DETERMINANTS OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN THREE SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ONE DISTRICTOF 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 thisstudy on the dynamics of school performance. This is a qualitative research study positioned in the interpretivist paradigm to understand multiple realities about thedynamics 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, thequality 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 directivesby 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.

INTRODUCTION

The South African education system has instituted policies and programmes in the expectationthat schools would perform better, but this does not seem to be the case when measured with academic performance. For the situation to be improved in schools, the dynamics of school performance need to be investigated. This study adopted a multiple case study method to seekanswers to this problem of academic performance in three primary schools in South Africa. The following questions were addressed, namely: what the factors are influencing school performance, in what

ways do teachers and School Management Team members see these factors influencing school performance and how can school performance be enhanced. Three schools were chosen to generate data to answer these questions. In each school, one principal, all the Departmental Heads (DHs) and three teachers were participants. The instruments of data generation included interviews, observations, and document reviews. Through the perspectives of the participants, the results were that there are multiple factors affecting school performance. These factors range from school community relationship that does not promote school performance, poor quality of teaching and learning and the nature of school culture that compromises school performance. 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 Department of Education seems not to make schools to be accountable for their academic performance. In addition to the policies and programmes for school performance improvement, schools need to develop internal school performance strategies.

The background of this study is that in terms of organisation, it looks like the South African education system has put things in place and one would hope that schools would function well, but this does not seem to be the case in terms of school performance. The state has done lots of work to improve school performance by introducing policies such as the quintile system to redress the injustices of the past, but school performance remains relatively low. I have read multiple local and international studies that talk to individual factors of school performance. Such studies include Lumadi's (2008) study whose purpose was to explore the challenges experienced by South African teachers in delivering school curriculum and the causes of their poor performance in the teaching-learning situation. The study found, among other things, that some of the challenges are because of current and recurrent changes in the school curriculum.

In the hope to better the level of teacher performance other scholars both local and internationally suggest, among others, designing teacher incentives to motivate them into performing well. Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos (2011) concur on the idea for pay-for performance of teachers as a possible avenue to incentivise teachers and ensure their accountability. I seek to study in a more holistic way the dynamics of school performance. There is not much knowledge about why schools perform so lowly, therefore this study seeks to investigate and explore these dynamics. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What do teachers and School Management Team members regard as factors influencing school performance?
2. In what ways do teachers and School Management Team members see these factors influencing school performance?
3. How can school performance be enhanced?

My experience as a teacher is that many South African schools are under-performing. Teaching and learning are frequently compromised by, among other things, teachers attending union meetings during school hours. In this study I seek to investigate factors that affect school performance. Several studies have been done on the nature of academic performance in schools, but there seemed to be no study that comes up with a holistic view on why schools perform poorly. In the next section numerous studies exploring school performance are presented.

Heystek and Terhoven (2014) conducted a study on aspects of motivation, professional development, and adult learning principles in relation to contextual factors that affect underperforming schools. Findings indicate that teachers are passionate about working with students from disadvantaged backgrounds because it gives them the opportunity to invest in these children's future. The underlying assumption is that a greater understanding of these factors could help development programme designers devise ways of encouraging teachers at underperforming schools to participate in professional development activities.

In a study by van Wyk's and Marumoloa's (2012), about the exploration of the role and function of the school management team in policy formulation and implementation, it was found that although the South African Schools Act of 1996 requires the SGB and SMT to workcollectively in formulating school policies, this was not the case at school. The SMTs have unilaterally become a more important policy making and implementation body than the SGB. This disjuncture between the two structures impacts negatively on the performance of the school.

Some scholars such identify school culture as having influence on school performance. Hargreaves (1994) argues that school culture is the lens through which participants view themselves and the world. School culture is comprised of unwritten rules and traditions, normsand expectations that permeate everything (Deal and Peterson, 2002, p.2). For example, the way people act, how they dress, what they talk about, whether they seek out colleagues for helpor don't and how teachers feel about their work and their students (Deal and Peterson, 2002, pp. 2-3). As a factor that affects performance, in a study by Sokro (2012) which aimed at investigating the relationship between organisational culture, employee motivation and performance, the study revealed that organisational culture has a direct impact on employee motivation and indirectly on organisational performance. In another study conducted by Shahzad*et al* (2012) which aimed at measuring organisational culture and its impact on the organisational performance, the findings were that organisational culture has deep impact on the variety of organisation's processes, employees, and its performance.
Findings about how school culture influences school performance will be dealt with extensively in section 6.

Since this study revolves around school performance, it is incumbent to seek as much information as possible factors that affect performance. It is against this backdrop that I regardaccountability as an appropriate factor to be explored to deeply understand school performance. Simply put, accountability is the acceptance of responsibility of one's own actions. The National Foundations for Educational Research (NFER) (2018) argues that there are many different definitions of accountability. For example, Fox and Meyer (1995) succinctly define accountability as the responsibility of government and its agents towards the public to achievepreviously set objectives and to account for them in public. NFER (2018) defines accountability broadly as a government's mechanism for holding educational institutions to account for the delivery of high-quality education. Within the school setting, this latter definition aptly captures the essence of accountability in that the government represented by the department of education (DoE) carries the responsibility of providing education to the public. According to Spaull (2013), there is a

widespread perception that the national, provincial, and local levels of government are not held accountable for how they use public resources. Similar sentiments go down to schools. The manifestation of lack of accountability at school level seems to be high learner failure rate, prevalent teacher and learner absenteeism, mismanagement of public funds to mention but a few.

