

# Contributory factors affecting level of academic performance



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FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TOWARDS POOR PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 12 LEARNERS AT MANOSHI AND MOKWATEDI HIGH SCHOOLS BY MOKGAETSI SALOME RAMMALA MINI-DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTERS IN DEVELOPMENT IN THE FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND LAW AT TURFLOOP GRADUATE SCHOOL OF LEADERSHIP SUPERVISOR: MS. M. C. MODIPANE DECEMBER 2009

#### DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation hereby submitted to the Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership for the degree of MASTERS IN DEVELOPMENT has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university, that it is my work in design and execution, and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged. \_\_\_\_\_ M.

S. Rammala (Ms) Date Student Number: 9434028 i DEDICATION This study is dedicated to my mother, the late Dinah Maboya. May her soul rest in peace.

#### ii ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my thanks to the following people who helped to make the completion of this research possible: • Ms Modipane M. C. , My supervisor, is thanked for the assistance and support that she gave me during the research process and writing of this mini-dissertation. I thank her especially for her expertise that she generously shared with me and ensuring that we submit in time. • Dr. Leketi Makalela for editing and proofreading my document within a few days despite his tight schedules and Dr R. V. McCabe who edited the final version. Dr. J. Matshabaphala made himself available even during his leave and assisted me to locate some of the information that was used in this mini-dissertation. • Mr. Donald Mongoai assisted with

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technical layout of the dissertation. • Yvonne Rammala who gave her time to help in typing this document. • My special gratitude goes to my husband and children for their continued support and encouragement when I was disillusioned and wanted to quit my M. A. research project. • Malose Lekganyane for taking his time to assist with technical problems. Finally, I want to thank the Almighty God for giving me the strength, wisdom and courage to persevere in the completion of this study. May the glory and honour be unto the Lord. iii Factors contributing towards poor performance of Grade 12 learners at Manoshi and Mokwatedi high schools Abstract The purpose of this study was to investigate factors contributing towards the poor performance of Grade 12 learners at two selected high schools, which fall within low quintiles in Limpopo Province. Specifically, the study focused on low Grade 12 outputs in relation to access to university.

Due to the exploratory nature of the study and the holistic approach that was undertaken both the home and school environments were targeted as points of investigation. Multiple methods of data collection were used. First, data were collected through individual interviews with learners, educators, principals, and parents. Second, an observation method was used to collect data, such as, time management by learners, their behavioral patterns inside and outside the classroom and in the schoolyard.

Finally, document analysis was used to analyse the attendance and performance of learners on attendance registers, quarterly and half yearly schedules, and mark sheets. Key findings of this research suggest that the home environment of learners is not educationally supportive due to poverty, which includes factors such as parents' low-level of education, high <https://assignbuster.com/contributory-factors-affecting-level-of-academic-performance/>

unemployment rate, child-headed families, unpredictable home environment, emotional problems and issues relating to gender roles.

In the school environment, the study showed the following causative factors: lack of facilities, unavailable learner support materials, lack of discipline, English as a medium of instruction, heavy workload due to rationalisation and redeployment of educators, and confusion with regard to the application of the new curriculum (National Curriculum Statement). As a result, the study concluded that both home and school environment factors collaborate in producing poor Grade 12 results in the schools. Recommendations are made for attention to be given to these factors by all educational stakeholders.

Directions are suggested for future research on poor performance and

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PA-: Parent of a learner at school A (Manoshi) PB-: Parent of a learner at school B (Mokwatedi) CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY 1.

INTRODUCTION South Africa is a developing country in which the poor and the rich exist side-by-side, where the levels of poverty in rural and urban areas are not the same. The problem that needs to be investigated in this <https://assignbuster.com/contributory-factors-affecting-level-of-academic-performance/>

study is that Grade 12 learners at Manoshi and Mokwatedi high schools are unable to perform to the required level that may allow them entrance to a university. In other words, the learner must pass with an exemption (50% and above) to be admitted at university.

Failure to obtain exemption means that learners might be required to first register for a bridging course before they can embark on their envisaged degrees. This could waste their time and scarce resources. Since 2008, learners are expected to pass with a Bachelor as a benchmark for university entrance. There are several studies internationally and locally (e. g. Saiduddin, 2003: 22; Themane, 1989: 151) regarding poor performance at high school; the results revealed that in many cases the level of academic performance in urban and rural areas is not the same. Adell (2002: 91) argues that poor performance at high schools is an international problem that has been linked to the low socio-economic background of the learners. It has also been found that urban students tend to perform better than those in the rural areas (Munn, 1996, cited by Louw, 1993: 26). Education does not exist in a vacuum; it reflects the broad social, economic and political structure of the country it services. In South Africa, the past education system for the Blacks was closely related to the broad development programme and political solutions, which are currently being worked out.

Education and politics exist in a symbiotic relationship since education is always addressed within an environment of politics. It is argued that these differences in academic performance represent social realities such as poverty, political, and socio-economic problems (Engelbrecht, Kruger and Booyesen, 1996: 263-266). 1 According to Kirov (2002: 53), poverty has <https://assignbuster.com/contributory-factors-affecting-level-of-academic-performance/>

spatial, racial, and gender dimensions. Poverty is concentrated in provinces that have a high rural population, which is predominantly Black. Their high poverty levels are due to their high illiteracy and unemployment levels.

These perpetuate the problems that influence poor school performance by the children. Kirov further indicates that the Human Development Indices (HDI) vary considerably and the Limpopo Province has been identified as the one with the highest poverty rate of 77.9% followed by the Eastern Cape at 74.3%. This figure (77.9%) confirms that illiteracy and unemployment levels are linked to poverty. The demarcation of provinces and settlement patterns seems to be politically motivated and confirms the findings of the other studies.

