate the effects of improvement plans employed to enhance learner performance.

School C

The principal from school C said that he believed in the principle of *“management by wandering around”*. That has assisted him a lot to oversee every corner of the school and be able to act whenever a need arises.

“In that way you quickly detect any situation where teaching and learning might not be taking place, and correct the situation on the spot.”

In order to uplift the learners so as to improve their performance, regular *motivational sessions* are conducted especially with the use of former learners from the same school who share the same socio-economic background like them, so that they could see that they too can do well irrespective of their backgrounds.

The focus group of teachers from school C applauded the effectiveness of the principal's moving around the school and not being office-based, as a good strategy that helps to deal with situations at the right time. Moreover, the school has adopted a system where learners' progress reports are issued directly to the parents in a meeting. This has allowed the principal and the teachers to even address other challenges with parents such as the high rate of absenteeism, and as a result, it has dropped significantly. Teacher 2 remarked as follows:

“Learners’ progress reports are issued to parents on a set date and parents have to attend. This forces interaction with them to discuss learners’ progress.”

In addition, the teachers emphasised the involvement of a specific police officer allocated to the school (adopt-a-cop programme) to assist with issues of safety around the school. A safe learning environment is maintained so that learners can feel safe when coming to school knowing that the police are visible and dealing with gang-related incidents that may disturb regular attendance by other learners. To add, the School Governing Body (SGB) of school C is very supportive of all initiatives taken by the principal in ensuring that all challenges are tackled so that learner performance could be improved.

Discussion: strategies to deal with challenges

The responses above illustrate that there are strategies that principals need to employ in order to deal with the challenges they are confronted with on a daily basis in their different schools. Sanders et al. (2010:1) warn that “...schools with high concentration of children living in poverty face significant school improvement challenges, and that leading high-poverty schools require a different set of

knowledge and skills as the challenges faced at these schools vary from those of more affluent schools.” This implies that principals in high-poverty schools should acquire certain leadership styles to be able to transform low performing high-poverty schools into high-performing schools. In a high-poverty background, the principals need to adopt an instructional and collaborative leadership style. This notion conjures up an image of a principal with extensive subject matter knowledge and broad command of instructional strategies who visits each classroom in a school and models effective teaching practices (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson (2010) in SRI International, 2011: 3).

Research shows that principals’ most important impact on learning and teacher practice is indirect. Principals influence learning by creating working conditions in which motivated teachers are provided the opportunity to work as professionals. In essence, effective leadership means creation of an effective, high-functioning professional community (SRI International, 2011:4).

As highlighted by the principal from school C, the principal in a high-poverty school should always be visible and be available to give support whenever needed. He leads by example and is never confined to his office desk, but is everywhere, anytime.

Oxford Leadership Academy Limited (2011:1) defines collaborative leadership as “...the process of engaging collective intelligence to deliver results across organisational boundaries when ordinary mechanisms of control are absent. It is grounded in a belief that all of us together can be smarter, more creative, and more competent than any of us alone. It calls on leaders to use power of influence rather than positional authority to engage and align people, focus their teams, sustain momentum, and perform. Leaders must thus focus on relationships as well as results, and the medium through which they operate is high-quality conversation.” Collaborative leadership therefore builds relationships; it makes individual teachers to be part of teams working together towards a shared goal. One of the key roles of the principal is to liaise between the school and the community, to represent the school in all community structures forming the link with the school. High-poverty schools should therefore be inviting to the broader community, they should serve as

community centres so that the community could not feel isolated from the school and eventually be able to take ownership of the school.

4.4.3. Qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty schools.

There are specific leadership qualities that the participants from all three identified schools agree that the principals of high-poverty schools should possess in order to be effective in their jobs.

The principal from school C highlighted the importance of being *empathetic* and a *highly-motivated* leader in order to function well in a high-poverty school. He added:

“As leaders, we need to put ourselves in the shoes of those needy learners and assist them.”

The focus group of school B and C told the researcher that a quality evident in their respective principals is that of being *motivators*. One teacher observed:

“He is a motivator who always believes in extra work. Always putting learners’ needs first, and personally being there during extra classes to help in monitoring the whole process.”

The focus group from school B added that the principal is *collaborative* and a *team player* as he includes everybody in decision-making processes. The principal from school B commented on what makes him different from other school leaders:

“Constantly selling the vision of the school to all stakeholders, involvement of all stakeholders in decision-making, at all levels, true and genuine transparency including finances. Providing teachers with the relevant tools of trade for all the subjects.”

In his study of specific leadership qualities essential in high-poverty schools, Kamper (2008:11) cited compassion, commitment and support. Compassion involves identification with the survival struggle of the poor, respect for human dignity and

personal interest in the individual learner, teacher and parent. He emphasised that the principal should model commitment through self-discipline, energy, being visible everywhere and teaching some classes personally. Finally, the school leadership requires essentially a supportive role player, namely the principal as facilitator of learning.

Leaders must build collaborative structures and cultures of trust. They must create high expectations for adults and learners alike. They need to provide support for teacher learning and establish structures and deploy resources in support of learner learning (SRI International, 2011:4). Principals of high-poverty schools should instil in the learners and teachers the belief that all learners can succeed against all odds. Learners from poor backgrounds have already adopted a mentality that being poor means that they can't go further in life, therefore it is the responsibility of the principal to bring the message of hope to these learners and create an environment conducive for effective learning for them to succeed.