Accountability can take various forms depending on the field in which it occurs. For example, Romzek (2000) cites hierarchical, legal, political, and professional accountabilities. Romzek (2000) argues that hierarchical or bureaucratic accountability is where relationships follow a rather strict superior-subordinate hierarchy, and where the public servant is technically accountable through the leadership of the department/unit up to the top. Romzek (2000) maintains that in hierarchical accountability, internal organisational form that utilises the organisational structure features as well as lines of authority and official channels of communication. In this form of accountability, the relationship is comparable to the one within the school context in that it is based on the internal controls through supervision of individuals with reliance on seniority of position arrangement. Within the school context there is hierarchy of management and leadership structures ranging from the principal at the top, down to deputy principal, departmental heads down to post level one educators. Each of these structures has a role to play in a hierarchical pattern.

Legal accountability according to Romzek (2000) is a conventional type where accountability relationships pertain a great deal of external oversight. For example, legislative and constitutional structures/agencies such as parliamentary committees, the Ombudsman, Auditor-General and the Public Service Commission. Under this accountability type, Romzek (2000) posits that people are expected to comply with rules and regulations. As such at school level legal accountability features strongly in that all activities done there are derivatives of polices and Acts enacted by South African Parliament. Strict adherence to those Acts and policies are a necessity otherwise what ever activity done which is not in compliance with the Acts and polices is regarded as invalid. For example, schools are supplied by DoE with policy documents from which annual teaching plans (ATPs) are derived. Strict adherence and compliance to those prescripts is mandatory. No teaching is expected to take place outside the ATPs. Also, the school's Act was promulgated by parliament so that the functioning of schools, inclusive of performance operates within the ambit of the law.

At school level it is expected that all individuals be treated democratically meaning that there should be no discrimination against anyone. This according to Romzek (2000) is called political accountability where the management of the school is responsive to the concerns of the key stakeholders and other social groups of the public. Romzek (2000) argues that this accountability form is more people focused. For example, school management is expected to account for all activities that are done at school through platforms like holding meetings.

Methods
Igwenagu (2016) argues that research methodology refers to a set of systematic techniques used in research. To this scholar research methodology simply means a guide to research and how it

is conducted. Goundar (2012) comparatively explains that the scope of research methodology is wider than that of research methods. It entails the logic behind the method usedin the context of a research study (Goundar, 2012, p.12). Goundar (2012) posits that researchmethodology explains why a particular method or technique is used. Goundar (2012) also claims that research methodology explains why other techniques or methods are not used so that research results are capable of being evaluated either by the researcher himself/herself or by others. As part of methodology, in this section I report on the delimitation of the study, selection of participants, data generation instruments, data generation procedures, data analysisprocedures and sampling procedures

Three primary schools were chosen for this study from general education and training (GET) band. In each chosen primary school, the principal, the deputy principal, the Departmental Heads (DHs) and post level one (PL1s) educators were identified as participants for the study.In this study not all primary schools had similar post levels. For example, at Sizabantu and Z primary schools there were no deputy principalship post levels because of their decreasing PPN.

Mujere (2016) posits that sampling is the act, process, or technique of selecting a suitable sample, or a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population. Mrtinez and Gonzalez-Chica (2016) argue that sampling can be defined as the process through which individuals or sampling units are selectedfrom the sample frame. In this study, sampling did not only involve selecting schools where the study was conducted but also participants were selected representing different post levels in each selected school. For example, principal, deputy principal (DP), departmental heads (DHs) as well as post level one educators were purposively selected. Each category of participants was perceived to be knowledgeable about the issue of school performance and thusthey were selected as part of the sample. The selection of the three schools was based on their
accessibility and convenience to the researcher. I regarded the selected participants in each ofthe participating schools as having rich information regarding their understanding of the dynamics of school performance. For example, these participants possessed vast experience inthe teaching profession ranging from three years to fourteen years.

The pseudonyms given to the three chosen schools were Ziningi, Z and Sizabantu primary schools respectively. The participants in the selected schools were the three principals, namely, A1 for Ziningi primary school, B1 for Sizabantu primary school and C1 for Z primary school.There was one deputy principal, coded as A1 DP. The departmental heads (DHs) previously known as heads of departments were coded as A2, B2 and C2. Finally, post level1 teachers were coded as follows: A3, B3 and C3 respectively. *Post level one-teachers (educators)*: Postlevel one-teachers (PL1s) were chosen as participants for this study because of their vast knowledge of their respective school's performance and their willingness to participate in the study. At Ziningi and Sizabantu primary schools respectively, three educators per school volunteered to participate in the study. At Z primary school only one educator participated while two withdrew their participation. Teachers are the heartbeat of the performance of any school. As such their input in matters related to school performance was inevitable. When selecting teachers as participants, their respective

principals granted me permission to meet them, and I explained the purpose of the study. I also explained to them that they were free to withdraw from the study if they so wished.