For instance, 89% of Limpopo Province's Black population lives in rural areas characterised by, among others, malnutrition (Statistics Africa, 2001).

Government came with a key mechanism to achieve redress of inequality at schools through distribution of the education budget policy that provided a framework for allocating "nonpersonnel recurrent costs on the basis of need". A "resource targeting list" was developed; informed by physical conditions, available facilities, the degree of overcrowding of the school, educator: learner ratios, availability of basic services, and the relative poverty of the community around the school.

The main impact of the revised formula is that the poorest 40% of schools should receive 60% of the provincial schooling non-personnel budget allocation and the less poor 20% receive 5% of the resources (National Norms and Standards for School Funding, which will be abbreviated to as

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NNSSF Act, 1998 henceforth. The two schools that were researched fall within quintile 1 and 2 respectively, since they are among the poorest of the poor (NNSSF Act, 1998).

These low quintiles represent high poverty levels, low levels of education, and high unemployment rates; while high the quintile represents areas with less poverty, high levels of education, and low unemployment rates. The learners at schools under study do not pay school fees. This supports the notion that the population in that area is poor, and this was highlighted in a baseline study that was conducted in Polokwane Municipality, Limpopo Province. These schools fall within Molepo/Maja/Chuene cluster, which has an unemployment rate of 63. 2% (Polokwane Municipal IDP 2005-2007). One other factor that might be attributed to poor academic performance could be socio-economic background, creating a negative social environment at home. According to Solo (1997), the atmosphere at home helps to foster or break school success. He further argues that domestic quarrels by parents especially those who are poor and unemployed result in child neglect and eventually the learner's performance will be affected negatively. Some of the research studies cite serious malnutrition problems that impact on poor academic performance of learners (Polite, 1994).

Munn (1996) contends that urban learners perform better than those in rural areas families in urban areas can afford to provide their children with balanced diet than rural families. The school environment might also be the source of poor performance if learner support materials are not adequate.

The arguments concerning lack of facilities and resources in ruralbased schools are always raised where there is serious under performance at <https://assignbuster.com/contributory-factors-affecting-level-of-academic-performance/>

schools. Such schools often serve disadvantaged learners who are from families that are not educationally supportive (Ralenala, 1993).

Although there are arguments that the difference between rural and urban areas is political; the researcher wishes to indicate that there was a need to take stock of what the current situation is, especially now that our country has been democratic for the past fifteen years, to check whether we are better or worse off than before 1994 (Engelbrecht et al. 1996). Despite the differences between rural and urban schools, there is a need to acknowledge that some high schools in the rural areas excel in performance while some urban-based high schools perform poorly which denies learners' entrance to university.

Learners who perform poorly might have other problems that are not academic, such as death or divorce, which are highly emotional issues to cope with. The situation might become worse because schools have no mandate to interfere with family matters unless the family requests advice or intervention that is in line with ethical considerations. Hence, the participation of parents in the education of their children could facilitate discussions of issues by parents and educators as they are encountered at home and at school.

Some parents might not talk about the behavior of their children, thus resulting in a negative relationship between educators and parents.

Education is one of the most important aspects of human resource development. Hence, 3 poor school performance does not only result in learners having low self-esteem, but also causes significant stress to the

parents. There is a suggestion that the school environment should link up with the environment at home in terms of warmth, love, understanding, and encouragement (Karande & Kulkarni, 2005: 72).

The findings of this research may come up with recommendations that might enhance communication between the educators and parents to discuss the strategies that might improve performance of learners. A caring environment in the school leads to the attainment of good education, which is associated with good outcomes. Schools are the testing ground for the success or failure of learners to adapt to the demands of the society. There is also more success in a climate with high learner involvement, personal learner-educator relationships, and innovative ways of improving the performance of learners.

The findings of this study will assist the researcher to recommend remedial measures that would address the problem relevant to the source of poor performance of Grade 12 learners (Adell, 2002: 91). Many children suffer from unpredictable home environments such as parents being arrested for always quarrelling due to substance abuse. The presence or availability of parents is crucial since they provide information, learning opportunities, behavioral models, and connection to other resources.

The absence of such support severely limits these transactional protection processes and results in learners having a low self-esteem. According to Saiduddin (2003: 88), educators should create a positive school environment for learners to feel at home at school in such a way that they can openly discuss what prevents them from performing to the required standards.

Hence, the involvement of parents would allow the school to seek assistance from relevant authorities to provide the necessary intervention

Generally, various studies that attempt to explain academic failure start with the three elements that intervene in education: parents (family causal factors), educators (academic causal factors), and learners (personal causal factors). Among personal variables, the most studied are motivation and self-concept (Saiduddin, 2003: 86). 4 Motivation as a personal variable was also found to be the most important since the learner will strive to achieve high marks even if he/she is not good in, for example, mathematics.

Consensus exists among the diverse motivational theories and approaches in as much as they conceptualize motivation in terms of conscious beliefs and values. In the arena of motivation, there exist all kinds of opinions and results. Some research found that motivation maintains a circular relationship with the level of information processing and improvement of academic performance of learners (Gonzalez, 1998). This study seeks to investigate the de-motivating factors that contribute to poor performance. The decline of performance at high school as compared to a learner's performance at primary school could be due to tighter academic standards here hard work and creativity are necessary to cope, in addition to less personal attention and fewer opportunities to participate in classroom decision-making (Berg, 2003: 530-631). There are arguments that the poor academic performance could be due to the teaching methods that were used during primary schooling, which created dependency in learners. Learners complain that educators at high school are less friendly, always stress

competition, which consequently make them feel less academically competent. As a result, their level of performance drops.