The focus group of school A indicated that above all, the principal at their school is not a loner, but cooperates well with other leaders and is himself a life-long learner. Teacher 5 had the following to say:

“Networking is one important measure our school rely on. As teachers, we normally exchange ideas with teachers from other schools. This gives us the idea of how we should deal with problem areas.”

Other leadership qualities that are outstanding in these high-poverty schools, the other critical element that distinguishes high-performing, high-poverty schools from low-performing, high-poverty schools, are the *key values and principles* that form the foundations of the former.

The principals of school A, B and C mentioned the following key values and principles as foundations at their respective schools: *dedication, hardworking, accountability* and being *results-driven*. Teachers show tremendous dedication in their work, and this is shown through lesson planning and continuous assessment of learners so as to evaluate the content taught. The principal of school A commented:

“Emphasis is put on spending quality time with learners. I have dedicated staff who go an extra mile in reaching out to children’s educational needs.”

A teacher from school A, like the principal of school B, added:

“Results- our school is results-orientated as our Grade 12 learners perform remarkably well. Culture – the culture of our school promotes a conducive atmosphere for learners to perform optimally in Grade 12.”

The principals also emphasised *accountability*. Teachers and learners are held accountable for poor performance. The teachers have to account to the principal if they have failed to reach the benchmark during tests or examinations. If the benchmark is 80% pass rate, and the subject average is put at 45%, anyone who fails to reach that target has to draw up an improvement plan as to what he is going to do to reach the set target. Learners are also held accountable by the principals for having failed. They too have to commit themselves in improving their own performance.

In order to bring about much anticipated changes in the high-poverty schools, principals are bound to develop turnaround strategies to meet expected levels of performance. They need to possess specific qualities of leadership that will help them to transform schools. The past legacies can no longer be used as an excuse for poor performance.

4.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter presented the analysis and interpretation of biographical and interview data. The brief profile of participants (principals, teachers) was first presented. The interpretation of data focused on the managerial challenges facing principals of high-poverty schools which were categorised as socio-economic and school impacts. Furthermore, the strategies to deal with those managerial challenges were also discussed. Finally, the chapter also entailed the specific leadership qualities which the principals of high-performing, high-poverty schools need to possess.

The chapter dealt with the managerial challenges confronting the principals of high-poverty schools, acknowledging that even though there is improved performance in those schools, the principals have to deal with a series of challenges. For the researcher, conducting the interviews brought a unique experience which was touching at times when principals had to relate their efforts to transform schools despite the challenges. There were stories of hope and strong belief systems, and that perseverance breeds success, for example the principal of school B who related how they assisted a learner from a very poor background to register at the University of Pretoria. The learner had nothing, but the conditions at home instead pushed him to be focused and aspire to use education to uplift both himself and his family.

Chapter five concludes the research with an overview of this investigation, synthesis of significant findings and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a summary and highlights the major findings of the research. Significant issues which came forth from the literature review and the empirical evidence, are summarised. The research question is presented again and answers are provided. Recommendations are directed to the Provincial Department of Education, the District Office and down to the level of the schools and the broader communities around where schools are located. In closing this chapter, the researcher also provides personal reflections on the study, states the significance of the study as well as the need for further research on the topic. This chapter finally presents themes for further research on which other researchers can build.

5.2. SUMMARY

5.2.1. Literature study findings

After a comprehensive literature survey the following themes were identified: managerial challenges faced by principals of high-poverty schools, strategies employed by principals of high-poverty schools to deal with the challenges, and specific qualities possessed by principals of high-performing, high-poverty schools. These are subsequently discussed in the following paragraphs.

5.2.1.1. Managerial challenges faced by principals of high-poverty schools

The literature review has revealed that the effects of poverty on education are far reaching. Children are poor because of the economic limitations of their parents or caregivers which affect their opportunity to acquire education (see 2.2.2). The link between poverty and academic achievement has been noted by many scholars in the field of academic achievement. It is argued that in most cases, learners from poor backgrounds often attend the lowest performing schools because they cannot

afford the high fees in the more affluent schools. The poverty level or status of parents, therefore, determines which schools children attend. Very poor communities face many hardships and children, families, and the schools that serve them encounter a host of challenges. For schools, these challenges include children who start school without literacy skills, high rates of absenteeism and transience, and difficulty in attracting experienced teachers. Moreover, literature has indicated that low-income learners come to school less ready to learn and with weaker educational support at home than those from more advantaged backgrounds (see 2.2.2).

Findings from the literature confirmed that socio-economic and sociological problems associated with poverty give rise to specific challenges concerning the orderly, effective and equal provision of education. However, these challenges have to be met because poor learners and poor schools are principally and constitutionally entitled to high-quality education and resources. This has led the Free State Department of Education to classify and provide schools with funding based on the poverty levels of communities where schools are located. These schools are therefore categorised into *quintiles* ranging from 1 to 5. Quintile 1 to 2 schools are termed no-fee paying schools which implies that learners do not have to pay school fees. They typically live in communities where the majority of parents do not work. In Quintile 3 to 5 schools the parents can afford to pay school fees. These schools are typically located in the more average to affluent areas (see 2.2.2).