Departmental Heads (DHs): According to Education Labour Relation Council (ELRC), Collective Agreement 1 of 2008, the duties of the Departmental Head (DH) is among others, as follows: To oversee the functioning of their departments. It was against this backdrop that the DHs were chosen as the most invaluable knowledge-rich informants in this study. The Departmental Heads are sometimes referred to as subject specialists. It was therefore logical to partly attribute the performance of the school to the Departmental Heads.

Principals were chosen as participants to the study because of their presumed vast knowledge of all the processes and regulation of the school and because of their seniority in their schools. Principals were expected to know the pros and cons of running the schools. As such principals were expected to have appropriate knowledge to respond to the objectives of the study. When the school performs well or bad it could be the principal who remained answerable and accountable. It was therefore against this backdrop.

In this study I adopted three data generation instruments to answer the research questions. These instruments were interviews (individual and focus group), observations and document reviews. The reason for the adoption of three data generation instruments followed Chako's (2017) assertion that one method of data generation cannot effectively reveal everything on every phenomenon. Annum (2019) maintains that data generation instruments are tools for data collection that enable the researcher to obtain relevant information or gain the experience of others from which he/she imbibes lessons for the enrichment of his/her report. It was against Annum's (2019) reasons of the usage of the above-named data generation instruments that I also opted for their usage in this study. I deliberately started with interviews because they are according to Coughlan (2009) a flexible and useful method of data collection. Observation was used to check nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with whom, grasp how participants communicate with each other and check how much time is spent on various activities (Schmuck, 1997). I used document reviews based on the values they have in research. For example, Bowen (2009) cites five of these values of document reviews in research as follows. First the fact that documents reviews can provide data on the context within which research participants operate. Second, information contained in documents can suggest some questions that need to be asked and situations that need to be observed as part of the research. Third, documents provide supplementary research data. For example, information and insights derived from documents can be valuable additions to a knowledge base. Fourth, documents provide a means of tracking change and development. For example, where various drafts of a particular document are accessible, the researcher can compare them to identify the changes. Fifth, documents can be analysed to verify findings or corroborate evidence from other sources. For example, Angrosino & Mays de Pérez (2000) argue that Sociologists typically use document analysis to verify their findings. Bowen (2009) concludes that if the documentary evidence is contradictory rather than corroboratory, the researcher is expected to investigate further. In the same breath when there is convergence of information from

different sources, readers of the research report usually have greater confidence in the trustworthiness (credibility) of the findings.

Interviews according to Denscombe (2010) and Silverman (1985) involve a set of assumptionsand understandings about the situation which are not normally associated with a casual conversation. Kvale (1996) describes an interview as a conversation, whose purpose is to gatherdescriptions of the lifeworld of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meanings of the 'described phenomena. Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin (2009) assert that interviews are widely used as data collection tool in qualitative research. Lambert and Loiselle (2008) point out that, interviews are typically used as a research strategy to gather information about participants' experiences, views and beliefs concerning a particular research question or phenomenon of interest.

It was partly against the afore-mentioned claim about the usage of interviews as a research strategy that prompted me to employ them (interviews) as one of data generation tools for this study. My usage of interviews was also based on Denscombe's (2010) claim that when the researcher needs to gain insights into things such as people's opinions, feelings, and emotions, then interviews will certainly provide a more suitable method. Denscombe's (2010) advises that the researcher should ensure that the interviews are viable in terms of the costs in time andtravel involved. In explaining the viability of the interview, Denscombe's (2010) argues that with limited resources, the researcher needs to ensure that the people are not distributed too widely across a large geographical area. Denscombe's (2010) warns that if interviews are not widely distributed in a large area, conducting the interviews will not incur prohibitive costs. Interviews are of different types, for example, structured, semi-structured, unstructured, individual, group and focus group interviews. For this study I conducted semi-structured individual and focus group interviews. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with the principals, the deputy principal of Ziningi primary school, C2 and C3, while semi- structured focus group interviews were conducted with A2s, B2s, A3s and B3s. in Fylan Milesand Gilbert (2005) describes semi-structured interviews as simple conversations in which the researcher knows what he/she wants to find out about and therefore have sets of questions to ask and a good idea of topics to be covered. I audio-recorded the interviews as per earlier agreement with the participants. This helped me during the data analysis process which was done during and after the interviews. The order which I followed in conducting interviews wasas follows: Since there were three schools, in each school I started with the principal, then thedeputy principal (if available), followed by the departmental heads and I concluded with post level one-educators. For each school, it took me five days apiece to conduct the interviews, observation, and document reviews.

While according to Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin (2009), interviews are a widely used data generation tool in qualitative research, they have both advantages and disadvantages. Denscombe (2010) indicates that interviews have multiple advantages. Among the advantages as cited by Denscombe (2010) are the following: Depth of information, Insights, Equipment, Informants' priorities, Flexibility, High response rate, Validity and Therapeutic.

