PARENTS' AND EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING HIGH RATE OF ACADEMIC FAILURE OF LEARNERS IN CLARKE ESTATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

By

Lucille Jacoba Petersen

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A Thesis Report in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Master in Education at the University of the Western Cape.

Supervisor: Prof. O. Bojuwoye

Date: November 2010

Declaration

I declare that **"Parents' and educators' perceptions of factors influencing academic failure of learners in Clarke Estate schools"** is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicted and acknowledged by complete references.

Lucille Jacoba Petersen

Signed_____ Date _____

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate parents' and educators' perceptions of factors influencing high rate of academic failure of learners in Clarke Estate primary schools. A quantitative, descriptive study design was used in this study. A descriptive study is used to gain information about characteristics within a particular field of study.

The instrument used was a research questionnaire as it is a quick and cheap instrument to obtain a lot of information covering a large area within a relatively short time. The study population was confined to two schools in Clarke Estate. The participants were randomly selected. The sample from the two selected schools comprised twenty educators and two hundred parents. The sample was heterogeneous, comprising both male and female.

The results revealed that there are not one or a few factors responsible for the high rate of academic failure of learners in schools. Rather there are arrays of factors interacting together to cause academic failure in schools. The participants of this study considered major factors responsible for high rate of academic failure of learners in schools to be due to learners themselves. Some of these factors are low level of interest in schoolwork, absenteeism, too much time devoted to watching television, cellphone and internet, peer pressure and idleness by learners. Some factors considered by participants as contributing to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools were also found to be due to home. For instance, participants considered low level of interest in children's education by parents, educational level of parents, poverty, living conditions at home and drug and alcohol abuse by parents are all responsible for high rate of academic failure of learners in schools.

Finally participants also considered those factors due to school, which includes school environment not conducive to learning, lack of learning materials in school, irrelevant curriculum, poorly trained and ill-prepared educators and poor educator attitude towards learners. All of the above mentioned factors contribute to high rate of academic failure and high drop out rates at schools. These learners who do not complete their formal school education, are semi- or unskilled and has a negative impact on the economy of the country.

From the research findings, recommendations were made in an attempt towards solving the important issue of the high rate of academic failure in schools.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge and extend my gratitude to the following who contributed to this study:

I am most grateful to the Almighty God for granting me the strength and courage during my studies.

I highly appreciate my supervisor, Prof. N. Bojuwoye, for his help, support, guidance and assistance in this study.

I am most grateful to my husband, Deon and son Kyle for their love, encouragement throughout the period of study, I applaud you for your patience.

I thank my parents for their love, support and encouragement.

I thank our school secretary, Mrs. J. Regions, for her assistance and help.

Dedication

I dedicate this minithesis to the Lord Almighty God. I also dedicate this work to my late niece, Lucinda Bianca Sampson, whom I am always proud of.

List of Acronyms

AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

ESL: English Second Language

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

HSRC: Human Sciences Research Council

IQ: Intelligence Quotient

LOLT: Language of teaching and learning

LSEN: Learners with Special Educational Needs

MLA: Monitoring Learning Achievement

MST: Mathematics, Science and Technology

NELS: National Educational Longitudinal Survey

PISA: Programme International Student Assessment

SABC: South African Broadcasting Corporation

SACMEQ II: Southern and East Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality

TIMSS: Human Sciences Research Council

UNESCO: United Nations Education Science and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF: United Nations Children Education Fund

WCED: Western Cape Education Department

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the Study

South Africa's move towards a more impartial education system was hugely complicated by the long period of colonialism followed by four decades of apartheid. The interest of white South Africans was privileged against those of blacks. Africans were placed in homelands which subjected them to dysfunctional systems of government, poor schools and little job opportunities. The vast majority of Africans emerged from apartheid with low income and lack of job opportunities (Fiske and Ladd, 2004:234-235).

The country's long history of using language policy for political purpose hampered the investment to address the language challenges faced by African students. The managerial inadequacy and low quality of the apartheid-era black universities provided an appealing rationale for the national policy makers not to invest in them. The challenges involved in creating a more equitable system were huge and would have to take a long time to remedy (Fiske and Ladd, 2004).

Fiske and Ladd (2004) state further that the apartheid government greatly restricted money spent on black schools, resulting in poor facilities, poor educator training, and an impoverished curriculum. The quality of education provided to black students prior to 1994, was of inferior quality. The long struggle against apartheid caused black students to distrust the apartheid government. Universities for blacks were placed in remote areas and the staff was second language Afrikaans speakers. This led to inferior institutions that were not on the same academic level with the more affluent white universities. With the election of the first democratic government in 1994, policy makers had to work with often underqualified educators who were trained under former apartheid system. Extreme poverty complicated the efforts of educators to keep learners in school and motivate them to finish their matric (Fiske and Ladd, 2004).

According to Du Toit (1994:49), there is a strong link between the socio-economic status of a community and school performance. Children's true potential will be hampered by negative influences of a particular community if the socio-economic conditions of a particular community are worse. The majority of South Africans have poor economic status. Homes have a lack of basic amenities such as water, electricity and a condusive atmosphere for studying. It is difficult for learners to have the required learning materials needed for academic progress in schools due to the high poverty level. Schools are under resourced and struggles with inadequate teaching facilities, lack of classrooms, chairs, desks and overcrowding (Mathunyane, 1992:16).

Many factors within the child (intrinsic), could pose a threat to effective learning. Health related problems, as well as neurological, physiological and genetic problems, can cause him/her to have problems learning at school. According to Du Toit (1994), a child's learning might be hampered by innate or acquired disabilities such as blindness, deafness or mental handicap, which could cause children to get specialized instructions to reach their full potential. Neurological dysfunction can cause learners to experience behavioural problems.

Fleisch (2008) states that South Africa's learners are falling behind internationally. South Africa participated in one of the first large scale cross-international studies of quality called Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA). The study (UNESCO/UNICEF 'Education for All' campaign) was designed to track and monitor participating countries primary school's quality of education. National samples of grade four learners were involved in the study. South Africa was one of a number of participating African countries (Fleisch, 2008).

Four hundred schools in all nine provinces participated in the Grade Four Numeracy, Literacy and Life Skills test. More than 10 400 learners participated. The average scores for the three tasks were 30, 2 percent for Numeracy, 48, 1 percent for Literacy and 47, 1 percent for Life Skills. In the Literacy area, almost 44 percent scored below 25 percent and 12 percent obtained scores of 75 percent or higher. Children performed best on items

requiring word recognition in the Literacy tasks. The table below presents the results of the study (Fleisch, 2008).

Table 1.1: Scores for Numeracy, Literacy and Life Skills, MLA 1999

Country	Numeracy %	Literacy %	Life Skills %
Tunisia	60,4	77,9	74,7
Mauritius	58,5	61,0	58,0
Morocco	56,4	67,6	62,3
Botswana	51,0	48,0	56,0
Uganda	49,3	58,7	66,8
Madagascar	43,7	54,7	72,1
Mali	43,6	51,8	56,9
Malawi	43,0	35,0	77,0
Senegal	39,7	48,9	45,7
Niger	37,3	41,1	44,7
Zambia	36,0	43,0	51,0
South Africa	30,2	48,1	47,1

Source: Primary Education in Crisis by Brahm Fleisch, 2008

Table 1.2: Distribution of South African scores in reading in the SACMEQ II study.

Levels		Frequency	Percentage
1	Pre-reading	385	12,2
2	Emergent reading	596	18,1
3	Basic reading	604	19,1
4	Reading for meaning	506	16,0
5	Interpretive reading	298	9,4
6	Inferential reading	223	7,0
7	Analytic reading	344	10,9
8	Critical reading	208	6,6
	Total	3163	100

Source: Primary Education in Crisis by Brahm Fleisch (2008)

GRADE 3 – ASSESSEMENT RESULTS 2002

Table 1.3: Percentage of mathematical skills of learners in the grade.

Mathematics	Below grade 1	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
School A	12	50	8	15	15
Circuit 6	15	42	11	20	12
Metropole North	12	33	10	22	22
Province	15	37	11	20	17

Average percentage marks and percentage of learners who obtained more than 50 percent.

Task	Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3		Grade 4	
	% Mark	% Pass	% Mark	% Pass	% Mark	% Pass	% mark	% Pass
Addition	90	90	50	55	28	28	20	35
Subtraction	81	95	39	33	29	28	14	13
Repeated Addition & Subtraction	50	50	26	23	43	55	13	3
Division of fractions	50	50	19	25	13	3		
Arrangement			48	48	35	35		

Average percentage and the percentage of learners who had more than 50 percent for knowledge or skills per grade in Numeracy

Knowledge or Skills	Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3		Grade 4	
	% Mark	% Pass	% Mark	% Pass	% Mark	% Pass	% Mark	% Pass
Counting, arranging and numbers	77	80	49	53	30	35	55	55
Problem solving	50	50	29	33	17	10	0	0
Calculations	82	95	50	55	41	33	17	15

Literacy results

LITERACY	Below grade 1	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
School A	15	12	35	38	0
Circuit B	13	8	27	22	30
Metropole North	8	10	21	21	40
Province	10	12	24	17	37

Source: Western Cape Education Department (2003)

The above table (Table 1.3) presents School A's results of the National Report on Systemic Evaluation done by the Department of Education on all grade 3 learners in the Western Province in 2002. The study was designed to monitor grade 3 learners' results in Numeracy and Literacy. The grade 3 learners of School A's average scores on Literacy and Numeracy were lower than those of Circuit 6, Metropole North and the Western Province.

According to Howie (2005), the first round of results from the Third International Mathematics and Science study were cause for national anxiety. In the Third International Mathematics and Science study, South Africa came at the bottom of the study. The mean scores of the country were seen as a weakness in Mathematics and Science teaching in secondary school rather than as a symptom of the crisis in primary school. The Human Sciences Research Council, HSRC stated that the poor performance was due to the unfortunate timing of the administration of the test which was done in the midst of curriculum change (Fleisch, 2008). But Reddy (Media Release 2004) points out that factors such as poverty, resources and infrastructure, low teacher qualifications, poor learning cultures and poor language are contributing factors to low scores.

The Human Sciences Research Council administered the TIMSS (Third International Mathematics and Science Study) 2003 to 9000 Grade Eight learners (15 year olds) in November 2002. Little change from 1999 assessment with East Asian countries scoring highest and South Africa appearing at the bottom of the list with the lowest average score in both Mathematics and Science, were reflected by the results. South Africa's average score for Mathematics was 264 (SE 5,5) compared to an international average of 467 and Science mean score was 244 (SE 6,7). The low score hides the huge spread in achievement within the 9000 learners who took the test (Fleisch, 2008).

While different gauges are used by studies to measure achievement, altogether they all directly or indirectly point to the crisis in primary education achievement levels. This is the dilemma of extremely low average primary education achievement levels. The descriptive statistics that summarises the central tendency conceal the underlying pattern

of uneven achievement. While a small number of primary school children who attend affluent schools are achieving at curriculum benchmarked 'Grade level', which is comparable to countries such as the United States of America and Germany, a vast number of children attending disadvantaged schools do not acquire a basic level of mastery in reading, writing and mathematics. The academic achievement gap start in South African primary education in the Foundation Phase and it continues to the end of primary education and beyond (Fleisch, 2008).

According to Du Toit (1994), academic failure, is to a large extent, associated with poverty and poor socio-economic conditions. Poverty, poor living conditions and academic failure are worldwide on the increase. Waxman (1992:1) states that in recent years, the number of students at risk students or those who are educationally disadvantaged, has increased and so has their degree of disadvantage. Special measures are being introduced by many countries with previously high living standards, to assist large numbers of children who lag behind scholastically. Twenty percent of the school population in the United States of America comes from poor homes (Du Toit 1994:43).

Zaaiman (1998) argues that other factors such as poor socio-economic background, low parental education level, single parent families, overcrowded and poor housing conditions, and diverse language backgrounds, have been named by other authors as factors contributing to academic failure. Racial and ethnic identity, poverty status, family composition, mother's education and language background are named by Natriello, McDill and Pallas (1990:16) as five key indicators associated with the educationally disadvantaged and they insist that all these factors are linked to underachievement in schools.

Natriello (1990) and Cullen, Fletcher-Campbell, Bowen, Osgood and Kelleher (2000) point out that one of the main contributing factors to academic failure in schools is the mismatch between the academic curriculum offered by the school and the interests and skills of students. Studies among Brazilian high school students highlight their dissatisfaction with the curriculum. The majority of students wish to take part in activities not taught at school.

Concerns have been raised in Australia regarding the traditional school curriculum and how it is unrelated the lived experiences of many young people (Hattam, 2004).

Caillods and Postlethwaite (1998) further state that the curriculum is a very important element in the analysis of teaching / learning conditions and learner achievement because it states what must be learned, at what level, how much and provides guidelines on how learning is organised. Jones and Charlton (1996:19) state that learning content must be embedded in the context of the children's culture and life world in order to be meaningful to them. Learners distance themselves from learning of they find the curriculum pointless and meaningless and targeted at an appropriate level. Learners may find the curriculum irrelevant to their future work-related needs. Such behaviour may included learners not paying attention in class, not completing homework, not studying for tests and in some instances even truancy.

