

**A CASE STUDY OF HOW SECONDARY SCHOOL  
TEACHERS DEAL WITH POOR ACADEMIC  
PERFORMANCE OF GRADE 9 LEARNERS**

BY

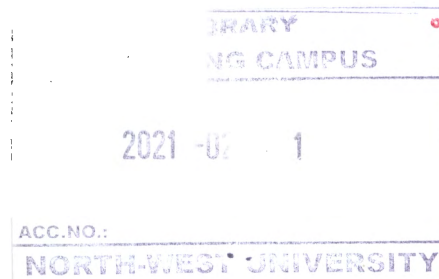
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A Mini Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Education in Education Management at Mafikeng Campus of the North-West University

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MAY 2015



## DECLARATION

I, Dikonketso Dessia Phaladi, declare that this mini dissertation, **A case study of how secondary school teachers deal with poor academic performance of grade 9 learners**, is my original work and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university and that all sources of my information have been quoted as indicated in the text and in the list of references.

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my husband, Motsisi, and our children, Abel, Danny, Morongwa, Sekgele, Mobakeng and Lerato, who were always willing to sacrifice and support me in this challenging task.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- My husband and children for their moral support.

## ABSTRACT

The poor academic performance of learners in South African secondary schools is a growing concern particularly in senior grade levels. It becomes all the more important to investigate the causes of poor academic performance of learners who are about to exit into further education and training in order to find strategies to deal with the causes. This study used the case study approach to investigate how secondary school teachers deal with poor academic performance of grade 9 learners in the Rekopantswe area office in purposefully selected schools. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and Vygotsky's concept of Zone of proximal development provided the theoretical framework for this study. The participants were heads of departments, teachers and learners from four secondary schools. A qualitative case study research method was used and the empirical study was conducted by means of survey instruments, interviews and document analysis. The responses from the survey instrument and interviews were qualitatively analysed. Themes were developed from the empirical and literature study to answer the research questions. The findings show that the causes of poor academic performance are lack of resources, overcrowded classrooms, language of instruction, age cohort policy, learner attitude, absenteeism, teachers' lack of knowledge, lack of proper foundation of learners, grouping of repeating learners in the same class, lack of parental involvement, excessive house chores, drugs and medical problems. Currently, teachers do not implement any particular strategy to address poor academic performance. However, they suggested early identification, early intervention, training, varied teaching methodologies and extra classes as possible strategies to deal with this problem. The causes of poor academic performance in the Rekopantswe Area Office stem from both intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to learning. The strategies for dealing with this problem should focus on the school, home and social environment. The government, schools and parents need to cooperate to provide sufficient resources, enabling class environment, proper training of teachers, and psychological support for learners to enable them to improve upon their performance.

Keywords:

Poor academic performance, teaching strategy, barrier to learning, Grade 9 learners, and secondary school teachers.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ANA	Annual National Assessment
<i>DoBE</i>	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
DoBE -NW	Department of Basic Education in North West
FET	Further Education and Training
GET	General Education and Training
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
HOD	Head of department
IEP	Individual Educational Programme
ISP	Individual Support Plan
LD	Learning Disability
NCESS	National Committee of Education Support Services
NCSNET	National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training
N-WU	North West University
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ORIENTATION

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Poor academic performance is usually adjudged by examiners and other significant academics as falling below an expected standard and quality (Aremu, 2000:231). Adel (2002:91) argues that poor performance in secondary schools is an international problem that has been linked to the low socio-economic background of most learners. Rammala (2009:18) looks at the poor performance in secondary schools and states that the results reveal that, in many cases, the level of academic performance in urban and rural areas is not the same.

Results in both national and international assessments indicate that South African learners have a challenge in mastering mathematics and language skills appropriate to their age (DoBE, 2011:12).

The articulation of a new vision for education in South Africa in the White Paper on General Education and Training (GET) has resulted in the development of a plethora of new education policies, all with the explicit purpose of transforming the legacy of the past and improving on the poor academic performance of grade 9 learners (Wilmot, 2003:313).

According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwane (2004: 333), many children with mild mental handicaps are in the regular classrooms, where their specific learning needs going unrecognised. Others have dropped out through repeated failure and lack of help. While relatively few are receiving the help and support they need. To meet these needs more adequately, flexibility in the teaching-learning process and in the curriculum as a whole, is essential. A critical part of the general challenge to improve the quality of education for all is to determine how the teachers can become more responsive to diverse learning needs and establishing a system and a process of education that is flexible, sensitive and responsive to the vast range of differences and learning needs.

Morakinyo (2003:230) believes that the falling level of academic achievement is attributable to teachers non-use of verbal reinforcement strategy.

Levine (2002:203) states that all individuals vary in learning abilities and that there are group of learners struggling to learn who also fail in school.

Poor academic achievement in school, according to Ong, Chandran, and Lim (2010:247), may be the result of the interplay between child factors and the environmental milieu. Pintrich (2002:389) argues that the link between family socio-economic status and children's academic motivation is well established, and that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, typically display lower academic motivation and are of greater risk for school failure and dropout than others. He believes that one of the contributory factors to poor performance is that such families have fewer resources to support their children's learning outside of school compared to families with higher socio-economic status. He highlights that the resource issue is a very critical one because low socio-economic students often display learning problems and require extra assistance.

The former Minister for Education, Ms Pandor (2007:47), highlighted in the strategic plan of 2007-2011 that, the goal of the Education Ministry is to actively support the provinces and schools in reducing the dropout and repeater rates in secondary schools. She also added that, the Department of Education will strengthen its collaboration with provincial education departments to ensure effective intervention at poorly performing schools to assist them in improving their performance.

It has been noted that in order to improve student performance, principals are required first to improve the management of their schools. This can be done by setting a clear vision for the school and communicating this vision to all students (Masinde, 2009:84)

Schlebusch (2000:38) highlights that the acquisition of English as second language has emerged as a challenge to the vast majority of learners for whom it is not their first language and has manifested itself in the previously disadvantaged black schools. Thousand and Villa (2007:62) state that many general educators report that they have not been exposed to any information about what students with learning disability can actually be. Special educators often have in-depth knowledge about disabilities but they may not have been exposed to strength-based perspectives in designing lessons that allow students access to the general education curriculum.

According to Sailors and Hoffman (2007:7), the correlation between socio-economic conditions and learner performance has been widely reported upon. However, they both take it as a myth to equate poor performance with poor resources. Research has also proved that it is actually what goes on in the classroom that seems to make a difference in any student's achievement. They say that learners in rural Venda and Soshanguve are a case in point to

prove that learners can beat the odds and come out tops despite the socio-economic hardships. The problems encountered in the secondary schools might be originating from the Foundation Phase. Baker (2004:1) believes that the Foundation Phase has been a neglected phase of education for years. Despite research lauding the phase as being important and even highlighting the benefits that a country can reap if it takes care of it, it had limited effect. That is one of the reasons why the Minister for Basic Education has decided to strengthen the Foundation Phase which is the pillar and foundation of education.

It is also stated in the White Paper Six (2001: 55) that Grade 3 should be made the critical place where the learners who require educational support must be identified so that the tailoring of the curriculum, instruments and assessment should also be identified early.

Schooling in South Africa, within the General Education and Training (GET) Band which ends at Grade 9, marks the end of compulsory education. It therefore becomes a matter of urgency to thoroughly prepare learners for schooling beyond the compulsory age (DoBE, 2011: 24).

The failure rate of some learners, which the researcher has noticed over twenty years in the secondary schools, made her question whether enough is being done to cater for the learners that experience poor academic performance, or whether the methods being employed are effective or not. In the process of establishing what constitutes these methods, this case study of poor academic performance may highlight the problem and assist in finding the root causes in order to apply corrective measures.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

There is a growing concern regarding poor academic performance of learners in secondary schools. Teachers who directly deal with learners with poor academic performance face great challenges in their work. After observing poor performance of learners who show no sign of improvement, the researcher decided to carry out this research study to be able to establish how teachers are dealing with learners with poor academic performance, and to develop, if possible, strategies that can help them in dealing with the poor academic performance of their learners. According to Kaznowski (2005:961), there are many reasons why children underperform at school. These include medical problems, below average intelligence, specific learning disabilities, attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder, emotional problems,

poor sociocultural home environments, psychiatric disorders, or even environmental causes. It has also been highlighted by Govender (2012:3) that hundreds of schools across South Africa experience the problem of learners who arrive at school drunk and having smoked dagga. The reasons for poor academic performance in Rekopantswe Area Office cannot be easily discerned without a focused investigation as envisaged in this case study.

### **1.3 RESEARCH AIMS**

This study was guided by two aims: the first aim was to investigate the causes of poor performance among Grade 9 learners with special reference to the Rekopantswe Area Office.

The second aim was to investigate strategies used by secondary school teachers in dealing with the problem of poor academic performance of learners at the Grade 9 levels.

#### **1.3.1 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to establish the causes of poor academic performance of Grade 9 learners in Rekopantswe Area Office and to develop strategies needed by the teachers to deal with poor academic performance of learners, in order to improve upon their achievement.

The following questions guided the study.

- What is the nature and what are the main causes of poor academic performance among Grade 9 learners in secondary schools?
- How do teachers deal with the poor performance of Grade 9 learners in secondary schools in the Rekopantswe Area Office?
- What strategies can be developed to help teachers improve the way they deal with poor academic performance of learners?

#### **1.3.2 The significance of the study**

The outcome of this study will be beneficial to heads of departments, teachers, as well as the Department of Basic Education.

The results from this study will enable departments and teachers to implement strategies to deal with poor academic performance of learners. The Department of Education may also use the results to formulate policies on how to deal with poor academic performance of learners in general. This study is important because it will provide strategies to guide Grade 9 teachers

on how to improve the performance of Grade 9 learners to enable them to proceed to the Further Education and Training (FET) level.

## **1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **1.4.1 Research paradigm**

A paradigm is a way of looking at the world (Mertens, 2005:7). The paradigm adopted in this research is the interpretive paradigm, based on the social constructivist world view. It asserts that participants make meaning of a phenomenon. According to Denzin, Lincoln and Guba, (in Brownwyn, 2011:36), there are three concepts which help define a paradigm. These are ontology, epistemology and methodology. Each of these concepts is briefly explained below.

- Ontology describes our view of the nature of reality.
- Epistemology considers views about the most appropriate ways of enquiring into the nature of the world, what knowledge is and what are the sources and limits of knowledge.
- Methodology explains how the researcher accesses and reports what is learned about the reality.

This study employed the case study design which allows for qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The intention of qualitative research is to understand a particular social situation (Creswell, 2009: 194). Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. The researcher in this study interacts with the respondents on face- to- face basis while observing their behaviour as well. Creswell also indicates that the researcher has to rely as much as possible on the participants views of the situation.

### **1.4.2 Research design**

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:85), a general strategy for solving a research problem, is a research design.

The design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research question and ultimately, to its conclusions (Yin, 2003:20). The research design provides the overall structure for the procedures that the researcher is to follow, the data the

researcher collects, and the data analysis the researcher engages in. In simple terms, research design is planning the route to follow when conducting a research study.

#### **1.4.3 The case study research approach**

The qualitative case study research approach was selected for this study. The case in this study is the Grade 9 learners while the units of analysis are poor academic performance and the appropriate strategies to employ to deal with this problem.

#### **1.4.4 Selection of research sites**

The total number of secondary schools in the Rekopantswe Area Office is 29. From these, four secondary schools were randomly selected. In each school one departmental head, representing the school management team (SMT) was chosen for the interview schedule. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012:104) state that, the sample must be representative of the population about which the researcher aims to draw conclusions, taking into consideration that these schools are situated in the vicinity of nearby villages from where these learners come. Three of the schools are in one township while one is in the village.

#### **1.4.5 Participants**

Schooling in South Africa, in the General Education and Training (GET) Band; (Grade 9), marks the end of compulsory education. It therefore becomes a matter of urgency to thoroughly prepare learners for schooling beyond the compulsory age (DoBE, 2011: 24). In the light of the recent development of phasing out middle schools, it is imperative to prepare the Grade 9 learners to be able to move to Further Education at the high school level. Eight teachers, four departmental heads and twenty learners from four secondary schools were selected to participate in the project. This includes two teachers, one departmental head and five Grade 9 repeating learners from each school.

#### **1.4.6. Purposeful sampling**

Purposive sampling was used. The sample consisted of teachers, departmental heads representing the school management team, and learners who agreed to take part in the study. Once the researcher had identified the schools, she selectively chose the teachers that had the interest of learner performance at heart, and learners who performed poorly because they were likely to yield fruitful data about the evolving research questions.

The researcher searched for experienced teachers who understand the learners and are information-rich informants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:433). In this study, the experienced teachers who know the learners not only at school but also from their home backgrounds provided rich and invaluable information.

#### **1.4.7 The site or social network selected**

The total number of the secondary schools in the Rekopantswe Area Office is 29. Four secondary schools from the 29 in the Rekopantswe Area Office were selected, with the focus on Grade 9 learners. The sites were randomly selected which means every member of the wider population had an equal chance of being included in the sample based on the assumption that every school in the Rekopantswe Area Office has underperforming learners. Inclusion or exclusion from the sample was a matter of chance and nothing else (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005:99).

#### **1.4.8 Participant selection**

Since the study focused on poor academic performance, the sample of learners was drawn from learners who had failed and were repeating or performing poorly and had been identified by their teachers as underachievers. The sample was taken from Grade 9 learners using purposive sampling. The essence of purposeful sampling is to select participants where the phenomenon under study is relevant and from whom an in-depth information can be obtained. Another sample consisted of teachers who are knowledgeable, and have taught for a long time. The reason for involving learners in the study was that, they may highlight their problems that would enable the teachers to help them.

#### **1.4.9 Data collection and recording**

A qualitative researcher is able to use a variety of techniques for gathering information. There is no single prescription for data collection instruments to use. Rather, the focus is fitness for purpose. The researcher used the case study to enquire and to explore in depth the activities, processes and events involving teachers, heads of departments and learners.

#### **1.4.10 Document Analysis**

The researcher used field notes, participant interviews, learners profiles, and school documents such as marked scripts, mark schedules, class registers and the learners portfolios, as stated in Cohen (2005:146) as sources of research information. All interviews

were recorded using a voice recorder for the purpose of later data analysis but permission was first requested from the participants.

#### **1.4.11 Interviews**

The researcher used an interview schedule to guide the interviews. The interview schedule contained questions that the researcher predetermined and used to investigate the problem under study. Structured face-to-face interviews were used for individual Grade 9 learners, teachers and the heads of departments. (See Appendices C, D, E).

Cohen (2005:188) advocates that notes be recorded as quickly as possible after observation, since the quantity of information forgotten is very slight over a short period of time but accelerates quickly as more time passes. He also states that in observation studies, researchers are able to discern on- going behaviour as it occurs and are able to make appropriate notes about its salient features. of attendance register, mark sheets, previous class schedule, and the reports of the two terms of the academic year were used to get information that might not be obtained during interviews. Some information was obtained through casual conversation with the participants. The researcher recorded information obtained from the interviews and from the documents by making hand written notes. For the Grade 9 learner participants to be more comfortable, the researcher allowed them to use their home language as to allow free conversation during the interview.

#### **1.4.12 Survey questions**

Maree (2007:155) asserts that, surveys set out to describe and to interpret what is , although survey is usually conducted by means of survey instrument, information can be obtained in a number of ways. Leedy and Ormrod (2005:183) explain survey as a tool which involves acquiring information about one or more groups of people perhaps about their characteristics, opinions, attitudes, or previous experiences. In this study, survey questions were distributed by hand to the selected departmental heads, teachers and learners.

#### **1.4.13 Data analysis**

Data analysis, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005:147), involves organizing, accounting for and explaining data. In short, this involves making sense of the data in terms of the participants definition of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities. For documents review, school teachers and learners documents were collected

and analysed and reviewed. It is typical in qualitative research for data analysis to commence during the data collection process. At the practical level, qualitative research rapidly amasses huge amounts of data, and early analysis reduces the problem of data overload by selecting significant features for future focus.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:140), the central task during data analysis is to identify common themes in people's description of their experiences.

### **1.5 RESEARCHER'S ROLE**

The researcher's role will be that of seeking information, by interviewing the information-rich participants. The researcher's assumption was that there were different causes for poor academic performance and that the teachers were capable of adjusting their strategies to deal with the poor academic performance in the secondary schools. The researcher's preconceived ideas did not affect the respondents' responses, as this would have negatively affected her ethical values.

Creswell (2009:196) states that, in qualitative research, the researcher as the primary data collection instrument necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions and biases at the outset of the study. Cohen *et al.* (2005:120) state that the most practical way of achieving greater validity is to minimize the amount of bias as much as possible and that there is the tendency for the interviewer to seek answers that support her preconceived notion.

### **1.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS**

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher used data from different sources and made sure that the following aspects were fully covered: reliability, credibility, validity and dependability (Cohen *et al.*, 2005:128)

### **1.7 ETHICAL ASPECTS OF THE RESEARCH**

Four secondary school principals in the Rekopantswe Area Office were approached by the researcher to be granted permission to conduct the research in their schools. Participants were

reassured that their responses would be treated with confidentiality. This allowed the participants to decide if they wished to be part of the study or not.

## **1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

### **Poor academic performance**

According to Aremu (2000:231), poor academic performance is performance that is adjudged by the examiners and other significant academics as falling below expected standards. In this study poor academic performance refers to the scholastic non accomplishment which is measured through continuous assessment conducted in every learning area offered at school (Ndimande, 2005:5)

### **Learner**

Learner means any person receiving education or obliged to receive education (RSA, 1996:4). In this study, learners refer to individuals that would have been identified as falling under the category of poor academic performers.

### **Teachers**

In the South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996:4), a teacher is defined as any person, including a person whose appointment is to exclusively perform extracurricular duties, who teaches, educates or trains other persons, or who provides professional educational services at a school.

### **Teaching strategy**

Teaching strategy is a broad plan of action for teaching-learning activities with a view to achieving one or more learning outcomes. A variety of teaching methods can be used to present a unit (Jacobs, Vakalisa & Gawe, 2004:175). Van der Walt and Du Toit (2003:284) highlight that strategies entail, among other things, the development of operating strategies or detail statements of the means to be used to achieve objectives.

## **1.9 CHAPTER DIVISION**

### **Chapter 1: Orientation to the study**

Orientation to the study includes a discussion of the introduction, motivation of the study, problem statement, the research question and purpose of the research.

### **Chapter 2: Literature review**

It is based on literature study focusing on the phenomenon of poor academic performance and how it can be improved.

### **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

The research methodology focuses on the methods and strategies used to gather data for the study. Among these are sampling strategies, data collection and procedures for analysis.