Regarding depth of information, interviews are perceived to be particularly good at producing data which deal with topics in depth and in detail. Subjects can be probed, issues pursued, and lines of investigation followed over a relatively lengthy period. Coming to insights, the researcher is likely to gain valuable insights based on the depth of the information gathered andthe wisdom of 'key informants. In the case of equipment, the interviews require only simple equipment and build on conversation skills which researchers already have. Pertaining to Informants' priorities, interviews are seen as a good method for producing data based on informants' priorities, opinions, and ideas. Informants can expand their ideas, explain their views, and identify what they regard as the crucial factors. Regarding flexibility, as a method for data collection, interviews are probably the most flexible. Adjustments to the lines of enquiry can be made during the interview itself. High response rate relates to the fact that interviews are generally prearranged and scheduled for a convenient time and location. As a result, this ensures a relatively high response rate. Concerning validity, Denscombe (2010) maintains that direct contact at the point of the interview means that data can be checked for accuracy and relevance as they are collected. Being therapeutic in this regard means that interviews can be a rewarding experience for the informants. In comparison with questionnaires, observation and experiments, there is a more personal element to the interviews, and people tend to enjoy the rather rare chance to talk about their ideas at length toa person whose purpose is to listen and note the ideas without being critical. Denscombe (2010) explains the following disadvantages: time-consuming, data analysis, reliability, interviewer effect, inhibitions, invasion of privacy and resources.

In this study the concept of individual interviews was used interchangeably with one-to-one interviews (Mathers, Fox, and Hunn, 1998). My usage of one-to-one interviews was based on Mathers et al (1998) assertion that they are preferable when the subject matter is very sensitive,if the questions are very complex or if the interview is likely to be lengthy. In this study the issue of sensitivity featured when allowing the freedom of speech to prevail when asking participants questions that touched their seniors. For example, when asking either PL 1 educators, DHs or DPs questions that required them to talk about sensitive issues about their superiors, they responded fearlessly. Coughlan and Cronin (2009) indicate that individual interviews offer the researcher the opportunity to interpret non-verbal cues through observationof body language, facial expression, and eye contact. This, according to Ryan, Coughlan, and

Cronin (2009) may enhance the interviewer's understanding of what has been said. Coughlan and Cronin (2009) affirm that to this end it (interpretation of non-verbal cues through observation) permits the researcher to probe and explore hidden meanings and understanding.After introducing myself and explaining the purpose of the interviews, I embarked on the actualinterviewing activity with the participants. Interviewing participants was not strange to me asI practised it during the pilot test in the school selected for pilot test. As indicated earlier, the individual interviews were carried out with the principals of all three selected schools separately. The order which I followed in conducting the interviews lasted on average approximately two days in each school. While the interviews were in progress notes were alsotaken in the field notes journal for things that I observed happening in line with observation schedule prepared earlier. As indicated earlier, the interview session with the principal of eachschool lasted for an entire day. The interview with the deputy principal of Ziningi primary school lasted about half a day. I spent a day interviewing HDs

and PL1s of each selected schoolrespectively. Each interview session consisted of several sub questions, for example, each group of participants were asked five questions apiece.

Dilshad and Latif (2013) argue that focus group interview is a qualitative technique for data collection that comprised of individuals with certain characteristics who focus discussions on a given issue or topic. Denscombe (2007) adds that focus group consists of a small group of people, usually between six and nine in number, who are brought together by a trained moderator (researcher) to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings, and ideas about a topic. In this study the usage of focus group interviews was informed by the following three distinctive characteristics as propounded by Casey and Krueger (2000): First, prompt/stimulus: this means that the sessions usually revolve around a prompt, a trigger, some stimulus introduced by the researcher to focus the discussion. Second, moderator/researcher-not a neutral person: this indicates that there is less emphasis on the moderator/researcher to adopt aneutral role in the proceedings than is normally the case with other interview techniques. Third,interaction within the group: this means that interaction between group members is given a particular value rather than just gathering opinions of people. Casey and Krueger (2000) conclude that the collective view is given more importance than the aggregate view. As mentioned above the focus group interviews were conducted with post level one-educators anddepartmental heads for both Ziningi and Sizabantu primary schools respectively. At Ziningi and Sizabantu primary schools there were three departmental heads and three post-level one educators who participated in the focus group interviews. The interviews with the departmental
took two days per school, that is, one day for departmental heads and another day for PL1 educators. Each category of participants (HDs and PL1s) was given five turns in which to respond to the interview questions in accordance with five sub questions.

In seeking to understand the dynamics of school performance, I used observation in this studyas one of the data generations instruments that enabled me to complement, corroborate and verify information that was gathered during interviews of the events, behaviours, and artefactsof a social setting. In line with the observation schedule prepared earlier I observed staff meetings, SMT meetings as well as assemblies. I particularly took notes of what was said in the meetings (staff and SMT) regarding the performance of the school. During the assembliesI observed how the issue of performance was addressed to learners. Kawulich (2012) argues that participant observation involves being in the setting under study as both observer and participant while direct observation involves observing without interacting with the objects orpeople under study in the setting. Based on what direct observation is about as described by Kawulich (2012), I became a direct observer in the schools.

