Similar context, different results: An analysis of factors influencing schools' academic performance in the Xhariep District.

By

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SUBMITTED BY THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION IN THE SUBJECT SOCIO-EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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2024

DECLARATION

I declare that **"Similar contextual factors, different results: A study of matric results in the rural schools in the Free State Province"** is my work and all the sources that I have used and quoted have been acknowledged by way of references.

Mr. MR Baartman

_____   **14/3/2024**

         Signature   **Date**

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my wife Palesa Lemaoana-Baartman and my two daughters Owethu and Andile for loving and supporting me in pursing my goals and allowing me to take time that I had to spend with them to complete my study. To my father Bonakele Baartman for giving life to my academic journey by paying for my registration fee back in 2007, when I started my first degree. My mother Matshediso Baartman, I always felt your prayers in my life, and I thank you for the principles you have instilled in me, they have shaped me to be a man that I am today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Abstract

This study aimed to establish how schools in the same district manage to have different matric results. For years since the dawn of democracy, matric results in South Africa have been a huge focus, since it is the final stage of formal schooling. The department of Education classifies all schools performing below 85% pass rate as underperforming and dysfunctional. Even though all schools are expected to achieve the mentioned target, some schools are still not achieving the set requirement. The study focuses on the academic performance of schools in the Xhariep district, by comparing why to do other schools reach the desired target and others do not. The study was conducted at four secondary schools in the Xhariep Education District. A qualitative method was used to generate data, and it included face-to-face interviews of learners, teachers, and SGB members, document analysis within the school as well as observation of the environment in each school. The findings revealed that Principals played an important role in ensuring the schools performed well by collaborating with the educators and school management team. Moreover, the study has revealed that all the four schools investigated have strategies that they use to achieve good results. The performing schools when compared to underperforming schools made sure that they have a small number of manageable strategies that are known, accepted, and implemented by all stakeholders in the school.

Key terms: Xhariep district; Schools academic performance; qualitative method; performance strategies

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Chapter 1: Outline of the research

1.1. Introduction

The basis of this chapter is to highlight the aim and objectives of the research, the questions that are asked and answered at the end of the paper and the rational of the study. Moreover, it will show the path in which the study followed in terms of the research method, the population to be sampled and the type of methods that will be used to collect data. Lastly, it will also review any literature that is related to the question that has been asked in the study. The chapters that follow will go into more detail of the aspects mentioned above.

1.2. Background of the Study

Section 58B (1) read together with section 58B (2) South African schools act requires all heads of department of education in all provinces to identify underperforming schools. There are three criteria used, for which my study only focused on the criteria that focuses on standard of performance of the learners according to the national curriculum statement. Circular D2 of 2017 further guide Provincial Department of education on the criteria to follow when identifying academic underperformance.

The study focused on secondary schools, and according to the criteria mentioned in circular D2 of 2017 secondary school are regarded dysfunction if its pass percentage falls below 65% and its bachelor and diploma passes are below 30% combined. The Free State education department has increased the benchmark of identifying dysfunctional school as any school achieving below 85% pass rate and below 40% bachelor pass.

The schools that are underperforming will be required to draft an academic improvement plan, that will be submitted by the school and monitored by the department officials. The focus of the study will be to investigate why are other schools performing and the others are not performing academically based on the benchmark of 85% pass rate and 40% bachelor set by the Free State Department of education.

The study focused on secondary schools in the agricultural rural area of the Xhariep district in the Free State province. The national framework on rural education refers to "rural" as spaces that are sparsely polluted and agriculture is the main economic activity. According to the 2023 NSC school performance report, Xhariep district had 10 out of 28 secondary schools not reaching the target of 85%. The focus is on this area to investigate the factors

affecting schools when it comes to the academic performance of the learners.

The investigation seeks to understand why are other schools in this rural area are able to perform above 85% and the other school do not reach the set target, even though they face similar challenges of being based in the same district. Such challenges are learners socio-economic background which includes poor family background, poverty and lack of parental support as outlined in the national framework for rural education.

The study will answer the question, why are other schools performing by focusing on different factors within the school?. Those factors include, the role of the principal and the SMT, strategies used to enhance performance in both underperforming and performing schools. How and what kind of support does the school receive form the district in the form of subject advisors and other sections with the district. Lastly the kind of teaching and learning culture with the school, in the form of the type of teaching and learning material that is used and the role played by different stake holder such as SGB to assist the school in ensuring good academic performance despite facing the challenges found in the rural areas as outlined above.

1.3. The Rationale for the Study

As outlined in the 2023 NSC school performance report, that showed from 2021 until 2023, that certain school in the Xhariep district have been trapped in underperformance for all those years. These are the schools that have similar kind of learners from the areas that are faced by similar challenges, the question arises on how do other schools achieve good academic performance and other do not achieve it, while both sets of school receive leaners from the same communities. The reason for the investigation is what happens in different schools because surely what happens in the community is seen by everyone. There must be differences on how different school go about conducting their business that makes these learners from a similar community background to achieve different results at school.

In my study I want to highlight what structures are in place in the performing schools that can be copied by the underperforming schools. The good practices that will be discovered can be applied to the underperforming schools as they are working in performing schools to ensure the learners from the same communities can also get results that will make them pass their grade 12. It is strange that

learner coming from the same community perform differently at different schools that are in the same community, the study can close the gap between the performances of the learners.

Unlike many research papers that are focusing on the pass rate in mathematics and sciences. My study will focus mainly on what practices are put in place in performing schools in the Xhariep district that can be put in place underperforming school to ensure that all school achieve the set-out target in the province of 85% pass and 40% average for all the schools. The study will realise the slogan of the Free State Department of education that say "close the gap, and leave no child behind".

1.4. Statement of the Problem

McGaghie, Bordage, and Shea (2001) describe a problem statement as an essential element that brings the issues and context that gives light to the study. The study seeks to address the challenge of having schools in the same area or community producing different results. The focus will be on discovering what are the factors leading to the differences in performance. Policies that govern and manage the Department of Education are applied to everyone in the Free State province. Nevertheless, why are other schools in the Xhariep district performing as required by the criteria above and the other are not able to reach the set criteria?

According to Christopher (2019), funding schools started during the pre-colonial days when the Baptist missionaries offered tuition-free education and even made gifts to encourage pupils to attend school (Christopher,2019). The Norms and standards for funding policy provide that non-fee-paying schools should be allocated money according to the number of learners to enable them to pay for the necessities such as electricity, copying machines, and copying paper that the school needs to ensure the curriculum is delivered to learners.

Therefore, if all schools are provided equally with resources and support from the department, it will not be unreasonable to think that they should all have the same or almost the same level of performance, but this is not what is happening now. Even though all the schools fall under the same Free State Department of Education and are provided equally with resources (financial and non-financial) and support, they still do not perform similarly.

The study will adopt a comparative theory, wherein it looks at what leads schools under one administration with similar resources and context to have different results. The education management processes that happen in the SMT through leadership and management, the

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governance by the SGB with the parents, the level of competence by the educators, and discipline. and dedication by the learners, school culture, mission, and vision of the school.

1.4. The Research Questions

A research question is a particularly significant step as it narrows the research aim and objective to specific areas the study will address (Doody and Bailey, 2016). Moreover, a clear research question is vital and sets the scene for developing a precise research aim and objective that are inextricably linked (Doody and Bailey, 2016).

1.4.1. Main research question

How are other schools in the Xhariep district performing better than others, where else they face the same contextual factors?

Sub questions:
- What are the factors leading to underperformance?

- What are the strategies used by performing schools?

- What kind of leadership and systems are required to maintain excellent performance?

1.4.2. Aim and Objectives of the Study

1. The study aims to identify the factors causing the underperformance of some schools in the same area.

2. To discover strategies used in performing schools and how they are appropriately implemented to get results.

3. To explore the kind of leadership and systems in performing schools that enable them to achieve the pass percentage required.

4. To ensure that all schools in the rural area of Xhariep have a reference from other schools on how to reach the target of 85% pass rate.

1.5. Research Methodology and Design

1.5.1. Research Approach

According to Kelly (2016), good quality qualitative research can provide rich explanations of what went on in each situation. The research method is appropriate for my study, as has allowed me to see what goes into each school on how they do things on a day-to-day basis. According to Rahman, the advantage of the qualitative method is that it produces detailed descriptions of participants, feelings, opinions, and experiences and interprets the meanings of their actions (Raman, 2016:104). This approach will let me into their environment and assist me in seeing things from their perspective.

Moreover, qualitative data instruments such as observation, open-ended questions, in-depth interviews, and field notes are used to collect data from the participants in their natural settings (Daniel, 2016:92). The process of going into schools and interviewing the participants has assisted the researcher to come up with themes and views from the participants that have assisted in answering the research question.

The qualitative method is not concerned with numerical representativity but with deepening understanding of a given problem (Gaia, 2017:369). The Qualitative Method is suitable for this study because it deals with the problem of underperformance by understanding the factors within schools that lead to others performing and others underperforming. "Qualitative research can be used to explore complex human behaviour" (Kelly, 2016). The study will focus on the complex situation involving learners' performance and school education management in their environment and what happens in the school that is causing performance or underperformance.

1.5.2. Population sampling

According to Achrya et al. (2013), a sample is a subject of the population selected to be representative of the larger population; since we cannot study the entire population, we need to take a sample. Johnson and Christensen (2010:216) view sampling as drawing a sample from the population. When we sample, we study the characteristics of a subset selected from a larger group to understand the behaviour of the larger group. After understanding the sample's characteristics, the researcher could make conclusions based on the sampled data.

In the current study, 4 (2 performing above 85% pass rate in Grade 12-year results and 2 underperforming achieving below 85% pass rate in Grade 12) schools will be sampled in the Xhariep education district. The study will focus on the grade 12 results of schools identified. The study will focus on quintiles 1 and 2, which are non-fee-paying schools, 1 Principal, 2 learners, 2 educators, 2 SGB members per school. The participants chosen are relevant as they will give the information needed for the study, in understanding what happens in their respective school that are leading to the pass rate they achieve in grade 12.

Achrya et al. (2013) describe purposive sampling as a procedure that ensures that a certain characteristic of the population sample will be represented to the exact extent that the investigator desires. The study samples: there are 28 secondary schools offering Grade 12 in the district, and sampling 4 out of 28 will represent what the study is trying to achieve. Below is a list of sampled schools, both performing and under-performing.

Performing schools

Schools	Results/years		
	2021	**2022**	**2023**
Panorama CS	96.9%	69%	100%
Trompsburg SS	100%	88.2%	90%

Under-performing schools

Schools	Results/years		
	2021	**2022**	**2023**
Ipetleng SC	66.7%	79.5%	72.5%
ReikaeletseSS	92.1%	81.3%	81%

1.5.3. Hypothesis

The study follows a qualitative method, it is difficult to predict the outcomes as it deals with human behaviour and can't be numerically measured.

1.6. Instrumentation and data collection techniques

1.6.1. Semi-structured Interviews

They consist of a predetermined question that is posed to every participant in the study (Tenny et.al, 2017). The interviews in the study were conducted face-to-face while following COVID-19 protocols, and the participants were individually interviewed. Interviews are appropriate for collecting in-depth information on people's opinions, thoughts, experiences, and feelings.

The interviews in the study were semi-structured, where the interviewer used a set of predetermined questions, the respondents answered in their own words, and follow-up questions were asked to clarify certain points. The questions differed according to the group of participants being interviewed, for example, teachers were asked different questions from the principals. A semi-structured interview will lead to the capturing of data in key areas while giving participants the freedom to bring their views and personalities into the discussion (Barrett & Twycross, 2018).

1.6.2. Document analysis.

Busetto et.al (2020) Document analysis is a process where the researcher reviews written material related to the study undertaken. In this study, schools participating were asked for permission to go through the templates used to control the educators' and learners' work, their mission and vision statement, and any documents that will offer a clear picture of how the school is run.

