

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LEARNERS ABSCONDING IN A HIGH SCHOOL IN PHOENIX

by

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Abstract

The focus of this study is to explore the factors that contribute to learners absconding. The study was conducted in one peri-urban school in Phoenix. The study was guided by two research questions: (i) what are the factors that contribute to absconding of learners? (ii) how does absconding impact on teaching and learning? The study employed Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model as a theoretical framework. The paradigmatic position of the study was from an interpretivist view. A qualitative research approach was used and the study was in the form of a single case study of a school in Phoenix, Durban. Ten participants were selected using snowball sampling, purposive sampling and convenience sampling. The participants were made up of seven learners and three educators. The data generation process was obtained through open-ended questionnaires with learner participants only, semi-structured interviews with all participants, focus group discussion with learner participants only and documentary sources (school records). Data was analysed using content analysis. The overall findings of the research show that the factors that contribute to learners absconding are situated at the peer and school level. The findings also show that absconding has educational and social effects. In addition, the findings reveal that educators and other learners who attend school regularly are also affected by absconding.

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation entitled **Factors contributing to learners absconding in a high school in Phoenix**, submitted for a Masters Degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, is my own production and has not been previously submitted for a degree at any other university for examination purposes. Furthermore, all sources that have been used for the research have been acknowledged and referenced.

Student's signature

Date

Supervisor's signature

Date

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
FET	Further Education and Training
UK	United Kingdom
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
ALAS	The Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success
RCL	Representative Council for Educators
HOD	Head of Department (at school level)

Table of Contents

Page number

Title page	i
Abstract	ii
Declaration	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
List of Acronyms and Abbreviations	v
Table of Contents	vi
Figures	xi
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background to the Study	1
1.3 Rationale of the Study	4
1.4 Problem Statement	5
1.5 Importance of the Study	6
1.6 Focus of the Study	7
1.7 Research Objectives	7
1.8 Research Questions	7
1.9 Clarification of Terms	7
1.9.1 Learner	7
1.9.2 High School	8
1.9.3 Absconding	8
1.10 Research Design and Methodology	8
1.10.1 Research Design	8
1.10.2 Research Methodology	9
1.10.2.1 The Sample	9
1.10.2.2 Data Generation and Analysis	9
1.10.3 Ethical Consideration	10

1.11 Organisation of Dissertation	10
1.12 Conclusion	11
CHAPTER TWO	12
LITERATURE REVIEW	12
2.1 Introduction.....	12
2.2 Exploring Concepts: Absconding, Absenteeism and Truancy	12
2.2.1 Absconding	12
2.2.2 Absenteeism.....	13
2.2.3 Truancy	13
2.3 Understanding the Life World of Absconding (A Case Study).....	14
2.4 Response to Absconding: Factors.....	15
2.4.1 Individual	16
2.4.2 Family	16
2.4.3 School	17
2.5 Effects of Absconding.....	21
2.5.1 Educational	22
<i>Negative Effects</i>	22
<i>Positive Effects</i>	23
2.5.2 Social Effects	24
2.5.3 Economic Effects.....	25
2.6 Responses towards Absconding: Policy Context.....	26
2.6.1 Legislation.....	26
2.6.1.1 United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO): A Human Rights-Based approach to Education for All.....	26
2.6.1.2 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child	26
2.6.1.3 The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	27
2.6.1.4 Constitution of South Africa	27
2.6.1.5 South African Schools Act.....	28
2.6.2 Policies and Initiatives	28
2.6.2.1 Education White Paper 6	29
2.6.2.2 SA Policy on attendance	29

2.6.2.3 Norms and Standards for Educators	29
2.6.2.4 Initiatives to keep learners in school.....	31
2.7 Conclusion	33
CHAPTER THREE	34
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	34
3.1 Introduction.....	34
3.2 Origins of the Theory.....	34
3.3 Bronfenbrenner’s Social Ecological Model.....	36
3.3.1 Microsystem.....	37
3.3.2 Mesosystem.....	38
3.3.3 Exosystem	38
3.3.4 Macrosystem	39
3.3.5 Chronosystem	39
3.4 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Theory	40
3.5 Bronfenbrenner’s Theory and the School.....	40
3.6 Conclusion	42
CHAPTER FOUR.....	43
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	43
4.1 Introduction.....	43
4.2 Problem Statement.....	43
4.3 Research Aims	43
4.4 Research Approach.....	43
4.5 Research Paradigm.....	44
4.6 Research Design.....	45
4.7. Sampling Procedure.....	46
4.7.1 Snowball Sampling	47
4.7.2 Purposive Sampling	47
4.7.3 Convenience Sampling	47
4.7.4 The Sample	48
<i>Learners</i>	48

<i>Educators</i>	49
4.8 Data Generation Process	50
4.8.1 Open-ended Questionnaires	51
4.8.2 Semi-Structured One-on-One Interviews	52
4.8.3 Focus Group Discussion	52
4.8.4 Documentary Sources	53
4.9 Data Analysis	53
4.10 Reflection	56
4.11 Trustworthiness	57
4.11.1 Credibility	57
4.11.2 Transferability	58
4.11.3 Dependability	58
4.11.4 Confirmability	59
4.12 Ethical Considerations	59
4.12.1 Permission	59
4.12.2 Consent of Participants	60
4.12.3 Confidentiality of Participants	60
4.12.4 Protection from Harm	61
4.12.5 Feedback from the Study	61
4.13 Conclusion	61
CHAPTER FIVE	62
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS.....	62
5.1 Introduction	62
5.2 Analysis and Discussion of Findings	62
5.2.1 Theme One: Exposition of Learners Absconding.....	62
5.2.1.1 Visible in School but not in Class.....	63
5.2.1.2 Early school leaving.....	64
5.2.1.3 In-between home and school	65
5.2.2 Theme Two: Factors Contributing to Learners Absconding	67
5.2.2.1 Peer-to-Peer Relationships.....	67

5.2.2.2 Learner-Educator Relationships.....	71
5.2.2.3 School Discipline.....	76
5.2.2.4 Safety and Security.....	77
5.2.2.5 School Leadership and Management.....	79
5.2.2.6 Engagement with Departmental Policies.....	81
5.2.3 Theme Three: The Impact of Learners Absconding on Teaching and Learning in High Schools.....	84
5.2.3.1 Educational Effects on Learners.....	85
5.2.3.2 Educational Effects on Educators.....	87
5.2.3.3 School Discipline.....	89
5.2.3.4 Effects on Social Relationships.....	92
5.3 Conclusion.....	94
CHAPTER SIX.....	95
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	95
6.1 Introduction.....	95
6.2 Summary of the Findings.....	95
6.2.1 Exposition of Learners Absconding.....	95
6.2.2 Factors Contributing to Learners Absconding.....	96
6.2.3 Impact of Learners Absconding on Teaching and Learning in High Schools.....	97
6.3 Recommendations for the Study.....	98
6.4 Reflection.....	99
6.5 Limitations of the Study.....	100
6.6 Recommendations for Further Research.....	100
6.7 Conclusion of Study.....	101
References.....	102
Appendices.....	115

Figures

FIGURE 3.1 Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model

FIGURE 4.1 Analyzing Data using Mayring's Technique

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This introductory chapter outlines the background and overview of the study. A glimpse of the research on learners absconding is provided to highlight the need for this study. A detailed description of the research problem, purpose, significance and the rationale of the study is presented. A brief description of the terminology used is given in order to provide a clear understanding of how the researcher operationalises the key concepts within the context of the study. A brief overview of the methodological approaches adopted in this empirical study is also provided. This chapter concludes with a preview of the chapters to follow.

1.2 Background to the Study

Absconding of learners in schools is an international phenomenon which is becoming a huge problem as it disrupts the teaching and learning process. “Absconding among school going students is a very serious problem world over” (Dhruv, Vedmitra & Kumar, 2012, p. 174). Rodriguez and Conchas (2009) state that the connection between absconding is too familiar in the lives of urban youth and the schools that they attend. This is concurred by McCray (2006) who states that absconding is prevalent in urban settings. Basu (2012) admits that absconding is not new to schools in India but it has never been so out of control as it is these days. Kershaw (2012) postulated that according to the Department of Education in the United Kingdom, 62 000 learners missed school in 2011 due to absconding. Similarly, schools in Africa are faced with the problem of absconding. Muula, Rudatsikira, Babaniyi, Songolo and Siziya (2012) conducted a study in Zambia and found that 58, 8 percent of learners admitted to absconding in the last 30 days. For some children, absconding does not mean indulging in drugs, alcohol and sex. Moseki (2004) reported that children in South Africa abscond school so that they can stay at home and play video games. While some children abscond for trivial reasons, majority get up to risky behaviour. Thamage (2013) stated that in Soweto, more than 30 children absconded school and were found in a house nearby. They were caught by the police. The children were found in

compromising positions, indulging in alcohol and empty condom packets were found in the house (Thamage, 2013). This clearly states that not only are children neglecting their education, but they are also indulging in risky practices. To add to the issue of absconding, on a particular day at a school in Durban, learners were found in a nearby shopping center, with school attire during school hours (Vermaak, 2012). In light of this, absconding becomes a complex phenomenon which needs to be explored, as is the case of this study.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to which South Africa is a signatory, recognises that every child has a right to better life, with Article 3 referring to “the best interest of the child” (UNCRC, 2010, p. 10). Following institution of UNCRC, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) frameworks have articulated clearly the guiding principles in making sure that children are in school and that they receive quality education:

- principle 1: A broad, relevant and inclusive curriculum. The curriculum at schools must be inclusive ensuring that the needs of all learners are met. This in turn will help retain learners at school.
- principle 2: Rights-based learning and assessment. Teaching and learning must include a variety of methods rather than simply transmitting knowledge to learners. Furthermore, the environment in which children learn should be conducive and child-friendly.
- principle 3: Child-friendly and safe environment. Schools have an obligation to protect the learners and keep them safe. This includes ensuring that school buildings, walls and fences are well maintained. Learners will want to be at school if they feel safe.

This clearly implies that schools should develop relevant and effective policies and programmes in relation to teaching and learning, which in turn will retain learners in school and support the contribution to reduce learners absconding.

In South Africa, policies have been developed to enforce the rights of all children. The first is the South African Constitution (South Africa, 1996) which enshrines the rights of all people, including learners. This constitution clearly advocates that children receive quality education and

that schools become truly safe and ensures that all learners achieve their best potentials. On the same note, in 2010 the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga emphasized in her speech that “each school has a duty to protect every learner’s fundamental right to education” (Department of Education, 2010, p. 9).

There are also policies by the Department of Basic Education to support schools to meet the needs of all learners. The White Paper 6 Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 2001) lays out the framework for inclusive education, including provision of guidelines to retain learners at school. The policy calls for “enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners” (Department of Education, 2001, p. 6). This highlights the need for schools to be enabling and teachers need to use learning methodologies that keep learners at school and hence reduce absconding.

The National Educational Policy Act: Norms and Standards for Educators (Department of Education, 2000) guides teachers by defining the roles and processes of teaching and learning, as well as supporting the learners experiencing different challenges, and it curbs the unnecessary learners absence from schools. The teachers’ roles to meet the diverse needs of learners are numerous and relate to quality education and holistic well-being of all the children, the role of pastoral care, quality teaching, mediation, amongst others (Department of Education, 2000). The policy also provides guidelines on the benefits of teacher, learner and parent’s collaboration in supporting learners, including, absconding.