When conducting observation, I used field notes to make recordings of what I had observed. I drew the map of the setting in line with Merriam's (1998) advice that helped me in making the description of the setting. The map also helped me to remember what the setting looked like, when I look at my field notes later (during data analysis stage). I recorded everything that I saw, paying particular attention to those aspects of the social setting that provided me with information related to the topic under study (Kawulich, 2012). This, according to Kawulich (2012) includes

the various activities and interactions that occur in the setting. For example, what was happening, when, for how long, and with or by whom? I observed participants' non-verbal and verbal behaviours alike. I observed principals addressing teachers in the meetings, DH, and DP. I observed DHs holding phase meetings and subject meetings. I also observed selected teachers delivering lessons to learners in classrooms. I recorded all the data captured during observations in my field note journals to be used later during data analysis stage. Sincemy observations were conducted separately at different sites on different days, I was able to draw similarities and comparisons on the responses of the participants within and across the sites. In short, consistent with Marshall's (2006) claim, I immersed myself in each setting/school which permitted me to hear, to see and to begin to experience reality as participants do. Marshall (2006) emphasises that this immersion offers the researcher the opportunity to learn directly from his/her own experience. Marshall (2006) argues that this method for generating data is basic to all qualitative studies and forces a consideration of the role or stance of the researcher as a participant observer.

Document review is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Bowen (2009) refers to document review as document analysis. Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue that document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted toelicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge. For this study documentanalysis was adopted to complement data generated during interviews and observation. This isin line with Bowen's (2009) assertion that a qualitative researcher is expected to draw upon multiple sources of evidence to seek convergence and corroboration using different data sources and methods. Eisner's (1991) concurs with Bowen's (2009) assertion that by examining information collected through different methods, the researcher can corroborate findings across data sets and thus reduce the impact of potential biases that can exist in a singlestudy. Patton (1990) argues that the use of multiple data source helps the researcher to guard against the accusation that a study's findings are simply an artefact of a single method, a singlesource, or a single investigator's bias. My usage of document analysis is that it mitigated and offset the weaknesses of other data generation instruments, namely, interviews and observations thereby promoting triangulation. Bowen (2009) justifies triangulating data that through it the researcher attempts to provide a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility.

Platt (1981) and Scott (1990) advise that documents need to be evaluated in relation to four basic criteria. These criteria are authenticity, representativeness, meaning and credibility. For documents to subscribe to each of the afore-mentioned criteria, Platt (1981) and Scott (1990) recommend that: For verifying authenticity these questions should be asked: Is it the genuine article? Is it the real thing? Can we be satisfied that the document is what it purports to be nota fake or a forgery? In verifying representativeness, the following questions need to be asked:Is the document typical of its type? Does it represent a typical instance of the thing it portrays?Is the document complete? Has it been edited? Is the extract treated 'in context'? The basic questions that need to be asked in verifying the meaning of documents are: Is the meaning of the words clear and unambiguous? Are there hidden meanings? Does the document contain argot and subtle codes? Are there meanings which involve 'what's left unsaid' or 'reading between the lines? In verifying credibility of documents, the researcher needs to ask the following questions: Are the

documents accurate? Are they free from bias and errors? The following documents were reviewed in the three selected schools (Ziningi, Sizabantu and Z

primary schools): Minutes of the meeting where issues of school performance were discussed, Mission and vision of each school, schedule of school performance over the period of three consecutive years and IQMS scores for three consecutive years. The sequence in which data generation instruments were administered per school was, firstly interviews, secondly observations and finally document reviews. The reason for sequencing these data generation instruments in that fashion lied on the fact that conducting interviews needed a lot of time compared to either observation or document reviews. The choice of doing observations prior to document reviews was also since observations took longer time than document reviews. This was discovered when these research instruments (interviews, observations, and document reviews) were pilot tested prior to the main study. In conclusion, as indicated above, in this study I utilised the above named three data generation instruments, namely, interviews, focus groups discussions (FGDs) observations and document reviews. The reason for employing these multiple data generation instruments was consistent with the requirements of triangulation. Heale and Forbes (2013) explain that triangulation in research is the use of more than one approach to researching a question. The objective of using triangulation in this study was to increase confidence in the findings through the confirmation of a proposition using two or more independent measures.

Data generation procedure consisted of three sessions. The first session was when I conducted interviews with the participants in one school at a time. The second session was when I generated data using observations. The third session was doing document analysis. During the first day of the first session, I went to the school to introduce myself to the participants. Each school had its day for introductory purposes. The length of each session depended on the size of the school and time taken generating data. For example, interviews were done over two days per school while observations and document analysis were conducted over one day each per school. The cumulative number of days it took me to generate data per school was five days which translated into fifteen days for all the selected schools. I started with individual interviews with mainly principals and with either post level one educators, departmental head. The reasons for starting with individual interviews were multi-fold. Coughlan (2009) cites the following reasons as valuable in using individual interviews also called one to one interview: One to one interview provided valuable information about the social milieu in which people live. One to one interview also provided insight into people's attitudes, experiences, and perspectives. Anderson and Ohlen (2005) add that one-to-one interviews are effective in gaining an understanding of participants' personal meaning and experiences of a given phenomenon.

Data analysis procedures according to Flick (2009) defines data analysis as the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) define analysis as a process the researcher uses to reduce data to a story and its interpretation. Paton in Kawulich (2005) indicates that three things occur during analysis and those are: data are organised, data are reduced through summarisation and categorisation and patterns and themes in the data are identified and linked. LeCompte and

Schensul (1999) add by suggesting that data analysis be done as data are collected in the field,as soon as possible after the data have been collected, both while the researcher is still in the field, and later, while the researcher is no longer in the field.