Document analysis is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation, the combination of methodologies in studying the same phenomenon. Triangulation will be done by having three methods of collecting data which are interviews, observation, and document analysis.

1.6.3. Observation

Observation is a process whereby a researcher gains first-hand experience of a particular setting and behaviour, in the qualitative method the observation can be done as a participant or non-participant (Busetto et.al, 2020). An observation tool in the form of a checklist was used to assess the teaching environment, how educators teach content to the learners, the participation or role of learners towards achievement, and how extra and co-curricular

activities are carried out. The predetermined items on the checklist were there to aid in answering the research question.

The schools were contacted via district offices, and the relevant officials were contacted to ensure that the correct procedure was followed, and permission was granted for the visits to materialize. Principals were given dates of visits and questionnaires well in advance to allow thorough and well-answered responses by participants with relevant and correct answers.

1.6.4. Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis in a qualitative method is a process used for the description and interpretation of recorded and written data using processes like coding and thematic analysis (Assarroudi et.al, 2018). Thematic analysis is a process of identifying, analysing, and interpreting themes within the data collected. The themes in the study were generated from the information gathered from the different methods that were used to collect data.

Different groups were asked the following questions, as illustrated in the table below.

Questions	Methods	Instruments	Sampling	Data analysis
What kind of leadership strategies are systems put in place at the school?	Interviews Questionnaire's survey	Interview schedule Questionnaire's	SGB Princi pal SMT Circuit managers	
What teaching and learning strategies are used to yield high achievement levels in the class?	Observation Interview	Observation Schedule Interview schedule	Grade 12 Educators Grade 12 Learners	

When data is generated, the process of analysing also begins. Marshall and Rossman (2016) warn that when data becomes voluminous, it can be overwhelming. In the study, I have

suggested the use of the preparatory research questions and introductory literature review established in the research proposal to chart a way forward in the data analysis process.

Familiarising myself with data: I listened to the recordings, transcribed all interviews, and read and re-read transcripts and data gathered through document analysis in written format to thoroughly comprehend the data's content.

Generating initial themes: Once I had familiarised myself with the data, manual coding was be used to locate lead codes that give direction and suggestions for the discussion between myself and the participants.

Searching for themes: This step was to interpret and arrange the codes. The data was sorted, extracted, and organised into themes while alluding to the thought processes between codes, themes, and subthemes. Using domain analysis (Cohen et al. (2011), which is described as grouping items and units into related clusters, themes, and patterns, a domain being a category that contains several other categories, themes will be established. This implies breaking the data into smaller segments, making them clearer and more understandable.

Defining and naming themes: At this stage, the themes with concise statements that give meaning to the content were named. This stage helps to view and enhance the data more clearly for the study and to avoid data overload. The intention of displaying the data is to give meaning to the data generated.

Producing the report: At this stage, the analysis is organised into a readable report by relating the analysis content to the research questions, literature, and theoretical framework, by not merely describing the themes but discussing and supporting them with evidence from the generated data that responded to the research questions.

1.7. Reliability and Validity (Quantitative Research) / Credibility and Trustworthiness (Qualitative Research)
Validity

Reliability and validity are ways of demonstrating and communicating the rigour of research processes and the trustworthiness of research findings (Roberts and Pries, 2016).

The study results are valid because the researcher visited real schools in different towns to interview real people and observed actual circumstances that anyone can notice and get hold of if they need to. Therefore, visiting schools in the Xhariep district gave the researcher a natural feel of how things are done or not being done, and this will present a study that can be used as a reference in the education fraternity.

The findings are reliable because the study focused on similar schools and the data was gathered using the same tools, e.g., a questionnaire to determine the research outcome. The study results can be used and applied to situations like those that would have been studied. Users of the information can rely on it because it is not based on assumptions but on real-life issues.

1.8. Research Ethics/Ethical Considerations

According to the HSRC Code of Research Ethics (2019), research and the pursuit of knowledge should never be regarded as the supreme goal at the expense of participants' personal, social, and cultural values. Moreover, the researcher must respect the autonomy and protect the community's welfare. Thus, permission was given from the district circuit managers, school principals, and SMT (school management teams), who will communicate with their educators and learners. There will be no possible risk to children or animals. The names and identities of learners who are questioned will be kept anonymous, certain information about the school will be kept discrete, and an ethical clearance form from UNISA will be given before collecting data.

1.9. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Limitations of a study are the potential weaknesses that are not in the control of the researcher. While delimitations are limitations on which the researcher perceived by the researcher (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

1.10. Possible methodological limitations

Sample size: If the sample size is too small, finding significant relationships from the data

will be difficult, as statistics require a large sample size to ensure a representative population distribution. (USC Libraries Research Guides, 2021). Four schools will be sampled; the findings might not represent the whole population of secondary schools in the Xhariep district but are enough to gather the information needed to answer the research question.

Lack of available or reliable data: a lack of data or reliable data will likely limit the scope of an analysis (USC Libraries Research Guides. 2021). Underperforming schools might feel they are exposing their incompetence by telling the truth about their situation, or well-performing schools could think of withholding their best practices to remain ahead of the rest.

Lack of prior research studies on the topic: citing previous studies forms the basis of a literature review and helps lay the foundation for understanding the research problem under investigation (USC Libraries Research Guides, 2021). The literature on rural school Grade 12 performance is limited; even the existing literature has low citations. Therefore, it might limit the gaps that need to be covered.

1.11. Closing Remarks

The chapter has outlined the background of the study, the research problem, the research methodology, data collection techniques, and the problem statement, giving directions about the problem area. The study researched how schools in Xhariep district achieve different results while facing the same challenges. Notably, in South Africa, a lot of research has been based on subject performances like Maths and Science and performance in urban areas like schools in Gauteng Province, but they have never identified other contextual factors that make other schools perform better than the others, especially in the rural areas. The previous chapter focused on the background of the study and what it intends to achieve. The study will benefit Principals and School Management Teams of underperforming schools by adopting good practices from performing schools and implementing them to improve their performance. This will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to examine different literature relevant to my study. The chapter considers relevant studies that affect the research question and sub-questions: How are other schools performing better than others, and where else do they face the same contextual factors? Below is the literature review to answer the research questions.

Reviewing literature gives an in-depth feel of literature that is like a method, theme, or theory and infuses past research to provide strength to the basis of a study (Paul and Criado, 2020:1). In this chapter, literature related to the current study is reviewed, on how other schools in Xhariep district are performing better than others, even though they are facing the same contextual factors.

In this chapter the researcher has examined some of the information that is available and relates to the question that is answered by the study. Moreover, the study will bring to light new information that is lacking on the publications that are available on a similar topic being investigated.

My literature review in answering the research question will focus on the following:

- What are the factors leading to underperformance?

- What are the strategies used by performing schools?

- What kind of leadership and systems are required to maintain excellent performance?

2.2. Rural Areas

South Africa has rural areas that are mainly defined by characteristics such as being controlled by traditional leaders in tribal lands and ones that are found in agricultural areas (DBE, 2018). The schools that the study focused on are found in an area where the main economic activity is agriculture hence, they fit the title of being rural schools.

Learners in some rural areas still face the challenge of walking long distances to access a school, which contributes to the poor outcomes mentioned above, and they end up not passing their matric (Moletsane et al., 2015). In rural areas, the school is an essential resource and a public institution. It teaches their children and empowers them with literacy and numeracy skills, and it is a place where the community can ask for advice from teachers, access study material, do photocopying, and lastly, can be a community centre (Moletsane et al., 2015).

In their study of perceptions of disadvantaged matriculants Maila & Ross (2018) described rural areas as characterised by poverty, dysfunctional schools' poor education and lack of information. The study above and many others portray rural areas to be having only dysfunctional schools, but there are schools in the district that are performing at the expected. According to the NSC report 2023, in the Xhariep district where the study was done, it is only 10 schools out of 28 that are performing below 85%.

It is evident from the report that there is good performance despite what has been written in an article about rural areas. The study answered the question of what is causing 18 schools to perform as expected and the other 10 not to reach the intended target. Xaba & Mofokeng (2021) suggested that organisational climate might be the reason for the good performance of rural and township schools, despite their disadvantaged background, and recognises a need for further investigation into why these schools perform well. The study intended to further investigate the other factors that are leading to good performance that exist in schools achieving above 85% and cannot be found in schools achieving below 85%.

2.3. Socio-economic Status

Baka et al. (2017) concurred that children who come from homes where parents are educated and have higher socioeconomic status get the advantages mentioned above compared to those of parents who are uneducated and have a low socioeconomic status. In his study, Pant (2020) observed that income generated by the parents played an influential role in children's success at school because learners from families with low or no income performed poorly compared to learners from high socioeconomic backgrounds who did well at school.
In my study, I will be having schools that are performing well despite having learners from poor backgrounds.

Challenges of low attendance and children who drop out in high numbers are very prevalent in communities where there is a low socioeconomic background. In concluding his research, Pant (2020) states that parental involvement is significant for the learner's success at school. The school should ensure that they involve parents, even the ones from low socioeconomic backgrounds, during school activities.

There should be frequent meetings between teachers and parents, and parents should be made aware of the children's performance and account for assisting the children when they bring work home. Pant (2020) investigated the effects of socioeconomic conditions and discovered that parents can influence learners' achievement by giving love and attention and providing comfortable, safe learning spaces for their children.

The studies above conclude that if a learner comes from a family with low socio-economic status, they will automatically have a low achievement rate concerning their education. Van der Berg et.al, (2006) in their study concluded that the weak performance of the schooling system cannot be related to the resource possessed by schools or even to the poverty of the households from which their students come. In this study, I have demonstrated how performing schools can make learners perform despite their socio-economic status, compared to underperforming schools.

2.4. Availability of Resources

Learning and teaching resources have a huge impact on the quality of education, and it is one of the important factors when considering improving academic achievement in the classroom (Maqoqa & Mvenene, 2023). Feza et al. (2015) argue that learning in a conducive environment is vital for learners' academic achievement and that the environment extends beyond the classroom to include the home.

Most of the schools in the Xhariep district lack resources like Wi-Fi, tablets, computers, and projectors that are needed to improve the performance of the learners. But that does not mean nothing will be done to get good performance, especially in schools performing above 85%, they come up with means even if it's not fancy or expensive gadgets. The department in most cases just provides the basic resources like textbooks and broadcasting of lessons during exams on community radio stations that are not available in the Xhariep district.
If the school does not have enough resources principal and teachers use their means to ensure

learners have basic resources needed in the class. They will download videos and liaise with colleagues from other districts to access the material needed at their costs to assist the learners.

Makgato (2014) concluded that quality teaching and learning are not the result of resources that are available in schools, there could be a lot of material on hand but if the educators cannot use them, they become useless. The greatest asset of a school is teachers who have the required knowledge, skill, and attitude which could result in effective teaching and learning. Schools in rural areas do not need to have the fanciest or most expensive resources, educators with the qualities mentioned above are often enough to get good results.

All the schools that are part of the study lack resources in one way or the other, and the study showed that the performing schools can achieve the required pass rate despite having the challenge of resources. The study proved that the lack of resources is not an excuse to fold arms and give up, but an opportunity to be creative and come up with solutions. How are performing schools able to perform well despite not having all the resources that a school could wish for? That question will be answered at the end of the study.