The literature survey has also revealed that HIV/AIDS is a major problem affecting the safety, security and well-being of both learners and teachers in South Africa which may furthermore disrupt school attendance because of illness, both among children themselves and their care-givers (see 2.2.1). The effects of HIV/AIDS may lead to another social problem which is child-headed families. Children in child-headed families are deprived of their childhood and the opportunity to go to school. Economic hardships oblige them to look for means of subsistence that increase their vulnerability to HIV infection, substance abuse, child labour, sex work and delinquency. All these factors therefore affect the academic performance of learners who at times are forced by circumstances to drop out of school.

Another factor that has become the focus of literature is the link between nutrition and academic performance as nutrition is directly linked to poverty and the effects of HIV/AIDS. Literature has revealed that malnutrition among infants, young children and adolescents has serious developmental implications because these age periods are critical in the growth and development of children. This link is so well-established that a myth has risen around it: learners in poverty are destined for low academic achievement.

The in-school factors

According to the literature, parental involvement is another critical factor that impacts on the academic achievement of learners. The support or lack of support at home plays a significant role in the child's learning. Parents who are poorer tend to have lower levels of education and they thus lack the verbal skills for more enriched dialogue with their children. This process, unfortunately, can easily become a self-perpetuating cycle in that children of low socio-economic status (SES) parents become adults with low educational levels and low ability to improve their children's verbal development (see 2.3.2).

From the literature review it became clear that learners who lack middle-class cultural capital and have limited parental involvement are likely to have lower academic achievement than their resourceful peers. The roles of parents are significant in ensuring that children perform well at school. Children need as much moral support as they can receive from their parents or other adults to boost their fragile self-image. When learners have assistance from a parent with homework, they do much better in school. Many parents in South Africa work in urban areas to earn money for the household, leaving parenting to siblings or members of the extended family. Parents, therefore, often have too little time and energy to become involved in their children's learning at home or at school (see 2.2.3).

The literature survey further revealed that overcrowding of classes is a common factor in low-performing, high-poverty schools which has an impact on academic performance. Overcrowding due to shortages of classrooms and teachers militates against effective teaching and individual attention to pupils. Teachers need to give

learners individual attention so that they are not left behind, however, with a class filled to capacity this much-needed attention is often compromised and underachievement becomes the unfortunate result (see 2.3.3).

Another challenge related to overcrowding is lack of resources - both human and material. The literature confirmed that the principals of high-poverty schools complain that the *Morkel Model* used to allocate teaching posts to schools, is flawed because it allocates more teaching posts to technical schools and fewer to academic schools. Due to this scenario, principals are left with the option of squeezing more learners into fewer classes to avoid exposing them to under-qualified teachers which subsequently leads to overcrowding. Overcrowded classes affect individual attention and cause teachers to lose their enthusiasm for teaching, their motivation and morale. Lack of resources is not limited to finance, books or laboratory equipment. The widespread physical deficiencies in many school buildings and equipment have compelled those in school planning and design to see it as an opportunity to enhance academic performance by creating better learning environments (see 2.3.3).

It was further reported that one of the factors that is characteristic of poor performing schools is the problem of school attendance or the high absenteeism rate, which is a major challenge faced by many principals in high-poverty schools. Poor attendance not only hinders academic achievement, but also promotes a poorly educated society and leads to many negative social issues. Youngsters in urban areas are affected by many social risk factors that contribute to their absence from school. Some of these risk factors include living in densely populated communities, in high crime neighbourhoods or in poverty. Other factors include nutrition deficits, negative peer and media influences, prejudice and unequal opportunities, family stress, physical or mental illness, and learners' inability to be resilient in their development (see 2.3.4.).

The literature confirmed the link between high rates of absenteeism and the eventual drop-out of learners in high-poverty schools - another factor contributing to low academic performance. Learners' attendance, interest, and attention to their studies affect how well they perform at each level and could furthermore be determinant

factors in their school completion. Various factors can influence learners' decision not to complete school. These include, amongst others, parent supervision at home, school attendance, role models, gang involvement, and self-esteem. Prevention measures which were successful for drop-outs, were reported as increasing motivation, notifying parents of late or absent learners, providing emotional support, and a lower learner-teacher ratio. It was also noted that learners who earn low grades, who don't participate in school activities, who have poor attendance, and who receive little support and encouragement to stay at school are at a greater risk of dropping out (see 2.3.5).

5.2.1.2. Strategies to deal with managerial challenges

Findings from the literature study confirmed that learners from high-poverty schools are confronted by various challenges that affect their stay at school and eventually their academic performance. These include, amongst others, poverty, conflict between home and school culture, an ineffective discipline system, low expectations, lack of parental support, curriculum content and under-qualified teachers (see 2.3.5). In their own communities there are challenges such as gangsterism, the effects of HIV/AIDS, being raised by single parents, child-headed families, teenage pregnancies and broken families (see 2.2).

In order to deal with the challenges presented by learners coming from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, it transpired that principals in these schools display specific leadership qualities and also employ certain leadership styles, in particular instructional and collaborative leadership styles (see 2.4.1). In the Instructional Leadership paradigm, the principal is primarily an instructional leader whose main focus is teaching and learning. Motivating and helping teachers to be academically successful with all learners is pivotal; the principal works closely with teachers on improving the instruction and learning process. School principals should have a sense of direction and invite others to follow the desired path (see 2.4.1).