In this study the process of data analysis unfolded as follows: Data summarisation: Data were made available to be analysed through using three data generation methods (interviews, observations, and documents). In this phase I prepared data for analysis as per Denscombe's (2010) advice that before the data can be used for research purposes, they need to be generated, processed, and filed in a way that makes them amenable to analysis. I did this in accordance with Miles and Huberman (1994) that it is a serious mistake for researchers to put primary energy into data generation for weeks, months, or even years then retire from the field to "workover their notes. Denscombe (2010) regards simultaneous collection of data and its analysis asan iterative process. Iterative process (Denscombe, 2010) is when the analysis tends to be an evolving process in which the data generation and data analysis phases occur alongside each other. So, to avoid the weakness of piling up data until the last minute I decided to cycle backand forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for generating newand often better-quality data (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 49). After transcription was done,I summarised data and put them into meaningful chunks.

I analysed the transcripts, made field notes and tried to make sense of the data generated. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. These annotations were based on the memories that came flooding back during the process of transcribing. I ensured that these annotations included observations about the ambience of the interview and things like gestures, outside interferences, uncomfortable silences or other feelings that give a richer meaning to the words that were spoken (Denscombe, 2010). Denscombe (2010) argues that transcriptions help with detailed searches and comparisons of the data. At first, I was tempted to regard transcription as a straightforward process, but little did I know that in practice it was contrary.For every hour of talk on an audio recording it took several more to transcribe it. I discoveredthat the process of transcription was certainly laborious (Denscombe, 2010, p. 275) however itwas also a very valuable part of the research, because it brought the researcher (me) 'close to the data'. As indicated earlier that transcription of audio recordings was not a straightforward mechanical exercise in which I simply wrote down the words that were spoken by research participants. Denscombe (2010) contends that in practice, it can be quite challenging, and thereare three main reasons for this: First, the recorded talk is not always easy to hear, especially with group interviews, but also with one-to-one versions, there can be occasions when more than one person speaks at the same time, where outside noises interfere or where poor audio quality itself makes transcribing the words very difficult. Second, people do not always speakin nice finite sentences. Normally, the researcher needs to add punctuation and a sentence structure to the talk, so that a reader can understand the sequence of words. The talk, in a sense,needs to be reconstructed so that it makes sense in a written form. This process took time – andit also means that the raw data get cleaned up a little by the researcher so that they can be intelligible to a readership that was not present at the time of the recording. Third, intonation, emphasis and accents used in speech are hard to depict in a transcript. Denscombe (2010) maintains that there are established conventions

which allow these to be added to a written transcript, but the project researcher is unlikely to be able to devote the necessary time to learnthese conventions. The result is that transcripts in small-scale research are generally based on the words and the words alone, with little attempt to show intonation, emphasis, and accents. The consequence is that, in practice, the data are stripped of some of their meaning. Tentativethemes were identified. Data from documents were also analysed using pre-planned documentschedules. The first day in each research site was very hectic and insufficient to conclude datageneration and analysis processes. This compelled that the data generation and analysis activities per school to be carried over to the next four days.

Data organisation and coding: During this phase data generation and analysis continued in a back-and-forth process. Miles and Huberman (1994) emphasise that the ideal model for data generation and analysis is one that interweaves them from the beginning. The data were organised through reading and re-reading the transcripts to become familiar with the data. Denscombe (2010) mentions that this entails getting a feel for the data and becoming immersed in the minute details of what was said, what was done, what was observed and what is portrayedthrough the data. I cross-referenced the material with field notes to enable a better understanding of the data in context. Subsequent re-readings of the data allowed me to identifythemes in the data. As the analysis progressed, new things emerged as relevant or new interpretations sprang to mind. As new insights came, the ideas were noted and kept as memos.These memos were of practical value as a means for logging new thoughts and exploring newpossibilities in relation to the analysis of the data. Such memos, according to Denscombe (2010), are valuable in the way they provide a documented record of the analytic thinking of the researcher as they refine the codes and categories. Denscombe (2010, p. 284) has the following to say about the role of memo in data analysis: Researchers should write memos as a way of keeping track of their decisions in relation to the analysis of the data. The memos provide a permanent record and can be referred to as a reminder about the researcher's thinkingat specific points during the research.

Data generated and analysed were coded. Denscombe (2010) maintains that codes are tags or labels that are attached to the 'raw' data. Denscombe (2010) argues that these codes can take the form of names, initials, or numbers; it does not matter as long as the code is succinct and isused systematically to link bits of the data to an idea that relates to the analysis. As such, the use of codes in connection with the interpretation of data were quite distinct from the process of putting a reference code on the various pieces of data so that the parts can be identified andstored in an organized manner. During the interpretation of the data, I engaged in analytic coding. Denscombe (2010) advises that whatever the form of the data – interview transcripts, field notes, documents, photographs, or video recordings – the first thing the researcher needsto do is decide on the *units* that will be used for coding the data. This process is sometimes known as 'unitizing' the data (Denscombe, 2010, p. 284). Denscombe (2010) elaborates on thefact that with text data the units could be as small as individual words, they could be lines in the text, complete sentences or they could be paragraphs.