This research could recommend how under performing learners could be assisted and encouraged through addressing the issues raised by such learners and by encouraging educators to give learners individual attention during study time since some of their problems might be academic while others might be problems within their families. Sanchez (2000) contends that self-concept as another personal variable is at the base of future school success or failure, having been formed since early Childhood Education, from peer contact, teacher attitude, and expectation.

Transition from primary to high school could be problematic because learners have to do most of the schoolwork alone. This needs self-reliance and a positive self-concept from learners. The learners' age group in this study is between 16-18 years, which is the adolescent stage that is usually a very difficult stage to transcend and if the learners' self-concepts are poor, they could rely solely on educators to finish the syllabus before the exams. This may impact on their performance.

Research indicates that there is a positive correlation between academic performance and peer relationships such as if the learner is isolated and rejected by his/her peers he/she may perform poorly. This is supported by another 5 study (Buote, 2001), which indicates that learners who perform poorly in school are those most rejected by their peer group in class. 1. 1  
**PROBLEM STATEMENT** The poor academic performance of Grade 12 learners in the Limpopo Province has been a concern for quite some time. Manoshi

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and Mokwatedi high schools are two of the schools in the Mankweng Circuit that are among the under performing schools.

The problem is that most learners do not perform at a level that would allow them university entrance. The final results of Grade 12 learners at Manoshi and Mokwatedi high schools between 2000- 2008 are reflected in Tables 1. 1

and 1. 2 below: TABLE: 1. 1 Grade 12 Results: Manoshi High School YEAR NO. WROTE PASS RATE% IMPROVED % 2000 131 22. 2 \_\_ 2001 84 28. 2 5. 9 (up) 2002 29 48. 8 20. 6 (up) 2003 57 76. 9 28. 1 (up) 2004 62 84. 2 7. 3 (up) 2005 7 5 47. 8 37. 5 (down) 2006 51 54. 9 7. 1 (up) 2007 44 81. 8 26. 9 (up) 2008 73 51. 0 30. 8 (down) Source: Records at Manoshi High School TABLE:

1. Grade 12 Results: Mokwatedi High School YEAR NO. WROTE PASS RATE % IMPROVED % 2000 68 45. 6 \_\_\_\_ 2001 58 36. 2 9. 4 (down) 2002 32 75. 0 38. 8 (up) 2003 23 86. 6 11. 6 (up) 2004 34 91. 2 4. 6 (up) 2005 37 78. 4 12. 8 (down) 2006 48 83. 3 4. 9 (up) 2007 48 68. 8 14. 5 (down) 2008 55 52. 2 16. 6 (down) Source: Records at Mokwatedi High School

6 1. 2 MOTIVATION TO CONDUCT THIS STUDY The researcher resides in the same Ward 4, where the schools under study are located. According to the researcher's observation, despite the improvement of results in recent years, few learners obtained university entrance.

Most of the learners have relocated to other high schools to the extent that the enrolment of the schools in question has dropped drastically and continues to do so. As a professional educator and member of the community, the researcher's need to investigate the problem became stronger to find out which factors could be contributing towards the poor

academic performance of Grade 12 learners at Manoshi and Mokwatedi high  
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schools where learners are unable to perform at a level of results that would allow them university entrance. 1. 3 AIM OF THE STUDY

This study aims to investigate factors that contribute towards the poor academic performance of Grade12 learners at Manoshi and Mokwatedi high schools and prevent them from achieving required results for university entrance. 1. 4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE The objective of the study: • The objective of the study is to establish the factors in the home and school environments that contribute towards the poor performance of Grade 12 learners at Manoshi and Mokwatedi high schools such that they are unable to achieve required results which would allow them university entrance. 7 1. 5

#### RESEARCH QUESTION

This study sought to unearth answers for the following question: • Which factors in the home and school environments contribute towards the poor performance of Grade 12 learners at Manoshi and Mokwatedi high schools and prevent them from achieving required results for university entrance? 1.

6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY The findings of this study could shed light on how to achieve quality education in comparable schools in the Department of Education. The study might provide insight into the problems whose solution might help inform specific actions to be taken to efficiently and effectively address the poor performance of these schools.

This study would not only assist the Department of Education and School Management Teams of Manoshi and Mokwatedi to improve their level of performance, but it would also provide strategies to guide the educators of Grade 12 how to improve the performance of learners to a level that would

allow them entrance to the university. 1. 7 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS For the purpose of this study, the following definitions will apply to the terms selected as key to the study. • Poor performance In this study, poor performance refers to scores below 50%, which was the benchmark for university entrance prior to 2008.

This 50% was an average of a learner's marks. Any mark from 49-40% translated in to the majority of learners passing with an S symbol; that is, School Leaving Certificate that does not allow learners university entrance. The new curriculum (Revised Curriculum Statement 2005) came with a new benchmark, Bachelor, that allows a learner university entrance from last year 2008. The difference is that the new benchmark for university entrance does not recognise the average mark of a learner, as it was the case with Exemption, instead the learner must pass all approved subjects with a minimum percentage. Grade 12 learners at Manoshi and Mokwatedi high schools are in the age group 16-19 years. This group is the most vulnerable since they are in the adolescent stage; which, if not properly managed, could disrupt the learning process and frustrate learners. They might be under a lot of pressure due to their peer groups that have a tendency of isolating those who do not conform to the group's mandate (Louw, 1993: 422). • Quintile Quintile is a framework used to categorise schools in terms of the level of education and the level of unemployment rates of the communities around the schools.