### **Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Analysis**

This chapter focuses on the presentation and analysis of the results from the data collected on the poor academic performance and teachers strategies in managing learners with poor performance.

### **Chapter 5: Discussion of the Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusion**

This chapter presents a summary of the research and concluding remarks on the main findings and recommendations, as well as limitations and strengths of the study and suggestions for further research.

## **1.10 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

In this chapter, identifying the problem as well as describing procedures for the empirical study gave an introduction to the undertaken study. As a result, this chapter laid a foundation for the review of literature and the research design that follows in the next chapters to expand some of the preliminary explanations and chapter division that is Chapter 1 to Chapter 5

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

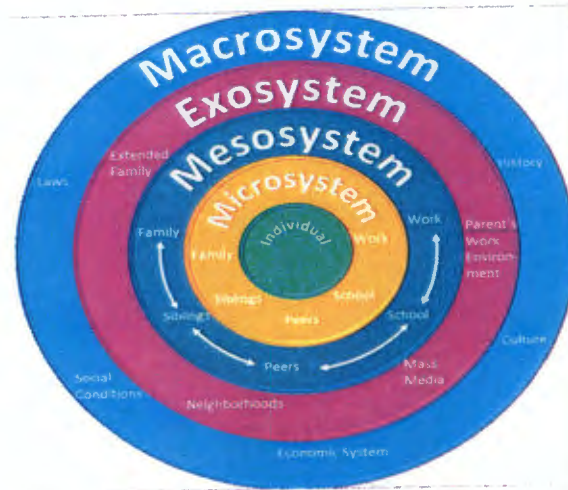
Chapter one served as a primer to this investigation and presents the research problem and how it would be dealt with. This chapter provides a review of the literature related to causes of poor academic performance of grade 9 learners. The purpose of this literature review is to outline the factors that contribute to the poor academic performance of learners as researched internationally and within South Africa focusing on the contribution of school, home and social environments. Poor academic performance in secondary schools is not only a South African problem as it also exists at the international level (Adel, 2002:91). The term poor academic performance has been explored by many researchers such as Donald, Lazarus and Lolwane (2004:333), Ong (2010: 247), and Pintrich (2002:389). This literature review is divided into three main sections, namely, a theoretical frame work, nature and causes of poor academic performance of learners as well as the strategies used by teachers to help learners with poor academic performance. The first section explains the theoretical frame work, and includes the two theories selected to frame this research. The second section defines and explains the nature and causes of poor academic performance of learners as explained by different authors. Thirdly, strategies used by secondary school teachers to help learners with poor academic performance is looked at.

According to the Report on Annual National Assessments (DoBE, 2012:6), South Africa has experienced numerous educational challenges that at various points in time necessitated curriculum reviews. These reviews were largely dictated to by the observed low levels of learner performance and inadvertent curriculum implementation and ambiguities that made it difficult for teachers to teach effectively.

#### **2.2 THEORETICAL FRAME WORK**

This study is underpinned by two theories which provide the framework to it. These are the constructivism theory of Vygotsky (1896-1934) and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory. In considering learners as active participators contributing to their social context and the integrated interaction between the learners, school, their home and neighbourhood, the researcher deemed it fit to select two theories to frame this research (Joubert, 2012:453).

The theory of ecological zones, proposes a hierarchy of influences on children s development from nearby to far off factors. The idea of the ecological systems theory refers to the environment, the community, school and specifically the place in which a child grows up.



**Figure 2.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System theory (Adapted from Gerrard 2012).**

According to Bronfenbrenner s ecological system theory, a child s development is seen as happening within four nested systems, the microsystems, the mesosystems, the exosystems and the macro system as is shown in Figure 2.1. Bronfenbrenner s ecological system theory (1979) emphasises the importance of the interaction between the development of an individual and the system within the individual s social context. The Ecological Theory is based on the interdependence of different organisms and their physical environment. This perspective integrates both constructivist and ecological theories (Brownwyn, 2011:14). The levels which Bronfenbrenner refers to as Microsystems are, according to Donald *et al.* (2004:51), the immediate environments in which an individual develops characterised by those individuals and events close to one s life. The micro system involves the relationships within the crucial setting of the learner. In this study, the school, home, classroom teachers and peer group are the most immediate people who should ensure that the learner reaches his or her highest potential. The evidence of the above statement about the microsystems, manifested itself in what Govender (2012:3) observed about the behaviour of school learners that come to school drunk and using substances. Mesosystems show continuous interaction among the microsystems. For example, what happens in the family or peer group can influence how learners respond at school. Since inclusive education focuses on a systems approach, this means that systems in the society, for example classroom, school, family,

community and government, need to interact with each other to provide a supportive structure for the learner.

The exosystems include other systems in which a child is not directly involved in, but which may influence or be influenced by the people who have proximal relationships with his or her Microsystems, for example, the parents place of work (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2004:53).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory as a framework for this study is relevant because it emphasises the interaction between an individual's development and the systems within the general social context. This theory is an example of a multi-dimensional model of human development, which posits that there are layers or levels of interacting systems resulting in change, growth and development, namely physical, biological, psychological, social and cultural. What happens in one system affects and is affected by other systems. Thus human behaviour, experiences and actions cannot be understood if the contexts in which they occur are not considered (Mahlo, 2011:21) and that the ecological system theory explains the direct and indirect influences on a child's life by referring to the many levels of environment or contexts that influence a person's development. Mahlo further argues that the major challenge to the present education system lies in understanding the complexity of the influences, interactions and interrelationships between the individual learner and multiple other systems to which he or she is connected.

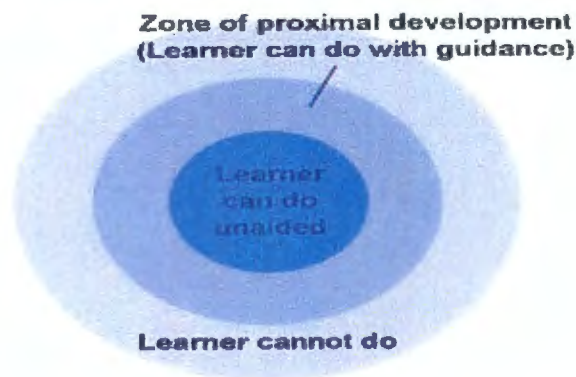
It is important that teachers also familiarise themselves with Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory as this theory enables them to understand complex influences, interactions and interrelationships between the learner and all the other systems that have to do with the learner (Nel & Hugo, 2012:11). In the light of this theory, to determine poor academic performance of the learners, will not be easy if people do not consider the interaction of family, home and the school. The other theory is Vygotsky's constructivism.

Vygotsky's constructivist theory (in Schunk, 2000: 241) views the social environment as a facilitator of development and learning. Vygotsky believes that from infancy onwards, children are engaged in constructing shared meaning through their interactions with parents, peers, teachers and others in their particular social contexts. Learners progressively develop new or adapted meaning and knowledge by building up the space between what they currently understand and what confronts them in social interactions (Donald, 2004:70). Vygotsky's theory is also relevant in this study as it emphasises the utilisation of the learners

strength and what they can do with the assistance of others ( Donald *et al.*, 2010:55).The constructivist teaching and learning, require learning that is hands-on, whereby students are actively involved in a learning process. This occurs by allowing them to build a better understanding; minds-on, allowing for learners to develop their cognitive processes and encourage them to question the validity of the situation presenting learners with real-life problems that they may be faced with in order to develop them (Dhurumraj, 2013:17).

The emphasis is laid on the fact that knowledge and learning are not just passively passed on from one person to the next but are actively and continually constructed anew by each individual through their experience and reflections. It is also postulated that one s interaction with the environment contributes to success and that the experiences one brings to a learning situation can greatly influence the outcome (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwane 2010:80). Vygotsky emphasises that mediation is the engine that drives development and the key to understanding the process of mediation is the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as is shown in Figure 2.2 below which relates to where meditation takes place (Donald *et al.*, 2004:71). The learner s experience and reflections are closely linked to his or her social, historical and cultural context. Such knowledge that is actively learned is regarded as viable if it helps people to cope with the world. The constructivists believe that knowledge is constructed through social experiences and therefore it is important that learners need to collaborate on an interpersonal level.

The following is Vygotsky s concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)



**Figure 2.2 Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) model. (Adapted from Coetzee, 2012).**

## 2.3 THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS

The area of specific learning difficulties is complex and a wide variety of terms and definitions have appeared in relation to it. What is most important is that people should be able to recognise the nature of such difficulties and to identify them. The causes of specific learning difficulties are also complex, and they are often the result of an interaction of factors (Donald *et al.*, 2004:340).

The Western Cape Education Department's (WCED: 2010) Diagnostic assessment results, for example, indicate that the majority of South African learners do not possess the basic reading and comprehension skills and strategies to cope with grade appropriate academic skills. In agreement with the above statement, the Minister of Basic Education, Motshekga, confirms that many learners lack proper foundations in literacy and numeracy and so they struggle to progress in the system ( Modisaotsile, 2012:3). As Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky are saying, the different influences of the young might be that these learners lack the learning stimulants such as educative toys, sufficient learning materials from home and school. Parents, who are well informed on school policies and resource allocation in the education sector, can exert considerable influence and contribute solutions to the challenges in the education system.

According to Kaznowski (2005:263), it has generally been noticed that at least 20% of children in a classroom get poor marks and are scholastically behind and that poor academic performance should be seen as a symptom reflecting a larger underlying problem in children. It is essential that this symptom be scientifically analysed to discover its underlying causes and most importantly, that a remedy should be found. The term specific learning disability is a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant unexpected specific and persistent difficulties in the acquisition and use of reading (dyslexia), writing (dysgraphia) or mathematical (dyscalculia) abilities despite conventional instruction, normal intelligence, proper motivation and adequate socio-cultural opportunities. Kaznowski also highlights that a large number of children with isolated growth hormone deficiency develop low self-esteem, behavioural problems and have academic under achievement and that recently HIV infected children also have been reported to exhibit clinically significant emotional problems.

Ogunbanjo (2001:28) highlights that there are inflexible teachers who adhere strictly to pre-planned schedules allowing little or no room for individual differences in term of speed of comprehension and learning styles. This shows that these types of teachers have no room for the slow learners.

Kapp (2003:30) states how difficult it is to establish accurately just how extensive the incidence of children s problems is, Kapp further mentions that the identification procedures are not always applied uniformly and on the basis of the same criteria. Further to this, the borderline between being different and being normal is so vague such that the ultimate diagnosis is not always valid because a child may be classified as having problem by one specialist while the other will not say so. Some categories overlap and the same child can therefore be placed in more than one category for equally good reasons. It may be accepted that many children with less conspicuous but nevertheless serious learning problems are not brought to the attention of experts and therefore remain unidentified.

According to Karande (2005:961), poor academic functioning and inconsistent school attendance are the early signs of emerging or existing depression. Teachers should be trained to understand and identify symptoms of depression such as unprovoked irritability, unsubstantiated complaints of lack of love from family members and somatic complaints. Problems with concentration in school, disorderly conduct and oppositional defiance are known as psychiatric causes of poor academic performance.

Every learner is a unique human being, that is, physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. This makes the task of the teacher complex. Nevertheless, a number of generalizations can serve as a tentative guide for the teacher when planning lessons (Jacobs, Vakalisa & Gawe, 2004:120). It is also highlighted that most of our teaching is directed towards the average learner, but it should be remembered that there are deviations from the norm when dealing with individual learners.

Kapp (2003:394) also highlights the fact that the children s problems can usually be subdivided into development, learning and behavioural problems, and that, in the case of behavioural problems, the child is initially identified because his behaviour is different, more intense and of longer duration than is expected from a child of that age. Developmental problems may be identified when a child shows conspicuous delay while learning problems appear in learning situations when, for some reasons, a child experiences more problems in learning than is normal.

Since 1994, the demand to educate learners with special needs within main stream classroom in South Africa has continued to grow and the implementation of inclusive education is in the final process of legislation. The result has been that an increasing number of learners with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, are being included in mainstream classroom (Engelbrecht & Oswald, 2003:1).

Neethling and Smit (2012:186) point out that in the past, support to learners was directly linked to the category of disability without taking into account the range of factors related to the level of functioning, participation and contextual circumstances which should be taken into consideration when determining the level and nature of support needed by a learner.

It is also further highlighted that a specific type of school may be capable of accommodating learners who fall within different levels of support, depending on where the learner can best be supported. This differs from one individual learner to another. According to Engelbrecht and Green (2003:158), educators in South Africa are at the receiving end of a number of changes within education as well as the broader society. Consequently, they feel overwhelmed, frustrated and helpless. Their perception is that decisions have been imposed upon them without being consulted and made a part of the decision-making process. This has resulted in a number of misperceptions and negativity.

It can be assumed that in every classroom there is a learner or learners who experience some kind of barrier to learning. In many instances some of these learners are wrongly labelled as difficult or problem children, because teachers do not have adequate knowledge in identifying barriers to learning (Nel & Hugo, 2012:48).

Fouché (2013:139) states that, in the past, education provision and support to learners have been organised according to categories of learners who were the slow or the mild to moderate learning disabled learners. Learners in the main stream were regarded as learners with ordinary needs and it is this group of special needs learners whose educational needs have not been met. This categorisation does not only serve to divide the learner population but it also fails to describe the nature of needs regarded as special, it furthermore provides no insight in to what has caused the learning breakdown or why such learners need to be excluded from the mainstream system.

According to Neethling and Smit (2012:153), it is important to recognize that the practicalities of adapting classroom to accommodate the learning needs of all learners have

fallen mostly on the educator. Support for educators in their increasing demanding roles within an inclusive support approach is vital; many educators feel that they do not have the necessary skills and support to meet many of the challenges presented by the diverse needs of the learners in their classes and the general problems facing the school as a whole.

### **2.3.1. Factors that contribute towards the poor academic performance of learners**

According to Nel and Hugo (2012:3), some factors that contribute to learner failure are *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* barriers. Extrinsic barriers that cause difficulty in learning are issues such as poverty, and unemployment rate in the area, gangster activities, the drug and alcohol abuse of parents, many different home languages, inadequately trained teachers with regard to learning support, and lack of sufficient support services. All these concur with what Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory says in the theoretical framework. The learner's home and school environmental factors need to be checked when investigating the causes of poor academic performance.

Some learners experience intrinsic barriers to learning such as learning difficulties, attention and hyperactivity difficulties, visual and hearing impairments; even learners with Autism and Down syndrome are attending the school.

### **2.3.2 Intrinsic barriers**

Though Intrinsic factors cannot be classified as environmental influences, the researcher included them because they may contribute to the poor academic performance of the learner. They are factors within the child, for example, genetic, behavioural, emotional, and personality factors. According to Kapp (2003:29), some learners' challenges are directly related to their biological or personality composition. Innate or acquired disabilities such as deafness, blindness, and mental challenge, among others, complicate a child's education to such an extent that the parents and the child require Ortho-pedagogical guidance. Teaching such children may also be so complicated that they cannot come to the regular school but have to receive specialized instruction. Kapp highlights that not all the learning disabilities are equally conspicuous. Sometimes learners experience learning or behaviour problems as a result of neurological dysfunctions that are difficult to identify such as in the case of epilepsy. In this case, the educational and teaching situation may also be problematic owing to these concealed factors within the child. A mentally challenged child's learning problem starts with his initial lack of motivation for a learning task. This is what Vygotsky is advocating in the

Zone of proximal Development. Vygotsky (in Schunk: 241) explains that the learner could potentially be capable of performing tasks with help from other people. Moletsane (2014:3) adds that support for learning is more the business of the school and teachers. The child is inherently poorly motivated and has little need to look for new stimulations on his own and he ends up preferring not to try at all rather than to risk failure by trying to succeed and such attitude is the result of a lifetime confrontation with tasks which they are intellectually ill equipped to deal with. Kapp (2003: 308) also points out that learners with learning difficulties to whom a series of difficult tasks are given, are later no longer able to solve the simplest task which they initially could do with ease.

Rief (2008:1) explains that students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Learning Disability (LD) will typically not achieve to their potential without emphatic and supportive teachers who understand their individual needs, differentiate instruction and provide the help and support they need. She also points out that ADHD and LD are distinct disorders that commonly coexist, and that many students have both. There are some overlapping characteristics as well as academic social behavioural challenges. According to her explanation, ADHD is a brain-based neurological disorder characterised by developmentally inappropriate degree of inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity while LD refers to a neurological disorder and set of conditions that interfere with the ability to receive, process, store, respond or to produce information which makes learning and using of certain skills a struggle.

Kapp (2003:394) referring to what Rief said about hyperactivity indicates that although both types of hyperactivity may have a detrimental effect on the child's academic progress, their social implications are the most disturbing because the hyperactive child show a high mobility level and inappropriate behaviour so that he or she is constantly in conflict with the social environment . It needs an experienced teacher with necessary patience to help the learners by providing the necessary support to meet their learning deficiency.

According to Jacobs, Vakalisa and Gawe (2004:121), teachers cannot plan learners' active participation in their lessons without considering the social and cultural backgrounds of the learners. Aspects such as patterns of learning and child rearing practices carried out within the home and family provide useful information about these backgrounds. For instance, Mwamwenda (in Jacobs *et al.*, 2004:121) indicates how diverse child rearing practices in South African communities are. Teachers have to realise that they need to respect shy,

withdrawn, and tense learners. At the same time they need to devise means of introducing elements of freedom and positive participation in the school and in such context, an atmosphere needs to be created in which learners feel free to express their own opinions without fear of being reprimanded for these opinions.

### **2.3.3 Extrinsic barriers**

This refers to those learners with socio-educational disadvantages, who need special educational support on a temporary basis within a restructured mainstream education. These learners have not acquired adequate basic educational skills and have not received proper support from the system. Extrinsic factors are factors outside the child like what Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky are saying in their theories about the environmental influences which affect his /her performance at school. These include socio cultural, economic and environmental factors as well as factors relating to the school environment (Thabana, 2004:55).

It has been asserted by DoBE NW (2012:24) that barriers can be located within the learner, within the centre of learning, within the education system and within the broader social, economic and political context. These barriers manifest themselves in different ways and only become obvious when learning breakdown occurs. Sometimes it is possible to identify permanent barriers in the learner or the system which can be addressed, through enabling mechanisms and processes.

However, barriers may also arise during the learning processes and are seen as transitory in nature. These may require different interventions or strategies to prevent them from causing learning breakdown, or excluding learners from the system.

### **2.3.4. The role played by the school environment**

The National Education Policy Act No 27 (1996: 21) states that, no learner should stay in the same phase for longer than four years unless the provincial Head of Department has given approval based on specific circumstances and professional advice. Government Gazette (19640), titled Assessment policy in the General Education and Training Band Grade R-9 , explains quite clearly that learners will progress with their age cohort, and where it is felt that a learner needs more time to demonstrate achievement, decisions shall be made based on the advice of the relevant role players like educators, learners, parents and education support services. The researcher argues that the existence of the age cohort is an automatic drawback

on the side of the educators as the learners entering a grade through it do not always learn successfully.