One of South Africa's greatest challenges in education today is the low Numeracy and Literacy levels. The National Report on Systemic Evaluation Department of Education (2003) found that the average scores of girls were slightly higher than that of boys and the performance of learners in literacy was similar across all provinces The grade three learners' national average literacy score in the South African Education system in 2003 was 54% (Department of Education, 2003). South African learners are falling behind the rest of the world in literacy levels to an alarming extent in 2008 (SABC News, 17 January 2008). A report by Allie-Husselman (2008) in the Athlone News on the 26th of March reported that the Minister of Education embarked on a rigorous national campaign called "Foundations for learning". The campaign aims to encourage teachers, learners and parents to jointly tackle the country's poor Literacy and Numeracy levels. The education department is committed to seeing that grade R receives quality education. As quality education starts with the foundation phase, the first years of schooling. The campaign will run over four years during which the education department hopes to double the country's literacy and Numeracy levels. Learners will be tested at the end of the four year period to determine its success.

2. Statement of the Study problem

Clarke Estate presents many challenges to the academic performance of the learners. According to Du Toit (1994), academic failure, is to a large extent, associated with family or community causal factors. Zaaiman (1998) similarly states that low socio-economic families are often single-parent and/or large families where the parents have low paid jobs and low levels of education. These families usually live in overcrowded and poorly resourced houses. These poor family circumstances have a negative influence on the learners' academic performance at school.

The majority of households in Clarke Estate are single- mother households or large families where parents have low paid jobs and low educational levels. Unemployment in the area is rife coupled with unhealthy living conditions, drug abuse and a high crime rate. The perceptions of these factors by parents and educators are what the study is about. The researcher is interested in which factors parents and educators consider or perceive to be more important in contributing to the academic failure of learners. The study was also designed to find out if educators' views were the same as those of parents' regarding the factors responsible for academic failures of learners.

3. Statement of Objectives

The main purpose of this study was to find out what factors educators and parents consider as responsible for the high rate of academic failures of learners in Clarke Estate primary schools. This study was also designed to find out whether or not there are differences in the

perceptions of parents and educators with regard to the factors they consider as responsible for the high failure rate of learners.

4. Research Questions

a) What do participants of this study consider as factors contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools?

b) Are there differences between the male and the female participants with regard to factors they considered as contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools?

c) Are there differences between parent and educator participants regarding factors they considered as contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools?

d) Are there differences between participants affiliated to School A and participants affiliated to School B with regard to factors contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools?

e) Are there differences between parent participants affiliated to School A and those parent participants affiliated to School B with regard to the factors they considered as contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools?

5. Rationale for the study

The negative effects of apartheid can still be seen in all aspects of South African society, including education, although apartheid came to a formal end with the 1994's first democratic elections (Fiske and Ladd, 2004:52). Economist Francis Wilson (2001) observed in a recent essay on the legacy of apartheid, that the harmful impact of the Bantu Education system caused damage that will take a long time to repair. Wilson further points

out that the mean-spiritedness which underlay the philosophy of Bantu education and the insufficient funds made available throughout most of the apartheid years, could almost have been designed to prevent them from being satisfactorily prepared for the challenges of globalisation in the 21st century. The failure rate of learners in primary schools is on the increase as learners continue to experience different barriers to learning. Landsberg (2008) states that factors responsible for the descending rate of academic performance of learners include family background variables, media of instruction, school curriculum, quality of educators, the societal social problems of high crime rate and drug abuse and generally inadequate educational support to learners. It was of interest to this study to identify specific factors responsible for academic failures of learners in Clarke Estate. Knowing these context specific factors should help to address the problem of academic failures of learners. Any effort to address such problem will certainly help learners to complete their schooling successfully which in turn will help them build appropriately towards their future career and contribute to the country's economy. With well-functioning learners graduating from our schools this will make for better quality of life and the well-being of the people of the country. Since no study of this kind has been done in Clarke Estate, this also provided rationale for this study to provide evidence-based data to enable policy-makers at both national and provincial levels acquire information as to how to minimize school failure and raise the standard of education.

While it is not the aim of this study to find solutions to all educational problems in the area, however, the study attempted to inform and sensitise educational authorities, teachers and parents about the factors that influences academic failure in schools. It is expected that the

study will enable stakeholders in education to understand the influences various aspects have on the learners' performances at school and reduce academic failure, reduce dropout rate, ensure better education policy to counter academic failure and to equip educators for better classroom management.

It is also hoped that the results of this study will shed light on why these schools do not improve their results irrespective of the amount of resources (textbooks, visual aids, library books) and interventions (learning material, lesson plans, learning programmes) provided to them by the government and non-governmental organisations. If the problem of academic failure is solved and learners are learning better, they might make better career choices and build a better academic future. Unemployment will be reduce, the standard of living will improve and also the quality of life of people as they function better as citizens and contributing to the nation's economy.

6. Definitions / Clarifications of terms

6.1 Learner

The Oxford Complete Word Finder describes a learner as "someone" who is learning a skill or subject. Synonymous for learner is one in the process of gaining knowledge of some sort through experience, study or instruction. Other terms used to describe a primary school learner is pupil. Learners are school children also referred to as pupils from the age of six to eighteen years old.

6.2 Academic performance

Performance is described by Page, Thomas and Marshall (1979:262), as 'action of a person or group when given a learning task". Performance is often presented in education as the same as achievement or attainment, in carrying out a task, assignment or course. Achievement is defined by Hawes and Hawes (1982:16) as successful accomplishment or performance in a particular subject, area, and course usually by reasons of skill, hard work and interest. Scholastic performance or scholastic achievement or attainment in education, can be seen as synonymous with academic performance.

6.3 Underachievement and the underachiever

Theoretically, underachievement represents an inconsistency between actual and expected performance (McCall, Evahn and Kratzer, 1992:2). Its meaning could be taken as "academic achievement which is at a lower level than would be predicted from a student's measured intelligence" (Donald and Green, 1995:19). Rimm (1997:18) describes it as a performance which is significantly below a pupil's demonstrated potential. In other words, it is a discrepancy between a learner's academic performance and some indicator of his ability. Learners are underachieving in school if they are not achieving according to their ability. While underachievement is the phenomenon, the learner is said to be an underachiever. Poor academic performance is generally shown by poor attainers, although, in reality they may be realizing their full potential. It cannot be expected of them to perform any better. Although the underachiever has potential, they still fall short.

Learners with special educational needs (LSEN), for example, those with mental, physical, or behavioural deficiencies may perform poorly academically due to their disabilities. To

make adequate academic progress in school, these learners require more than usual methods (Du Toit, 1994:9).

7. Delimitation of the study

The study was delimited to educators and parents of two primary schools in Clarke Estate. This is a mini-thesis and by the scope of the study and the time available for the study it is impossible to cover more than two schools. Responsibilities at work also made it difficult to cover more than two schools. The results of the study are expected to give a general picture of factors considered / perceived by parents and educators as contributing to the high rate of academic failures of learners in the two primary schools in Clarke Estate.

8. Organization of the Thesis

This study is organised into five chapters as follows:

Chapter One: This chapter deals with the introduction to the study. Background to the study is discussed and the significance of the study is also presented.

Chapter Two: This chapter deals with the review of the literature. The purpose is to focus on the conceptual understanding of the phenomenon of academic failure in primary schools and the underlying theories as to factors responsible for it as contained in the literature.

Chapter Three: This chapter describes the methodology used in this research. This includes the research design adopted, the participants involved and the methods of data collection.

Chapter Four: This chapter presents empirical data obtained from the participants and also deals with the analysis of the data and the interpretation of the findings from the study.

Chapter Five: This chapter provides a summary and discussion of the research findings based on the results of the study. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations on how to improve academic performances of primary school learners are made. Limitations of the study are outlined and suggestions for further research are offered.

The next chapter presents a review of related literature.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction to the chapter

The previous chapter provided the background for the study. The chapter dealt with the statement of the problem and the research questions to which answers were to be provided. This chapter presents the review of related literature. The review of related literature is essential because according to Tuckman (1994:46), "When you know what others have done, you are better prepared to attack the problem you have chosen to investigate with deeper insight and more complete knowledge". The first part of the literature presents conceptual understandings around school failure; the second part is devoted to theoretical basis underlying the study while the third part is about the various works and studies already done on school failure.

2.2 The Conceptual Framework

School performance is defined by Tzani (1988) as a cluster of maneuvers attempting to integrate the student to the schooling system and the student's efficiency towards lessons. School performance can also be defined as a continuation in a ladder where success and failure are on opposite ends (Paraskevopoulos, 1985).

According to Kologridi (1995) and Dimou (1997), school success or failure refers to the extent or the degree to which the student has fulfilled (fully or partially) teaching goals. Failure is categorized by difficulties and an inability to reach the desired goals. It is also accompanied by an assortment of other problems which is often associated with school failure (Kupersmidt and Copie, 1990). Papadopoulos (1990) points out that school failure do not only entails the students' failure, but also that of the educational institution as it has not successfully met the needs of the students.

Patterson, De Baryshe and Ramsey (1989), state that school failure affects mostly poor students and becomes an obstacle that prevents them from making full use of their educational opportunities to improve their social status. Human resources are not adequately used and this has a negative impact on the economic mobility of society. People who fail at school find it hard to join and be competitive in the labour market. They end up doing menial jobs with no specific specialisation. Young people are adversely affected by educational differences, failure and drop out. Research has proved that children with barriers to learning get together with similar peers who have the same learning abilities and behaviour and form group gangs. The risk of anti-social behaviour is increased (Patterson, De Baryshe and Ramsey, 1989).

Recently, high school failure rates have been followed by grade retention which has become a distinctive characteristic of many primary school systems even in first world countries (Marshall, 2003). School failure can lead to serious consequences if left untreated. Students who fail lose their self-confidence, become discouraged, decreases effort, and are more likely to fail again Failure in the grade causes children to be older than their same-grade peers, which will eventually negatively affect their self-esteem (Byrd, 2005). In general, the various studies which attempted to explain school failure do so beginning with the three elements that intervene in education: parents (family causal factors), teachers (academic causal factors) and students (personal causal factors).

According to Du Toit (1994), academic failure, is to a large extent, associated with family or community causal factors. Poverty, poor living conditions and academic failure are worldwide on the increase. Waxman (1992:1) states that in recent years, the number of students at risk or those who are educationally disadvantaged, has increased and so has their degree of disadvantage. Special measures are being introduced by many countries with previously high living standards, to assist large numbers of children who lag behind scholastically due to poverty or economic hardship of their parents. Twenty percent of the school population in the United States of America comes from poor homes (Du Toit, 1994:43). Greene (1986) and Zaaiman (1998) also contend that family socio-economic conditions negatively impact on children's academic performance. Other factors associated

with homes which researchers identified as contributing negatively to academic performance include low parental education level, overcrowded and poor housing conditions, single-parent households and diverse language backgrounds (Natriello, McDill and Pallas, 1990).

In terms of academic causal factors Natriello (1990) and Cullen, Fletcher-Campbell, Bowen, Osgood and Kelleher (2000), state that one of the main contributing factors to school failure is the mismatch between the academic curriculum offered by the school and the interest and skills of the learners. Jones and Charlton (1996) are of the opinion that if learning contents are not embedded in the context of the learners' culture and life world, these would not be meaningful to the learners. The result is that the learners would distance themselves from the task of learning if they find the curriculum irrelevant. Such behaviour may include not paying attention in class, not completing homework, not preparing for tests and in circumstances, even truancy.

Du Toit (1994) has also asserted that a child's learning might be hampered by innate or acquired disabilities such as blindness, deafness or mental handicap, which could cause children to get specialized instructions in order to reach their full potential. Other personal causal factors such as neurological dysfunction can cause learners to experiences behavioural problems. Shittu (2004) also points out that a child's schooling may be affected by parental and material deprivation, due to divorce or death, absence of one of the parents, the mother's inability to pay school fees or buy learning materials and uniforms. Such a child's academic performance would be severely affected due to the child's absenteeism from school.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

According to Giavrimis and Papanis (2008), there are a number of theoretical explanations for school failure based on theories of intelligence, cultural deprivation, material deprivation, culture and interaction. The intelligence theory is based on IQ (Intelligence Quotient) scores. The supporters of this theory are of the opinion that intelligence can be

hereditary. This theory let to heavy criticism by sociologists, who believe that environmental influences and genetics interrelate (as in poverty and education). Sociologists are of the opinion that IQ tests are culturally biased. According to them, IQ tests are not objective, since the standards are set out by the researcher to what he considers to be important and that usually reflects middle class knowledge.

The ability to communicate is related to school success by the theory of cultural deprivation. This theory states that middle class children learn to make use of communication skills at a younger age than those of the labour class. This causes middle class children to have a more elaborated verbal code and they are more familiar with the way of thought prevailing at schools (which is made out for the middle class), which is of great importance of school success. The link between linguistic performance of a child and socio-economic factors is based on Bernstein's (1969) theories. Bernstein calls the linguistic weakness of the lower class "a limited verbal code of communication", this has adverse effect on both the way a child expresses himself/herself and on his/her education (Vrizas, 1992).

Wedge and Prosser (1973), who are supporters of the materialistic deprivation theory, have linked poverty to school performance. According to them, children from poor backgrounds are more prone to illnesses. They have more accidents and present learning and speaking problems more often than children from the middle and upper classes. Due to poverty, a very difficult environment for the family is created, which also include a lack of learning opportunities for the children (Herbert, 1996).

Bourdieu (1994) points out that the knowledge, skills, and experience is underestimated by the educational system, and subsequently, the culture of the labour class children. This may be as a result of the way education is organized, not done on purpose. Bourdieu believes a certain type of culture is enforced by education, of the predominant class. This creates a sort of "symbolic violence". He also reports that middle class children join the educational system at a more advantageous position and succeed because their background is similar to that of the predominant class. This is considered by Bourdieu as "a cultural investment".