Collaborative or distributed leadership style was also found to be effective by principals of high-poverty schools. Distributed leadership is a model of leadership that implies broad based involvement in the practice of leadership, involving teachers

and other professionals, learners and parents and the wider community in decision-making. The key to success lies in the ability to create and manage effective teams, to stimulate an environment in which innovation and knowledge sharing are not just paid lip service, and to communicate complex concepts and strategies comprehensibly to a wider stakeholder group. Collaboration is another key characteristic of successful school principals. They empower staff through collaboration and shared leadership. They encourage risk taking and problem solving. Shared leadership is an integral part of how schools conduct business. The staff could be trusted to make academic and instructional decisions (see 2.4.1). The literature survey has clearly indicated that high-poverty schools from disadvantaged communities are confronted by a host of challenges that require school principals to possess certain leadership qualities to be able to make a difference in those schools. This investigation has therefore identified specific leadership qualities necessary to ensure effective teaching and learning in high-poverty schools. These qualities include caring, compassion, motivation, and setting high expectations (see 2.4.1).

5.2.2. Empirical findings

The researcher conducted interviews with the principals and teachers of three schools under investigation. Data was collected and analysed (see 3.6.2). From the empirical findings the following themes were identified: managerial challenges facing principals of high-poverty schools, the strategies to deal with those managerial challenges, and the specific qualities possessed by principals of high-performing, high-poverty schools.

5.2.2.1. Managerial challenges facing principals of high-poverty schools

(a) Impact of socio-economic factors on learning

The responses from the participants revealed that learners from high-poverty schools bring along with them a variety of challenges that impact on both their learning as well as the effective management of schools by the principals. In accordance with the literature study, the challenges, amongst others, include gangsterism, poverty, child-headed families, teenage-pregnancy, physiological and social needs. The participants' responses confirmed that learners from high-poverty

environments do not perform well in comparison to their counterparts in the most affluent environments. This makes the task of principals even more challenging since they have to deal with extra problems that are not necessarily prevalent in other schools. More effort is therefore needed to ensure that anticipated academic excellence is achieved and maintained (see 4.4.1).

The data indicated that school safety is a serious challenge confronted by principals in high-poverty schools. Safety of learners is mostly compromised by a number of gang-related incidents that either start in the community and spills over to the school premises, or vice versa. In order to address this problem, schools have adopted police officers or members of the Community Police Forum (CPFs) to make regular visits to schools to monitor incidences of violence that could impact on learning and teaching. Police are called to make regular patrols around the school to ensure that the learning environment is safe for teaching and learning to take place. Respondents have confirmed that learning and teaching is difficult, if not impossible, in an unsafe environment. As a result, learners facing these challenges cannot be expected to perform, and nor will principals be able to manage schools effectively (see 4.4.1.1).

Interview responses have also confirmed that most learners from disadvantaged communities come from broken families, or families where they had been brought up by single parents (mostly mothers) as a result of failed marriages or relationships. Learners from these backgrounds sometimes find it difficult to cope at school and their performance is badly affected. These learners sometimes need special intervention from teaching staff and it is the task of the principal to motivate staff members to walk the extra mile with these learners (see 4.4.1.1).

Respondents have on many occasions emphasised the impact of poverty on academic achievement. Many learners were found to be attending school only because the school serves as a requirement for them to access social grants from the Social Development Department. This implies that many learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds come to school for the wrong reasons which consequently limit their efforts to succeed at school (see 4.4.1.1).

(b) Impact of in-school factors

All the principals of the selected schools have confirmed the fact that lack of parental involvement has serious implications for learning and their work as managers of high-poverty schools. Parents were found to typically restrict their involvement to parents' meetings which they occasionally attended. In order to encourage parents to attend grade meetings and contact sessions with teachers, some schools are no longer handing out progress reports to learners, but only to the parents (see 4.4.1.2).

The empirical findings also revealed that aspects such as overcrowding and a high rate of absenteeism are common amongst learners and teachers in high-poverty schools. If school managers do not deal with them appropriately, they can add to the host of challenges school managers have to deal with on a daily basis. Absenteeism is at times related to gang-related incidences since some learners might opt for absenting themselves from school rather than risking the crossfire of gangster-related activities. The effect of this on academic achievement is substantial (see 4.4.1.2).

5.2.2.2. Strategies to deal with managerial challenges

Through interaction with the principals and teachers, the most outstanding strategy to deal with issues such as gangsterism, teenage pregnancy and a high rate of absenteeism is to engage as many stakeholders as possible in addressing these problems. To limit incidences of gangsterism, the visibility of the police is crucial. Schools go as far as organising trips to prisons with school learners who are often culprits of violence at school so that they could observe how difficult life is in prison. Former convicts are occasionally invited to schools to give motivation talks to learners because the impact becomes more positive when learners learn from those with first-hand experience.

From the data collected from the principals, it was discovered that all the principals adopt a principle of "management by wandering around". This implies that principals in high-poverty schools are not confined to their offices, but spend most of their time moving around the school to monitor whether effective teaching and learning are

taking place in classes. This allows the principals to deal with crises whenever they arise.

The empirical study further revealed that motivational sessions rated high amongst principals of high-poverty schools. Principals usually call upon former learners who themselves come from poor socio-economic backgrounds, but have become successful to offer motivational speeches to the learners. This strategy has been found to be effective because these motivators are able to easily identify with the learners because they managed to overcome their circumstances and be successful.