The lower quintiles 1-2 represent relative poverty of communities with low level of education and high unemployment rates. The schools under study are d as quintile 1 and 2, Manoshi and Mokwatedi high schools, respectively <https://assignbuster.com/contributory-factors-affecting-level-of-academic-performance/>



and learners do not pay school fees (National Norms Standard School Funding Act, 1998).

1. 8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY Limitations of the study cannot be overlooked since participation in this study is not compulsory and those who do not want to participate might be the ones who could give crucial information.

1. 9 CHAPTERS OUTLINE The chapters are outlined as follows:

1. 9. 1 Chapter 1: Background to the study 9 The chapters outline the introduction, problem statement, motivation to conduct the study, aim of the study, research objective, research question, significance of the study, definition of concepts, limitations of the study and chapters outline.

1. 9. 2 Chapter 2: Literature review The literature review sought to present factors relating to academic performance researched internationally, in South Africa, and in Limpopo Province. The factors are categorised under home and school environment respectively.

1. 9. Chapter 3: Data collection procedure This chapter presents the introduction, research methodology, research design, area of study, population, sampling method, purposive sampling, research sample, data collection procedures, data collection instruments, pilot study, interviews, observation, ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

1. 9. 4 Chapter 4: Data analysis and results The data that were collected, analysed and the results are presented in this chapter. This was done through: data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification.

Findings were categorised, thus factors contributing towards poor performance were reflected under home environment and school environments.

1. 9. 5 Chapter 5: Findings, recommendations, and conclusion The chapter summarises the major findings, which are categorised into home and school environments, recommendations, implications for further

research and conclusion. 10 CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW 2.

INTRODUCTION This chapter provides an account of the literature reviewed on poor performance of high school learners.

The purpose of the literature review is to outline the factors that contribute towards the poor performance of high school learners as researched internationally and within South Africa, focusing on home and school environments. Numerous studies link the poor academic performance of learners to socio-economic problems, poverty, and politics (Engelbrecht et al. 1996). The reviewed literature was mainly from primary sources, journals, secondary sources; education policy documents, articles, and newspapers.

The South African perspective is not different from the international perspective since poor performance of learners at high school affects all high school learners from a poor socio-economic background. Therefore, poor performance of learners should be looked at holistically due to factors such as poverty, which has spatial, racial and gender dimensions, which in turn have determined settlement patterns of different racial groups in all provinces. Human Development Indices (HDI) for different provinces varies considerably and Limpopo Province was found to be the worst at 0. 31, and a 77. 9% poverty rate (Kirov, 2002: 53). HDI is an indicator that is used to measure basic standards of living, life expectancy and literacy levels of population; if the educational levels are low then the unemployment levels will be high. For example, in the Limpopo Province, the unemployment levels are the highest (42. 5%) due to the fact that the educational levels are low while the province is geographically vast; with the rural population of 89% which is predominantly Black (Statistics South Africa, 2001).  
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The literature that was reviewed revealed that factors contributing towards poor performance are linked to socio-economic problems, poverty, and politics. 11 The following are different factors that have been identified as contributors to poor performance in the literature reviewed. In the home environment, factors that were identified are: unpredictable home environment, self-concept and self-identity, parents' educational levels, unemployment of parents, marital status of parents, availability of natural resources, communication style vs. relationship, and educational resources at home.

In the school environment the following factors were identified: learner profiles which highlighted anomalies regarding attendance of classes, motivation to learn, attitude towards learning, substance abuse, relationship between the learner and educator, the relationship between the educator's motivation and that of a learner, sensitivity towards individual needs and differences, school transition, medium of instruction, the role of South African's School's Act (SASA), unequal distribution of facilities and resources, decision-making by the School Management Team, extra-curricular activities, and peer pressure. . 1 HOME ENVIRONMENT The educational condition attributed to the family needs no emphasis, as there is an everincreasing awareness of the importance of the parents' role in the progress and educational development of their children. The family background is the most important and weighty factor in determining the academic performance of learners (Adell, 2002: 91). Countries that are educationally progressive encourage the active interest of parents and local communities

in the education of their children. However, this has not been the case in South Africa.

The Education of the Black learner has experienced a high Grade 12 failure rate as well as a high dropout resulting in vast pool of unskilled labour (Themane, 1989: 151). The researcher intuitively concurs with Themane (1989) regarding the minimal participation of parents in their children's education. Children who need assistance for their homework become frustrated and without any hope resulting in poor performance at the end of the year with results that prevent them from achieving required results for university entrance.

### 2. 1. 1 Unpredictable home environment

Unpredictable home environment includes loss in the family through death, divorce, separation or substance abuse. Domestic quarrels by parents' results in child neglect. Research on poor academic performance was conducted on African Americans (Saiduddin, 2003: 22). The study found that factors influencing poor academic performance are poverty, cultural differences, unstable homes, drug abuse and teenage pregnancy. African Americans learners are exposed to a similar negative environment at home as learners in South Africa also come from poor family backgrounds.

The exposure of the youth to negative role models from an early age contributes not only to poor performance but also to learners dropping out. Hence, research has found that children from intact homes were less likely to repeat a school grade even when socio-economic status was removed statistically. Learners from unstable families are emotionally disturbed and therefore tend to under-perform (Adell, 2002: 91). In South Africa, the

researcher found that parents who abuse substances could not model the correct behaviour or be of any assistance, let alone motivate their children.

In contrast, it has been found that internationally, poor academic performance is a problem that manifests itself not only in poor communities but also in countries that are classified as developed. The ability to control one's environment is directly related to self-esteem. Since African Americans had little control over their educational environment and perceived their educators expectations of them as low, they often performed poorly. In turn, their underperformances then reinforced their negative self-image.