Labour class children will fail, as their knowledge and background are considered to be of a lower standard and cannot fit within school in general.

In the theory of interaction, Keddie (1973) argues that educational failure is vastly due to facts attributed to the abilities and intellect of an educator. The educator's beliefs and evaluation criteria are not objective. They are based entirely on their cultural background. These beliefs are standardised by educators when it comes to teaching methods, a custom which is connected to social class and race. It has been proven by researchers that educators have a clear-cut opinion of how a student should communicate, react and appear, and in some instances these attributes are even considered more important than learning. Labour class children are placed at the most unfavourable position due to the fact that an ideal student's attributes coincide with those of the middle class children.

2.4 Previous Studies which have been carried out

In a significant study which reviewed teaching and learning conditions in developing countries in Africa and Asia, Caillods and Postlethwaite (1989) point out that there is not one single factor, but arrays of factors influencing learner achievement in school. Caillods and Postlethwaite (1989) refer to family background, the school curriculum, media of instruction, lack of support materials for learning, quality of teachers and their teaching as intervening factors of influence. They state further that, "it is one thing to enroll and keep children in school, what they learn is another matter."

The argument by Caillods and Postlethwaite (1989), that there was little empirical evidence, that academic performance is poorer in developing countries than in developed countries, is supported by Beaton (1999), who argues that international studies of educational achievement which started in the early 1960s only received government and public recognition in the late 1990s. The benefits of countries participating in international achievement studies have only been acknowledged after large scale studies like the Third International Mathematics and Science Study was conducted in 1995. They further point out that, 'international studies of educational achievement typically reveal substantial

differences in the average level of student performance in different countries, whatever the subject area'.

According to Beaton (1999:14-15), "international studies of educational achievement typically reveal substantial differences in the average level of student performance in different countries, whatever the subject area". The majority of international studies collect information that allows for a detailed examination of factors likely to influence education achievement. The following factors have been mostly focused on:

1. Home background: educational levels and occupation of parents, educational resources within the home, such as daily newspaper, availability of dictionary, computer access, etc.
2. School characteristics: type of school, site, student / teacher ratio, etc.
3. Teacher characteristics: educational level of teachers in terms of academic and pedagogical training, teaching experience, gender, etc.
4. Teaching conditions and practices: class site, instructional hours per subject area, amount of homework assigned, etc.
5. Student motivation: liking for school, level of interest in subject area, views of their importance, etc.

These factors can be clustered to three categories of factors to arrive at family causal factors, teacher causal factors and student personal causal factors as did Byrd (2005).

Beaton (1999) argues that there are a number of issues peculiar to the learning conditions of students in South Africa, which influence their academic achievement, particularly in schools with an inhibiting learning climate. These can be due to extrinsic and intrinsic factors. Extrinsic factors are factors outside the child which affect his performance at school. These include socio-cultural, economic and environmental factors, as well as factors relating to the school. That is, extrinsic factors include family or societal causal factors, and school or teacher casual factors. Intrinsic factors include factors within the child. For example genetic, behavioural, emotional and personality factors.

In terms of extrinsic factors associated with family or society, Zaaiman (1998) notes that there is a strong link between academic performance and socio-economic status of the family or community. Du Toit (1994) agreed with this contention by stating that if the socio-economic status of a particular community is worse, the chance is greater that children will not realise their true potential due to negative environmental influences. For instance, uneducated, impoverished parents feel disempowered and are unable to enrich the lives of their children or even encouraged them to remain at school and to do well. Homes have a lack of basic amenities such as water and electricity. The high level of poverty makes it difficult for the learner to obtain necessary learning materials needed for academic achievement (Madzamba, 1999:19).

According to Kapp (1994:29), some children's learning or behavioural problems are directly linked to their personality or biological composition. Learning or behavioural problems may be experienced by children due to neurological dysfunction that are difficult to identify. Children, who suffer from chronic illness, are also at risk of developing learning problems or underachievement because of a lack of attention or absenteeism due to ill health (Du Toit, 1994).

A large number of studies, carried out such as those by Fullana Noel (1995) and Montero (1990), sought to understand the factors contributing to low achievement. The various studies which attempted to explain academic failure, did so beginning with the three elements that intervene in education: parents (family causal factors), teachers (academic causal factors), and students (personal causal factors resources (Zaaiman, 1998). Other authors have found that children themselves attribute low performance to low ability and to luck (Valle Arias, 1999), and an improvement in performance to motivation, to self-regulating behaviours, and to competence as a function of task characteristics (Slater, 2002). In recent research positive correlations were found between the perceptions of auto-efficacy, the value given to tasks and performance (Yi Chia, 2002). De La Fuente (2002), shows in a recent theoretical review, how there has been a move towards the study of academic goals, to the detriment of those of a social nature, even though these have been shown to be especially important in the most disadvantaged contexts.

Sanchez (2000) argues that academic self-concept is at the base of future school success or failure. It has been formed since early childhood education from peer contact and teacher attitude and expectations. An interesting study points out that positive self-concept is a risk-reducing factor against school failure in the case of unfavourable family situations (Fullana Noel, 1995).

2.5 Factors related to the home and family

Many researchers agree that socio-economic status has a lot to do with the child's performance at school (Slaughter and Epps, 1987). Upper class parents are usually more involved in their children's education compared to low-income families (Hickman, Greenwood and Miller, 1995). Scott-Jones (1984) disagrees, pointing out that these families

are involved in their children's' education. The majority of South African studies on academic achievement consistently find strong and positive correlations between socio-economic background and academic performance. Children from poor families tend, on average, to perform poorly in reading and mathematics tests. In a study by Crouch and Mabogoane (1998), they found that 25% of achievement is explainable in terms of social background of pupils. Howie and Plomp (2002) found in their earlier Third International Mathematics and Science Study results that 'possessions at home … are the most significant predictor of pupils' achievement '. According to a recent study in the Western Cape, 'the poverty index proved to be a strong indicator of results and showed that there was a clear relationship between the poverty index and performance" (Western Cape Education Department, 2004).

Out-of-school factors are divided by Stefanakis (2000) into three main categories, all of which reflect the influence of socio-economic status. The first category is the learners' health, nutrition, cognitive ability, gender, previous schooling which have an influence on academic achievement. The second category is the family's socio-economic status, the size of the family, the education background of the family and the importance of education to the family. The third important out-of-school factor is the community factor, which is

reflected by the demographics, the characteristics of culture, the urban/rural distribution, the composition of the workforce and the link between education and employment Stefanakis, 2000).

According to Zaaiman (1998:24-25), low socio-economic families are often single-parent and/or large families where the parents have low paid jobs and low levels of education. They are also second-language speakers. Such families usually live in overcrowded and poorly-resourced houses. Poor family circumstances have a negative influence on learner's academic performance in a number of ways. The learners' do not have the learning materials needed to do projects or tasks at home. There are significant correlations between parent's educational and occupational levels and the educational opportunities and academic achievement of their children (Thomas, 2006). Parents are often illiterate or have very little education. Children are not encouraged by their parents to attend school regularly. Habitual absenteeism from school, cause gaps develop and it becomes even more difficult to catch up on their studies (Khoza, 1997). Parents' education levels strongly affect the education of their children. Teale (1986) found in his studies that "children experience literacy primarily as a social progress during their preschool years". Parents strongly affect this social learning process because "parents who have gone beyond a high school education are found to be more involved with their infants and children than those who did not finish high school". Ann (1993) points out that the mother's education is one of the most important factors influencing children's reading levels and other school achievements. According to traditional research, more highly educated mothers are more involved in their children's learning processes.

According to a study done by PISA (Programme International Student Assessment, 2000), home background influences academic and educational success of students and schoolwork, while socio-economic status reinforces the activities and functioning of the teachers and students. Poor parental care with gross negligence of social and economic needs of a child, usually produce poor academic achievement of the child.

A child's schooling may be affected by parental and material deprivation care due to divorce or death, absence of one the parents due to the mother's inability to pay school fees or buy learning materials and uniforms. Such a child's academic performance would be severely affected due to the child's absenteeism from school (Shittu, 2004). According to a study by The United States Department of Education (2000) the relationship between poverty and students' performance is not simple and direct. It concluded that poverty is an important factor accounting for differences in performance and achievement across rural, suburban and urban districts. Poverty alone is not alone is not responsible for the differences in the academic performances of the students.

2.6 Factors related to the environment and society

"Crime can be defined as behaviour that is forbidden by an empowered authority and criminal acts are punished through the application of formal sanctions" (Bezuidenhout, 2008). According to Schonteich (2002), South Africa has very high levels of violent crime in terms of both global and African standards. According to a victim survey, violent crime levels in South Africa were not the highest in Africa. South African victims of crime were more likely to be attacked or threatened with a weapon than in other African countries surveyed. According to his analysis, South Africans are less likely to be victimised than many Africans living on the African content.

South African studies of academic achievement consistently find strong and positive correlations between socio-economic background and academic performance. Children from poor families, on average, tend to perform poorly in tests of reading and mathematics. In a study by Crouch and Mabogoane, they found that a full '25 percent (of achievement) is explainable in terms of social background of pupils (Crouch and Mabogoane, 1998).

According to Lerner and Spanier (1980:459), the school is part of the adolescent's environment and a great deal of their time is spent in school. Some of them who come from the lower socioeconomic classes, who do not regard school as improving their

socioeconomic status, may reach a point of frustration that may be relieved by delinquency. The lower-class youth may find that the school is dominated by middle-class youth and that teachers do not support their progress. The school itself may serve as a location for delinquent behaviour such as attacking teachers, fighting with peers, drug pushing and vandalism.

Hirschi (in Glanz, 1990:50) found a causal link leading to delinquent behaviour:
a lack of academic ability leading to poor school performance that results in a dislike of school, and consequently a rejection of school authority, which leads to delinquent behaviour.

Crime statistics for the year April 2005 to March 2006 was released by the South African Police Service on the 27th of September 2006. The report stated that the overall recorded rate for the total of 21 serious crimes had decreased by 9% from the previous year (Louw, 2006). The Minister of Safety and Security, Charles Nqakula, released statistics during July 2007, that indicated 118% increase in bank robberies and 25,4% increase in robberies at residential premises. Burglary takes place in all areas of South Africa. Other reasons for burglary are that it may be related to gang activities, poverty and unemployment. Many people resort to criminal acts as they are unable to find jobs or to secure permanent work positions.

Bezuidenhout (2008) states that the school environment is formal and impersonal. The child has to cope with strictly enforced rules of behaviour. A child has to prove his or her competency and worth. There are many learners with learning difficulties who cannot cope with the pressures of school life. In an attempt to cope, they may start using drugs. Anker, Milman, Kahan and Valenti (1971) found the use of marijuana is associated with poor past school grades and not present grades. Viewed from this perspective, it seems the use of drugs is triggered by poor academic achievement rather than the reverse. Children resort to crime in order to feed their habit of drug abuse.

2.7 FACTORS RELATED TO THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

2.7.1 Curriculum

In the 21st century, the majority of schools follow a curriculum that is set at national, regional or state level. Teachers tend to follow recommended guidelines, when curriculum regulations are not based on legislative enactment. Curriculum requirements in the United States of America, in some states, exert a huge influence over textbook market. Students are required to follow a common curriculum throughout the compulsory stages of schooling, in Australia, Hungary, Italy and Sweden (Le Metais, 2002). There remains a lack of consensus about its value to pupils in relation to attainment, despite the number of countries adopting a centralized curriculum. According to Natriello (1990) and Cullen, Fletcher-Campbell, Bowen, Osgood and Kelleher (2000), one of the main factors contributing to school failure and pupils how drop out of school, is the mismatch between the academic curriculum offered by the school and the interest and skills of the students. Studies among high school learners in Brazil, highlights student dissatisfaction with the curriculum, most whishing to engage in activities not taught at school. Concerns have been raised in Australia, how the curriculum is unrelated to the lived experiences of many young people (Hattam, 2004).

O'Gara and Kendall (1996: 25-56) state that "curriculum goals and objectives, content, format and relevance may deny access to some social groups as ethnic minorities or girls by being irrelevant, incomplete or repellent." The curriculum is a very important element in the analysis of teaching / learning conditions and learner achievement because it states what must be learned, at what level, how much and provides guidelines on how learning is organised (Caillods and Postlethwaite). Maja (1997:8) points out that the medium of instruction within the curriculum also affects the extent to which both teachers and learners are at ease with the language, which has an effect on the language used in the classroom. The curriculum has to be differentiated and understood from three perspectives: i) 'intended curriculum ii) 'implemented curriculum and ii) 'achieved curriculum.'

According to Jones and Charlton (1996:19), learning content must be embedded in the context of the children's culture and life world in order to be meaningful to them. Learners distance themselves from the task of learning if they find the curriculum pointless and meaningless and targeted at an appropriate level. They may also find the curriculum irrelevant to their future work-related needs. Such behaviour may typically include not paying attention in class, not completing homework, not preparing for tests, and in circumstances, even truancy.

Curriculum renewal has become a top priority in South Africa's education policy since 1994. The present curriculum strives to reflect learners' culture, unique history, familiar life experiences and future work-related needs. Great emphasis is placed on the teacher's task to present the study material in a matter that is in line with learners' life world and is filled with meaning and relevance. The learners need to be encouraged to critically evaluate their study material and to be involved in the implementation of it in their frame of reference. All content need to be presented by the teacher in a learner-orientated way by using examples and assignments that relate to the learner's life worlds. The focus in the classroom of the new National Curriculum was changed from content to vocational training and emphasises the developmental outcomes of each phase. This is a difficult task in culturally diverse classes where learners are not taught in their mother tongue. In the present inclusive educational scene with its large classes and increasing levels of diversity, this task has become extremely complex (Landsberg 2005:451-452).

