

# Factors Contributing To Poor Academic Performance Among Grade 10 Learners At Thokoza

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*The study investigates the factors that contribute to poor academic performance of Grade-10 learners in a full-service township school at Thokoza, Ekurhuleni South District of Gauteng province. The study was motivated by the observation of the high failure rate among Grade-10 learners in this township school, especially in Mathematics and Physical Sciences. The study adopted qualitative research approach and employed face-to-face interview as a means for data collection. Purposive sampling method was used in selecting eight educators from the selected school. Data collected from the educators was transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that school, home environment and child factors intersect and contributed to the poor academic performance of the Grade-10 learners at this full-service township school. Factors identified include school factors, environment factors and child-related factors are poor academic performance contributors. The study recommends that resources and skills should be provided to educators/teachers to enhance teaching and learning. The Department of Education should identify suitable strategies to uplift academic performance of learners, while teachers and parents should work together for performance achievement of Grade-10 learners in full-service township schools.*

**Key words:** Grade-10, Academic performance, Education, Factors, Full-service Township School

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## Introduction

Aligned with the global focus on inclusion, South Africa adopted inclusive education in 2001 (Nel et al., 2013). Consequently, South Africa is a signatory to the various international legal frameworks on inclusive education, including the Salamanca Statement the Framework for Action on Special Needs of 1994 (Landsberg, 2010). The achievements of learners in inclusive schools emphasise inclusive education. Thus, the country has both an international and national mandate to provide assurance for the achievements of all learners in schools (UNESCO, 1994). Despite the notable involvement of South Africa in implementing inclusive education, South Africa's minimal achievements have been identified by the weak academic achievement of Grade-10 learners in full-service township schools.

It was found through teaching experience in a full-service township school, that the poor academic performance among the Grade-10 learners is a serious concern however, the numbers of learners who are required to repeat Grade-10 are not widely published. Grade-10 learners in township schools are failing in large numbers (Masola, 2010). This has been supported by Grossen, Grobler and Lacante (2017) who revealed that repetition and retention due to poor academic performance, is much higher in Grade-10. Similar findings indicate that learners fail in large numbers in Grade-10 and 11 since they proceed to higher grades without acquiring the Grade appropriate skills (Spaull, 2012). Information provided by the Department of Education (DOE) (2016) shows that learners repeating a grade are high in South Africa and that repetition is prevalent in the higher grades than in the lower grades. According to a study conducted by Van den Berg et al. (2019), there is a prevalence of learners repeating a grade in the secondary school phase with the largest number located in Grade-10, where at least one in every five learners repeats a grade and the larger proportion of repeaters are from low economic backgrounds. Learners repeating Grade-10 from quintile 1 schools were triple the number of learners in quintile 5 schools which indicates that low economic background may have a negative effect on learners' academic performance.

## Literature Review

According to the South African Constitution, Education is a human right, and the 1996 constitution laid the groundwork for inclusion policies. The Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy in 2014 advocates for major reforms on how teachers are expected to teach learners with barriers and to make education accessible to all, regardless of background, disability, gender or creed (Ayaya, Makoelle and Van de Merwe, 2020). Inclusive education in the South African context is about addressing the diverse needs of all the learners who experience barriers to learning and redressing the past inequalities in education. As a result, full-service schools were improved and provided with resources to become inclusive schools while developing support teams at district and institutional levels as well as developing a flexible curriculum, appropriate development of materials and availability of assistive devices (DoE, 2001).

However, the inclusive education policy in South Africa is ambiguous because it does not provide clear directions on how it should be implemented. In addition, there is scarcity of teachers with the capacity and knowledge of how to deal with learners with diverse educational needs in inclusive schools (Donohue and Bornman, 2014). As a result, learners are faced with poor academic performance.

### 2.1 Poor academic performance

Learners' academic performance is defined by Suleman, et al. (2012) as "the inability of the learners to study and remember facts, and being able to communicate the knowledge acquired orally or on paper". Several definitions of poor academic performance have been put forward. Despite the age of these articles, it still has relevance today, in Aremu's opinion (2003), poor academic performance is "performance that is judged by the examiner and some other significant individual as falling below an expected standard". Asikhia (2010) defines poor academic performance as any performance that falls below a desired standard. In the school that participated in this study, the academic performance of Grade-10 learners was dismal, and this study sought to identify the reasons for the poor academic performance of Grade-10 learners. Below follows a discussion of the reasons for the poor academic performance according to the literature that was reviewed.

### 2.2 Factors contributing to poor academic performance

Poor academic performance is experienced all over the world and some of these factors are contextual. Research on poor academic performance has revealed that there is no single factor that causes poor academic performance but a combination of factors such as socio-economic factors, single parents, immigration background, the difference between the home language and the language of instruction, repeating a grade, a less positive attitude towards learning, less supportive teachers, schools and some of the factors may be contextual (OECD, 2016).

