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Parents perspective on poor academic performance among learners at a full-service township school

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Abstract

Despite ongoing educational reforms and support interventions, many learners in township schools continue to experience academic challenges. Understanding parents' views is essential, as they play a significant role in learners' educational development and support systems. Hence, this study explores parents' perspectives on poor academic performance among Grade-10 learners at a full-service township school at Thokoza, Ekurhuleni South District of Gauteng province. The study adopted a qualitative research approach within an interpretivist paradigm. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected eight parents of learners identified as underperforming academically. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings are presented according to themes and subthemes that emerged from the responses. The study concludes that school, home, environment and child factors intersect and contribute to the poor academic performance of the Grade-10 learners at this full-service township school at Thokoza. The study recommends that adequate resources be provided, upskills the teachers to support teaching and learning. Also, the need to strengthen the collaboration between the parents and teachers/school, enhanced learner support programmes, parental empowerment initiatives, and improved resource allocation to full-service township schools. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of parental perceptions and may inform targeted interventions which are aimed at improving learner performance and outcomes.

Keywords: Academic performance, Education, Factors, Full-service township school, Grade-10.

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1. Introduction

Aligned with the global focus on inclusion, South Africa adopted inclusive education in 2001 [1]. Consequently, South Africa is a signatory to the various international legal frameworks on inclusive education, including the Salamanca Statement the Framework for Action on Special Needs of 1994 [2]. The achievements of learners in inclusive schools emphasise inclusive education. Thus, the country has both an international and national mandate to provide assurance for the achievements of all learners in schools [3]. Despite the notable involvement of South Africa in implementing inclusive education, South Africa's minimal achievements have been identified by the weak academic achievement of Grade-10 learners in full-service township schools.

It was found through teaching experience in a full-service township school, that the poor academic performance among the Grade-10 learners is a serious concern however, the numbers of learners who are required to repeat Grade-10 are not widely published. Grade-10 learners in township schools are failing in large numbers [4]. This has been supported by Grossen, et al. [5] who revealed that repetition and retention due to poor academic performance, is much higher in Grade-10. Similar findings indicate that learners fail in large numbers in Grade-10 and 11 since they proceed to higher grades without acquiring the Grade appropriate skills [6]. Information provided by the Department of Education [7] shows that learners repeating a grade are high in South Africa and that repetition is prevalent in the higher grades than in the lower grades. According to a study conducted by Van den Berg, et al. [8] there is a prevalence of learners repeating a grade in the secondary school phase with the largest number located in Grade-10, where at least one in every five learners repeats a grade and the larger proportion of repeaters are from low economic backgrounds. Learners repeating Grade-10 from quintile 1 schools were triple the number of learners in quintile 5 schools. This indicates that low economic background may have a negative effect on learners' academic performance.

2. Literature Review

According to the South African Constitution, Education is a human right, and the constitution laid the groundwork for inclusion policies. The Siqueira and Giannetti [9] policy advocates for major reforms on how teachers are expected to teach learners with barriers to learning and to make education accessible to all, regardless of background, disability, gender or creed [10]. Full-service schools were improved and provided with resources to become inclusive schools. Inclusive education in the South African context is about addressing the diverse needs of all the learners who experience barriers to learning and redressing the past inequalities in education. It focuses on developing support teams at district and institutional levels, developing a flexible curriculum and appropriate development of materials and assistive devices [11].

However, the inclusive education policy in South Africa is ambiguous because it does not provide clear directions on how it should be implemented. In addition, there is scarcity of teachers with the capacity and knowledge of how to deal with learners with diverse educational needs in inclusive schools [12]. As a result, learners are faced with poor academic performance.

2.1. Poor Academic Performance

Learners' academic performance is defined by Suleman, et al. [13] as "the inability of the learners to study and remember facts, and being able to communicate the knowledge acquired orally or on paper". Several definitions of poor academic performance have been put forward. Despite the age of these articles, it still has relevance today, in Aremu and Sokan [14] poor academic performance is "performance that is judged by the examiner and some other significant individual as falling below an expected standard". Asikhia [15] defines poor academic performance as any performance that falls below a desired standard. In the school that participated in this study the academic performance of Grade-10 learners was dismal, and this study sought to identify the reasons for the poor academic performance of Grade-10 learners. Below follows a discussion of the reasons for the poor academic performance according to the literature that was reviewed.

2.2. Factors Contributing to Poor Academic Performance

Poor academic performance is experienced all over the world and some of these factors are contextual. Research on poor academic performance has revealed that there is no single factor that causes poor academic performance but a combination of factors such as socio-economic factors, single parents, immigration background, the difference between the home language and the language of instruction, repeating a grade, a less positive attitude towards learning, less supportive teachers, and schools and some of the factors may be contextual [16].

In the UK, Banerjee [17] identified individual's factors, family, neighbourhood effects, socio-economic status, ethnic minority, school, and learning viewed with negative attitudes and a lack of support from the background are all seen as factors that may cause the poor academic performance in Mathematics and Science. Omoruyi [18] identified the following environmental related factors such as home environment, family structure, marital status of the parents, parental involvement, parental level of education and parenting styles as additional reasons for the learners performing poorly in academics.