Where such assistance does not occur due to parents being migrant workers, learners struggle to adjust to school requirements while their academic performance is negatively affected, preventing them from achieving required results for university entrance (Wilson & Black, 1978). 2. 1. 2 Self-concept and self-identity Success in school often correlates with positive self-concept and self-identity. Research generally indicates that African Americans learners are not as confident as those from other racial/ethnic groups. As a result, they have more difficulty in establishing ethnic, tribal identity, and pride in their African Americans heritage.

They feel despaired, disillusioned, alienated, frustrated, hopeless, powerless, rejected and estranged. These are all elements of negative views of the self. Conditions at home help foster or block school success. Some of these conducive home conditions are: close family relationships that help build positive self-concept; helping children read at home; parental involvement in school; having high expectations for children's schooling; clear rules and

standards for their behaviour; thus encouraging learners to perform at a level that earns them entrance to university (Solo, 1997).

The researcher supports this argument because in most cases Black learners from disadvantaged schools (rural) tend to be de-motivated, and lack confidence especially if they are to compete with those from better (urban/Model C) schools. 2. 1. 3 Parents' educational level Diaz, a teacher and psycho pedagogy expert in Spain who wrote a paper titled ' Personal, family and academic factors affecting low achievement in secondary school', indicates that among family factors of the greatest influence are the educational levels of parents (Castejon & Perez, 1998).

The learner's perception of family support directly affects performance, while the mother's level of education does so indirectly. Those learners whose parents are not adequately literate are disadvantaged because these days' parents are required to assist their children with their assignments and projects that are supposed to be done at home. Marchesi and Martin (2002) conducted research regarding social class in Spain and the results revealed that one's results and expectations for the future are better if one belongs to a higher social ladder.

Research conducted in America equally indicates a high correlation between low school achievement and socio-economic background where most of the researched families are classified in the lower economic brackets, with the highest poverty and unemployment rates. Education failure is legitimised by inherent inferiority, where there is a high illiteracy rate, poor hygiene, and lack of middle class child rearing practices, especially among parents, all of

which are viewed as a manifestation of poverty (Cummins, 1994: 3). 2. 1. 4

#### Unemployment of parents

Nutritional deficiencies in early childhood are associated with poor cognition in later years where chronic deficiency of iron (leading to anemia), zinc and intake of vitamins are lacking, which is independent of psychosocial adversity. Feeding schemes could assist to curb such problems since learners would be able to eat a balanced diet at school, thus improving in their academic performance (Polite, 1994). Unfortunately, in this country (South Africa) feeding programmes are only implemented in primary schools and not at high schools.

However, there are discussions to extend feeding schemes to high schools. Most of the parents in rural areas are 14 single, illiterate, and unemployed. Such parents might not be able to provide their families with a balanced meal. However, Munn's (1996) arguments about urban learners performing better than those from rural area could be challenged since sometimes even learners who are brought up in families that can afford to provide their children with balanced a diet perform poorly which could be due to other factors. The unemployment rate of Limpopo Province is 42. 5%.

Polokwane Municipality has a 41, 5% unemployment rate, which is concentrated in rural than in urban areas (Statistics South Africa, 2001). The area where the study was conducted is in ward 4 in Polokwane Municipality, which is rural and falls within the rural cluster Molepo/ Maja/ Chuene with the highest unemployment rate of 63. 02% compared to the Moletji cluster (also rural) 54. 16%, and the City/Seshego (urban) cluster is the lowest at 27. 24%

(Polokwane Municipality IDP 2005-2007). Given the unemployment levels of the area, malnutrition poses a threat to the performance of learners at the schools under research.

The poverty levels where the schools are located affect the Grade 12 learners in such a way that they cannot attain university entrance results. 2.

1. 5 Marital status of parents According to the history of research relating to poor academic performance of learners at high schools, is an International problem, which has been linked to the low socio-economic background of learners. The marital status of being either single, married, divorced, or widow, the parents' social class in terms of their income categories of lower, middle or upper income class all impact on self-concept and the learning process of learners.

A stigma is often attached to separation and divorce, affecting the learner's academic performance negatively (Adell, 2002: 91). The uncertainty results in undue anxiety among young people. Discussion of family problems between parents and their children will reduce such uncertainty, and they will eventually adapt to the situation. However, it is taboo to talk to children about reasons why their father did not marry or divorce their mother in our Black culture.

The anxiety triggers emotional problems and long-term distress resulting in academic underachievement. Internal processes such as perception, memory, motivation, attitude, level of ability, and emotions should be taken into account when issues relating to the academic performance of learners are being dealt with. If a learner is an orphan or his/her parent is



terminally ill, the learner will have a problem coping with schoolwork, thus resulting in poor academic performance due to her/his emotional state (Karande and Kulkarni, 2005: 961-967).

A lower level of concentration results in poor academic performance (Litner, 1991: 24). This affects the level at which learners perform at school and prevents them from obtaining results, which allow them university entrance. In contrast to some of the afore-mentioned research, the research conducted in Spain indicates that the most influential family components on performance are not socio-cultural or economic, but rather those pertaining to the affective or psychological dimension.

Although there was good academic preparation in parents, especially the mother, a positive cultural environment and a favorable school environment, it is the affective and relational variables which most stand out as factors that influence academic performance either positively or negatively (Castejon & Perez, 1998). 2. 1. 6 Availability of natural resources Natural resources like land and water are necessary for the sustainable livelihood of communities. However, sometimes land might be available but water could be a limiting factor as communities still rely on rain, which is seasonal and not reliable, thus perpetuating malnutrition.