The Policy on Learner attendance at Public Ordinary Schools (Department of Education, 2010) provides practical guidelines to schools on developing their own learner attendance policy. The policy also provides guidelines on monitoring and managing learners absenteeism or absconding, in the case of this study. The policy places obligation on a principal, parent or guardian to manage learner’s attendance regularly. For instance, South African school’s Code of Conduct (Department of Education, 2008) states, “no learner may leave the school during school hours without a letter from a parent/guardian requesting the release of their child and the permission of the principal must be obtained” (p. 5). Similarly, the Department of Education (2010, p. 12)

maintains that “a parent is expected to ensure that a learner attends school daily, on time and for the whole school day”. The community also plays an important role in schooling. If members of the community see children outside school during school hours they should enquire as to why they are not in school. Kelto (2013) believes that it is a South African trend of communal parenting.

Despite enabling policies described above and other numerous guidelines, managing and monitoring learners absconding is still high, especially in public school (Makhubu, 2013). The reasons for learners absconding are multiple and complex and relate to problems that public schools as a whole encounter. Attwood (2006) contends that absconding occurs due to poor relationships between learners and educators in public schools. Public schools do not appear to be adequately creating an environment that ensures positive learning, resulting in sexual harassment and forcing learners out of school, amongst others (Makhubu, 2013). The issue of enabling environment is fundamental to the monitoring and management of learners absconding (Perumal, 2011). The idea of making school enabling is to ensure that learners who abscond from schools will be able to share their reasons and experiences of absconding.

This study therefore seeks to explore factors that contribute to learners absconding in a selected school in Phoenix, in South Africa. It also attempts to gain an understanding of how learners absconding affects the teaching and learning as a whole in this selected school. Before describing the issue of absconding, it will be helpful to provide a brief rationale for undertaking this study.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

The rationale of this study emanates from two essential elements; personal and from literature. Firstly, from a personal dimension, I have been teaching in a school in Phoenix, KwaZulu Natal for the past six years and have observed that the absconding rate in this institution has been increasing. In a class of 32 learners, approximately seven attend lessons on a daily basis. Learners attendance registers provide a gloomy picture, thus showing that majority of learners abscond class or school on daily basis. Upon interaction with some learners, the researcher discovered that there are differing reasons for learners absconding. For some, it is a wide-range of issues that make school boring, including, lack of resources, student discipline, poor learner-

teacher relationships, and own personal problems. Though schools have developed policies to manage learners attendance, absconding in the Phoenix area is still rife. As a teacher, the researcher became aware of how learners absconding affect other learners, educators, parents and the principal, as well as teaching and learning as a whole.

Studies on factors that contribute to the high rate of learner absenteeism have been conducted (Baker, Sigmon & Nugent, 2001; Johns, 2012; Legotlo et al., 2002; Thambiran, 2013) with widely varying factors, including lack of student discipline (Legotlo et al., 2002); Discipline issues, lack of resources and security measures (Thambiran, 2013); reading problems and overwhelming tasks at school (John, 2012); truancy, thus, “leaving the class during lessons, coming to school late and disappearing before noon” (Legotlo et al., 2002, p.115). Johns (2012) claimed that in just one day, 55 children ranging from Grades R to 12 were caught absconding school in Athlone, Western Cape Province of South. In my observation, I have noticed that majority of the absconders are from the higher grades (Grades 10 to 12). Baker et al. (2001) argued that absconding is most prevalent at the age of 15.

Factors that contribute to absconding are not homogenous, as described in the previous section. They are linked to, and dependent on the interaction between a variety of subsystems including, individual, peers, teachers, family environment, school environment and community as a whole. South Africa’s schools vary a lot, some located in rural, peri-urban, urban, formal and informal settlements. As a result, factors contributing to learners absconding and their influence on teaching learning cannot be the same. Little is known about the factors that contribute to learners absconding in peri-urban schools in South Africa, more specifically in Phoenix. This study utilised a case study from a selected school in Phoenix to explore factors that contribute to learners absconding and its effects on teaching and learning.

1.4 Problem Statement

Over the past decade children’s education has been on the agenda of every debate nationally and internationally. However, barriers to education, in this case, learners absconding continue to remain a challenge in many schools as indicated at the beginning of this chapter. South African policies, guidelines and initiatives on learners attendance and to curb the high rate of learners

absenteeism have been slow, patchy and fragmented (Makhubu, 2013). The education system has increased the school's responsibility to effectively develop their own school policies to monitor and manage learners absenteeism (Department of Education, 2008). School members, such as, principal, teachers, and parents must work together to decrease learners who absent themselves from schools. More specifically, learners should not leave school without the principal's and/or parent's permission. The question one may ask is whether schools, especially the studied one, has relevant policies and is indeed implementing the policies. Another concern is the wide-ranging variation of factors that contribute to learners absconding, that is, whether national policy, to curb absenteeism is enough to address these factors, or is there a need to develop school-based policies that are specific and context-bound. In this regard, Oswald and Swart (2011, p.3) said "The gap between policy development and implementation remains a challenge".

In addition, research regarding factors that contribute to learners absconding stems from the fact that research mostly focused either on rural or urban schools and little is known about peri-urban schools. Moreover, research, including some of these studies at the beginning of this chapter involved educators or parents, thereby limiting the voices of the learners themselves. There could be many factors, contributing to the absconding, which need to be voiced by the learners themselves. All learners, including those who abscond, are expected to be involved in all decisions that are aimed at them, heard and listened to, and supported. Despite clearly articulated policies and guidelines, many learners are still excluded in decisions-making processes (Mncube & Harber, 2013). This study incorporates both the teachers and learners as significant in understanding factors that contribute to learners absconding and its effect on teaching and learning, especially in selected peri-urban schools in Phoenix.

1.5 Importance of the Study

The study provides an understanding of why these learners abscond school and how it impacts on their education. From tertiary level, this research will generate knowledge which may be useful for other researchers in the same field. Schools will benefit from this research since it can help improve the quality of education in these institutions. From a class level, children are made aware of how absconding not only affects those who abscond, but also those who attend school

regularly. From a personal professional development perspective as an educator, it will enable us (educators) to structure our lessons in a way that includes every learner. This can further help educators understand why learners abscond, hence this will make us more compassionate toward them creating a good rapport with learners since these are some of the reasons why learners abscond.

Furthermore, this study will enable the learners who abscond to comment on their experiences. Thus, the research may come up with information which may lead to more durable solutions.

1.6 Focus of the Study

According to Vithal and Jansen (2010) the first step in a research process is deciding on a focus. The focus of this study is to explore the factors contributing to learners absconding school in the Phoenix, Durban area.

1.7 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- Investigate factors that contribute to the high absconding rate.
- Examine the impact that absconding has on teaching and learning.

1.8 Research Questions

- What are the factors that contribute to absconding of learners?
- How does absconding impact on teaching and learning?

1.9 Clarification of Terms

1.9.1 Learner

The Department of Education (2010) defines a ‘learner’ as a person who is obliged to receive education in terms of the South African Schools Act (Department of Education, 1996). For this study special reference is made to learners who are in the Further Education and Training phase (FET), which consist of grades 10 to 12 of a public Secondary School.

1.9.2 High School

Schooling in South Africa is made up of primary and secondary education. According to Department of Education (2011) a high school offers from grade 8 to 12. A 'Grade' is defined as an educational course which a learner completes in one year (Department of Education, 1996).

1.9.3 Absconding

According to Claes, Hooghe and Reeskens (2009) absconding takes a number of forms from learners arriving late at school to learners not even coming to school at all. Some learners stay in school but do not attend certain lessons. Kinder (1996) stated that absconding is defined as a learner who remains in school but loiters around and attends lessons that interest them and avoids those that are not appealing to them. Absconding may refer to absenteeism, thus referring to the frequent non-attendance at school. It can be categorised into excusable and non-excusable absence (Kearney, 2008). In other words absconding and absenteeism could be used interchangeably and vary from country to country or context to context.

For the intention of this study absconding is used, referring to absent from school, non-attendance of certain lessons, excusable and non-excusable absence.

1.10 Research Design and Methodology

1.10.1 Research Design

The paradigmatic position for this study is the interpretivist. In the interpretivist paradigm, the aim of educational research is to understand the meaning behind learners experiences, which is a part of the social and cultural context in which they occur (Kim, 2003). The researcher adopted the interpretive paradigm because it enabled her to understand why learners abscond. The study employed a qualitative research approach. Qualitative approach does not aim to generalize, but to acquire an in-depth exploration of an event (Creswell, 2012). The researcher aimed to get rich textual data from the learners. The qualitative approach enabled participants to interact extensively in order to understand the phenomena (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

A case study was adopted because the researcher intended to do an in-depth investigation of a school in Phoenix where learners absconding rate is high. Punch (2009, p. 119) said:

A case study aims to understand the case in-depth, and in its natural setting, recognizing its complexity and its context. It also has a holistic focus, aiming to preserve and understand the wholeness and unity of the case.

The purpose of the research was to understand why learners are absconding and what are the factors that lead them to abscond. The researcher also took into consideration that this study was context driven and is not applicable to other contexts.

1.10.2 Research Methodology

1.10.2.1 The Sample

Teddlie and Yu (2007) stated that the representative selection of people, places or things from which data is gathered is called a sample. Three sampling techniques were used: (i) snowball, (ii) convenience, (iii) purposive. Snowball sampling was used to choose the participants. Convenience sampling was used to choose the school. Since the researcher teaches at the same school that the research was conducted in, it was easily accessible. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p.156) maintained that “the researcher simply chooses the sample from those to whom she has easy access.” Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. The participants included educators and learners. Purposive sampling is characterized by deliberate targeting of samples. Creswell (2012) argues that researchers deliberately select individuals, likewise the researcher deliberately chose the learners and educators. In addition, Creswell (2012) states that almost every qualitative research uses purposive sampling. Since my study is qualitative in nature the researcher used purposive sampling. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) the number of participants in a study is referred to as a sample. There was a total of ten participants. A small sample of ten participants were used because the researcher intended to do extensive discussions with them and it is compatible with a qualitative case study (Yin, 2009).

1.10.2.2 Data Generation and Analysis

Since this study involved close interaction with the participants, a focus group was used. According to Check and Schutt (2010) a focus group requires the researcher to form a group of individuals in which a discussion is conducted regarding the topic at hand. Furthermore, open-ended questionnaires were given to the learner participants. This allowed learners who are shy to

speak in front of a group of people or even alone, the opportunity to freely express their views. All participants participated in individual semi-structured interviews. This allowed the participants to express their views about absconding more freely. Documentary sources were used to gain information about how often these learners abscond. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) assert that documents are records of that which are written or printed.

The data analysis plan that was used is content analysis. Data was first organised making sure that all videos captured are sorted. Videos were played and then transcribed by the researcher. Transcriptions were typed out by the researcher and were read numerous times until the researcher began the coding process. This was written out on the side of the transcript. Once the coding was completed, themes were formulated. According to Creswell (2012) the data analysis process includes organising, transcribing, coding the data and then formulating themes. In addition, interpretation was linked to Bronfenbrenner's socio ecological model as a framework in order to understand factors that contribute to learners absconding in a selected school in Phoenix.

1.10.3 Ethical Consideration

Ethical clearance was acquired from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Educational Psychology) since this was the discipline project. Permission was granted by Department of Education and the school. Consent forms were sent out to all participants and they were told about the purpose of the research and were asked to read and sign consent forms. Participants were made aware that it is voluntary to take part in the study. This meant that no participant should be forced to participate (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Furthermore, the participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were emphasized. Pseudonyms were used hence reassuring confidentiality. Since the study requires interacting with children, they might be sensitive while revealing personal issues and that can result in psychological trauma or may cause them to feel ashamed or embarrassed, hence a professional counsellor was on standby if the need arose. This ensured that no harm goes to the learner.

1.11 Organisation of Dissertation

This dissertation comprises of six chapters:

Chapter one presents the Introduction and Background to the Study. The intention of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of the study and the context within which this study takes place. It also presents the research questions, the research design and methodology used in the study.

Chapter two presents the Literature Review on absconding. It further discusses policies and legislation that pertains to absconding as well as initiatives to keep learners at school. The literature has been structured following themes and it was drawn from international, continental and South African contexts.