Another factor that contributes to poor academic performance of the learners, according to DoBE Inclusive Education (2012:6), is an inflexible curriculum that cannot meet the diverse needs of learners. The nature of the curriculum in all phases of education involves a number of components that are critical but undermine effective teaching and learning, what is taught, the way the classroom is managed and organised as well as materials and equipment which are used in the teaching-learning process. Sometimes educators, through inadequate training, use teaching styles which may not meet the needs of some of the learners as they teach at a pace which only accommodates learners that learn very quickly. Other contributory factors arising from the curriculum are those which result from the medium of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning for many learners takes place through a language which is not their first language. This, not only places these learners at a disadvantage, but it also leads to linguistic difficulties which contribute to learning breakdown. Educators often experience difficulties in developing appropriate support mechanisms for second language learners, hence poor academic performance is experienced.

According to the Report of Annual Assessment Basic Education (2012:6), the Grade 9 results confirm that a number of factors are at play in the education system. These include generally known but perhaps less often quantified socio-economic, demographic and historical realities of South Africa. For instance, the negative impact of poverty was clearly borne out by the emerging pattern of performance across the quintiles. Learners in schools in the lower poverty quintiles consistently achieved much lower learning outcomes than their counterparts in the higher quintile schools. Congruent with poverty differentials in performance were also patterns of performance which reflected relatively lower achievement in predominantly rural and historically disadvantaged provinces (DoBE, 2012: 68).

The South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) embodies the obligations of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) by stating that public schools must admit learners and serve their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating in any way in determining the placement of a learner with special educational needs the head of the department and the principal must take into account the rights and wishes of the parents and of such learner and uphold the principle of what is the best interest of the child in any decision making. The Act further states that where reasonably practicable

the state must provide education for learners with special education needs at ordinary public schools and provide relevant educational support services for such learners and take all reasonable measures to ensure that the physical facilities at public schools are accessible to learners with learning difficulties (Thutong South African Education Portal, 2013: 34).

#### **2.4 POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS INTERNATIONALLY**

According to Mahlo (2011:35) the USA was one of the first Western countries to introduce detailed anti-discrimination legislation in education of children with learning needs. A major change was realised in 1975 in the way schools were functioning with the enactment of Public Law 9-142, known as Education for All Handicapped Children Act, and which gave directives that students with disabilities be taught in the same settings as peers without disabilities.

Mahlo further reveals that in Canada, all learners are accommodated in the mainstream with specialised support, and that Canada's resource teachers are responsible for providing direct and effective support for the classroom teacher.

In the USA, for example, the response to learners with learning problems was to create special programmes that were separated from the scope of general education. Learners with learning disabilities or any specific need that could not be catered for by the dominant education system were separated and taught in special institutions. International human rights movements exposed such educational practices in many countries as questionable.

Within America, according to Swart and Pettipher (in Engelbrecht & Green, 2005:7), the beginning of a change in paradigm became evident when normalisation was introduced. Normalisation can be defined as making available to all handicapped people patterns of life and conditions of everyday living which are as close as possible to the regular circumstances and ways of life of society and that this process placed children with learning problems into normal schools and expected them to adjust and fit in like the other normal children. Normalisation was the idea that gave rise to mainstreaming in education. They also explained that the goal of mainstreaming was to return learners with learning needs to the mainstream. This usually only applied to some learners (those with mild learning problems), as learners would still have to prove their readiness to enter the education mainstream. The main problem that learners with special needs encountered was that upon entering the main stream,

they had little or no access to support services, yet they were expected to prove their readiness to fit in while the schools or classrooms are never adjusted to fit their needs.

Race (2005:153) points out that, in the further education sector in the UK, there is now significantly increased emphasis on catering for a greater mix of abilities within any classroom, and that the term differentiation is used to describe the process of ensuring that high fliers are catered for alongside low fliers and that most schools in UK have expertise available to learners with barriers in learning. According to Chisaka (2003:176), the secondary schools in Zimbabwe are placing slow learners in a separate group from fast learners. This in turn allows teachers to adjust their teaching to the learning pace and learning styles of each group.

All over the country there is a consensus of opinion about the fallen standard of education in Nigeria. Parents and government are in total agreement that their huge investment in education is not yielding the desired dividend and the annual releases of secondary school examination results conducted by the West African Examination Council justified the problematic nature and generalization of poor academic performance of learners in different learning areas (Adebule, 2004:229).

## **2.5 POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

It is quite useful to look at education and special education in South Africa through the phases of its educational history especially how it developed into what it is today. In South Africa, as everywhere else in the world, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw hardly any provision for any type of special education need. The people with learning problems were recognised as mentally retarded. The 1920 saw the first development of intelligence tests. These intelligence tests were the precursors of categorisation, labelling and exclusive system of special education (Brownwyn, 2011:24).

In 1948, the Special Schools Act was passed. This introduced a medical diagnosis and treatment model (Engelbrecht, 2006:24) as some children were seen as having deficits within themselves. Therefore, separate special education was justified. The outcome of this Act is contrary to the theoretical framework of this work by Vygotsky which condones the working together of slow and high achieving learners. In 1996, the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) was appointed, along with the National

Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS). This indicated that the issue of human rights moved to the forefront of all policy making.

In 1997, the report created by the joint NCSNET, NCESS, and Quality Education, covering barriers to learning, recognised the need for all learners to have access to a single unified education system and provided comments regarding where South Africa was in terms of its quest to become inclusive (Engelbrecht, 2006:25). Wildman and Nomdo (2007:3) highlighted that provinces did not conceptualise a strategic campaign and integration strategy for the inclusion of marginalised children and youth with learning difficulties. Thus, in provinces where learners were successfully mobilised, provinces did not have the requisite resources to provide access to education in the existing institutions and the South African education system failed to produce competent learners.

Dhurumraj (2013:19) points out that though there is an association between low socio-economic status and poor academic performance, evidence has suggested that it is not the socio-economic status per se but factors associated with home resources and background experiences that affect the learners' academic performance and that factors such as unstable homes, drug abuse and teenage pregnancy also contribute to poor performance among learners. Dhurumraj further explains that the family background of a learner plays a very important role in the learner's learning process. Family background includes factors such as socio-economic status, two-parents versus single parent household, divorce, family size and neighbourhood. Moletsane (2014:1) agrees with the abovementioned statement and argues further that many learners lack a proper foundation of knowledge such as basic numeracy and literacy.

Learners are not able to read, write, and count at expected levels and they are unable to execute tasks that demonstrate key skills associated with literacy and numeracy. This incompetence was demonstrated in the South African Grade 9 learners' performance in Mathematics and Science study in 1995 which was significantly lower than that of learners in all other participating countries (Joubert, 2012:2).

In the light of the statement above, Mouton, Louw and Strydom (2012:1212) are of the opinion that teachers were ill-prepared and did not receive adequate training. Thus learners suffered from the outset. They further highlight that some of the provinces in South Africa are in the grip of extreme poverty where providing food and shelter is a dominant concern framing educational needs and impacting negatively on the undermining education.

McFarlane and Chayskowski (2012:3) raise a point that teachers' bunking of lessons with tacit union endorsement is a major cause of learners' poor academic performance. They further explain that the reason for the teachers' bunking of classes is because the teachers confess that they are not trained to teach the learning areas allocated to them. A concern raised by McFarlane and Chayskowski demanded to know from Cembu, Sadu's national spokes person, whether the union recognises that teachers' absenteeism from the classroom, often for union meetings was a factor in poor learner performance. Modisaotsile agrees with the above statement and further highlights that a study conducted by the HSRC found that almost 20 percent of teachers were absent on Mondays and Fridays, and that teacher in black schools teach an average of 3, 5 hours a day, compared to about 6, 5 hours a day in former white schools.

In 2011, the Department of basic Education introduced Annual National Assessments (ANA) in Language and Mathematics for grade 1-6. In 2012 the annual assessment was extended to grade 9. When the results of the 2012 ANA for grade 9 Mathematics were released, there was a national outcry about the poor performance of learners. The national average of 13% indicated that there were serious issues with regard to the teaching and learning of mathematics in grade 9 (Govender 2012:1). Some of the findings in a report by Govender (2013:1) pointed to possible reasons for the poor performance of learners in grade 9. These included the poor mathematics qualifications of teachers, poor utilisation of existing resources by teachers, gaps in learner knowledge.

Rammala (2009:18) states that low academic performance of learners emanates from factors such as socio-economic status, family culture and the learner being less intelligent than others. Research conducted at a secondary school in South Dakota has shown that all learners are educate-able and that the way in which the school is managed is the most critical factor in determining the quality of education for its learners. Masinde (2009:84) emphasizes that to improve the learners' performance the principals are required to improve the management of the school. This can be done by setting a clear vision for the school and communicating this vision to the students.

Neethling and Smit (2012:124) emphasise that the way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families.

This statement challenges educators to reflect critically and honestly about their personal views and values with regard to children's learning and development, and more specially the

role that families and communities play in their education. If educators narrowly perceive children as learners only, then they will accept the families to leave education to the school. The role of the families in their children's learning therefore ends at the school gate. On the other hand if educators perceive learners as children with unique needs and individual social circumstances, they are more likely to regard both the families and community members as partners with a shared interest in children's learning.

Thousand and Villa (2007:62) state that many general educators report that they have not been exposed to any information about what students with learning disability can actually be expected to do. Special educators often have the in-depth knowledge about disabilities but they may not have been exposed to strength-based perspective in designing lessons that allow students access to the general education curriculum.

Jansen (in Webber, 2008:329) argues that the reason for poor academic performance of learners emanates from lack of concentrated and coordinated management of three important factors in education, being teachers, textbooks and time. He also points out that one of the most serious barriers to learning and development exists within the curriculum itself and relates primarily to the inflexible nature of the curriculum which prevents it from meeting diverse needs among learners.

Neethling and Smit (2012:140) are of the opinion that socio-economic barriers, and the relation between education provision and the socio-economic conditions in any society are to be recognized and that effective learning is fundamentally influenced by the availability of educational and other resources to meet the needs of our learner population. The following are some examples of typical socio-economic barriers: Lack of access to basic services, poverty and under-development, are factors that place learners at risk like the HIV /AIDS pandemic. There is therefore the ever increasing orphan and street child phenomenon.

According to Kapp (2003:127), the modern world is intensely socially conscious and concerned about the education of young people in general and of the environmentally deprived child in particular. These environmentally deprived children find themselves in a life situation which is generally characterised by an impoverished environment that is devoid of opportunities, a poor residential area with conditions such as overcrowded housing, noise, crime, and other socio- pathological phenomena as well as little motivation resulting from poorly directed pedagogical intervention.

According to Donald *et al.* (2004:52), what happens at home or in the peer group can influence how learners respond at school, for example, a child who is unsupported at home may experience care and understanding from a neighbour, peer, or teacher at school.

Moletsane, Stofile and Moolla (2014:1) state that several challenges characterize education in South Africa and that many factors are responsible for these challenges including those associated with learners, school and families. Many learners lack proper foundation of knowledge such as basic numeracy and literacy, they also have poor work ethics, poor study habits, misconduct and developmental disorder. This statement complements what Bronfenbrenner says in the theoretical framework of this study when he states that when a learner performs poorly, three areas need to be checked that is the learner himself or herself, home background and the peer group.

The Mail and Guardian once asked SADTUs spokesperson whether the union recognised that teacher absenteeism from the classroom, often for Union meetings was a factor in poor learner performance.

Realistically, SADTU is not the only Union representing teachers. It can therefore be assumed that what is observed under SADTU may to some extent be applicable to other teacher unions.

Teachers bunking of lessons with tacit union endorsement, is a major cause of learners poor academic performance, a ground breaking study reveals (McFarlane, 2012:3).

### **2.5.1 Home environment**

Many research studies have indicated that children from nuclear families perform better in school than children from the compound or polygamous families. The following reasons are responsible for this: Children have more time for their studies in most cases because there are fewer people to send them on errands. This is not the case in a large family setup. Here children have the tendency to be social deviants due to inadequate supervision and care, since there are more people in such a family. The older ones tend to exert a lot of pressure or influence on the child. If it happens that a lot of such influences are negative, then this will adversely affect the academic performance of the child (Asikhia, 2010: 232).

The learning of the child may be influenced either positively or negatively at the family level by a number of specific factors. These may include the resources of the family, the language

spoken in the family in relation to the medium of instruction at school, the values held by the family, particularly in relation to scholastic achievement and the degree of both cognitive and motivational support a learner receives from the family for the task of learning. It has been proven that family relationships and family environment influence a child's success at school (Donald, Lolwane & Lazarus, 2004:56).

Parent involvement has diminished since the introduction of school governing bodies and the consolidation of community schools into state schools. Before the passing of the South African Schools Act in 1996, parents used to help build schools and provide other resources which reinforce their involvement. In the new democratic era, there has been much talk about parents' inability to contribute to their children's education due to high level of illiteracy (Khosa, 2008:15)

Kazoski (2005:72) highlights that children living in noisy environments can exhibit poor academic performance. Too much television viewing among adolescents has been linked with inadequate study patterns, erratic sleep/awake schedule and poor sleep quality, violent or aggressive behaviour, substance abuse, sexual activities resulting in decreased school performance or even school dropouts. There is also irrefutable evidence that poor home environment can lead to mild intellectual impairment, hyperactivity, shortened concentration span, hearing impairment all resulting in poor academic performance (Kazoski, 2005:73)

Kapp (2003:151) claims that the home environment is the single most important influence both positively and negatively on how well a child does in school. Insecurity, family disharmony, family incompleteness, inability of parents to offer the child continual affective and spiritual security in a confused society and economic pressure are all factors that affect the child's learning.

The educational condition attributed to the family needs no emphasis as there is an ever increasing awareness of the importance of the parents' role in the progress and educational development of their children. The family background is the most important and weighty factor in determining the academic performance of learners (Rammala, 2009:12). Countries that are educationally progressive encourage the active interest of parents and local communities in the education of their children. However, this has not been the case in South Africa. The education of the black learner has experienced a high Grade 9 failure rate as well as a high dropout resulting in a vast pool of unskilled labour (Adel, 2002:91).

Educators are not perfect as they make educational mistakes such as spoiling, hard-heartedness, overprotection, over strictness, instability, too much criticism which cause neuroses in children and all these generally occur when parents evade their educational responsibility or apply it so wrongly that the child is overly anxious, insecure and lonely (Kapp, 2003:394).

### **2.5.2 School Environment**

It has been reported that outdated teaching practices and lack of basic content knowledge have resulted in poor teaching standards. Several studies have reported a number of shortcomings in the teaching and learning of mathematics and science in South Africa (Makgato & Mji, 2006:253). Modisaotsile (2012:2) adds that the quality of education remains very poor and the output rate has not improved. She states further that classrooms are still overcrowded, the dropout rate very high and literacy and numeracy levels are low. Other challenges include: poor teacher training, unskilled teachers, lack of commitment to teach by teachers, poor support for learners at home and a shortage of resources in education despite of the large budgetary commitments by government.

### **2.5.3 Social Environment**

According to Donald *et al.* (2004:31), there are social and interpersonal relationship problems that also cause barriers to learning. This is in accordance with what Bronfenbrenner says that micro systems can influence the career life of the learner. Youth problems of alcohol, drug abuse, and being sexually active leading to HIV/AIDS, violence, racism, and gender prejudices are examples of such problems. All of these are of serious concern in our society. Other social problems referred to here, involve relationships. Learners have to learn how to relate differently and more effectively with peers, as well as with adults both in the school and outside. Research suggests that as a result of their experience of being bullied, some victims perform poorly in their academic work and eventually drop out of school (Neethling & Smit, 2012:5).

Gurian (2003:37) highlights the point that decrease in family bond creates emotional stress in students and a stressed student acts out, causing disturbance or withdrawing in an unconscious effort to make sure the other students and the teachers experience the stress with him or her. Pattern and Robertson (in Stride, 2004:176) state that approximately eight million school kids are left unsupervised after school, and this constitutes danger laden times for the

youth because these are hours in which juvenile crime peaks as does experimentation with drugs and health compromising sexual behaviour. Karande (2005:20) points out that, conditions such as emotional problems in children and chronic neglect, sexual abuse, parents getting divorced or losing sibling, might cause long term distress, resulting in poor academic performance of learners.

## **2.6 STRATEGIES USED BY TEACHERS TO HELP LEARNERS WITH POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

### **2.6.1 What is teaching strategy?**

A teaching strategy is a broad plan of action for teaching- learning activities with a view to achieving one or more learning outcome. A strategy gives an outline of the approach a teacher will use when facilitating teaching and learning activities (Jacobs, Vakalisa & Gawe, 2004:175).

The National Curriculum Statement for Grade R-9 requires the use of a variety of appropriate assessment strategies that adequately assess learner achievement and develop skills for lifelong learning. The strategies and forms of assessment used should be appropriate for the knowledge, skills, or attitudes and range of competencies being assessed as well as for the age and developmental needs of the learners (National Education Policy Act 27, 1996:8). Some of the intervention strategies which were highlighted by the Department of Basic Education, range from the review of the curriculum, the launch of a comprehensive literacy and numeracy strategy, comprehensive feedback that was given to the schools following the release of ANA 2011 results, learner support materials placed in the hands of the teachers and learners and support given to districts (DoBE, 2011: 8)

### **2.6.2 Strategies recommended by the Department of Basic Education**

The report of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS) envisaged an integrated system of education where irrespective of the learning context, opportunities, for all learners in all aspects of life could be provided. This is the framework for full service schools. This kind of education would have the capacity to respond to diversity by providing appropriate education for the particular needs of each learner, irrespective of disability or difference in learning style or pace or social difficulties experienced and establish methods to assist curriculum and institutional transformation to ensure that both an awareness of

diversity and an additional support area available to those learners and educators who need them (DoBE, 2011:6).

The site-based support teams need to ensure that the support for teachers and learners is properly co-ordinated. In order to fulfil their task, they should invite expertise from the local community, district support teams and higher education institutions. Site based teams need to follow up learner needs identified through learner profiles accompanied by intervention strategies tried out in classrooms. They also play a crucial role in identifying institutional needs and ensuring that there are on-going possibilities, skills acquisition and support (DoE, 1997:7). According to White Paper 6 (2001:29), at the institutional level on GET Band, there is the requirement to establish institutional level support services. The DoBE-NW in the Rekopantswe Area Office has started launching it in GET Band schools in 2013. The primary function of this team will be to put in place properly co-ordinated learner and educator support service. This service will support the learning and teaching progress by identifying and addressing learner, educator and institutional needs.