In one school the principal indicated that they were winning the battle against the high rate of learner absenteeism due to the strategy of allocating blocks to a departmental head (HOD), also called the block supervisor. This method was discussed in 4.4 and is clearly considered a very effective curbing mechanism.

5.2.2.3. Specific qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty schools

According to the data collected from principals and teachers of the participating schools, it became clear that leading high-poverty schools required certain specific qualities from the principals. One of these is *being empathetic*, getting “into the shoes of the poor child” who comes to class with an empty stomach. A principal needs to be a *motivator*. He/she should inspire both the learners and the teachers to achieve set goals irrespective of their situation. Learners should be able to see in the principal the energy and hope which inspire them to believe that there is light and hope for them too, notwithstanding their backgrounds (see 4.4.3).

Another unique finding from the participants is that effective principals in the high-poverty schools should be *collaborative* and be a *team player*. Such a principal has the ability to build team spirit, build relationships and empower both teachers and learners to take leading roles where they have expertise. Principals must *create high expectations* for learners and teachers alike. He/she must instil the belief that all learners must succeed. If learners are aware that high expectations are set for them,

they will channel all their energy into making a success of their studies and achieve the expected high standard.

Findings have confirmed that a principal in a high-performing, high-poverty school is not a loner, but he/she is a *networker*, able to establish successful networks with his/her other successful counterparts. Building successful networks allows the teachers and the learners alike to exchange ideas that make schools arenas of excellence. Networking further signifies that the effective principal acknowledges the fact that he/she must be a lifelong learner to sustain academic excellence, tapping into the expertise and knowledge of others.

Other key principles that the principals of high-poverty schools see as paramount are *dedication, diligence, accountability* and being *results-driven*. The staff and principals in high-poverty schools exhibit tremendous dedication to their work and this is shown through thorough lesson planning and continuous assessment of learners. The principals inspire teachers to be accountable for the results, and should they not achieve set targets, teachers are expected to account for it and develop improvement strategies which are closely monitored by the principals.

5.3. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions are stated as answers to the original research question (see chapter 1). The main research question was:

Given the overwhelming evidence that confirms the negative effect of poor socio-economic circumstances on the academic success of learners from poverty-stricken areas, how do some schools in these areas manage to excel academically despite their poor living conditions, and which elements constitute a profile of effective leadership in high-poverty schools?

In answering the main question, answers will be provided for each sub-question as stated in Chapter 1:

- Why do certain “shack schools” render good or even outstanding academic results regardless of the socio-economic environments in which they operate?

- Which variables play a role in the outstanding performance of these achieving schools?
- Do poor socio-economic factors necessarily determine academic underachievement?
- What role is played by the environment on the academic achievement of learners?

5.3.1. Why do certain “shack schools” render good or even outstanding academic results regardless of the socio-economic environments in which they operate?

The literature and empirical findings indicate that although the socio-economic and societal factors have an impact on the academic performance of secondary schools in impoverished communities, there are certain schools in those areas who have managed to render outstanding academic results despite the circumstances they find themselves in (see 2.1).

Literature revealed that in order to raise performance in these areas, successful or high-performing, high-poverty schools have managed to increase *learner attendance*, recruit *highly qualified teachers* and *increase instructional spending* (see 2.1).

Studies also indicated that principals in high-performing, high-poverty schools understand the significance of establishing a *safe learning environment* as playing a pivotal role in creating a conducive teaching and learning atmosphere. All relevant *stakeholders are involved* at schools, the police are highly visible so that it becomes clear to learners that they are safe during their entire stay at school. Access to schools is vigorously controlled so as to limit easy inflow of unwanted people in the school premises which could jeopardise the safety of learners (see 4.4).

Learners in high-performing, high-poverty schools are *holistically engaged* to ensure that they remain focused at all times and run away from the derailing activities that could hamper their performance. These schools ensure that all learners are engaged

in extra-mural activities during their spare time so as to keep them getting involved in gang-related activities. On top of excelling academically, these learners are afforded the opportunity to engage in different sporting activities, they are therefore kept very busy at schools (see 4.4.).

One outstanding characteristic of high-achieving, high poverty schools is *effective leadership*. Studies have revealed that principals in these environments are primarily instructional leaders whose main focus is teaching, motivating and helping teachers and learners to be academically successful. Successful and effective principals in high-poverty schools have a vision for the school and they articulate the vision to staff, parents and learners. The philosophy, structures and activities of the school are geared towards the achievement of this *shared vision* (see 2.4.1).

Studies have also highlighted that the staff of high-performing schools are different from their colleagues in low-performing schools in that they are *competent or exceptional in carrying out their tasks*. They have both content knowledge and a compassionate way of relating to the learners and families while maintaining a high degree of flexibility in managing the school day (see 2.4.1).

5.3.2. Which variables play a role in the outstanding performance of these achieving schools?

One of the most critical variables in achieving schools already alluded to in the previous paragraph, is *outstanding leadership* and also the *key values and principles* adhered to at these institutions.

Literature has revealed that the principals of high-performing schools are *highly-motivated and* are therefore able to motivate others, teachers and learners alike. Motivational talks serve as ingredients for success at these schools aimed at inspiring learners and teachers to achieve (see 4.4.3). *Collaboration* plays a critical role in these schools. The teachers are inspired to lead areas of their expertise and become leaders in their own right. Leaders therefore build collaborative structures and *cultures of trust*. When teachers and learners realise that they are trusted and

supported to produce excellent results, it serves as a motivation to do exceptionally well.