Chapter three outlines the Theoretical Framework that was used for the study. Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Theory was used to frame this study. It discusses the origins of the study and explains in detail Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. The strengths and weaknesses of this theory are also presented.

The fourth chapter presents the Research Design and Methodology. The paradigm within which the study was conducted is outlined and the approach adopted in this study is explained. The research aims are reiterated and the details of the design presented. Research methods and instruments employed are described in detail and their suitability for the study illuminated. Issues pertaining to the trustworthiness and ethics of the research are also discussed.

Chapter five includes Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion. This chapter presents the results of the study by analyzing and discussing the themes that emerged from all the data collecting instruments.

Lastly, chapter six outlines the Summary of the Findings and Recommendations. This chapter also presents a critical reflection on the research and gives limitations of the study. It concludes by giving closing remarks of the study.

1.12 Conclusion

This section presented the research topic, rationale of the study, the statement of the problem, focus and purpose, objectives and critical questions. Terminology was clarified making it easier for readers to understand concepts. The research methodology was then briefly highlighted. The next section will focus on the literature review.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Vithal and Jansen (2010) define literature review as a synthesis of what has already been written about a topic. It is a systematic analysis of work written by scholars in a particular field (Baker et al., 2001). Furthermore, Meda (2013) asserts that literature review is done to delimit the problem and to have a deep understanding of your study. Among other motives, literature is reviewed to show that we are aware about the issues and debates in the field of research.

This chapter reviews literature that is associated with absconding of learners. This chapter uses a thematic approach. It begins by illuminating the difference between absenteeism, absconding and truancy since absconding is sometimes mistaken for absence. It then moves on to an overview of the life world of an absconder. The third section focuses on the factors contributing to learners absconding. The fourth section speaks about the challenges of absconding. The fifth section deals with policies and lastly, the contribution of partnerships is presented.

2.2 Exploring Concepts: Absconding, Absenteeism and Truancy

From the onset, the researcher found that it is imperative to distinguish between these three terminologies since there are similarities between these words and in different countries these words are used interchangeably.

2.2.1 Absconding

Absconding is a broad term which has many definitions. According to Ebersohn and Eloff (2006) there is a kaleidoscopic understanding of absconding. McCray (2006) defines absconding as the unexcused absence from school. Since there are different conceptions of absconding, for the context of my study, I have used the definition of absconding given by Kinder (1996) who defines absconding as learners who remains in school but loiter around and attend lessons that interest them and avoids those that are not appealing to them and some learners who choose to

leave before the school day ends. There are alternate words for absconding. Words such as ‘bunking off’, ‘wagging’ and ‘bobbing’ are a few synonyms for absconding (Gleeson, 1994). Absconding is an issue that is not only native to South Africa. Badgajar and Joshi (2013) said that the main concern for schools in India was absconding. In the United Kingdom (UK) schools, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) is the official body ensuring that all schools have quality education. Reid (2000) maintains that OFSTED’s visits to the UK schools are finding that absconding is a problem. Harber (2009) concurs that OFSTED found that schools in the UK are faced with the issue of absconding. Although it may appear that absconding and absenteeism are similar, it is actually different.

2.2.2 Absenteeism

Absence refers to the non-attendance at school. Kearney (2008) claimed that it can be categorized into excusable and inexcusable absence. Excusable absence can be related to illnesses or injuries whereas inexcusable absence is associated with learners refusing to go to school. This is referred to as school refusal. Inexcusable behaviour can also be caused by school withdrawal such as parents forcing learners to stay away from school due to economic reasons (Kearney, 2003)

2.2.3 Truancy

In some countries absconding is referred to as truancy, which is defined as a learner leaving school for three days or more without a valid reason (De Witte & Csillag, 2012) while in other countries that is referred to as absenteeism. Claes et al. (2009) define truancy in Europe as illegal absence. Each country has its own definition of truancy depending on its culture (Strand, 2012). There are two main types of truancy, blanket and post-registration truancy. Stoll (1990, p. 23) asserts that “blanket” truancy refers to learners who intend to come to school but do not end up at school while post-registration truancy is when a learner is marked present on the school register but does not attend lessons. In India, truancy refers to children who attend school but do not regularly attend classes (Dhruv et al., 2012). This is more aligned with absconding.

According to Reid (2000, p. 1) truancy is known in parts of Great Britain as ‘skipping off’, ‘mitching’, ‘dodging’, ‘skiving’, ‘bunking-off’ and ‘going missing’. This is concurred by

Wilson, Malcom and Davidson (2008, p. 1) who believe that truancy is known as “Bunking-off”. From a South African perspective, Moseki (2004, p. 21) maintains that most learners use the term “bunking”, which is mentioned before as another term for absconding, when they refer to truancy. Therefore, in this particular context, truancy will be referred to as a learner who skips school, a particular class or comes late to school (Strand, 2012) and henceforth in this dissertation truancy will be referred to as absconding. The issue of absconding is a reality and is continuing on a daily basis. Below is a case study revealing the experiences of absconding.

2.3 Understanding the Life World of Absconding (A Case Study)

Jane, a 13 year old girl leaves home with the intention of going to school but does not end up at school. When she does go to school she pays very little interest in the lesson and does not involve herself in class discussions. She has been absconding from primary school at the tender age of 9. Her mother is aware of her actions and is in need of assistance. Jane is unruly. At home, she eats, sleeps and plays loud music and during the day she is roaming the streets. She has no friends and she dislikes her teacher. Her mother feels helpless and gets little help from the school which she regards as being very insensitive. Now and then she gets a letter from school stating that her child has been absconding. For her, she feels even low because it reminds her of her own days when she used to abscond school. The social worker involved offers her some comfort but does not really provide any change. The long-term outlook for Jane is very grim.

(Adapted from Reid, 2000)

The purpose of the case study is to show that absconding is a reality and happening on a daily basis. It also shows us that there are a multitude of factors that contribute to learners absconding. With absconding being rife, especially in this context, many learners leave home with the intention of going to school but do not really end up at school. For those learners who do come to school, some of them chose not to go to class or be part of the learning process. Others engage in meaningless activities. Reid (2000) maintains that children engage in meaningless activities while they are absconding school. Henry (2010) maintains that children who abscond use drugs. This is backed up by Chimwamurombe (2011) who claims that children who abscond deal with drugs. Baker et al. (2001) contends that smoking leads to children absconding since some of them are unable to freely smoke at home. Rodriguez and Conchas (2009) postulate that while children abscond they indulge in smoking and consuming alcohol. For many, they have started to

abscond from a very young age hence it has become a part of them. However, absconding is particularly prevalent in high schools. According to Attwood (2006) absconding is increasing in high schools. It can be suggested that although the schools are aware of it, not much is being done about it. Even though policies exist regarding absconding, educators do not implement policies, perhaps because of the lack of interpretation or they do not have access to these policies. According to Baker et al. (2001) students abscond when there is lack of comprehending policies. This suggests that educators do not understand the policies properly therefore are unable to explain the policies to learners. Monobe and Baloyi (2012) maintain a lack of interpretation of policies hinders the implementation of it.

Absconding has educational and social implications for learners. In relation to the case study above, since Jane does not socialize, she has no friends. This destroys the possibility of social progress. Furthermore, it has educational effects since these absconders are not in the class they are unable to understand what is being taught, consequently they fail. It is obvious that if a learner is absconding from such a young age he/she is bound to be far behind with their school work. In addition if learners do not share a good relationship with their educators, even if they want assistance, they are afraid to ask. As seen in the case study (A life world of absconding), Jane does not share a good relationship with her educators hence she does not like them. Strand (2012) postulated that absconding stems from a school level such as not sharing a good relationship with teachers.

There is no universal cause for absconding, however, issues at school are the main reason why learners abscond (Reid, 2000). The case study mentioned above, showed us that it is for personal reasons, reasons within the family and within the school that cause Jane to abscond. However, there are other factors of absconding. These factors are further discussed in the section below.

2.4 Response to Absconding: Factors

The causes of absconding are “multiple, complex and contested” (Malcom, Wilson, Davidson & Kirk, p. 60, 2003). However, Baker et al. (2001) maintained that factors such as lack of parental guidance, school climate, economic issues and lack of understanding school laws influence absconding. Monobe and Baloyi (2012) state that peer group influences as well as socio-environmental, psychological and cultural factors play a role in absconding. Whereas McCray

(2006) states that there are four causes of absconding and these are found in an unsupportive school environments, lack of community support, chaotic family life, and personal, academic or social deficits. Gullatt and Lemoine (1997) maintain that there is a combination of student, family and school elements. Claes et al. (2009) concurred that there are three kinds of factors that contribute to absconding. These factors are situated in the individual, family and school level (Claes et al., 2009). Bronfenbrenner (1986) postulates that these factors are situated within the proximal levels of the microsystem. This level starts with the learner being in the center of the microsystem.

2.4.1 Individual

Harber (2009) believes that when it comes to absconding, learners are the problem not the schools. From an individual level, Corville-smith, Ryan, Adams and Dalicandru (1998) postulated that learners who have low academic self-esteem tend to abscond. Psychologically, absconding is suggestive of pupils who are insecure, have low academic and general levels of self-esteem, and have personality disorders (Reid, 2000). These conditions may indicate more serious conditions in later adolescence and adult life. Baker et al. (2001) state that student variables such as drug and alcohol abuse are some of the reasons why learners abscond. The next close interaction the child would have is with their family. Some children abscond school because of factors within their families.

2.4.2 Family

McNeal (1999) proposes that from a family level, children who come from a background of abuse and neglect are more susceptible to abscond than children who come from good families. Monobe and Baloyi (2012) concurs that parental neglect is a common cause that influences absconding. Baker et al. (2001) agree that a lack of parental guidance leads children to abscond. This conforms with Reid (2000) who also believe that parental involvement curbs absconding. As seen in the case study, an additional factor that encourages Jane to abscond is due to family factors. Jane has a single mother who herself was an absconder and feels helpless about her daughter's situation, therefore she feels that not much can be done about it. It is for this reason that Zhang (2010) believes that more parental involvement will result in lower absconding rate.

Legally, absconding is a problem because parents fail to ensure that their children receive a fulltime education (Reid, 2000). Although there are many other influences that exist within the family, I have chosen to discuss the *economic and social factors*.

Economic Factors

Sometimes economic factors influence children to abscond. These include children who are employed, single-parent homes and parents who have multiple jobs (Baker et al., 2001). Sometimes children have no choice but to abscond because they are employed part-time because they want to help out in their household. Other children simply abscond because they come from single parent homes where some of them (parents) are working double jobs. Their parents do not play an active role in their schooling career not because they are not interested, but because of their workload. There is no time to report to school if their child is absconding. This can be misconstrued by the school as the parent not taking responsibility for their children and eventually schools come to the “realization” that they are not interested, hence they so not bother if the child repeatedly absconds henceforth.

Social Factors

Sociologically, absconding is known to be linked with multiple adverse home conditions, low social class and deprivation (Reid, 2000). This coincides with Marsh (2000) who stated that a report which was commissioned by the Federal Department of Employment and Education identified that learners from low socio economic backgrounds abscond. This suggests that a correlation exist between learners absconding and their socio-economic background. Apart from factors situated within the family, many factors lie within the school that promotes learners to abscond from school.