Teachers have to examine and adopt effective teaching approaches as many teachers, according to DoE (1997:35), still tend to think that it is correct to use the one size fits all approach to teaching.

In reality, all teachers are faced with a group of learners of which each and every one has his or her unique character, interest, style and pace of learning and working. One size does not fit all. Curriculum differentiation should not be an exception but rather a central method of ensuring curriculum access.

### **2.6.3 Possible strategies for improving learner performance**

Neethling and Smit (2012:124) state that, it is strongly believed that the active involvement of families and the wider community in the learning and teaching process of their children is fundamental to the development of an inclusive learning community. In South Africa, the critical role which parents and the community need to play in the education and the development of children has been given official recognition through legislation and education policies such as the South African Schools Act (1996) the National Plan of Action for children (1996) and Education White Paper 6 on inclusive Education (2001) White Paper 6, in particular, acknowledges that inclusive education is broader than formal schooling and for

that reason also incorporates the role of the home and the community. Arrangements could be made by way of formulating policies where by teachers observe the good teachers in order to improve their teaching practice (Ornstein, 2000:38).

According to the Report on the Annual National Assessments of Basic Education (DoBE, 2012:2), the improvement of the quality of basic education has been identified as the top priority of the South African Government which the Department of Basic Education (DoBE) has to deliver. The ANA is a critical measure for monitoring progress in learners achievements. The Education Sector Plan Action Plan to 2014 towards the realisation of schooling 2025 specifies that ANA is a testing programme that requires all schools in the country to conduct the same grade- specific language and mathematics tests for Grade 9. This is the Department of Basic Education s attempts to raise the standards of education for the whole country of South Africa.

### **2.6.3.1 Identifying the barriers**

Identifying the barriers to learning and development is, according to Nel and Hugo (2012: 74), the stage that involves the teacher s reflection, parent s consultation and involvement, identification of learner support needs, identification of contextual barriers, review of teaching and classroom practices, whole school changes and support strategies, identification of community resources and tracking support, initial identification of children s needs, and that these have to be gleaned from the curriculum assessment process that is observation of children s portfolios, workbooks, information from other teachers and parents/caregivers. At this stage, the teacher will have gathered enough information to know how to support the learner effectively and Individual Support Plan (ISP) of Individual Educational Programme (IEP) can be drawn up which outlines the support that will be provided and how it will be monitored.

It is, however, important for a teacher to acknowledge that when a barrier is identified, it requires team effort to define the barrier accurately and implement the appropriate assessment and support strategies (Nel & Hugo, 2012:48). The same authors further argue that, learners who experience barriers to learning should be identified as early as possible because early identification and consequent immediate appropriate support is essential to ensure that learners achieve according to their learning potential, and that if barriers are identified too late in a child s life, it will cause academic backlogs and possible learning difficulties.

The aim of inclusive education, as a policy in South Africa, is to identify and make an effort to remove the barriers in society as well as to collaborate with all the different role players in the learner's life. The teacher plays a central role in identifying, assessing, and supporting learners who experience barriers to learning in any classroom meaning that the teachers need to have knowledge and skills on how to differentiate instructions and be able to address the individual needs of learners in their diverse classrooms, therefore systems must be in place to support teachers in gaining knowledge and skills (Nel & Hugo, 2012:9). It is therefore important that inclusive education is not incorrectly viewed as a further add-on and burden but to regard inclusive education as an opportunity to review how educational activities can be done defiantly, rather than additionally, within the aim of ultimately providing quality education for all.

### **2.6.3.2 Early Intervention**

According to Wekesa (2012:389), the child that performs poorly becomes disenfranchised or deprived of privileges because his/her educational needs are not adequately met in the education service. Early intervention will lead to improved academic performance and enhance the child's self-esteem and a positive self-concept. Eventually a child with learning problem who receives early intervention is brought back to their successful academic and career journeys. Jill (2007:73) states that providing instruction to students with different needs who may be working at a variety of skill levels can challenge even the most systematic and knowledgeable teacher. But he proposes that teachers should develop a formal method of keeping track of progress made towards Individual Educational Progress (IEP) goals and objectives. Those teachers should remember that their planning must aim at helping students with learning difficulties to meet their goals. He also points out that whether a teacher works in an inclusive general education classroom or special education classroom, he or she will most likely need to do some lesson adapting for his/her students.

The process of early identification and early intervention should acknowledge that learning occurs at home, in the community and within formal and informal settings. To prevent barriers to learning from developing and intensifying, it is essential to identify learners who are contending with such barriers as soon as possible even before children reach school age, to ensure early intervention programmes. Many educators and schools become more directly involved in the early identification of barriers to learning. One such example is the screening

of Grade R learners to determine possible barriers to learning in order to facilitate early intervention (Neethling & Smit, 2012:183).

Shindler (2010:219) states that meeting the needs of all students is a challenge, and therefore one solution would be to provide differential learning experiences for students depending on their needs and abilities. Some students may only need small changes that will help them to get the same results as the students in general education. However, for other students, the teacher will have to modify work to their skill level or provide alternative materials and strategies to use them.

Killen (2010:2) pronounces that an effective teacher is one who maximises the achievements of students by acting in accordance with an explicit set of principles that have order, coherence and relevance in the particular instructional context. Hattie (in Killen, 2010:3) concluded that the most effective way of improving learning is for the teachers to encourage their learners to self-report on their learning and to ask questions about things they do not understand.

Many contemporary views of effective teaching are based on constructivist theories of learning. Therefore these ideas need to be reviewed as a framework for considering the teaching strategies (Killen, 2010:6). What a person knows is not just received passively but is actively constructed by the learner and that knowledge is the result of personal interpretation of experience. Therefore, the cultures and societies to which people belong influence their views of the world around them and what they know.

De Wet (2007:296) highlights the necessity of being knowledgeable regarding the rights and obligations of learners so that learners cannot manipulate the teacher by, for example, making claims to a right that does not exist. For the same reason educators must be aware of the correct interpretation and application of the rights. Rights should not be interpreted incorrectly with the aim of shunning responsibilities or to other s detriment. Educators should be familiar with the rights of learners and be able to apply their knowledge correctly in order for them to act in an appropriate manner with learners.

Therefore, the development of collaborative relationship among educators so that expertise can be shared is crucial to the success of meeting the needs of all learners in inclusive schools and for people working in collaborative teams to accomplish much more than individuals on their own.

This also implies that alternative placement, for example, in a special school, is less important than eligibility to access support programmes which can be provided in the most cost effective way in the most appropriate site on either a full-time or part-time basis.

It is only through understanding the complex relationship of individual to family, peers, classroom, school, community and the social system as a whole, and how these influences interact, that these problems and the resulting specific needs can be effectively addressed.

Stride (2004:171) also adds that there is a direct relationship between parental involvement in the schooling of their children and student achievement. This relationship is enhanced when parents provide an affirmative environment for learning, communicate reasonably and avail themselves in school matters.

In dealing with poor academic performance of learners, Hallan and Rogers (2008:32), are of the opinion that parental involvement and interest in their child s education, has a positive impact on its outcomes, and many children do not become truant because they are afraid of their parents finding out.

Good teachers, according to Killen (2010:18), never underestimate the difficulty that students have in learning how to comprehend, evaluate questions, debate, integrate and synthesise information. Teachers cannot expect learners to be engaged in meaningful learning if the environment is not supportive, encouraging and focused on learning and the environment is more than just the physical space in which learning occurs.

Mclean (2009:69) states that engagement of learners is the main energizer through which teachers show that they are interested in and value their learners and learners work hard for teachers who value them as individuals and encourage them to be all they can be while accepting them for who they are. Teachers should bear in mind that many parents or guardians of students with poor academic performance are exasperated, depressed, confused and frustrated by the situation that they and their children are caught in. That is, many years of negative school reports and critical remarks have made them cautious and even angry with their children and teachers, Therefore, for most productive results from parents and students, whenever possible, focus on students strength, attempt to collaborate to overcome students deficiencies and problem behaviour (Stride, 2004:170). Teachers must show willingness to work with parents because they have special information to contribute that can be beneficial to the mutual goals for their children.

Neethling and Smit (2012:162) point out that in applying teaching strategies, educators should bear in mind that there is no single classroom where all learners will be exactly the same, or learn in the same way, and at the same pace. Hence, educators are required to be creative in the use of a variety of teaching strategies to reach learners who are at different levels. In this regard, multi-level teaching is not a teaching strategy as such, but a golden thread that should run through the implementation of all strategies to reach learners at different levels. Neethling and Smit further indicate that multi-level teaching is an approach that assumes the principles of individualization, flexibility and inclusion for all learners regardless of their personal level of skills and those teachers should unconditionally accept learners who experience barriers to learning and involve all learners in all classroom activities. In contrast to preparing different lessons for different learners, multi-level teaching advocates for one lesson with various methods of learning, teaching and assessment and the lesson must include a variety of teaching techniques aimed at reaching all learners at all levels.

In any school, whether an ordinary school, full-service school or special school, there will be learners with diverse needs within the majority group and there will be different needs which can be dealt with in a classroom at the lesson plan level through differentiated tasks/ activities and alternative assessment. However, with the variety of learner needs there will be a few or an individual learner that needs more or different support than others. In this case, it is important that the learning opportunity for these learners is planned against assessment standards within the same learning outcomes and their learning opportunities to show conceptual progression (Neethling & Smit, 2012:170). For learners experiencing barriers to learning, the strategy of designing down, breaking down or scaffolding of assessment standards into manageable units is highly recommended, designing down involves breaking down the assessment standard in order to build it up in a logical progressive way. Simply put, designing down involves looking at an assessment standard and dividing the set standard for the year into smaller, achievable components, which are spread across the duration of the year. This allows time for each component to be achieved in a step by step way (Neethling & Smit, 2012:171).

## 2.7 SUMMARY

In conclusion, the literature review highlighted several factors that contribute to poor academic performance of learners. For example, it reveals that extrinsic as well as intrinsic factors may directly or indirectly affect the learner's academic performance at school. The theories of Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner indicate that to reduce poor performance, teachers need to consider environmental factors that affect the learning capabilities. Poor academic performance internationally and in South Africa had been reviewed and possible strategies for improving poor academic performance of learners were discussed. The relevant literature on poor academic performance was discussed and for this reason this study sought to find out what the causes of poor academic performance in Rekopantswe Area Office are.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research design which deals with the manner in which the study progressed. The study used a qualitative case study research approach and purposive sampling to select relevant samples from the population in the Rekopantswe Area Office. Furthermore, the study used survey questions and structured interviews at four secondary schools. It is of critical importance that the research procedure, data collection, and data analysis be clearly documented to enhance the validity of the research findings. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:9), research methodology refers to a design according to which the researcher engages in and selects data collection and analysis procedures to investigate a specific research problem.

#### 3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

This study employed a qualitative research approach. A paradigm is described by de Vos (2011:40) as a model or pattern containing a set of legitimated assumptions and a design for collecting and interpreting data. The qualitative paradigm in this study came to mind in this regard. The purpose of this study was to establish the causes of poor academic performance and to develop strategies needed by teachers to deal with poor academic performance of Grade 9 learners.

The qualitative case study research design was selected for this study which sought to determine why learners perform poorly, and how teachers could help them to achieve better results. It is a question of a social phenomenon. The case study also reflects the manner in which the research is set up and the methods of data collection used. Its purpose is to provide within an appropriate mode of inquiry, the most valid and accurate answer possible to the research question at hand (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:30). The methodology of this case study is described with reference to population sampling, data collection instruments, data collection and data analysis, including validity, reliability and ethical consideration.

The reason for selecting the qualitative case study research design is that it allows the researcher to make an in depth examination of the exploration programme events and activities of individuals as well as collecting detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures (Creswell, 2009:13).

### **3.3. THE CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN**

A case study is an in-depth explanation from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution programme or system in a real life context, whose primary purpose is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic (Gary, 2012:10). In this study, the researcher used field notes, interviews, as well as voice recording instrument for collecting data. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. The case in this study is the Grade 9 learners while the unit of analysis is poor academic performance and how appropriate strategies are employed to deal with this problem.

In this situation, the researcher sought to establish the way the teachers and learners perceive the causes of poor academic performance.

A researcher provides an interpretation of events in terms of the participants understanding. The qualitative research approach answers questions about the complex nature and phenomenon with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomenon from the participants point of view (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:395). A case study, according to Yin (2009:53), may contain more than a single case. The study at hand treated common problems of poor academic performance of learners as a case study but in different schools. Yin also states that a case study should take place in the natural setting of the case and create the opportunity for direct observations. These observations can range from formal to causal data collection activities.

This is a case study of the poor academic performance of Grade 9 learners, and the strategies used by their teachers to deal with it. According to Creswell (2009:13), a case study is an exploration of a bounded system over time through detailed and in-depth data collection. It entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a case. Such analysis is connected with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question. The main purpose of the design is to help to avoid the situation in which the evidence does not address the initial question.

In this sense, the research design deals with a logical problem and not a logistical problem (Yin, 2009:27). Neuman (2000:90) explains that data collected using the case study design can be used to draw conclusions of the larger entity, and a case study helps researchers to connect the micro-level, or the action of the individual people to the macro-level or large

scale social structure and processes. Therefore, this case study allows the researcher to draw conclusions about the larger population from which the representative sample data was collected.

Schooling in South Africa, in the General Education and Training (GET) Band, Grade 9, marks the end of compulsory education. It therefore becomes a matter of urgency to thoroughly prepare learners for schooling beyond the compulsory age (DoBE, 2011:24). In the light of the recent development that the middle schools are now being phased out, it is imperative to prepare the Grade 9 learners to be able to move to Further Education in high school level.

### **3.4 POPULATION**

Population is defined as all elements of any well-defined class of people, objects or substances (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005:92). In agreement with this, de Vos, (2002:198) refers to population as the total number of subjects the researcher wishes to make inferences from, and as a term that sets boundaries on the study units. It refers to individuals in the universe who possess specific characteristics.

The North West Province comprises of four districts, namely: Bojanala, Dr Kenneth Kaunda, Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati and Ngaka Modiri-Molema. Each district is sub-divided into Area Offices. Rekopantswe Area Office is one of the area offices within Ngaka Modiri Molema District. The number of schools having Grade 9, are 29 in total within the Rekopantswe area office.

### **3.5 SAMPLING**

Sampling in qualitative research refers to the process used to select a portion of the population for study (Maree, 2007:79). In agreement with this, de Vos (2002:199) refers to sampling as the subset of measurements drawn from a population in which the researcher is interested. The researcher studies the sample in an effort to understand the population from which it is drawn. It refers to individuals in the universe who possess specific characteristics. In terms of this study, the sample comprises twenty (20) Grade 9 learners from four secondary schools in Rekopantswe Area Office in Mafikeng. There are 29 secondary schools in Rekopantswe Area Office where the sample of four schools is drawn. From each school five (5) Grade 9 learners, two (2) teachers and one (1) departmental head of any learning area were chosen. The whole sample consisted of thirty two (32) participants

The reason for the selection of academic underachievers was that there is a need to change the way we have been looking at learners that perform poorly. The teachers are expected to focus on intrinsic as well as extrinsic barriers, that is, physical and intellectual barriers of the learner (DoBE-NW, 2012:5).

The reason for selecting Rekopantswe Area Office is the fact that the researcher herself is placed in the same area. The schools involved in this study are within reach of the researcher. All these schools have grade 9 and are experiencing poor academic performance of learners. The solutions and recommendations emanating from this research will be of great assistance to the community of the researcher.

### **3.6 SAMPLING PROCEDURE**

Grade 9 learners were selected because they are in the critical exit point grade from the GET Band to FET. Some are in the middle schools, which are in the process of being phased out. The study focuses on the poor performance of this group. Convenience sampling was used to select four schools out of 29 secondary schools in the Rekopantswe Area Office. For a case study Sampling has two functions, first it allows the researcher to feel confident about the representativeness of the sample if the population's characteristics are known. The Purposive sampling was used to select 20 repeating learners from the four secondary schools. The logic for purposive sampling according to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012:104) lies in selecting information rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The degree of representativeness of a sample can always be checked and such representativeness allows the researcher to make broader inferences (Silverman, 2011:385). In this case, the learners who were performing poorly in Grade 9 were purposefully selected from four secondary schools three of which are situated in the same township while the fourth one is situated a village. It was also necessary for the Grade 9 teachers and the departmental heads of every selected school to be part of the sampling as they are the ones that are dealing directly with the learners that perform poorly. This enabled them to provide their version of what they knew about those learners. The teachers and the heads of the departments were also purposefully selected.

Purposive sampling, according to Neuman (2004:91), is a form of non-probability sampling whereby the researcher picks the units for study using their own judgment on which subjects

best fit their criteria of the study. When the desired population for the study is rare or very difficult to locate and recruit for a study, purposive sampling may be the only option. It is best suitable when dealing with small numbers of instances to be researched. In this study the case is not rare as poor academic performance is a worldwide problem. Neuman further indicates that the advantage of purposive sampling is that it permits the selection of interviewees whose qualities or experiences permit an understanding of the phenomena in question and are therefore valuable. Yin (2003:70) highlights that the selection of the site or individuals, who serve as the case studies, may sometimes be straight forward because the researcher has chosen to study a unique case whose identity has been known from the onset of the inquiry, and the researcher may access the case study of his or her choice through special arrangements.

In agreement with this view, de Vos (2011:232) describes purposive sampling as being based entirely on the judgement of the researcher and that a sample is composed of elements that contain the most characteristics, representative, or typical attributes of the population that serves the purpose of the study best. The researcher was given the mark recoding sheets where the repeaters were selected according to the number of red rings around their marks, and the word not promoted against their names.

### **3.7 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS**

In order to provide triangulation, data was obtained from more than one source. By drawing on other types of information, different data collection techniques such as interviews, survey instrument, analysis of documents and different sources of data were the form of triangulation, which according to Neuman (2000:368), adds to the trustworthiness of data, which to some extent, addressed the question of validity and reliability. The study also made use of open-ended questions in order to allow respondents to expound their views and feelings in their answers. Closed questions aimed at obtaining biographic information from respondents and survey instrument were administered in a structured interview. Additional data was taken from secondary sources such as mark schedules, learner profiles and attendance registers to confirm that the learners attend school regularly. The mark sheets of the previous years (fourth term) and the current year (first term) were checked by the researcher to track the learners performance. The researcher also used interview schedules. These were survey questions written to guide the interviews.