2.5. Teachers

Educators in rural areas face several complex challenges, which include learners who do not attend school every day because they sometimes have to work in the farm fields and are not encouraged to attend school (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Other learners who attend school frequently tend not to find the curriculum relevant to their lives, and education is not supported and encouraged at school (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). A high-quality education system can be attained if it has excellent teachers. However, excellent teachers who are highly qualified and produce good results prefer teaching in urban areas, and this leaves education authorities with serious challenges (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

In the study of recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas of South Africa, it was concluded that schools in rural provinces in South Africa appear to have a big challenge in attracting and retaining newly qualified graduates (Masinire, 2015). A survey by Maringe, Masinire, and Nkambule (2014) estimated that about two percent of primary school teachers in one of the rural provinces in South Africa were aged between 20 and 25 years. They attribute that to newly graduated teachers not being attracted to work in rural areas. Gardiner (2017:6) states that most teachers who work in rural areas live far away from the

schools where they work, and it affects their time of arrival; they arrive late and leave immediately when the school day ends, and that prohibits chances for after school classes to close gaps, and limits their knowledge of what is happening in the local area where the school is situated. Like everyone else, these teachers want access to nice shopping centres, being closer to higher education institutions, and proper sanitation and services, which is why they do not stay in rural areas (Masinire, 2015).

All the schools in the Xhariep district face the problem of teachers not staying in school for a long time. Despite all schools facing the same problem, schools that are performing above 85% can use the educators that they have to get good results, despite them being new to the context of rural teaching. The study looked at how performing and underperforming schools do to integrate and induct their teachers once they are recruited into the schools for the first time.

2.6.   Community Involvement

School family community partnerships include mothers and fathers, grandparents, relatives, caregivers, business leaders, and all other community members participating in school activities to ensure school goals are achieved, especially the ones linked to learner achievement. It refers to the role that parents play in improving their children's school performance in partnership with the teachers (Ngozwana et.al, 2024).

Malatji (2019) suggests that schools should create partnerships with the community to involve them in attaining quality education. He further states that good communication is key if the school wants any assistance from all stakeholders in the community the reason being is that the learners will see that there is a good relationship when teachers and parents are sharing problems and solutions, and no learners will want to disappoint either of them (Malatji, 2019).

According to Ramasimu (2023), Bringing different stakeholders on board into the decision-making in school is crucial and gives them a sense of responsibility and belonging in the school. Some parents are only involved in the governance of the school and only focus on the finances of the through the SGB's (Venter et.al, 2014). Pailwar & Mahajan (2005) experimented with community involvement in education and found that participation in education by communities has a vital role in

sustainable development in education. Many bilateral organisations such as USAID and the World Bank have emphasized it as one of the key strategies to address the challenges faced by the marginalised and disadvantaged section of society (Pailwar & Mahajan, 2005).

Moreover, community participation in education is being envisaged as an efficient strategy to achieve many objectives, including increasing the relevance and quality of education, improving access and coverage, identifying problems reflecting local priorities and developing relevant curriculum and learning materials, improving ownership, local accountability and responsiveness, ensuring sustainability, reaching disadvantaged groups, mobilising additional resources and building institutional capacity (Pailwar & Mahajan, 2005). Supporting all segments of the community helps achieve quality educational outcomes.

The study intended to establish the role-played different stakeholders in the community, especially the ones who have children who are attending school. A comparison between the performing and underperforming schools will be made to look into the activities undertaken by the community together with the school to enhance the academic performance of the learners.

2.7. School Culture

School culture can be the uniformity in which staff members behave in a school. Which can include how everyone attends classes, the type of assessment given to learners, and the discipline in carrying out their duties. In an organisation like a school, it means how they participate in sports and music and the standard of education provided at the school. It is ultimately how the broader community views the school and what they are known for.

Schools in the Xhariep district have the same contextual factors and are situated in the same area or region but have different operating methods and achieve different pass rates. Culture is not stagnant. It continuously evolves; every school has a way of doing things that can be visibly identified, influencing how people act and conduct themselves in that organisation (Gruenert and Whitaker, 2017).

Culture is a potent force, and rules must not be written down. They are imprinted into our souls as allegiance is pledged to the school (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017). The study looked at how things are done at the school through observation, the conduct of a school can be seen on how the learners

move when they change classes and how the teachers position themselves to welcome the learners in the class.

Xiaoju, Xiangyun, & Kai (2018) conducted a study that proved that culture is imperative in influencing workers and directly impacts the results achieved by the organisation. Badri et al. (2014) concurred that the school's culture could impact academic performance. The study looked at the conduct of learners and teachers during school time to establish the differences between the two types of schools.

In a study of school culture effectiveness by Xiaoju, Xiangyun, and Kai (2018), the correlation between school culture, teachers' satisfaction at work, and the effectiveness of school operations was measured, and it was concluded that these three elements are positively correlated. Moreover, Treputtharat (2014) demonstrated that school culture as a combination of different elements like ceremonies and rituals within a school is an important signal of the school's effectiveness.

School culture creates a situation where individual goals are transformed into common goals in schools with a strong culture (Turan and Bektas, 2013). A common goal of togetherness through culture makes the impossible achievable, and school employees and leaders can turn their vision into action that can make them prosper even in difficult situations.

2.8. Rural School Management (Principal and SMT)

There are different styles of leadership styles that a leader can adopt in running an organisation. They can adopt democratic, servant, autocratic, bureaucratic, and visionary styles. To successfully lead a rural school, a leader can adopt a style that is centred around establishing and maintaining healthy relationships among the staff the community, and the department officials (Preston, J. & Barnes, K.E., 2017). This approach will assist them in gathering all the support needed to run the school effectively.

The role of school management takes the center in the school as it sets the tone and direction that the school takes in terms of academic performance. The study shed light on the kind of school leadership styles that are found in performing and underperforming schools. The approach of the study regarding leadership was to establish the type of leadership style adopted by the leaders in these two types of schools to solve the challenges that they face to

ensure learners perform well in their academically.

Yobe (2019) established that these Principals in rural areas cannot employ specialist educators in their schools, as they are sometimes forced to take educators who are not qualified in the subjects needed. They do not have enough SMT members specialising in all subjects to monitor curriculum effectively, promote teacher collaboration or enforce discipline. The above challenges will have a ripple effect and negatively affect the teaching and learning culture, and in the long run, the performance of learners will severely drop.

Moletsane and Maringe (2015) advise that principals deploy different leadership styles to help cope with their circumstances. These forms of leadership include transformational, distributed, and instructional leadership, particularly with schools facing many challenges. This view is supported by Chikoko, Naicker, and Mthiyane (2015), who state that strong leadership is needed in poorly performing schools and has been shown to bring functionality and improve learner achievement.

Maringe & Moletsane (2016) completed a study in which they discovered that education leaders have used multiple approaches like instructional, distributed, and transformational leadership styles to improve learners' outcomes. What got principals to achieve their goals was their ability to focus on standards, instruction, and what they expect from learners. On top of that, they empowered educators and devised different ways to support learners with different needs (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015).

The above literature clearly outlines how leaders in schools facing challenges can go about adopting a leadership style that could help them to succeed but does say not what leaders in struggling schools are not doing. The study has differentiated what the leaders in performing schools are doing that is not being done by the underperforming schools to solve the same challenges that they face.

2.9. Strategies to enhance academic performance.

According to Donker et.al, (2014), Strategies used in the learning process are referred to as processes or sequences that when matched to the requirements of a task, enhance performance. Moreover, learning strategies have continuously been demonstrated to be

associated with academic performance. The strategies that are used by the rural performing schools are what might be leading to their good performance, in the study I strive to identify what they are and how they implement them in their schools to enhance performance. Agustin et.al, (2021) In their study outlined the importance of students identifying the best learning strategies that fit their learning styles, and they may use as many learning strategies as possible to improve the results. How learners learn can be a strategy used to enhance performance and schools can assist learners in identifying them for them to learn according to their abilities.

The literature that I have found mentions other strategies to improve performance like teacher collaboration, but these strategies are not in detail. In the study, I will like to outline in detail specifically the strategies that are used in rural schools that impact directly on the performance of the learners.

In their study, they identified that the Department of Education in the Free State offers strategies like learner support, high-quality learning material, and tracking the progress of Grade 12 classes in all schools every quarter (Kgothule & Letsie, 2014). But all these strategies mentioned above are from outside the school and are difficult to monitor daily. They can be supplemented by strategies that emanate from inside the school and can be owned and monitored daily by management inside the school.

2.10. Closing Remarks

This chapter has reviewed literature that relates to my research question and proves that rural schools have high levels of achievement, despite difficult contextual factors. The literature above has some gaps in that they mainly focus on the problems that rural schools experience, but they do not show how some rural schools achieve high learner achievement despite their challenges. The following chapter will explore the research methodology.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Design

3.1. Introduction

The following section of the study outlined the data collection methods and design of the paper. The study follows a qualitative approach which is further explained and the kind of design, which includes the tools used and how information will be extracted from the participants.

3.2. Research Approach

According to Kothari (2004), research methodology is referred to as a way in which a research problem can be tackled. It can also be referred to as a scientific way of doing research. With research methodology, we learn different ways that an investigator implements studying their research problem with a reason with them (Kothari, 2004). A research method is simply a way or a plan on how a researcher will collect evidence and state the type of resources and techniques they will use during data collection (Cavaye, 1996). In this chapter, I will outline the methods, tools, and techniques I will use to research.

Qualitative research involves people's lived experiences in an organization on how they behave, their emotional interactions with each other, and organizational functioning. It focuses on the culture and social movements (Raman, 2016). Good qualitative research, as stated by Kelly (2016), can explain what happens in different situations. The good aspect of the research method is that it broadly explains feelings and experiences and interprets the meanings of their actions (Rahman, 2016).

Data instruments used in a qualitative method, including observation, interview, field notes, and document analysis, are used to collect data from the participants in their natural setting (Daniel, 2016). It does not focus on interpreting several figures but on understanding the problem involving human behaviour and their problem (Gaia, 2017). The method is suitable for my study of grade 12 results because I will deal with human beings in an organisational setting like a school.

The thesis is based on comparing what performing schools do well compared to the other schools that are not performing well in Xhariep district. The qualitative method provided a

first-hand experience of what happens at schools. Qualitative work focuses on specific individuals and events, lending itself to an ideographical style of analysis (Gerring, 2017). I will focus on the qualitative method, which will be appropriate because it honours an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of reporting the complexity of a situation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

3.3. Research Design

Marshall and Rossman (2011) describe a research design as a detailed outline of the phenomenon under study. A design is a road map a researcher uses for their study. It outlines the tools to use, the kind of data they intend to generate, and the research site and participants to select for the study (Johnson and Christensen, 2008). In summary, research designs provide the direction of the research study (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

The research that has been conducted has followed a case study design. The design is found in many fields, especially evaluation. Creswell and Creswell (2017) further state that it is an in-depth analysis of a case, often an event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Collecting the data involves visiting a site where someone can talk openly about a topic. Data collection can be done using an instrument or a test or gathering information using a checklist.

3.4. The Research Site, Population, and Sampling

3.4.1. Location

The research was conducted in schools in the rural district of Xhariep in the Free State province of South Africa. The researcher went to the schools to get first-hand experience and interview the participants.

3.4.2. Population

Complex human behaviour can be explored using research (Kelly, 2016). My study focused on the complex situation involving performance and education management in schools. Sukmawati et.al., (2023) refer to a population sample as subjects identified to have certain characteristics perceived by the researcher to be relevant to answering the research questions of the study. A population sample is taken because the researcher cannot observe everything due to constraints related to funds and

manpower (Sukmawati et.al., 2023).

My population comprises four secondary schools in rural areas with a focus on grade 12, four principals, three educators per school, one learner per school, and one SGB member per school. I chose these populations because they are the main stakeholders in the school, and they play a very key role in ensuring the school reaches its goals.

The type of classrooms that deliver the curriculum and the material they use to teach the learners, including the assessments given to them and how often they are given. After assessing how feedback and remedial progress are used to assist learners who are not quick in grasping concepts and topics, how long do they take to complete a chapter in the subject, and how quickly do they cover the curriculum? Content knowledge of educators is very pivotal in the delivery of content, and I will also look at the qualifications and experience of the educators in delivering content.