2.7.2 Language of instruction

A theoretical explanation for the high levels of failure in the primary schools in South Africa is provided by Kathleen Heugh. Two language policy models have become dominant in disadvantaged primary schools in South Africa, namely subtractive bilingualism (straight for English) or transitional bilingualism (early exit from mother tongue). Results from her analysis indicated that both have the same basic consequences – school failure (Heugh, 2000).

The generative process for the failure of these language models can be found in literacy/language acquisition theory. The literacy/language theory indicates that the vast majority of children enter school with proficiency in one or even several languages used in their home (mother tongue or home language) and community. In the ideal situation, children are expected to extend this language knowledge into formal academic contexts and to learn to read and write in the language. Children are expected to master higher-order thinking in a range of subject or learning areas which becomes increasingly more difficult and demanding as children progress to the next grade (Fleisch, 2008).

According to Fleisch (2008), the main problem is that while children begin schooling with an adequate knowledge of their mother- tongue language, the shift to the second language means that they never master the knowledge and skills required by the school. This has to do with the particular ways in which second-language learning actually takes place. Heugh and a number of other colleagues argue that children cannot transfer the understanding to the second language, unless they have a deep understanding of their first language. There is an early transition to English in historically disadvantaged schools. Children engage in a range of learning activities in their first language in the first two or three years of schooling. These activities include a few (and limited range) of reading, writing and Numeracy tasks. The tasks include decoding letters or blends, simple vocabulary and simple sentences used in familiar narratives. In the second year, the second language, which becomes the language of learning, is introduced through equally simple, mostly oral activities, with limited amounts of reading and writing, and a number of counting exercises. However, two expectations change by grade four. Firstly, the demands of the curriculum increase from learning the tools of learning, that is reading and writing, to using the tools of reading to learn across the curriculum. This is the moment that the children begin to use the second language across the curriculum (Fleisch, 2008).

According to Bloch and Mahlalela (1998:2), when concepts are formed and learned in their mother tongue/home language, children develop a strong foundation in thinking, reasoning and imagination. Heugh (2000: 12-140) argues that a large part of South African research,

has identified the importance of early mother tongue literacy and home language maintenance as important for successful education. Bamgbose (2000:3) points out that a learner's language of teaching and learning is best in a language the learner has some competence in, preferably the mother tongue. If the language other than a learner's home language is used as a Language of Teaching and Learning (LOLT), particularly in early primary education, it is a case of language exclusion, since it ignores the language that the learner is already fairly competent in. In many developing countries, the language of teaching and learning (LOLT) are different to the children's mother tongue. The children are compelled to learn in a second language that is unfamiliar to them. Brahm Fleisch (2008) states that "it is the package of language practices, particularly the straight-for-English polices and early exit from mother-tongue tuition, that are primarily responsible for systemic underachievement in reading and writing and mathematics." Researchers found in a Western Cape Grade Six 2003 Assessment study, children that spoke English as their home language had a mean score on the literacy test of 70%, compared to a mean score for isiXhosa first-language speakers of 37%.

In 2002, The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) launched its MST (Mathematics, Science and Technology) strategy for 2002 – 2008. The goal of this strategy was to increase learner participation and success rates in Mathematics, Science and Technology through strengthening the teaching and learning of aforementioned subjects in the General and further Education and Training bands. A representative sample of a study of grade 3 learners from all schools showed 37 percent were reading at Grade 3 level; 41 percent at grade 2 level; 12 percent at grade 1 level and 10 percent below grade 1. In the same sample of children, 37 percent were found to be calculating at the grade 3 level; 11 percent at grade 2 level; 37 percent at grade 1 level and 155 at below grade 1. The same tendency was shown in the grade 6 test results of 2003.

In 2001 and 2007, two grade 3 systemic evaluations of children's Literacy and Numeracy learning achievements, were conducted by the Western Cape Education Department. With the exception of Limpopo, provincial results of the 2007 evaluation showed improved national and provincial averages. Average provincial scores mask differences within

provinces. Although the Western Cape had the highest mean scores, some of its districts have the largest number of out of school children. Brahm Fleisch (2008:104) states " …that although we know that particular language practices coincide with poor achievement, other factors such as poverty and poor health and under-resourced schools are equally likely to be part of the lived worlds of children that fail the standardised tests ". Garner (1990:2) points out learners who come from different language backgrounds and need to learn English in order to follow the English-medium school curriculum, are referred to as "English second language learners (ESL learners)" as English is not their mother tongue. English is learned as a second or third language by many learners in South African schools, even though it is the LOLT in the majority of classrooms and schools.

Setati (2002:73) points out that English language learners (ESL learners) may have the advantage that English is spoken at home and in their community and that this exposes them to many opportunities to learn it (for example, from newspapers, television, etc.). This is mainly the case in urban areas in South Africa. Learners who stay in rural areas are hardly exposed to English at home or in their communities and thus their opportunities to learn it are extremely limited.

Lapp (2001:4) states that learners learning in ESL (English language learners) usually begin literacy instruction in their first language. ESL learners' academic and linguistic skills which have been acquired in the first language can easily be transferred to the second language and fluency in the first language shortcuts the normal development process in the second language. Learners, who are compelled to learn English too early, can result in them not speaking, reading or writing their first or second language well.

2.8 Quality of teachers and their teaching

According to Caillods and Postlethwaite (1989:16), what teachers actually do in the classroom or rather the quality of their teaching can help improve academic achievement. Andersen, Kermyt, Case and Lam, (1988) argued that when teachers prepare their lessons well, set and mark homework and class work and are skillful in using a variety of

teaching methods to reach every learner, they would be able to produce higher academic achievement in their learners. Combinations of post-secondary and professional teacher training are a prerequisite to good classroom practices. (Caillods and Postlethwaite, 1989:16) They also argued that dedicated teachers are able to inspire children to learn in the most deprived areas and that teachers with more post-secondary education achieves more with their pupils than teachers with less post-secondary education". Stefanakis (2000:13) points out regarding teaching practices, that effective teaching research suggests that effective teachers adjust their instruction to(1) the goals, which reflect the expectations of the system, (2) the content, which are the requirements of their subject, (3) the context, which relate to in-school factors and (4) the context, which are the out– of- school factors influencing learning. Stefanakis argues further that, effective teachers use a variety of techniques to teach and re-teach contents and use a sequence of skills training.

Various teaching practices as discussed by Walberg and Paik (2001:6-12) shows "large, positive learning effects in widely varying conditions". He also explains that "the traits of teachers employing effective direct instructions, task orientation and enthusiasm and flexibility "lead to improved learner achievement".

Carron and Châu (1996) state that the quality of education requires quality teachers. This is particularly true of primary education and it is even truer of developing countries, where, especially in rural towns, other factors involved in the teaching process are often rare or quite simply non-existent. Carron and Châu's inter-regional research project for the Improvement of basic education services in developing countries, involved four regions: China, India, Guinea and Mexico. The project sought to facilitate the formulation of strategies aimed at improving the quality of basic education, covered in the interaction between education demand and supply, the material conditions of schools in the regions, teacher characteristics, teaching style and teaching processes and the mastering of basic skills, with emphasis on communication and arithmetic. They have found conclusive evidence that differences in achievement are "more related to the quality of the teacher, than to the availability of equipment." Their research shows that

teachers with low academic qualifications did not master their subjects well and therefore did not spend enough time-on-task. Their great concern was for the lack of pedagogical or professional pre- and in-service training of teachers, which was a great barrier for efficient teaching.

Carron and Châu (1996) point out that the individual school case studies show that in the end teacher quality is more a question of motivation than competence. Classes, in which the results were better than expected, were invariably run by teachers, who were more motivated than elsewhere. In other words, competence is an important but not a sufficient condition for an efficient teaching-learning process to take place (Carron and Châu: 1996).

2.9 Support and materials for learning

Fuller and Clarke (1994) argue that textbooks, readers, workbooks and other learning materials has become an important feature of classrooms worldwide. Many educators consider it as the core content of the curriculum and the key to successful reading and Mathematics. It was confirmed by numerous international research literature since the late 1970's. One of the most cost-effective ways of improving academic achievement was the increasing availability of textbooks in particular (Fuller and Clarke, 1994).

In a SACMEQ II (Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality) study, conducted to find out if textbooks are linked to academic achievement, results showed considerable variations between provinces. Less than a third child in the Northern Cape had their reading books compared to more than 60 percent in the Free State. In a simple of grade six samples, less than half of the children in the sample had their own reading book (Moloi and Strauss, 2005).

According to a baseline study undertaken in the Khanyisa project, a different picture emerged. Taylor and Monyane found that the majority of children in the Khanyisa study sample had either textbooks available in class, but they could not take it or that they were

allowed to take it home (57,5 percent in Language and 63 percent in Mathematics.) About 70 percent of children in the study had access to both language and mathematic books (Taylor and Monyane, 2004)

Two prominent studies (SACMEQ II and Khanyisa) provided no conclusive evidence of the extent of access to textbooks. According to the Education Department, learning materials make a difference to academic achievement. The Grade Six Systemic Evaluation Report shows that the richer the learning environment, the better children perform on the performance tasks: 'where schools have a library or a book collection, an internet connection or a teaching resource centre, their learners, tenders to score significantly higher'(Fleisch, 2008). The report acknowledged that the presence of resources alone is not sufficient. A big number of schools who performed satisfactory or even high levels of resources, performed very poorly in Mathematics. The Department of Education's principle is that while resources cannot guarantee success, it is unrealistic to expect schools to achieve without having the basic minimum books (Department of Education, 2005).

The problems facing the South African society on the threshold of the 21st century is manifold. The dynamic and radical changes taking place have many adverse influences on human relationships and are mostly negative with regard to creating a positive and sympathetic learning climate for the children of the country. A complex polyvalent social structure with its disintegrated family life, moral and sexual licentiousness, its war against positive values, child abuse, and the problems of language and cultural differences can be confusing to children and young people. Society, and in our case specifically educators, will have to take responsibility for the children and adolescents in our ranks. It is necessary to create safe and secure surroundings where children can experience warmth and acceptance and where there is provision for most of their needs in order for them to fulfill their learning task as best they can (Prinsloo, 2002).

2.10 Factors related to the learner

Many factors within the child (intrinsic), could pose a threat to effective learning. Health related problems, as well as neurological, physiological and genetic problems, can cause him/her to have problems learning at school. According to Du Toit (1994), a child's learning might be hampered by innate or acquired disabilities such as blindness, deafness or mental handicap, which could cause children to get specialized instructions to reach their full potential. Neurological dysfunction can cause learners to experience behavioural problems.

Researchers such as Rizzo and Zabel (1988) identified the experience of a variety of needs in the developmental years of children and adolescents: they want to be accepted and needed by their families, they want to be cared for and protected, they want to be treated with respect and dignity, they want to experience a sense of belonging and feel valuable to their families, they want to be educated and guided to act in a socially acceptable way and they want to benefit from opportunities which will provide them with a feeling of self-actualisation by being creative and having done useful work.

According to Whitmore (in Kapp, 1994), underachievers usually have a negative self-concept. Self-concept is described by Butler-Por (in Tlale, 1991:18) as a mirror image, which is shaped by all positive and negative reflections received from important individuals in the child's environment. Children, who internalise mostly negative responses from meaningful individuals in their lives, may form a low self-concept and develop a negative attitude towards school. This may result in academic underachievement. Du Toit (1994) further notes that "Children, who show indications of poor self-image, will not have an innate capacity to do well and the slightest negative experience regarding their performance will weaken their resolve even further".

Academic achievement might be inhibited by fear or failure or anxiety by bringing about negative effects, which may inhibit thinking. When children perceive the possibility of failure as a great threat, they experience the fear of failure. If parents place unrealistic demands on the child which cannot be fulfilled, the child experiences anxiety which

originates from feelings of guilt and aggression (Kapp, 1994:150). Tlale (1991:18) asserts that “fear of success” can have a negative impact on the learners.

Truancy in schools has been cited by many researchers as a major contributor to poor academic performance. Denny (in Khoza, 1997:17), a strong contributory factor in truancy is a fear of failure in school. Habitual absenteeism by learners from school, cause gaps to develop and it becomes more difficult for the learners to catch up on lost studies.

There are high percentage rates of South African children whose basic needs are not met. Preconditions for self-fulfillment are: a child must be actively involved in forming relationships with himself, his peers, parents, teachers and the community, as well as with objects and ideas. A child must experience joy and success in most of these relationships in order to attribute meaning to his world. The child will be able to form positive self-image which in turn leads to adequate self-actualization, only through dynamic involvement, positive experiences and sufficient attribution of meaning to the life-world (Prinsloo, 1998).

2.11 Summary and Conclusion

School failure is not only an educational problem but also a social one. It has been connected to many different factors, such as low socio-economic status, poverty, home background, school curriculum etc. School failure leads to marginalization and social exclusion. (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992).

The next chapter deals with research methodology used in investigating factors contributing to academic failure of learners in the two Clarke Estate primary schools.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter endeavours to explain the methodology used in conducting the fieldwork component of this study, by presenting an outline of the research design, participants, research instrument, procedure, ethical consideration and method of data analysis.

3.2 Research Design

Mouton (2001:55) states that a research design is a plan or blueprint of how you intend conducting the research. According to Huysamen (1993:10) a design is "the plan or blueprint according to which data are collected to investigate the research hypothesis or question in the most economical manner". Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:63) by contrast, point out that a research design is "a specification of the most adequate operations to be performed in order to test a specific hypothesis under given condition".