Cohen *et al.* (2005:188) advocate that notes be recorded as quickly as possible after observation, since the quantity of information forgotten is very slight over a short period of time but accelerates quickly as more time passes. They also state that in observation studies, researchers are able to discern ongoing behaviour as it occurs and are able to make appropriate notes about its salient features. Document analysis of attendance registers, mark sheets, previous class schedules, and the reports of the two terms of the academic year were used to get information that might not be obtained during interviews. Some information can be obtained through casual conversation with the participants. The researcher recorded information obtained from the interviews and from the documents by making hand written notes. For the Grade 9 learner participants to be more comfortable, the researcher allowed them to use their home language in order to allow free conversation during the interview.

### **3.7.1 Learner Document Review**

According to Merriam (2009:139), document refers to a wide range of written, visual, digital and physical material and that may shed light on the phenomenon under study. The purpose of qualitative document analysis is to determine new emergent patterns that might have been ignored by participants during the interviews (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008:63) Documents may include official documents, mark schedules, attendance class register. In this study, the learner documents reviewed were; class register, learner portfolios, and the teachers mark recording sheets. Learner documents helped to triangulate data from other sources about their poor performances.

### **3.7.2 Learner Interview Schedule**

The learners were interviewed at their schools. Interviews were held face-to-face and were individually conducted. Learner interviews took 20 minutes. All the participating learners answered the questions in Setswana because most of them confessed that English as second language is one of the contributory factors towards them failing Grade 9.

### **3.7.3 Learner survey instrument**

The survey and interview schedule questions were asked. The researcher was prompted by the two theorists Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky to ask the questions based on the factors in the home, peer group and school environment which might be contributing towards their poor performance in Grade 9?

Firstly a survey methodology using a paper and pencil instrument was used. Secondly individual interviews with 20 learners took place at different schools named school A, B, C and D.

#### **3.7.4 HODs and teachers' survey instrument**

Four heads of departments (HOD) from the four secondary schools also completed seven open-ended questions which are similar to that of the teachers except one question which was specifically designed for the heads of the departments, which says: Explain how you try to support other teachers to deal with poor academic performance of learners . The responses by the HODs underlined their roles in monitoring teachers on the practice of teaching.

#### **3.7.5 HODs and teachers' interviews schedule**

As stated in chapter one, there were eight teachers and four heads of departments as participants. Their open-ended survey instrument and the interview schedule questions were hand delivered before the actual day of the interviews. Face-to-face interviews were used as part of data collection as this method reduces the probability of the respondents being influenced by others to give answers. For instance, survey questions that are posted to respondents are prone to such biases allowing different people to contribute in answering one survey question. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were especially appropriate for this study because they allowed the researcher to clarify matters to the respondents.

The selected Grade 9 teachers were also interviewed. The interviews were conducted in the language that they felt comfortable in. The researcher used an individual face-to-face interview with two teachers per school. The interviews took plus/minus 30 minutes per person. The researcher personally hand-delivered the interviews schedules to all the participants before the actual date of the interviews in order to allow the interviewees to become familiar with the questions contained on the interview schedules, to establish rapport with the participants, create trust and cooperation in the participants and to encourage the participants to communicate their feelings.

The interview questions focused on the role they play in trying to help the learners who are performing poorly. The interview schedules questions were given to the participants a week in advance so as to allow the participants to get used to the questions.

The in-depth interviews used individuals as the point of departure for the research process and assumed that individuals had important and unique knowledge about the social world ascertainable through verbal communication (Brownwyn, 2011:42).

In order to provide triangulation, data was obtained from more than one source. By drawing on other types of information, different data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, analysis of documents and different sources of data formed the triangulation which, according to Neuman (2000:368), adds to trustworthiness of data, which to some extent, addressed the question of validity and reliability.

### **3.8 RESEARCHER'S ROLE**

The researcher's role will be that of seeking information, by interviewing the information-rich participants. In qualitative research, Creswell (2009:196) states that, the researcher, as the primary data collection instrument, necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions and biases at the outset of the study. Cohen *et al.* (2005:120) say that the most practical way of achieving greater validity is to minimize the amount of bias as much as possible and that there is the tendency for the interviewer to seek answers that support her preconceived notion. The researcher's assumption was that there are different causes for poor academic performance and that the teachers are capable of adjusting their strategies to deal with the poor academic performance in the secondary schools. The researcher's preconceived ideas did not affect the respondents.

### **3.9 MEASURES OF TRUSTWORTHINESS**

The term trustworthiness refers to the way in which the inquirer is able to persuade the audience that the findings in the study are worth paying attention to and that the research is of high quality (Maree, 2007:297). Sources of evidence in any case study, according to Yin (2003:98), allow the investigator to address the broader range of historical, attitudinal and behavioural issues, and when data has been triangulated, the events or facts of the case study have been supported by more than a single source of evidence. The reliability of measuring instruments is the degree of consistency with which they measure whatever they are measuring. A reliable instrument for a piece of research will yield similar data from similar respondents over time (Ary, 2006:254). This study sought to explore factors that affect the academic performance of underachieving grade 9 learners. The repeating learners were interviewed, as well as their teachers and heads of department. They gave first hand

information of those factors which they felt affected their academic performance. A survey instrument, interview schedule and document analysis were used. School document sources such as attendance registers, mark schedules, learners portfolios were also used to complement what the researcher collected.

Maree (2007:297) outlines the four pillars of trustworthiness in a study, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. In this study, the researcher gathered data from the participants. Different methods of data collection from different sources were triangulated.

### **3.9.1 Credibility**

Maree (2007:297) states that the researcher establishes the credibility by applying triangulation to the methods of data collection. To attain believable findings, the researcher presented a truthful account of what transpired in the research setting (Cohen *et al.*, 2004; Merriam, 2009:363). To achieve credibility of the findings, the researcher presented accurate and deliberate inferences from data about the poor academic performance of the learner. The researcher used strategies such as triangulation to address credibility.

### **3.9.2 Dependability**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012:113) and Maree (2007:297) dependability refers to whether one can track the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret data, and that it is the degree to which the reader can be convinced that the findings did indeed occur. The researcher had to be clear when asking questions, cautious, neutral and not biased to influence participants with her own personal beliefs, opinions, and experiences (Cohen *et al.*, 2004:121)

The researcher provided participants with transcribed data, interpretations and findings to verify their experiences with regard to the way they deal with poor academic performers.

### **3.9.3 Transferability**

De Vos *et al.* (2011:426) see transferability as the inclusion of detailed descriptions and various experiences whereby readers can draw inferences relating to their own situation. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012:113) further highlight transferability being how well the study has made it possible for readers to decide whether similar processes will be at work in their own settings. Transferability or generalization refers to the extent to which one can extend

the account of a particular situation to other persons. This study presented information about the research site and provided rich descriptions of the views of the selected participants under study.

### **3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The researcher obtained informed written consent from the North-West University ethics committee which she duplicated and distributed to the four schools, particularly to the principals. Consent from the Rekopantswe Area Office was received. The other letters requesting for permission were also given to the participants as well as to the parents allowing the selected learners to participate as they were minors. Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, if so desired. The researcher protected the identity of the participants and schools in the study through the use of letters and numbers.

In all the instances an explanation was given to the respondents clarifying that data collected would be used purely for academic purposes. The letter of permission obtained from the North-West University was also shown to the principals first and then later to the participants after the principals allowed me to do the research at their schools. The reason for showing them the letter was to alleviate fears of some participants. Participants were also reassured that what they said would be considered confidential. This allowed the participants to decide if they wished to be part of the study or not. That is why all the names pertaining to schools and the participants were omitted but instead numbers were used. For example school A-D for four schools.

### **3.11 SUMMARY**

This chapter focused on the methodology employed in the collection of data for this study. The qualitative case study approach was used to investigate the poor academic performance of Grade 9 learners from four schools in the Rekopantswe Area Office. It also explained the rationale for using such an approach and gave information on how data was collected.

In Chapter Four, the results of the data collected are analysed and discussed

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter three provided a comprehensive justification for the selection of the research methodology and design utilised for this study. This chapter focuses on the presentation and analysis of the data collected from the research participants. The participants came from the four schools in the Rekopantswe Area Office. The participants were interviewed individually, sometimes early in the morning before the school or after school per arrangement. Copies of the survey instrument were distributed and the learner participants were requested to fill them in and return them immediately, but those copies meant for the teachers and the heads of the departments were left to be collected after a week giving them ample time to complete them.

The researcher encountered a few problems trying to secure interviews with the teaching staff. These problems were associated with lack of time and unforeseen circumstances. Some times during exam it was not easy to organise the teachers so the researcher had to wait for the reopening of the schools.

#### **4.2 PRESENTATION OF DATA**

For this study the researcher used qualitative method to obtain first hand information from teachers, heads of the departments, and grade 9 repeating learners. In this chapter, the raw data obtained from the audio recording of semi-structured interviews and transcripts, document analysis, and open-ended survey questions are presented. Furthermore, this chapter provides an analysis and interpretation of the data according to the purpose of the investigation. This chapter also outlines the findings of the empirical investigation undertaken to establish causes of poor academic performance of learners and strategies needed by the teachers to deal with poor academic performance.

#### **4.3 ANALYSIS OF DATA**

Data analysis in qualitative research is an ongoing, emerging and iterative or non-linear process and takes place throughout the data collection process (Henning, 2004:127). Data analysis consists of selecting, organising, reducing, describing and integrating data in order to elicit meaning from data in a systematic and comprehensive manner. Wellington (2000:134) suggests three stages in the analysis of qualitative data where data are collected, summarised,

coded and sorted into themes. The above statements created a chance for the researcher to analyse the data. This is an analysis of the results of data collected from the four secondary schools that highlight several causes of the poor academic performance of grade 9 learners.

**Table 4.1 Demographic data of the respondents**

Age category	All respondents	Gender	
		Male	Female
<b>A: Heads of department and teachers</b>			
1.	40-44 years	3	2
2.	45-49 years	1	2
3.	50-54 years	2	1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>B: Grade 9 Learners</b>			
4.	15-18 years	10	10
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Total Number Of Respondents = 32</b>			

Since it is important to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the information supplied, the researcher developed codes to represent participants and research sites. The four research sites are referred to as Institution A, Institution B, Institution C and Institution D.

**Table 4.2 Coding of participants**

INSTITUTION	CODES	EXPLANATION
Institution A	H-A	Head of department of institution A.
	TA-1	Teacher 1 of institution A
	TA-2	Teacher 2 of institution A
	LA-1	Learner 1 of institution A
	LA-2	Learner 2 of institution A
	LA-3	Learner 3 of institution A
	LA-4	Learner 4 of institution A
	LA-5	Learner 5 of institution A
Institution B	H-B	Head of department of institution B
	TB-1	Teacher 1 of institution B
	TB-2	Teacher 2 of institution B
	LB-1	Learner 1 of institution B
	LB-2	Learner 2 of institution B
	LB-3	Learner 3 of institution B
	LB-4	Learner 4 of institution B
	LB-5	Learner 5 of institution B
Institution C	HC	Head of department of institution C
	TC-1	Teachers 1 of institution C
	TC-2	Teacher 2 of institution C
	LC-1	Learner 1 of institution C
	LC-2	Learner 2 of institution C
	LC-3	Learner 3 of institution C
	LC-4	Learner 4 of institution C
	LC-5	Learner 5 of institution C
Institution D	H-D	Head of department of D

	TD-1	Teacher 1 of institution D
	TD-2	Teacher 2 of institution D
	LD-1	Learner 1 of institution D
	LD-2	Learner 2 of institution D
	LD-3	Learner 3 of institution D
	LD-4	Learner 4 of institution D
	LD-5	Learner 5 of institution D

#### 4.4 PRESENTATION OF DATA COLLECTED THROUGH DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

The researcher sought permission from the principals to analyse some of the school official documents. The documents were made available to the researcher. The document was in the form of attendance register, mark recording sheets and the learners portfolios.

**Table 4.3      Analysed Documents**

Documents	Purpose	findings
Learners portfolios	To check their performance	<p>The learners find it difficult to express their thoughts correctly on paper. The language is very often not easy to understand. Even when they were doing corrections the spellings were still wrong, e.g tsaba , for tshaba meaning run in Tswana, shool for school grls for girls.</p> <p>In some instances teachers did not seem to do a good job</p>

		<p>of teaching.</p> <p>In one class the problem discovered when reviewing the learner portfolios was inconsistency in the feedback. The learners portfolios were marked once in the whole term.</p>
Attendance registers	To check if absenteeism may be the cause of their poor academic performance	<p>The attendance register showed patterns in learner absence especially on Fridays and Mondays and after long weekends. The learners often chose to stay longer than the given time. The reason for this behaviour pattern is not known. The document analysis of the registers of the four schools showed that most of the learners absented themselves from school and, as a result their school work suffers. The teachers confirmed that the learners absented themselves from school but the learners in their response to a question on absence from school in Table 4.2, every one of</p>

		<p>them said they were always present.</p> <p>But some learners performed poorly whether they were in school or not.</p>
Mark recording sheets	To see whether the teachers are doing a good job and to find out the pattern of performance of the learners.	<p>Entry of marks was done correctly but performance was always far below averaged. The marks were very poor ranging from level one (1) that is from 0-29 to level two (2) that is from 29-30. According to school promotion policy these ranges of marks do not grant a pass.</p>

This chapter analyses and interprets data collected by means of a survey instrument and interview schedule from the heads of department teachers and learners. The results of the data collected from the four secondary schools in the Rekopantswe Area Office highlighted several factors that might be used by learners, teachers and the departmental heads. According to De Vos (2011:397), qualitative analysis transforms data in to findings. This involves reducing the volume of raw information, sifting significance from trivia, identifying significance patterns and constructing a frame work for communicating the essence of what the data reveals. In analysing the data, the researcher read and independently sorted responses from both the learners and their teachers. In sorting out the responses, statements projecting similar ideas were grouped together. For example, resources was discussed under lack of resources and larger classes.

## **4.5 PRESENTATION OF DATA COLLECTED THROUGH SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW OF TEACHERS AND HEADS OF DEPARTMENT**

### **4.5.1 The nature and causes of poor academic performance among grade 9 learners in secondary schools**

The researcher personally hand-delivered the interview schedules to all the participants before the actual date of the interviews in order to allow the interviewees to become familiar with the questions contained in the interview schedules, to establish rapport with the participants, create trust and cooperation in the participants and to encourage the participants to communicate their feelings. The researcher made it clear to all the participants that she aimed to collect rich and descriptive data on factors causing poor academic performance of grade 9 learners in the Rekopantswe Area Office.

A clear audible voice recorder was used. In the mean time the researcher took notes during the interview. She later replayed the recordings so that the correct content of the interview could be noted. All the interviews were recorded with the permission of each of the participants.

Question

**What are common challenges experienced by the learners that have poor academic performance?**

The themes derived from this question were: Lack of study time, drugs, peer pressure, learner attitude, lack of resources and larger classes, teacher bunking classes grouping of repeaters in one class, medium of instruction lack of parental involvement lack of basic needs at home and bad friends. Most of the learner interviewees highlighted that they do not have study time at their schools. The feeling of the learners is that if the school can have a stipulated time for study they might perform better. The idea of the first theme is to help the learners that have no place to study at home.

The second theme highlights that there are some possibilities that other learners performance were affected by the use of drugs. Govender (2012:3) highlights that: hundreds of schools across South Africa experience learners who arrive at school drunk and smoking dagga.

With regard to the third theme about peer pressure, it takes us back to the fundamentals of the theoretical framework which pronounced peer pressure as one of the major environmental factors whose influence need to be checked. The fourth theme dealt with the dedication of the learner participants towards their schoolwork by having unlimited leisure time. This shows that the learners are not serious about their work. The idea of the fifth theme was to find out the feeling of the participants concerning the current situation of the teaching resources. Regarding the sixth theme, the idea was to find out the feeling of the participants about salvaging the situation of bunking classes.

The idea of the seventh theme was to establish the feelings of the participants on giving the support to learners that are disadvantaged by poverty.

The findings from the responses on these themes are presented as follows:

During the interviews participants mentioned that they do not have study time at their schools. There is a general response that more learner participants ascribe their poor academic performance to the lack of studying time at school. Some learner participants confessed that drug usage was the cause of their failing.

Both the heads of department and the teachers identified a variety of factors contributing to the poor academic performance of grade 9 learners. Details of their responses are as follows:

Teacher 1 of school B summarises the problem that most teachers said in this way:

*TB-1 Lack of study time at school, drug usage, bad friends that is peer pressure, unlimited leisure time, lack of relevant facilities, resources such as libraries and laboratories, class bunking, absenteeism, late coming to school as well as poverty and marital status of parents are contributory factors that cause poor academic performance of the learners."*

In agreement, TA-1 adds with the following: *"Lack of parental involvement, lack of teaching resources and inconsistent departmental strategies, are factors that contribute to poor academic performance of the learners."*

TA-2 raised the following comments, *"Poor infrastructure, lack of furniture, and lack of teaching resources for example, text books, and lack of teaching media all these factors contribute to the poor performance of the learners."*

TB-2 has this to say; *“The following factors according to my opinion could be contributing to poor academic performance of the learners: Family problems, lack of support when doing home-works, abuse, health care concern, mental health, financial issues, and parent’s unemployed.”*

TD-1 *“Economic status of a family like if there is unemployment, some social factors like lack of parental care, divorce, rape, absenteeism, bullying drug and alcohol abuse.”*

The findings from the responses to these themes are presented as follows:

According to the majority of respondents, they agree about the existence of all the facts in the table below.

The findings of the interviews and document analysis survey questions are integrated in the presentation. From the analysis of the data collected from the above mentioned sources, the following themes became evident:

The main theme is from Bronfenbrenner s micro systems. The Microsystems according to Donald *et al.* (2004:51), involves the relationships within the crucial setting of the learner, in this study the school, home, classroom teachers and peer group, all fall under the Microsystems theory.

**Table 4.4 Summary of themes**

From the school as the component of the microsystems	<p>Lack of study time</p> <p>Lack of resources and large classes</p> <p>Teachers bunking classes</p> <p>Age cohort</p> <p>extra classes</p> <p>understanding teachers needed</p> <p>Grouping of repeaters in one class</p> <p>English as medium of instruction</p>
From home as the component of the microsystems	<p>Excessive house chores</p> <p>Lack of parental involvement</p> <p>Lack of basic necessities at home</p> <p>No place for studying at home</p>
From the peer as component of the	Drug usage

microsystems	Bad influences e.g dodging lessons, Unlimited leisure time
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### Medium of instruction

LA-1 *The language that is being used in class sometimes makes it difficult for me to understand. In the exam usually I find that the questions are asked in a very difficult language so it becomes difficult for me to understand. That is why I end up failing.*

There is a serious problem regarding English as a medium of instruction. The whole interview process with the learners had to be done in their home language. The usage of English as the language of teaching and learning was found to be a contributing factor to poor performance that emerged as being serious during the interview. The educators also reiterated the issue that learners cannot read. It is worse in communication and tests because they cannot read the question paper with understanding.