Data categorisation: In this phase, data codes that were established during phase 2 of data analysis were then grouped into categories and themes that acted as an umbrella term under which several

individual codes were placed. Denscombe (2010) indicates that the terms 'taxonomy' and 'typology' are sometimes applied to this stage of the analysis, reflecting the general idea of classifying the various components of the data under key headings. I ensured that the various components were linked in adherence to Denscombe's (2010) assertion that the task for the researcher is to 'make the link'. The next task that I undertook was to reduce the number of codes and categories through merging them and others were brought together within a broader category (Denscombe, 2010). Each of the codes brought together within the category had a feature that was shared with others and, of course, that feature was particularlyrelevant for the emerging analysis. Denscombe (2010) argues that at this point, some decisionsalso need to be made about which parts of the data are more important than others. Denscombe(2010) asserts that attention must be focused on these parts, with other parts of the data being relegated to the side-lines. The importance of such parts of the data is determined solely by their significance for the emerging analysis (Denscombe, 2010, p. 285). I made sense of the data through making some differentiations (Denscombe, 2010) among the established codes and categories. Denscombe (2010) advises that the researcher should check the emerging codes, categories, and concepts with the data. Denscombe (2010) maintains that the development of these concepts is the main purpose of the analysis because the concepts providesome new understanding of the data and constitute the foundations for any theory or general conclusions to emerge from the research.

Theory

In this section I discuss three relevant leadership theories in the following order: transformational leadership theory, servant-leadership theory and situational leadership theorythat collectively make up the theoretical framework for the study. This study's transformationalleadership theory is relevant as it transforms performance through education. The concept of transformational leadership was introduced by Burns (1978). Burns (1978) suggests that leadership could be expressed in two different forms: transformational or transactional leadership, which in his opinion are the opposites of each other. Like other leadership theories,transformational leadership theory is composed of characteristics that distinguish it from othertheories. According to Smith and Bell (2014) transformational leadership theory consists of thefollowing seven characteristics in order of their importance: person-centredness: a key attribute; development and change: possibility forpeople and their environment; forming the future: the focus on vision; sharing the vision: inspiring others; seizing the chance: fluidity andflexibility; core values: a cornerstone for transformational leadership; developing people: the ability to change. The implication of transformational leadership theory for this study is that itwould add more understanding of how school performance is transformed to better factors influencing performance in the school.

Page and Wong (2000) define servant-leadership as serving others by working toward their growth and well-being to meet goals for the common good. Another definition that is evident in the servant-leadership literature describes it as "distancing oneself from using power, influence and position to serve self, and instead gravitating to a position where these instruments are used to empower, enable and encourage those who are within one's circle of influence" (Rude, 2003). Since servant-leadership theory speaks about a leader possessing particular personality traits such as listening, empathy, healing, and awareness, to name but a few, the implication that it would

have for the study is that the leader would be able to get intothe shoes of the followers thereby having minimal hiccups in his/her leadership. The likelihoodof improving school performance in this instance is high.

Various situations under which school performance occurs make situational leadership theory important in underpinning this study. For example, discipline, teaching and learning, punctuality and many other situations need to be led to realise good school performance. According to Northouse (2016), situational leadership theory is one of the more widely recognised approaches to leadership developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1969). Northouse (2016) indicates that as the name of the approach implies, the situational approach focuses onleadership in situations. The implication of situational leadership theory for this study is that the leader leads according to the dictates of the situation he/she is confronted with at that particular point in time. For example, if it calls for the leader to be authoritative, democratic, or permissive, that would be acceptable to attain the envisaged goal: good school performance.In the context of this study, teachers and SMT members are regarded as leaders in their own right.

Results

The findings identified in this study emanate from reviewed literature, and data generation instruments in the three researched schools. These findings were instrumental in responding to critical questions cited in section 4. The literature reveals that school performance is dependenton multiple factors. For example, motivation, school climate, school culture, accountability, management of school resources, inequality in the provisioning of school resources, and teacher absenteeism. The data generated from participants were presented under the followingthemes: ensuring quality of teaching, the role of school culture on school performance and thenature of school-community relationships.

Ensuring quality of teaching

The key issue in this theme was to find out how quality of teaching was ensured. In one primary school I interacted with A1 participant (principal) and inquired about how quality of teaching was ensured. In this regard the principal had the following to say:

We ensure that quality of teaching occurs by devising strategies to improve our learners' performance. These strategies include each teacher identifying problem areas experienced by learners in his/her subjects. When the problem areas have been identified, teachers categorise learners according to their abilities. Usually, when these strategies are employed, the quality of teaching is enhanced. If quality of teaching is not improved despite categorising our learners according to their abilities, we involve staff development team (SDT) whose responsibility is to develop teachers.

The principal explained how the SDT worked in developing teachers to ensure the quality of teaching in the school. He explained as follows:

The SDT assists teachers in establishing developmental support groups (DSGs) for each teacher. The responsibility of the DSG is to mentor the teacher so that the teacher eventually improves his/her teaching.