2.4.3 School

Schools are supposed to be the center of care and support. However, research has shown that is not the case. When children do not feel a sense of belonging in school, they often seek support elsewhere, which can result in absconding (McCray, 2006). Institutionally, absconding suggests dissatisfaction from school (Reid, 2000). It is for this reason that schools need to provide a

supportive and structured environment. Studies have shown that children who like school excel academically (Hallinan, 2008). Therefore schools have an impact on the absconding levels. Baker et al. (2001) assert that the school climate is a factor that contributes to absconding. Henry and Huizenga (2007, p. 508) stated: “Peer influence is important because schools bring children together”. However, when it is bringing children together for the wrong reasons then it does create problems. Scott (2007) postulates that peer pressure contributes to absconding. Reid (2000) stated that during the 1950’s and 1960’s absconding was an isolated activity however, these days, through evidence, absconding is more organised, pre-planned and in groups. It was found from previous studies that children who become involved with delinquent peers are more likely to start committing delinquent acts such as absconding (Henry & Huizinga, 2007). Prichard and Williams (2001) maintain that absconding takes place with others which indicates peer influence. A pull factor stated by Henry & Huizinga (2007) indicates that learners abscond to be with their friends. Furthermore, Rossouw (2003) maintains that even if children do not want to abscond, they still do since they do not wish to get teased by their peers for not absconding. While Attwood (2006) mentions that a correlation exists between the dislike of school and lack of relationships with teachers especially when they feel unwanted, hence this is a push factor that contributes to learners absconding. Moseki (2004) regards this as a defense mechanism because they feel this is the only way forward.

Lehr, Sinclair and Christenson (2004) state that the relationships between learners and educators are vital in keeping learners involved in school. Perumal (2011) agrees that teachers are the most vital factor ensuring that children receive the best education possible, therefore it is important to create a positive school climate. It is for this reason that a dearth of good relationships between children and educators in the classroom could be followed by absconding (Reid, 2008). Pomeroy (1999) believes that absconding occurs in schools where there is an unfriendly relationship between learners and teachers. Bad relationship results in a negative school atmosphere, which may lead to non-attendance (Attwood 2006). If students feel ignored, misunderstood, devalued, or disrespected by their teachers, they are likely to react negatively (Hallinan, 2008). High levels of engagement are associated with higher attendance of lessons at school (Klem & Connell, 2004). However, Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart and Eloff maintain that it very difficult for educators to divide their attention amongst learners. This is evident that inclusivity is not being

practiced in schools. Contradictory to this, Bloom and Smith (2001) postulate that children abscond due to school phobia and not because they do not feel included in class. School phobia occurs when learners do not want to go to school (Bloom & Smith, 2001). In addition Yoneyama (2000) explains that school phobia is a psychiatric discourse which can be regarded as mental illness, the behavioural discourse which is known as pupil laziness and the socio-medical discourse which is learner fatigue and learners are criticized for learners 'not fitting' in school. According to Mokhele (2007) educators who develop good relationships with learners do not have problems with absconding. This is concurred by Strand (2012) who conducted a study in Sweden and found that when learners restored their relationship with their teachers they developed a positive attitude toward school hence it limited absconding. It was found that students' who perceive that their teachers care about them, respect them, and praise them are more likely to like school than those who do not abscond (Hallinan, 2008). Besides caring educators give children hope (Khanare, 2012). Contradictory to this, Mokhele (2007) argues that if educators maintain a friendly relationship with learners, they will lose their authority in class. Therefore, some educators choose to maintain a strict relationship with learners so that they do not encounter discipline issues. This has an adverse effect because some children abscond lessons due to educators overbearing attitude and character. However, according to Prinsloo (2005) South African educators have a responsibility towards the safety and the protection of learners, not only in terms of the Constitution and other legislation, but also in terms of their *in loco parentis*.

According to the Department of Education (2000), there are seven roles of an educator. One of the roles includes playing a pastoral role in the lives of the learners. This means that they play the role of a parent in school. Prinsloo (2005, p. 9) maintained: "The duty of care of an educator is therefore compared to the degree of care that a diligent father of a family would serve towards his family". This indicates that an educator should treat a child in a loving and caring way as what a parent would do, but this is not always the case. Since there is an ongoing challenge to maintain an atmosphere that is conducive to learning, it results in educators shouting at learners Chimwamurombe (2011). However, if an educator is able to identify if a learner has issues, he/she will be more understanding to the learner's situation (Mugabe, 2013).

The educational style at a school makes a difference (Pellerin, 2005). Rodriguez and Conchas(2009) maintain that learners abscond when they find school boring. Strand (2013) states that not comprehending the work taught leads to absconding. Rutter (1983) maintains that if the educator's instruction is more inspiring, this will encourage learners to participate in the lesson. Sheppard (2005) found that learners abscond because they did not like their school lessons. Rodriguez and Conchas (2009) maintain that learners abscond due to their lessons being boring. However, Moseki (2004) states that there is no relationship between absconding and the subjects that learners abscond. Furthermore, literature has shown that children abscond due to corporal punishment. However, according to Department of Education (1996, p. 17): "No person shall administer corporal punishment or subject a student to psychological or physical abuse at any educational institution." Grayson (2006) stated that between two to three million incidents of corporal punishment are reported in a year. According to the Department of Education (1996) discipline should be corrective and nurturing. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) has underlined that corporal punishment be banned. However, in countries like South Africa, it is still being practiced (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). Some educators believe that corporal punishment is necessary with the notion that this will teach them not to repeat the mistake (Mugabe, 2013). However, Kimaryo (1998) believes that educators do not have to use corporal punishment to get learners to behave, they can praise good behavior and this in turn will reduce discipline problems. There is a notion that bullying only takes place among peers. Zdravomyslova and Gorshkova (2006) concur by saying that educators insult learners and even use physical force on them. In this way educators can be guilty of bullying (Harber, 2009). Schools need to ensure that it is a bully-free zone. Wilson et al. (2008) stated that schools in the UK abscond due to being victims of bullying. This suggests that absconding is a discipline problem.

The way in which learners are treated determines the discipline and tone at school. "Safe schools are characterized by good discipline, a culture conducive to teaching and learning, professional educator conduct, good governance and management practices, and an absence (or low level) of crime and violence" (Squelch, 2001, p. 137).

When schools encounter discipline problems this is an indication of a poor relationship between members of the school and bad management (Department of Education,1996). Badgujar and Joshi (2013) believe that the success of the school depends on the ability of the principal.

According to Chimwamurombe (2011) principals are responsible for fostering a caring school environment. Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu and Van Rooyen (2010, p.162) concur:

The core purpose of principal ship is to provide leadership and management in all areas of the school under which high quality teaching and learning can take place.

It is for this reason that Masekoameng (2010) believes that principals who are autocratic experience voluminous discipline problems at school. According to Mugabe (2013) school rules are the foundation to create discipline at school. Chimwamurombe (2011) maintains that these beliefs are regarded as the hidden curriculum and are taught to learners indirectly. When schools encounter discipline problems this is an indication of a poor relationship between members of the school and bad management (Department of Education,1996). Henry & Huizinga (2007) state that children abscond school because it is unsafe. According to Prinsloo (2005) indicators of safe schools include the presence of certain physical features such as secure walls, fencing and gates, buildings that are in a good state of repair, and well-maintained school grounds. Lehr et al. (2004) state that school structures are important in keeping learners at school. In addition, schools are being faced with discipline issues that hinder the learning process and lead to children absconding (Maheba & Prinsloo, 2000). In Australia, discipline is a major problem that educators encounter (Wolhuter & Steyn, 2003). Schools in Nigeria also face the issue of discipline problems (Nakpodia, 2010). Rossouw (2003) adds that schools face discipline issues as a result of over emphasizing on human rights. Apart from the absconders enjoying the ‘pleasures’ of absconding, there are major consequences for not only the absconder but also on other stakeholders at school since it impacts on teaching and learning.

2.5 Effects of Absconding

The effects of absconding are mammoth. Therefore this section will be divided into: *educational, social and economic effects*. This is backed up by Reid (2000) who agrees that absconding is a social, educational and economic problem.

2.5.1 Educational

Absconding has implications for teaching and learning. Dhruv et al. (2012) asserted that absconding is an educational problem. However, Claes et al. (2009) believed that absconding is a law and order problem and not an educational issue. The researcher disagrees with that since absconding prevents schools from reaching their goals, therefore is an educational issue. From a South African perspective, Legotlo et al. (2002) maintained that while developed countries like United States of America (USA) and the UK concentrate on improving the quality of education, in South Africa more attention is spent on improving the grade 12 pass rate. Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) conducted a study in South Africa and found that one of the effects of school violence is absconding of classes. Similarly, Nelson and Almon (2013) found that in South Africa, violence was prevalent in high schools and the effects on learners were absconding of classes and performing poorly in their work. Absconding has the most effect on the absconder itself. Wilson et al. (2008) maintained that the person affected the most when absconding is the learner himself. It is taken for granted that if a learner absconds school, he/she will perform poorly. Educationally, absconding is a concern because absconders generally tend to fall behind in their work and their attitude and behavior in the case of disruptive learners affects other pupils and teachers, as well as themselves (Reid, 2000). However, research has shown that absconding is not necessarily harmful to other learners in the class and educators. It is for this reason that this section will be divided into two sub-sections: *negative and positive effects*.

Negative Effects

From a UK Perspective, Attwood (2006) agrees that absconding leads to poor results in school. Reid (2008) found that absconding is associated with a lower level of academic self-esteem. The fact that learners are not in class, this disrupts the learning process and hence the child would miss something important that was taught (Wilson et al., 2008). This can result in early drop out from school (De Witte & Csillag, 2012).

However, this also has negative implications for learners who attend school regularly and educators. Claes et al. (2009, p.125) argued that “endemic absconding can disturb the entire pedagogical process within the class, negatively affecting the learners who are present in class”. Dhruv et al. (2012) assert that absconding needs to be taken seriously as this affects other

learners in the class. This is backed by Wilson et al. (2008) that regular attenders end up helping the absconder, hence absconding affects them. In addition, learners who attend school regularly might model the behavior of absconders (Wilson, 2008). Chimwamurombe (2011) agrees that children repeat actions of other children. Furthermore, some absconders have the tendency to disturb lessons because they are backward with work, they do not understand the current work being taught due to absconding and hence they become bored and disruptive. According to Mokhele (2007) absconding has an effect on educators since teaching time is spent on dealing with absconders. Henry and Huizinga (2007) state that as a result of absconding, educational time is being lost. Some educators feel that there is not enough time during the lesson to re-explain to the absconders, therefore they use up their free time or breaks to teach the absconders. Dhruv et al.(2012) postulate that educators feel “stressed” since absconders add to their workload as they need to give them extra lessons to ensure that they understand. Similarly, Wilson et al. (p. 2008, p. 14) postulated that absconding “adds to the workload” of teaching. Furthermore, Wilson et al. (2008) found that educators in their study indicated that poor academic results suggest poor teaching strategies and this affects the school’s reputation.

Positive Effects

On a more positive note, absconding does have positive effects for other role players of the school. Many educators also have little sympathy with learners who abscond. As professionals the main concern is imparting knowledge to learners, therefore they feel that good attendance is essential if learners want to make satisfactory progress. Furthermore, educators are busy people. Their work does not only include teaching but also a lot of administration, therefore very few of them have the time to know a great deal about those learners who abscond (Reid, 2000). This breakdown in communication between educators and absconders makes it difficult to assist them. In fact, with such pressure on today’s educators, some are pleased at the hope of instructing fewer learners. According to Wilson et al. (2008) educators feel that school is better off without the absconders since they (educators) end up spending too much time when these learners get back to school. Since educators feel that working with absconders is tiresome, they feel that it is much better not having them in class. Monobi and Baloyi (2012) maintained that they are not too sad when they find 20 learners in a class rather than 30 present because it means less work for them and furthermore, the class is more manageable for them. Also educators feel

that more teaching can get done if these absconders are not in class since they can become disruptive. In some schools absconding is so rife and not much is done about it hence teachers feel that it is pointless reporting the matter. Monobe and Baloyi (2012) state that some educators do not even report absconding. Some educators view absconding as positive, however, according to South African Constitution (1996), every child has a right to education. This is therefore my point of argument. With every right comes a responsibility, hence it is arguable that learners need to take responsibility to ensure that they are in school for the full school day and are attending all lessons but it is arguable about what are schools doing to eradicate or limit the rate of absconding or should we say what are schools not doing to curb the issue of absconding.