In the UK, Banerjee (2016) identified individual's factors, family, neighbourhood effects, socio-economic status, ethnic minority, school, and learning viewed with negative attitudes and a lack of support from the background as factors that may cause the poor academic performance in Mathematics and Science. Omoruyi (2014) identified the following environmental related factors such as home environment, family structure, marital status of the parents, parental involvement, parental level of education and parenting styles as additional reasons for the learners performing poorly in academics.

In South Africa, Navsaria, Pascoe and Kathard (2011) identified the following school related factors such as school environment, resources, language issues, discipline, and peer pressure. Landsberg (2010) identified child related factor such as physical impairments, health issues, absenteeism and truancy, lack of interest, poor study habits, learning disabilities and substance abuse. Other factors that have been identified are lower socio-economic status and, ethnic minority status. Apart from the above, there are diverse school factors which contribute to the poor academic performance of learners. These factors are divided into three namely, school factors, environmental factors and child related factors which are discussed below.

#### 2.2.1 School factors

According to studies conducted in different countries, it is believed that school factors such as the school environment, resources, overcrowding, language issues, peer influence are key issues that cause learners to perform poorly in academics. Earlier studies by Bolu-Steve and Sani, (2013); Geldenhuys and Wevers, (2013); Tomul and Polat, (2013) found that the poor academic performance of learners was as a result of school related factors. The situation has not changed much as school related reasons continue to be the cause of the poor academic performance of learners worldwide. Recent studies by Kapur (2018) in India and Banerjee (2016) in the OECD countries concluded that school factors do in fact influence the academic performance of learners. However, Chowa, Masa, and Wietman (2010) argued that school factors are not the only significant factors that impact the academic performance of learners. This implies that there are other significant issues that are not school related which have an influence on learners and result in poor academic performance.

- **The school environment**

The school plays an important role in the life of learners as demonstrated in the bio-ecological system. Also, the school as part of the mesosystem is important for the development and learning of a child. The relationship between the family, school, parents, and teachers can have a significant effect on the learner's academic performance (Shoukat, Kiran and Zia, 2023). Usaini, Abubakar and Bichi (2015) conducted a study in Malaysia that examined whether the effects of the school, teachers and the environment significantly affected secondary school learners' academic

performance. They used a quantitative descriptive survey research design, this research approach focused on answering the how, what, when and where questions and data was collected using self-administered questionnaires. Results from the study indicated that schools with sufficient amenities, proficient teachers and a favourable school environment have learners whose achievement is very good compared with learners from schools with insufficient amenities, untrained teachers and an environment that is less enabling. This suggests that having a good school environment enables learners to feel comfortable and concentrate on studying which enhances their academic performance. If the environment is not conducive and supportive, it affects the academic performance of learners negatively.

- **School resources**

Inadequate school resources could be a major issue related to learners' poor academic achievement. The resources identified by Samikwo (2013) are teachers, classrooms, basic educational equipment such as libraries and laboratories. A more recent study by Makondo and Makondo (2020) revealed that a shortage of these resources could affect the academic achievement of learners. Various studies employed diverse methodologies and arrived at the same conclusion, for example, a study by Navsaria, Pascoe and Kathard (2011) employed the exploratory inductive case study and found that a shortage of resources such as teachers, classrooms, textbooks, and the lack of basic amenities such as water, toilets, electricity, textbooks, teaching material, personnel and furniture exacerbate the learners' weak academic achievements. Further, another study by Sullivan, Perry and McConney (2013) used data from the Programmes of International Students Assessment (PISA) which revealed that shortage of resources hamper the process of teaching and learning which consequently affects the learners' academic performance. According to Munje and Maaman (2017) the quantity and quality of resources at school could have a negative effect on the academic performance of learners.

As a human resource, teachers are an important resource in schools and may inadvertently be a cause of learners' poor academic performance. Numerous studies have linked teachers' qualifications to poor academic performance. Research findings by Gicharu and Ongus (2016) discovered that unqualified, inexperienced, and unprepared teachers could have a problem to manage the teaching and learning process as they lack subject matter (knowledge), hence this could cause poor academic performance. Mosha (2014) conducted a study into the reasons for learners' poor performance in the English language in Zanzibar and found that the shortage of teachers, the presence of untrained and unqualified teachers who are incompetent to deliver the content of the subject was the cause of learners' poor achievement in English.

- **Overcrowded classrooms**

The shortage of classrooms leads to overcrowding in schools, and this could negatively affect the learners' academic performance. There is empirical evidence that links overcrowding to the poor academic performance of learners. Shirley (2017) found that overcrowding affects learners' academic achievement in Kentucky high schools as teachers find it difficult to have one on one interaction resulting in learners' educational accomplishment suffering. Similarly, Tope (2013) points out that the above-mentioned factor, as well as large classes and the location of the schools inhibit scholastic achievement. Warfield (2016) suggests that crowded and disorganised classrooms and the lack of seating space are causes of the poor academic performance of learners and these factors could possibly distract learners. Once the learners are distracted from learning, they lose focus and concentration, and this may cause poor academic performance.