For this study the researcher has opted to use a quantitative- descriptive research design. The purpose of descriptive research is to make interpretations about and describes the current status of individuals, objects, settings, conditions, or events (Mertler and Charles, 2008). Descriptive research examines the phenomenon as it exists; no attempt is made to artificially manipulate any conditions or situations. Two common descriptive research designs are survey and observational research (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005).Leedy and Ormrod (2005) point out that survey research involves acquiring information from individuals representing one or more groups. For example, about their attitudes, opinions or characteristics by specifically asking them questions and then tabulating their responses. The survey research's ultimate goal is to learn more about the current status of a reasonably large population either by surveying a sample from the population or by surveying the entire population, if it is not too large. Survey research is a relatively simple, straightforward design. The researcher asks a series of questions, usually in written form, to willing participants. Once the questions have been answered, the

responses are aggregated across subgroups or all the participants. The analysis of data usually involves percentages of responses or the calculation of frequency counts. The researcher captures opinions through the administration of the survey (Mertler and Charles, 2008).

The research method that was used in this study was a survey approach, which is the one most commonly used descriptive method in educational research. According to Wiersma (1980:16), the survey research deals more with "… a question of what is, rather than why it is so." A survey basically deals with research questions of 'what is?' with possibly, some emphasis on attempting to explain what is. Therefore, the rationale behind choosing a survey is also to find out what are the Parents' and educators' perceptions of factors contributing to high failure rate of primary school learners in Clarke Estate.

3.3 Population and Sample

3.3.1 Population

Population is defined by Bless and Higson (1995:85) as "*the entire set of objects and events or group of people …….. about which the researcher wants to determine some characteristics."* The population of this study was drawn from the two primary schools in Clarke Estate. These two schools share similar characteristics and both are also characterised by high rate of academic failure among their learners which is much higher than those of other schools in surrounding areas. The two schools in Clarke Estate were selected because they were within the distance convenient for the researcher to visit frequently in the process of conducting this study. The researcher has been working in this area for the past twenty years and therefore is familiar with many of the educators including the principals and parents. This familiarity helped the researcher to communicate easily with and to get maximum cooperation within the area of study. This also includes getting access to the school premises, calling educators to meetings by their respective principals in order to administer the study instrument and collect data.

Since the study focused on factors influencing academic failure of learners, parents and educators of the two schools in Clarke Estate comprised the population of this study.

Parents and educators are the two most important stakeholders in the education of the children. Since children belong to both the home and the school worlds and since the home and the school play significant roles in the education of children, parents' and teachers' opinions and ideas are particularly important to the study (Ferreira and Puth, 1988:167). The parents, who live in the area around the school, know the area and the problems of the area which can facilitate or hinder children's education. The educators teach the children and know the problems the latter face in the schools of the area.

3.3.2 Sample and Sampling Method

Sampling is the process of selecting a number of individuals for the study in such a way that the individuals represent a large group from which they were selected (Behr, 1988). Arkava and Lane (1983:27) also state that a sample comprise elements of the population considered for actual inclusion in the study. The concept of sampling involves taking a portion of the population, making a study of the smaller group and generalizing the findings to the larger population. Feasibility is the major reason for sampling (Sarantakos, 2000:139) as it is seldom possible to cover the total population and all the members of a population of interest cannot possibly be reached (Yates, 2004:25). Generalizing is a necessary scientific procedure since it is rarely possible to study all members of a defined population (Behr, 1988).

The sample comprised educators and parents from the two schools. Ten educators from each school were randomly selected taking gender balance and experiences into consideration. One hundred parents or guardians of children of each school were randomly selected. Altogether the sample comprised two hundred parents and twenty educators. Random sampling is when there is an equal chance that each member of the population is included (Kerlinger, 1986). The researcher took the list of names of children which was in alphabetical order and selected one in every tenth name to represent their parents. The same procedure was done for the teacher sample. The information regarding the participants of this study is presented below.

Table 3.1: Participants by gender

Participants			
Gender	Teachers	Parents	Total
Male	5	22	27
Female	15	168	183
Total	20	200	220

Table 3.2: Participants by age group

Participants					
	Educators		Parents		
Age	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total
15-24		1	7	29	37
25-34	3	2	12	67	84
35-44	1	9	6	52	58
45-54	1	3	2	17	23
55-64			1	7	8
Total	5	15	28	172	220

From table 3.2 it is observed that the total number of participants were 220. Among them 35 (15, 9%) were males and 185 (84, 1%) were females. This shows that more females than males were surveyed. Most of the participants who responded to the invitation to be surveyed were females. The area consists of a lot of single- mother households. Females seem to be more concerned about their children's education. They are more involved in their children's education. The majority of the participants fall in the age group between 25-34.

3.4 Research Instrument

This study focused on factors influencing academic failure of learners in primary schools. The researcher needed information on what factors either from homes, schools or within

the learners which may be contributing to academic failure of learners from the perspectives of educators and parents who were involved in this study.

Research approach for investigating people's opinions on learners' failure has been identified as both qualitative and quantitative. However, for the purpose of this study quantitative approach was employed as data collected was quantified to enable group comparison. Questionnaire as quantitative data gathering instrument was used. Questionnaire, particularly the one with open-ended questions has the advantage of revealing participants unexpected thoughts and feelings which the researcher may not have been able to anticipate (Schmuck, 1977).

According to Strydom (2005:166) the main objective of a questionnaire is to obtain many facts and opinions from people who are informed about an issue. Kumar (2005:126) defines a questionnaire as, a written list of questions, the answers to which are recorded by the respondents. In a questionnaire respondents first read questions or statements, interpret what is expected and then write down the response or comment on the questions or statements.

The type of questionnaire chosen and applied was the group-administered questionnaire. Delport (2005:169) describes this type of questionnaire as one which is completed by those present in the group. Parents and educators were informed of a meeting at school two weeks prior to the meeting. On the specific date the parents and educators met in the school hall when the questionnaire were handed out and completed. The researcher was available to answer any queries which respondents had about the different questions. The educators and parents were informed well in advance. The type of questions chosen for this study was the close-ended questions. After reviewing the literature on academic failure, the researcher decided to use close-ended questions. Close-ended questions can be used when response options are well-known and that the degree, frequency and comprehensiveness of a phenomenon can be studied successfully by using closed questions (Delport, 2005:176).

The questionnaire administered to educators and the parents were the same. It consisted of four sections. Section A consisted of the demographic data where participants filled in their gender, religion, home language and race. Section B consisted of seven questions on school related factors influencing academic failure of the learners. Section C consisted of 5 questions on home-related factors which are responsible for academic failure of learners. Section D consisted of six questions which consisted of factors due to personal characteristics of the learners which cause them to fail.

3.4.1 Validity

Validity is an essential quality in quantitative research data and has to do with whether the data are, in fact, what they believed it would be. Validity is defined as the degree to which all the accumulated evidence supports the intended interpretation of test scores for the proposed purposes." The critical factor is whether the data collected is accurate and appropriate for the purpose of the study. There are four distinct types of validity namely content, concurrent, predictive, and construct.

Litwin (1995:35) states that face or content validity is based on a cursory review of items by judges. A questionnaire was administered to accumulate information. To facilitate the validity of the questionnaire, certain steps were taken. To ensure face validity in this study, experts in the field of Educational Psychology, were given the draft of the questionnaire to indicate as to whether the items of the questionnaire on the face of it, have determined the factors influencing academic failure of the learners.

3.4.2 Reliability

Mason (1996:24) states that reliability involves the accuracy of the research methods and techniques used. In this study the reliability was checked by means of computer analysis, Quantitative Data Analysis.

3.7 Pilot study

A pilot study was carried out using the questionnaire for both parents and educators. Three parents and two educators in the pilot study were asked to complete the questionnaire. The five participants involved in the pilot study were not included in the main study. The pilot study took one day. The aim of the study was to determine how well the respondents understood the questionnaire and how long it took the participants to answer the questions. The parent and educator participants were allowed to ask questions to clarify the questionnaire. After the pilot study, the questionnaire was modified using the information collected from the parents and educators. This included making changes to question 2 of Section C where illiteracy of parents was changed to educational level of parents. Ethical procedures were followed during the pilot study and parents and educators were informed that their responses would be used to make revisions to the questionnaire that would be used in the main study.

Reliability was determined by internal consistency using the Kuder-Richardson 21 (K-21) formula.

$$\text{Reliability} = 1 - \frac{x(n-x)}{n\delta^2}$$

Where x = the mean; n = number of items and S^2 = variance.

The reliability index of 0, 75 were obtained after the correlation analysis was performed.

3.8 Procedure

Preliminary meetings were held with the principals of the selected schools to obtain their support and to arrange for an appropriate time for the questionnaires to be administered to the educators and parents. The participants were assured that anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained within the boundaries of the research process. A letter explaining the purpose of the study was given to them. Respondents were encouraged to express their views. The aspect of anonymity and confidentiality was emphasised.

Different approaches can be used to fill in the questionnaire. For this research, a group-administered procedure was used in which educators and parents gathered in the school hall where the purpose of the research was explained. Copies of the questionnaire were handed out. The survey was conducted at two primary schools in Clarke Estate, with the help of the two headmasters and other parties at the schools. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire on Parents' and educators' perceptions of factors contributing to academic failure of learners in schools.

It did not take more that 20 minutes to complete. The survey was printed in English. Where language barriers existed, the researcher explained the questions in Afrikaans. A cover letter to assure confidentiality accompanied the questionnaire. After all educators and parents completed the questionnaire, they were asked to place the questionnaires in a box. .

3.9 Method of data analysis

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), data analysis is a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. The data obtained from the survey questionnaire was subjected to descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis is a set of concepts and methods used in organizing, summarising, tabulating, depicting and describing collections of data (Cohen and Manion, 1989). The goal of descriptive analysis is to provide a representation of data, which describes, in tabular, graphical or numerical form the results of the research (Shavelson, 1981).

The data from the survey questionnaire were cleansed in order to look for possible errors, assess the quality and see if the data answer the original questions and prepare the final data analysis. The descriptive analysis was used to interpret the statistical outputs. The results of analysis were presented in frequencies and tables for the participants' demographics. With regards to the analysis of the factors responsible for the failing of learners in Clarke Estate primary schools, frequencies were used. In order to compare each factor to demographic variables the researcher used cross-tabulation.

3.10 Ethical consideration

The research was carried out in accordance with the ethical requirements of the University of the Western Cape. Appropriate steps were taken to negotiate the research project to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. Approval was obtained from the Western Cape Education Department and the schools concerned. During the process of research, all members of the schools concerned were, as far as possible, treated with the utmost respect and were provided with necessary protection to ensure that they did not come to harm.

Participants of this study were provided adequate information about the nature of the study and the roles which participants had to play. Participants were informed that the information they provided would be treated in strict confidence. They were told that the information was for research purpose. To assure confidentiality the questionnaire for the research was completed anonymously. Participants were also told that participation was voluntary and that they could discontinue their participation at any stage of the study. Participants signed a consent form to further indicate that they freely consent to participate in the study. The research did not disrupt the normal functioning of the schools because a convenient time and place was arranged to collect the required data.

This chapter attempted to describe the approach, methodology and data gathering procedures used in this study. In the next chapter, the results of the investigation will be explained.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction to the Chapter

The purpose of this study was to find out what factors educators and parents consider as responsible for the high rate of academic failures of learners in Clarke Estate Primary schools. This study was also designed to find out whether or not there are differences in the perceptions of parents and educators with regard to the factors they consider as responsible for the high failure rate of learners. In the previous chapter the researcher presented a description of the methodology employed to achieve the purpose of the study. This chapter presents the results of the study.

4.2 Presentation of the Results

Data analysis was carried out by first finding out participants who chose "Yes" response option on each of the items on the questionnaire indicated as possible factors contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools. The total frequency counts of "Yes" option for each item on the questionnaire, indicated by all the participants as well as groups of participants, were calculated. That is, the total number of participants and groups of participants (parents/educators, male/female) agreeing to the suggestions on the questionnaire as to factors contributing to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools, were calculated. The frequency counts were converted into percentage frequencies and the results presented in tables. The results are presented as information is provided to answer the research questions.

4.2.1 Research Question One: What do participants of this study consider as factors contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools?

The intension of this question was to find out which of the suggested items on the questionnaire are considered by the participants as factors contributing to high rate of

academic failure by learners in schools. The information displayed on Table 4.1 provides answer to the question.

Table 4.1. Respondents and factors considered as responsible for high rate of academic failure by learners in Clarke Estate Primary Schools.

Sections on the questionnaire	Parents		Educators		Total	
	Male (N=28) %	Female (N=172) %	Male (N=6) %	Female (N=14) %	All Male (N=34) %	All Female (N=86) %
1. School environment not conducive for learning	82	89	50	36	79	84
2. Lack of learning materials	96	95	83	79	97	93
3. Irrelevant curriculum	64	67	33	36	61	65
4. Little or no extramural activities	100	92	83	71	100	90
5. Learners low level of interest in activities	100	91	83	93	100	90
6. Poorly trained and ill-prepared educators	36	58	100	36	48	56
7. Poor educator attitude towards learners	64	81	67	14	67	75
Total	77	82	71	52	79	79
1. Low levels of interest of Parents	79	95	100	86	85	94
2. Educational level of parents	64	90	100	93	73	90
3. Poverty	100	91	100	93	100	90
4. Living conditions	100	94	100	79	100	92
5. Drugs/Alcohol	89	95	100	86	94	94
Total	86	93	100	87	90	92
1. Low levels of interest in schoolwork	100	95	100	79	100	93
2. Absenteeism	89	92	83	79	91	91
3. Too much television	100	85	100	71	100	83
4. Cell phone and Internet	100	92	100	71	100	90
5. Peer pressure	89	96	83	86	91	95
6. Idleness	93	95	100	86	97	94
Total	95	93	94	79	97	91

According to the information presented on table 1 the following, in declining order of importance, are the factors participants considered as contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in Clarke Estate primary schools:

- Idleness of learners (96%);
- Peer pressure (95%);
- Lack of learning materials in schools (94%);
- Drugs and alcohol abuse by parents (94%);
- Living conditions of learners in their homes (93%);
- Low level of interest in education by learners (92%);
- Poverty (92%);
- Low levels of interest of parents in their children's education (92%); and
- Spending too much time with cellphone and on the internet by learners (92%).