2.5.2 Social Effects

Rigby and Slee (1999) maintain that children are suicidal due to problems they encounter in school. Apart from absconding having impacts at school, it is linked to other difficulties in life. Absconding is linked to later difficulties in life (Reid, 2000). Absconding later results in social and law enforcement problems Male absconders will eventually marry females who used to abscond while in school as well. Later on they tend to have children who also abscond. The cycle perpetuates to the next generation, similarly like the case study mentioned, Jane's mother was an absconder in her days of schooling and now Jane is an absconder as well. Parry et al. (2004) found that alcohol and drugs are associated with declining grades and absconding. Claes et al. (2009) maintain that absconding is associated with risky behavior. This could mean drugs and criminal activities (Reid, 2008). Reid (2000) argues that from facts, 40 percent of street robberies in London, 33 percent of car thefts, 25 percent of burglaries and 20 percent of criminal damage were committed by 10 to 16 year old children, and these acts were blamed on absconding. In addition, Dhruv et al. (2012) believe that boys who abscond have a strong chance of becoming street gang members and girls are likely to fall pregnant. Absconding is also associated with a greater chance of becoming teenage parents (Reid, 2000).

Furthermore, adults who have not received adequate education are more likely to be on welfare, almost twice as likely to be unemployed, and will earn much lower wages than adults who graduate (Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, 1996). Reid (2000) maintained that a high proportion of absconders spend most of their adult lives dependent on the Social Services for

state aid. This means that the government is wasting a lot of money therefore, if absconding is reduced at schools and potential absconders receive success at school, millions of rands could be saved from this sector and used in other areas in need of funding. This suggests that absconding has implications for children even after they finish school.

In addition, in some countries, their attendance of children depends on the funding they receive from the state. According to McCray (2006) schools are losing funds because of children absconding and therefore this has an effect on other children in the school. Businesses also suffer the consequences of absconding as they now have to train unqualified workers or have to wait for qualified workers (McCray, 2006). Moreover, businesses also stand a risk of burglaries as absconders indulge in criminal activities (Baker et al., 2001). In addition, taxpayers also bear the repercussion of absconding since police officers are required to locate absconders, take them to school or even arrest them depending on what they are doing. McCray (2006, p. 32) maintained: “To pay law enforcement officers, taxes have to be increased.

2.5.3 Economic Effects

Absconding has economic consequences as well. Firstly, some children live far from home. They have to probably take public transport to school. Their parents work very hard to provide for them and by giving them money to come to school in the hope that they are receiving a proper education, they default by absconding school or even lessons. This is purely a waste of money.

Secondly, schools demand fees for the academic year. Parents are summoned to pay or else statement of results for their children will be withheld although lawfully they are not supposed to retain it. Therefore some parents ensure that the school fees are paid religiously. Not all schools receive textbooks to work from hence worksheets are duplicated to aid in teaching. It costs the school lots of money to duplicate work and only to find that learners who abscond regularly are not handed these worksheets since they are not at school when it is passed out or sometimes it is given to them but is wasted since they do not bother to look or read it. Furthermore, schools try to curb absconding by putting high fences so the learners are unable to escape school by jumping over these fences. However in some schools, the learners cut through these boundary fences in order to abscond. The costs of repairing these damaged fences became a financial burden to the school as these funds can be used to improve other facets of the school. Reid (2000) stated that a

school in the UK has built a fence that is 2.4 meters high in the hope of keeping absconders in school. Another school in Manchester spent money on fencing that is equivalent to the salary of two full time educators and this is taken from the school budget (Reid, 2000).

In reference to the discussion on the case study, absconding cannot be solved alone. The case study shows that the school has intervened and made attempts to solve the issue. For this reason policies have be drafted out for assistance.

2.6 Responses towards Absconding: Policy Context

2.6.1 Legislation

The legislature sets out the goals of the government and ensures that laws are put into place to ensure that there is order. It organizes society and protects the citizens. The legislation below focuses on children and their rights.

2.6.1.1 United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO): A Human Rights-Based approach to Education for All

UNESCO was founded on 16 November 1945 with the purpose of being the center of support and care for children, by protecting them and ensuring that they have proper education. This committee urges government of each country to ensure that children have proper education and there is family involvement. Furthermore, it states that the curriculum in schools must enable each child to attain basic skills and to prepare them to face life's challenges. "The curriculum must be inclusive and tailored to the needs of children in different or difficult circumstances" (UNESCO, 2007, p. 33). It is obvious that the government cannot fulfill their responsibilities without the assistance of parents and community members. "Parental involvement ensures that their children are committed to education" (UNESCO, 2007, p. 88).

2.6.1.2 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

According to Prinsloo (2007) the United Nations Convention on the rights of a child compels the country to pass laws and take social, educational and administrative measures to "protect the child from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse".

This act was instituted in November, 1989. The aim of this legislation was centered on the rights of children around the world. According to Convention on the rights of a child (1989) family play a fundamental role in the growth and protection of children. South Africa, Australia and United States of America are to name a few that have committed themselves to the convention (Marsh, 2000). Although these countries are part of the convention, human right violations are still taking place (Hall, 2013).

2.6.1.3 The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child commits its member states to these same measures as the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child and adds that they must take steps to ensure that a child "who is subjected to school or parental discipline shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the child". South Africa also ratified this regional convention. Furthermore, the charter states that schools must do everything in their power to ensure learners regularly attend school (Organisation of African Unity, 1999).

2.6.1.4 Constitution of South Africa

Dating back to South African history, this country was characterized by a whites-only government that inflicted racial segregation (Van de Merwe, Venter & Temane, 2009). This meant that children of colour could not attend the privileged white schools. The curriculum during apartheid ensured that it brought about control to the African education. Bloom (1965) postulated that the education of Africans was of a lower quality than any other group. The general elections of 1994 brought about a new change. A Constitution was drawn up which enshrined the rights of all citizens. According to the South African Constitution (1996) everyone has a right to education. "With the abolition of formal apartheid education in South Africa there has been a movement of children classified as Africans into schools which were previously reserved for Indians, 'Coloureds' and Whites" (Soudien, 1998, p. 7). This meant that henceforth everyone could attend the same school. The constitution further outlines that people should not be treated differently and that children are entitled to a safe school environment. One could argue that even though children have the opportunity of equal education, they are taking that for granted and therefore view absconding as not a big offence, hence they continue to do so.

2.6.1.5 South African Schools Act

The South African Schools Act was enacted in 1996. The aim was to redress past injustices and to ensure that there is standardization of governing of schools. The rights of the learners are emphasised and the roles and duties of educators and parents are outlined. One important aspect of this act is that corporal punishment should be banned and discipline should be corrective (Department of Education, 1996). This act stresses that a code of conduct should be drawn by the school governing body. This code of conduct should be based on human rights principles and should contain school rules, regulations, sanctions and disciplinary procedures (the rules of natural justice). Furthermore, this should include rules for dealing with school safety and security, and the consequences of breaching such safety and security. According to Department of Education (1996), the primary aim of the code of conduct is to establish a disciplined and purposeful school environment, dedicated to improving and maintaining the quality of the learning process. This means that the school has an obligation to ensure that all school structures are properly maintained (Department of Education, 1996).

2.6.2 Policies and Initiatives

Policies are important since it ensures control. Without policies there would be no guidance on how to make decisions. Mitchell and Walters (2011) asserted that the formulation of policy does not guarantee that policy goals will be attained. However, Rodriguez and Conchas (2009) postulate that policies should take into consideration the context of the school. Many policies only state how the offender will be at a disadvantage, however, it should include the negative impact it has on everyone. Claes et.al (2009) postulate that school policies should include the negative impacts on those learners who do come to school. Schools have internal policies which govern them. More absconding policies should be implemented in schools. Zhang (2010) asserts that more absconding campaigns need to be established. Firm messages needs to be sent to parents of absconders that absconding will not be accepted anymore (Zhang, 2010). Below are policies and initiatives that are related to my study.

2.6.2.1 Education White Paper 6

In 2001 the Department of Education in South Africa released the Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education, with the aim to build an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 2001). Inclusive Education is defined as: “enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners” (Department of Education, 2001, p. 6). This policy is relevant to my study since, through reviewing literature it was found that some of the reasons why learners abscond are due to lessons not being inclusive in nature. Reid (2000) argues that learners abscond due to reading difficulties and educational failure.

2.6.2.2 SA Policy on attendance

The purpose of this policy is to promote punctual and regular attendance at school (Department of Education, 2010). Therefore, this policy postulates standardization for recording and monitoring learner attendance. The importance of keeping a daily record of learner attendance assists the school in monitoring absconding of learners and absence so that appropriate action can be taken and parents can be notified. This, however, poses a problem because some schools are financially disadvantaged hence this does not allow them to call in parents and sometimes sending letters with learners does not work out. According to the Department of Education (2010) there are two types of registers that should be marked at school, class register and a period register. A class register should be marked by the form educator responsible for that specific class and a period register should be marked by the subject educator. The problem with this is that not every educator marks the subject register hence learners are found wandering around the school or even outside school during that specific lesson.

2.6.2.3 Norms and Standards for Educators

This policy was established in February 2000 with the sole purpose of describing the roles of an educator. According to the Department of Education (2000) an educator is a person who provides an educational service to people. This policy outlines that every educator, apart from providing a service, has to play other roles in order to develop as an educator. “The roles, their associated set of applied competence and the qualifications described here will be used by the

Department of Education for purpose of recognition and evaluation for employment as an educator” (Department of Education, 2000, p. 9). The seven roles of an educator serve as a guideline of what it means to be a competent educator. According to the Department of Education (2000), the roles of an educator are:

Learning Mediator: Educators should teach in a manner that caters for the diverse needs of learners. Communication and instruction should be effective. Various resources and strategies should be used in order to ensure that optimal learning takes place in a South African context.

Interpreter and designer of learning programmes: The educator must be able to interpret learning programmes and should prepare resources for learning. Learning should be paced to cater for the needs of all learners.

Leader, administrator and manager: The educator should be able to manage learning in the classroom and carry out administrative duties.

Scholar, researcher and lifelong learner: The educator should continuously achieve personal, academic and professional growth by forms of a reflective study and also be knowledgeable about educational matters.

Community, citizen and pastoral role: Educators should practice an attitude that promotes respect towards others. Democratic values will be practiced. The educator should create an environment to able to respond to educational and other needs. Furthermore, an educator should develop relationships with parents.

Assessor: The educator will understand that assessments are an important feature in the learning process. Assessments have to be appropriate for all levels of understanding. Detailed records of assessment should be kept.

Subject specialist: The educator will be well knowledgeable in his/her subject. Educators should know about the different approaches to teaching.

2.6.2.4 Initiatives to keep learners in school

Sometimes children need an incentive to keep them in school. Schools across the world have different programmes in place to ensure that children are kept in school for the entire school day and to ensure that they achieve academic success. Marsh (2000) stated that legislation in Australia has major policy initiatives for learners to stay in school. Below are a few initiatives to keep learners in school:

The World Food Programme: is an initiative that provides food for children in school. The benefit of this acts as an incentive to get learners to stay at school. By giving learners a meal everyday this helps keep them in school. Furthermore, in some areas these meals are the only food that a child receives, therefore it provides nutrition for them ensuring that they can focus on their studies and not their hunger as some learners abscond because they do not understand the work taught. One could argue that perhaps of their hunger they are unable to concentrate on their studies. A study conducted by Pollitt (1995) argued that a morning and overnight fast had adverse effects intellectually. Furthermore, the human brain functions to its maximum when there is an availability of nutrient supplies (Pollitt, 1995).

The Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS): was to target low income Latinos, a similar socio-economic context to my study, who were at risk of school failure (Gandara, Larson, Mehan, & Rumberger, 1998). This initiative focused on promoting student success at school. Some components included intensive attendance monitoring with the community fully involved. The results showed that participants stayed longer in school than learners who did not participate.

The Advancement via Individual Determination: Also targets low income groups with the goal of developing support systems for learners who have hopes of going to college after finishing school. Some of the skills taught include studying skills which they can use currently at school. This will provide academic success at school which in turn will keep them at school since one of the reasons that learners abscond is due to academic failure. According to Rodriguez and Conchas (2009) over time these initiatives help curb absconding. This is in line with Bronfenbrenner (1994) who states that over time, changes can take place.

The Truancy Intervention Project: Rodriguez and Conchas (2009) state that this initiative addresses truancy by pairing up volunteer lawyers to absconders in the school. Results show that more than 50 percent of the learners who were absconding re-engaged with school. Similarly, McCray (2006) states that the ‘Stay in School Program’ uses positive peer pressure and mentor support to help children with regular school attendance. Once these children are identified, they go to truancy court where a panel of older children would question them and help find solutions and thereafter mentors are assigned to them.

Young Peoples Vision: This is an initiative carried out so that the youth in schools have a space to talk to other youth, encourage and allow other youth to feel that they are not going through issues at school, home and society. Roth & Hendrikson (1991) believe that children who come from the same social background should work together and identify issues.

Furthermore, Price (2013) asserted that a study conducted in Birmingham, UK, proved that introduction of outdoor activities as an initiative to remain in school, improved attendance to all lessons at school. All the above initiative programmes include the assistance of community members. Community based programmes help to limit absconding in schools (Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009). Booth and Dunn (2013) maintain that the relationship between parents, educators, communities and school is important. Rutherford (2008) argued that the importance of this partnership is to help parents become more actively involved in their children’s education. School contributions can improve schools, strengthen communities to minimize problems and maximize results. Schools, families and communities should diligently work together to meet educational goals. Since schools are situated in communities, there should be a link between community members and schools. Schools need to design programmes that strengthen parent and community involvement. However, it is important to note that even though these programmes exist, not all parents will be involved. Rutherford (2008) postulated that not all programmes will succeed especially involving parents of low income, racial and ethnic minority and parents with a limited English vocabulary. Parents are also needed to assist with homework supervision as educators are unable to ensure that homework is done meticulously by the learners. According to UNESCO (2007) although the school has a primary objective to ensure quality education, contribution from partnerships assists in making that possible.

Absconding is a problem and something drastic has to be done about it. In order to eradicate the problem of absconding, the attitude and mindset of learners, parents and teachers need to be changed (Reid, 2000). “Each school has a duty to protect every learner’s fundamental right to education” (Department of Education, 2010, p. 13).

The gap here lies due to the disparity between theory of policies and implementation. This is due to the fact that it is influenced by context.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the literature review for the study. The next chapter presents the research methodology that was used.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on literature that was reviewed related to the issue of absconding. This chapter presents the theoretical framework that was used to guide this study. Kerlinger (1973) stated: “A theory is a set of interrelated concepts, definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena (p. 73).” Similarly, Swart and Pettipher (2011) maintain that a theoretical framework is a set of ideas which is systematically arranged in a way so we are able to understand the world and ourselves better.

This study adopts Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Social Ecological Theory as a theoretical framework since context is vital in human development. During the growth process, learners interact with systems. According to Meda (2013) children interact with microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems and chronosystems. This theory is in line with absconding since the factors that contribute to learners absconding are influenced by the context. Furthermore, this model is known for its relevance for understanding the multiple factors that influence development. This chapter begins by giving the origins of the study. It also discusses the model where the five systems are presented. Like with any theory, there are strengths and weaknesses. These are then presented. This theory is also used as an analytical framework for understanding the issue of absconding in a selected urban school in Durban, South Africa. This chapter is summed up with the conclusion.

3.2 Origins of the Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner, henceforth referred to as Bronfenbrenner, was an American psychologist who was known for developing the Bio-ecological model. This theory developed due to an infusion of the medical model and the social model. The medical model originated in the 18th century when science and philosophy were prominent. The emphasis of this model was based on disabilities and impairments of human beings. The human needs such as love and forming

relationships with families and people around them were put aside as these were not regarded as vital. However, importance was placed on their impairment (Borsay, 2004). Children with disabilities were unable to interact with 'normal' people, they were institutionalized and underwent treatment and only once they were seen as 'fit', they were released. There was a general prejudice toward people with disabilities (Malhotra, 2001). According to this model, people with disabilities were regarded as weak. People who took care of people with disabilities were respected for the generosity. However, Baboo (2011) asserts that people with disabilities were looked down upon and criticized for being needy. There had to be some form of emotional connection between people who took care of people with disabilities and non-disabled people.

The social model claims that the disability itself is not disabling, however social consequences such as isolation acts as a barrier. So in saying that, it is social consequences that hinder efficiency of people with disabilities (Rieser, 2008). An ideal example from a medical model perspective would be if a child's lack of progress at school is due to his disabilities, however, from a social model view, this model values the child and looks for ways to help the child to improve (Rieser, 2008). Bronfenbrenner infused both the medical and social model and called it the bio-ecological systems theory (Stubbs, 2008). This theory was first introduced in the 1970's (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Harkonen (2007) Bronfenbrenner later added a time-related fifth system, known as the chronosystem. This involves the shift over time and affects the interactions between the systems as well as the influence on the developing time of the individual (Donald, Lazarus, Lolwana, 2010). This emphasizes the child's own biology as the main source for development. Bronfenbrenner (1994) stated that in the Bio-ecological Model:

Child development takes place through processes of progressively more complex interaction between an active child and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended period of time (p. 996).

Later this theory was revised to the social ecological systems theory with the child being in the center of all systems. Although Bronfenbrenner (1989) contended that the 1977 and 1979 versions of the theory had been amended and extended, his theory was always ecological, stressing person-context interconnection. Daniels (2013) concurs that this theory speaks about how change can be brought about within the individual's social context and so influences the

individual. Therefore, for this study, this theory is favoured since the factors contributing to learners (Persons) absconding in a school in Phoenix (Context) are in line with the theory.

The above paragraph aimed to discuss the origins of this theory and to illustrate why it was used in this study. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that human beings cannot develop in isolation, but within a system of relationships that include family and society. According to Baboo (2011) the five systems that shape the context of the child's development interrelate with one another.

3.3 Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model

Absconding of children is influenced by the context and environment which surrounds them. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological systems contends that central to the development of a child, is their context and environment. In addition, Swart and Pettipher (2011) maintain that the fundamental principal of Bronfenbrenner's social ecological model is that growth is certain to take place if there is an interaction amongst people and their environment. Therefore understanding the development of a child involves closely examining the environment in which they live in. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model views the development of children through the interaction of systems. In this model, these five systems are used to guide the researcher's thoughts about the context and the environment in which the child develops (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These systems are: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems and chronosystems.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the social ecological model graphically. It shows the systems interlinking with each other and the influence it has on the development of a child.

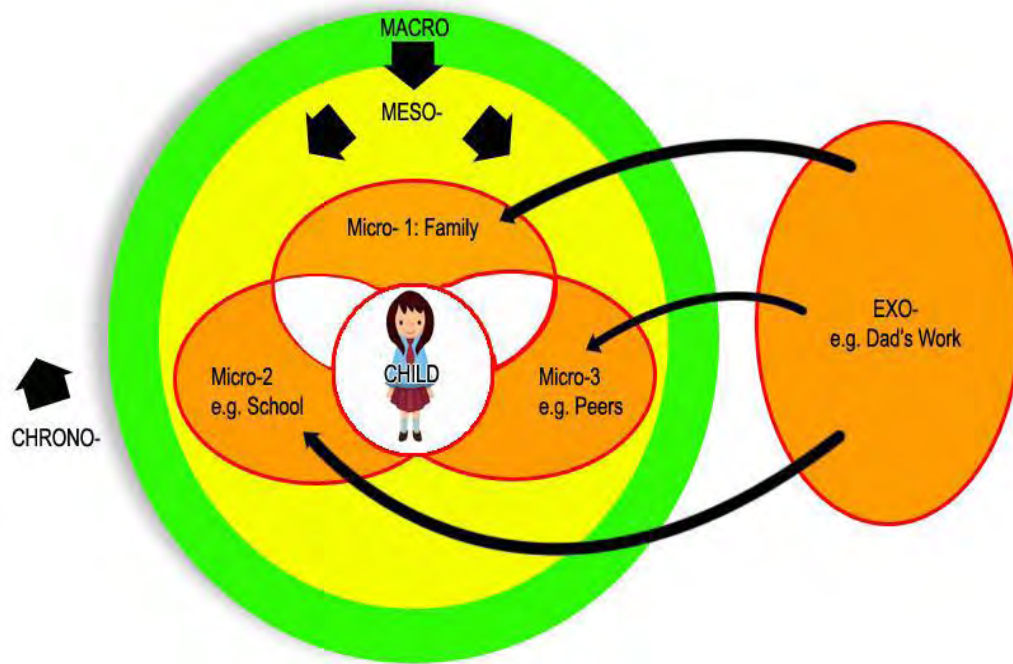


Figure 3.1: Adapted from Daniels (2003, p. 14)

3.3.1 Microsystem

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) the microsystem refers to the environment in which a person lives and creates a relationship with his/her proximal settings such as family, peers and school. It indicates the first level of interaction with other people and it begins with a child interacting with family thereafter there is an interaction with peers and people at school. The microsystem is the innermost system which is closest to the child and contains the structures with which the child has direct contact. Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen and Frater-Mathieson (2004) argue that the microsystem analyses the relationship between the individual child and the immediate settings which have a direct impact on the developing child. This system should foster the need for a learner to receive love and support. The focus of this study was based on the microsystem which is made up of the school in which the children develop. Due to the fact that children spend most of the day at school, there is an interaction between peers and educators. Sometimes this interaction can have a positive or negative effect on the child (Daniels, 2013).

On the contrary, this system can pose as a risk if parents do not play the role of re-affirming the importance of school and the repercussions of absconding. Furthermore, perhaps the lessons at school are not inclusive in nature hence learners abscond. This means that the lessons are not catering for the needs of every learner and perhaps out of boredom, learners abscond. Other learners may not develop good relationships with their educators hence they abscond those lessons. Bronfenbrenner (1999) maintains that peers, family, school and neighbours are very important in promoting the growth and development of a child.

3.3.2 Mesosystem

The second system of Bronfenbrenner's (1994) model is the Mesosystem. According to Swart and Pettipher (2011) the mesosystem is an interaction of microsystems. The Mesosystem shows the continuous interaction between the school, peers and family in the development of a child (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). An example, concerning my study, could be the poor interaction of the parents and the school. If parents are unaware of the issues at school they are unable to assist. Sometimes indirect issues affect the child. This is referred to as the exosystem.

3.3.3 Exosystem

The exosystem is the third system of Bronfenbrenner's model (1992) which is regarded as the social context and exists when the learner is not directly involved but is affected indirectly.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1986):

The psychological development of children in the family is affected not only by what happens in the other environments in which children spend their time but also by what occurs in the other settings in which their parents live their lives, especially in a place that children seldom enter like the parents' world of work (p. 723).

Although the influence of an exosystem is indirect, its effects on human development can be fervent (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2010). In relation to my study, for example, if a parent loses his/her job, this could result in added stress. This does not involve the learner directly but it does affect the relationship with the parent and learner. The parents can take out their frustration on their

children which can lead to them being emotionally scarred which adversely affects the learners at school. When there is an influence from broader issues such as national policies, political and economic structures, the macrosystem will be formed.