Language in South Africa remains highly controversial and emotional. The South African Constitution of 1996 (Act 108 of 1996) (South Africa.1996) clearly states that everyone has the right to use language and to participate in the cultural life of his choice. This is meant to cater for South Africa's diverse population. The Constitution provides for 11 official languages. In spite of this provision in the Constitution stating that all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem, and equal use where practicable, there is a marked move towards unilingualism in the public sector. In most government departments the medium of communication is English (Mouton, Louw & Strydom, 2012:2013). According to CAPS if the learner fails English, she or he fails the grade and has to repeat.

#### 4.5.2 The way teachers are dealing with poor academic performance of the learners

How does your teaching accommodate the learners that perform poorly in your class?

Themes derived from this question were: reassessing the learners, peer-teaching

H-C highlighted the following: *Re assessing them, trying peer- learning. They can also have some discussion groups as well as oral testing.*”

H-B explained that, *“The teacher can always identify the learners that have understood better, to explain to the class. Learners can sometimes learn better from their peers than from the teacher.”*

Vygotsky's theory of Zone of proximal development stated clearly that some of the things the learner can only do with the help of the knowledgeable ones. Therefore peer-teaching is appropriate.

In the two secondary schools, schools B and C that were used for this research, the learners during the interview schedules complained about being dumped as a class of repeaters and that it demoralised them as they are neglected by the teachers.

### **The need of an understanding teacher**

LD-1 *"I think I need teachers who understand my epileptic problem. That when it leaves me I am totally blank I can hardly tell what my name is.*

LA-5 *At home there are no problems but I have lost my mother and that is the reason why I am always down and it is difficult to adjust after the passing away of my mother. I do not have a father; I also have bad eye sight and cannot hear properly."*

Some learners attributed their failing to ill health. A certain learner in particular, due to poor eyesight and impaired hearing, was unable to fully comprehend the lesson. Lip reading was a technique that she used, however it failed due to poor eyesight. This contributed to her failing Grade 9 four times. Another learner stated that her failing was the results of epilepsy attacks that she experienced the previous years but since she is taking medication. It is now under control and she is now performing better.

### **4.5.3 The strategies for helping teachers to improve the way they deal with poor academic performance of learners**

**Is there any additional knowledge or skill you need in order to be able to support learners that are performing poorly?**

Kindly state the strategies that can be used to help the learners with poor academic performance.

The themes derived from this question were:

Need to be trained, extra classes, mix ability grouping, and identification of learners, parental involvement, and oral assessment

For the question that says, Is there any additional knowledge or skill you need in order to be able to support the learners that perform poorly , most of the participants indicated that they need to be trained and work shopped on how to deal with the poor academic performers.

H-A stated these words, *“I need additional knowledge on how to deal with this type of learners. Some learners do not want to answer questions in class. These are non-volunteers, but when you ask him/her even if the hand was not raised the child is able to give the right answer but feels that you are intimidating him/her. I need to be work shopped on how to help the learners to come out of their shyness. Additional knowledge and skills are needed so that these learners can boost their ego or confidence in class and be able to participate like other children”*.

H-D stated that, *experience and prior knowledge for me are not enough. It is therefore necessary for me to have specialized training, because that will help to understand the behaviour of different children in class especially those that perform poorly”*.

H-C expressed, *“knowledge is power and learning a lifelong process; therefore I need to be given opportunity to study and to be mentored in remedial work or a work shop or regular monitoring, the strategies used by remedial teachers”*.

The themes derived from this question were:

Mix grouping of learners, parental involvement, learner identification and extra classes and remedial classes

TA-1 *I suggest that the learners should be grouped because they have different abilities as this will help. The high achievers will help the low achiever and that the parents should also be involved. Low achievers must not be grouped in one class because it makes them to have low morale and think that they are just dumped there.”*

TC-1 *came up with another suggestion, “I suggest reassessment of learners and if these learners cannot write, they may be orally assessed”*.

TB-2 emphasised that, *learners should be identified first, and then identify their problems prior to assisting them. Always involve their parents. The learners need to be grouped for their mutual support.”*

TC-1, *The remedial classes and extra classes, allow learners to improve and get more involved in their learning without getting any humiliation from the rest of the class. Learners are grouped according to their performance as a result, work is planned to suit their needs. They need to be constantly motivated. Even clapping hands is a way of motivating them.*

## 4.6 PRESENTATION OF DATA COLLECTED THROUGH QUALITATIVE OPEN-ENDED SURVEY INSTRUMENT FOR TEACHERS AND HEADS OF DEPARTMENT

### 4.6.1 The nature and causes of poor academic performance of learners

The following questions were answered through open-ended survey instrument:

Question:

**How do you identify a learner with learning difficulty?**

The following theme emerged from the above question;

**Non- participating,**

Concerning the identification of the learners that perform poorly, most of the respondents assert that the type of learners do not participate in class activities.

Most learners are afraid to ask questions even when they do not understand. You will not know that they do not understand until they write test or exam then they fail.

- How does your teaching accommodate the learners that perform poorly in class?

H-C, *Reassessing them, trying peer-learning, they can also have some discussion groups as well as oral testing.*"

TD-1 highlighted that: *Code switching accommodates learners who perform poorly, giving them extra work and homework also helps, and I use drill-method when teaching.*

H-A Explained, *I talk slowly and explain the content in their mother-tongue, I also use visual and audio aids to enhance learning. I also allow the learners to work in groups so that other group members can help them. I offer extra classes in order to address the gaps. I use a variety of teaching methods, depending on the type of the content and learners and employ the services of the remedial teacher where possible.*"

The themes that emerged from the question saying how your teaching accommodates the learners that perform poorly in class, yielded good results if only they can be put into practice. These are: Reassessing the learner, that is remedial work. Sometimes the learners may not understand the teacher but they can understand their peer so if the teachers allow

group work, the slow ones can also benefit. To the learners that cannot write, oral test is the ideal formula.

#### **4.6.2 Ways teachers deal with poor academic performance of grade 9 learners**

**How does the practice of age cohort policy of the Department of Basic education affect your teaching ability?**

This question aimed to find out what the teachers are doing to help the learners that move to the higher grades on the basis of age cohort.

TB-2, *“Over age learners in class undermine educators, bully other learners, bank classes and they do not do their work and submit in time. Some use drugs hence influence others to behave badly.”*

TC-1, *“It is a challenge because they lack the basics and then it means I have to repeat what they should have done in the early grades and at the same time, they must grasp what is being taught in Grade 9. It drains a lot of my energy.”*

From the data collected through open-ended survey instruments the research revealed that all the teachers are not in favour of age cohort policy. Their appeal is that the government should do away with it.

#### **4.6.3 The strategies for helping teachers to improve the way they deal with poor academic performance of learners.**

#### **4.6.4 Presentation of data collected from the open-ended survey instrument from the HODS**

From the question saying;

**Explain how you try to support other teachers to deal with poor academic performance of learners.**

The following themes are derived from the above question:

Special programme to be formed, intervention, peer teaching, discussion team

**In which ways are the parents involved in the studies of their children who are performing poorly?**

The following themes emerged from the above questions

Lack of parental involvement

Parents are very much aloof from their children's progress; some, because they are illiterate and cannot help even when they really want to help. Some parents do not care and even when they are called to school they do not come.

#### **4.7 PRESENTATION OF DATA COLLECTED THROUGH INTERVIEW SCHEDULE OF LEARNERS**

##### **4.7.1 The nature and causes of poor academic performance of learners**

Question

**Which factors in your home contribute to poor academic performance?**

The researcher was prompted by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory especially the Microsystems to ask questions about home conditions, school and peers

The following themes emerged;

**Excessive house chores, lack of parental involvement, no learning space at home**

LB-4, *"I wash the dishes and clean the house when I arrive home. I just have to do house chores. It may be the reason why my school work suffers."*

LB-1, *"My granny is illiterate she cannot help if I have homework and I need help."*

LD-4, *"I am staying with disturbing parents who are always fighting and talking about divorce and this disturbs me as I cannot have concentration because I love them both."*

LA-5, *"I do not have parents. I am staying with my brother, my married elder sister and her husband and my little sister. They are not so supportive. I am struggling alone especially because I cannot see and hear properly."*

LC-2, *"I don't stay at home. At home there are so many problems that make me to roam in the street to keep my mind busy. I am always fighting with my uncle. I fail because I do not have time to study."*

LA-3, *I do not have a place to study at home. They disturb me. There are small children that cause a lot of disturbance at home. The only time for me to study is when the little ones are asleep and during that time I am also tired.*”

**Do you think the type of friend you have may be contributing to your poor academic performance?**

Themes emerged from this questions are; peer pressure, drugs

In your opinion what could be done to help your learning condition?

The teachers realized the problem of drug abuse which the learners also admitted might in turn be the cause of poor academic performance.

LD-5, *I started to use drugs with my friends. It was just for fun but I ended being addicted and then I was not doing my school work. But this year i am trying very hard to get rid of drugs though it is not easy.*” Govender (2012:3) highlights that hundreds of schools across south Africa experience learners who arrive at school drunk and having smoked dagga.

LD-2, *My friends influence me to avoid other teachers. They deliberately plan to come very late. They say we have to chill that is why I failed last year”*

LB-4, *“Sometimes during the weekends my friends want us to go and stay in the malls and at the places where there are parties.”*

One would expect that because learners are unique, the needs of individual learners would be considered and individual attention given to those who need it. The positive attitude of the teachers towards learners is very important to the learning process. A positive attitude builds a positive classroom atmosphere where learners feel happy, safe and secure. In such environment learners thrive. Learning cannot take place in an environment where young people are constantly in fear of being ridiculed by teachers (Ogunbanjo, 2001:144).

LC-3, *The school must always get substitute teacher if one teacher is absent or on sick leave. With us it was not like that we struggled a lot without a maths teacher.”*

Learners complain about teacher absenteeism. Their plea is that if a teacher is on leave there should be some arrangement for a substitute. The learners in school C stated that they spent the whole term without a maths teacher.

As the teachers mentioned that bad friends are the cause for poor academic performance of Grade 9 learners, some learners also confirm that by saying:

LA-4, *Last year I failed because of the type of friends I had. We were always in the streets, and staying at the shops doing nothing just roaming. I have changed my friends. The friends I have this year are good*

LB-3, *The types of friends I have are really taking a lot of my study time because boyfriends are very time consuming*

According to Bronfenbrenner's Microsystems theory (in Donald *et al.*, 2004:51), the immediate environments in which an individual develops characterised by those individuals and events close to one's life. The micro system involves the relationships within the crucial setting of the learner, in this study the school, home, classroom teachers and peer group become the main focus concerning the learners' influences.

Most of the learners complain that when they arrive home in the afternoon, they always start by cleaning the houses, washing dishes and cooking for supper instead of resting. When they are supposed to study, they cannot because they are already tired.

**The following are the responses from other learners responding to the nature and causes of poor academic performance of grade 9 learners:**

### **Questions from the learners' interview schedule**

#### **Responses of learners on Questions:**

Question:

#### **In your opinion what could be done to help your learning condition?**

The themes derived from this question were: introduction of extra classes, simplified medium of instruction and supervised afternoon study.

The schools have overlooked the very tool by not including study time in their school programme.

LA-2, *Extra classes will help me. My maths teacher in most of the time is very difficult to understand. Maths is difficult because the teacher will be using difficult English so I get lost. The English language is a problem on its own because once you misunderstand a question, you are off track.*”

LA-5, *Afternoon classes can help me to cope. I sometimes do not understand the words especially because I have a serious hearing problem.*”

LB-1, *If I can get someone to help me with my homework or attend the extra classes because if I study alone I do not understand anything*

This comes from the comments made by the learner participants, especially about the extra classes and study time. From the researcher s experience, these learners need to be taught during their study time otherwise they will not benefit from unsupervised studies. It is again imperative for the learners to have study time at school because they do not have places and time to study at home.

#### **4.7.2 RESPONSES OF GRADE 9 LEARNERS TO ASSESSMENT OF FACTORS IMPLICATED IN POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

Yes or no questions were given to the learners to determine if causes of their poor performance emanated from the school, home or from their peers.

**Table 4.6 Responses of grade 9 learners to factors implicated in poor academic performance**

SEQ	QUESTIONS	YES	NO	%YES	%NO
1	Do you have sufficient learning resources e.g. Books, computers etc.?	3	17	15	85
2	Do you ask the teachers questions if you do not understand?	13	7	65	35
3	Is there somebody to help you with your school work at home?	16	4	80	20
4	Do you have time to study at home?	11	9	55	45
5	Is there a place where you can do your school work at home?	11	9	55	45
6	Are you most of the time absent from school?	0	20	0	100
7	Are you able to read with understanding?	14	6	70	30
8	Do you discuss your school work with your friends?	16	4	80	20
9	Are the people you are staying with very good and helpful to you?	16	4	80	20

The teachers confirm what was said by the learners in the interview schedule about the shortage of educational resources. In the interview schedule most of the respondents highlighted, lack of the resources as a challenge to teaching and learning.

#### **4.7.3 WHAT STRATEGIES CAN BE DEVELOPED TO HELP TEACHERS?**

Teaching strategy, according to Jacob, Vakalisa and Gawe (2004:175), is a broad plan of action for teaching- learning activities with a view to achieving one or more learning outcomes. A strategy gives an outline of the approach a teacher will use when facilitating teaching and learning activities.

- **Early identification**

Nel and Hugo (2012:47) highlighted that learners who experience barriers to learning, should be identified as early as possible because early identification and immediate and appropriate support is essential to ensure that learners achieve according to their learning potential. They also stated that if learners are identified too late in a child's life, it might cause academic backlog and possible learning difficulties.

One teacher participant also added to what Nel and Hugo said when he emphasised the importance of early identification of the learners with learning problems.

TB-2, *“Learners should be identified first, and then identify their problems prior to assisting them. Always involve their parents. And learners need to be grouped for their mutual support.”*

- **Early intervention**

According to Wekesa (2012:389), early intervention will lead to improved academic performance and enhances the child's self-esteem and a positive self-concept. One head of department explained how they practise intervention by allowing the learners to rewrite the same test which they failed or by approaching the same activity in a simpler manner. For the learners experiencing barriers to learning, Neethling and Smit (2012:170) pointed out that the strategy of designing down, breaking down, or scaffolding of assessment standard in to manageable units is highly recommended.

- **Need for training**

The teachers explained their desire to be trained in order to deal with diverse learning needs of learners and to develop suitable materials for such learners. They also stated that overcrowded classes hampered individual attention. What the teachers are saying, is supported by the DoE, (1997:7) when it states that for the teachers to be able to fulfil their tasks, they should invite expertise from the district support team, and higher education institutions.

- **Different teaching methods or approaches needed**

The importance of varied methodology in teaching was stressed as the learner participants confessed that they do not understand their Maths teacher who usually uses difficult English

terms and moves along with the fast learners leaves the slow ones behind and that in itself makes learning uninteresting and difficult to them. Donald, Lazarus and Lolwane (2004:333). In order for the teachers to be able to meet the different needs of the learners adequately, flexibility in the teaching learning process and in the curriculum as a whole is essential. The DoE (1997:35) has also warned the teachers that are still using one-size fits all method of teaching because the learners are not learning at the same pace.

- **Extra classes are one of the strategies mentioned by the teachers as well as the learners.**

The teachers realize that learners do not learn at the same pace that is why they opted for giving those that experience learning problems extra time as well as extra work. In other schools the learners complained that there was no time for study at school.

According to official documents such as attendance registers, the attendance of learners was not satisfactory but failure cannot be attributed solely to this because some learners were always present but performed poorly.

#### **4.7.4 DATA REDUCTION**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008:96), the data generated by qualitative methods are voluminous, and the sheer quantity of raw data which can indeed be daunting, therefore most of the data without reducing the meaning thereof, has been reduced, and that for data to be thoroughly analysed, it must be well organized.

#### **4.8 RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The purpose of this chapter was to analyse data collected during the empirical investigation. The researcher used participants quotations from interview transcripts to support her explanation of causes of poor academic performance. There were commonalities and differences from the teachers and the learners views.

In the attempt to identify the nature and causes of poor academic performance from the data collected using the interview schedules, survey instrument and document analysis, the following were some of the important findings related to this study:

- The teachers must teach the subjects they specialise in to maximise the knowledge impart to the learners

- The more experienced teachers must assist their colleagues for the benefit of the learners.
- In general, the teachers emphasise the need to do away with age cohort as it does more harm to the learners and hamper learner development.
- In addressing question 7 in Table 4.5 which tried to find out if the teachers were trained to deal with learners that have learning difficulties, 75% of the teachers emphasised the need to be trained as to be able to deal with the learners that have learning difficulties and to have remedial teacher assistance.

#### **4.9 CONCLUSION**

This chapter outlined the findings of the empirical investigation undertaken to determine the factors causing poor academic performance of the grade 9 learners in the Rekopantswe Area Office learners, the way teachers are dealing with the situation, and the strategies that can be developed to help the teachers to deal with the problem. The analysis was done in relation to the themes that were designed in accordance with the three research questions.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter four, the researcher reported the findings from the respondents according to the themes as they emerged during data analysis. Participants in this study shared their experiences and views with regards to the causes of poor academic performance. This study explored factors causing poor academic performance of Grade 9 learners in the Rekopantswe Area Office and looked at strategies used by secondary school teachers in dealing with the problem. A number of factors have been identified as causes for the poor academic performance of learners. The conclusions that are drawn are based on the findings.

This chapter provides the major findings from the empirical study as well as the literature study. The summary follows the sequence provided in the research questions as follows:

- Consideration of the main causes of poor academic performance among Grade 9 learners in the selected four secondary schools,
- An analysis of the process and procedures used by teachers in dealing with this problem, and
- It provides strategies that can be developed to help the teachers in solving this problem.

#### 5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

In chapter four, the researcher reported the findings from the respondents according to the themes as they emerged during data analysis. Participants in this study shared their experiences and views with regard to the causes of the poor academic performance of grade 9 learners.

This study was organised in to five chapters. This section presents a summary of each chapter.

**Chapter 1** dealt with the introduction and aim of the research. It indicated that the research aimed at investigating the causes of poor academic performance and how the secondary

school teachers deal with it. The statement of the problem, the aim of the study, the methods of research for realizing these aims were indicated.