The study has shown that successful high-poverty schools have teachers who are *committed to personal and professional development* as that is viewed as an ingredient for promoting the delivery of education and training as well as improving learners' performance. Empowered teachers will succeed and their success will enable them to innovate their teaching and learning practices in the best interest of the learners.

Another variable that cause high-poverty schools to excel, is that staff in these schools are driven by a *common purpose* which make them strive for the same goal, i.e. excellent learner achievement. Although learners come from poor socio-economic backgrounds, they are taken seriously and are shown that the only way out of their situation is through quality education. Unlike some common practices in low- performing schools where staff tends to focus on learners' background and where a learner suffers continued ridicule due to his/her past mistakes and performance, *equity* is an important part of common purpose in high-performing schools. These schools ensure that learners from the low income background receive the same standard of education as other learners. A learners' background and prior academic performance do not pass as reasons for lower expectations.

In addition to what has been cited, the staff establishments of successful high-poverty schools spend a considerable amount of *time collaborating around instructional issues*. Teachers often use this time to plan lessons that address the same concepts across disciplines so that learners gain exposure to material through different teachers and in different contexts. Through common planning, teachers in high-poverty schools attend to learners' developmental needs based on collective knowledge. Principals in high-performing schools understand the need for additional time for learners to be assisted beyond the normal school day. Therefore, programmes that extend the schooling time is a common practice in high-performing, high-poverty schools.

5.3.3. Do poor socio-economic factors necessarily determine academic underachievement?

Although the link between socio-economic factors and academic achievement has been clearly reported in the literature study and the empirical investigation, the mere fact that there are high-performing, high-poverty schools, as reported in this study, proves that socio-economic factors do not necessarily cause academic underachievement. This is clear from the findings that have been reported. It seems that there are ways and means of combatting the effects of socio-economic ills such as poverty, HIV/Aids and others on academic achievement. These have already been discussed in 5.3.1 and 5.3.2.

5.3.4. What role is played by the environment on the academic achievement of learners?

Literature and empirical findings have revealed that an environment plays a significant role in the academic achievement of learners. Environment refers to the external conditions or surroundings in which people live. In this sense, the homes, community as well as the school are environments in which learners spend most of their time, and they can therefore influence how learners perform.

Children are dependent on their *parents* for financial support. In poverty-stricken households children are poor by virtue of their parents' economic limitations. They are harshly affected at times by this set of circumstances and they fare worse than other children from well to do families. Studies have found that very *poor communities* face many hardships and children, families, and the schools that serve them, confront a host of challenges. Low-income learners have a probability of lower achievement than learners from a higher socio-economic status backgrounds, and these lower-income learners may very well continue into the cycle of poverty. Low-income learners come to school less ready and with weaker educational support at home compared to those from more advantaged backgrounds. Teachers also perceive that schools with large proportions of learners from poor families offer harsher working environments than those schools serving more advantaged

learners. A child's family background and the school's socio-economic make up are the best predictors of academic success (see 2.2.2).

Literature has found that the environment in the low-performing schools is often *uninviting and unpleasant*. The *premises* (buildings, furniture and other facilities) are neglected, unkempt and damaged. There is *poor waste collection*; the school environment in general reflects the poor state of buildings in the community. Learning does not begin at school, and the background of a child who learns more at home can lay a better foundation at school. The support or lack of support at home plays a significant role in the child's learning. *Home environment* is therefore critical in the learning process of the child - it must be stimulating and help prepare the child for a conducive learning environment at school.

High-performing, high-poverty schools offer conducive environments for learning and teaching because of the culture of high expectation that exists there. The culture of high expectations in high-performing, high-poverty schools is embedded in a *caring and nurturing environment* where adults and young people alike treat each other with respect. In order for learners to do well, teachers have to provide a caring environment in which learners are viewed as the most valuable resources of the school, and in such a culture of caring, teachers do not expect learners to repress their own background knowledge. The environment, therefore, plays a significant role in the academic achievement of learners.

5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made on the managerial challenges facing principals of high-poverty schools.

5.4.1. Recommendation 1

The Provincial and National Departments of Education should take into cognisance the host of *socio-economic challenges* experienced in the so-called high-poverty schools which have a determining impact on the delivery and acquisition of education. These challenges should be addressed by building more schools with better facilities and appointing more teachers.

5.4.2. Recommendation 2

The allocation of funding based on the quintile system should be reviewed by the National Department of Education. The highly impoverished schools in the disadvantaged communities should be allocated more funding in order to address the wide gap that exists in terms of resources between the more affluent and more impoverished schools.

5.4.3. Recommendation 3

There must be *continuous and sustained support* for the principals, staff and learners of high-poverty schools by all sections within the local Education Districts so that relevant support is readily available. This support could be in the form of training, the supply of resources and financial support.

5.4.4. Recommendation 4

In appointing principals, it must be recommended by the Provincial Education Department that principals should follow a comprehensive *leadership course* such as the ACE in School Leadership.

5.4.5. Recommendation 5

The district officials should play a supervisory role in the functionality of the *School-based Support Teams* who are, amongst others, tasked to help identify and provide support to learners with different scholastic, socio-economic and behavioural challenges.