3.3.4 Macrosystem

This is the fourth system in Bronfenbrenner's model (1994). The macrosystem refers to the attitudes, beliefs and values of a society (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Examples of values and beliefs are equity, equality and discrimination. Inclusion of children would fall under this system since this does not only affect the individual but also the school cultures and classroom approaches.

In this study, if lessons are not inclusive in nature, meaning not catering for the needs of all learners, learners who have problems academically will suffer due to them not understanding the lesson, hence this could lead to absconding since they feel worthless in class and do not want to feel embarrassed. The advancement of all the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem happens over a period of time and that forms the chronosystem.

3.3.5 Chronosystem

The chronosystem captures the aspect of time and how it relates to all the systems. Bronfenbrenner (1994) states that:

A chronosystem encompasses change of consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person, but also of the environment in which that person lives (e.g. changes over the life course in family structure, socio-economic status, employment, place of residence, or the degree of franticness and ability in everyday life (p. 40).

This can relate to absconding if a child's socio-economic status changes for the worse, then it may force learners to abscond school and indulge in criminal activities as means of making a living or helping in the household.

This theory is useful in this study as the context influences whether children abscond or not. Absconding has to be looked from a broader aspect. Since Claes et al. (2009) state that the three factors that contribute to absconding are situated in the individual, family and school level,

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological model was be most ideal to use as a theoretical framework for this study. Since this theory is inclusive in nature, it is best suited for this study. Furthermore, Hook (2009) states that Bronfenbrenner's model provides a good theoretical framework to analyze the influence of the environment on a child.

3.4 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Theory

Research shows that there are positive and negatives of this theory. According to Sudbery (2010) Bronfenbrenner's theory is flexible and can be used by most researchers. Meda (2013) asserted that this theory is "user-friendly" (p. 82). Daniels (2013) confirms that the ecological system can bring an understanding of the learner experiencing barriers to learning and development in school. In addition, Meda (2013) claimed that this model is inclusive in nature. Landsberg (2005) claimed that the ecological model contributes towards the role of the individual's development and in the systems social medium. Despite the strengths of this theory, there are some weaknesses of the theory.

Hook (2009) stated that this theory can be criticized due to the fact that it is difficult to measure. It is difficult to evaluate whether children can be affected by the meso or exosystem. Hook (2009) contended that it is challenging to measure the degree to which a child is affected by his/her parent's social capacity. Furthermore, Meda (2013) states that the model is criticized for not explaining the extent of how the mesosystem affects the child's development.

3.5 Bronfenbrenner's Theory and the School

This theory states that a child develops by interacting with other people. Naicker (2013) stated that the interaction between people has an effect both ways. Furthermore, another significant idea that stems from this theory is that if parents contradict with regards to raising their child, this hinders the process of growth and this can have an effect at school (Seigner, 2006). According to Bronfenbrenner (2005) if the family life of a child is unstable, that impacts on the development of the child. Naicker (2013) maintains that if there is dissatisfaction in the microsystem, the child would not be able to discover other parts of their environment. If children are unhappy with the relationship they share at home, they resort to finding other ways of support which can include absconding so that they can be with their friends who seem to give

them that comfort and hence they do not feel isolated. According to Naicker (2013) these children can show anti-social behaviour and lack of discipline due to feeling unloved at home. It is for this reason that schools have to compensate for the breakdowns that children face at home. Therefore it is important for educators to provide positive, long lasting relationships with children.

Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, Seigner (2006) explains the four steps that investigate the context, interpersonal processes and personal characteristics of children and parents that prompt parental educational involvement and mediate the parental involvement, child outcome link. The first step relates to the child's personality, the parent's expectations for their child, the context like the school atmosphere and the process such as the relationship between the parent and teacher. The second encompasses the parent-child communication pertaining to school related matters. The third refers to the child's educational self-efficacy. The fourth indicates the child's educational outcomes such as academic achievement (Seigner, 2006). Since there are a variety of family issues, teachers need to have a deeper understanding of their learners. Bronfenbrenner (1995) stated that there are five propositions that explain how the relationship at home and school can contribute to an encouraging development.

Proposition one:

Bronfenbrenner (2005) maintains that children should be in a relationship with adults and they should feel valued. They should receive unconditional love.

Proposition two:

This strong relationship will help children connect to characteristics pertaining to the Mesosystem. However, it is important for this relationship to be sustained for the child to develop.

Proposition three:

Since the child shares a good relationship with adults in school and out of school this will give him/her confidence to move onto more complicated relationships with others (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Proposition four:

According to Bronfenbrenner (2005) children are only able to develop if there is a continuous communication between the child and the primary adult. It is important for children to have this communication at home and school.

Proposition five:

Parents and educators must allow time to spend with the child for the relationship to continuously blossom.

These five propositions disclose important implication for schools. Parents should not forget the important role that they play in supporting and encouraging learners to perform academically. The parent-teacher relationship is also vital in promoting the academic success of learners. Neither the parent nor the school can work alone to provide for the child's positive development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the theoretical framework that was used for the study. Bronfenbrenner's social ecological theory was adapted as a theoretical lens. This chapter also presented justification for the use of this theory to study children who abscond. The next chapter presents the research design and methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the theoretical framework which was used to underpin this study. This chapter looks at the methodology and the design that the researcher used to investigate the research questions. The chapter presents detailed information about the research approach, paradigm, design, and study area. It also provides thorough information about sampling techniques employed, data generation methods used, and how the data was analysed. Since the study dealt with children, it could be sensitive therefore a detailed description of ethical issues is also provided in this chapter.

4.2 Problem Statement

Absconders have become “victims of their own misguided practices” (Reid, 2000, p. 2). Absconding does not only have implications while at school but also affect learner’s long term prospects. It can be linked to difficulties in life such as isolation. Studies have shown that children who abscond come from deprived home backgrounds (Reid, 2008). Schools cannot function in isolation hence there should be a strong link between the school, families and the community. For this reason, it is vital to build partnerships.

4.3 Research Aims

The aim of the study is to investigate factors that contribute to absconding which is particularly prevalent in high schools. Furthermore, it aims to examine the impact that absconding has on teaching and learning.

4.4 Research Approach

According to Naicker (2013) research methods are influenced by the nature of study. Preferences often involve selecting either qualitative, quantitative or combined qualitative and quantitative

research methods (De Vos & Fouche, 2002). A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study since the researcher aimed to obtain an in-depth investigation of a specific setting (Mertens, 2010). According to Creswell (2012) qualitative research is a type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of participants, asks broad, general questions, describes and analyses themes, and conducts the inquiry in a subjective manner. Participants were able to engage in meaningful discussions because the qualitative approach was chosen. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) argue that qualitative research allows a researcher to intermingle with participants in order to gain understanding about the nature of a particular event. This approach is best suited for this study because it permitted the researcher to collect data about factors of absconding and the impact it has on teaching and learning by closely interacting extensively with the participants. Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest and Namey (2005) contend that the qualitative approach is suitable to use when the researcher aims to acquire multifaceted textual descriptions of people's experiences.

Qualitative studies produce textual data. Qualitative data is collected using words and observations which are recorded in language rather than using quantitative study which uses numbers (Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter, 2006). It is for this reason that a quantitative approach was not favored in this study and since it does not have characteristics of numerical values, therefore the participants perceptions of absconding cannot be quantified.

A limitation of qualitative research is that due to the large amount of data generation, data analysis and interpretation can be time consuming and demanding (Daniels, 2013). However, for Mason (2002) qualitative research is stimulating and significant. Furthermore, since Bronfenbrenner's Eco-systemic Theory was used to frame this study, Khanare (2009) maintains that a qualitative approach is closely linked to this theory. Qualitative research was therefore used to explore the factors that contribute to learners absconding.

4.5 Research Paradigm

A paradigm is a set of beliefs that guides the thinking and outlines the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In addition, Naicker (2013) maintains that paradigms are assumptions, ideas, perceptions and views about the nature of reality. This study is viewed from an interpretivist paradigm. The researcher does not intend to predict nor emancipate, but she aims to understand

the phenomena of absconding, hence the interpretivist paradigm allowed her to do so. Denscombe (2003) argues that an interpretivist paradigm is a process of understanding phenomena. This paradigm allowed the researcher to obtain information by engaging extensively with the participants. Furthermore, Lapan, Quartaroli and Riemer (2012) contended that every qualitative research has an interpretive view which emphasizes on revealing participants' views. Since this study deals with human experiences, it is based within the social sciences. Neuman (2001) describes the social sciences as those sciences that deal with a particular phase or aspect of human society. This type of paradigm allows participants to freely express their experiences with absconding. Since this research employed a qualitative approach and is about factors that contribute to learners absconding, the interpretivist paradigm is best suited to guide this study.

4.6 Research Design

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) propose that a research design indicates how the research is executed, what happens to the subjects and what methods of data generation are used. A research design is the logic that links the data that will be collected to the research questions of the study (Yin, 2003). Creswell and Miller (2000) maintain that in a qualitative research, the following five strategies can be identified, namely, biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study.

A case study was chosen to conduct this investigation since factors contributing to learners absconding are eco-systemic in nature. The study is related and influenced by the school, its context and the learners themselves. Yin (2003) defines a case study as an empirical investigation within its own context. Furthermore, Creswell (2008) maintains that a case study identifies one participant, one setting, one situation or one event. Therefore, a case study is best suited to use in this study since it had one setting (a school in Phoenix) and one situation (absconding).

A single-case explanatory method was used in this study to explain factors contributing to learners absconding. Yin (2003) argued that single-case studies often do not seek to test a theory. Instead, they aim to understand a single case with the purpose of understanding similar cases (Vogt, Gardner, Haeffele & Baker, 2011). Furthermore, case studies are qualitative in nature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As with anything, there are advantages and disadvantages. Yin (2003)

maintains that an advantage of case studies is that the research study takes place within its own context. This however, contrasts with experiments which isolates an event from its context (Lowe, 2007). Yin (2003) further goes on to say that a disadvantage of case studies is that it is criticized since a small number of participants are used.

The Case

Since the research is based on gathering data from participants at a school, the location of the research study was at an urban residential secondary school in Phoenix, which is located in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa. For ethical reasons the school will not be named. It is a co-educational (boys and girls) public school located in a middle to low class community and was one of the first schools to be built in Phoenix. The school is governed by the school governing body which is elected by the parents and consists of educator representatives, parents and learners from the representative council for learners (RCL). There are 52 educators which consist of five Heads of Department (HOD), one Deputy Principal and one principal. There are approximately 1100 learners that attend the school. Grade 8 is the lowest grade and grade 12 is the highest grade offered at the school. This school was preferred because absconding is extremely prevalent in this particular school.

4.7. Sampling Procedure

Sampling is a process whereby participants are chosen from a population to participate in a study which involves that specific population (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). According to Neuman (2011, p. 240): “When we sample, we select some case to examine in detail and then we use what we learn from them to understand a much larger set of cases”. Kothari (2004) says that there are many types of sampling techniques, however the sampling technique which was used in this study is non-probability sampling. This method of sampling is not influenced by statistical randomness (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This study adopted three methods of sampling: snowball sampling, convenience sampling and purposive sampling.

4.7.1 Snowball Sampling

Sometimes it may not be possible for the researcher to include the best people in the study, this is when snowball sampling will be used (Creswell, 2008). According to Meda (2013) snowball sampling is used when the researcher asks participants to recommend other participants that will be used in the study. Snowball sampling was used to select the participants. Since the researcher did not know who the regular absconders for each grade were, she approached the HOD's for grade 10, 11 and 12 as absconding was most prevalent in the higher grades and asked them to identify learners in each grade that are regular absconders since they have access to that information. In addition documentary sources were used to identify these absconders. Educator participants were referred to by other educators.