Are the educators teaching the subjects they are qualified and experienced in teaching? The population that I have chosen is the schools in rural area of Xhariep district, as these are the groups that will assist me in answering my research question. All these schools are based in the Free State and are secondary or combined schools. The focus was on the Grade 12 class, including the teachers, the learners in that class, SGB, and school management.

3.4.3. Sampling

The primary purpose of sampling is the selection of suitable participants to enable the research question to be answered. Effective sample selection is a crucial component of the design process. Sampling approaches unsuitable for the study can negatively affect its outcome (Schneider *et al*., 2016). A sample is a part of the population chosen to be studied. It was chosen because it represents the broader population since the entire population cannot be studied, so we selected a sample to represent the entire population (Achrya *et al*. (2013).

Sampling can take the form of non-probability sampling, in which samples are those in which the probability that the subject is selected is unknown and results in selection bias in the study (Achrya *et al*., 2013). I have chosen to choose convenience sampling, a commonly used method because the sample is chosen at the investigator's convenience. Therefore, I will

choose schools that will answer my research question.

Another sampling method is quota sampling, which is a procedure that ensures the characteristics of the population sampled are represented to the extent that the researcher desires (Acharya *et al.*, 2013). I will test a hypothesis where I will have two groups: one will be performing schools, and the other group will be underperforming schools. Both groups will be based in the rural Xhariep district, quintiles 1 and 2, section 21 public schools. I have observed what happens in these two groups of schools.

In their study of nursing midwifery research, Schneider et.al, (2016) insisted that sampling in a qualitative study is non-probably sampling. This means that participants in qualitative research do not have an equal chance of being chosen. The researcher is the one who specifically approaches the participants who fit the purpose of the study. There are four main types of non-probability sampling: convenience sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling, and theoretical sampling. In my study, I will use purposive sampling.

Participants will be chosen because they match the aims/questions of the given study (Schneider et al., 2016). Schools that I have sampled in the study have the required characteristics: situated in rural areas and performing and underperforming schools according to the criteria set by the Free State Department of Education, which is 85% pass.

Four schools from four towns are selected, in each school one principal, three Grade 12 educators, one learner, one SMT member, and one SGB member per school. The researcher performed a document analysis of monitoring and control tools that the SMT uses to monitor curriculum in the school, minutes of meetings where they discuss curriculum matters, and the resources the teachers use to teach the learners. Interview the SGB members and the learners and ask permission to observe how lessons are delivered.

3.5. Instrumentation and Data Collection Techniques

Data collection that generates narrative or non-numeric information is often associated with qualitative research (Bowling and Ebrahim, 2005). It tries to access how the viewer perceives their social world. At any time in the study, it tries not to make any value judgment while data is collected. According to Schneider et al. (2016), various methods of collecting data can be used singularly or in combination to obtain data. In this study, interviews, observation,

open-ended questionnaires, and document analysis were used to collect data.

3.5.1. Interview

Interviews are done with individuals or groups, and face-to-face conversations are held between the interviewer and the participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). According to Moser and Korstjens (2018), present or past situations and personal issues can be discussed in an interview. The interviews were conducted in each school one one-on-one with the participants mentioned above. When designing an interview schedule, the questions posed to the participants must be able to get as much information out of them as possible to address the study's aims (Gill *et al*., 2008). The researcher used pre-determined questions that will assist in answering the research question, the participants were allowed to elaborate and the researcher was able to ask follow-up questions.

Phrasing good questions is vital in a qualitative study. They should be open-ended so the participant can elaborate and be neutral, sensitive, and, more importantly, understandable (Gill *et al*., 2008). The best approach in designing the type of interview by a researcher to collect data should be tailored to the research question and the interviewee's character (Barret & Twycross, 2018). Interviews are the best in qualitative research because they directly collect rich data regarding a particular phenomenon.

Scaffolding of questions is vital in an interview. Gill *et al*. (2008) elaborates that the questioning should begin with easy-to-answer questions that require yes or no as a response. Then, move to questions that require a bit of elaboration and finish with questions that might be sensitive (Gill *et al*., 2008). Asking questions that build up can generate rich data and help develop the interview further because respondents' confidence will build up, and they will be at ease during the interview.

In my study, I had an interview with different school stakeholders, including SMT members, SGB members, and learners. For the researcher to understand the participants' world, interviews are a gateway to entering and reflecting on the event (Lopez and Whitehead, 2013). Questions perceived as unbalanced, coercive, and manipulative in an interview schedule should be done away with as they will not be ethical. There should be no power imbalance between the interviewer and the interviewee (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013).

My interviews took the form of a semi-structured interview. I came up come up with pre-set questions that were posed to the respondents, who answered them in their own words (Moorthy, 2006). The interviews in my study were done face to face as I needed to be in the environment where the study was done. I had face-to-face interviews with the following participants.

3.5.1.1. Learners

They have given me insight into what makes them perform or not perform at their respective schools. I was able to know their background regarding their socioeconomic status and other factors that affect their schooling. I have only interviewed grade 12 learners from each school.

3.5.1.2. Educators

The level of qualifications, methods of teaching, and teacher development programs are some of the things I have asked from the educators. The focus was mainly on their strategies or methods in grade 12.

3.5.1.3. Principal

As the school's accounting officer and instructional leader, the principal is crucial in my study to establish how the school ensures that the learners' academic performance is kept at a higher level to ensure learners are passing. What strategies are employed by the school to ensure a high level of achievement in grade 12?

3.5.1.4. SGB Members

As the governance structure in the school, the SGB I have gained insight into how they support the school towards the realization of quality teaching and learning and to ensure that parents support the school with all the required things to ensure that the school's academic performance is at a high standard. The participants are very critical in achieving the aims of the study because they are the ones who have first-hand information on what is taking place in the school on a day-to-day basis. They will be able to provide the information that will be used to answer the research question as they are the ones responsible for and affected by the

school's academic performance.

3.5.2. Observation

There are certain things that people say in interviews, but they will not make sense until you see them first-hand. Observation of verbal and non-verbal communications and actions can give a researcher much information that might not be mentioned in interviews (Berrett and Twycross, 2018). Lopez and Whitehead (2013) define observation as going into the natural setting of the participants, watching daily life and behaviours, and recording the interactions and functioning in the social setting.

Most of the time, observation in qualitative research does not follow a particular structure, but the researcher can structure observation in terms of what they want to observe depending on the research question (Lopez & Whitehead,2013). A considerable amount of data can be captured and analysed through observation. It will be advantageous to digitally capture every moment for repeated viewing (Berrett & Twycross, 2018).

The observation was based on how the school starts in the morning and when the learners and teachers arrive. What time does tuition start, and what role does the principal play as the instructional leader? I will also observe how lessons are conducted and how the learners respond to lessons.

3.5.3. Document analysis

When doing research, one of the methods that can provide rich information can be found in documents. Document analysis is used in qualitative research to analyse documents systematically and rigorously (Wach & Ward, 2013). Documents can give background information about a subject and be used as questions when designing an interview schedule (Owen, 2014). He further states that they can corroborate observational and interview data or refute them. Moreover, the researcher will have information that can be used to clarify or challenge what they are being told.

Cardno (2018) suggests that document analysis appeals to many researchers as cost-effective and manageable. Documents that I will use for evaluation during a study come in various forms, including Agendas, attendance registers, minutes of meetings, and event programs,

amongst others (Bowen, 2009). The document to be analysed can be printed and electronic (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis requires examining and interpreting data to understand meaning and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

In my study, I have requested the schools participating to allow me to go through their school policies, minutes of staff, SMT, parents, and Representative Counsel of Learners meetings. I have also looked at the visitors' book at the school to see the recommendations made by departmental officials like subject advisors who visit the school. Lastly, also read the mission and vision statements of the school to see how they fit into the daily running of the school.

The documents mentioned above have helped me understand what the school intends to achieve daily, how they are going about doing that, and really what is happening. Understanding what is contained in the documents has assisted in comparing how different schools approach learner's performance.

3.6. Data analysis and interpretation

Graue (2015) defines qualitative data analysis as describing, classifying, and interconnecting phenomena with the researcher's concepts. What is unique to qualitative data is that the researcher will analyse everything participants said and what he saw to conclude a meaning. All the information analysed is the one that was gathered during interviews, observation, and document analysis.

In the study, the information collected at schools using the methods mentioned above has been classified, organised, and sorted to match the questions that need to be answered. The information gathered can be too much; therefore, the researchers formulate research questions at the beginning to sort the information gathered according to the research questions (Graue, 2015).

Qualitative data analysis is a complex and challenging part of the research process that has received limited attention in the literature (de Casterlé *et al*., 2012). de Casterlé *et al*. (2012) further expand on this to say that qualitative methods produce much information in a large quantity. Investigators face the battle of choosing significant facts, knowing the difference between different themes, and being able to put together what they have collected from

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responses into useful, presentable data. Themes will be generated using the information collected from the participants in the schools.

Coding is the foundation stage in data analysis in a qualitative study. The researcher has taken each piece of data collected and give it a name or a label (Liamputtong, 2009). Liamputtong (2009) insists that, at the beginning of the data collection, the researcher should have already in mind how they will categorize each data by giving it a name. I have read through transcripts, field notes, and documents in my study. After going through the data, I have written down a few notes about what is significant, giving names to the data's themes.

I have also used the thematic analysis, defined by Liamputtong (2009), to identify, analyse, and report patterns within the data. There are two steps in thematic analysis. First, as a researcher, one reads through the interviews, goes through documents, and re-watch the videos of the field observation. After that, you identify what was generally said by the group and form themes based on that information, which means you identify patterns and meaning (Liamputtong, 2009). All the ways of analysing the data will be shown in chapter four of the study.

3.6.1. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness or rigor of study refers to how confident a researcher is of the methods they used for the study, the data collection, and interpretation in ensuring that the study is of good quality (Peck & Beck, 2014). The onus is on the researcher to ensure that they follow the correct procedures when doing their study to ensure that it is considered worthy by the readers (Amankwaa, 2016).

Judging whether published qualitative research is trustworthy is difficult because there are no set criteria to apply to conclude it; instead, each researcher follows what has been done by other researchers in the literature available. Research seen as worthless among nothing gets less attention because it is unreliable. Trustworthiness involves establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.6.2. Credibility

The credibility of research has to do with how the study can be trusted, which can be referred to as how well the data addresses the intended focus (Pilot & Beck, 2012). Moreover, Amankwaa (2016) believes in the truth of the findings. Some techniques can be used to ensure the findings are credible. For example, a researcher can do triangulation, comparing results from observations, interviews, and document analysis to establish if they confirm the same thing. Other techniques include negative case analysis and member checking (Amankwaa, 2016).

In my study, I have compared data from different schools in the rural areas of the Free State. The schools chosen have presented credible data as they are registered with the Department of Education. I have used more than one method to collect data, and that has ensured that verification of information from one method collates with others.

3.6.3. Transferability

Information or data from qualitative research should be able to be applied in other contexts for us to say it is transferable. Amankwaa (2016) emphasizes that a research study should describe participants clearly so that whoever reads the data can compare the findings to other studies or groups not in the study (Curtin and Fosse, 2007). The findings in my study regarding the performance of matric results should be able to be used to make comparisons with other studies, as matric results are similar in many schools in South Africa.

3.6.4. Dependability

Amankwaa (2016) refers to dependability as the confidence of relying on the findings of a study, where they are consistent and can be repeated repeatedly. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose an inquiry audit method to determine dependability. When doing an audit, an investigator who was not part of the research is brought in to assess the procedures and outcomes (Amankwaa, 2016).

Dependability can be achieved by using similar research methods in a similar setting with the same respondents and obtaining similar results (Cresswell, 2003). My study will be dependable; I will be using real school situations, and anyone can go to these schools and

verify the data I will be presenting using any method of their choice.