My next destination was Sizabantu primary school where I interacted with participant B1, B2and B3 respectively about how quality of teaching was ensured. The principal's (B1) responsewent as follows:

Teaching has become our culture. We spend most of our time teaching and using many strategies to quality teaching. These strategies involve dramatisation of our teaching to understand the lesson easily. There are many approaches that we use in teaching our learners, like I have said we are dealing with young learners here. The testing and evaluation of learners is done through tests of course, orally which is done mainly in grade R

The overall impression I got from these participants about how they ensure quality of teachingin their school was diverse in accordance with their post levels. This meant that their perceptionabout ensuring quality of teaching differed. In summary this also meant the way quality of teaching was perceived from school to school and from participant differed.

The role of school culture on school performance

In addressing the above theme, in one of the schools I inquired from the principal how shecould describe her perception about the culture of her institution (school) concerning its performance. In this regard the principal responded as follows:

I would describe our school culture as focusing more on achievement and success in every aspect of the school community. When we teach, we strictly adhere to the notional time set by the DoE. We devise turn around strategies that assist us to even come to the rescue of even the slow learners in our classrooms. This does not only improve the performance of individual learners but also of the entire school. By school community I mean even teachers and learners. The culture of our school is not only focused on achievement and success and how our learners perform but also on the ways and means of achieving good performance.

I went to Z primary school and interacted with the participants. The mother question that I asked C1 participant was how she could describe the culture of Z primary school. The principal(C1) responded as follows:

In describing the culture of my school, I would say it is to strive for the best and we do not settle for less. This means that we dedicate ourselves to our teaching responsibilities to teach our learners in the best possible ways. We look after each other, for example, if a parent comeshere annoyed because a certain teacher did blur, blur. I cannot just say there is a teacher. Welook after each other, it does not matter whether there are clashes within but we look after eachother. We live like a family. In our teaching our culture is seen through caring for our learners'needs. Through our culture of caring, we can diagnose learners needing attention.

Shortly, the responses from these participants from different schools signified that even school cultures of different schools are quite different. This is why there are indeed dynamics in school performance of different schools.

The nature of school community-relationship

Pertaining this theme, I explored how the school community relationship impacted school performance. Educators are expected to form relationships with stakeholders consistent withthe South African council of educators' Act 31 of 2000. Throughout my interaction with the

participants, relationship with the community appeared to be the strongest factor, the main question was how the nature of relationship between the school and the community impacted the performance of Ziningi primary school. In this regard the participant AI (principal) responded as follows:

> *The nature of the relationship between the school and the community on our school's performance is that we have a strong bond with the community through different structures of the community. The strong bond translates into the school being respected and trusted by the community. That includes Izinduna and a councilor. We sit together in a government structure called Operation Sukuma Sakhe. Operation Sukuma Sakhe is a service delivery model initiated by KwaZulu-Natal provincial government. At the centre of Operation Sukuma Sakhe is the War Room. The War Room is the service delivery engine set up at ward level to deliver a fully coordinated and integrated basket of services by different stakeholders. As a school within the community, we form part of the War Room. In the War Room I, as principal represent the school. When there is an issue that needs to be reported, such as school physical development,I report that to the ward councilor to become the item of the agenda in the War Room meeting. The procedure in the community is that when there is any development taking place that needs to be reported to the relevant structures in the War Room for protection purposes, that development is reported through the councilor.*

In a nutshell school performance is shaped by the way a school interacts with its community. If the interaction is positive, there is likelihood for the school to perform and vice versa.

DISCUSSION
The major findings from both the reviewed literature and data generation instruments about dynamics of school performance include motivation, school climate, school culture, accountability, management of resources, inequality, and absenteeism. The overarching finding is school culture (SC) wherein all others are dependent. Within school culture, there are subcultures (sub dynamics), that have the potential of influencing how the school performs.These sub dynamics include school-community relations (SCR), quality of teaching (QT), leadership and management (L&M). The findings reveal that the interaction of these subcultures with one another causes the performance of a school to move in a particular way. For example, if school-community relations leave much to be desired, quality of teaching andlearning would summarily be compromised. In the same breath, if leadership and managementare at logger heads with the community it serves, quality of teaching will severely be negativelyimpacted to the detriment of school performance. This study had limitations, firstly, that the number of schools chosen for the it was limited in number and therefore the magnitude of datagenerated was not as initially thought it was going to be. Secondly, when the study was first undertaken, it was hoped that all the educator post levels were going to be available in all the researched schools, but this did not happen because of the post provision norm policy of the Department of Basic Education. Initially I expected that each researched school was going to have a principal, a deputy principal, departmental head(s) and post level one posts. The absenceof some post levels compromised the breadth of the data generated for the study.

CONCLUSION

The report on academic performance of three primary schools in King Cetshwayo District has revealed different debates aiming at improved school performance. These debates involve views from scholars cited in the literature review as well as participants' perceptions from three researched schools. The purpose of such views helps one to understand how school performance can be managed within the school context. The findings of the study show that school performance is influenced by a variety of factors. It is therefore for this reason that school management team and teachers should always be on guard to have proper control of factors affecting school performance for the benefit of the school. The take-home message fromthis study is that school performance is not static, it will always going to be negatively or positively be affected by a variety of factors. School leadership and management need not be complacent, if they are to successfully respond to research questions cited in section 4. It is inthis context that different leadership and management styles should be used to properly run theschool. In that way school performance will properly be managed.

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