Educators who teach in overcrowded classrooms are confronted with disciplinary and behavioural problems which may go unnoticed. Consequently, educators spend more time on classroom management instead of teaching and this could add to learners' poor performance academically. However, in a study conducted by Savasci et al. (2013), the authors argue that in village classrooms that were less crowded, there was low academic achievement and in urban schools where classrooms were overcrowded the academic performance was high, therefore in their opinion, the size of the class has no effect on the learners' academic performance.

- **Language Barriers**

Language is an issue that could impact the academic performance of learners. The difference between the learners' home language and the language of instruction at schools may result in the under achievement of learners (Donald et al., 2012). Mhlauli and Moloko-Mphale (2014) conducted a study in Botswana that revealed that language is a factor that contributes to learners' poor academic performance, because learners lack fluency in the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) used in schools. Most learners struggle with English which is the language of instruction and because learners lack fluency in English, it is difficult for them to comprehend the subjects and associated questions which result in low performance or outright failure.

Prinsloo, Rogers and Harvey (2018) recently conducted a study which found that home language and school language have a great effect on the learners' educational achievement. Learners, who are taught in an additional language from the Fourth Grade, fall further behind in "Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency" (CALP), which is crucial for learners' success. Maemeko, Nkengbeza and Chokomosi (2017) in their study conducted in Namibia concluded that English as a medium of instruction is a major issue leading to the poor academic performance of Grade-12 learners. By contrast, a study conducted by Cekiso, Tshotsho and Masha (2015) found that there is no relationship between English language proficiency and academic performance at primary school level in South Africa. However, the use of

English as a medium of instruction might not have an influence on the educational achievement when they reach high school.

- **Peer Influence**

Peer influence causes deviant behaviour in children and this in turn leads to poor academic performance (Deepika and Prema, 2017). This may be a school related factor and learner related factor concurrently. During the adolescent stage, peers are regarded as more important than parents, teachers and counsellors. The influence peers have on adolescents has far reaching consequences especially undisciplined friends resulting to engaging in high-risk behaviour such as substance abuse, youth violence, teenage pregnancy and failure at school (Hussain et al., 2013). Similarly, Butler-Barnes, Martinez, Rosa, and Jones (2015) pointed out that despite having peers with negative attitudes towards school, some African American boys could perform well in academics, however, peer pressure can be both negative and positive for the learners. The negative peer pressure has great consequences and could lead to laziness, absenteeism from school, disregarding school rules and regulations which may affect the academic performance while the positive peer pressure could lead to the formation of study groups, going to the library and encouraging each other with academic issues (Afolabi, 2019).

### 2.2.2 Environmental factors

Environmental related factors are factors that include the area in which the learner lives, the type of family, the family structure, marital status of parents, parental involvement, parental level of education, parenting styles and financial background of the family. Reference to the environment in this study refers to the environment at home and the society where the learner resides. The poor academic performance of learners maybe caused by various environmental factors such as cultural and historic background, geographical area, home environment, parental involvement, and socio-economic factors (Alami, 2016). Nato (2016) claims that if family support is lacking, as well as the study environment at home not conducive, it could have adverse influence on the academic performance. It is also established that home environment has a greater impact on educational achievement than the school environment.

- **The home environment**

The home environment refers to objects, forces and conditions in the home which influence the development of the child physically, intellectually, and emotionally (Muola, 2010). Furthermore, the home environment includes parents, siblings, and peers, social situations and poverty that could have a negative effect on learners' academic achievements. Donald et al. (2010) study reported that factors like the shortage of space, overcrowding in the home causes conflict and arguments in families, and this could cause learners' academic success to suffer by making it challenging for children to pay attention to their studies, and this consequently affects their educational successes (Chinyoka and Naidu, 2014). An additional factor that was identified is the structure of the family.

- **Family structure**

Family is an important institution in any society as it provides psychosocial support in the development of the child. Recently, there has been a shift in the family structure, from the traditional structure which comprised a mother, father and children to other forms such as single parent families and same sex parents. Studies have revealed that single parent families may possibly impact learners' scholastic accomplishment negatively (Anyakoha, 2016). Learners from a single parent family background, many lack the financial support to buy extra educational resources to use at home and this may have an adverse effect on their educational performance (Oyedemi, 2019). However, a study conducted by Diez (2018) asserts that most learners from single parent families do well in school as the parents encourage and support their children with their schoolwork. That notwithstanding, it depends on how the issue at hand is handled concerning the support of learners in the family, be it single parents or traditional family structure.