**Chapter 2** presented a review of the literature. The theoretical framework underpinning this study was elaborated under Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System theory and Vygotsky's concept of zone of proximal development that emphasises the environmental influences on the poor academic performance of the learners. (cf 2.3). The researcher's literature review highlighted several factors that contribute to poor academic performance of learners. (cf 2.3.1) For example, it reveals that intrinsic (cf 2.3.2) as well as extrinsic (cf 2.3.3) factors influenced by the school environment, home as well as from peer group, may affect the learners' academic performance. Poor academic performance internationally and in South Africa had been reviewed and possible strategies for improving poor academic performance of learners were discussed, explored and investigated extensively and the literature related to the causes of poor academic performance of Grade 9 learners and how the secondary school teachers deal with it.

**Chapter 3** indicated how the researcher obtained the empirical data that was needed to address the research questions. The qualitative case study research was adopted (cf 3.3) It further explained procedure for sampling and sample selection (cf 3.4 and 3.4.1) Data collection instruments (cf 3.5) data analysis processes (cf 3.5.2) trustworthiness of the study (cf 3.6) ethical consideration of the study were explained and described in section (cf 3.8 with appropriate reference to permission from authorities, and the participants. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants and the need for participants to be well informed in advance are important. The researcher personally hand-delivered the interviews schedules to all the participants before the actual date of the interviews in order to allow the interviewees to become familiar with the questions contained from the interview schedules (cf 3.6.7)

**Chapter 4** focused on the presentation and discussed the key empirical findings. The introduction (see 4.1) provided a brief recap of the data analysis process followed in this study. The presentation of the findings (cf 4.4.1) was structured around the research question and the emerging themes. The code descriptions employed for analysing the data were described and explained in section cf 4.3. The data that was obtained from the interviews, survey instrument and document analyses together with the reflections from the research was categorised in line with the following research questions:

- What is the nature and what are the main causes of poor academic performance among Grade 9 learners in secondary schools?

- How do teachers deal with the poor performance of Grade 9 learners in secondary schools in the Rekopantswe Area Office?
- What strategies can be developed to help teachers improve the way they deal with poor academic performance of learners?

In section 4.6 the discussion based on the first question dealt with the nature and causes of poor academic performance. Several themes were identified; lack of resources, lack of study time. Most of the learner participants highlighted that they do not have study time at their schools.

### **5.2.1 Findings from the literature**

**Aim 1**, (cf 1.3) relates to investigating the causes of poor performance among Grade 9 learners and the following outcome was reached:-

The first research question says, What is the nature and what are the main causes of poor academic performances among Grade 9 learners in secondary schools?

The following findings surfaced from the literature review:

Bronfenbrenner in his ecological systems theory and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development emphasises the environmental factors that may influence the academic performance of learners.

The review of the literature showed that the teachers belonging to Unions for examples, SADTU attend meetings more often during school working hours leaving the learners on their own and that it is a contributory factor to poor academic performance of the learners. (Section 2.5)

Some of the findings reported by Govender (cf 2.5) pointed to possible reasons for the poor performance of learners in grade 9 as poor mathematics qualifications of teachers, poor utilisation of existing resources by teachers, gaps in learner knowledge.

There are many other reasons why children underperform at school (cf 1.2 ) These include medical problems, below average intelligence, specific learning disabilities, attention deficit,

hyperactivity disorder, emotional problems, poor socio-cultural home environments ,psychiatric disorders, and even environmental causes.

It has been reported that outdated teaching practises and lack of basic content knowledge have resulted in poor teaching standards. Several studies have reported a number of shortcomings in the teaching and learning on mathematics and science in South Africa (section 2.5.2) McFarlane (cf 2.5) states that a SADTU spokesperson was asked whether the Union recognised that teacher absenteeism from the classroom often for Union meetings was a factor in poor learner performance and that bunking of lessons with tacit Union endorsement is a major cause of learner poor academic performance.

- It has been reported that hundreds of schools across South Africa experience learners who arrive at school drunk and having smoked dagga.

A number of factors were found to contribute to the problem of poor academic performance of Grade 9 learners in secondary schools. Within the context of this study, as guided by its theoretical framework, these included the following:

- At school, the teachers negative attitudes towards learners and their rigid teaching methods and over-crowded classrooms inhibit individual attention. Lack of resources such as textbooks, emerged as one of the major contributing factors to poor academic performance.
- At home, the learners lack supervision, and guidance, excessive home chores that leave the learner with very little or no time for study. Lack of constant encouragement and support from their parents or guardians, they do not have proper places to study as they are congested at home, which are characterised by noise, fighting and excessive house chores. Separation of the parents and divorces also affect learner s performance.
- Peer pressure dominates the learners decision making and their lifestyle choices. To exacerbate the situation, learners do not take their work seriously as they bunk classes

and use drugs. It was also found from the empirical discussion that poor academic performance of the learners emanates from the following listed factors:

- At school, lack of resources such as text books, libraries, and laboratories. The teachers put all the repeaters in one class and ignore them. These negative attitudes affect the learners performance.
- From their peers the learners do not always get positive role models and that is where they learn substance abuse. Therefore, peer pressure influences learner performance dramatically.
- English is a second language to most black students but it is also the medium of instruction and a determining factor used in promoting the learners because if they fail English they cannot be allowed to proceed to the next grade.
- Teacher attitude  
The teachers have the tendency of having no patience with the poor academic performers. They shout at them. When the learners are hurt, they dodge the classes.
- Learner s attitudes  
The learners also do not take their school work seriously. It was also found that the poor academic performers had an indifferent attitude towards their school work.
- Health issues  
Some learners experience the health challenges which also inhibit their progress like the child who cannot hear nor see properly
- Excessive house chores  
After school, parents are expecting their children to carry out whatever portion of work that had been earmarked for them irrespective of whether they have homework to do or needed time to study.

**Aim 2, (cf 1.3)]** relates to strategies used by secondary school teachers in dealing with the problem of poor academic performance of learners at the Grade 9 levels. It relates to the second research question which asks: How do teachers deal with the poor academic performance of Grade 9 learners in secondary school?

The Department of Basic Education has uncovered that many teachers still tend to think that it is correct to use one-size fits all approach to teaching (cf 2.5.2). In reality all teachers are faced with a group of learners each one with unique character, interest, style and pace of learning and working. It was also found that failing level of academic performance is attributed to teacher s non-use of verbal reinforcement strategy (cf 1.1)

### **5.2.2. Findings from the empirical research.**

**The nature and causes of poor academic performance of grade 9 learners in the Rekopantswe Area Office.**

**What the majority of the teachers are raising about their experiences at school.**

The findings reveal that there are various reasons for causes of poor academic performance which are:

- **Need for training**

The majority of teachers emphasise their need to be trained as they have not been exposed to any information about what learners with learning difficulties can actually be expected to do hence they need training (cf 2.4).

- **Lack of facilities and resources**

- Teachers in the four selected schools reported that there is a lack of resources
- Teachers group all the repeaters in one class so as to give them special attention

### **5.2.3 The challenges faced by the learners**

- **The way teachers deal with poor academic performance of the learners.**  
The researcher has established that there are many factors responsible for poor academic performance of learner. Teachers confess that they are not taught to deal with the type of learners and that they need in-service training.
- The findings reveal that there are teachers out there that do not have the welfare of the learners at heart. The learners complained that the teachers dictate notes to them and simply refuse to repeat what they had said. This type of action cannot be regarded as developing the learners but frustrating them.
- The grouped repeating learners complain that they are neglected; they are called names, and are shouted at by teachers.
- The learners struggle to learn in English because in their group of failures there is no one who can help them.
- They share text books which makes it difficult to complete schoolwork at home
- From their peers the learners do not always get positive role models and that is where they learn substance abuse.
- English as a second language becomes a barrier to most black learners to the extent of limiting their chances of proceeding to the next grade.
- The teachers have the tendency of having no patience with the poor academic performers as they shout at them. When the learners are hurt, they dodge the classes.

### **5.2.4 Findings from the open-ended Questions**

- **Age cohort policy**  
The teachers unanimously reject the practice of age cohort policy as they see it as retarding the learners progress.
- **What kind of support will the HODs give to other teachers?**  
Discussion team need to be formed, where by factors causing poor academic performance of learners will be discussed.

- **Parent's involvement in their children's learning.**

The teachers and the learners were concerned that parents were minimally involved in their children's learning. Since most of the parents are illiterate, they shy away their responsibility. Neethling and Smit (2012: 124) strongly believe that the active involvement of families in the learning and teaching of their children is invaluable.

- **Addressing the problem of poor academic performance**

The teachers emphasise the extra classes and extra work that they give to the poor performers as well as interventions.

The teachers also highlight the code switching method that they apply during their teaching activities.

#### **5.2.5. Strategies emanating from literature review and empirical study**

- " Early identification of areas needing support and intervention with learning difficulties in order to help them (cf 2.5.3.1)
- " Individual Study Plan (ISP) of Individual Educational Program (IEP) to be demanded as the first priority when the learner is being admitted at any school.
- " Consulting with parents and learners on the important areas of learning and socio-emotional development of their children
- " Intervention to be done immediately after a classwork or test
- " Extra class and extra work to be given to those that perform poorly
- " Pre testing can be given to them so that when they do it with the rest of the class, it will not be as difficult to them to do this is what the researcher of this study is doing at school it really works

According to Bronwyn (2011: 152) the following factors need to be followed.

- " Overseeing the screening for learning difficulties for all incoming learners
- " Annual re-screening and tracking of children at risk for learning difficulties throughout the grades.
- " Meeting weekly with class teachers to discuss the progress and special needs of every learner in every class.

### 5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are provided in relation to what the researcher found in both the literature and the empirical investigations, and from the findings it can be concluded that not enough is being done by the department of Education to support the schools as there is an outcry of overcrowded classes and shortage of resources.

- Based on the finding that the teaching participants complain about overcrowded classes, the researcher recommends the reduction of class numbers so as to improve the individual attention that is given to learners. Teaching may become more effective when the class size is manageable at least to the ratio of 1:30 and not more.
- Based on the finding that there is a lack of parental involvement in the academic work of learners, the researcher recommend the formation of parent-teacher association whereby teachers and parents/guardians meet regularly to appraise the performance of learners. The parents must not leave all the responsibility of their children to the teachers. The parents may be able to shed light about the history and background their children s development.
- Based on the findings that the learners are being grouped in one class of repeaters, the researcher recommend introduction and implementation of a policy similar to the one being practiced in the USA, implies that normalisation policy could be practised here, whereby poor performers are grouped together with well-performing students. (cf 2.4) also to complement what Vygotsky is saying by Zone of proximal development whereby the knowledgeable ones sit together with weak ones so as to help them out.
- Based on the finding that some learners failure was ascribed to ill health like the learner suffering from epilepsy and that one with impaired vision and

hearing problem, the researcher recommends the introduction of health check-ups of learners in conjunction with the Department of Health.

- Based on the findings that according to The CAPS policy when a learner fails English has failed a grade, making things difficult for the learners that speak English only during school hours, It is therefore recommended that teachers use code switching and allow the learner to understand the concepts through their mother tongue, especially when new concepts are introduced.
- Based on the finding about the comments raised against age cohort policy, the practicality and effect of this policy upon the slow learners should be revisited by the Department of Education.
- In addressing Question 7 in Table 1 which tried to find out if the teachers were trained to deal with learners that have learning difficulties, 75% of the teachers emphasised the need to be trained so as to be able to deal with the learners that have learning difficulties, and to have remedial teacher assistance.
- Based on the findings that Union members in general, tend to work short hours on days when union meetings are scheduled, would do well to correct this behaviour, for the benefit of the learners, and in particular, the academically poor performing ones.

#### **5.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

It is acknowledged that it was not possible for a research study of this nature to exhaust all possible matters relating to causes of poor academic performance of grade 9 learners and how secondary school teachers deal with the situation. The following aspects regarding the field of poor academic performance of grade 9 learners may be topics for further investigation and could be done on:

- Partnership with parents concerning the education of their children
- Partnership with the Department of Education discussing the irrelevant policies and a way forward.
- The schools used in this study were from one Area Office of Rekopantswe. A bigger sample could be obtained from several districts for more information.

## 5.5 CONCLUSION

Poor academic performance is a growing concern because it affects the prospect of learners to function normally in society. According to the literature review undertaken, it is apparent that the problem of poor performance of learners is not solely a South African problem. Studies have shown that countries such as the USA, the UK, Nigeria and Zimbabwe have also suffered from this problem. However, to date, no study has explored this problem in the Mafikeng Area of the North-West Province of South Africa. This research set out to investigate the causes of poor academic performance among Grade 9 learners in the Rekopantswe Area Office and to investigate the strategies used by teachers to deal with this problem. Survey instrument and interview schedules aimed at meeting the aims of the research were conducted in order to obtain data from learners, teachers and heads of departments. The research was guided by Bronfenbrenner's theory which asserts that the causes of poor academic performance can be attributed to three main factors, that is, the school, home and peer contexts. The factors leading to poor academic performance as elucidated in the literature review concur strongly with the findings of the empirical research study.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### OPEN- ENDED QUESTIONS FOR HODS AND TEACHERS

The questions below are designed to get information about poor academic performance of Grade 9 learners as well as the strategies that the teachers use to help the learners that perform poorly.

You are requested to respond to questions to the best of your ability. Do not write your name anywhere. Your Responses will not be used anywhere except in the application of this research.

#### Open-ended questions

##### Situation in School

1. How do you identify a learner with learning difficulties?

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2. How does the practice of age cohort policy of the Department of Education affect your teaching ability?

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3. Which factors according to your opinion could be contributing to poor academic performance of the learners?

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4. How does your teaching accommodate the learners that perform poorly in your class?

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5. In which way are the parents involved in the studies of their learners who are performing poorly?

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**APPENDIX B:**

**OPEN-ENDED QUESTION FOR THE HODS ONLY**

**Open ended Questions**

**Situation in School**

1. Explain how you try to support other teachers to deal with poor academic performance of learners

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## APPENDIX C:

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE HODS

1. What are common challenges experienced by the learners that have poor academic performance?
2. In which way are parents involved in their children s learning?
3. Kindly state the strategies that can be used to help the learners with poor academic performance
4. Do you have any kind of support that you provide to the teachers so as to enable them to deal with learners with poor academic performance?
5. In your teaching how do you address learners with different learning needs?
6. Is there any additional knowledge or skill you need in order to be able to support learners that are performing poorly?
7. How does age cohort policy affect your learners progress?

## **APPENDIX D:**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE TEACHERS**

1. What are common challenges experienced by the learners that have poor academic performance?
2. In which way are parents involved in their children s learning?
3. Kindly state the strategies that can be used to help the learners with poor academic performance
4. Do you have any kind of support that you provide to the learners with learning difficulties?
5. In your teaching how do you address learners with different learning needs?
6. Is there any additional knowledge or skill you need in order to be able to support learners that are performing poorly?
7. How does age cohort policy affect your learners progress?

**APPENDIX E:****ASSESSMENT SURVEY INSTRUMENT FOR LEARNERS**

SEQ	QUESTIONS	YES	NO
1	Do you have sufficient learning resources e.g. Books, computers etc.?		
2	Do you ask the teachers questions if you do not understand?		
3	Is there somebody to help you with your school work at home?		
4	Do you have time to study at home?		
5	Is there a place where you can do your school work at home?		
6	Are you most of the time absent from school?		
7	Are you able to read with understanding?		
8	Do you discuss your school work with your friends?		
9	Are the people you are staying with very good and helpful to you?		

## **APPENDIX F:**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE LEARNERS**

1. Which factors in your home contribute to your poor academic performance?
2. Do you think that the type of friends you have may be contributing to your poor academic performance?
3. How do the people you are staying with help you with your studies?
4. How is your relationship with them?
5. In your opinion what could be done to help your learning condition?

## **APPENDIX G:**

### **RESPONSES FROM OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS OF HODS AND TEACHERS**

#### **Responses to Question 1**

##### **How do you identify a learner with learning difficulties?**

Most of the departmental heads and teachers state that these types of learners do not participate actively in school activities.

H-D The learners with learning difficulty lack commitment to their work. They dodge classes and fail to submit on time.

H-C The inability to comprehend the question asked. The child can also be identified by his/her response during discussions and presentation. Performance as well shows that she/he has a problem and the number of years in a grade also shows that there is a problem

T-B-2 Learners with learning difficulties lack concentration; do not participate in class and are unable to read and write. Sometimes they are excessively quiet, i.e. they may be introverts.

H-A The learner can easily be detected during the lesson by not participating. Check her/his presence by asking him/her question even if he/she did not raise the hand

H-B The learner with learning difficulty does not participate during the lesson presentation

H-C The inability to comprehend the question asked. The child can also be identified by his/her response during discussions and presentation. Performance as well shows that she/he has a problem and the number of years in a grade also shows that there is a problem.

H-D The learners with learning difficulty lack commitment to their work. They dodge classes and fail to submit on time .

#### **Responses to Question 2**

**How does the practice of age cohort policy of the Department of Education affect your teaching ability?**

Both the educators and their departmental heads displayed dissatisfaction concerning the implementation of age cohort policy.

H-C Age cohort poses a serious challenge whereby adult learners seem to be out of control. They become bullies towards the small ones. They display a lot of retaliation and stubbornness towards the educators

TB-1 It is a challenge because they lack the basics and then it means I have to repeat what they should have done in the early grades and at the same time, they must grasp what is being taught in Grade 9. It drains a lot of my energy.

H-A Age cohort retards teaching progress because the learners promoted on age cohort usually do not perform as expected. They are older and do not behave as their younger classmates. It also makes some activities difficult as older learners may find them not suitable for their age. It demotivates these learners as they may not be ready for the next grade. It also increases the number of under performers.

H-B Age cohort affects my stability in teaching because I need to switch to the lower level so as to accommodate the learners who had been promoted to the grade by age cohort policy

H-C Age cohort poses a serious challenge whereby adult learners seem to be out of control. They become bullies towards the small ones. They display a lot of retaliation and stubbornness towards the educators.

H-D Age cohort policy promotes poor education quality as a result the teacher s ability is not fully realized.

### **Responses to Question 3**

**Explain how you try to support other teachers to deal with poor academic performance of learners.**

H-A We have to form a discussion team to discuss factors causing poor performance and solutions to improve it. I will encourage the teachers to attend seminars and conferences in order to acquaint themselves with the new developments. Encourage them to use information from the internet in teaching, and to analyse the learner performance (results) on a regular basis and implement strategies to improve.

H-B We can establish a special program in school to assist other teachers we can also embark on peer teaching because learners may understand other teachers better than the teacher who teaches them regularly.

H-C I will encourage other teachers to do intervention in the form of repeating what they have taught to as to allow the slow learners to catch up.

H-D As their HOD, I will try to teach the learners self so as to find out where the problem with the learners lie. May be if they see a different teacher they may be cooperative.

#### **Responses to Question 4**

##### **How does your teaching accommodate the learners that perform poorly in class?**

H-A I talk slowly, explain the content in their mother-tongue, and use visual and audio aids to enhance learning. I also allow the learners to work in groups so that other group members can help them. I offer extra classes in order to address the gaps. I use a variety of teaching methods, depending on the type of the content and learners and employ the services of the remedial teacher where possible.