3.6.5. Confirmability

The study's findings must be neutral, and there must be proof that the study outcomes are shaped by respondents and not the researcher's agenda or interest (Amankwaa, 2016). To establish confirmability, Lincoln, and Guba (1985) suggest a confirmability audit, an audit trail that will detail the steps the researcher has taken from the beginning to the end until they conclude their findings.

3.6.6. Validity

When a method measures what it assumes to measure, and the results are close to what happens in the real world, it can be considered valid (Middleton, 2020), which means that the method can accurately measure something. Validity can be classified in four ways.

3.6.6.1. Construct validity.

Evaluate whether a measurement tool represents what we are interested in measuring (Middleton, 2020). This will be validated by the observations that will be taking place at the school during data collection.

3.6.6.2. Content validity

It focuses on the ability of a test, a survey, or a measurement to cover all the important parts of the subject it aims to achieve (Middleton, 2020). Interview questions will be used to cover all the important information needed for the study.

3.6.6.3. Face validity

Considers how relevant the content of a survey looks on the surface (Middleton, 2020). The questions that will be asked in the interviews will be directly associated with the research question and the academic performance of the school.

3.6.6.4. Criterion validity

It assesses how closely the findings of a test correlate to the findings of a different test (Middleton, 2020). The criteria used to generate the interview questions are of the same standard used in other similar research papers.

3.7. Ethical considerations

Pursuing knowledge through research should not be more important than the well-being of

the participant's personal and cultural beliefs and values. Research should not be done at the expense of the participants. The participants in the study were not harmed in a way, as they were answering interview questions and not taking any form of substance. It should always consider how it will negatively affect the participants (HSRC Code of Ethics, 2019). The researcher must always protect participants and communities when conducting the study. The names of the participants will not be mentioned anywhere in the study to protect them from harm.

I have contacted and received permission from the Free State Department of Education to visit the schools that I have chosen, and they have issued me with a letter to present at the schools. I went to the school to make an appointment when I came to the school and gave the learners who will be participating ascension forms that parents should sign to me permission for their children to be part of the study. No names of participants will be revealed in the study, and the names of the schools will be kept anonymous.

3.7.1. Institutional approval

Permission from the College of Education's research ethics committee was given before doing the research. This committee reviews research applications involving human participants, such as collecting data through questionnaires or interviews. Before I go on to collect data, I will make an application to the committee requesting permission to conduct my research.

3.7.2. Informed consent and voluntary participation

The ethical conduct of research requires the participants in the research study to give

informed consent and to voluntarily agree to participate in the research process. All participants who took part in my study signed a consent form before answering any questions, and the parents gave consent for their children to take part in the study. All the documents that were signed will be kept for verification. Informed consent, according to Josephson and Smale (2021), makes participants aware that participating in a study is voluntary and if they wish to withdraw, they can do it at any time.

Kaiser (2009) further states that consent forms will be used during a study, and they generally give information on the study. They should clearly state who the researcher intends to share the information with to allow the respondents to make an informed decision about using their information. Research subjects have the right to know that they are being researched. Above that, they have a right to understand the study and they can withdraw at any time (Ryen, 2011). The researcher and participants should sign the consent forms before the research begins. It indicates and agrees that no one was forced to participate in the study.

3.7.3. Right to privacy

Confidentiality means no personal information about the participants will be revealed unless it is necessary to do so. For researchers, the duty of confidentiality is less clear and involves elaborating on an outcome that might be expected from the study (Sanjari et al., 2014). As the researcher and participant relationship is established, qualitative researchers face difficulties such as respect for privacy and establishing honest and open interactions (Sanjari et al., 2014).

As a researcher, I will ensure that participants' privacy is protected and limit the access to the participants' characteristics, behaviours, and other information to the researcher. Keeping information private is imperative as the study will include school learners who might be minors; therefore, protecting their privacy is very important for their future. I will not mention anyone by name nor state the school's name and the town where it is situated.

3.7.4. Protection from harm

Researchers must collect, analyse, and report data without risking the personal identities of

their participants. This happens typically when the traits of individuals or groups make them identifiable in research reports (Kaiser, 2009). When conducting I will not give the name of the school where the study took place, any person with knowledge of the district will not be able to identify a teacher based on traits such as gender, age, and the number of years in service. I will hide the identity of participants because they might be victimized by officials in higher positions, especially if they expose the wrong things done by them.

3.8. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

3.8.1. Limitations – application relevance to your study

Simon and Goes (2013) describe the limitation of a study as the features of design or methodology that affect the application or how the study results are interpreted. Simon and Goes (2013) concurred that limitations are those factors that researchers cannot control but could affect the study's outcome. The limitations primarily associated with the study are validity and reliability because the studies are done in a natural setting. Therefore, it is not easy to replicate the study in other schools other than schools where the studies took place.

As mentioned above, the potential weaknesses or things that can affect the study outcomes most often cannot be controlled by the researcher and are related to the chosen design or other factors (Theofanidis and Fountouki, 2018). One of the approaches used is observation it involves the studying of how individuals or groups behave in a school, and the behaviour of the schools studied might not be the same for other individuals or groups of schools.

3.8.2. Possible methodological limitations

Sample size: conducting a study in four schools can make it difficult to find significant relationships from the data, as statistics require a large sample size to ensure a representative population distribution. A lack of reliable data will force a researcher to limit the scope of their analysis to the four schools I have studied.

3.8.3. Lack of prior research studies on the topic

A literature review helps lay the foundation for understanding the research problem you are investigating by citing prior knowledge. Some studies that are like my study do not have all

the components that I am required to answer my research question. The study conducted by Rammala (2009) on factors contributing to poor performance of grade 12 learners focused more on the factors causing the learners to perform poorly in the NSC results and did not indicate how other schools are overcoming the same challenges and achieving good results.

The current study showed not only why learners perform poorly but also how other schools perform while facing the same contextual factors as the schools performing poorly. Jackson (2009) also based his study on the reasons for poor performance. My study hopefully highlighted the reasons for good performance. Jackson (2009), in his study, also focused on the causes of poor performance, which shows that most of the studies only focused on the negative part of school performance in rural areas. My study will hopefully highlight the parts that their studies ignored to show.

3.8.4. Delimitations of the study

According to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018), authors sometimes consciously set limitations for themselves; they set the parameters or limit their work for the set objectives and goals that are possible to reach. They conclude by stating delimitations. Unlike limitations, authors have control over delimitations.

Delimitations in my study will be the interview questions that I have asked, and they should give me the information I need to complete the study. If I do not structure them properly, they might lead to incomplete or useless information. Document analysis and observation will be other tools to ensure I get the right information to ensure the aims and objectives of the study are achieved.

3.9. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have set out my research design, which I have used to collect data. The methods I have decided on are relevant to a qualitative research approach and they have enabled me to collect that I will be able to use to ensure the research question is answered appropriately. The qualitative research method is based on the principles of being in the natural setting of the participant and observing their behaviour. Because my research is about the performance of the schools in the Xhariep district, the qualitative data collection

method is the most appropriate. This is because it has allowed me to observe, interview, and analyse some documents to answer my research question and present empirical data that will show exactly what happens in the rural schools of Xhariep district on why some schools are performing well and others are not.

Chapter Four: Analysis and Presentation of Data

4. 1. Introduction

The previous chapter outlined in detail the methods and where I have collected data for my study. In this chapter, I have analysed the data that has been collected. According to Mezmir (2020), qualitative data analysis can describe as what happens in the field on routines and daily practices. Moreover, he further states that qualitative data analysis is the interpretation of what people have said and what has been seen and tries to make meaning of what has been seen and presented.

The data I am presenting was collected from twelve teachers, four learners, four principals, and four SMT members in four towns of the Xhariep district. Interviews, observation, and analysis of documents were methods used to collect the data. The research intended to answer why some schools in rural areas perform well while others do not perform as per the required 85% pass rate according to the Free State Department of Education criteria.

4.2. Participants Groups

The researcher used purposive sampling when collecting data. Participants were chosen because they would likely respond to the research question (Schneider et al., 2016). The schools I sampled in the study have the required characteristics, which are situated in rural areas and performing and underperforming schools according to the criteria set by the Free State Department of Education, which is 85% pass. I sampled a principal, three teachers, one Grade 12 learner, and one SGB member per school for interviews to answer the questions for my study.

4.3. Pseudonyms for Participants

Pseudo-names in research are used to conceal the identity of the participants to protect them from victimisation. The following pseudonyms are used in the study. The first two schools are performing schools and the last two are underperforming schools. The first and second schools are achieving above 85% and the third and fourth schools are achieving below 85%. For Principals, the code is P, P1 (principal of the first school), P2 (principal of the second school), P3 (principal of the third school) and P4 (principal of the fourth school). For educators, the code will be Ed 1/1, Ed 1/2, and Ed 1/3 (educators of the first school). Ed 2/1,

Ed 2/2, and Ed 2/3 (educators of the second school). Ed 3/1, Ed 3/2, and Ed 3/3 (educators of the third school). Ed 4/1, Ed 4/2, Ed 4/3, and Ed 4/4 (educators of the fourth school). For the learners, the codes will be LN1, LN2, LN3, and LN4 for four respective schools. The SGB will be classified as SG1, SG2, SG3 and SG4.

4.4. Themes Generated

Vaismoradi and Snelgrove (2019) describe a theme as the subjective meaning and cultural-contextual message of data. They concluded by identifying a theme as a red thread of underlying meanings, within which similar pieces of data can be tied together and within which the researcher may answer the question "Why?". The following codes and themes have been generated from the data collected.

Codes	Main themes	Sub-themes
• Resources • Teacher development • Communication • Programmes • Monitoring	• The role played by SMT	• Instructional leadership • Institutional Values
• Incentives • Motivation • Money • Material • Parent involvement • Accountability	• Support	• Recognition • Resources • Learner Discipline

• YouTube video • Live lessons • Visuals (projector) • Past question papers • Learner identification • Identify challenges • Strategizing • Adopt a learner • Extra classes • Subject notes • Class attendance • Confidence	• Good Performance	• Differentiated learning • Learner support • Learner discipline

• Motivation		
• Teaching learners • School visits • Teaching material • Past question papers • Monitoring	• District Support	• Direct learner support • Resources
• Facilities • Unemployment • Alcohol abuse • Drugs	• Environment	• Resources • Societal ills
• Communication • Parents meeting • Resources • Alcohol • Poverty	• Parental involvement	• Socio-economic background
• Camping learners • Extra mile	• Extended programmes	• Blocked time table
• Prize giving • Incentives • Role modelling	• Motivation	• Rewards • Constant feedback

The tables above represent the information that was gathered from the data that was collected. The information was summarised into codes and themes that will be used to answer the questions posed by the study. Here are the sub-questions that the researcher is asking to answer the questions.

- What are the factors leading to underperformance?

- What are the strategies used by performing school?

- What kind of leadership and systems are required to maintain performance above 85% pass rate?

4.5. Research Question 1:

What are the factors leading to underperformance?

4.5.1. Resources

The education process without the needed resources to implement it is a fatal exercise. The district, especially the curriculum section via subject specialists, plays a significant role in guiding educators on how to approach the teaching process in terms of what is required. The subjects' specialist provides support like annual teaching plans and past question papers from other provinces. Subject specialists play a vital role in ensuring educators reach the expected outcomes. The subject specialists play the following role in terms of providing resources, according to the educators:

Ed1/1. "*She communicates via WhatsApp because they cannot visit schools regularly due to transport and distance. We exchange assessment papers as the educators in the district to ensure quality in our assessment*".

Ed1/2. "*The subject advisors assist with question papers. Because the subject advisors cannot come to school regularly, there is a WhatsApp group where we can communicate with anything that I might need to ask regarding the subject*".

Ed2/2. "*They are always available to provide us with resources that we need to assist the learners to pass*".