Nonetheless, the relationships between parents and families with learners may be an additional issue that may bring about learners' inadequate intellectual accomplishment. Again, parental conflicts, whether married and living together or divorced, may negatively impact learners' achievement and be a reason for less achievement or failure of learners (Odenweller, 2014). Instability in the family has a negative effect on learners who suffer academically as a result. Furthermore, changes in the home environment, such as a parent's loss of a job may affect the academic performance of learners negatively because the parent may suffer from stress related to the job loss and this may affect the academic performance of a learner negatively.

Additionally, the marital status and parental relationship may be an additional factor that could be a cause of a learner's failure academically. Studies have highlighted the fact that learners from single parent households could suffer from emotional and disciplinary problems because single parents sometimes fail to cater for their necessary basic needs, and this contributes to the learner's lack of success at school (Olaitan, 2017). Learners with divorced parents tend to perform poorly and attain low marks in academics as opposed to children with both parents (Amato, 2014). Parental involvement is said to have a positive effect on learners' academic achievements as revealed below.

- **Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement in the scholastic achievement of their children cannot be overemphasised. A child's academic achievement level at school is a function of the extent to which the parents are involved in the academic activities of that child (Rafiq et al., 2013). In South Africa, the SASA Act 84 of 96 section 24 (1) states quite categorically that parents play an active role in learners' schoolwork and ensure that their children complete their homework. In

addition, it points out that parents should be participating in their children's educational endeavours, at school and home. The involvement of parents signifies that parents assist with homework, discuss the schoolwork, encourage, and provide a conducive learning environment at home. At school, parental involvement includes communicating with teachers, school visits and attending parents' meetings. In as much as parental involvement is imperative to influence the academic work of learners positively, it does not automatically make the learner perform well academically (Torpor et al., 2010).

According to Amponsha et al. (2018), "there is a significant indisputable connection between parents' involvement and their children's academic positive performance". Poor academic performance is a consequence of parents not being involved with their children's academic activities. Chowa, Masa and Tucker (2013) alluded to the fact that involvement of parents in their children's education is associated with academic success of the youth. Further, another factor that could impact learners' academic performance is the parents' level of education.

- **Parent level of education**

An additional factor that may influence the poor academic performance of a learner in many ways is the parents' educational background. Parents' level of education plays a significant role in the academic achievement of their children. According to studies by Khan, Iqbal and Tasneem (2015) and Visser et al. (2015), "parents' level of education is a factor that could contribute to the learners' under achievement in academics. Parents who have a low level of education do not understand the content of the subjects and consequently are unable to be of assistance to their children with their homework". Poverty equally has a devastating effect on many learners' academic success.

- **Poverty**

Poverty is a threat to learners' positive academic performance and achievement. The level of income and social class placements of parents could negatively influence the academic performance of learners (Omonyi, 2014). According to Wool, Fermanich and Reichart (2015), there is a connection between the under achievement of learners and poverty. Schools have a large influx of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds where poverty is rife, poor living conditions, undernourishment, and indecent housing, unemployment, high level of violence, crime, abuse, substance abuse and HIV and AIDS, are a consequence of poverty. These circumstances seriously impact the academic success of inclusive township schools' learners (Nel and Grosser, 2016). Poverty causes insecurity in the community which is affecting the development of the children and academic success of learners. Parents or care givers from poor households work for longer hours during which children are left unsupervised and are expected to look after themselves and their siblings. This type of livelihood makes it difficult for learners to cope with their academic activities at home in preparation of schoolwork, because of very limited time (Oriakhi, Osamiro and Omogbai, 2013). Nonetheless, poor nutrition may be another factor that could be a contributor to underdevelopment that leads to underperformance and under achievement of learners. Carroll (2014) posits that learners who come from poor households do not sometimes have enough to eat before going to school. Invariably learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are mostly not encouraged to pursue their education, instead they are encouraged to stay back and assist the family in one way or another to supplement family income. Apart from poverty, parenting style plays a key role in learners' academic performance.

- **Parenting style**

Obviously, there are different parenting styles depending on what the parents want to achieve by the style. The application of the parenting style may have a negative or positive effect on a learner's academic performance if not well checked. The academic performance of a learner is reliant on the parenting styles which play a crucial role towards the child upbringing and education. The way the parents take care of their children has an impact on their positive or negative academic performance. Permissive parents spoil their children and cannot discipline them resulting in a negative effect on their academic performance. On the other hand, strict parents may succeed in making their children rebellious and it may have adverse effect on learners' academic success (Inam, Norman and Abiodulla, 2016). Hence, achieving balance between the two styles may be the key to avoid harmful effects on the academic success of the learners. Meanwhile, there are child related factors which impede learners' success.

### 2.2.3 Child related factors

Learner related factors are situated within an individual and are organic in nature (Landsberg, 2010). Intrinsic factors also affect the academic performance of learners. Poor academic performance can be caused by learner's lack of interest in education by not studying or reviewing the material at home, being absent from school and missing classes (Alami, 2016). Moreover, truancy, substance abuse and alcohol abuse are serious factors that may affect the academic success of learners. Other child related factors are discussed below.