In South Africa, Navsaria, et al. [19] identified the following school related factors such as school environment, resources, language issues, discipline, and peer pressure. Landsberg, et al. [2] identified the following child related factors, physical impairments, health issues, absenteeism and truancy, lack of interest, poor study habits, learning disabilities and substance abuse. Other factors that have been identified are lower socio-economic status and, ethnic minority status. Apart from the above, there are diverse school factors which contribute to the poor academic performance of learners. These factors are divided into three namely, school factors, environmental factors and child related factors which are discussed below.

2.2.1. School Factors

According to studies conducted in different countries it is believed that school factors such as the school environment, resources, overcrowding, language issues, peer influence are key issues that causes learners to perform poorly in academics. Earlier, studies by Bolu-Steve and Sanni [20]; Geldenhuys and Wevers [21]; Tomul and Polat [22] found that the poor academic performance of learners was as a result of school related factors. The situation has not changed much as school related reasons continue to be the cause of the poor academic performance of learners worldwide. Recent studies by Kapur [23] in India and Banerjee [17] in the OECD countries concluded that school factors do in fact influence the academic performance of learners. However, Chowa, et al. [24] in their study ‘to investigate the impact of household possessions on youth academic performance in Ghana’ argue that school factors are not the only significant factors that impact the academic performance of learners. This implies that there are other significant issues that are not school related which have an influence on learners and result in poor academic performance.

2.2.1.1. The School Environment

The school plays an important role in the life of learners as demonstrated in the bio-ecological system. The school as part of the mesosystem is important for the development and learning of a child. The relationship between the family, school, parents, and teachers can have a significant effect on the learner’s academic performance Shoukat, et al. [25]. Usaini, et al. [3] conducted a study in Malaysia that examined whether the effects of the school, teachers and the environment significantly affected secondary school learners’ academic performance. They used a quantitative descriptive survey research design, this research approach focused on answering the how, what, when and where questions and data was collected using self-administered questionnaires. Results from the study indicated that schools with sufficient amenities, proficient teachers and a favourable school environment have learners whose achievement is very good compared with learners from schools with insufficient amenities, untrained teachers and an environment that is less enabling. This suggests that having a good school environment enables learners to feel comfortable and concentrate on studying which enhances their academic performance. If the environment is not conducive and supportive, it affects the academic performance of learners negatively.

2.2.1.2. School Resources

Inadequate school resources could be a major issue related to learners’ poor academic achievement. The resources identified by Samikwo [26] are teachers, classrooms, basic educational equipment such as libraries and laboratories. A more recent study by Makondo and Makondo [27] revealed that a shortage of these resources could affect the academic achievement of learners. Various studies employed diverse methodologies and arrived at the same conclusion, for example, a study by Navsaria, et al. [19] employed the exploratory inductive case study and found that a shortage of resources such as teachers, classrooms, textbooks, and the lack of basic amenities such as water, toilets, electricity, textbooks, teaching material, personnel and furniture exacerbate the learners’ weak academic achievements. Further, another study by Sullivan, et al. [28] used data from the Programmes of International Students Assessment (PISA) which revealed that it is a shortage of resources that hampers the process of teaching and learning which consequently affects the learners’ academic performance. According to Munje and Maarman [29] the quantity and quality of resources at school could have a negative effect on the academic performance of learners.

As a human resource, teachers are an important resource in schools and may inadvertently be a cause of learners’ poor academic performance. Numerous studies have linked teachers’ qualifications to poor academic performance. Research findings by Gicharu and Sindabi [30] discovered that unqualified, inexperienced, and unprepared teachers could have a problem to manage the teaching and learning process as they lack subject matter (knowledge), hence this could cause poor academic performance. Mosha [31] conducted a study into the reasons for learners’ poor performance in the English language in Zanzibar and found that the shortage of teachers, the presence of untrained and unqualified teachers who are incompetent to deliver the content of the subject was the cause of learners’ poor achievement in English.

2.2.1.3. Overcrowded Classrooms

The shortage of classrooms leads to overcrowding in schools, and this could negatively affect the learners’ academic performance. There is empirical evidence that links overcrowding to the poor academic performance of learners. Shirley [32] found that overcrowding affects learners’ academic achievement in Kentucky high schools and found that overcrowding in the classrooms makes it difficult for teachers to have one on one interaction resulting in learners’ educational accomplishment suffering. Similarly, Tope [33] points out that the above- mentioned factor, as well as large classes and the location of the schools inhibit scholastic achievement. Warfield [34] suggests that crowded and disorganised classrooms and the lack of seating space are causes of the poor academic performance of learners and these factors could possibly distract learners. Once the learners are distracted from learning, they lose focus and concentration, and this may cause poor academic performance.

Educators who teach in overcrowded classrooms are confronted with disciplinary and behavioural problems which may go unnoticed. Consequently, educators spend more time on classroom management instead of teaching and this could add to learners’ poor performance academically. However, in a study conducted by Savasci and Tomul [35] the authors posit that in village classrooms that were less crowded, there was low academic achievement and in urban schools where classrooms were overcrowded the academic performance was high, therefore in their opinion, the size of the class has no effect on the learners’ academic performance. In addition, language could have an adverse on the academic performance of learners as shown below.