Ed3/1. "*They constantly provide us with the latest material that we need to ensure learners are on the right path, and they pass well*".

Ed3/2. "*She provides all the material and offers advice always on how to approach content*".

The participants above clearly communicate that there is no shortage of resources from the district site, and all the material they need flows smoothly from the district to the school efficiently and on time.

4.5.2. Parental involvement

Parents play a crucial role in their children's academic lives. The learning process does not only stop at school. It continues even at home, where the learners must do the homework and some assignments. Parents are responsible for providing the resources and assistance the learner needs to complete the work at home. Teachers rely on parents to assist them in making sure that the learners go to school regularly and check that they do the work given to them by the school. The schools had this to say about parental involvement.

P1:" *Parents do support the school; they come to meetings when we call them to try and assist the school with the learners who are having challenges. But in terms of other means, it is difficult to get funds from them to support the school*".

P2: "*The parents do come to school to hear how their children are doing and try to assist us where they can. They mainly help us in ensuring their children attend school regularly and not give them a lot of chores at home to allow them more time to focus on their studies*".

P3: "*Parents do not support the schooling of their children, due to socio-economic issues even. The issue of alcohol abuse results in the parents not fully involved in the education of the learners*".

P4: "*The parents are not assisting the school or the learners. Everything that happens during our intervention programme rests mainly on the educator's shoulders*".

Ed1/1. "*I have parents' cell numbers, and they can communicate with them via WhatsApp to inform them of their children's conduct, and also used when the teacher needs to see the parents. The majority of the parents try to be supportive when the learners are in grade 12*".

LN1. "*My guardian is assisting me at home with my homework. He is always motivating me to do my best on my school work. My Parents do support me financially with the things I need at school*".

The statement above shows a lack of support from the parents in schools 2 and 3. However, schools 1 and 2 can get some support from the parents even though it is not financial, but at least parents play some role in their children's education. According to Boonk et al. (2018), parental involvement is more important to children's success at school than their family's socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and educational background. Schools 3 and 4 need to devise some means to get parents involved, at least by assisting them with non-financial matters like ensuring learners attend regularly, helping to supervise evening classes or helping to cook for the learners.

4.5.3. Socio-economic background

Life in rural areas is usually hard due to unemployment, leading people to depend on government social welfare to survive. Since there is no income for the parents to support their children, they can come up with non-financial means to ensure they support their children through other means. The district and the school can implement measures to assist the abovementioned situations.

P1." *The materials that the learners need for learning all come from the school, and if the school does not provide things like stationery, most of the learners will not have them, and learning will not take place. When the learners write examinations, as the school, we know that most of them are faced with challenges of studying space, disturbances by taverns and drugs; the school will make a decision to make a camp for the learners at school for the whole duration of the exam to give learners classes to study, provide them with three meals per day*".

Ed1/1. *"The areas do not have facilities that can allow learners to do their school work outside the school".*

The schools have responded by doing the following, seeing that the situation of the learners requires an intervention beyond school hours.

P2: "*We have identified that learners do not have adequate space at home to study, and we identify what each learner's challenges are, and we try to solve them. We have started study classes from 15:00 – 17:00, where learners study or do homework before they go home. One of our main strategies that is working is for every grade 12 teacher to "adopt a learner". Each teacher will try to assist the learner on contextual factors outside the school that might hinder the learners to perform*".

P3: "*We face challenges of learners coming from poor families. As a school, we make sure that we provide them with meals in the morning and afternoon so that the learners can stay longer at the school. Towards the examination, we do a blocked timetable where we give every subject more hours for them to engage with the learners*".

P4: "*We do weekend classes and evening classes and provide the learners with meals so that they can stay in the schoolyard*".

As a leader working in rural areas, you need to be aware of the challenges the learners face, hindering them from doing their best in their education. You need to be a proactive leader who solves the situations that arise, even if you feel they are situations that parents at home must solve. During examinations, you must provide the learners with space to study, and some principals mentioned camping the learners at school; you might even have to turn some classes into bedrooms to ensure learners stay at school and monitor what they are studying.

Providing the learners with meals during studies or classes is used as a motivation for the learners to be at school because the reality is that some of the learners do not have food at home, and if you leave them and think they will study at home, some might not even do it because the parents are struggling, as a leader you need to dig deeper into the school funds or some time from your pocket to ensure learners eat. In their research, Wall et al. (2022) concluded that providing meals at schools improves at least one of the following educational outcomes: learning capabilities, attendance and enrolment.

4.6. What Strategies are Used by Performing and Underperforming Schools?

The question was posed to all stakeholders to understand how the performance ensures that their learners succeed in passing their matric every year by reaching the target that the Department of Education has set. Furthermore, compare what the other schools that are not performing are doing that they think is working for them, but at the end of the year, they still do not achieve the set target.

4.6.1. Learner support

Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) believe that poor socio-economic conditions of parents in rural areas lead children to be disadvantaged in their education. Moreover, they indicate that due to low levels of education, working low-paying jobs leads to parents not attaching value to schooling. Because of the conditions mentioned above, the schools have to do everything to support the learners as they face a lot of challenges at home that do not enable them to study and achieve good achievement levels. The schools are doing the following to support the learners.

P1. "*Regularly invites parents for a meeting where they discuss the performance of the learners and identify some of the problems that might even emanate from the households which hinder the learners from doing well at school. Learners with problems can be referred to the social workers from the department*".

P2. *"One of our main strategies that is working is for every grade 12 teacher to adopt a learner". Each teacher will try to assist the learner on contextual factors outside the school that might hinder the learners to perform".*

P3. "*We try to ensure we have programmes that move the learners away from the location and keep them at school for longer so that they are learning more*".

P4. "*Extra tuition for the learners*". *Learners in rural areas do not have strong support systems at home due to the conditions that persist at their homes. Each Principal at the four schools has*

devised means to support the learners in ensuring they can cope with the work in grade 12. These programmes help the learners cope with the workload they could not do at home.

4.6.2. Differentiated learning

Haniya and Roberts-Lieb (2017) define differentiated learning as a phenomenon that recognises what the learner knows and what kind of a person they are before they enter the classroom and how to work with them to achieve what they need to learn. Due to the intensity and high standards that learners have to reach to pass Grade 12, educators need to come up with ways and means of ensuring that the learners are up to the task of answering any question that will be asked in the examination.

Haniya and Roberts-Lieb (2017) further talk about differentiating instruction, which is tailoring instruction to meet the needs of every learner. The process of preparing the learners will determine whether they pass or fail. Every educator has a way of preparing the learners to answer the questions successfully. The educators do this to ensure that the learners are prepared for the examinations.

Ed1/1. "*As an educator, when I do not have facilities where learners can enrich their learning in class, I make means of bringing in the facilities to them. For literature in English, I invite the cast that is doing some of the books I'm teaching so that they can see on a play the book that they read in class. I also take the activities from the Model C schools so that they can have confidence and be able to answer any question that they come across. I also compile question papers and expose them to the standard that they will come across at the end of the year*".

Ed1/2. "*Identify different types of learners and modify the learners according to their level of knowledge. I have extra classes every morning at 7 am for the different groups in order to go through the work slowly so that they can understand the work. The use of question papers is also used to prepare the learners for the examination*".

Ed1/3. "*In my class, I have devised means to make the classroom interesting by changing the chalkboard into a whiteboard so that instead of using chalk, I use whiteboard makers, and I use a projector to make learning appealing to those learners who are more into visual learning. I also play music in class to make them interested in learning when it seems as if they become bored. The*

class is equipped with machines like over locks and sewing machines for the practical side of the subject".

Ed3/2. "*One of the strategies that I use is checking that the learners are able to do things on their own rather than standing in front of them and always teaching. Regularly assessing them using past papers to ensure that they are studying".*

Ed 4/1. "*There is a lack of resources at the school; as a Life Sciences teacher, I don't have models. I have to be creative by using videos to expose them to things that we don't have. I use colourful pictures when I show the diagrams. I have created a culture of communicating in scientific terms. I also use previous question papers. I give them a glossary of biological terms*".

The educators' responses show that educators from schools one and four do things differently. While other teachers talk about past papers, which everyone uses, the educators from schools 1 and 4 have deployed different methods of making the teaching process exciting and meaningful for the learners. For example, one teacher above identified different types of learners and modified the lesson according to their different levels.

4.6.3. District support

The DBE mandates education districts to support and work with principals and schools to ensure that all learners have access to high-quality education (DBE, 2013). Districts are responsible for ensuring school support to enable them to perform to their maximum potential. The regular visits by the district officials at schools to support schools are essential in letting the principal see that they are not alone in the fight to ensure learners get high- quality education (Bantwini and Moorosi, 2018).

Hence, the district has a learner support section dedicated to ensuring learners at school are assisted with social worker services, psychologists and programmes from SYRAC (Sports, Youth development, Recreation, Arts and Culture). Most schools that are doing well exploit the services of sections like that and even use the curriculum section to assist novice educators and ensure the continuous development of educators who have long been in the services.

4.6.4. District direct learner support

The district officials' job description is to visit schools, support them and monitor what they do as required. The district assists the schools in the following way: ensuring learners can pass.

P3. "*The subject advisors are supporting the school in every way. They do not only monitor the educators' work, but they also come and do direct intervention by teaching the learners when they come to the school. They also mentor the new educators, as the educators do not stay for a long time in this area*".

P4. "*Subject advisors do support the school. They even come during holiday classes. When the school experiences a shortage of teachers, they do close the gap to teach the learners while the school is in the process of appointing*".

Ed1/1. "*The district is hands-on they look after the wellbeing of the learners; the section of learner support they are frequently at the school. The subject advisor sends us policy documents for the subjects; they organise memo discussions to ensure marking is at the same standard. She communicates via WhatsApp because they cannot visit schools regularly due to transport and distance. We exchange assessment papers as the educators in the district to ensure quality in our assessment*".

Ed2/1. "*The subject for business studies comes to the school when they have time or transport. They do not only come to school to check the files and admin, but they also do direct learner support, where they go to classes to talk to the learners and give them tips on how to approach questions*".

Ed2/2. "*They are always available to provide us with resources that we need to assist the learners pass. There is a WhatsApp group where we can communicate any of our needs to them. They also arrange teacher development activities to help educators.*

Although the district's primary role is that of oversite and monitoring, the subject advisors have taken a role of not only monitoring but supporting the schools in showing them how to it is done by directly teaching the learners as a form of showing the educators how tackled certain topics and provide the extra material for enrichment. Schools that are performing even take advantage of accommodations and concessions given by the district and province to ensure that struggling learners get some advantage, like being given extra time or having a reader or a scriber.

4.6.5. Extended hour programme

The situation in rural areas is unique; the school cannot just run for a minimum of seven hours as required in the PAM (Personnel Administrative Measures) document, which sets out the conditions of employment for educators. If you release learners to go home after school and think that they will study on their own, most of them will not do it because of the challenges mentioned below.

P3:" *The environment is adversely affecting the results of the school because people are not working and they are indulging in alcohol and drugs. The parents are always intoxicated, and they can't even support their children".*

P4:" *The environment is affecting the results badly because there is a huge problem of alcohol abuse. Drug abuse is emerging because of the town being next to the N1. The parents in this area are not working; they depend on the social grants for survival".*

Ed1/1: *"The area is largely affected by alcohol and drug abuse; most of the parents are heavy drinkers and neglect the wellness of their kids".*

Ed2/2: "*The environment around here is not enabling or inspiring for the learners because the learners do not push themselves. As a teacher, I'm the one who has to push the learners to pass by constantly coming up with strategies to make them pass".*

Ed3/3: "*Most of the learners come from abusive families, alcohol abuse-stricken families and the parents are not working; those situations always pose a threat to their education because they are*

carrying a lot of baggage".