- **Health Issues**

Chronic illnesses, such as tuberculosis, cancer and diabetes could also affect the academic achievement of learners. Some illnesses may require a special care, prolonged hospital stay, repeated doctor's visits or appointments and these may cause the learner to miss out on school activities. The effects of medication and therapy may impair the cognitive functioning of a learner, and this leads to the learner performing weakly at school (Pinquart and Teubert, 2011). Kamal et al. (2009) identified health related issues such as hearing disorders, anaemia, epilepsy, diabetes and cancer as parts of the causes of learners' poor academic performance and achievement. Physical factors such as physical maldevelopment, visual impaired, auditory physical, glandular abnormality, may be additional causes of poor academic performance and achievement of learners. Further, delays in the child's development of speech and

language may result to spoken language and hearing impediment and these usually lead to learning problems and might exacerbate the learner's weak performance in academics and other school activities (Packer, 2015). Learning disabilities are also cited as a problem that could hinder a learner's academic achievement, which is discussed below.

- **Learning disabilities**

Learning disabilities are cited by many authors as reasons that cause a decline in the academic abilities of learners. Learners with learning disabilities have no physical characteristics that accompany this disability; however, the nature of the disability is mild, but it does influence the child's ability to learn (Raymond, 2008). Learning disabilities are related to challenges of acquisition and brain functions involved in learning and these learning disabilities may be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic factors such as dyslexia (reading problems) and dyscalculia (difficulty in understanding numbers, writing disorders). Extrinsic learning disabilities that may cause underachievement in academics are ineffective teaching methods, learners' low self-esteem, unfavourable or poorly stimulatory sociocultural status, as well as the demotivation of learners (Siqueira and Giannetti, 2010). In a study conducted by Runo (2010), reading difficulties contribute to the underperformance in academics.

- **Intellectual disabilities**

Intellectual disabilities such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Downs Syndrome and Autism are factors that contribute to poor academic performance (Rardin, 2014). Loe and Feldman (2007) revealed that intellectual disabilities such as ADHD is associated to learners' underachievement and has a higher risk of grade retention, although learners have average or above average intellectual abilities, they face considerable academic and educational challenges. Another factor that impacts learners' success is absenteeism and truancy which is addressed next.

- **Absenteeism and truancy**

Learners are required to attend school regularly as attendance is a significant factor in academic success (Landsberg, 2010). Absenteeism and truancy hamper the academic performance and development and may finally lead to learners' dropout. There are many reasons for learners' absenteeism, such as health problems, learners' experiencing boredom at school, feelings of academic or social inadequacy/inclusivity (Demir and Karabeyoglu, 2015). Chronic truancy is a sign which shows that a learner is at risk of poor academic performance and achievement, and it is a strong predictor of academic failure in learners (Bruner, Discher and Chang, 2011) because it hinders effective learning and leads to poor academic performance (Oluremi, 2013). Drug abuse has become a plague in many schools which could impact a learner's academic performance as discussed below.

- **Substance abuse and lack of interest**

Drug abuse is prevalent in schools and seriously affects learners, leading to learners' poor academic performance (Kavutha, 2015). Learners who abuse drugs record low marks, since drugs alter the minds of the learners leading to loss of concentration on schoolwork and activities. This may consequently lead to learners' loss of interest in education and studying, as a result affect their academic performance and achievement. Furthermore, lack of interest in academic activities causes poor academic achievement. As Asiedu and Boniface (2016) assert that learners who are not interested in their studies are at risk of producing poor academic results. There are several factors that cause lack of interest in studying, such as wrong subject choices, weak teachers, bullying, difficulty with the syllabus, learning difficulties and distractions in the environment such as loud noise or music. Njoroge and Nyabuto (2014) reveal that repeating a grade several times has a psychological effect which negatively impacts learners. This leads to the learner's lack of interest in school which in turn results to poor academic performance.

- **Poor study habits**

Study habits play a significant role in influencing the academic performance of a learner. Poor study habits result in the poor academic performance of learners. Learners with poor study habits perform worse than learners with good study habits (Mendezabal, 2013). Chand (2013) asserts that effective study habits contribute to a learner's enhanced results whereas flawed study habits contribute to underperformance as there is a link between academic achievement and study habits. Researchers have identified that poor study habits result in poor academic achievement (Siah and Maiyo, 2015; Gudaganvar and Halayannavar, 2014). Some learners do not study in advance or simultaneously after school day's classroom activities but only study when its time for examinations (Chamundeswari, Sridevi and Kumari, 2014).