5.4.6. Recommendation 6

The National and Provincial Departments of Education should acknowledge that within the system there are many so-called “deadwood” type of teachers who are weighing the system down. The issue of *performance management* should be revisited and teachers could be required to sign performance contracts.

5.4.7. Recommendation 7

Principals should ensure that schools become *community centres* and that the gap that exists between schools and the communities be narrowed. Principals should be part of the communities in which they operate and be caring for the people in the community so that the community itself could own the school and protect it from all the social ills.

5.4.8. Recommendation 8

The study recommends that the principals leading high-poverty schools should develop strategies to better deal with the challenges facing their learners. This includes being compassionate and supportive and to inculcate into the broader staff a culture of *high expectation* and caring for the learners irrespective of their backgrounds.

5.4.9. Recommendation 9

It is recommended that principals of high-poverty schools should build a *network* with principals of other high-performing schools so as to foster an exchange of ideas and sharing of best-practices. Constant support and guidance from other successful schools will be to the benefit of all.

5.4.10. Recommendation 10

The principals of high-poverty schools should instil in their staff a *culture of accountability*. Teachers must at all times be held accountable and they must develop improvement strategies of which the effective implementation is regularly monitored by the principals. Measures should be put in place to effectively control and eradicate the high absenteeism rate of both learners and teachers. Principals must at all times strive to protect teaching and learning time, thereby ensuring that contact time with learners is used profitably.

5.5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of this study include the following:

- This study entailed eliciting the viewpoints of the principals and educators regarding the determinants of school success in disadvantaged communities. and therefore, only the viewpoints of these participants were included in the study.
- The study focused on the challenges faced by the principals of high-poverty schools. The challenges confronting the principals of private and affluent schools (formerly model-C schools) were not considered.
- All the participating principals were males, and therefore the viewpoints or experiences of female principals were not included.
- The study was based on only one district (Lejweleputswa) in the Free State Province, and about four districts (Fezile Dabi, Thabo-Mofutsanayana, Xhariep and Motheo) were excluded, therefore the findings of this study cannot be generalised to the whole province.

5.6. THEMES FOR FURTHER STUDY

There is a clear need for further research to deal with managerial challenges confronting principals of high-poverty schools, and the employment of different approaches to make schools better centres of academic excellence. Based on the discussions and findings from the study, the following themes for further research are recommended:

- Qualities of teachers as determinants of success in high-poverty schools.
- The impact of the ACE: School Leadership course in the effectiveness of school principals in the Lejweleputswa District.
- The roles of School Management and Governance Developers (SMGDs) in enhancing performance of principals and schools in the Lejweleputswa District.
- Lessons that can be learnt from former “Model C” schools by principals of high-poverty schools.

5.7. CLOSING REMARKS

It has been the tendency of the authorities to determine the effectiveness of schools in terms of their Grade 12 pass results at the end of each year, and this has for many years put tremendous pressure on the principals leading secondary schools, particularly high-poverty schools. The drawback of this whole scenario was the fact that previously all schools have been rated the same and have been expected to perform equally, whether or not they served impoverished communities or affluent communities or have been equipped to meet the required expectations. Data from this study has revealed that there is a host of very specific challenges confronted by the principals of high-poverty schools (2.2.) which affect how these schools are managed and how they perform.

The study has successfully answered the main research question and has consequently presented strategies to be employed when dealing with the unique challenges facing principals of high-poverty schools. The study has made a considerable contribution in the following manner:

- The study has identified the challenges confronted by the principals of high-poverty schools which make it difficult for these schools to meet the expected performance standards.
- Strategies to deal with the challenges facing principals in high-poverty schools have been presented which will assist many schools operating in the same conditions to better deal with the challenges and eventually free themselves from those conditions.
- Relevant leadership styles that could be employed by the principals of high-poverty schools to deal with those challenges, were also identified.
- The study further presented specific leadership qualities that principals in high-poverty schools should possess in order to make a difference in such schools.
- The key principles and values which are prominent in the high-performing, high-poverty schools were also shared as guiding principles that can help to turn around the low-performing, high-poverty schools.

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CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, FREE STATE
SENTRALE UNIVERSITEIT VIR TEGNOLOGIE, VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI E BOHARENG YA THEKENOLOJI, FOREISTATA

School of Teacher Education
Welkom Campus

APPENDIX A

DIRECTOR: STRATEGIC PLANNING, POLICY & RESEARCH

Room 319

Old CAN Building

BLOEMFONTEIN

Tel: 051-404 9283/404 9221

Fax: 086 6678 678

Dear Sir/Madam

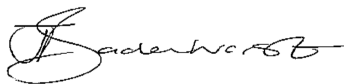
CONFIRMATION OF REGISTRATION

This is to certify that Mr L.J.Koalepe is currently registered for his M.Ed in Education Management at the Central University of Technology. He wishes to conduct empirical research involving teachers and principals and other departmental officials from the Lejweleputswa district of the Free State DoE for his dissertation and seeks your permission to grant him approval. His title:

Determinants of schools success in disadvantaged communities: managerial implications for principals of high-poverty schools.

Attached you will find all relevant documents as requested.