The situations presented above clearly show that if learners are not kept at school to ensure they are studying or doing their homework, most of them will not finish their matric. You need to respond to such situations as a leader and a teacher. The best measure put in place by schools that are doing well is to ensure they always have a timetable that enables learners to be at school in the afternoon and during the weekends.

Even when learners in urban areas are allowed to prepare for the exam independently, they only come to school to write their papers and go back home to prepare for the next exam. In rural areas, you must hold their hands, walk them into the exam room and prepare them for every paper they have to write for the whole duration of the examination. Leepo (2015) discovered in his study that one of the strategies to improve performance in the Free State province is to accommodate learners in a hostel or at school where they would be placed and attend school until the final examination is written.

4.7. Research Question 2: What Kind of Leadership and Systems are Required to Maintain Excellent Performance?

4.7.1. Role-played SMT members

The SMT members play a major role in how the school perform. Their leadership style and how they conduct themselves as exemplary to educators sets a tone for how they conduct themselves and approach their work.

4.7.1.1. Instructional leadership

Providing resources, teacher development, communication and monitoring were mentioned a lot when I posed questions regarding the role played by SMT members. The principals spoke mainly of providing resources for the educators to be able to do their work and monitoring the work done by the educators, which was important to ensure that work was being done as expected. The principals had this to say:

P1: "*I ensure that resources that educators need like copies, textbooks and classrooms for teaching and taking them to developmental courses. I advise the educators on the topics that they need to do from the annual teaching plan. Moderate their assessments to ensure they are at the right standard. I also monitor that they do their work as expected.*"

P2:" *I ensure that the school has the correct and enough human resources. Our role is to generally ensure that the educators know what to teach and monitor that they*
teach the correct content at the required pace".

P3:" *I ensure that programmes are in place that ensure that contact time between teachers and learners takes place. The role of the SMT is basically to overlook how the educators are performing their duties.*

P4: "*My role as a principal is to ensure that resources are available at school, and together with the SMT and educator, we come up with different programmes to*
improve performance at our school".

According to the participants above, their primary role is to provide resources for educators to carry out their teaching and learning mandate. They understand that without resources like textbooks and conducive classrooms, it will be materially impossible for educators even to begin teaching the learners. After providing the resources, they ensure that the expected outcomes are delivered by monitoring and controlling the work done by educators. Monitoring and control assist the teachers and the SMT in evaluating their work and changing approaches if challenges are identified or if more or different resources are needed (Safer & Fleischman, 2005). Therefore, monitoring and evaluating educators work by SMT will lead to improved learning and continuous development of educators.

4.7.1.2. Institutional values

Institutions comprise different individuals, and eventually, these individuals become one in an organisation where they share a common understanding and interpretations of acceptable norms of collective activity (Suddaby et al., 2010). For an organisation like a school to thrive, all the stakeholders should have a common understanding to steer the school in the right direction. One principal from a performing school said this about having a common goal.

P1:" *I employ a democratic leadership style, where I allow people to voice their opinions when it comes to issues in the school and makes everyone feel involved and they know the direction that the school is taking".*

The above comment concurs with what is happening at the school where they can achieve, and it differs from other schools where I did not get such content. Even when talking to the principal, I did not hear any comment where they talked about how they share values; it was always about how they solved immediate problems rather than having a long-term vision with everyone.

4.7.1.3. Support

According to Pitt Barnes and Lang (2023), Teaching is the most stressful profession in the world and even more so in South Africa. Stress levels affect the educator's mental health, teacher burnout, poor performance and job dissatisfaction overall. Working conditions and learner behaviour appeared to be the thorny issue that makes teaching difficult in the schools I visited. The teacher cannot focus on teaching, but they have to struggle to get the learners to attend the classes and school.

4.7.1.4. Recognition

The working environment is very stressful in South African schools, and most of the time, employees need to be motivated or supported to endure the harsh conditions they experience in schools. In their scientific study, Bradler et al. (2016) concluded that showing recognition to employees in public leads to a significant increase in performance. This is how the educators are shown recognition in the schools I visited.

P1: "*We meet with the SGB to discuss some incentives that we can give to the educators for the extra mile that they take for the learners. As a principal, I give them a certificate when they have done well in front of other colleagues".*

P2: *"Pastoral care is also one of my roles where I ensure that educators are also emotionally fit to perform their duties. I also invite specialists from outside to assist the learners during weekends to assist my teachers with teaching content".*

P3. "*I ensure that they are motivated from the hardships they experience at school. By inviting motivational speakers to the school. We ensure that the educators have resources to do their job".*

The participants showed support in different ways they knew how. From the above comments, only the "P1" talks about recognising educators by giving them incentives, which can be monetary or providing them with meals during late classes and the weekends. "P1" also highlights giving educators certificates when they have done well, motivating them to continue doing more. P2 and P3 are just doing what is required by them as per their duties, which is to provide resources and give pastoral care to the educators, and they are not going over and beyond their call of duty to motivate the educators. The educators also had their way of keeping learners going even when it was difficult, and they had these to say.

Ed 1/2." *I motivate them to take their schooling seriously looking at the background. I constantly talk to them to set goals and try to achieve them".*

Ed 3/1. *"I motivate the learners by talking to them and showing them examples of the kind of life they are living and how they have an opportunity to change their lives through education".*

Ed 3/2. *"I always motivate them using myself as an example. I show them that I was attending the same school as them in the same town and managed to make good choices, and I tell them that it's also possible for them to achieve the same".*

Ed 3/3." *I try to talk to my learners and show them the value of education. I try to give them prizes for their performance in order to motivate them to do more".*

Ed 4/1. *"I keep my learners motivated, I try by all means to make the subject interesting. Like I said, I use colourful pictures. I have a sense of humour, so I'm able to engage the learners and relate to their situations".*

Most educators motivate learners by talking when you look at the information above, and learners get bored when you are always talking. They come to classes and give all their effort for the classes or lessons to be interesting or have something to look forward to when they go to class. The educators who demonstrate these are Ed 1/1 and 1/3, which is why their school is getting good results. The positive social climate in the classroom stimulates the ability of learners to learn and improves subjects' results

4.7.1.5. Learner discipline

Segalo and Rambuda (2018) state that, generally, discipline should be a norm in a classroom to ensure the education process's functionality. They further note that the increase in the use and abuse of drugs in our communities fuels the decline in morality by learners. How the schools that I visited handled learners' discipline was different, and each one of them struggled to ensure learners were disciplined, and it is a task that they take on every day. This is how each handled it at their respective schools.

P1. "You will find that some learners fail because they are not attending school or classes; as a principal, I make it my priority to ensure that learners attend classes, even if it means that I have to go out and get them from home".

The discipline of some learners leads to the school being unable to reach its intended levels of achievement. The principal above understands that they are working in communities where learners are left on their own by their parents and not encouraged to attend school regularly. As a principal, he/she takes matters into his/her hands to ensure all learners attend.

As I observed in one underperforming school, there was no fence on the other site of the school and the learners were coming in and out of the school during teaching and learning time. Even in the staff room the learners were coming I and out. While in performing schools there was order and I could not see learners moving around during school hours. Even when changing classes in performing school leaners moved in an orderly manner.

4.7.1.6. Good performance

Good performance is always demanded in Free State education, and the researcher has attended a lot of HoD roadshows where he goes around the province and meets with the district and SMTs of underperforming schools. In those meetings, only one thing was discussed: learner performance in Grade 12, what is causing some schools to underperform, and how the district, head office officials, and schools can turn around underperforming schools. An educator's performance and effectiveness in the classroom should be linked to the learner's performance on tests and examination results (Bichi, 2017). Several strategies are presented, and these are some things that schools do to improve the performance of grade 12 learners.

4.8. The school environment

All the schools I visited are in rural townships and residential areas surrounded by the inhabitants' houses or households. The areas are still structured according to the spatial development of the apartheid era, where there is still an area called a "town" which is inhibited by the white communities, and they still have Afrikaans medium schools mainly attended by white learners and some few black African children and a drop of coloured communities. The schools in town are well-resourced and still have their hostel buildings and playing fields, occupying a considerable hector of land. The schools I visited have only the admin block, the classes and the playing fields are not equipped and not well looked after. Nevertheless, at least all of them are built with bricks, decently looked after, and properly maintained fences.

4.9. The teaching and learning atmosphere

The atmosphere in the secondary school I visited was impressive, and I could feel that teaching and learning were happening. There was no movement of learners of learners outside; it was silent, and the educators were seen hastily moving to their respective classrooms. On arrival at the second school I visited, I found a group of learners standing outside the schoolyard. They seemed to have arrived late, and the gates were locked while they waited for the principal to come and allow them in or whatever the procedure was. The gate was opened, and I fairly observed that the school was in and the learners were in class while I waited at the admin to be assisted by the clerk.

I arrived at the third school at about noon and was unsure whether the school was in or out. Learners stood outside, most teachers were in the staffroom, and no clerk was at a reception. I found an educator on the computer, maybe printing or typing something. The principal was sitting in the office chatting to some driver from the district. It can even be heard on the interview recordings that learners were making noise next to the principal's office while I was asking him questions.

At the last school I visited, I arrived between 11:00 and 12:00. I think it was break time because there was the movement of learners and what seemed to be assistant teachers and

teachers going out of the gate towards the shops. Even though I made an appointment with the acting principal to visit the school and requested him to organise participants, I still had to move around the school and ask the educators for an interview. Some educators were in class with learners, while in other classes, learners were standing at the door and moving up and down. There was no sense of teaching and learning taking place.

4.10. Classrooms

The classrooms in all schools were fairly decent and clean, with adequate furniture to allow teaching and learning to take place. The educator tried to modify them and put up posters relevant to the subject. All the schools still use chalkboards, and there was no evidence of incorporating any form of technology like projectors, except for one school where their educator brought the projector into the class and modified or turned the chalkboard into a whiteboard by painting it white so that she can project on it.

4.11. Observation of the School

Another method of collecting data was to observe how things are done at the school, how the researcher was welcomed, and what the general atmosphere is during school hours. The researcher recorded the observation on the observation tool. The researcher also went around the classes in some schools and saw the environment in which the teaching and learning takes place, the type of material and posters displayed in the classrooms.

According to Ahmadi (2018), learners' cooperation can be increased through technology. Moreover, he further stated that computer technology helps teachers meet their learners' educational needs. Using technology like a projector helps the educator make learning interesting for the learners, and it is a way to make them attend school and look forward to attending class. Schools that perform well achieve results by integrating technology and other strategies that make learners cooperate and improve their performance.

The schools that are not performing educators were always complaining of simple teaching material like printing as there was constant unavailability of ink and printing paper. The educators at these schools still use traditional methods such as textbooks to teach the learners, and there are no other ways of delivering curriculum to make it interesting.

4.12. Document Analysis

Document analysis has been instrumental in qualitative studies and has been used frequently. It analyses documents such as books and institutional reports (Morgan,2022). The documents that I needed for the research are minutes of meetings, materials used for teaching learning and the mission and vision statements of the schools. The documents mentioned above will assist the researcher in identifying the planning in the SMT meetings regarding learner performance, and the type of textbook question papers used to enhance learner performance.

4.12.1. Minutes meetings

The researcher requested the documents from the principals of the different schools. After the requests, it was not easy to get them. I have not seen or analysed them in my data collection as there seemed to be some resistance to revealing to the researcher what is contained in the minutes about advancing learners' achievement in grade 12.

4.12.2. Teaching and learning material

All schools use different textbooks prescribed by the department that are CAPS-approved. The educators complained that they are subjected to use certain textbooks that the department is making available to order on the EMIS portal, and they cannot get the books they desire because the head office handles the LTSM money. Even if they do not like what is offered to order, they do not have a choice because the school does not decide what is to be ordered.

Moreover, they use previous question papers that they can download on the DBE website and the additional notes provided by the subject advisors. Three educators from the three schools raised a point that sometimes the school runs out of printing paper and ink due to financial constraints at the school, which delays their teaching schedule, and they have to wait for a couple of days before the situation is restored.