- **Lack of self-discipline**

Discipline is essential regarding the academic performance of learners. Since the abolishment of corporal punishment in South Africa, it is believed that the behaviour of learners has deteriorated considerably. Lack of discipline negatively influences academic achievement of a learner (Njoroge and Nyabuto, 2014) and affects the academic performance of a child in several ways (Simba, Agak and Kabuka, 2016). Disobedience, poor attitude to learning, lack of punctuality and gangsterism may lead to suspension of a learner and when it does happen, the learner misses out on school activities and in turn falls behind, which leads to poor academic performance and achievement. Moreover, teenage pregnancies, adolescence and intensive use of cell phones, social media and bullying contribute to the poor academic performance and achievement of learners (Maemeko et al., 2018).

## **Research Methodology**

The study adopts interpretivism research paradigm which asserts that reality is subjective and socially constructed, focusing on understanding the deep meanings, interpretations, and experiences people assign to their world, rather than objective facts. Accordingly, qualitative research approach was employed, utilizing interviews to gather insights from the participants. Qualitative research, according to Ezennia et al., (2024) is “a process of realistic inquiry that seeks towards an in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon within its natural setting”. It relies on the direct experiences of people’s everyday lives.

The site for data collection was a full-service school as evidenced by the South Africa inclusive education policy. Such a school serves individuals with a wide range of learning barriers and for special needs, for example, learners who have different impairments and infirmities are enrolled in the school. The school has been equipped with ramps to cater for those who use wheelchairs for mobility and equally has a team that give support to learners who have learning difficulties. Purposive sampling was used to select eight (8) teachers who teaches the learners in Grade-10 and are directly involved with the learners. These participants were able to provide detailed evidence regarding the phenomena under investigation.

### Data Analysis

Data is presented to achieve the intentions of the study which sought to investigate, establish, and portray the views of the educators on factors that contribute to the poor academic achievement of learners in Grade-10, in a full-service township school in Thokoza. Interviews were done with eight teachers and thematic analysis of data was used to analyse for better comprehension of the participants' perspectives on reasons for poor academic performance of Grade-10 learners in a full-service township school in Thokoza.

#### 4.1 Result and Findings

Participants were requested to provide their demographic information such as age, qualifications, and the number of years that they had been teaching. Seven of the teachers selected had taught Grade-10 for more than ten years, while one of them had taught for only three years. The gender distribution was four males and four females which amounted to 50% equal distribution, and the age range of the participants was from 27 years to 59 years. All the teachers have a qualification in teaching ranging from a Diploma in Education to a bachelor’s Degree or Honours Degree in Education and only one participant had a qualification in inclusive education.

#### 4.2 Factors contributing to poor academic performance

With regards to the thematic analysis, two themes emerged as factors that contribute to the poor academic performance of Grade-10 learners. These two themes are school factors and home factors which are discussed below.

##### 4.2.1 School factors

The result of the research findings revealed that the school environment may be culpable for the learners failing to achieve the expected results. The school is a microsystem where the child lives and develops. Factors in the microsystem such as the school environment and resources available at school could be an additional factor that could influence negative results. A significant problem according to the teachers was the lack of resources that impacts the success of Grade-10 learners in an inclusive township school. Schools are under resourced regarding furniture, classrooms, and textbooks, this could be a contributory problem to the failure of learners in Grade-10. The participants responded thus.

**T1:** *We are teaching learners whilst they are standing or squatting because they don't have chairs and desks.*

**T3:** *Learners spend most of the time looking for furniture and, by the time they come back to the classroom, the period is almost over, and they would have missed out (shaking his head in dismay).*

**R:** *You are talking about the shortage of desks and chairs. Are these the only resources that are not enough?*

**T8:** *No, these are not the only resources that are not enough, there is also the issue of shortage of textbooks in certain subjects such as Life Sciences. Some of the learners are sharing three per book. Some learners are using the computer lab as a classroom due to shortages of classrooms.*

Another aspect is the shortage of space which is evident in the overcrowding in classrooms. Because of the overcrowding in classrooms, teachers are unable to provide learners with individual attention. The participants responses are.

**T1:** *Huuuuuu mam, they are quite a lot. Number one. overcrowding in a classroom is a factor that contributes to poor academic performance among Grade-10 learners. You find that, as a teacher teaching in an overcrowded classroom, you cannot give each and every one individual attention so that leads to that particular learner not given the attention not to perform.*

**T3:** *Shortage of classrooms here at school leads to a classroom having many learners than it should accommodate.*

**T2:** *Overcrowding makes it not easy for teachers to identify learners and offer remedial services.*

A lack of or inadequate resources could prevent Grade-10 learners from succeeding in this inclusive school. This concurs with Sullivan et al. (2013), who established that the shortages of resources, such as teachers, classrooms, and basic educational equipment such as textbooks, hinder the teaching and learning process which impacts the educational achievement of a learner. Munje and Maaman (2017) affirm that a learner’s academic under achievement is based on the quantity and quality of resources at school, and this could have a negative effect on the successful

educational achievement of learners. Besides this lack of resources, there are additional reasons that can cause learners' academic underachievement.