2.2.1.4. Language Barriers

Language is an issue that could impact the academic performance of learners. The difference between the learners' home language and the language of instruction at schools may result in the under achievement of learners Donald, et al. [12]. Mphale and Mhlauli [36] conducted a study in Botswana that revealed that language is a factor that contribute to learners' poor academic performance, because learners lack fluency in the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) used in schools. Most learners struggle with English which is the language of instruction and all the subjects are examined in English. Consequently, and because learners lack fluency in English, it is difficult for them to comprehend the subjects and associated questions which result to low performance or outright failure.

Prinsloo, et al. [37] recently conducted a study which found that home language and school language have a great effect on the learners' educational achievement. Learners, who are taught in an additional language from the Fourth Grade, fall further behind in "Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency" (CALP), which is crucial for learners' success. Maemeko, et al. [38] concluded in their study conducted in Namibia that English as a medium of instruction is a major issue leading to the poor academic performance of Grade-12 learners. By contrast, a study conducted by Cekiso, et al. [39] found that there is no relationship between English language proficiency and academic performance at primary school level in South Africa. However, the use of English as a medium of instruction might not have an influence on the educational achievement when they reach high school. Learners' poor academic performance may be attributed to peer pressure or peer influence as discussed next.

2.2.1.5. Peer Influence

Peer influence causes deviant behaviour in children and this in turn leads to poor academic performance Deepika and Prema [40]. This may be a school related factor and learner related factor concurrently. During the adolescent stage, peers are regarded as more important than parents, teachers and counsellors and are very influential in an individual's life and behaviour. The influence peers have on adolescents has far reaching consequences such as undisciplined friends influence on an adolescent to engage in high-risk behaviour such as substance abuse, youth violence, teenage pregnancy and failure at school [41]. Similarly, Butler-Barnes, et al. [42] pointed out that despite having peers with negative attitudes towards school, some African American boys could perform well in academics, however, peer pressure can be both negative and positive for the learners. The negative peer pressure has great consequences and could lead to laziness, absenteeism from school, disregarding school rules and regulations which may affect the academic performance. The positive peer pressure could lead to the formation of study groups, going to the library and encouraging each other with academic issues [43]. Environmental factors play a significant role in learners' academic performance, which is found next.

2.2.2. Environmental Factors

Environmental related factors are factors that include the area in which the learner lives, the type of family, the family structure, marital status of parents, parental involvement, parental level of education, parenting styles and financial background of the family. Reference to the environment in this study refers to the environment at home and the society where the learner resides. The poor academic performance of learners maybe caused by various environmental factors such as cultural and historic background, geographical area, home environment, parental involvement, and socio-economic factors Alami [44]. Nato [45] claims that if family support is lacking, as well as the study environment at home not conducive, it could have adverse influence on the academic performance. It is also established that home environment has a greater impact on educational achievement than the school environment.

2.2.2.1. The Home Environment

The home environment refers to objects, forces and conditions in the home which influence the development of the child physically, intellectually, and emotionally [46]. Furthermore, the home environment includes parents, siblings, and peers, social situations and poverty that could have a negative effect on learners' academic achievements. Donald, et al. [12] study reported that factors like the shortage of space, overcrowding in the home causes conflict and arguments in families, and this could cause learners' academic success to suffer. It is challenging for children to pay attention to their studies, and this consequently affects their educational successes [47]. An additional factor that was identified is the structure of the family, which could impact learners' academic performance, is presented below.

2.2.2.2. Family Structure

Family is an important institution in any society as it provides psychosocial support in the development of the child. Recently, there has been a shift in the family structure, from the traditional structure which comprised a mother, father and children to other forms such as single parent families and same sex parents. Studies have revealed that single parent families may possibly impact learners' scholastic accomplishment negatively. Learners from a single parent family background, many lack the financial support to buy extra educational resources to use at home and this may have an adverse effect on their educational performance [48]. However, a study conducted by Diez [49] asserts that the majority of learners from single parent families do well in school as the parents encourage and support their children with their schoolwork. That notwithstanding, it depends on how the issue at hand is handled concerning the support of learners in the family, be it single parents or traditional family structure.

Nonetheless, the relationships between parents and families with learners may be an additional issue that may bring about learners' inadequate intellectual accomplishment. Again, parental conflicts, whether married and living together or divorced, may negatively impact learners' achievement and be a reason for less achievement or failure of learners.

Instability in the family has a negative effect on learners who suffer academically as a result. Furthermore, Odenweller [50] posits that an unstable relationship between parents who are constantly in conflict may negatively influence a learner's scholastic performance. Changes in the home environment, such as a parent's loss of a job may affect the academic performance of learners negatively. The parent may suffer from stress related to the job loss and this may affect the academic performance of a learner negatively. In addition, the marital status of parents may impact learners' academic performance and may cause several issues.

2.2.2.3. Marital Status of Parents

The marital status and parental relationship may be an additional factor that could be a cause of a learner's failure academically. Studies have highlighted the fact that learners from single parent households could suffer from emotional and disciplinary problems because single parents sometimes fail to cater for their necessary basic needs, and this contributes to the learner's lack of success at school [51]. Learners with divorced parents tend to perform poorly and attain low marks in academics as opposed to children with both parents [52]. Parental involvement is said to have a positive effect on learners' academic achievements as revealed below.