4.12.3. Mission and vision statements

Sulastri et al. (2021) describe missions and vision as the goals that provide a guideline for school activities and the basis for the type of education provided to learners. He has noted

that many schools have mission and vision statements that are done for compliance and do not form the basis of how they deliver the education to achieve good results.

The vision said" to provide quality and lifelong education to all members of the community", and the mission reads" To establish an institution of teaching and learning excellence that will develop responsible and dedicated citizens". However, upon my observation, there was less teaching and learning atmosphere at that school, and they have been underperforming in the Matric results for the last four years.

At other schools, the mission and vision were not displayed, and I had to request them from the principals, which had the researcher asking himself whether everyone at the school knew what the vision and mission of the school were. The mission and vision statements in the other school read "to provide a nurturing and safe environment for learning and teaching", the mission read "by ensuring that teachers are in class on time teaching, by instilling values and ethos such as discipline, respect, loyalty, commitment and responsibility".

The school embraced its mission and vision statement because teaching was taking place at the school, and the environment was appropriate for teaching and learning. The school has been classified as performing as an indication that they are achieving its vision and mission. The vision of the third school is "to ensure that every learner achieves their maximum

independence, to play an active role in the community and labour market". The mission is "good quality teaching will be offered at all times, and the pursuit of good values such as purposefulness, care, honesty and love". The school embraces the vision and mission statements as the teaching occurs at all times when the researcher is there.

The school's mission and vision are vital and link to the daily activities that need to happen at school. They also have a direct link to how the school perform. The performing school in the study had a similar mission: "learning and teaching". It is evident by the results they achieve that learning and teaching are indeed taking place.

4.13. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have analysed data that answers the questions of what strategies schools use for performing schools and what kind of leadership and systems are required to maintain excellent performance. The data was analysed thematically method. The findings revealed that all schools have some strategies that they try to use to achieve good results in Grade 12. Strategies can be there on paper, but their implementation and success depend on the principal, the educator, the parents, and the learners' attitude towards achieving the goals.

Schools that are performing showed signs of principals collaborating with the educators and involving them in the processes that need to be taken to achieve results; the role that the SMT plays is crucial. The chapter also looked at the factors outside of the school that can be disruptive or supportive towards the school, how each school faces challenges, and how they take advantage of the support from stakeholders around the school. In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss the findings, reach conclusions and offer recommendations.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the summary and conclusion drawn from the study. The study's main aim is to find out why other schools in Xhariep district perform better in Grade 12 results by attaining more than 85% pass than others who attain less than 85% pass rate when they face the same contextual factors. It also provides recommendations that different stakeholders can pursue to mitigate the problem of schools in rural areas that are not performing well in Grade 12.

The study was conducted in the rural areas of Xhariep district in the Free State province of South Africa. It involved different stakeholders within a school environment in the four towns of the four schools the researcher visited. The schools the researcher visited were good-performing and underperforming to answer the research question and the hypothesis mentioned in Chapter 1.

5.2. Summary of Findings

The research wanted to understand why other schools in rural areas obtained good Grade 12 results, but other schools underperformed. In the Free State, a school performs well if they obtain a pass percentage of 85. This was done by comparing. The study seeks to answer the following questions.

- What are the factors leading to underperformance?
- What are the strategies used by performing schools?
- What kind of leadership and systems are required to maintain excellent performance?

The main findings were in the previous chapter, Chapter 4: Analysis and Presentation of Data. Schools that are performing showed signs of principals collaborating with the educators and involving them in the processes that need to be taken to achieve results, the role that the SMT plays is crucial. Moreover, the schools that are referred to above, mentioned also implement strategies like "adopting" a learner, where each educator ensures that the learner assigned to them is attending school and doing their schoolwork.

The also use a strategy of ensuring the is always supervision by SMT members when learners are attending extended teaching hours. They also ensure that educators are recognised for good performance and the ones struggling are supported on how to improve their work. They also ensure learners constantly account for their results at the end of each term with their parents, the learners who are performing are given recognition by pasting their names on schools notice board as good examples to other learners. The schools that are not performing have SMT members who are not involved in supervising the extra classes and do not support their educators. The educators are not recognised for their hard work. The learners are not recognised for their hard work and they are left on their own and they do not get special attention from the teachers to improve their performance.

5.3. Summary of Findings According to the Main Themes

5.3.1. Role played by SMT and principal

In one of the performing schools, the principal mentioned that at the beginning of each quarter, the SMT meet and analyses the performance. After the analysis, they discussed and found ways to improve on whatever area they were lacking and came up with strategies that could assist the school in performing better. What the principal mentioned was also present in their in the minutes of the meeting, and the details were outlined in the minutes I have read.

The next step will be to meet with all the educators, present them with their plans, and hear how they feel about them and how they can be improved. After that, everyone will own the strategies, and everyone involved will understand how things will be done. With this common understanding, all stakeholders understand their role in the plan towards a common goal of the school. While I was present at the school, I observed in performing schools that when its teaching time, everyone was in class. In underperforming schools, some classes where in and in other classes learners were standing at the door and other were even going out of the school gate.

5.3.2. Support

5.3.2.1. Educators

In schools that perform, support is given to the educators and learners. Support is in the form of recognising the good work done by educators. In one school, the principal recognised the effort of the educators by giving everyone a certificate of good performance. The teachers were given the basic resources like copying machines and teaching material needed to perform their duties well.

5.3.2.2. Learners

The learners in performing schools are supported beyond the premises of the school. In one school that is performing, the school has a strategy that they call "adopt a learner". Each teacher adopts a learner in Grade 12, supports the learner with challenges at school and home, and tries to mitigate and support them where they can. A strategy like the one above assists the school in understanding the challenges learners face and tries to assist where possible because sometimes a learner might not be performing at school because of challenges outside the school.

Another thing that the educator does at one of the performing schools is cater to different types of learners in their class. They have classes and materials that suit learners according to their performance levels because the teacher recognises that the learners are not the same and they need to be supported differently. The educator gives challenging content to high flyers and manageable content to learners who are struggling to enable them to reach at least a level 2 or 3.

5.3.2.3. Extended hour programme

Extra tuition or extra classes were a common strategy used by all the schools I visited. The performing schools use this time to strengthen whatever content is taught during regular school hours. They give learners past papers to test their level of understanding of learners and improve where they are lacking. In underperforming schools, the extended hour programmes are used by educators to catch up on the work not done during regular school hours due to factors like teacher absenteeism or disruptions that might happen.

5.3.2.4. Parental involvement

All the schools that I visited had the same experience when it comes to parental involvement. Parents in the rural areas are not supporting schools as they should. In all schools, they face a situation where most parents do not attend parent meetings. The schools even struggle to pass a budget due to low meeting numbers. In one school, a teacher mentioned that parents come to school when they have accusations against a teacher or a principal but will never show up when you call them to discuss their learner's performance.

5.3.2.5. Environment

The participants described the situation in the areas I visited as dire and said that the schools do not assist the learners in achieving good results. I was told that the learner's attention is drawn away from schools by things like drug use, taverns, and social events taking place, especially during examination time. The schools are battling learners' attention with the things happening in the environment, and they have to devise ways to make learners focus on their studies and attend weekend classes.

5.4. Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the causes of schools in rural areas achieving different results but facing similar contextual factors. The first question that the study answered was the factors that lead to underperformance. The Factors like socio-economic conditions that exist in Xhariep district are dire, the issue of alcohol abuse was the most mentioned factor that is affecting learners. The alcohol abuse is by parents and the learners, with learners is worse because they choose to stay away from school during weekends and choose to indulge in alcohol. Poverty also affects the learner's performance due to parents not working and can't get all the necessary tools like calculators to use at school.

The second goal was to answer the questions about what strategies performing schools use. The research findings revealed that all schools have strategies to try to improve performance, but the performing schools are the ones that implement them better and yield the desired results. The research revealed that all schools have strategies like extended-hour programs like weekend classes and holiday classes, but it does not guarantee that the learners will all attend. Performing schools go the extra mile to ensure learners are attending, and they do things like adopting a learner by the educators who visit the learner's homes and have a

relationship with the parents. The educator who adopted the learner will hold the learner accountable if they are not attending.

Performing, they also infuse interesting activities in their strategies that learners enjoy, like the educator from one school taking learners to watch theatre plays related to their literature content. She also hosted gallery dinners for Grade 12 towards the end of the year, and that motivated the learners to be disciplined because you cannot be part of the activities if you are not disciplined as a learner.

The third question was what kind of leadership and systems are required to maintain excellent performance. The research has also discovered that a leader must collaborate with the stakeholders when making certain decisions, especially those ensuring learners pass. Most schools hold camps at the schools, and most do not have hostel facilities and classes are turned into bedrooms. Schools do not have money to hire people to look after the learners at night, and teachers are roped in to take turns and sleep at the school to ensure learners are studying and not misbehaving.

For teachers to agree to sleep at school and leave their families, they would have to fully understand the goals that the school is trying to achieve. Thus, as a leader, collaborating and involving them when making decisions is vital so they understand why certain sacrifices must be made. Instructional leadership has also shown its existence in performing schools. As leaders, all principals teach grade 12 classes and are involved in these classes for learners. The principal and SMT need to lead whatever they preach to the learners.

Performing schools also have good systems to ensure learners attend classes, such as visiting the learner's homes when they show signs of being absent. They hold accountability sessions for parents and learners at the beginning of the term, where parents and learners account for the good or bad performance from the previous quarter. They also ensure that their school-based support team refers learners for concessions. Camping for the learners at school has shown to be a good system, especially for those who do not have stability in their homes and those who are distracted by the things that happen in the townships.

5.5. Limitations of the Study

The study was done with a sample of four schools from two out of three circuits of the Xhariep district. There are five districts in the free state and 76 more in the country. The experience of schools might be different from the ones the researcher visited.

The data collected excluded documents like meeting minutes held by the SMT, and some information given about such meetings was from participants, which could not be verified. A principal from the underperforming school in the study was new in the district, having just one year in the school. The information he gave was from the years that he has been at the school, and he could not provide details of past years' experience there.

5.6. Recommendations

The district office can also learn and formulate an action plan to assist with underperformance. The research generated recommendations that can be implemented by both the district and the underperforming schools. The recommendations are outlined as follows.

- The decisions taken when formulating strategies should include every stakeholder in the school environment so that everyone contributes and owns them. This ensures that everyone commits and has the same goal. Principals and SMTs should not develop strategies in their offices and force them down educators' throats.
- Strategies should not only be about learners being in class all the time, or else the learners will get tired and start losing interest. There should be fun and interesting activities that draw learners to school.
- Revision material should be differentiated according to different learners; not all learners achieve high levels. As a school, there is a programme where different levels of learners are catered for so that even the low-level learners feel a sense of achievement and feel they are contributing or gaining something.
- The Department of Education should ensure that the schools have sufficient funds to feed the learners, as some stay longer at school when they are given something to eat.
- The schools should also be proactive in approaching ward councillors, farmers, and businesses to assist with whatever food can be given to learners during camps. Principals should be held accountable as engaging with stakeholders around the school is one of the

key performance areas.

- It should be a policy for all schools to have an accountability session where parents attend with their learners to account for their results, and the district should monitor it. In that way, parents will ensure they support their children, as no one wants to be viewed negatively. The sessions will also allow parents and learners to raise their challenges, and together with the school, solutions will come up.

- Concessions and accommodations for learners with barriers to learning should be compulsory for all schools to identify the learners as early as Grade 8 at least. The department should not leave it to the discretion of the school. They should develop a system or some assessment that will enable them to identify barriers in all schools.

5.7. Suggestions for Further Research

More studies should be done in other provinces and districts to further understand their experiences and develop more solutions to ensure rural schools are not left behind while children in urban areas achieve more.

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