Further, Warfield (2016) study found that overcrowded and disorganised classrooms are major setbacks that inhibit learners' success. In overcrowded classrooms teachers cannot attend to individual learners who are struggling, and this contributes to poor academic performance. Ncontsha and Shumba (2013) equally contend that due to overcrowding in the classroom, cases of learners who misbehave are not easily noticed. These learners cause disruptions in learning and teaching, and this consequently affects learners' academic performance negatively. Overcrowding in the absence of other risk factors may not contribute to underperformance academically; Teachers' competence has been identified as a factor that could impact learners' academic development and achievement. Notwithstanding that teachers have necessary qualifications in education and are their own subject specialist, but sometimes they are allocated subjects outside their specialization. This is detrimental to positive academic performance of learners because of teacher's lack the competence in those subjects. Below are the responses from the participants.

**T3:** *Teachers can be a factor that may contribute to poor academic performance among Grade-10 learners. If you are teaching a subject that you are not comfortable with and you cannot do your best in, learners are getting nothing.*

**T1:** *I want to add something (throwing up his hands in exasperation). Teaching is a battle on its own. Normally, in our township schools, we tend to just hire teachers without considering their qualifications. Learners in Grades 8 and 9 are taught by teachers who did not specialise in those subjects and automatically these learners find themselves failing in Grade-10. I am speaking from experience. I for one taught NS, EMS, basically I taught everything here at school.*

As a result of this discomfort, teachers may be incapable of providing support when it is needed, especially when subjects content is difficult for learners to understand. Teachers' qualifications and experience are not solely responsible for learners' problems as there are other factors that could be the cause of learners' academic problems. However, studies by Musau and Abere (2015), as well as Maphoso and Mahlo (2015) found that those teachers' qualifications and experience did not significantly influence learners' achievement. An additional factor that influences learners' academic achievement could be related to the home environment.

#### **4.2.2 Home Factors**

Some of the learners' poor academic performance may be attributed to the home environment where the child develops. The bioecological theory regards the home as a microsystem and proximate background in which a child interacts, experience face to face relationships with parents, friends and/or teachers daily (Duerden and Witt 2010). Therefore, academic performance of a learner is greatly influenced by the school and home environment. However, bioecological system has a ripple effect, where what happens in one system influences other systems. The situation at home can affect how a learner performs at school. Factors in the microsystem such as poverty and lack of parental involvement can contribute to the poor academic performance of the learners.

Lack of parental involvement and support in the education of a child was identified as one of the significant reasons for Grade-10 learners' failure. Parental involvement in a child's education includes attending meetings, assisting learners with homework, providing educational resources at home, paying a visit to the school to request information about the learners' progress, as well as responding to invitations sent by teachers regarding the performance of the learners. Consequently, the participants responded as follows below.

**T6:** *Parents are also a contributing factor of poor academic performance. Most of the parents are not so much involved in their children's education.*

**T1:** *I heard a learner at this school telling me that my parents don't even know the Grade I am doing.*

**T8:** *Sometimes these parents are not even educated so they cannot assist their children.*

**T7:** *Some of them do not have time; they do not stay with their kids. You find that the mother is working somewhere, and the kids are staying with the grandparents who are not educated.*

**T1:** *Most of the learners are staying with single parents who are busy earning a living.*

Teachers concurred that some parents do not have interest in or do not support their children's education. Some of the learners' parents, whom teachers invite to discuss the conduct and academic weakness of their children, do not keep appointments. Participants also pointed out that poverty contributes to the poor academic performance among Grade-10 learners in inclusive townships schools. They assert that some parents are noticeably unable to afford the basics and consequently are affected negatively which influence learners too. These are the responses.

**T1:** *The learners don't have the privilege of access to food during short break and lunch, that leads them not to perform. When a learner is sitting down, he is busy thinking where am I going to get the next meal, while you are busy teaching, so it leads to a learner not to perform. Again, is the issue of pocket money, parents do not give their children pocket money to buy food at school, so the kids are always hungry and cannot focus.*

Apart from the above participant, others confirmed that poverty is an issue that contributes to the poor academic performance among Grade-10 learners. Furthermore, a child who has a chronic illness might be absent from school for a long period and this may negatively affect the academic performance. Events in life such as a death of a parent can contribute to poor academic performance of learners. Peer pressure is another factor that deters learners from

performing well at school. Teachers added that peer pressure can lead to substance abuse, and this may affect the learners' academic performance. The following responses support the above view:

**T2:** *Peer pressure, they usually prefer to be accepted especially at adolescence stage and, as a result, when other learners are misbehaving, they also want to do that. They are playful, not because they are not achieving, but they want to please their friends. They want to fit in, so they end up losing on lessons.*

**T6:** *Drugs can contribute to poor academic performance. Learners who use drugs most of the time are disruptive in class, they do not attend classes, and they do not do their work. They are disrespectful to teachers and do not listen to teachers.*

The participants posit that learners' lack of motivation to study equally plays a pivotal role in learners' academic outcomes. The following responses below substantiate the claims.