The factor which was indicated by the least number of participants as contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools is "poorly trained and ill-prepared educators". Only 55% participants (the least percentage frequency recorded for any item on the questionnaire) indicated that poorly trained and ill-prepared educators could contribute to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools. That is, the participants of this study considered poorly trained and ill-prepared educators as the most unlikely factors contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in Clarke Estate Primary schools.

The results of data analysis displayed on Table 4.1 show that all factors suggested on the questionnaire as contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners and indicated as due to learners themselves were chosen by more that 90% participants. Three of the five factors suggested on the questionnaire as contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners due to their home conditions were agreed to by more than 90% of participants. Two of the factors due to school were agreed to by more than 90% participants. Therefore the participants of this study were of the opinions that most factors contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in Clarke Estate primary schools are due to learners themselves.

In general it could be said that no one single factor was considered by participants as contributing to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools. Rather, as results indicated, participants considered that high rate of academic failure of learners in schools are due to many factors interacting together.

4.2.2: Research Question 2: Are there differences between the male and the female participants with regard to factors they considered as contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools?

The information for answering this question is presented in table 4.1

From the information displayed on table 1 there are many factors on which all male participants and all female participants differed. Male and female participants' differences with regard to factors contributing to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools include:

- Learners spending too much time watching television indicated by 100% males as against 83% females;
- Schools with little or no extramural activities indicated by 100% males as against 90% females;
- Low levels of interest in education by learners indicated by 100% males as against 90% females;
- Poverty indicated by 100% males as against 90% females; and,
- Learners spending too much time with cellphone and on the internet by learners being indicated by 100% males a against 90% females.

Differences can also be seen with regard to how important each group of male and female participants rated the factors. Thus, in declining order, most important factors considered by all male participants as contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools include:

- Little or no extramural activities (100%);
- Poverty (100%);

- Living conditions of learners at home (100%);
- Low levels of interest by learners in school activities (100%);
- Low levels of interest in learning by learners (100%);
- Watching too much television by learners (100%);
- Spending too much time with cellphone and on the internet by learners (100%);
- Idleness of learners (97%); and,
- Lack of learning materials in schools (97%).

Factors considered by all female participants as contributing significantly to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools, in declining order, include:

- Peer pressure (95%);
- Low levels of interest in children's education by parents (94%);
- Idleness by learners (94%);
- Drugs and alcohol abuse by parents (94%);
- Lack of learning materials in schools (93%);
- Low levels of interest in learning by learners (93%);
- Living conditions of learner at home (92%); and,
- Absenteeism by learners (91%).

The factor contributing to high rate of failure of learners in school which male and female participants had the highest disagreement on their perceptions was illiteracy of parents. Whereas 90% female participants agreed that this is an important factor contributing to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools, only 73% males agreed.

In general it could be said that no one single factor was considered by male and female participants as contributing to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools. Rather, as results indicated, male and female participants considered that the high rate of academic failure of learners in schools is due to many factors interacting together.

Table 4.2. Parents' and Educators' responses to questionnaire on factors responsible for high rate of academic failure by learners in Clarke Estate Primary Schools.

Sections on questionnaire	Parents			Educators		
	Male (N=28) %	Female(N=172 %	All Parents (N=200) %	Male (N=6) %	Female (N=14) %	All Educators (N=20) %
Factors due to School						
1. School environment not conducive for learning	82	89	88	50	36	40
2. Lack of learning materials	96	95	95	83	100	95
3. Irrelevant curriculum	64	67	67	33	36	35
4. Little or no extra mural activities	100	92	93	83	71	75
5. Learners low level of interest in activities	100	91	92	83	93	90
6. Poorly trained and ill-prepared educators	36	58	55	50	36	40
7. Poor educator attitude towards learners	64	81	79	67	14	30
Total	77	82	81	64	55	58
Factors due to Home						
1. Low levels of interest of Parents	79	95	93	100	86	85
2. Educational level of parents	64	90	87	100	93	90
3. Poverty	96	91	99	100	93	95
4. Living conditions	100	94	99	100	79	85
5. Drugs/Alcohol	89	95	94	100	86	90
Total	86	93	94	100	87	89
Factors due to learners						
1. Low levels of interest	96	95	95	100	79	85
2. Absenteeism	89	92	92	83	79	80
3. Too much television	100	85	87	100	71	80
4. Cell phone and Internet	100	92	94	100	71	80
5. Peer pressure	89	96	94	83	86	85
6. Idleness	93	95	91	100	86	90
Total	95	93	92	94	79	83

4.2.3 Research Question 3: Are there differences between parent and educator participants regarding factors they considered as contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools?

The intension of the question was to find out if there are differences among educator and parent participants of this study as to the factors they considered as contributing to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools.

Table 4.2 presents the results of data analysis on the basis of responses by parent and educator participants in order to provide answer to this question.

From the information displayed on table 4. 2, parents and educators differed in their perceptions of many factors. Differences between parents and educators with regard to their perceptions of factors contributing to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools are noted in the following factors.

- School environment not conducive to learning indicated by 88% parents as against 40% educators;
- Irrelevant curriculum indicated by 67% parents as against 35% educators;
- Absenteeism indicated by 92% parents as against 80% educators; and,
- Peer pressure indicated by 94% parents as against 85% educators.

Differences can also be seen with regard to how each group of participants rated the factors. Thus, in declining order, most important factors parents considered as contributing to high rate of academic failure in schools include:

- Poverty (99%);
- General living conditions (99%);
- Lack of learning materials in school (95%);
- Low level of interest in learning by learners (95%);
- Drug and alcohol abuse by parents (94%);
- Cellphone and internet usage (94%);

- Peer pressure (94%);
- Low level of interest in children's education by parents (93%); and,
- Absenteeism by learners (92%).

On the other hand, the factors considered by educators as contributing significantly to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools, in declining order of significance, include:

- Poverty (95%);
- Lack of learning materials in schools (95%);
- Educational level of parents (90%);
- Idleness by learners (90%);
- Drug and alcohol abuse by parents (90%);
- Low level of interest in learning by learners (85%);
- Peer pressure (85%);
- Low level of interest in children's education by parents (85%); and,
- Living conditions of parents (85%).

Thus while generally there seems to be agreement as to the two most important factors rated by parents and educators as contributing to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools, there appears to be sharp disagreement when it comes to considering other factors contributing to high rate of academic failure of learners especially those which are due to schools and those which are due to learners.

4.2.4 Research Question 4: Are there differences between participants affiliated to School A and participants affiliated to School B with regard to factors they considered as contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools?

The intension of the question is to find out if there are differences between participants affiliated to School A and participants affiliated to School B in terms of their perceptions of the factors responsible for high failure rates of learners in the two schools in Clarke Estate.

The information from the responses to questionnaire questions, on the basis of the participants affiliated to the two schools, for answering this question, is presented in the table below (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 presents the results of data analysis on the basis of whether participants are affiliated to School A or School B in order to provide answers to the research question.

Table 4.3. School A and School B participants' responses to questionnaire on factors responsible for high rate of academic failure by learners in Clarke Estate Primary Schools.

Sections on the questionnaire	School A			School B		
	Parents (N=100) %	Educators (N=10) %	All School A Participants (N=110) %	Parents (N=100) %	Educators (N=10) %	All School B Participants (N=110) %
Factors due to School						
1. School environment not conducive for learning	95	50	91	81	30	76
2. Lack of learning materials	100	100	100	92	60	89
3. Irrelevant curriculum	64	20	60	70	50	69
4. Little or no extramural activities	96	90	95	90	60	87
5. Learners low level of interest in activities	98	100	98	86	100	87
6. Poorly trained and ill-prepared educators	60	50	59	50	50	50
7. Poor educators attitude towards learners	90	50	86	67	100	70
Total	86	66	84	77	64	75
Factors due to Home						
1. Low levels of interest of Parents	98	90	97	87	90	87
2. Educational level of parents	92	100	93	82	90	82
3. Poverty	100	100	100	94	90	94
4. Living conditions	99	100	99	91	70	89
5. Drugs/Alcohol	99	100	99	89	80	88
Total	98	100	98	88	84	88
Factors due to Learners						
1. Low levels of interest	97	90	96	94	90	94
2. Absenteeism	93	90	93	95	80	94
3. Too much television	87	90	87	89	80	88
4. Cellphone and Internet	95	90	95	90	70	88
5. Peer pressure	96	90	95	94	90	94
6. Idleness	100	90	99	94	100	95
Total	95	90	94	93	85	92

From the information displayed on Table 4.3 participants affiliated to the two schools differed in their perceptions of many factors considered as contributing to high rate of academic failure in schools. The two groups of participants differed in their perceptions of the following factors:

- School environment not conducive for learning indicated by 91% participants affiliated to School A as against 76% participants affiliated to School B.
- Poor educator attitude towards learners indicated by 86% participants affiliated to School A as against 70% participants affiliated to School B.
- A lack of learning materials at school indicated by 100% participants affiliated to School A as against 89% participants affiliated to School B.
- Living conditions at home indicated by 86% participants affiliated to School A as against 70% participants affiliated to School B.

Differences could also be seen with regard to how each group of participants affiliated to School A and School B rated or ranked the factors which are contributing to the high rate of academic failure by learners in schools. Thus, in declining order, most important factors participants affiliated to School A considered as contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools include:

- A lack of learning materials in schools (100%);
- Poverty (100%);
- General living conditions (100%);
- Drug and alcohol abuse (99%);
- Idleness by learners (99%);
- Low level of interest in learning by learners (98%); and,
- Low levels of interest in children's education by parents (97%)

On the other hand, the factors considered by all participants affiliated to School B as contributing significantly to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools, in declining order include:

- Idleness by learners (95%);
- Poverty (94%);
- Low levels of interest in learning by learners (94%);
- Absenteeism by learners (94%);
- Peer pressure (94%);
- Lack of learning materials in schools (89%); and,
- Living conditions at home (89%)

Participants of this study did not consider poorly trained and ill-prepared educators as a major factor contributing to high failure rate of learners in Clarke Estate primary schools. Only 55% of participants indicted this as a factor contributing to high failure rate of academic failure. This percentage frequency is the least in comparison with percentage frequencies of participants indicating other factors suggested in the questionnaire.

About 91% participants affiliated to School A indicated that 'school environment not conducive to learning' is the most likely contributing factor to high rate of academic failure in schools as compared to 76% participants affiliated to School B who disagreed.

4.2.5 Research Question 5: Are there differences between parent participants affiliated to School A and those affiliated to School B with regard to the factors they considered as contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools?

The intension of the question is to find out if there are differences between parent participants affiliated to School A and parent participants affiliated to School B with regard to their perceptions of the factors responsible for high failure rate of learners in Clarke Estate.

The information from the responses to questionnaire questions, on the basis of parent participants affiliated to School A and parent participants affiliated to School B, for answering this question, is presented in table 4.3.

Table 3 presents the results of data analysis on the basis of status of participants – that is, whether parent participants were affiliated to School A or School B.

From the information displayed on Table 4.3 there are many factors on which parents affiliated to School A and School B differed. Factors considered as contributing to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools in which participants affiliated to School A and B differed include:

- Poor educator attitude towards learners indicated by 90% parents of School A as against 67% parents of School B;
- School environment not conducive for learning indicated by 95% parents of School A as against 81% parents of School B;
- Learners low level of interest in school activities indicated by 98% parents of School A against 86% parents of School B
- Low levels of interest by parents in their children's education indicated by 98% parents against 87% of School B;
- Educational level of parents indicated by 92% parents of School A as against 82% parents of School B; and,
- Drugs and alcohol abuse by learners indicated by 99% parents of School A as against 89% parents of School B;

Differences between parent participants affiliated to School A and parent participants affiliated to School B can also be seen with regard to how each group of participants rated the factors. Thus, in declining order, most important factors parent participants of School A considered as contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools include:

- Lack of learning materials in schools (100%);
- Poverty (100%);
- Idleness (100%);
- Living conditions of learners in their homes (99%);
- Drugs and alcohol abuse by parents (99%);
- Low levels of interest by parents in their children's education (98%); and,

- Low level of interest in learning by learners (98%).

On the other hand, the factors considered by parent participants affiliated to School B as contributing significantly to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools, in declining order, include:

- Absenteeism by learners (95%);
- Poverty (94%);
- Low levels of interest in learning by learners (94%);
- Peer pressure (94%);
- Idleness (94%);
- Lack of learning materials in schools (92%);
- Living conditions of learners at home (91%);
- Little or no extra mural activities (90%); and,
- Cellphone and internet usage (90%).