Hence, aspects of the physical environment (e. g. land) have received considerable attention from psychologists as it has an influence on malnutrition which affects the growth of the child's brain, which is also linked to low intelligence in rural areas (Lloyd & Still, 1989). The researcher concurs with the findings of the study because the area under research is a

rural area where access to land and water could curb the malnutrition problem through food gardens and consequently enhance the academic performance of learners. 2. 1. 7 Communication style vs. relationship

The influence of a family's educational climate is defined by the amount and the style of help that learners receive from family; this is determined by elements of the family context such as the dynamic communication and relationships and attitudes towards values and expectations. Similarly, parental expectations have a notable influence on their children's academic results, 16 even when the socio-economic status is not that favorable. There is an indirect relationship with performance from the learner's perception of how much importance his/her parents assign to their children's studies at home (Marchesi & Martin, 2002).

Another study (June, 2003) found that parents' expectations encourage their children to pursue goals with hard work, enhance self-efficacy and nurture good study habits. However, high parental expectations and unwillingness to accommodate alternatives could result in counterproductive anxiety in their children (June, 2003: 198-200). Other studies in Spain indicate that the level of family cohesion and relationships prove themselves capable of predicting performance.

The parenting style (democratic, authoritarian) is also influential both in the learner's educational process as well as in the family-school relations; research has indicated that a positive family climate favours the development of well-adapted, mature, stable, and integrated subjects, while an unfavorable family climate promotes nonadaptation, immaturity, lack of

balance, and insecurity among children. Their poor concentration results in under-achievement at school (Castejon & Perez, 1998). 2. 1. 8 Educational resources at home

The learner's background relating to availability of educational resources at home like books, electronic resources such as TV, computer, study desk and table for their own use and general academic support at home are crucial. Learners who have access to such resources are at an advantage compared to those from poor families because they will be more informed about the latest developments around them thus assisting them to improve their performance at school while those from poor families with no resources still have to write the same examination paper.

Thus, the learners' non-exposure to educational resources from poor families will affect their performance compared to those who have access to such resources. Despite exposure to programmes that should not be viewed by our learners, there is a lot of educational information that can be accessed through TV. Computers that are connected to the Internet would assist our learners to source information for school assignments and projects. 17 2. 2

## SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

According to Saiduddin (2003: 2), it is a convenient scapegoat to pass the blame and responsibility for the low academic performance to factors such as socio-economic status, family, culture and the learner being less intelligent than the others. Research conducted at high schools in South Dakota has shown that all learners are educateable, and that the way in

which the school is managed is the most critical factor in determining the quality of education for its learners.

Researchers at the Ohio State University attribute the academic failure to the economic and social conditions while administrators and educators have also developed this mindset. The study was undertaken at a high school on the Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota. This argument can be disputed based on the status quo of most rural schools in South Africa because how can learners perform well in chemistry, life science, and physical science without the necessary facilities (laboratory) and chemicals that are necessary for them to perform experiments. . 2. 1 Learner profiles The performance of learners should be investigated in line with their opportunity-to-learn indicators (learner-profiles). Indicators such as attendance of classes would highlight anomalies regarding his/her attendance, which might be regular or irregular and such indicators are early signs that might determine whether learners will perform well academically or not and remedial measures could be implemented before it is too late.

Learner-profiles also indicate the positive effects of participation of learners in extra-curricular activities in Wisconsin where learners involved in extra-curricular activities tend to improve in their performance unlike those who are not participating (Burmester, 2005). 2. 2. 2 Motivation to learn A study in England noted many factors that influence both the rate and enjoyment of learning. Once an individual has experienced something, and has stored that experience, he is able to refer to and use it at a later stage. As such, learning and memory are inextricably linked.

The reward and punishment levelled at learners in the past will affect their motivation and attitude towards learning in the present. The expectations of others and the climate which surround learners will determine their readiness to learn, which in turn will result in learners performing poorly academically (Mullins, 2005: 39). Another study suggests that maintenance of high motivation influences psychological and social functioning and facilitates academic performance as well as positive school perceptions (Gilman & Anderman, 2006: 375-391).

### 2. 3 Attitude towards learning

Attitudes are learned throughout life and are embodied within our socialisation process. All of us observe others and assess attitudes on the basis of communication style (verbal and nonverbal) and behaviour. This is an example of an informal approach, which is spontaneous and based on our understanding of social cues. We may be wrong in our judgment of learners who turn up late for classes and do not ask questions, but they may still hold very positive attitudes towards the subject that was being presented at that time. The negative attitude towards learning could result in learners performing poorly preventing them from obtaining required results for university entrance (Mullins, 2005: 365).

### 2. 2. 4 Substance abuse

Cunningham (1994: 272) found that 94% of high school learners at Pine Ridge Reservation have used alcohol. He indicated that drinking among this age group is considered 'normal' where males are twice as likely as females to drink daily, which disturbs their concentration and their level of performance at school.

In South Africa, the problem of learners abusing alcohol is also an issue that needs serious attention since most rural schools are near liquor outlets.

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Marijuana and cigarettes are easily accessible to learners these days; it becomes even more difficult for educators to control learners who use such substances. The abuse of such substances impairs the learner's ability to learn and respond to questions relating to the learned information. In most cases of the crime committed at schools substance abuse is involved.

Research conducted by Colorado State University (Hodgkinson, 1990) points out that more than a third of the African Americans adolescents use marijuana on a regular basis, compared to only 5% regular users among White Americans. It is assumed that crime and unbecoming behaviour at schools were the result of substance abuse. This problem is becoming a threat to our high school learners because of the accessibility of substances (alcohol, marijuana, cigarettes, and drugs).

19 2. 2. 5 Relationships •  
Relationship between the learner and educator

The research conducted in Spain (Marchesi & Martin, 2002) found that the relationship between the learner and educator are some of the factors that determine academic performance. Characteristics of the educator are considered as key elements for the learner's personal and academic development. Hence, it is crucial that educators should be role models to be emulated by the learners. Research (Castejon & Perez, 1998) found that educator's expectations significantly influence the learner's results.