2.2.2.4. Parental Involvement

Parental involvement in the scholastic achievement of their children cannot be overemphasised. A child's academic achievement level at school is a function of the extent to which the parents are involved in the academic activities of that child [53]. In South Africa, the SASA Act 84 of 96 section 24 (1) states quite categorically that parents play an active role in learners' schoolwork and ensure that their children complete their homework. In addition, it points out that parents should be participating in their children's educational endeavours, at school and home. The involvement of parents signifies that parents assist with homework, discuss the schoolwork, encourage, and provide a conducive learning environment at home. At school, parental involvement includes communicating with teachers, school visits and attending parents' meetings. In as much as parental involvement is imperative to influence the academic work of learners positively, it does not automatically make the learner perform well academically [54].

According to Amponsha, et al. [55] "there is a significant indisputable connection between parents' involvement and their children's academic positive performance". Poor academic performance is a consequence of parents not being involved with their children's academic activities. Chowa, et al. [24] alluded to the fact that involvement of parents in their children's education is associated with academic success of the youth. Further, another factor that could impact learners' academic performance is the parents' level of education.

2.2.2.5. Parent Level of Education

An additional factor that may influence the poor academic performance of a learner in many ways is the parents' educational background. Parents' level of education plays a significant role in the academic achievement of their children. According to studies by Khan, et al. [56] and Visser, et al. [57] "parents' level of education is a factor that could contribute to the learners' under achievement in academics. Parents who have a low level of education do not understand the content of the subjects and consequently are unable to be of assistance to their children with their homework". Poverty equally has a devastating effect on many learners' academic success.

2.2.2.6. Poverty

Poverty is a threat to learners' positive academic performance and achievement. The level of income and social class placements of parents could negatively influence the academic performance of learners [18]. According to Wool, et al. [58] there is a connection between the under achievement of learners and poverty. Schools have a large influx of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds where poverty is rife, poor living conditions, undernourishment, and indecent housing, unemployment, high level of violence, crime, abuse, substance abuse and HIV & AIDS, are a consequence of poverty. These circumstances seriously impact the academic success of inclusive township schools' learners [59]. Poverty causes insecurity in the community which is affecting the development of the children and academic success of learners. Parents or care givers from poor households work for longer hours during which children are left unsupervised and are expected to look after themselves and their siblings. This type of livelihood makes it difficult for learners to cope with their academic activities at home (homework) in preparation of schoolwork, because of very limited time [60].

Nonetheless, poor nutrition may be another factor that could be a contributor to underdevelopment that leads to underperformance and under achievement of learners. Carroll [61] posits that learners who come from poor households do not sometimes have enough to eat before going to school. Invariably learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are mostly not encouraged to pursue their education, instead they are encouraged to stay back and assist the family in one way or another to supplement family income. Apart from poverty, parenting style plays a key role in learners' academic performance.

2.2.2.7. Parenting Style

Obviously, there are different parenting styles depending on what the parents want to achieve by the style. The application of the parenting style may have a negative or positive effect on a learner's academic performance if not well checked. The academic performance of a learner is reliant on the parenting styles which play a crucial role towards the child upbringing and education. The way the parents take care of their children has an impact on their positive or negative academic performance. Permissive parents spoil their children and cannot discipline them resulting in a negative effect on

their academic performance. On the other hand, strict parents may succeed in making their children rebellious and it may have adverse effect on learners' academic success [62]. Hence, achieving balance between the two styles may be the key to avoid harmful effects on the academic success of the learners. Meanwhile, there are child related factors which impede learners' success.

2.2.3. Child Related Factors

Learner related factors are situated within an individual and are organic in nature [2]. Intrinsic factors also affect the academic performance of learners. Poor academic performance can be caused by lack of interest in education by the learner, not studying or reviewing the material at home, being absent from school and missing classes [44]. Moreover, truancy, substance abuse and alcohol abuse are serious factors that may affect the academic success of learners. Other child related factors are discussed below.

2.2.3.1. Health Issues

Chronic illnesses, such as tuberculosis, cancer and diabetes could also affect the academic achievement of learners. Some illnesses may require a special care, prolonged hospital stay, repeated doctor's visits or appointments and these may cause the learner to miss out on school activities. The effects of medication and therapy may impair the cognitive functioning of a learner, and this leads to the learner performing weakly at school Piquart and Teubert [63]. Kamal and Bener [64] identified health related issues such as hearing disorders, anaemia, epilepsy, diabetes and cancer as parts of the causes of learners' poor academic performance and achievement. Physical factors such as physical maldevelopment, visual impaired, auditory physical, glandular abnormality, may be additional causes of poor academic performance and achievement of learners. Further, delays in the child's development of speech and language may result to spoken language and hearing impediment and these usually lead to learning problems and might exacerbate the learner's weak performance in academics and other school activities [65]. Learning disabilities are also cited as a problem that could hinder a learner's academic achievement, which is discussed below.

