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DETERMINANTS OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN THREE SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ONE DISTRICT OF SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The South African education system has instituted policies and programmes to expect schools to function better, but this does not seem to be the case when measured by school performance. School performance in South Africa is a multi-faceted phenomenon that needs to be studied and understood in-depth, hence this study on the dynamics of school performance. This is a qualitative research study positioned in the interpretivist paradigm to understand multiple realities about the dynamics of school performance as expounded by Rehman and Alharthi's (2016) that interpretivists believe in multiple socially constructed realities. The study adopted a multiple case study approach involving three primary schools in one district of the KwaZulu-Natal province. The following questions were posed: what factors influence school performance? How do teachers and school management team members see these factors influencing school performance? How can school performance be enhanced? Research participants included the school principals, departmental heads, and teachers in each school. The data generation instruments included interviews, observations, and document reviews. Central to school performance, the major conclusions reached show that school culture was the overarching dynamic of school performance. Within school culture, the key sub-dynamics were the nature of leadership and management, the quality of teaching and learning, and school community relationships. Schools need not only rely on the policies and programmes from the Department of Education (DoE) to improve their performance. Heavy reliance on the directives by the DoE seems not to make schools accountable for their academic performance. In addition to the policies and programmes for improving school performance, schools need to develop internal school performance strategies.

Keywords: School performance, School culture, accountability.