The educator's assessment is mediated by two variables: firstly, the greater the learner's intelligence, the better the academic results and the better reciprocal appreciation between the educator and learner; secondly, family support for study also makes the learner value his/her educator more highly.

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- Relationship between educator's motivation and that of a learner Studies found that there is a positive relationship between the educator's motivation and that of the learner, while educator-learner relationships are also mediated by the educator's attribution of poor performance to the learner in terms of academic performance.

The socio-metric status of the learner affects performance both directly and indirectly, since it is influenced by intelligence (Georgiou, 2002). Some researchers argue that educator development is at the heart of long-term sustainable improvement in the South African context. Their proposal is that educators need development along three dimensions simultaneously: content knowledge, teaching approaches and professional attitudes (Kriek & Grayson 2009: 185-203).

## 2. 2. Sensitivity to individual needs and differences

Educators who want to achieve their objectives, learner individual differences and opportunities should be taken into account to ensure that learners are given individual attention. Sensitivity to individual needs and differences is crucial in order to analyse the historical, psychological and societal context where the sense of self is shaped by inherited characteristics and influenced by social environments in which the learner finds herself/himself.

Most social scientists would agree that both inherited and environmental factors are important in our development, and it is the way in which these factors interact which is key to adult personality. However, some scientists differ with regard to the weight they place on these factors, some arguing that personality is heavily influenced by our inherited characteristics and will never change while others believe that the personality will reverse (Mullins, <https://assignbuster.com/contributory-factors-affecting-level-of-academic-performance/>)

2005: 336-339). 2. 2. 7 School transition A study of Oglala Sioux in South Dakota (Bryde, 1969) indicates that the learners perform satisfactorily until the sixth grade.

After the sixth grade there was a decline in learner performance. This phenomenon was labelled as the 'Crossover Phenomenon,' believing that early adolescence is an extremely difficult time because the cultural differences become more evident during that stage of development, resulting in personality disturbances thus blocking achievement at school (Bryde, 1969). 2. 2. 8 Medium of instruction The problems in education have a long history such as the strong campaign from way back in 1954 by the African National Congress when they challenged the Group Area's Act.

The use of Afrikaans as medium of instruction was also a serious concern in the past, among Black learners. However, the 16th of June 1976 represented the end of the use of Afrikaans and ushered in the new dispensation in which English became the medium of instruction for the education of a Black child. Currently, there are arguments that mother tongue is the basis of all teaching and that must be the medium of instruction because bilingualism cannot be set as the aim of teaching (Themane, 1989: 122-177).

Most Grade 12 learners are struggling to communicate in English and that could be one of the factors that put them at a disadvantage, since that is the language used to respond to questions in the examination. A study that was conducted in India and in South Africa (Sayed et al. 2007: 111) found that similar exclusionary experiences are being felt in both countries where language is used as a critical means of exclusion. In South Africa, exclusion



is experienced in the almost blanket denial of access to mother tongue learning while in India children are forced to learn Hindi at the expense of their mother tongue. 1 2. 2. 9 The role of the South African School's Act (SASA) South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996d), Section 34 (1) indicates that the state “ must ensure access of learners to education and the redress of past educational inequalities among sections of our people who have suffered particular disadvantages”. The past injustices in education are to be redressed through provision of an education of progressively high quality for all learners. As such, it is proper to take stock of the achievements regarding the envisaged aims of the South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996d).

In order to advance the democratic transformation of society, the Act requires the establishment of elected School Governing Bodies (SGB) and Learner Representative Councils (LRC) in all schools. The SGB and the LRC are expected to work hand in glove with the School Management Team to ensure that the schools run smoothly without disruptions especially from learner disruptions. The schools under study have complied with the requirement of SASA. 2. 2. 10 Unequal distributions of facilities and resources

Education promotes human capital as an asset that has greater or lower rates of return depending on the extent and quality of education that is provided. The South African government's aim is to redress the huge backlog of facilities created by apartheid's segregated schooling environment, as well as gross inequalities in provision of resources for the different racial groups. However, the inequalities regarding the quality of facilities and distribution of

resources are still a serious problem even after celebrating fifteen years of democracy, during which government emphasised equity.

Generally, some of the factors contributing towards the poor performance of learners are lack of resources and poor facilities in most schools, but especially in rural areas. Some of the schools are dilapidated compared to those in urban areas. The problem regarding unequal distribution of resources between provinces, rural and urban areas are still intact (Motala & Pampalis, 2001: 56). • Facilities According to Ralenala (2003) thousands of schools still have poor physical infrastructure and many are dilapidated, dangerous, and unfit for human habitation.

There is often no water on site or sanitation thus such conditions do not only restrict the teaching and learning activities of the 22 school but also threaten the health of learners and educators as well. This could influence absenteeism of both learners and educators. Problems encountered regarding the academic performance of high school learners in the whole of South Africa, also apply to Limpopo Province. There is a strong relationship between learner performance and the quality of the facilities available to learners.

Several schools do not have laboratories and the situation simply means that learners learn science by rote learning and some of them even complete their high school education without ever having seen a beaker (Ralenala, 1993). Ralenala quoted an article in the Sunday Times of 27 July 2003, titled: " Are we making progress? " where Potenza points out that only 27% of the

schools in the country have libraries. Manoshi and Mokwatedi high schools are examples of such schools where facilities are not available.