2.2.3.2. Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities are cited by many authors as reasons that cause a decline in the academic abilities of learners. Learners with learning disabilities have no physical characteristics that accompany this disability; however, the nature of the disability is mild, but it does influence the child's ability to learn [66]. Learning disabilities are related to challenges of acquisition and brain functions involved in learning and these learning disabilities may be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic factors such as dyslexia (reading problems), dyscalculia (difficulty in understanding numbers, writing disorders). In a study conducted by Runo [67] reading difficulties contribute to the underperformance in academics. Extrinsic learning disabilities that may cause underachievement in academics are ineffective teaching methods, learners' low self-esteem, unfavourable or poorly stimulatory sociocultural status, as well as the demotivation of learners [9].

2.2.3.3. Intellectual Disabilities

Intellectual disabilities such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Downs Syndrome and Autism are factors that contribute to poor academic performance Rardin [68]. Loe and Feldman [69] revealed that intellectual disabilities such as ADHD is associated to learners' underachievement and has a higher risk of grade retention, although learners have average or above average intellectual abilities, they face considerable academic and educational challenges. Another factor that impacts learners' success is absenteeism and truancy which is addressed next.

2.2.3.4. Absenteeism and Truancy

Learners are required to attend school regularly as attendance is a significant factor in academic success [2]. Absenteeism and truancy hamper the academic performance and development and may finally lead to learners' dropout. There are many reasons for learners' absenteeism, such as health problems, learners' experiencing boredom at school, feelings of academic or social inadequacy/inclusivity [70]. Chronic truancy is a sign which shows that a learner is at risk of poor academic performance and achievement, and it is a strong predictor of academic failure in learners [71] because it hinders effective learning and leads to poor academic performance [72]. Drug abuse has become a plague in many schools which could impact a learner's academic performance as discussed below.

2.2.3.5. Substance Abuse and Lack of Interest

Drug abuse is prevalent in schools and seriously affects learners, leading to learners' poor academic performance [73]. Learners who abuse drugs record low marks, since drugs alter the minds of the learners leading to loss of concentration on schoolwork and activities. This may consequently lead to learners' loss of interest in education and studying, as a result affect their academic performance and achievement. Furthermore, lack of interest in academic activities causes poor academic achievement. As Asiedu, et al. [74] assert that learners who are not interested in their studies are at risk of producing poor academic results. There are several factors that cause lack of interest in studying, such as wrong subject choices, weak teachers, bullying, difficulty with the syllabus, learning difficulties and distractions in the environment such as loud noise or music. Njoroge and Nyabuto [75] reveal that repeating a grade several times has a psychological effect which negatively impacts learners. This leads to the learner's lack of interest in school which in turn results to poor academic performance.

2.2.3.6. Poor Study Habits

Study habits play a significant role in influencing the academic performance of a learner. Poor study habits result in the poor academic performance of learners. Learners with poor study habits perform worse than learners with good study habits Mendezabal [76]. Chand [77] asserts that effective study habits contribute to a learner's enhanced results whereas flawed study habits contribute to underperformance as there is a link between academic achievement and study habits. Siah and Maiyo [78] found that most learners who fail in schools lack good study habits. Similarly, Gudaganavar and Halayannavar [79] posit that poor study habits result in poor academic achievement. Some learners do not study in advance or simultaneously after school day's classroom activities but only wait when they are about to write the examinations [80].

2.2.3.7. Lack Of Self-Discipline

Discipline is essential regarding the academic performance of learners. Since the abolishment of corporal punishment in South Africa, it is believed that the behaviour of learners has deteriorated considerably. Lack of discipline negatively influences academic achievement of a learner Njoroge and Nyabuto [75] and affects the academic performance of a child in several ways [81]. Disobedience, poor attitude to learning, lack of punctuality and gangsterism may lead to suspension of a learner and if it does happen, the learner misses out on school activities and in turn falls behind, which leads to poor academic performance and achievement. Moreover, teenage pregnancies, adolescence and intensive use of cell phones, social media and bullying contribute to the poor academic performance and achievement of learners [38].

3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach within an interpretivist paradigm to explore parents' perspectives on poor academic performance among learners at a full-service township school. Qualitative research, according to Ezennia, et al. [82] is "a process of realistic inquiry that seeks towards an in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon within its natural setting. It is dependent on the direct experiences of people's everyday lives". A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand parents' lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations rather than to test hypotheses or quantify variables.

A descriptive case study design was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon within its real-life context. The selected full-service township school is located in a township community and served as the case for the study. Full-service schools are inclusive institutions that are designed to provide additional support to learners experiencing barriers to learning as evidenced by the South Africa inclusive education policy. The target population for the study consists of parents or guardians of learners identified to be experiencing poor academic performance at the selected school. Therefore, a purposive sampling technique was used to select eight parents who could provide rich and relevant information regarding the phenomenon under investigation. These parents were involved because their children had failed Grade-10. Data were collected from parents through focus group discussions (FGDs). This method was selected because it allows parents to interact, share experiences, and build on one another's responses, thereby generating deeper and more nuanced insights. Data were analysed using thematic analysis.

4. Data Analysis

Data is presented to achieve the intentions of the study which sought to investigate, establish, and portray the views of the parents to establish the reasons that contribute to the poor academic performance and achievement of learners in Grade-10, in a full-service township school in Thokoza. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with seven of the eight selected parents as one of the parents did not arrive for the interview. The data collected was analysed to obtain a deeper understanding of the participants' views on their experiences in relation to their perspectives on the factors that contribute to poor academic performance of Grade-10 learners. Thematic analysis of data was used to gain a better understanding of participants' perspectives on what the reasons for the poor academic performance of Grade-10 learners in a full-service township school in Thokoza were.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Demographic Information of the Parents

The demographic result of the parents shows that three (3) of them were males and four (4) were females. These participants were chosen on the basis that their children were not performing well in school academically. Each participant was asked to provide a brief background on age, employment status, marital status and education level. Among the seven participants interviewed, the age category of five (5) participants falls within the range of 40 years to 50 years and the remaining two (2) participants were in their thirties. In terms of the marital status, five (5) participants are married, one (1) is widowed, while the other participant is divorced. On employment status, two (2) participants are formally employed, two (2) are self-employed, while the other three (3) participants are unemployed. Additionally, in terms of educational status, four (4) participants attained Matric (Grade-12), two (2) participants have Grade-10, and one (1) participant has Grade-9.

5.2. Findings From the Interviews

This section presents the findings from the focus group discussions conducted with parents of learners experiencing poor academic performance at the selected full-service township school at Thokoza. The use of focus groups enabled interactive discussions, allowing parents to share experiences, agree or disagree with one another, and collectively reflect on the challenges affecting learners' academic outcomes. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, and several key

themes emerged. The themes that emerged are discussed and findings are integrated with existing literature on academic performance in township schools.

5.2.1. School Factors

During the interviews of the participants, it emerged that the school environment may be culpable for the learners failing to achieve the expected results. The school is a microsystem where the child lives and develop. Factors in the microsystem such as the school environment and resources available at school could be an additional factor that could influence negative results. One of the problems according to the parents was the lack of resources that impacts the success of Grade-10 learners in an inclusive township school. Schools are under resourced as regards furniture, classrooms, and textbooks, and it contributes to the failure of these learners in Grade-10. The following are the participants' responses.

PD: The book sharing. There are three or four learners sharing a book. When she wants to do the homework, she has to go and take it from someone she shares it with.

PC: Other learners do not have chairs, and they struggle before the lesson. My son said they should go around looking for chairs and desks every morning.

However, one of the participants disagreed with the above participants on the issue of the lack of textbooks as a problematic issue that inhibits success and responded otherwise.

PG: Maybe I am not well informed on that one but sometimes the issue of books not enough; I don't quite buy that one. During our time, a single textbook was shared by three or four people.

Although this parent disagrees with others on the impact of resource shortages, the reality is that it is difficult when learners must share a book. The questions remain: Who takes the book home and how does the others do their homework if they do not have access to the book? Meanwhile, another aspect is the shortage of space which is evident in the overcrowding in classrooms. Because of the overcrowding in classrooms, teachers are unable to provide learners with individual attention. As a result, teachers cannot give maximum support to learners. There are between 45 to 50 learners in a classroom as opposed to the recommended teacher/pupil ratio of 1:27. A participant responded in that regard thus.

PG: Surely the environment in which you learn affects academic performance. If you are in a class of 45 learners in a classroom designed for 30 learners clearly there will be a problem of breathing and seating learners. I do think class size affects the academic performance of learners.

A lack of or inadequate resources could prevent Grade-10 learners from succeeding in this inclusive school. This agrees with Sullivan, et al. [28] who established that the shortages of resources, such as teachers, classrooms, and basic educational equipment such as textbooks, hinder the teaching and learning process which impacts the educational achievement of a learner. Munje and Maarman [29] affirmed that a learner's academic under achievement is based on the quantity and quality of resources available at school and this could have a negative effect on the successful educational achievement of learners. Further, teachers may have the necessary educational qualifications and be the subject specialist, but sometimes they are allocated subjects outside their area of specialization. This is detrimental to the academic performance of learners because the teachers lack the competence in the subjects in which they are not specialists in.

As a result of this discomfort, teachers may be incapable of providing support when it is difficult for learners to understand. This development has led the participants believing that teachers' attitude and commitment towards some learners caused them to experience difficulty academically. The learners who do not understand what they are being taught are ignored by their teachers which could contribute to their struggling with the subject's content and thus may cause failure. Participant PF responded as follows:

PF: Some of the educators – if a child does not understand, they do not have to explain to the children – they just want those who are academically okay because they understand. Those who do not understand, they don't pay attention to them.

This study found that teachers could possibly be responsible for learners under achievement because of their lack of knowledge of the subject content. These findings are in line result of the findings of studies conducted by Jepketer, et al. [83] and Gicharu and Sindabi [30] which revealed that a shortage of qualified teachers to teach in secondary school is an important aspect that causes learners' lack of performance and failure. An additional factor that influences learners' academic performance achievement could be related to the home environment.

5.2.2. Home Factors

The bioecological theory regards the home as a microsystem where a child interacts as well as experience face to face relationships with parents, friends and/or teachers daily [84]. Hence, the academic performance of a learner is greatly influenced by the school and home environment. The bioecological system has a ripple effect, where what happens in one system influences other systems. The situation at home can affect how a learner performs at school. Factors in the microsystem such as poverty and lack of parental involvement can contribute to the poor academic performance of the learners.

Lack of parental involvement and support in the education of a child was identified as one of the significant reasons for Grade-10 learners' failure. Parental involvement in a child's education includes attending meetings, assisting learners with homework, providing educational resources at home, paying a visit to the school to request information about the learners' progress, as well as responding to invitations sent by teachers regarding the performance of the learners. Some parents are not educated, and they cannot assist their children with homework, some do not even live with their children. Others, due to the nature of their work, cannot attend parents' meetings or attend consultation meetings. The participants respond thus.

PB: I am busy selling beers and drinks, and I don't have time for the kids. The mother comes home from work late.

Sometimes I try to help with homework, but I don't understand these things of today, but I try here and there if I can.

PF: Besides checking homework and books, I don't want to lie, even when the principal asked me that question, I told her I did not do anything, and I do not provide any reading material at home.

PE: When it comes to ask about his performance, I don't go to school and ask about his performance and how he is doing, I think that is my problem. You know the reason I don't come because sometimes I get angry with him, so I told myself I won't go there to school and ask how he is doing; you know he is giving me headaches, so I told him that when I talk to you, you don't listen so it's better to stay at home.

PD: You know, these kids, if maybe the parents did not finish school, they think that you don't know anything, so they don't ask.

The environment encompasses the home and the community, and the lack of parental involvement contributes to the poor academic performance. Information from document analysis revealed that learners whose parents did not show concern about their children's academic achievements proves to perform poorly. Some learners' parents whom teachers invited to discuss the conduct and academic weakness of their children do not keep appointments. Nonetheless, participants confirmed that poverty is one of the factors that contributes to the poor academic performance among Grade-10 learners. This manifest where some parents cannot provide some necessities, such as food, clothing, and shelter. The following are responses from the participants to substantiate the claim.

PA: However, even though I am working, I sometimes fail to provide enough for my children in terms of money for lunch and breakfast. Sometimes I give them money for lunch and sometimes I fail to do so. They usually become angry at me when I don't give them money for lunch. This might also be another reason why they are failing; they don't concentrate in class since they will be hungry.

PG: Look at my financial situation. I can't afford them to go and see a movie once or buy something they want. I can't give them pocket money. The problem is poverty.

It suffices to say that poverty contributes to poor academic performance since learners from poor backgrounds do not have access to extra reading material at home because of the poor condition of the parents to provide the needed academic resources. Nel and Grosser [59] assert that schools in the townships attract learners from poor backgrounds, living in abject poverty under poor living conditions and undernourishment, and this results in learners' lack of success in academics. Furthermore, peer pressure is another factor that deters learners from performing well at school. Participants in the study concurred that peer pressure may lead to substance abuse and may equally affect the academic performance of the learners. Below are the responses from the participants.

PF: The friends he has are not good friends for him and are old. Some of them are smoking dagga and cigarettes and they do alcohol sometimes.

PE: He spends the whole day in the streets; he likes to go with wrong friends.

PC: My child was involved with wrong friends; boys who were smoking dagga, I mean, after smoking, the mind is tired, and he won't even concentrate in class.

PB: My child failed because of her friends; friends she stays with are bad friends because they do bad things.

Participants revealed that peer influence affects learners' academic performance because the peer pressure drag them to dangerous behaviour such as drug abuse, alcohol, which may result in poor academic performance achievement. Rafiq, et al. [53] posit that the influence peers have on adolescents has far-reaching consequences. Peer pressure may affect learners negatively, and could influence adolescents to engage in substance abuse, deviant behaviour such as truancy. A study by Deepika and Prema [40] confirm that peer pressure is a source of deviant behaviour. When behaviour is deviant, automatically the academic performance declines. Participants responded below to express the lack of motivation being exhibited by the learners.

PG: On the issue of attitude, it means if a learner goes to school and play with friends, sort of misbehaving, so it means the learner does not have the right mind set to learn.

PB: My child failed because she was not serious about school.

PA: She is passive, she does not concentrate, she does not do her homework, she studies for a very short time when there is a test, and she is lazy.

PE: He likes to play; every time I come to school all the teachers are complaining that he likes to play too much; this boy does not want to read; he plays too much; he is too playful.

PG: My child is playful and has lost interest and the energy in the school itself. He has lost interest because of repeated failing.

PC: I think that my child was not serious enough, he was being playful.

Most of the learners lack interest and focus on their studies because of peer pressure. Asiedu, et al. [74] study support the above findings by revealing that learners who lack interest in academics are at the risk of poor academic performance and failure. Moreover, lack of respect has proved to be another factor that hinders Grade-10 learners' academic performance achievement.

Participants highlighted the abolishment of corporal punishment policy and issues of human rights as the duo that influenced the learners' disrespectfulness and deviant behaviour. One of the participants responded below.

PG: The issue of rights, too much freedom is given to these learners. I think the Department of Education has made a teacher an authority without power. They are now afraid to reprimand learners.