The biggest disagreement between parent participants affiliated to School A and School B is with regard to the factor of poor educator attitude. About 86% parents of School A as against 70% parents of School B, considered it as responsible for the high rate of academic failure in schools. The factor of school environment not conducive to learning was rated very high by parent participants affiliated to School A (91%), compared to 70% of School B's parent participants.

4.3 Summary

This chapter presented the results of analysis of data collected for this study. The results revealed that there are not one or a few factors responsible for the high rate of academic failure of learners in schools. Rather there are arrays of factors interacting together to cause academic failure in schools. The participants of this study considered major factors responsible for high rate of academic failure of learners in schools to be due to learners themselves. Some of these factors are low level of interest in schoolwork, absenteeism, too much time devoted to television, cellphone and internet, peer pressure and idleness by

learners. Some factors considered by participants as contributing to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools were also found to be due to home. For instance, participants considered low level of interest in children's education by parents (86%), illiteracy of parents (92%), poverty (94%), living conditions at home and drug and alcohol abuse by parents (88%) are all responsible for high rate of academic failure of learners in schools.

Finally participants also considered those factors due to school, which include school environment not conducive to learning, lack of learning materials in school, irrelevant curriculum, learners' low level of interest in school activities, poorly trained and ill-prepared educators. Poorly trained and ill-prepared educators (55%) were considered by all participants as the least responsible factor for the high rate of academic failure in schools.

All of the above mentioned factors contribute to high rate of academic failure in schools. The discussion and recommendations based on the findings will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction to the Chapter

The purpose of this study was to investigate what parents and educators consider as factors responsible for high rate of academic failure of learners in Clarke Estate Primary schools. In the last chapter the results of the study were represented. In this chapter the discussion of the findings of the study is presented. This chapter also features recommendations based on the findings for future studies.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The results revealed that there are many factors interacting together to cause high rate of academic failure of learners in Clarke Estate Schools. From the perspectives of the participants of the study (parents and educators) most of these factors are due to the learners themselves. The participants were of the view that learners' low level of interest in schoolwork, absenteeism, spending too much time on television, cellphone and internet as well as peer pressure and idleness by learners are major factors contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in Clarke Estate Schools.

The study also found that parents and teachers were also concerned about certain factors associated with homes contributing to high rate of academic failure of learners in schools. These home-related factors include educational level of parents, poverty, poor living conditions a well as drug and alcohol abuse by parents. Some school-related factors contributing to failure of learners identified by participants include lack of learning materials, school-environment not conducive for learning and irrelevant school curriculum. Poor educators attitude towards learners were considered by all participants as the least likely factor responsible for the high rate of academic failure in schools.

The results of the study further indicate that there are many factors on which all male participants and all female participants differed. Male and female participants differences with regard to factors contributing to high rate of academic failure include: learners spending too much time watching television, spending too much time on their cellphone and internet, learners low level of interest in their schoolwork, low levels of interest by parents in their children's education, little or no extra-mural activities at school and poverty.

Differences between parents and teachers in terms of their perceptions of school-related factors contributing to academic failure were also found. These differences are with regard to school environment not conducive to learning, irrelevant curriculum, absenteeism by learners and peer pressure.

Participants affiliated to the two schools differed in their perceptions of many factors considered as contributing to high rate of academic failure by learners in schools. The two groups of participants differed in their perceptions of the following factors: school environment not conducive to learning, a lack of learning materials, poor educator attitude towards learners and living conditions at home.

School affiliation was also found to influence the way participants perceived academic failure causal factors. This is especially with regard to factors such as poor educator attitude towards learners, school environment not conducive to learning, learners low level of interest, low level of interest of parents in their children's education, educational level of parents and drug and alcohol abuse by parents. Parents affiliated to School A and those affiliated to School B did not agree on these factors in terms of their importance in contributing to academic failure of learners in Clarke Estate schools.

5.3 Discussion of the Findings

The first finding is that there are many factors contributing to academic failure of learners in schools. This finding is consistent with the finding by Caillods and

Postlethwaite (1989). In a significant study which reviewed teaching and learning conditions in developing countries in Africa and Asia, Caillods and Postlethwaite (1989) found that there was not one single factor, but arrays of factors influencing learner achievement in school. According to Byrd (2005), these arrays of factors can be clustered into three categories which include those related to parents (family or societal) causal factors, teachers (school or curriculum) causal factors and students (personal) causal factors.

The study found that parents and educators were of the opinions that most of the factors contributing to high rate of academic failure in school are due to the learners themselves. These factors include learners' idleness, low level of interest by the learners in their schoolwork, peer pressure, learners spending too much time on television and with cell phone and internet as well as learners' absenteeism from school are contributing factors to their academic failure.

Many factors within the child (intrinsic), could pose a threat to effective learning. Health related problems, as well as neurological, physiological and genetic problems, can cause him/her to have problems learning at school. According to Du Toit (1994), a child's learning might be hampered by innate or acquired disabilities such as blindness, deafness or mental handicap, which could cause children to get specialized instructions to reach their full potential. Neurological dysfunction can cause learners to experience behavioural problems.

Tlale (1991:18) argues that "Children differ from each other in the way in which they cope with their problems and therefore manifest various personality characteristics, some of which may result in underachievement". According to Whitmore (in Kapp, 1994:151), researchers are of the opinion that underachievers usually have a negative self-concept. Self-concept is described by Butler-Por (in Tlale, 1991) as a mirror image, which is shaped by all positive and negative reflections received from meaningful individuals in the child's environment. Children, who internalise mostly negative responses from meaningful individuals in their lives, may form a low self-concept and develop a negative

attitude towards to school. This can result in underachievement. Du Toit (1994:59) further points out that "Children, who show indications of poor self-image, will not have an inborn capacity to do well and the slightest negative experience regarding their performance will weaken their resolve even further".

The study also found out that certain aspects of homes also contribute to high rate of academic failure of learners. According to Fleisch (2008), South African studies of academic achievement have consistently found strong and positive correlation between socio-economic background and academic performance. Children from impoverished families tend, on average, to perform poorly in tests of reading and mathematics. In a study by Crouch and Mabogoane (1998), 25 percent of academic achievement is explainable in terms of social background of pupils. Howie and Plomp (2002) found in the earlier TIMSS (Third International Mathematics and Science Study) results that 'possessions at home … are the most significant predictor of pupils' achievement (Howie and Plomp, 2002). A recent Western Cape study pointed out that 'the poverty index proved to be a strong indicator of results showed that there was a clear relationship between the poverty index and performance (Department of Education, 2004).

The participants of this study indicated that poverty, living conditions, parents low level of interest in their children's education and educational level of parents are all contributing factors to the high rate of academic failure of learners. Poverty and living conditions of learners were considered as major factors contributing to the high rate of academic failure in schools. Clarke Estate consists of block of flats and houses which are often overcrowded and poorly resourced. The majority of households are single-parent. Large families live in these houses with people often living in the lounge. The area has a high unemployment and crime rate. Drug abuse is on the increase. Parents have low paid jobs and cannot provide for their children. Homes are often dark because there is no money to buy electricity. Children do not have a place to do their homework or even sleep at night. The living conditions in this estate, not only make learning difficult, but poverty also make it impossible for learners to have educational materials. They feel discouraged because other children make fun of them.

Parent and educator participants of this study also indicated that parental non-involvement in children's education has a negative impact on their children's academic performance at school. According to Abrosetti-De Catro and Cho (2005), parents are the children's only and best advocates, therefore the key to successful parental involvement is communication. Parents are taking the first step to becoming involved, if they regularly contact educators to inquire about their children's progress (Measuring Up, 1999). Parents need to become directly involved by setting up a time for homework to be done and checking it, limiting time spend watching television and with friends, providing support for educators, and policy and decision making at school. If parents become more involved in the school environment, this has an important impact on their children's success in school, especially when parents become a familiar presence in the school environment (National Education Association, 1997; Nye, 2006 and Quigley, 2000).

The study found that there are significant correlations between parents' educational and occupational levels and the educational opportunities and achievement of their children (Thomas, 2006). According to Fleisch (2008), the single strongest predictor of under-achievement is parents' educational attainment. Studies consistently find strong positive associations between children's' success at school and the duration of parents' school careers. Children often drop out of school because of a lack of motivation and encouragement from their parents.

Educational levels of parents strongly affect the children's education development. Teale (1986) found in his studies that "children experience literacy primarily as a social progress during their preschool years". Parents strongly affect this social learning process because "parents who have gone beyond a high school education are found to be more involved with their infants and children than those who did not finish high school. Many less educated parents simply have more unmanaged stress in their lives, and this stress interferes with their ability and opportunity. Additional research shows that uniquely the mother's education has a significant impact on her children's learning process. Ann (1993) points out that the mother's education is one of the most important factors influencing children's reading levels and other school achievements. Generally, research

has revealed that more highly educated mothers have greater success in providing their children with the time spend reading to their children and getting more involved in their children's learning process.

The study also found that certain aspects of school contribute to the high rate of academic failure of learners. Participants also indicated these school-related factors to include school environment not conducive to learning, lack of learning materials, irrelevant curriculum and poorly trained and ill-prepared educators.

Caillods and Postlethwaite (1989) state that the curriculum is a very important element in the analysis of teaching and learning conditions and learner achievement because it states what must be learned, at what level, how much and provides guidelines to teachers on how learning will be organized. However, it has also been found that in most cases, the curriculum content does not relate to the learners lives and therefore the learners find the content meaningless and uninteresting. This is partially true in areas where the learners' cultural milieu differs from the schools' cultural milieu (Du Toit, 1994:57). Jones and Charlton (1996:19) point out that learners distance themselves from the task of learning if they find the curriculum pointless and meaningless and targeted at an appropriate level. They may also find the curriculum irrelevant to their future work-related needs. Such behaviours may typically included not paying attention in class, not completing homework, not preparing for tests and in circumstances, even truancy.

According to Hallam and Rogers (2008), the curriculum must be applicable to engage learners' interest in learning. Schools can adapt the curriculum to provide flexibility when they notice the early signs of disaffection, including increased absenteeism. Extra-curricular activities which offer support to learners should be provided in the period leading up to examinations. Before school activities such as breakfast clubs and other activities, can improve punctuality and attendance. Hallam, Rogers and Shaw (2004) point out that homework clubs can provide facilities to learners whose home environment may not be conducive to do homework and also foster a positive attitude towards school. Children can develop their self-confidence and skills through a range of extra-curricular

after-school activities. Schools that have extensive and well focused extra-curricular activities, educators and learners benefit (Ofsted, 2001). Children develop self-esteem when they have opportunities to display their abilities in other areas apart from the formal education in class. Children learn to understand themselves and each other better when taking part in sport, drama, music and activities (Ofsted, 2001).

The study also found that poorly trained and ill-prepared educators are contributing to the high rate of academic failure of learners in schools. Caillods and Postlethwaite (1898:16) argue what teachers actually do in the classroom or rather the quality of their teaching can help improve academic achievement. Teachers also "… tend to develop stronger instructional and classroom management skills, … are quick at restoring order and develop a tempo of teaching which fosters more 'time on tasks' on the part of students". According to Anderson, Kermyt, Case & Lam (1988), when teachers prepare their lessons well, set mark homework and class work are skillful in using a variety of teaching methods to reach every learner, they would be able to produce higher academic achievement in their learners. Carron and Chau (1996) point out that the individual school case studies show that in the end teacher quality is more a question of motivation than competence. Classes, in which the results were better than expected, were invariably run by teachers, who were more motivated than elsewhere. Competence is an important but not a sufficient condition for an efficient teaching-learning process to take place.

Teachers who are inflexible are those who strictly adhere to pre-planned schedules allowing little or no room for individual differences in terms of speed of comprehension and learning styles. Gifted learners can be stifled, while slow learners are pressured into keeping pace with the rest of the class. When the curriculum is rigid, formal and with inflexible teaching methods, it does not allow children to satisfy their need for autonomy and it does not help them to develop initiatives. This can be the cause or reinforce underachieving behaviour (Tlale, 1991:17).

5.4 Recommendations

5.4.1 Recommendations at governmental level

People responsible for formulating policies must take note of the following. Overcrowding and a lack of resources at school especially in previously disadvantaged areas (such as where this study was conducted) have led to high rate of academic failure in schools. Learners are often blamed for the high rate of academic failure at school. Children are often idle because the curriculum is irrelevant and meaningless to them. The high ratio of educator-learner might be responsible for the high failure rate in schools. The high pupil- teacher ratio does not allow for personal attention given to learners by the educator. The Department of Education should introduce a policy that would reduce the class size and teacher-pupil ratio. More teachers need to be employed so that they can provide support to learners with special needs.

Poorly trained and ill-prepared educators were also identified as a factor that affected the way lessons are presented and how it relates to the learners. Policies on in-service training and effective teacher training programmes need to be implemented by the Department of Education. A teacher preparation programme should be put in place to ensure that teachers prepare the lesson in a way that includes all learners in the learning process.

Everyone must take responsibility for their own development and wellbeing. A lot can be done at the micro level to curb the high rate of academic failure in schools. Although factors such as poverty, living conditions and learner's low level of interest in their schoolwork etc. remain, parents, educators and learners can collaborate to bring about effective teaching and learning in schools.

5.4.2 Recommendations for the Parents

According to Baker and Bridger (1998:12), parental involvement is important in reversing underachievement. They further points out that consultation with parents regarding behaviour management and parenting issues, is a commonly accepted

remediation strategy for underachievement. Support from parents is critical for the school's success of all children. This study found that learner's academic performance is affected negatively if there is a lack of parental guidance and supervision.