For example, both schools do not have laboratories; administrative blocks and only the principal of Manoshi have an office. Recently (2009) when the researcher visited the schools during phase 2 investigations the principal at Mokwatedi high school still shares a room with the administrative clerk. The room has been divided with cupboards. Currently, the situation has not changed that much, since most schools especially those that are in the rural areas, in contrast to those in the urban areas, do not have satisfactory infrastructure.

These disparities among schools were confirmed by the previous Premier of Gauteng Province, Mbazima Shilowa on Monday the 19 February 2007 during his State of the Province Address. His speech was titled: ' Education Action. Promise to Black kids'. This is what he said: " The education of the Black child continues to be compromised 13 years into democracy. We have made important strides in redressing the inequalities of the education system of the past, we have not yet succeeded in ensuring that the quality of the education of the African child is up to scratch".

The Premier's statement supports the argument that our schools need much more support from the Department of Education for learners to perform up to the required standard, allowing them to achieve required results for university entrance. There are suggestions of how to improve the performance of learners irrespective of whether facilities and resources are available or not, which argue that it depends on an individual educator and

his/her creativity. Greame Bloch, an education policy analyst of the Development Bank of South Africa was quoted by (Kgosana, 2006: 25), arguing that creative educators do 23 experiments with baking powder. He believes that each school is entitled to a good library and computer lab; however, sometimes facilities without committed educators are just not good enough. Kgosana (2006) further quoted the education policy analyst specialist (Bloch) who emphasised that facilities and adequate relevant resources are important but the recipe for managing a good school also has to do with an efficient principal who knows how to manage his/her staff. It means that the principal has to ensure that educators are at school on time; that they are in class during school hours and have a good knowledge of what they teach. Resources/Funds In the United States, although there was relatively minimal research available in 1995 about effects on performance after implementing school-based budgeting reforms in the United States, few districts have tried to decentralize, and of those that have, school performance improved. Hence, in December 1996, the New York State Legislature, under pressure from Mayor Rudolf Giuliani and Chancellor Crew, introduced changes in the governance of the New York City school system.

Among the provisions to the 1996 governance law was a timetable for ' Performance-Driven Budgeting' implementation that called for all schools in New York City to do school-based budgeting by the 1999-2000 academic years (Stiefel, Schwartz, Portas, & Kim, 2001: 1-7). A study of 44 schools in 13 districts in the United States, Canada, and Australia by the Centre on Education Governance, found that schools that implemented school-based

budgeting and focused on actively restructuring curriculum and instruction were able to improve learner performance.

The schools also had to have meaningful authority over the budget, personnel, and curriculum. However, where school-based-budgeting failed it was found that school-based budgeting was viewed as an end in itself rather than a way to focus on improving teaching and learning (Wohlstetter, 1995; cited by Stiefel et al. 2001: 3). However, South Africa's budgeting is not school-based, nor does it focus on restructuring the curriculum and instruction methods. The budgets are centralised from National Government; the Provincial Treasury allocates funds to Provincial Education Departments before allocations are transferred to different schools.

The researcher's argument is that the budget at school must be used to address the needs of learners in a specific school because the needs of one school might not be similar to the needs of another school. Each school should be given the responsibility of utilising resources efficiently and effectively without compromising quality and in line with the needs as prioritised by those LRC members as beneficiaries to improve their performance and access university education. Wilson and Ramphela (1994: 141-145) are concerned about the discrimination in the funding of education by the state.

They indicated that in 1983/4, the subsidy for an African learner was R234, 00 compared to a white learner at R1654, 00 for the same academic years. In 1991/2 the school expenditure per white learner was R4 448, 00 per annum but only R1 248, 00 for the African learner. Moreover, levels of

inequality varied between provinces, between rural and urban environments and in types of education offered. Generally, the situation was worse at higher levels of schooling (Motala & Pampalis, 2001: 56). Thus, funding is one of the factors that are raised where performance is not satisfactory.

Funding was skewed in the sense that in 1981, forty-five point six percent (45, 6%) of state funding was spent on white pupils who represented only 20% of the total school population in South Africa (Themane, 1989: 107). According to the research findings, distribution of funds had a racial segregation. For example, an African child was allocated R146. 00, a Coloured-R498. 00, Indian-R711. 00, and the White child-R1211. 00 (Themane, 1989: 133-134). Currently, the allocation of funds in rural schools has gradually increased since 1994 compared to the situation in the previous era.

However, the gap between the rural and the urban-based schools is still huge and there is a need for urgent intervention by the Department of Education. Information regarding disparities in funding is reflected in chapter 4, Table: 4. 1. According to the researcher, poor literacy levels in South Africa indicate the extent of deliberate neglect of investment in human capital. Prior to the 1994 elections, the situation was such that urban, particularly former Model C schools were and they are still in a more satisfactory position than rural schools; hence they require minimal state expenditure while rural schools facing many problems should be funded more than urban schools that have already benefited from the past. There is a need for enormous state assistance to close the gap between such disparities (Motala & 25 Pampallis, 2001: 55-56). Hence, in most cases when <https://assignbuster.com/contributory-factors-affecting-level-of-academic-performance/>

learners are not performing, the issue that is always raised is the lack of facilities and inadequate resources like learner support materials. 2. 2. 1 Decision-making by School Management Team Crew, the Chancellor of New York City School introduced a school-based budgeting initiative called ' Performance-Driven Budgeting' in order to stress that the cornerstone of the plan was to have every expenditure made with the intention of improving a school's performance. The main goal of the reform was to give the schools more control over how resources were spent so that they could be used more effectively and efficiently to improve learner performance (Stiefel et al. 001: 7). Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1997) contend that site-based management is an innovation that has its roots in the private sector, which encourages self-management and empowers the employees, leading to improved morale and higher productivity. Site-based management theory was transferred from the corporate world to the realm of public education, giving schools authori