**T3:** *The children do not put value on education; they don't regard education as important.*

**T6:** *The other thing is negligence on the part of learners. They have this laissez faire attitude like, whatever happens, they don't care, they lack focus.*

The analysis revealed that most of the learners lack interest and do not focus on their studies. These findings concur with Asiedu et al. (2016) that learners who lack interest in the academic activities are at risk of failure in academic performance. However, poor academic performance among Grade-10 learners in an inclusive township school may be attributed to lack of discipline. Participants highlighted that the abolishment of corporal punishment policy and issues of human rights gave rise to learners' deviant behavioural attitudes. The following responses corroborate the above.

**T4:** *Discipline is also a major factor, and it is difficult to discipline these learners these days since the abolishment of corporal punishment.*

**T8:** *This policy where they have abolished corporal punishment and since then the learners do as they wish.*

**T3:** *They are no longer listening to the teachers, and they do as they wish.*

**T8:** *The government is putting policies that are contrary to our culture. As a result, the learners take advantages of that, and they misbehave during lessons, and this leads to poor academic performance.*

Lack of discipline was identified as a serious problem that affects the academic success of learners. Njoroge and Nyabuto (2014) confirmed that a lack of discipline could interfere with a learner's academic performance and achievement. Simba et al. (2016) maintains that poor discipline affects the child in several ways, such as disobedience, poor attitude to learning, substance abuse, truancy, punctuality and gangsterism. These issues may cause a learner to be suspended and therefore miss out in school academic activities which exacerbates poor academic performance.

#### **4.2.3 Strategies for academic performance**

There are several strategies to enhance the academic performance as were highlighted by the participants. They indicated that each group of teachers, parents, and learners need to play their part. Parental involvement should not be restricted to checking and assisting with the homework only, but also attend school parents' meetings and consultation days, making the home environment conducive to learning, and providing the basic needs for the children. Even if the parent is not educated, an assistant should be hired to assist the children with schoolwork or homework. Below are the comments from the participants.

**T1:** *They need to be involved, they need to attend parents' meetings, come for consultations.*

**T2:** *They must come and collect the progress reports of their children and sign their children's books.*

Participants stated that they should monitor their children at home and exercise strict measures regarding their schoolwork. Khan and Unnisa (2017) assert that a favourable home environment could improve learners' academic results. In addition, Sherafat and Murthy (2016) recommend that parents should pay attention to the study habits of their children.

#### **4.2.4. Support for teachers**

Participants pointed out that they face several challenges teaching in an inclusive school. They are not given support by the Department of Education and the School Management Team (SMT) in their school. Instead of getting support they are blamed for everything that happened at the school. They expect the Department and SMT to support them in disciplining the learners. Here are the responses from the participants.

**T1:** *Number 1. I expect the SMT to protect me from the learners, those parents who are coming and to give me support. If I need support on a particular book, they are supposed to give me that. That is what we are expecting.*

**T2:** *I also want the SMT to be the man between my class and the department of education. The SMT should take the grievances of the learners and teachers to the district.*

**T4:** *Cooperation with various stakeholders such as specialists, social workers, and psychologists.*

The study established that the school management were not giving teachers adequate support and it failed in their duty to support teachers. Support in knowledge, skills, collaborations, and trainings to be able to improve the academic performance of learners are what are required by teachers. The findings support Adewumi and Mosito (2019) and Mahlo (2017) who posit that teachers require intensive training, skills development, and collaboration with other stakeholders such as psychologists, nurses, doctors, and school administrators to enhance learners' academic performance and success.

## **Conclusion And Recommendations**

This study examined the factors that contribute to the poor academic performance of Grade-10 learners in a full-service township school. Participants who are teachers identified numerous factors that provided insight into the main causes of the high failure rate in Grade-10 learners, however there is no general factor that caused the poor academic performance as each learner's situation differs. Factors identified as contributing to poor academic performance among learners in a full-service township school were a lack of resources, learners' lack of interest, substance abuse, and teachers' lack of competencies in some subjects. Other factors include ill-discipline, poverty, absenteeism, and lack of parental involvement. However, these are not the only factors that negatively impact the academic performance of Grade-10 learners in a full-service township school. Apart from the issues that have been identified, there could possibly be other issues that affect Grade-10 learners' success that could be explored.

The study recommends that teachers should be given the necessary support and skills required to enhance learners' academic performance such trainings on curriculum adaptation and delivery, workshops, and the provisions of learning material, mentorship, and professional development. The Department of Education should assist in identifying suitable strategies to enhance the academic performance of learners while teachers and parents work together to support Grade-10 learners in full-service township schools. Teachers need to be supported to improve the academic performance of learners. The stakeholders should take cognisance of the recommendations emanating from this study to enhance Grade-10's academic success in full-service township schools and others alike.

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