H-B The teacher can always identify the learners that have understood better, to explain to the class. Learners can sometimes learn better from their peers than from the teacher.

H-C Re assessing them, trying peer- learning. They can also have some discussion groups as well as oral testing.

H-D The teacher must always bear in mind that these learners are not the same and therefore try to cater for their different cognitive levels.

#### **Responses to Question 5**

##### **In which way are the parents involved in the studies of their learners who are performing poorly?**

H-A The parents monitor their children s progress by checking their books on a regular basis. They also attend intervention meetings. They supervise learning at home i.e. assignments, projects, home-work, etc. They buy learning resources such as books and stationery. They pay for excursions for educational purposes.

H-B The parents rarely contribute to the education of their children.

H-C Most of the parents are not involved in their children s education especially because of the level of their education.

H-D Parents are mostly not involved in their children s poor performance but some parents do help their children and even make some arrangements with some private tutors.

rner s school work. Learners also tend to neglect their work since their parents do not care. Parents must check their children s books, visit the school to check the learner s progress no to come during parent s meeting or the day of collecting reports.

TB-1 Parents are involved in the studies of their learners through parent s meeting, invitation by subject teachers, to discuss the learner s performance. They can also fill the invitation forms to acknowledge that they are informed about their child s performance. Extra actives provided are signed by to show that they have an input on the work given, set up goals to observe the learner s progressive performance.

TB-2 Parents need to ensure that their children attend school regularly and check their note books to ascertain whether the learner attend school.

TC-1 Some parents get involved in their children s learning activities and help them with homework. They send them to community libraries. They help them to do research on internet. Most of our learners do not have such supportive parents therefore it is a struggle to achieve their academic excellence.

TC-2 Parents are sometimes lazy to help their children who do not perform well and put the burden on the teacher who also feel discouraged because of lack of support from the parents and the learners . But some parents do put in some effort to help their children.

TD-1 Most parents are not involved in the studies of their children, for example, they do not check their children s books, help them to do home works, or come to school to check their children s progress. They do not even collect their children s reports.

TD-2 Mostly we are faced with a challenge of parents who are illiterate, some are very sickly. When they are invited to school, they are unable to come. This in itself leaves the teachers with challenges of underperforming learners.

## **APPENDIX H:**

### **RESPONSES OF LEARNERS TO THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE.**

#### **Question 1**

##### **Which factors in your home contribute to your poor academic performance?**

LA-1, I do not have a room where I can do my studies and people at home are disturbing me when I try to study. And there are always visitors at home.

LA-2, There is no place to study at home and there are too many people at home that will be moving up and down to disturb me.

LA-3, I do not have a place to study at home. They disturb me. There are small children that cause a lot of disturbance at home. The only time for me to study is when the little ones are asleep and during that time I am also tired.

LA-4, At home there is nothing that makes me to fail. I have enough time. The only thing is the place where I can study and concentrate without disturbances.

LA-5, At home there are no problems but I have lost my mother and that is the reason why I am always down and it is difficult to adjust after the passing away of my mother. I do not have a father, I also have bad eye side and cannot hear properly.

LB-1, We are congested at home hence I decided to stay with my grandmother. When I arrive at home, I have to clean the house, and cook supper every day.

LB-2, At home there are no problems. I have failed because I was not studying at all. There are so many people at home and they like to send me around and as a result, I end up having no enough time for my school work. They promised to create a room for me where I could study but until now there is nothing so I am still struggling. I fail because I do not study at all.

LB-3, If you are staying with your uncle, even if you are given assignment, you find that daily routine awaits you such as cleaning the house and cooking. So, I end up not being committed to my school work. Boys are also disturbing because I want to show them love.

LB-4, I wash the dishes and clean the house when I arrive home. I just have to do house chores. It may be the reason why my school work suffer.

LB-5, At home they are always shouting at me saying you are not studying you are chatting even when I am busy with my exam. They say I have to cook and continue with my daily routine. They do not encourage me with my studies at all.

LC-1, We lack textbooks. The few that we are sharing make it difficult for us to complete our homework. For example I share a book with someone who stays far and uses transport. So, we cannot stay at school to complete our schoolwork. And teachers must stop dictating notes to the learners. There is a teacher who likes dictating notes to us and she is very strict and does not want to repeat what she has said. She always says you are not listening. So the learners with some hearing problem suffer a lot.

LC-2, I don't stay at home. At home there are so many problems that make me to roam in the street to keep my mind busy. I am always fighting with my uncle. I fail because I do not have time to study.

LC-3, There is no computer to help me when I need information to complete my school work. There is no library next to our village. I do not have money to travel to the libraries in town that is why I end up failing.

LC-4, There is no problem at home. The problem is here at school because when we fail we do not get the second opportunity but others do get the second opportunities. I do not know the criteria that they use to do that.

LC-5, At home there is no problem. I failed because last year I was not studying at all.

LD-1, I did not give myself a chance to study, but mainly I suffered epilepsy attacks and when the epilepsy leaves me, my mind will be so blank that I could hardly tell what my name is.

LD-2, I experience sexual abuse at home and it causes me too much stress especially because it is not easy to talk about it I feel depressed at all times and that is why my school work suffer.

LD-3, I use to walk a lot. I was moving around with my cousins and when I come back I would be beaten by my father obviously there will be no concentration at school.

LD-4, Sometimes if there are problems at home, I become too emotional like when my parents are quarrelling and fighting. Sometimes I feel like my mom is being unfairly treated or just abused. Sometimes they even talk about divorce. It disturbs my mind and I cannot concentrate in my studies and that is the reason why I failed last year.

LD-5, I started to use drugs with my friends. It was just for fun but I ended being addicted and then I was not doing my school work. But this year I am trying very hard to get rid of drugs though it is not easy.

## **Question2**

**Do you think that the type of friends you have may be contributing to your poor academic performance?**

LA-1, My friends always take me from home and they say we have to play football. I liked to conform to what they are saying and therefore peer pressure caused me to fail.

LA-2, The type of friends I have are very helpful and supportive we struggle together with our school work

LA-3, I study with my friends and we always visit the library together. We encourage each other in our studies

LA-4, Last year I failed because of the type of friends I had. We were always in the streets, and staying at the shops doing nothing just roaming. I have changed my friends. The friends I have this year are good

LA-5, My friends are helpful they are not hampering my studies at all .

LB-1, I do not have friends that can delay me with my studies. The friends I have are here at school and not outside the school

LB-2, My friends are very good we help each other. They like studying

LB-3, The types of friends I have are really taking a lot of my study time because boyfriends are very time consuming

LB-4, Sometimes during the weekends my friends want us to go and stay in the malls and at the places where there are parties.

LB-5, The friends I am studying with are always negative and not serious about school work. Peer pressure is a great problem.

LC-1, Some of my friends study at home and come at my home just to disturb me. They do not want me to progress so they managed to pass and I have failed.

LC-2, The type of friends I have, are not serious about the school work.

LC-3 Though we have failed, we were trying very hard to study and to help each other.

LC-4, I sometimes ask my friends for help. They usually refuse to help but I know that they have the ability and understanding. That is why I have failed because I am struggling alone.

LC-5, We realized our mistake that last year we were playing and we gave little time to our study that is the reason why we decided to change our attitude and to put more effort to our studies.

LD-1, My friends are good, we help each other with our studies but sometimes we find that we do not have the ability in some subjects and that is why we fail.

LD-2, My friends influence me to avoid other teachers. They deliberately plan to come very late. They say we have to chill that is why I failed last year.

LD-3, My cousins delayed my studies last year and since I dropped them I can see progress in my studies even my first and second term performance this year is satisfactory unlike last year.

LD-4, The type of friends I have like moving around especially at night as a result, they end up forgetting to do their school work.

LD-5, Though I failed last year, my friends are so supportive and we encourage one another to study for the sake of progress.

### **Question 3**

**How do the people you are staying with help you with your studies?**

LA-1, They are trying to help me with my school work. Like my dad is very good in maths

- LA-2, I am staying with my mom only but my aunt always brings her little ones at home, and they are always at the TV until very late so I do not have time to study.
- LA-3, When I do not understand, I usually ask someone. My sisters help me with my school work.
- LA-4, They remind me to do my homework. My sister is always supportive because she helps me with my schoolwork.
- LA-5, My brother helps me with my homework.
- LB-1, My granny is illiterate she cannot help if I have homework and I need help.
- LB-2, At home they sometimes help me with my homework. My sister has access to the internet at her work so if I am in need of something, she looks for information for me at her work, and brings it to me when she comes from work.
- LB-3, They are always with their friends and nobody really tries to help me. My mother is working in Koster and I am staying with her sister. So she is not helping me at all and she does not have patience with me.
- LB-4, I am staying with my aunt who always helps me with my school work. If I have a school work, I leave my work with her at home, and my aunt will search information for me during the day.
- LB-5, At home there is no one to help me with my schoolwork. My mother is sometimes helpful because last year, she bought me calculator.
- LC-1, I am staying with my mother and my brother, and they are not serious about my school work and I am always fighting with my mother.
- LC-2, I am staying with my mother and my father. If they cannot help me with my school work, they call our neighbours. He helps me with my maths. He has finished schooling.
- LC-3, My mother wakes me up every day at 4hoo to study.
- LC-4, At home, I only benefit from their presence against loneliness. They are there as parents but they cannot help me with my school work.
- LC-5, At home my parents are so supportive in my studies.

LD-1, Some parents like helping their children. Afterschool, they take their children to after care, where they are helped with their school work.

LD-2, I am struggling with accounting but my parents sometimes help me. My brother and my sister also help me sometimes, now because I want to focus on my studies, I left my home to stay with my granny.

LD-3, When I do not understand I ask my sister to help me with my school work.

LD-4, My parents are also teachers and when I have problem with my schoolwork they explain in such a way that next time I must not have problem.

LD-5, I am staying with my three siblings and my mother. They always help me with my school work. And if they are unable to help me, a sister next door is robed in. for help.

#### **Question 4**

##### **How is your relationship with them?**

LA-1, I am staying with my parents that are very supportive because whatever I need in connection with my studies, they provide.

LA-2, I am staying with my mom only. I am her only child.

LA-3, I am staying with my mother and my sister. My mother buys my school needs and she is very supportive.

LA-4, I am staying with my mother and my sister who has done Grade 12. So she has a better understanding and my mother encourages her to help me with my school work.

LA-5, I do not have parents. I am staying with my brother, my married elder sister and her husband and my little sister. They are not so supportive. I am struggling alone especially because I cannot see and hear properly.

LB-1, Where I am staying, I am just adopted by a certain granny because she does not have her own children. We are just a group of children staying with a granny who is not even our relative.

LB-2, I am staying with my parents, my uncles, my aunts and my siblings. We are simply too many in one house. We are a family of sixteen. They take advantage of me so they keep on sending me around and this thing eats a lot of my study time.

LB-3, I am staying with my uncle who is not supportive at all.

LB-4, I am staying with my aunt if I have a school work, I show it and leave it with her at home and she always search for information for me.

LB-5, I am staying with my parents and my cousins.

LC-1, I am staying with my uncle and my brother. The two do not take my school work serious. I am always fighting with my uncle.

LC-2, I am staying with my parents and they invite our neighbour to help me with my school work.

LC-3, I am staying with my mother who wakes me up every day at four o'clock so that I can study.

LC-4, I am staying with my parents and my nephew.

LC-5, I am staying with my supportive parents.

LD My father is staying somewhere and at home I am staying with my mother who is interested in my studies.

LIDF-2, I am staying with parents that are always fighting.

LD-3, I am staying with my granny. I left my home where there are parents and my siblings because at home there are so many things that take my focus away from books.

LD-4, I am staying with disturbing parents who are always fighting and talking about divorce and this disturbs me as I cannot have concentration because I love them both.

LD-5, I am staying with my mother and three siblings. If my mother is unable to help me with my homework, there is a good neighbour who helps me.

### **Question 5**

**In your opinion, what could be done to help your learning condition?**

LA-1, The language that is being used in class sometimes makes it difficult for me to understand. In the exam usually I find that the questions are asked in a very difficult language so it becomes difficult for me to understand. That is why I end up failing.

LA-2, Extra classes will help me. My maths teacher is most of the time very difficult to understand. Maths is difficult because the teacher will be using difficult English so I get lost. The English language is a problem on its own because once you misunderstand a question, you are off track.

LA-3, Extra classes can be my solution because when I enter test or exam room I know already that I am going to fail because for me maths is very difficult and I just do not know how to do it.

LA-4, We were once promised to have extra classes now we are nearing the end of the year without it. I think extra classes would have helped me.

LA-5, Afternoon classes can help me to cope. I sometimes do not understand the words especially because I have a serious hearing problem.

LB-1, If I can get someone to help me with my homework or attend the extra classes it would help me because if I study alone I will not understand anything and in our class we are grouped as repeating class so there is no one who can help me.

LB-2, If I can have extra classes, they can help us, At home I need someone to help me like an extra tutor mostly the questions are difficult and I do not understand my maths teacher. The teacher is simply too fast and likes to move with the fast catchers. The teacher must try to be slower so that all the learners can understand. I need to be taught even during the weekends, like on Saturdays. The maths teacher likes to use big English words and I don't even understand the method he is using when teaching maths.

LB-3, If I can have time to visit the library it will be of great help to me. I think we boys of the same village can group ourselves and study together, this will help but instead, we are always roaming about in the street.

LB-4, I wish I could be away from my negative friends. We need study time at our school because there is no study time here.

LB-5, I need extra classes.

LC-1, We lack textbooks, and they must stop dictating notes to the learners. The teacher dictates notes to us and refuses to repeat what we did not hear properly, so learners with hearing problem are suffering a lot.

LC-2, I think I can perform better if I can have extra classes.

LC-3, The school must always get substitute teacher if one teacher is absent or on sick leave .with us it was not like that we struggled a lot without a maths teacher and yet we are the repeating class.

LC-4, I just need to put more effort on my schoolwork. Our teacher was on sick leave for the whole term. We informed the principal who did nothing to help us.

LC-5, Some teachers do not know how to teach they just throw dangerous things at us. There are no studies here at our school we need studies.

LD-1, I think I need teachers who understand my epileptic problem. That when it leaves me I am totally blank I can hardly tell what my name is.

LD-2, We need reading rocket for all the learning areas. It will help us and the teachers must not develop bad attitudes towards the slow learners. We need more time especially for the extra classes.

LD-3, Sometimes it does not depend on the school because the teachers do not know our backgrounds but it depend on us as students to change what we were doing last year and to change for the better I have to improve my studies by changing my life style, and bad habits of alcohol, drugs and love affairs.

LD-4, Since I started to attend the maths centre my maths is improving. The maths centre has been existing but not available. Study time must also be increased because it is where we get chance to be helped by other students who understand better.

LD-5, I need extra classes for Tswana language because at home we speak Zulu. I have managed to pass every learning area but then Tswana is regarded as my home language which must not be failed and that is why I am repeating Grade 9.

**APPENDIX I:**

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM- PARENTS**

Dear Parent,

My name is Mrs D. Phaladi and I am an educator in the Rekopantswe area. I am studying for a Master s degree in Educational management at the North-West University, Mafikeng Campus. As part of the requirements for my degree, I am conducting a research study that seeks to understand why some students perform poorly at school, and what strategies teachers can use to deal with learners poor performance.

In this regard, I would like to ask for your permission to conduct an interview with your child for the purpose of my research. I assure you that the information collected will be used only for the purposes of this research study, and that it will be treated confidentially.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully,

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX J:**

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM - LEARNER**

Dear Learner,

My name is Mrs D. Phaladi and I am an educator in the Rekopantswe area. I am studying for a Master s degree in Educational management at the North-West University, Mafikeng Campus. As part of the requirements for my degree, I am conducting a research study that seeks to understand why some students perform poorly at school, and what strategies teachers can use to deal with learners poor performance.

In this regard, I would like to ask for your permission to conduct an interview with you for the purpose of my research. I assure you that the information collected will be used only for the purposes of this research study, and that it will be treated confidentially.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully,

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX K:**

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM - HOD**

Dear HOD

My name is Mrs D. Phaladi and I am an educator in the Rekopantswe area. I am studying for a Master s degree in Educational management at the North-West University, Mafikeng Campus. As part of the requirements for my degree, I am conducting a research study that seeks to understand why some students perform poorly at school, and what strategies teachers can use to deal with learners poor performance.

In this regard, I would like to ask for your permission to conduct an interview with you for the purpose of my research. I assure you that the information collected will be used only for the purposes of this research study, and that it will be treated confidentially.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully,

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX L:**

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM - TEACHER**

Dear Teacher

My name is Mrs D. Phaladi and I am an educator in the Rekopantswe area. I am studying for a Master s degree in Educational management at the North-West University, Mafikeng Campus. As part of the requirements for my degree, I am conducting a research study that seeks to understand why some students perform poorly at school, and what strategies teachers can use to deal with learners poor performance.

In this regard, I would like to ask for your permission to conduct an interview with you for the purpose of my research. I assure you that the information collected will be used only for the purposes of this research study, and that it will be treated confidentially.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully,

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_



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21 August 2013


**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

This is to confirm that **Ms Dikonketso .Dessia Phaladi**  
(Student No: 20424345) is a Masters (MEd) student studying Education  
Management at the North West University, Mafikeng Campus.

She is collecting data for her research. **TOPIC: A Case study of how  
secondary school teachers deal with poor academic performance of  
Grade nine learners.** We request that she be allowed to collect data from the  
HOD's educators and learners in Rekopantswe Area Office.

Any assistance given to her will be appreciated.

**Prof JR Debeila**  
Director: School of Postgraduate Studies

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## education and training

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### OFFICE OF THE AREA MANAGER: REKOPANTSWE AREA OFFICE NGAKA MODIRI MOLEMA DISTRICT

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**ENQUIRIES:** B.A ITUMELENG  
**DATE:** 26 AUGUST 2013  
**TO:** PRINCIPALS OF SCHOOLS  
EDUCATORS  
SGB's  
REKOPANTSWE AREA OFFICE  
**FROM:** THE CIRCUIT MANAGER  
REKOPANTSWE AREA OFFICE  
**SUBJECT:** REQUEST TO COLLECT DATA FOR ACADEMIC RESEARCH  
PURPOSES – D.D PHALADI, STUDENT NO. 20424345

The above mentioned educator has been granted permission to collect data for research purposes from schools in the Rekopantswe Area.

The process must be managed in such a way that teaching and learning are not in any way compromised.

Your co-operation and support in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

**BOITUMELO ITUMELENG**  
CIRCUIT MANAGER