Kind regards



Dr JW Badenhorst

Supervisor

082 202 4626



education

Department of
Education
FREE STATE PROVINCE

APPENDIX B



education

Department of
Education
FREE STATE PROVINCE

Enquiries: LV Alexander
Reference: 16/4/1/32 - 2012

Tel: 051 404 9283
Fax: 086 6678 678
E-mail: research@edu.fs.gov.za

2012 – 09 – 12

Mr L. J. Koalepe
19 Angora Road
VIRGINIA
9431

Dear Mr Koalepe

REGISTRATION OF RESEARCH PROJECT

1. This letter is in reply to your application for the registration of your research project.
2. Research topic: **DETERMINANTS OF SCHOOL SUCCESS IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES: MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PRINCIPALS OF HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS**
- 3 Your research project has been registered with the Free State Education Department.
4. Approval is granted under the following conditions:-
 - 4.1 The name of participants involved remains confidential.
 - 4.2 The questionnaires are completed and the **interviews are conducted outside normal tuition time.**
 - 4.3 This letter is shown to all participating persons.
 - 4.4 A bound copy of the report and a summary on a computer disc on this study is donated to the Free State Department of Education.
 - 4.5 Findings and recommendations are presented to relevant officials in the Department.
5. The costs relating to all the conditions mentioned above are your own responsibility.
6. **You are requested to confirm acceptance of the above conditions in writing to:**

**DIRECTOR: STRATEGIC PLANNING, POLICY AND RESEARCH,
Old CNA Building, Maitland Street OR Private Bag X20565, BLOEMFONTEIN, 9301**

We wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely

MJ MOTHEBE
DIRECTOR: STRATEGIC PLANNING, POLICY AND RESEARCH

Directorate: Strategic Planning, Policy & Research - Private Bag X20565, Bloemfontein, 9300 – Room 301, Old CNA building,
Maitland Street, Bloemfontein 9300 - Tel: 051 404 9283 / Fax: 086 6678 678 E-mail: research@edu.fs.gov.za

www.education.fs.gov.za

APPENDIX C

TO : THE PRINCIPAL

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT AN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

DATE : 28/08/2012

Dear Sir/ Madam

I wish to apply for a permission to conduct research at your school. The topic of the research is “

DETERMINANTS OF SCHOOL SUCCESS IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES: MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PRINCIPALS OF HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS”.

It should be mentioned that all interview logistics and ethical considerations will be seriously adhered to as expected. The research will not be of any disturbance to the teaching and learning processes.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours in education

L.J. Koalepe

Dr J.W. Badenhorst (School for Teacher Training, Central University of Technology-Welkom Campus)

APPENDIX D**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS**

Name of the School: _____

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Gender

Category	(X)
Male	1
Female	2

2. Age group

Category	(X)
31-40 years	1
41-50 years	2
51-60 years	3
61- 70 years	4
71- 80 years	5
80 and over	6

3. What is your qualification level?

Category	(X)
Grade 12 with certificate	1
Grade 12 with diploma	2
Bachelor's Degree	3
Bachelor's Degree with Diploma	4
Honours Degree	5
Masters' Degree	6
Doctoral Degree	7

4. Have you acquired or registered for any qualification in school leadership and management?

Category	(X)
Yes	1
No	2
Interested	3
Not interested	4

5. How long have you been the principal at your current school?

Category	(X)
Between 1 and 3 years	1
Between 4 and 7 years	2
8 years and over	3

6. What was your school's Grade 12 pass rate over the past 5 years??

Category	(X)
2007	
2008	
2009	
2010	
2011	

7. How would you categorise the background of the majority of your learners?

Category	(X)
Very poor	1
Average to poor	2

8. What is the learner enrolment of your school?

Category	(X)
200- 500 learners	1
500-1000 learners	2
1000 -1200 learners	3
1200 and above	4

9. What is the staff establishment status of your school?

Category	(X)
08 – 15 educators	1
16 – 30 educators	2
31 – 60 educators	3

SECTION B

1. How would you describe the key values and principles of your school?

2. What are the most serious management challenges facing your school?

3. How do you overcome these challenges?

4. In your opinion, what specific leadership qualities are needed in a high-poverty school?

5. Your school is known for its consistent good performance in Grade 12. What makes you different from other school leaders?

6. Which measures do you apply to ensure that effective teaching and learning take place in classes?

7. How do you create a culture of high expectations and caring for learners at your school?

8. Which support measures do you have in place to uplift learners so that their performance is not hindered by their poverty?

9. What do you do to create a safe and disciplined environment at your school?

10. In your opinion, which measures at national, provincial and district level are needed to continuously improve learning and teaching at your school?

11. Are there any other comments you would like to add?

APPENDIX E

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRES FOR THE TEACHERS

1. What are the most serious challenges confronting your school?

2. What strategies are in place to assist in addressing the challenges mentioned above?

3. Do you think that your principal has succeeded in creating a culture of learning and teaching in your school? Motivate.

4. Which key values and principles are held at a high esteem at your school (define your school)?

5. Your school is known for its consistent good performance in Grade 12. Can you cite few leadership qualities possessed by your principal that makes him/her an effective leader?

6. What measures are taken by the principal to ensure that a safe learning environment is maintained at your school?

7. Which measures does your principal apply to ensure that effective teaching and learning take place in classes?

8. How does he/she overcome those management challenges?

9. What strategies do your principal apply to ensure that educators are accountable for poor learner performance?

10. Are there any other comments you would like to add?

APPENDIX F**OBSERVATION SCHEDULE TEMPLATE:**

<u>Date & Time</u>	<u>Situation</u>	<u>Participants</u>	<u>Action observed</u>	<u>Reflection</u>