The findings of this investigation show that parents need to be more involved in the education of their children. Although the majority of parents have low educational levels and may not be able to help their children with their schoolwork, they can encourage their children to work hard. They must show an interest by visiting the school, attending parent teacher's meetings and regularly check on their children's academic progress at school. Educators need to be informed by parents on their children's' home background to ensure that the educator understand how to deal with the child if any problem arises. Parents must share important information of their children such as any illnesses or metal problems etc. and also be co-operative. Parents should volunteer to be part of the school governing body of the school. They must be involved in the affairs of the school and ensure that effective teaching and learning take place in the school. They must encourage their children to learn and be successful in life. Parents need to take ownership of the school. They need to be vigilant and protect the school building and resources from vandalism and theft. They need to report any burglary to the police. Workshops need to be established to develop better collaboration between parents and their children. These workshops could help parents to learn how to help their children be successful in life.

5.4.3 Recommendations for the School

Educators need to consider methods to bring about more interaction between educator and learner. They should vary their teaching methods during lessons to encourage a variety of modes of thinking and learning among the learners. They should provide the learners with opportunities for critical thinking during activities in class. They should attempt to understand the background of each learner in their class. They need to understand the difficulties experienced by the learners and how to best meet their needs. Educator training programmes need to be implemented as to ensure that educators are exposed to current policies and documents that can assist them in dealing with learners

who are struggling. Schools and educators need to be made aware of structures that are in place to guide educators in how to prevent school failures. Implementations of these guidelines could ensure that educators are equipped to help the slow learners in class. In line with Education Department's White Paper Six, all learners should be included in the learning process. Educators should be trained in Special Needs Education to provide support for learners with special needs. The Education Department should put a policy in place that directly deals with academic failure in schools and intervention programmes that could guide educators on ways to help the slow learners.

It is important for educators to understand which factors contribute to academic failure so in school so that they can effectively intervene when necessary. Educators' attitude to academic towards the learners plays an important role in their positive attitude towards learning. Poor educator-learner relationships have a negative effect on learner participation in class and subsequently poor academic achievement.

5.4.4 Recommendations for further research

Since this study focused on schools within a disadvantaged area that has a poor socioeconomic background, a comparative study could be done between schools in the affluent areas and these disadvantaged schools. Schools used in this study were from one district in the Western Cape. A bigger sample could be obtained from several other districts in the various provinces so that findings could be generalised for South Africa.

5.5 Limitations of the study

Adequate steps and procedures were taken to ensure validity and reliability of the study and minimize any potential bias. However, retrospective analysis shows some limitations such as, it is not possible to generalise the findings of this study, because of the sample size and because it was limited to a small area of the country. In this study a questionnaire was used as a data gathering instrument. The researcher could use an

interview which would allow greater flexibility. The participants could also express their opinion freely. The participants could express their feelings about factors influencing academic failure in schools.

Findings are transferable to areas with similar context. Since many schools in South Africa fall within these similar contexts of poor socioeconomic backgrounds, poverty and lack of resources, findings remain very useful. The aim of this study, however, was to gain an in depth understanding of factors responsible for academic failure of learners. This was achieved.

5.6 Conclusion

It was found in this study that there were difficulties at all levels of education, the learners, at home and at school. Problems need to be addressed at all levels. The investigation showed many factors that prevent learners from actualizing their full potential at school. Poor socioeconomic backgrounds are linked to several factors such as illiteracy of parents, lack of learning materials in schools, poverty, learners low levels of interest in school work, high absenteeism etc. The environment has a huge influence on learners' academic achievement because it affects their motivation and interest in their school work.

Due to academic failure, many learners never realise their full potential and sometimes drop out of school. The country's urgent need for skilled people is not met; instead school leavers are produced who are semi skilled in the work place. These school drop outs can never positively contribute socially, politically or economically to the country's needs. They will be part of the ever growing number of unemployed people who depend on state welfare grants for their livelihood.

Illnesses such as Tuberculosis, Cancer and HIV/AIDS and other diseases have already a negative impact on the country's economy and society, the country cannot afford to allow academic failure to impact further on the already failing economy. It is important that the

school in collaboration with society as a whole intervene to solve the problem of academic failure. The Education Department and other educational institutions need to implement new programmes and recommendations to eradicate the problem of academic failure in schools.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

The Research Director
Western Cape Education Department
CAPE TOWN

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I, Lucille Petersen, an Educational Psychology student at the University of the Western Cape, hereby request permission to conduct research at schools within the Western Cape Education Department.

The main purpose of this study is to find out what factors are responsible for the high failure rate of learners in Clarke Estate primary schools. The study will also compare the perception of the educators to that of the parents as to which factors are most critical in the situation.

The research approach will be a qualitative research. In this study the researcher will be using the questionnaire as research instrument to collect the desired data from parents and educators. Two hundred parents and twenty educators will participate in this study. A questionnaire will be used in order to gain access to a large group of parents and educators. The questionnaire will be distributed to 200 parents who will be randomly selected. They represent 25% of a population of 800 parents. Twenty educators which represent 60% of both schools will participate in this study.

Ethical clearance will be obtained from the university before commencement of this research project. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have further enquiries.

Yours faithfully

.....

Contact numbers:

(Cell): 076 4579 416
E-mail: petersen.lucille@gmail.com

APPENDIX B

Faculty of Education, Private Bag X17 Bellville 7535, Western Cape South Africa

May 12, 2009

Dr. Ronald Cornelisen

Director of Research

Western Cape Education Department

Dear Sir,

RE - PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH

Lucille Petersen (Student Number 2555418) is a registered Master in Education (Educational Psychology) degree student of the University of the Western Cape. As part of the fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, students are expected to conduct and report on a research study. Lucille Petersen is registered to conduct a study on "Parents and Educators' Perceptions of factors influencing academic failures of learners in two primary schools in Clarke Estate". The study is focused essentially on finding what parents and educators consider as the origins and or causes of failure by learners. This study is expected to come up with recommendations as to how learners can be assisted to learn better and reduce their failure so that they can better plan and build for future.

Lucille Petersen, like other student colleagues, have been put through guidelines on involving humans in research study. She is expected to ensure that no harm comes to participants as a result of the study and that information collected will be kept confidential. Participation will be voluntary and participants are expected to sign consent form.

participants are expected to sign consent form.

I have been appointed as her supervisor for the research study. She needs ethical clearance from the Department of Education to conduct the study. We should be highly grateful, therefore, if you are kind enough to facilitate the process of this ethical clearance.

Thank you very much.

Yours truly

signed

O. Bojuwoye, PhD (Pitt.)

Professor of Educational Psychology

APPENDIX C

Navrae
Enquiries
IMibuzo
Dr RS Cornelissen

Telefoon
Telephone
IFoni
(021) 467-2286

Faks
Fax
IFeksi
(021) 425-7445

Verwysing
Reference
ISalathiso
20090605-0073

Wes-Kaap Onderwysdepartement

Western Cape Education Department

ISebe leMfundo leNtshona Koloni

Ms Lucille Petersen
Faculty of Education
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17
BELLVILLE
7535

Dear Ms L. Petersen

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: PARENTS' AND EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING ACADEMIC FAILURE OF LEARNERS.

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **21st July 2009 to 30th September 2009**.
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr R. Cornelissen at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

    The Director: Research Services
    Western Cape Education Department
    Private Bag X9114
    CAPE TOWN
    8000

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Ronald S. Cornelissen
for: **HEAD: EDUCATION**
DATE: 2nd July 2009

APPENDIX D

Letter for Permission to Conduct Research: School A

The Principal
School A
Clarke Estate

Dear Sir / Madam

Re: Permission To Conduct Research

I hereby wish to formally apply for permission to conduct research at your school.

My name is Lucille Petersen and I am currently enrolled in the Faculty of Education at the University of the Western Cape, studying towards a Masters degree in Education Psychology. My research topic is: Parents' and educators' perceptions of factors influencing academic failure of learners in Clarke Estate primary schools.

I have already obtained permission from the Western Cape Education Department as well as the University of the Western Cape. (Letters attached).

I would like to hand out a questionnaire to ten educators and 100 parents of your school. The filling in of the questionnaire will take about 20 minutes.

I will be happy to come to the school and explain my research at a time convenient to you. I am aware of time constraints but would appreciate your co-operation.

Could you please inform me what will be a suitable date and time for you to allow me to come to your school, either to explain further or to hand out the questionnaires.

If you have any questions please contact me at 0764579416. I will call you in the week starting 27 July 2009 to find out what can be arranged.

Thank you for your time.

Yours in education.

Lucille Petersen

APPENDIX E

Letter for Permission to Conduct Research: School B

The Principal
School B
Clarke Estate

Dear Sir / Madam

Re: Permission To Conduct Research

I hereby wish to formally apply for permission to conduct research at your school.

My name is Lucille Petersen and I am currently enrolled in the Faculty of Education at the University of the Western Cape, studying towards a Masters degree in Education Psychology. My research topic is: Parents' and educators' perceptions of factors influencing academic failure of learners in Clarke Estate primary schools.

I have already obtained permission from the Western Cape Education Department as well as the University of the Western Cape. (Letters attached).

I would like to hand out a questionnaire to ten educators and 100 parents of your school. The filling in of the questionnaire will take about 20 minutes.

I will be happy to come to the school and explain my research at a time convenient to you. I am aware of time constraints but would appreciate your co-operation.

Could you please inform me what will be a suitable date and time for you to allow me to come to your school, either to explain further or to hand out the questionnaires.

If you have any questions please contact me at 0764579416. I will call you in the week starting 27 July 2009 to find out what can be arranged.

Thank you for your time.

Yours in education.

Lucille Petersen

APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORM

I, MARGARET JONGEBLOED..., hereby grant Lucille Petersen, an Psych student at The University of the Western Cape, permission to conduct research questionnaires at this educational institution. I understand that strict ethical guidelines will be followed and that the research process will fall within the Code of Conduct of The Western cape Education Department, University of the Western Cape and the Health professions Council of South Africa.

Signed: .....

Print name clearly: M. JONGEBLOED.

Date: 2009-07-07

Place: EDWARD PRIMARY SCHOOL, ELSIES RIVER

APPENDIX G

CONSENT FORM

I, S. B. J. VALENTYN, hereby grant Lucille Petersen, an Psych student at The University of the Western Cape, permission to conduct research questionnaires at this educational institution. I understand that strict ethical guidelines will be followed and that the research process will fall within the Code of Conduct of The Western cape Education Department, University of the Western Cape and the Health professions Council of South Africa.

Signed: .....

Print name clearly: S. B. J. VALENTYN

Date: 2009. 07. 09

Place: ELSIES RIVER

APPENDIX H

TITLE

FACTORS AFFECTING LEARNERS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information on the factors which influence learners' academic performance. The information is for research purpose only. To ensure confidentiality of information you are not required to write your name on the questionnaire. Please answer all the questions as accurately as you can.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer all items of this questionnaire. We would like to know your views. Your answers will be used for educational research purposes only. Your responses will be treated confidentially. Your identity will not be revealed.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Gender: Male ( ) Female ( ) Age: ( )

Religion: Christian ( ) Muslim ( ) Other ( )

Home Language: English ( ) Afrikaans ( ) Other ( )

Race: Coloured ( ) African ( ) White ( ) Indian ( )

SECTION B: FACTORS INFLUENCING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AT SCHOOL

Please respond to each item in the space provided by simply making a cross (X) in the block opposite your response. Please note that for each question you must ONLY MAKE ONE (X).

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR ACADEMIC FAILURE OF LEARNERS MAY BE:

	Yes	**No**
1. School environment not condusive to learning (e.g. external interruptions such as noise, etc.)		
2. Lack of learning materials (in addition to textbooks) to enhance learning.		
3. Irrelevant curriculum (school subjects are not preparing learners for specific employable skills.)		
4. Little or no extra-mural activities (sport, arts & culture, debate, etc. to keep learners occupied)		
5. Learners low level of interest in school activities (not Interested to take part in plays, singing, dancing)		
6. Poorly trained and ill-prepared educators (educators are unsure of the subject content)		
7. Educators' attitude towards learners (struggling learners do not get the necessary support)		

SECTION C: FACTORS AT HOME INFLUENCING LEARNERS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

	Yes	**No**
1. Low levels of interest of parents (Parents do not encourage their children to do homework/assignments etc.)		
2. Educational levels of parents (Parents cannot help their children with schoolwork and often do not have educational materials.)		

3. Poverty (Parents cannot provide appropriate nurturance for their children.)		

4. Living conditions (The neighbourhood where learners live is dangerous, full of violence and crime preventing them to study at home.)		
5. Drugs/Alcohol (Parents spent more time outside their homes and when at home often are too drunk or drugged to help their children. They are not good role models.)		

SECTION D: FACTORS DUE TO PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNERS

	Yes	**No**
1. Low levels of interest/motivation of learners in schoolwork (Due to lack of resources at home. learners do not do assignments/projects which in turn leads to low marks and/or failure.)		
2. Absenteeism (Frequent absence from school or non-attendance of school make them fall behind in schoolwork.)		
3. Too much television (Children spend too much time watching television. Parents do not monitor or supervise the out-of-school activities of their children.)		
4. Cell phone and Internet (Learners concentrate too much on entertainment and this prevent them from studying or doing assignment/projects.)		
5. Peer pressure (Too many gangs in the neighbourhood and they influence the learners negatively.)		
6. Idleness (Learners are too lazy to do schoolwork. They focus on irrelevant activities.)		

Thank you for your co-operation in completing this questionnaire. Kindly return the questionnaire as specified by the cover letter.

UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE