

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**TEACHERS' AND MANAGEMENT PERCEPTIONS ON FACTORS THAT
INFLUENCE POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF FORM 'E'
STUDENTS AT MARYLAND HIGH SCHOOL IN LESOTHO.**

RESEARCH REPORT

BY

**TSEPO AUGUSTINUS MOLAPO, Master of Education: EDUCATIONAL
MANAGEMENT
FACULTY OF EDUCATION: UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL,
DURBAN**

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ACRONYMS

COSC	Cambridge Overseas School Certificate
JC	Junior Certificate
NUL	National University of Lesotho
NTTC	National Teacher Training College
STC	Secondary Teacher's Certificate
ECOL	Examinations Council of Lesotho

AUTHOR DECLARATION

I hereby declare that teachers' and management perceptions on factors that influence poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School in Lesotho is my work and that all sources consulted and quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of references. In the event of failure to comply, I did not do it intentionally.




Signed



Date

The Statement by the supervisor:

This mini-dissertation is submitted with/~~without~~ my approval.



Vitalis Chikoko

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated perceptions of teachers and school management on factors influencing poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School in Lesotho. After realizing that the poor academic performance by Form 'E' students was a national crisis, the study aimed to examine factors that influenced poor academic of Form 'E' students. This study adopted a qualitative method through which data was collected from the principal, deputy principal, heads of department and teachers. A qualitative design used interviews, observation and document analysis to collect data for the research.

The research findings disclosed that teachers and management perceived that the following factors influence poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School:

1. Leadership of Maryland High School is very poor.
2. The running of the school without clearly written or documented policies.
3. The control of the school funds by the chairperson of the School Board instead of the principal.
4. Absence of a library and poorly equipped science laboratory.
5. Teachers are not motivated due to lack of some teaching and learning materials.
6. Heads of department are not involved when decisions pertinent to management are made.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

During the last three decades, there has been a significant general decline regarding the academic performance of Form 'E' students on Cambridge Overseas School Certificate Examinations (COSC) in Lesotho. This phenomenon has turned out to be a great concern to the entire nation. Therefore in the midst of this frustration and disgruntlement, the government of Lesotho through the ministry of education, organized a national dialogue on Lesotho's educational crisis and this action was effected in 1978. The National Education Dialogue recommended that a task force be formed with a view to carrying out a thorough study of the problems facing education and to present its findings with recommendations to government.

The report of the Task Force was published in November 1982. Some of the findings were that, "much of the poor work in the schools was due to the low morale of the teachers" (Education Sector Survey Task Force, 1982:13). Going further on the same plight, the Education Sector Survey Task Force (1982:12) also discovered that:

There was universal dismay and complaint at what was said to be the declining quality of education. The most obvious and shocking manifestation was the performance of high school students on the COSC examinations. From a pass rate of 61 percent in 1970, the rate declined to 21 percent in 1980. Some employers and trainers alleged that COSC holders now had less competence than the Junior Certificate (JC) graduates in 1970.

In some further findings of the Task Force, it was also realized that the public was dissatisfied with "the quality of graduates and teachers being trained at the National University of Lesotho (NUL) and teachers who had undergone teacher training at the National Teacher Training

College (NTTC)” (Education Sector Survey Task Force, 1982:13). The feeling was that more intensive and vigorous training on teachers was urgently required. Therefore, this national concern also justified the fact that the performance had been very bad between 1970 and 1980. If the capacity of teachers is an issue, one wonders whether schools themselves are doing any internal development of their staff. In order to address the issue of poor teacher training, the Education Sector Survey Task Force (1982:126) recommended that:

To strengthen the teaching of Maths and Science it is essential that the Secondary Teacher’s Certificate (STC) programme at NTTC be strengthened in these areas, and that the proportion of Basotho teaching these subjects be increased. The presence of expatriate teachers will continue to be helpful at the degree level with the stipulation that they should be of high quality, with medium to long-term contracts and, if possible, provided through technical assistance. In the area of practical studies, qualifications should not be purely academic; some work experience is generally desirable. Therefore qualification equivalences must be developed as has been done at the NTTC for basic handcrafts teachers. Typically, a practical studies teacher will have a combination of a certificate or diploma in a technical field (agriculture, commerce, home economics or technical subjects) followed by a short-term course in education.

However, even today, regardless of these efforts, students are still performing very badly in the COSC examinations. But the state through the ministry of education has not given up; there are a number of initiatives applied. For the past three years, the ministry of education has been conducting workshops for principals and School Management Boards throughout the country. The purpose was to redress the unpleasant situation. As evidence that the problem has not been solved, some COSC results analyses as compiled by the Examinations Council Of Lesotho disclosed that students’ performance is still very poor. For example, according to the COSC results analyses for the years 2001 and 2002, many students performed very badly in their examinations. In the year 2001 the national overall percentage pass was 45.3 percent, while in the year 2002 it was 50.2 percent (Examinations Council of Lesotho results analysis 2001 and 2002). These results analyses show that the poor academic performance of students at COSC is a serious issue that needs to be strategically and carefully approached.

This study looked into some factors that influence the poor academic performance by COSC students. This plight is perceived to be a national problem. However, this study is a case study of one school, Maryland High School in the Leribe district of Lesotho. My attention was drawn to this school because it ranks among the poorest performers within the Leribe district. For example, the COSC results as shown by the Examinations Council of Lesotho in the past three years, 2000 to 2002 indicate that the school scored the following percentage passes: 42.9 percent, 30.3 percent and 9.4 percent respectively. These are poor results compared to the national average percentage pass of 50 percent. This study is narrowed to 'Form E' students only, simply because of the time constraint.

However, one is of a strong optimism that some findings from this school may represent what is taking place in other schools. This might be of great help towards the alleviation of this alarming poor performance in most if not all high schools.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The study intended to look into some factors that influence the poor academic performance of COSC students. While poor academic performance is a national problem, this study narrowed its focus to Form 'E' students at Maryland High School in Lesotho. The study intended to generate information that could be useful not only to the school in question, but to the entire nation.

1.3 Statement of the problem

A study of perceptions of teachers and management on factors influencing poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School in Lesotho.

1.4 Sub-problems

The study intended to address the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions on factors influencing poor academic performance to Form 'E' students at Maryland High School?
2. From the management's point of view, what are those factors that influence poor academic performance to Form 'E' students?
3. To what extent do teachers' and management perceptions agree?

1.5 Assumptions of the study

This study assumed that poor academic performance by Form 'E' students at Maryland High School was perceived to be a serious problem by both teachers and management. Because of this, the study further assumed that the respondents to the study would provide adequate and genuine answers to the questions of the study.

1.6 Limitations of the study

This study was a case study of one school. The limitations of a case study are summarised by Cohen et al. (2001:184) as:

The results may not be generalizable except where other readers/researchers see their application. Moreover, they are not easily open to cross-checking; hence they may be selective, biased, personal and subjective. And they are prone to problems of observer bias, despite attempts made to address reflexivity.

However, many insights can be drawn from a case study and such insights may be very useful to other researchers.

1.7 Delimitations of the study

This study was restricted to the principal, deputy principal, heads of the departments and teachers. Another delimitation was the extent to which teachers' and management perceptions would converge.

1.8 Definitions of terms

Key terms as used in the context of the study are defined in order to facilitate understanding on some findings of this research.

Management, as used in the context of this study, refers to the principal, deputy principal and all heads of department within Maryland High School.

Members of the teaching staff: this term refers to members of the management team and teachers.

Perceptions: are feelings and beliefs about factors that have contributed towards the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students.

Teachers: are only those who are engaged in the teaching of students but not members of the management team.

A Secondary School: in this study, it means a school that provides three years of post-primary education to a Junior Certificate Level.

A high school: is the school that provides up to five years of post-primary education to Ordinary level or up to seven years to Advanced Level.

Form 'E'students: are students who are in the fifth year of their high school education (final year of the high school education).

Board of Governors: refers to those people who are in control of the whole school and among other responsibilities, are vested with powers for school's long term planning.

Stakeholders: are all those who have the right to participate in the decision-making of the school.

Parents: are the parents of the students who are currently attending school at Maryland High School.

1.9 Organization of the study

This chapter has provided the insight of the study, and also disclosed major research questions in order to give the general overview of the whole study.

Chapter Two aims at reviewing the literature on factors that may influence poor academic performance of students. The relevant theoretical frameworks are reviewed in order to assess and analyse factors influencing poor academic performance internationally as well as frameworks applied locally in the collection and analysing of data. The final part of the chapter shows some findings from the reviewed literature and also areas that the literature failed to address.

Chapter Three presents discussions on research methodologies that have been applied in the process of data collection. This chapter explains why certain methods were used hence advantages of methods employed are briefly outlined. The chapter also clarifies the

participants in the study, tools or instruments used in the data collection process and how information was compiled.

Chapter Four focuses on data presentation and discussions in this chapter are primarily based on some findings from the questionnaire.

Chapter Five presents a summary of the research findings. Failures and successes of the study are also related and finally recommendations are made for the present and even for future researchers.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This study investigated perceptions of teachers and school management about factors influencing poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School in Lesotho. The passing or failing of examinations by students is a major gauge of school effectiveness in Lesotho. Thus this chapter begins by a review of what school effectiveness entails. Pupils' academic performance is likely to be influenced by many factors. However, this study is unable to address all the possible factors. Thus this chapter reviews only three factors, namely: school leadership, staff development and motivation as some of the possible influential factors.

2.2 School Effectiveness

2.2.1 Meaning of School Effectiveness

According to Crawford et al (1997: 51), the first two characteristics of school effectiveness are: purposeful leadership of the staff by the head teacher and the involvement of the deputy head. The implication is that any school that is led without purposeful leadership, and the involvement of the deputy head, is likely to be ineffective. Caldwell and Spinks (1992: 72) define an excellent school as an effective school:

that is, goals of great worth are achieved. An excellent school will place value on empowering its staff, students, parents and the wider community. Such empowerment calls for appropriate involvement in decision-making and decision implementation and the acquisition of knowledge and skills so that involvement will be fruitful.

Schools that do not value the empowerment of their immediate stakeholders may hardly achieve their goals.

According to Hopkins (1994: 75) cited in Thurlow et al. (2003: 9) the effectiveness paradigm focuses on “establishing valid measures of performance for educational institutions, and sub-units within them in order to assess the extent to which they are meeting their objectives, which may be determined by internal or external groups.”

The implication is that without clearly set objectives within educational organisations, it may be difficult to know where they are heading. One of the central features of an effective school is that it is ‘aligned’; it knows where it wants to go because goals are clearly outlined to each member of the staff (Morrison, 1998: 46). Any institution that does not make its goals known to its staff is likely to be ineffective.

2.2.2 What School effectiveness entails

To show the danger of excluding staff when decisions are made, Fidler (1997: 42) argues, “lack of decision-making opportunities, according to one teacher, ‘make me think ill of my principal’, other teachers explain ‘you’ are not asked if you want to do something, you are just told to do it, or to be there.” It seems therefore that if teachers are not properly treated or approached, they may develop a strong negative attitude towards the principal. This attitude may impact negatively on the performance of teachers, which may eventually result in the poor academic performance of students. If relationships between the principal and staff are sour, goals of the school may not be realized and the effectiveness of the school is likely to be at stake. As Lieberman (1986), cited in Bennett et al. (1992: 61) argues, “Schools cannot be improved without people working together.” Once there are some divisions between staff and management, it may be difficult for staff to jointly work towards the achievement of organizational goals. This may impact negatively on the academic performance of students because poor results are likely to be produced and that is a clear indication of the ineffectiveness of a school.

Bush and West-Burnham (1994: 224) argue, “effective organizations have to get to grips with how people are stimulated to participate and be productive at work.” It is therefore implicit that if teachers are not motivated to do their work, they may be less effective in their teaching processes. This is reinforced by Piek (1991: 10) who argues:

when school principals try to push their staff, verbally or otherwise, the staff will push back with words or actions. Further, if pupils feel that their school principals like them and want to deal with them fairly, they will tend to meet them more than half way.

What it implies is that, any principal who does not treat teachers or students as human beings is likely to experience hatred from them. This may have a negative impact on teaching because teachers may be reluctant to exert more effort to their work. Indeed, it may also be difficult for students to do well in their studies if they feel that their principal does not like them. The next part of this chapter explores staff development and its possible impact on school effectiveness.

2.3 Possible Factors Influencing Academic Performance

2.3.1 School Leadership

2.3.1.1 Meaning of Leadership

According to Peters (1988), cited in Charlton (1993: 32) leadership is defined as, “a unique alliance between managers and workers that fully engages the talents and potentials of everyone in the organisation.” Dubrin (2001: 3) defines leadership as, “the ability to inspire confidence and support among the people who are needed to achieve organizational goals.”

What is therefore inferred from these definitions is that leadership entails the ability to harness skills and potentials of individuals towards the achievement of organisational goals. For example, in a school context, a good leader or principal may be viewed as the one who harnesses all the effort of staff members towards the success of the school. But on the other hand, if the principal does not render any support to teachers, the performance may be poor

due to low morale among teachers. The type of leadership style may determine the performance of staff and students within an educational organisation. This study investigated how able the school leadership was to harness the efforts of teachers towards the achievement of set goals.

2.3.1.2 Leadership Styles

2.3.1.3 Participative Leadership Style

For this type of leadership, decisions are made by both the leader and staff members (Dubrin, 2001: 124). Staff members will eventually implement decisions that they participated in making hence they can rightly claim to be implementing their own decisions. Apart from that, participative leadership encompasses consultative, consensus and democratic behaviours (Dubrin, 2001: 124). Therefore, this notion of organisational democracy should in Whites' (1982: 75) view, cited in Grace (1997: 57) extend beyond simply the involvement of teachers and other adults in educational decision-making, to include pupils:

the democratic head will also be keen that pupils should take a more active role within the school, both in the management of their own and others' learning and in the organization and running of the school itself...because for pupils such participation will be a part of their earliest formal political education.

This quotation shows the importance of involving students in the decision-making processes. Indeed, students need to know that they are also part of the institution that they attend. As such, there are specific roles that they have to play for their academic success and also for the effectiveness of their school. This empowerment will enable students to feel a real ownership of their institution and ensures that its performance always ranks high. In addition to that Likert (1967) cited in Bush and West-Burnham (1994: 59) identified an 'ideal' leader as one who encourages group participation in most decisions so that individuals feel responsible for the goals of the organization. The participative leadership style supports the involvement of all the stakeholders in the decision-making processes. There is a great likelihood that any

attempt to exclude other stakeholders may significantly disrupt the smooth running of any educational organisation. It is likely to have a negative impact on the academic performance of students.

Participative leadership style proves to be democratic almost in all activities that take place within the organisation. According to Bush (1995: 52):

collegial models assume that organizations determine policy and make decisions through a process of discussion leading to consensus. Power is shared among some or all members of the organization who are thought to have a mutual understanding about the objectives of the institution.

This quotation implies that teachers as professionals have a right to participate in the wider decision-making processes. It is even further inferred that teachers possess authority arising directly from their knowledge and skill (Bush, 1995: 53). There is a great likelihood that principals who do not value 'participative leadership' may fail to lead their schools to success. The major contributing factor to that effect might be lack of cooperation among members of the staff. Eventually the academic performance of students may suffer. In collegial models, the head or principal is typified as the facilitator of an essential participative process (Bush, 1995: 65). The principal is not loaded with managerial problems and conflicts; all the stakeholders are responsible for all matters or issues relating to the institution. This study sought to investigate how participative the leadership processes at Maryland High School were. Another type of leadership style is 'autocratic' through which there is no sharing of power.

2.3.1.4 Autocratic Leadership Style

Autocratic leaders retain most of the authority for themselves. They make decisions confidently and assume that group members will comply (Dubrin, 2001: 123). Autocratic leaders are only concerned with the performance of tasks through forceful means; the leader

strictly makes decisions. Typical autocratic behaviour is noticed in a leader who tells staff what to do and then force them to perform the job (Dubrin, 2001: 123). This type of leadership is not democratic hence there are no “opportunities for individuals to exercise genuine leadership” (Grace, 1997: 56). In fact, autocratic leadership is likely to be drawing some boundaries between teachers and school management. These boundaries may result in having teachers revolting against management. This is likely to create sour relationships between teachers and management. These bad relationships may lead to poor teaching that may eventually influence poor academic performance by students.

To this end, autocratic leadership seems to be one of the factors that may influence poor academic performance of students. In this regard, the head teacher or principal who practices autocratic style may be viewed as an obstacle in school improvement and school effectiveness (Davies and Harber, 1997: 60). It is therefore implied that autocratic leadership may not create harmony between principals and staff within the educational organisation hence this type of leadership may impact negatively on both teaching and learning.

According to McGregor (1960: 33), cited in Stoner and Wankel (1986: 96) theory X seems to be autocratic inclined while theory Y favours democratic style of leadership. This seems to be in congruence with what Piek (1991: 8) says:

a manifestation of Theory X is seen in the autocratic behaviour of school managers who enforce their own predetermined decision by manipulative means, which causes alienative or calculative responses in others. A manifestation of Theory Y is seen in the practice of genuine delegation to appropriate subgroups, whose majority decisions are accepted and implemented.

Therefore this study investigated the nature of leadership in the school in question.

2.3.2 Staff Development

2.3.2.1 Definition of Staff Development

According to Glatter (1988), “definitions of staff development usually refer to a process which meets institutional as well as individual needs.” To reinforce this, Billing (1982), cited in Glatter (1988:81) postulates that:

staff development is a deliberate and continuous process involving the identification and discussion of present and anticipated needs of individual staff for furthering their job satisfaction and career prospects and of the institution for supporting its academic work and plans, and the implementation of programmes of staff activities designed for the harmonious satisfaction of those needs.

Indeed, it is logical and sensible that skills acquired by any staff member after having undergone training, should be beneficial to individuals and even to the school as well. Any school management that undermines the importance of staff development may hardly lead the school to success. Therefore the notion of teacher empowerment both professionally and managerially has been persuasively noted by Corrigan (1981: 31) cited in Adey (1991: 150) who argues that:

in a world rocked with the explosion of knowledge, the public and the teaching profession must begin to realise that the continually learning teacher is as important as the continually learning child. In-service education must be provided for all teachers throughout their careers.

Therefore staff development can be construed as referring to in-service training, refresher courses or workshops. There is a great likelihood that if these types of training are not valued or practiced, educational institutions may hardly realize their goals. Any school management that does not value the importance of in-service education denies their staff one of the most valuable assets, which is extremely crucial for the improvement and effectiveness of a school. Therefore lack of staff development in schools may eventually impact negatively in the academic performance of students. The study investigated the influence of staff development on the academic performance of students.

2.3.2.2 Aspects of Staff Development

2.3.2.3 On-the-job Method

According to Stoner and Wankel (1986: 339) for this method, the training is to be tailored to the individual, job-related and conveniently located. This type of training can be effected in different ways; for example, 'coaching' is one of the major formal 'on-the-job' development methods. It entails the training of a subordinate by his or her immediate superior (Stoner and Wankel, 1986: 339). In addition to that, Gray et al. (1999: 28) argue that:

as part of its approach the school is likely to support forms of professional development which involve utilizing members of staff as 'experts who can support both their own and colleagues' needs for professional development.

The implication is that, this type of training can materialise on a daily basis where the trainer and the trainee are always together. For this type of training, the chances of producing competent staff are very high. However, schools that do not value this type of staff development, may find it expensive or time consuming to resort to some other means of staff development. Of course, lack of staff development from within may be perceived as one of the factors that can influence poor academic performance of students. This study investigated whether or not the school under study engaged its teachers in the improvement of their skills and profession through different training programmes.

2.3.2.4 Off-the-job Method

"Off-the-job development techniques remove individuals from the stress and ongoing demands of the workplace, enabling them to focus fully on the learning experience" (Stoner and Wankel, 1986: 340). This quotation discloses that training of staff is effected away from the school environment. This type of training provides opportunities for meeting people from other departments or institutions. Thus, it provides exposure to new ideas and experiences hence these contacts may be useful when they return to their working contexts (Stoner and

Wankel, 1986: 340). In order for staff development to be beneficial, it must be relevant to the needs of the school Paisey (1981: 97) argues, “the field of staff development includes the matching of person to job.” Therefore, offsite workshops and courses are very important as MacGilchrist et al. (1995: 215) argue, they provide:

Opportunities for teachers to learn with and from one another through, for example, paired work and teams of teachers working together; and the use of consultants and advisory support both from colleagues and from those bought in from outside.

This study investigated whether opportunities for ‘off-the-job’ training were offered to teachers or not.

2.3.3 Motivation

2.3.3.1 Definition of Motivation

Motivation refers to differences with regard to the priorities, attitudes and aspects of life style that people seek to fulfil in work, that is, those things that drive them on and make them feel good about doing so (Bush and West-Burnham, 1994: 224). On the other hand, the same concept is defined by Hodgetts (1990: 482) as, “a force pulling the person toward the desired objective.” These two definitions seem to be sharing some commonalities. For example, the former definition talks about ‘things which drive’ individuals to feel more determined and enthusiastic towards their work. The latter definition views motivation as a force that pulls workers toward the desired objective. These definitions imply that prior to any successful input or productivity, needs of staff have to be satisfied in anticipation of the achievement of organisational goals.

Any school management that ignores the importance of satisfying teachers’ needs is likely to promote low morale among staff. Once teachers become negative about their work, both teaching and learning may be seriously hampered. Then the academic performance of students becomes poor and this behaviour may lead to the ineffectiveness of the entire

institution. This study investigated whether teachers were motivated to exert more effort on their work or not.

2.3.3.2 Expectancy Theory of Motivation

According to Bush and West-Burnham (1994: 234) “the basis of expectancy theory is that people are influenced by what they expect to be the impact of their actions.” For example, if teachers know that their hardwork is likely to produce poor results, their morale may be low. Hence Neider (1980), cited in Bush and West-Burnham (1994: 234) argues, “managers need to realise that people work well when they expect their efforts to produce good performance”.

He goes further to disclose that managers should:

- seek to give appropriate rewards for individual performance
- attempt to establish clear relationships between effort-performance and rewards as seen by the individual.
- establish clear procedures for evaluating levels of performance (appraisal).

This quotation implies that in a school context, if teachers know that their hardwork will be rewarded, for example, if good results are linked with a certain reward, then teachers would exert more effort to their work in order to qualify for the reward. Principals who undermine the importance of expectancy theory are likely to promote low morale among their staff. Then this may culminate in the production of poor examination results. This study investigated whether teachers at Maryland High School were inspired by their performance or not.

2.3.3.3 Equity Theory of Motivation

According to Adams (1965), cited in Bush and West-Burnham (1994: 235), “the motivation of individuals in organizations is influenced by the extent to which they feel they are being treated in a fair and equitable manner in comparison with the treatment received by others.” The implication is that if teachers always feel that the management is not treating them with

fairness, they may revolt against such management. It is during this unfair treatment that teaching and learning are at stake. Eventually the academic performance of students is likely to be hampered and the school is likely to be viewed as being ineffective. This study also sought to investigate the treatment of staff, that is, whether they are treated fairly or not.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter literature was reviewed on three factors; school leadership, staff development and motivation, as some of the possible factors that may influence the poor academic performance of students. The main framework for this chapter is school effectiveness. Characteristics of an effective school have been broadly explored from different authors. Any school that completely fails to apply characteristics of an effective school is likely to engage itself in poor teaching and poor results may be experienced.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study investigated perceptions of teachers and school management in relation to factors that influence poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School in Lesotho. Through the use of a case study, the research focused on the role of leadership, staff development and motivation as some of the factors that may influence academic performance of Form 'E' students at the high school. This chapter addresses the research methodology. First the research design is described. This is followed by interviews, next is observations and finally documents analysis. In addition, limitations of the study are addressed in this chapter.

3.2 Research Design

The case study design was used. A case study is defined as “an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group” (Merriam, 1988: 9). Along similar lines, Yin (1988) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that:

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its research life context; when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which
- multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1988: 23).

These two definitions seem to share some commonalities because they both indicate that a case study focuses on a specific situation or phenomenon. By (multiple sources of evidence) it is implied that several research tools may be used to accumulate data, for example, interviewing, observation and use of records” (Johnson, 1994: 20). Elaborating further on boundaries that are not clearly evident between phenomenon and context, Johnson (1994: 21) says:

Common sense perceived boundaries to case studies are not ring fences. As the study progresses, the boundaries appear increasingly permeable. But where a social phenomenon has an institutional form, for example, a school governing body, there is a more immediate sense of structure than for a more exploratory enquiry.

The importance and strengths of this method of data collection is found in Cohen et al. (2001: 181), who argue that case studies observe effects in real context, recognising that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects.

Even though case studies seem to be important, they still have some weaknesses that should be considered for the validity of research findings. As Guba and Lincoln (1981: 377), cited in Merriam (1988: 33) argue, case studies can oversimplify or exaggerate a situation, leading the reader to erroneous conclusions about the actual state of affairs. The chief criticism levelled at the case study approach is 'lack of scientific rigour' for the design of a case study. Each must depend on the nature of the phenomenon investigated, and the particular circumstances in which it occurs (Johnson, 1994: 22). Therefore it is very important for the researcher to be cautious of these weaknesses that seem to be linked to a case study.

3.3 The Respondents

There are two main methods of sampling: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. The essential feature of a probability sample is that each individual in the entire population, to which a generalisation is being made, must have a known probability of appearing in the sample (Johnson, 1994: 97).

On the other hand, a non-probability sample deliberately avoids representing the wider population; it seeks only to represent a particular group, a particular named section of the wider population, for example, a class of students, a group of students who are not taking a particular examination, a group of teachers. In this latter type, the researcher has deliberately, purposely selected a particular section of the wider population to include in or exclude from the sample (Cohen et al., 2001: 99).

In this study, the investigator employed non-probability sampling. The researcher has identified one high school in the northern district of Lesotho, namely, Maryland High School. The reason for the choice of this school was that it ranked very high among schools whose Form 'E' students perform poorly in their Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) examinations. The school is situated adjacent to the main road hence the researcher could easily get access to the institution without wasting time or incurring high travelling costs.

The respondents comprised the following informed participants:

- Teachers
- Heads of departments
- The deputy principal and
- The principal.

They were chosen because they directly deal with students and it was believed that they stood a better chance of having genuine perceptions about factors that influence poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

As Stake (1995) argues, "for data source triangulation, we look to see if the phenomenon or case remains the same at other times, in other spaces or as persons interact differently" (Stake, 1995: 112). It is implicit that triangulation in research refers to the use of more than one method of data collection to ensure validity and reliability of the data. With the qualitative research method, triangulation is very important because the bias that is connected to this method is minimised. For the sake of validity and reliability, different methods of data collection were used. This research was triangulated through the use of three research methods: interviews, to be a member of the group but keep participation to a minimum,

observations and analysis of school documents. This approach was used in order to validate the data that was collected on factors that were perceived by teachers and management to impact negatively on the academic performance of Form 'E' students. The same instrument would also help to measure the extent to which teachers' and management perceptions agree or disagree.

The research methods applied in the collection of data for this study were as follows:

- Interviews
- Observations
- Document analysis

3.4.1 Interviews

Interviewing is a common means of collecting qualitative data. The most common form of interview is the person-to-person encounter in which one person elicits information from another. Group or panel formats can also be used to obtain data (Merriam, 1988:71). In addition to that, an interview is defined as a conversation, but a conversation with a purpose (Webb and Webb quoted in Merriam, 1988: 71). For this particular research, semi-structured interviews were conducted in which the interviewees were teachers, heads of departments, the deputy principal and the principal. Interview questions were semi-structured to allow flexibility and also to provide opportunities for further explanations and clarifications; in turn a researcher gained a thorough insight into the study. To create a peaceful atmosphere to the interviewee, may lead to obtaining his full co-operation (Verma and Beard, 1981: 114).

Notes were taken and jotted down as interviews were in progress. For fear that tape-recorded data could fall into the hands of school management; a tape-recorder could not be used. That was due to the relationships that were sour between teachers and school management.

3.4.2 Observation

Observation is a research tool when it “serves a formulated research purpose; is planned deliberately; is recorded systematically and is subjected to checks and controls on validity and reliability” (Kidder, 1981: 64 quoted in Merriam, 1988: 88). On the other hand, Johnson (1994: 52) argues that:

In social research, observation is generally used to record behaviour. It may be employed as a primary method of data collection to provide an accurate description of a situation; to gather supplementary data, which may qualify or help interpret other sources of data; or it may be used in an exploratory way, to gain insights, which can be tested by other techniques.

Since observation is another way of collecting data, the nature of the school in general was observed: classrooms, principal’s office, deputy principal’s office, staff room, staff houses, social relationships among all the members of the school community and the entire school’s surroundings. Observation is an important aspect of a case study through which different behaviours can be thoroughly studied. Hence the manner in which teachers and school management interact was also given a keen observation.

According to Johnson (1994: 56) there are four forms of participation in observation:

1. To participate actively in the group observed.
2. To be a member of the group but keep participation to a minimum.
3. To observe without becoming a member of the group.
4. To keep his or her presence unknown.

The researcher therefore preferred to be a member of the group but kept participation to a minimum. Because of the time constraints, that is, the collection of data over a period of five

days, demanded the researcher to be fully engaged in actual data collection than being a full participant in most school activities.

For this study, observations were unstructured. As Johnson (1994: 54) argues, “unstructured observation is, like all forms of research, still systematic and planned activity, but it casts its net wider than the ‘structured’ variety of observation.” What it implies is that if there are some occurrences or behaviours that are relevant to the study, the researcher is at liberty to take note of them. This can happen even though the researcher had not planned for them in advance.

An unstructured observation will be far less clear on what it is looking for and will therefore have to go into the situation and observe what is taking place before deciding on its significance on the research. An unstructured observation will be hypothesis generating rather than hypothesis testing (Cohen et al., 2001: 305).

However, unstructured observations have some limitations. The researcher may record and accumulate a great deal of information which subsequently proves to be of little relevance to the research question. Webb et al. (1966), quoted in Johnson (1994: 55) calls this superfluous material ‘dross’. Some events, and many forms of private behaviour, are not accessible to direct observation (Johnson, 1994: 55). The implication is that a researcher should try by all means to stick to research questions when this method of data collection is used. For example, the purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of both teachers and school management regarding factors that influence poor academic performance of Form ‘E’ students at Maryland High School in Lesotho.

3.4.3 Document Analysis

According to Merriam (1988: 104), “documents are a ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator.” This definition shows that they are ‘ready-made’ meaning that they don’t require any additional effort; the only important

aspect about them is to be accessed through proper arrangements. The importance of documents is reinforced by Yin (1988: 19) who argues that, “when no relevant persons are alive to report, even retrospectively, what occurred, and when an investigator must rely on primary documents, secondary documents, and cultural and physical artefacts as the main sources of evidence.” Therefore teachers’ and management perceptions can either be reinforced or disproved by relevant school documents.

For this study, the following documents were analysed in order to compare teachers’ and management perceptions in view of assessing the extent to which they agree or disagree:

1. Agenda for the meeting of heads of departments with the deputy principal.
2. A document showing school fees and other payments made by students.
3. Copy of a document found in the staff room, entitled: what makes a good teacher?
4. Marksheets for Form ‘E’ students reflecting results from the first quarter to the third for the academic year, 2003.
5. A document on clinical supervision.
6. Scheme books.
7. Attendance registers.
8. Log books of the school.
9. Preparation Books.
10. Lesson planning books.
11. Quarterly academic reports for students.
12. Analysis of COSC results for the past three years.
13. School receipt books.

Even though documents are so important and resourceful, they still have some limitations like other research instruments. A major problem with documentary materials is determining their authenticity and accuracy. Even public records that purport to be objective and accurate contain built-in biases that a researcher may not be aware of (Merriam, 1988: 106). It is therefore very important for the researcher to know about these limitations in order to avoid some biasness when analysing school documents. As Selltiz et al. (1959: 325), quote Augustine in Merriam (1988: 107) who noted this problem of authenticity in his famous personal document 'confessions': "And when they hear me confessing of myself, how do they know whether I speak the truth?"

3.5 Data Analysis

According to Merriam (1988: 123), collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process in qualitative research. However, analysis becomes more intensive once all the data is compiled, even though analysis has been an ongoing activity. For this study, analysis started together with data collection as is commonly practiced with case studies. But later, data that had been coded during collection was then decoded for broader interpretations. To reinforce this, Johnson (1994: 177) argues:

An investigator should not move directly from data collection to writing up, however small-scale the study. A weakness of many dissertations or thesis is that, although considerable pains may have been taken to set up and carry out an effective piece of fieldwork, little use is made of the data collected in the eventual discussion of the thesis topic.

This quotation therefore justifies the importance of properly analysed data. In order to validate the interpretations, actual quotations from interviews have also been included in the analysis. The data has to be categorised into themes, then meanings from each must be interpreted.

3.6 Limitations of the Study

The study was restricted to one high school, Maryland High School in which a major focus of the research was associated with teachers and school management only. This limited the findings of the study because not all the high schools in Lesotho were represented. However, the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students is known to be a national problem. Another limitation of the research was experienced when teachers disliked the use of a tape-recorder due to the fact that tape-recorded data might somehow fall into the hands of school management. This was a serious limitation of the study because the data that could have been collected through the use of a tape-recorder failed to be accessed. Their fear emanated from the fact that they had already launched their complaints about the inefficiency of the present school management and had requested for a new principal to assume duty by early next year, 2004.

Since the research was conducted during the examinations period for all the students at Maryland High School, it was not easy for the researcher to have a thorough observation of all the necessary activities within the institution. However, the findings have important implications for education policy regarding factors that influence poor academic performance of Form 'E' students in high schools of Lesotho. The study investigated both teachers' and management perceptions on factors that influence poor academic performance of Form 'E' students. Agreement or differences in perceptions by teachers and management were also looked into. The next chapter deals with the findings and analysis of data.

3.7 Summary

This chapter examined instruments used to collect data for a qualitative design. It has been noticed that data may be best collected through the use of interviews, observation and

document analysis. These instruments are intended to collect data on school leadership staff development and school leadership. These factors are perceived to be possible influencers of poor academic performance

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This study aimed to investigate perceptions of teachers and school management about factors influencing poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School in Lesotho. In particular, the study focused on the nature of school leadership, staff development and motivation as some of the factors that may influence poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at the high school. This chapter presents and discusses the data obtained.

The key questions of the research were as follows:

1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding factors that influence poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School?
2. From management perceptions, what are those factors that influence poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School?
3. To what extent do teachers' and management perceptions agree?

As described in chapter 3, the major data collection methods included group and single interviews, observations and document analysis. Through the use of these research instruments, data were collected from fourteen (14) respondents including teachers and school management. In this chapter responses are organised into themes informed by the research questions. The chapter begins by describing the school setting then addresses teachers' perceptions in relation to the influence of school leadership, staff development and motivation. This is followed by management perceptions about the same factors as possible

influences of the academic performance of students. Finally the chapter examines the extent to which teachers' and management perceptions agree.

School Setting

Maryland High School is a day school. The school is located in a rural area and the main road passes near the school. The proprietor is the Roman Catholic Church but the government through the ministry of education pays teachers and also ensures that schools are run through stipulated educational policies. Like other high schools in Lesotho, this school is managed through the School Management Board, apart from being a member of the Board; the principal should also be fully responsible for the use of school funds. As a visitor enters the main gate, well-constructed buildings are seen. The appearance of the school in general is really good. During the study, both teachers and students seemed to be very much time conscious, for example, when the assembly starts at 7: 45 a.m., everybody becomes ready for prayers that are followed by announcements. Immediately after the assembly, students go to their classrooms, the school culture on the conducting of the assembly and what follows thereafter, seems to be clear to both teachers and students. Timetables are also found in the staff room and in the classrooms to provide direction to both teachers and students. The surroundings of the school look very clean.

During the week of the 17th to 21st November when the researcher visited the school, Form 'E' students were taking their final examinations at Mount Royal High School, a distance of about 20 kilometres from Maryland High School. As the principal said, "we are no longer recognised as a high school hence this school cannot be used as a centre for Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) examinations." The principal went further to disclose that the school enrolment at the beginning of the year was one hundred and ninety (190), but

when the researcher visited the school, numbers had gone down to one hundred and fifty (150).

The offices of the principal, the deputy principal and the staff room show that a lot of equipment is needed. For example, there is a small photocopier in the office of the principal and it is used by the whole school. In the staff room there are no reference books. As one teacher stated, “we even run short of teachers’ manuals for reference purposes and our teaching is seriously affected by this phenomenon.” Since students are well disciplined, the relationships between them and their teachers seem to be good. Another important aspect is the proper wearing of the school uniform by the students.

4.2 Teachers’ perceptions about factors influencing poor academic performance of Form ‘E’ students

4.2.1 The nature of leadership

According to the responses of teachers during interviews, the chairperson of the School Board has full control of the school funds, instead of the principal. This occurrence causes some serious inconveniences because school equipment, teaching and learning aids are not bought on time. It is of great importance to note that all the teachers associated inaccessibility to the use of school funds by the principal with the poor academic performance of Form ‘E’ students. To reinforce this, one teacher said, “the principal at this institution has no say on the use of school funds, only the chairperson of the board is fully responsible hence it is very difficult for us to get some teaching materials”. On this issue of school funds, it becomes difficult to understand what is happening at this school because Education (Amendment) Act of 1996 section 14A clarifies that the principal shall:

- (b) be the chief accounting officer of the school and shall be responsible to the Management Committee or School Board for the control and use of school funds;

- (c) maintain or cause to be maintained records of income and expenditure for the school;
- (d) prepare an annual budget for the school and submit it to the Management Committee or School Board for its approval;
- (e) submit at the end of each school year a financial statement of the school to the Management Committee or School Board for its approval.

One understands that the issue of funds is likely to impact negatively on pupils' performance because teaching and learning aids may not be bought as urgently as they would if the principal was responsible for the use of school funds.

Another important factor was that teachers perceived a 'laissez-faire leadership style' as a major influencing factor towards the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students. Morphet et al. (1959) argues that leadership may be democratic or autocratic but never laissez-faire. From their responses during the process of interviews, one teacher said:

there is simply no follow-up here, it looks like the principal does not care, at this school teachers are trying to do their best but leadership is very weak, we are simply like a flock without a shepherd. The problem with our school is that there is no direction; the school is simply run by luck.

Further responses from interviews showed that teachers perceived unwritten and unclear school policies as another influencing factor to the poor academic performance of students and they attributed this to the type of leadership style that is practiced at their institution. It is the responsibility of any school leadership to ensure that all the stakeholders know rules and policies of their institution. However, "through staff meetings important decisions are made in order to keep the institution functional" (Teacher).

From their responses during interviews, most teachers perceived lack of participation by the School Board as another influencing factor to the poor academic performance of students, for example, "as teachers of this school we are eager to share our views with Board Members but meetings are never called here" (The teacher). As one teacher argued during interviews, "if

the principal of the school is not active it becomes very difficult to expect the School Board to be active and alive” (Teacher). According to teachers’ perceptions, all the other factors are a result of poor leadership. “Because of poor leadership that we have here, we even feel shy and ashamed to freely talk about our school to other people” (Teacher). They went further to indicate that since meetings are not called for members of the School Board, it becomes difficult to inform them about these problems.

During the data collection week, what the investigator observed was the lenience of leadership towards students because some of the students were seen walking away from the school campus without permission. As one teacher put it:

the principal usually keeps quiet even when things go bad, for example, sometimes he turns a blind eye to uniform defaulters while on the other hand teachers are trying to enforce uniform-keeping among students. Some of us have turned out to be enemies to students because we always trouble them while the principal is not uttering even a single word.

The researcher believes that the practice of leaving school before time could lead to absenteeism among students and this may influence poor academic performance because pupils miss some of the classes that would be beneficial to them. “Due to the lenience of the principal they sometimes go home even without permission, we have been trying to stop it but we failed” (Teacher).

The researcher got access to a petition that was directed to the chairperson of the Board by the teachers in which among others they complained about the inefficiency of the present leadership. They requested for the change of school leadership with effect from the beginning of the next academic year, 2004. This is supported by Fullan (1992: 82) who argues, “the principal has often been cited as a key figure in blocking or promoting change.” The

document showed how seriously teachers were concerned about the type of leadership at Maryland High School. Other contents of the petition included the following:

- the principal does not do anything about the development of the school
- he shows less concern about the poor academic performance of students
- he does not satisfactorily attend classes, he sometimes sits in his office yet he should be in class
- in short, the school has no direction.

From these points, there is a great likelihood that the academic performance of students may be negatively affected, particularly if pupils are not taught and teachers show less concern about the teaching of such pupils.

4.2.2 Teachers' perceptions about staff development as an influencing factor to the academic performance of students

From their responses in the interviews, teachers perceived the absence of written policies on induction and mentoring, as other influencing factors towards the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students. As one teacher stated during interviews:

if new teachers are inducted and mentored on voluntary basis one may doubt the effectiveness of that activity. In fact, absence of written policies on staff development makes it null and void.

In their further responses, teachers agreed that, lack of adequate qualified teachers influences poor academic performance of Form 'E' students. To reinforce this, another teacher said:

For the teacher who is not qualified, he might dedicate himself to his work but unfortunately teach the wrong content. For example, we had a case of the teacher who taught classes for the whole year but at the end of the year all the students failed his subject. The implication was that even though that teacher seemed to be working hard, but in reality there was no learning or teaching that actually went on in that class.

From their responses during interviews, the teachers perceived lack of reporting-back policies after the attendance of workshops by teachers or management as another problem. In order to show the importance of staff development through workshops or courses, one teacher said:

As for the issue of staff development, we are very much serious about it but we seem not to be particular about a follow-up on reporting-back and I would like to acknowledge this as a serious weakness. We perceive this as one of the factors that influence poor academic performance of our students. Because the skills that have been gained from such courses or workshops are not communicated to those who did not attend. In the process of that the academic performance of students deteriorates.

Indeed, it is understandable that for any training to be fruitful those who attend workshops must disseminate information to those who remained at work but where there is no reporting-back, there would be no improvement in the skills of those who did not attend. Then this would negatively influence the academic performance of Form 'E' students.

In addition to that, teachers perceived poor coordination of 'on-the-job' training as one of the factors that are influential towards the poor academic performance of students. If there is no cooperation between experienced and inexperienced teachers, chances of sharing skills and experiences will be nil, hence teachers can hardly improve their teaching. This is likely to influence poor academic performance among students. Glickman (1998: 347) says, "if one is to look for a place to improve the quality of education in a school, a sensible place to look is the continuous education of educators, that is, professional development." In general, teachers' responses revealed that if policies on staff development are not clear, it becomes difficult to successfully offer training to teachers and this occurrence can impact negatively on the academic performance of students.

Since students were very busy with their examinations during the data collection week, it was not possible for the researcher to observe all activities in their natural setting; for example, teachers were invigilating instead of teaching. However, the investigator participated in a meeting that was arranged for heads of department and the deputy principal. The meeting was held in a room that was reserved as a small library for the use by Form 'E' students only.

It was in that meeting where factors pertinent to staff development were addressed, for example, how heads of department can coach other teachers and how experienced teachers can help those who are new to the school. In the process of their discussions, it was revealed that reports about meetings attended by the principal could hardly be found due to their misplacement. It was therefore noticed that disappearance of such reports could have a negative impact on staff development; for example, teachers are not getting new ideas from such meetings. The researcher believes that the misplacement of those reports might impact negatively on the equipping of teachers with new skills and fresh ideas that would otherwise improve their teaching. This is perceived as a serious handicap to the performance of students.

Finally, heads of department were perceived by the deputy principal as not satisfactorily performing their duties, as she stated, “this issue of scheme books shows that a strong follow-up must be done to teachers in our departments, otherwise our results can hardly improve.” One head of department responded by saying, “we are not even sure of our duties”. The researcher perceived lack of clarity on the responsibilities of heads of department as one of the factors that could have a negative bearing on the academic performance of students, more especially when heads of department are expected to provide direction to both teachers and students in their capacity as part of school management.

During the deliberations of the same meeting of the heads of department and the deputy principal, one teacher was announced as having lost his scheme book. However, one head of department thought that the scheme book was not lost but no recording had been done in it, as a result, the teacher was shy to submit a blank scheme book. “It is clear that this particular teacher is not satisfactorily doing his work” (Deputy Principal). The researcher noticed that poor or lack of scheming by some of the teachers might impact negatively on the academic

performance of students because the teacher who does not scheme can hardly teach in an organised manner.

4.2.3 Teachers' perceptions About motivation as an influencing factor to the academic performance of students

According to the responses of one member of the teaching staff, "there are no procedures and clearly written policies for evaluating levels of performance at this institution." He went further, "we even do not know how teachers are promoted because there are no performance standards. Our biggest problem is that this institution is simply run without written policies."

From their perceptions, most teachers explained that absence of written motivational policies makes it very difficult for one to understand how awards or prizes are allocated. But on the other hand, other teachers disclosed that those who produced good results get prizes in order to show appreciation for their good performance. According to their arrangement, good results refer to high numbers of students who passed in their external examinations. "The purpose of this practice is to motivate teachers" (Teacher). In order to decide who qualifies for the prize:

we usually hold a staff meeting once Junior Certificate or Cambridge Overseas School Certificate results have been released, the purpose is to analyse the results and discuss about the type of prizes and those who qualify (Teacher).

Regardless of this arrangement, the performance of the students is still very bad. This is proved by COSC external results in the past two years as they were analysed by the Examinations Council of Lesotho (ECOL). This occurrence leaves one with doubts as to whether the award of prizes serves any significant purpose towards the promotion of morale among teachers at Maryland High School.

When they were asked to comment on their level of motivation, teachers disclosed poor response to their needs, for example, one teacher said, “there are no teachers’ manuals and graph-boards for the proper teaching of mathematics, science and other subjects.” This is supported by responses from one of the teachers, “due to lack of teaching and learning aids, teachers do not teach to their fullest potentials.” As Kotler (1988: 188) argues, “how the motivated person acts is influenced by his or her perception of the situation.” Teachers’ responses show that they are not motivated hence it becomes difficult for them to exert more effort to their work. As a result, the academic performance of Form ‘E’ students at Maryland High School shows no signs of improvement.

Since it was the last week of the fourth quarter and also examinations period, teachers were concentrating on invigilation and marking of the scripts. As for students, they seemed to be motivated because of their punctuality for the assembly and were also seen seriously revising before the assembly began. It must be remembered that students that are being referred to here are those who are in the junior classes because Form ‘E’ students were having their final examinations at Mount Royal High School. When looking at teachers from the point of view of a stranger, one could realise that their morale was low because they did not look as active as the researcher had anticipated.

An analysis of mark sheets for Form ‘E’ students showed that their performance from the first quarter to the third quarter had been very bad hence their morale might not be high because they did not score high marks in their quarterly tests. Perhaps their performance in their final examinations might be influenced by this phenomenon.

4.3 Management perceptions About factors influencing poor academic performance of Form 'E' students.

4.3.1 The influence of Leadership

The pass rate of our Form 'E' students at this school is very low, this can be linked to various reasons, for example, the type of students that we admit here are rejects from other schools or those who could not be admitted anywhere due to their poor academic performance (Principal).

In expounding further on that problem the principal disclosed that the leadership of the school is not strict on admissions, he showed that even poor performers from other schools are admitted due to shortage of students at this institution. According to the principal, it therefore becomes very difficult for the school to produce good results while pupils of such a calibre are admitted at this school.

Apart from that, we are also faced with a problem of unqualified teachers. For example, there are only three qualified teachers to teach the Form 'E' students out of fourteen (14) teachers at this school. A major contributing factor to this problem is that leadership is unable to meet the requirements of well-qualified teachers, to mention a few, electrified accommodation with all necessary facilities (Principal).

He went further to indicate that the school has no real library to meet the needs of all the students for the whole school. In addition, the small laboratory that they have is very poorly equipped hence it does not serve any significant purpose.

Another major problem that may directly contribute to the poor performance of students is lack of books among students that school leadership is not able to supply due to shortage of money. "Parents always complain about high prices of books and this problem promotes book theft among students" (The Principal). The principal went further to explain that without books, students could hardly benefit from their classes.

According to the response of the principal during the interview, some of the students were not staying with their parents because their homes are as far as 60 km away from the school;

they either stay with their relatives or pay rent to the landlord. The principal showed that some members of the local community give no support to the school that is why school property is vandalized and the reigning spirit from some of the villagers negatively influences students. In his view, the school environment played a vital role in the education of children. That is, the academic performance of students is likely to be influenced by the attitude of the local community towards education.

On the issue of staff development, the principal reported that the school leadership ensures that teachers attend workshops and internal class observation is commonly practiced among teachers in attempting to help one another. Regardless of all these efforts, he accepts that the academic performance of students is still very poor. He also showed that there were no clearly written policies on staff development. The principal tried to indicate that staff development was not effectively practiced at Maryland High School because it was something that was done on voluntary basis not documented. In addition to that, in their responses, heads of department doubted themselves as to how they were part of management. "We do not see the practicality of being heads of departments" (Head of Department). During interviews with heads of department, they disclosed that they were always excluded when decisions were made, only the principal and the deputy principal used to decide for the school, and then disseminate information through heads of department. They regard their exclusion as one of the factors that seriously influence the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students because their submissions that would contribute to the improvement of the school are not included.

When elaborating on the inefficiency of the principal, one head of department was quoted as saying:

Teachers' meetings are rarely held, for example, during this year, 2003; only two staff meetings were called. Teachers always complain about lack of meetings, yet there are so many issues and problems to be addressed.

From his responses, another head of department stated that the principal is too lenient to maintain discipline and follow-up on both teachers' and students' work:

In fact, teachers are not supervised at this institution hence the attendance of teachers to Form 'E' students is not good and the principal is doing nothing about it. In reality, there is no cooperation and coordination between school leadership and teachers hence the academic performance of students is very poor. Due to this occurrence, parents complain about poor leadership of the school, that is why they no longer bring their children to this institution.

If the supervision of students and teachers is poorly done, chances are very high for students to perform badly in their examinations; one therefore believes that lack of supervision among teachers and students impacts negatively on the performance of students.

As the researcher talked to teachers and school leadership during interviews, it was noticed that teachers' morale was really low. However, they were optimistic that one day their school will improve. As one head of department said, "the main problem with our school is just poor leadership and nothing else, once that problem is solved, everything will be right". But they seemed to be worried, why the School Board is silent about leadership problems at this school. While the poor performance of students shows that something needs to be done. According to the heads of department, this is viewed as a major contributing factor to the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students. As one head of department put it, "the problem of this school is known but it looks like there is no person who wants to do anything about the change of leadership at this institution". The problem of poor leadership was even perceived by the principal himself as he was quoted:

there was a time when the morale was low among teachers due to poor leadership, teachers needed open lines of communication. I therefore acknowledged that the problem was with me because at that time, there was no room for contributions from teachers.

Even now, it looks like school leadership is still failing to respond to the needs of teachers, this behaviour leads to low morale which culminates in poor teaching and in the final analysis, the academic performance of Form 'E' students is adversely affected.

4.4 Comparison of teachers' and management perceptions on factors that influence poor academic performance of students

4.4.1 Common perceptions of teachers and management

From the perceptions of both teachers and management on factors that seem to influence the poor academic performance of students, it is noticed that absence of written policies is commonly perceived to be influencing the poor performance of students. Responses of teachers and management show that almost all the decisions pertaining to the running of the school are arrived at through staff meeting discussions. Teachers' and management perceptions also agreed that the problem of inadequate qualified teachers is another factor that can be associated with the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students. Among other causes to this problem, lack of accommodation for teachers seems to be playing a major role. Hence shortage of qualified teachers is perceived by both sides as one of the major influencing factors to the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at the school.

Another factor that is commonly perceived by teachers and management is absence of restrictions on admissions of students. According to what the principal disclosed, the school is experiencing a serious shortage of students hence teachers and management regard this as another influencing factor to the poor performance of students. If rejects are admitted from other schools, it is difficult to expect good results from students of such a calibre. In addition to that, teachers' and management perceptions also overlap on poor school leadership. Perceptions from both sides indicate that poor leadership of the school plays a big role in the

influence of poor academic performance of Form 'E' students. Poor leadership can hardly provide a clear direction to both teachers and students. This leads to poor teaching and learning that eventually culminates in the production of poor results among students. More especially if laissez-fair leadership style is practiced where no serious action is taken against undesirable behaviours.

Another point on which teachers' and management perceptions converge is staff development. Responses from both sides disclose that unwritten or undocumented policies on the management of staff development, make it difficult to achieve the intended purpose of equipping teachers with new skills, ideas and techniques. While Bush and Middlewood (1997: 192) argue, "devising a staff development plan is crucial to the task of managing staff development." Hence poor practice of staff development is perceived by teachers and management as one of the factors that are influential in the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at the school. Another factor on which teachers' and management perceptions agree is low motivation among teachers and this problem is believed to emanate from the poor supply of teaching and learning aids at the school. The researcher also noticed the issue of low morale among teachers during the data collection period. This is reinforced by Middlewood and Lumby (1988: 46), who argue that "things that make people dissatisfied are related to the job environment." The manner in which they presented their problems to him indicated that their morale was very low, for example, the manner in which they talked indicated that they had lost hope, as one teacher said, "we are like a flock without a shepherd". Also their slow movement on school campus showed that their morale was low. This factor is perceived by teachers and management as influencing poor teaching which culminates in the poor performance of the Form 'E' students.

According to teachers' and head of department perceptions, the silence of the School Board on the poor academic performance of students is perceived as one of the major factors that influence poor performance of students. In fact, the School Board is expected to be familiar with almost all the events that are taking place within the school. Under normal circumstances, if there are some irregularities pertaining to the functioning or performance of the school, they are the first people to respond and react. Their silence on school issues can impact badly on the functioning of the school. This behaviour can directly be linked to the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School.

4.4.2 Different Perceptions between teachers and management

Perceptions of management show that, the absence of a library and the use of a poorly equipped science laboratory are some of the factors that influence poor academic performance of Form 'E' students. In the rural area where there is not even a single library, it really becomes difficult for students to access any reading materials. On the other hand, a small and poorly equipped science laboratory can influence poor performance of students. Another factor that is perceived by teachers to be influential in the academic performance of students, is poor scheming by some of the teachers. As it was stated, it is very difficult for any teacher to properly organise content without scheming. Any teacher who just teaches without proper scheming is subject to the risk of poor teaching that can end up with the production of poor results among Form 'E' students.

Furthermore, management also perceived shortage of books among students as another factor that is responsible for ineffective teaching and learning. It is a known fact that books are some of the major sources of knowledge, therefore teaching and learning can hardly take place without books. Even though parents complain about expensive books, it can be very

difficult for students to learn without the use of books. Hence lack of books among students is one of the major factors that influence poor academic performance of Form 'E' students. According to teachers' perceptions, this issue of books could be linked to the principal's lack of access to school funds. As one teacher elaborated, "if the principal was fully accessed to the use of school funds, he would be able to buy books for the school then students pay rental fee for the use of such books." This phenomenon is viewed as one of the major contributing factors that lead to the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students.

According to the response of the head of department, in his capacity as a member of the management team, he regarded the exclusion of heads of department on issues pertinent to management as one of the major obstacles towards the development of the school. He indicated that as heads of departments, they have many constructive ideas that could probably contribute towards the improvement of their school. It is therefore realised that exclusion of some members of management from decision-making processes is a serious handicap to the development of the school. This practice could be viewed as one of the factors that impacts negatively to the academic performance of students.

At Maryland High School, teachers perceive the principal as showing less concern about the poor performance of Form 'E' students as it was stated in their petition. Their perceptions went further to disclose that the principal usually sits in his office while the timetable shows that he should be teaching. If the principal is not concerned about the poor performance of students, for example, by not even attending classes, the syllabus may not be finished and this is one of the major factors that may influence poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School. The principal perceived poor support from the local community as another factor that negatively changes the attitude of students. The stealing

and vandalizing of the school property makes the principal believe that the community of that area has a negative attitude towards education. He perceives the environment as also having played a major role in the academic performance of students. According to the principal, the environment contributes a great deal towards the shaping of students' attitudes. Hence the environment might also be regarded as one of the influencing factors in the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School.

4.5 Summary

From the discussions on data that is presented in this chapter, the researcher has found out that teachers and management regard poor leadership of the school as one of the major factors that influence poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School. They also perceive undocumented school policies and poor involvement of other stakeholders in the decision-making processes as other influencing factors to the poor academic performance of students. As for the issue of staff development, which seems to be disorganised at the moment, teachers' and management perceptions regard it as one of the influencing factors to the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students. On the issue of motivation, teachers and management agree that the morale is very low among teachers; this behaviour is attributed to the lack of teaching and learning materials together with persistent poor academic performance of students. The researcher has therefore observed that lack of motivation among teachers and management is another influencing factor in the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School.

According to teachers' perceptions on factors influencing poor academic performance of students, the following factors seem to be playing a major influential role: poor scheming by some of the teachers, accessibility to the use of school funds by the chairperson of the School

Board instead of the principal and less concern by the principal in the poor performance of students, for example, he usually sits in his office instead of attending classes for the teaching of students.

Finally, management perceptions also indicate the under-mentioned factors as influential in the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School: absence of a library and poorly equipped science laboratory, shortage of books among students, exclusion of heads of department regarding issues that are linked to management and poor support from the local community.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This study aimed to investigate perceptions of teachers and school management about factors influencing the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School in Lesotho. In particular, the study focused on the nature of school leadership, staff development and motivation as some of the factors that may influence poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School. This chapter summarises the study, draws conclusions and makes recommendations.

The key questions of the research were as follows:

1. What are teachers' perceptions on factors influencing poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School?
2. From management perceptions, what are those factors that influence poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School?
3. To what extent do teachers' and management perceptions agree?

5.2 Summary

Chapter one presents an outline of the study. The chapter also highlights the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students in the high schools of Lesotho as a problem that has existed for a period of more than a decade till now, the year 2003. Furthermore, chapter two presents a literature review that is related to the study, with a major focus on school leadership, staff development and motivation. In addition to that, chapter three focuses on methodologies and

research instruments that were used during the data collection process. Finally, chapter four explores data presentation and discussions.

5.3 Conclusions

Through guidance of key questions, the following conclusions were drawn from teachers' and management perceptions on factors that are influential to the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School:

1. Leadership of Maryland High School seems to be very poor; it is inclined to the laissez-fair leadership style because there is no action taken even when things turn out to be bad. This behaviour seems to be contributing towards the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students.
2. The running of the school without clearly written or documented policies makes it very difficult for the school to have clearly structured direction. This is perceived as one of the major influences on the poor academic performance of students at the school.
3. The chairperson of the School Board's access to the use of school funds instead of the principal. The study has established that this phenomenon causes some serious problems when school equipment, teaching or learning materials have to be bought. In fact, unnecessary delays were mentioned during the data collection process. The arrangement as it stands now, impacts negatively on the academic performance of students.
4. The study has also disclosed that shortage of a library and poorly equipped science laboratory are some of the factors that are responsible for the poor academic performance of Form 'E' students at Maryland High School.

5. Findings have revealed that teachers are not motivated due to lack of some teaching and learning materials that are not found at the school. This prevailing situation seems to create low morale among teachers. This behaviour results in poor teaching that culminates in the production of poor results among Form 'E' students.
6. The research has also discovered that heads of department are not involved when decisions pertinent to management are made. Only the principal and the deputy principal seem to be responsible for the making of such decisions.
7. The researcher has discovered that lack of staff development also plays a major influential role towards the poor academic performance of students. For example, teachers perceived the absence of written policies on staff development and lack of qualified teachers as other influencing factors.

5.4 Recommendations

Conclusions of this study led to the following recommendations:

1. The leadership of Maryland High School can be improved by visiting principals of schools that are producing good results or if possible such principals may be invited to the school during their convenient times. This activity may be effected through inviting one principal of the other school or a group of principals who are known to be good leaders and their schools are known to be constant in the production of good results, more especially to Form 'E' students.
2. On the problem of undocumented or unwritten policies, a recommendation is that all the stakeholders, for example, parents, teachers, students, school management and other concerned parties be involved in the formulation of school policies.
3. As for the use of school funds, it is recommended that a School Board for Maryland High School should visit or invite other School Boards with a view to learn how they

treat or handle the management of funds. The Boards that are referred to here must be known to be properly and effectively functioning within their schools. Otherwise this initiative will be a futile exercise.

4. In relation to the problem of a library and poorly equipped science laboratory, recommendations are of a short term period and of a long term period:

- (i) Library: for a short term period, books may be gradually bought by the school and teachers be encouraged to ensure that certain books are lent to students over a clearly stipulated period, for example, a student may borrow a book for a period of two weeks then after that period, the same book be lent to another student. For this process to succeed, teachers have to be assigned responsibilities to monitor the proper rotation of books among students. Then after a reasonable period, for example, fortnightly or monthly, students may be evaluated on books that they have read.
- (ii) Library: as for a long term period, if the school remains with a certain balance as surplus at the end of the academic year, a recommendation is that surplus for the following year, if there is any, be added to that of last year, till after a period of five years when a reasonable amount to erect a building for a library has been accumulated. If there is no surplus at the end of the year, the school may resort to some other means of raising funds, for example, the running of a tuck-shop.
- (iii) Poorly equipped science laboratory: a recommendation is that parents' meeting be called in which a problem is clearly presented to the parents. Then possible solutions are examined till a unanimously agreed solution is reached. Since laboratory equipment is known to be very expensive, possibly a solution may be expected to be of a long-term nature.

5. As for the problem of low motivation among teachers, a recommendation is that there must be transparency on school finances. Teachers have to be informed about what the school can afford and what it cannot. After their involvement, suggestions and contributions may be invited from them in relation to what can be done to solve the problem, for example, how teaching and learning materials may be bought from the available resources.
6. On the problem where heads of department are excluded when decisions are made at management level, a recommendation is that heads of department are encouraged or advised to politely and constructively approach the principal together with the deputy principal and make them aware that heads of department are part and parcel of school management. Therefore their involvement will enable them to render assistance to the improvement and development of the school.
7. As for lack of staff development, a recommendation is that all the stakeholders have to draw policies on how skills of teachers may be improved and also teachers' houses be gradually erected in order to attract qualified teachers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Schedule For Teachers

- (i) Has the school management ever made some arrangements in which experienced and qualified teachers support their colleagues?
- (ii) As a teacher at this school, are you comfortable with the academic performance of Form 'E' students?
- (iii) Can you briefly comment about some few factors that might be influential to the performance of students?
- (iv) Can you tell how many teachers are qualified at this school?

APPENDIX 2: Interview Schedule for School Management

- (i) Are you happy about the academic performance of your Form 'E' students at this institution?
- (ii) What can you say about the level of motivation to teachers?
- (iii) Do you have a library at this school?
- (iv) How many times are parents called for parents' meeting?
- (v) How active is the School Board?

APPENDIX 3: Observation

The appearance of the school is really very good; classrooms are many and well built.

Students and teachers seem to be punctual for their work.

The researcher observed that the morale for teachers is very low due to lack of teaching and learning aids.

The researcher also noticed that relationships between the local community and the school are not good.

APPENDIX 4: Meeting for Heads of Departments and the deputy: Dated 20-11-2003**(A)****Agenda:**

1. Minutes of the last meeting
2. Schemes, records and registers
3. Students' Academic work
 - Notes
 - Exercise book
 - Text books
 - Tests etc.
4. Punctuality
5. Teachers' loads for 2004
6. Budgets
7. Planning for 2004
8. A. O. B

(B) Mark sheets for quarterly tests were also shown to the researcher and the performance was not satisfactory. And that was attributed to a number of factors, for example, inadequate number of qualified teachers and scarce teaching and learning materials.