According to Njoroge and Nyabuto [75] "lack of discipline could interfere with a learner's academic achievement". Additionally, [81] maintain that lack of discipline affects a child in several ways, such as disobedience, poor attitude to learning, substance abuse, truancy, punctuality and gangsterism. These issues may lead to learners being suspended from

the school and therefore miss out on classroom and school activities which exacerbates poor academic performance. Absenteeism is also one of the factors that cause poor academic performance achievement of learners. Consequently, learners may start to fall behind on teaching and learning, and other academic activities. This may lead to widening of the gap between the learner and others in what has been taught, unable to recover. Participants views are presented below.

PG: My child bunks lessons. He goes to school with everyone else, but when he gets to school, that's when he bunks and does not attend lessons but will be at school. The records I have, like he comes to school, but finds the way out of building and disappearing in buildings and coming up with silly excuses. When other learners are coming back from school he is also coming.

PB: I remember I was once called twice and, these two times, she was not at school. She was absent for one week. You see, when I accompany the mother to work, I leave her preparing to go to school, but she does not go to school. When I come back, I think that she is at school, but she is dodging and going out somewhere.

PC: Number one factor is absenteeism; my child was being absent because he was bullied at school, and he was afraid of going to school.

Pinquart and Teubert [63] posit that absenteeism in some cases may be health related, such as chronic illness, ill health, and effects of medication. In some cases, boredom at school and the feeling of academically and socially inadequacy may result in learners' absenteeism from school Demir and Karabeyoglu [70]. According to Oluremi [72] chronic truancy suggests that a learner is at risk of poor academic performance and that hinders effective learning and academic performance.

5.2.3. Strategies for academic performance

Several strategies to enhance academic performance were highlighted by the participants. They indicated that teachers, parents, and learners all need to play their part. Participants highlighted the following intervention strategies to enhance academic performance among Grade-10 learners such as adequate resources, conducive environment and parental involvement. Hence, the views of the participants below.

PD: If maybe the school can buy books, have extra classes after school and Saturday lessons.

PC: The school environment needs to be conducive. By that I mean clean classrooms and furniture need to be up to date. The school can ask teachers to help these learners after school to catch up with their work.

PC: Teachers must always be at school. If they can have some time with the child and also work as a team, maybe, if one teacher can understand a certain topic, the other doesn't, they should help each other.

The participants equally mentioned that the school should provide sufficient resources such as adequate furniture, learning and teaching material, to enhance teaching and learning for greater academic performance. Accordingly, Marima [85] indicated that by providing reading and learning material, academic performance of learners would be greatly improved. Further, Korir and Kipkemboi [86] assert that conducive learning environment enhances the academic performance of learners, motivates and arouse the interest to learn more. Usaini, et al. [3] also agree that supportive, favourable school conditions ensure learners' comfortability and high concentration on their education for greater academic performance.

Furthermore, parental involvement should not be restricted to checking and assisting with homework but also attend meetings and be present on consultation days, making the home environment conducive to learning, and providing the basic needs for the children. According to the study findings, some participants admit that parents should be stern in their parenting and be more involved in their children's schoolwork. Below are some of the responses.

PB: Parents should be strict in taking care of their children. If the child does not ask for help, call her, and find out if she has homework.

PC: I need to make sure that whatever my child needs, yes, we don't have money, but try to provide.

PE: If maybe I start to be involved in his schoolwork, it was going to be better, finding him a private tutor and Saturday school so that he can stay away from bad friends and concentrate on his schoolwork. I think, as parents, we must help teachers to make sure that the children are doing their work, go to school and ask teachers about our children's work.

According to Khan and Khan [87] "a favourable home environment could improve learners' academic results". Additionally, Sherafat and Venkatesha Murthy [88] posit that parents should pay attention to the study habits of their children to enhance the positive academic progression.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored parents' perspectives on poor academic performance among learners at a full-service township school at Thokoza. The research sought to understand how parents perceive and interpret the factors contributing to learners' academic challenges within their specific community context using focus group discussions. The findings revealed that poor academic performance is a complex and multifaceted issue influenced by interconnected factors such as home, school, and community factors. Parents identified limited access to educational resources, overcrowded classrooms, poverty, unemployment and food insecurity as significant barriers to learners' academic success. These challenges often undermine the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes while limiting parents' ability to provide adequate academic support at home. Furthermore, factors that are learner-related such as low motivation and peer influence were identified as contributing factors to declining academic performance.

Overall, the study concludes that poor academic performance among learners at the selected full-service township school cannot be attributed to a single cause because each learner is unique. Rather, it reflects broader factors relating to

socio-economic inequalities and systemic challenges that require coordinated intervention by the teachers, parents and stakeholders. Hence, the study recommends that teachers should be given the necessary support and skills required to enhance learners' academic performance, such as trainings on curriculum adaptation and delivery, workshops and provisions of learning material, mentorship, and other professional development. In like manner, the Department of Education should assist in implementing suitable strategies to enhance the academic performance of learners while teachers and parents work together to support Grade-10 learners in full-service township schools. Further studies could be conducted on learners' perspectives to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing academic performance.

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