4.7.2 Purposive Sampling

Koerber & McMichael (2008) define purposive sampling as looking for participants who have certain traits or qualities. Naicker (2013) suggest that this type of sampling is used when the researcher has already chosen a particular context and participants. Patton (2002) argues that the best way to guarantee rich information would be to purposefully select the participants. Furthermore, Creswell (2008) states that this type of sampling allows the researcher to deliberately chose participants and the research site. This method was preferred since it is in line with qualitative research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2007). In addition this method was deemed most suitable because it allowed selecting unique participants. Once a list of absconders was obtained from the HOD's, the researcher purposefully chose the participants.

4.7.3 Convenience Sampling

By definition, convenience sample consists of participants who are readily available to interact with (Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012). Blurtit (2009) maintains that convenience sampling is an ideal method of sampling because it is relatively inexpensive and allows the researcher to get maximum results. However, there are some limitations of this sampling. While some convenience samples are easily accessible, some participants may be difficult to reach (Koerber and McMichael, 2008). This technique was used since the researcher teaches at the specific school and it was more convenient and easily accessible.

4.7.4 The Sample

The sample is limited to ten participants: seven learners and three educators. A brief profile of the learner and educator participants was compiled.

Learners

John: a 19 year old male who is in grade 12 feels strongly that the educators contribute to him absconding. He has repeated grade 11 and feels that due to him absconding, it has impacted on his studies, hence he has failed. Overall, he is an intelligent learner, but he chooses not to work as he shares no positive connection with his educators.

Mary: is a grade 11 female that is 17 years old. She has not failed a grade yet but has a fear that she will fail this year as she is not putting enough effort as she is supposed to. She is unable to understand work taught and hence absconds to escape the embarrassment of not comprehending.

Peter: is an 18 year old grade 12 male who has not failed a grade. However, due to absconding, it has impacted on his choice of subjects. He has been absconding from grade 9 because his friends were absconding and did not want to be an 'outcast', hence he started. Although he knows that absconding is bad, he believes that it is still worth absconding.

Raymond: is a male learner who is in grade 10 and he has failed grade 9. He is 16 years old and he admits that his failing is a consequence of his absconding. He feels that his educators do not respect him and hence he cannot respect them and as a result he absconds so that he does not have to be around them.

Mike: is also a male in grade 10 who is 16 years. He has failed grade 10 and is repeating the year. He absconds because he likes to socialize with his friends because he is unable to smoke and consume alcohol at home, so he absconds lessons and uses that time to hang out with his friends.

Cathy: an 18 year old female, in grade 12 has not repeated a grade but feels very bored in class and as a result she absconds.

Chris: is a male who is 17 years old and in grade 11. He has failed grade 10. He has been absconding since primary school. He blames his failing due to absconding. He absconds in order to be with his friends.

The aim of the above was to briefly highlight the profile on each learner participant and they were able to provide information regarding the factors that contribute to learners absconding. These learners were identified by using document sources such as attendance registers and period control registers and were selected based on the number of days absconded. Below is a brief profile of the educator participants.

Educators

Educator one: is a female, aged 29 years old who has a Bachelor of Education degree from University of KwaZulu-Natal. She has 7 years of teaching experience and has been teaching at this school for 7 years. Since she teaches a specialized subject, there are fewer learners in her class in comparison to other educators, therefore absconding has a huge impact on her teaching. She is unable to teach new sections if learners are absconding, which results in her being delayed with syllabus coverage. She does not receive much assistance from management.

Educator two: is a male who is 43 years old. He has a diploma in education with 15 years teaching experience. He has been teaching at this school for 12 years. His general perception of schooling now is very negative. He feels that the learners in general do not want to learn. He believes that the major factor that contributes to learners absconding is due to peer pressure. He also has to delay teaching as he feels bad, even though the learners absconded, he still believes in giving them a chance and would not want them to be at a disadvantage. For him, management does nothing about learners who abscond and if they set an example with one learner, the rest of the school will be able to see that absconding will not be tolerated anymore.

Educator three: is a 26 year old female who has a Bachelor of Education degree. She has been teaching for four years and is teaching in the school ever since she started teaching. She developed the attitude of moving onto new sections even though learners abscond lessons. She believes that she cannot waste time because syllabus needs to be covered.

The above educators were identified with the help of the HODs based on the number of encounters with absconding.

A small sample of ten participants was chosen as this made the data generation manageable. Baboo (2011) maintained that in a qualitative case study research, the quality of responses is more important than quantity. Learners from grade 10, 11 and 12 were chosen because the study

was about factors contributing to their absconding and were most rife in those grades. Initially, the researcher intended to include only six learner participants in the study however, one more learner participant wanted to be part of the study. This is still in line with a qualitative research study, because small samples are commonly used in qualitative research (Daniels, 2013). Educators were included in the study to show the impact that absconding has on teaching and learning. They were chosen on the basis of being most affected by absconding.

4.8 Data Generation Process

After obtaining permission from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, the researcher had an initial meeting with the principal of the school to discuss the study and the purpose of it. This was well received and he was very positive and enthusiastic about the study. The researcher was asked to get written permission from the Department of Education. It was only once permission was granted from relevant authorities, the data generating process began. The data generation process took one month, which began in October 2014. Hartley (2004) stated that the use of various data collecting tools is associated with a case study research. Therefore, the use of multiple tools allowed the researcher to obtain the general idea of absconding. Furthermore, Merriam (1998) maintained that to reinforce validity of a study, multiple methods of data generation from multiple sources should be used for the purpose of triangulation. This will further be explained later on in this chapter. Kothari (2004) contended that research data can be classified into primary or secondary data. In this research study, primary data was obtained from open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Secondary data was obtained from school records (documents) such as registers, period control registers and misdemeanor reports. The first data collecting tool that was given to the learner participants was open-ended questionnaires.

Learners were asked to meet with the researcher during their break in the boardroom of the school which is in the administration block of the school. This room was used for all the interviews as it was a quiet area, away from the rest of the school, ensuring that no disturbances will take place. During this time, participants were first briefed on the topic and this time was further used to establish a good rapport with the participants. They were later asked to sign consent forms if they choose to participate in the study. Since most of the learner participants

were under the age of 18, they needed consent from their parents, hence consent forms were given for their parents to sign. Learner participants were then handed the questionnaires in which they were told that they have one day to complete it and hand back to the researcher. Once all the questionnaires were completed, all participants had specific times to meet with the researcher so the one-on-one interviews could take place. The individual interviews lasted between 15 to 25 minutes. The last tool that was used with the learner participants was a focus group discussion. This lasted 35 minutes. All participants were told that interviews and the focus group discussion will be recorded. However, one of the educator participants was very apprehensive about being video recorded. Even though the researcher assured her about confidentiality and anonymity, she still chose not to be video recorded. All other interviews and the focus group discussion were video recorded. Below is a detailed description of the three data collecting tools that were used for this study in order of the way it was conducted.

4.8.1 Open-ended Questionnaires

One of the data collecting tools that were used in this study was a questionnaire. There are open-ended and close-ended questionnaires. Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) state that open-ended questionnaires are unstructured, there are no restrictions and it allows for any response. Whereas, close-ended questionnaires are easily processed and transferred into computer format (Babbie& Mouton, 2006). Open-ended questionnaires involve participants expressing their personal feelings and opinions (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This study employed an open-ended questionnaire as this type of questionnaire will produce textual data which is synonymous with qualitative studies, allowing learners to freely respond to questions without any limitations. It was also used as a tool to acquire an overall picture of the learners understanding of absconding, therefore this was given to the learners first. Furthermore, since learners were able to take their questionnaires home, it allowed them sufficient time to work with it, ensuring rich responses. In addition, the questionnaire did not require participants to write their names, it provides anonymity hence learners did not feel shy about their responses. Participants are sometimes hesitant to report on controversial issues during interviews but are willing to respond to an anonymous questionnaire (Babbie& Mouton, 2001). This data collecting tool was used with the learner participants only.

4.8.2 Semi-Structured One-on-One Interviews

An interview is regarded as interaction between two individuals. According to Naicker (2013, p. 78): “Research interview is a two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for specific purpose of obtaining information relevant to the research”. Seidman (2006) postulates that an interview is the best way of collecting individuals’ responses. In a case study, interviews are one of the most important sources of information (Yin, 2009). Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from the learners and educator participants. This data collecting tool enabled learners to talk about their issues on absconding and for educators to express their difficulties related to absconding and the impact that it has on education (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Furthermore, this technique allowed for probing, hence, it enabled the researcher to get more information pertaining to the study. Probing allows for digging deep into responses (Baboo, 2011). The strength of this technique is that it is useful in getting large volume of data quickly (Naicker, 2013). A challenge can be establishing a rapport with the participants in order to gain information (Wolcott, 2001). The main characteristics of semi-structured interviews are that it allows the participants to be at liberty to express their views. Cohen et al. (2007) maintain that participants are not constrained by the researcher. Almost all, with the exception of one participant consented to be video recorded. The data was transcribed and analysed by the researcher, details of which will be dealt with in the following section (section 4.9).

4.8.3 Focus Group Discussion

According to Greenbaum (1993) focus group discussion is a qualitative method that comprises of six to 12 people. Focus group discussions allow a researcher to ask questions and prompt responses through discussions (Creswell, 2008). The researcher chose this method because it allowed the participants to engage in an extensive discussion on absconding hence allowing her to gather rich and in-depth data pertaining to the topic. Since focus group discussions can generate immense information within a short period of time (Mack et al., 2005), the researcher was able to collect extensive information within a short space of time.

There was only one focus group discussion in which only the learner participants participated. At the beginning of the focus group discussion, learners were given a case study to read that was based on absconding. Each participant had access to their own copy of it, which allowed them to

read at their own pace. This was used as a stimulus to get a discussion going and to get learners to make reference to their own experiences of absconding. The researcher created a comfortable environment so that learners felt free to discuss their experiences. Roulston (2010) maintains that it is vital to create a comfortable environment. All learner participants agreed to have the discussion video recorded and from the onset the researcher indicated that they should feel free to express themselves.

4.8.4 Documentary Sources

Punch (2009, p. 158) said: “Documents both historical and contemporary are a rich source of data for educational and social research”. Documentary sources for this study included school records such as registers which are marked in the morning and afternoon by the form educator and period control registers which are marked by the subject educators. Hence, these records show the number of days learners are absent (have not attended school for the day) and the number of days learners have been absconding. These documents are found with the form educator who is responsible for the learners who were chosen as participants. Furthermore, learners who are reprimanded for absconding, a misdemeanor report is filed against them. In this report, the reason for absconding is noted and yet again this information is kept with the form educator. This information was used to select the participants who abscond most frequently from grade 10 to grade 12.

The information gathered from these multiple methods of data generation tools were synthesized and analysed during data analysis.

4.9 Data Analysis

Analyzing data allows the researcher to make sense of the data that was collected. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) define data analysis as a process of order, structure and meaning to the collection of data. The straightforwardness of the definition fails to express how complex the data analysis process is. According to Baboo (2011) data analysis is a complex process that involves selecting, sorting, discarding, synthesizing and organising information in order to draw conclusions and verify the data. Data analysis in a qualitative study is an ongoing process (Patton, 2002). This meant that literature was revisited during and after the collection of data and

more literature was added to support the findings. The researcher went back and forth through the data collecting tools to establish themes. Data was analysed using content analysis. Cohen et al. (2007) maintain that content analysis is a process that involves classifying textual data into categories and themes. The data analysis process began by sorting out all video tapes. The researcher transcribed and analyzed the data herself. The data was read through vigorously and then the process of coding began. Thereafter, the researcher searched for patterns in the codes which eventually collapsed into themes. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) postulated that a theme is a group of ideas that are closely related. Figure 4.1 below illustrates the techniques used by Mayring (2000) to analyze data using content analysis.

attitudes

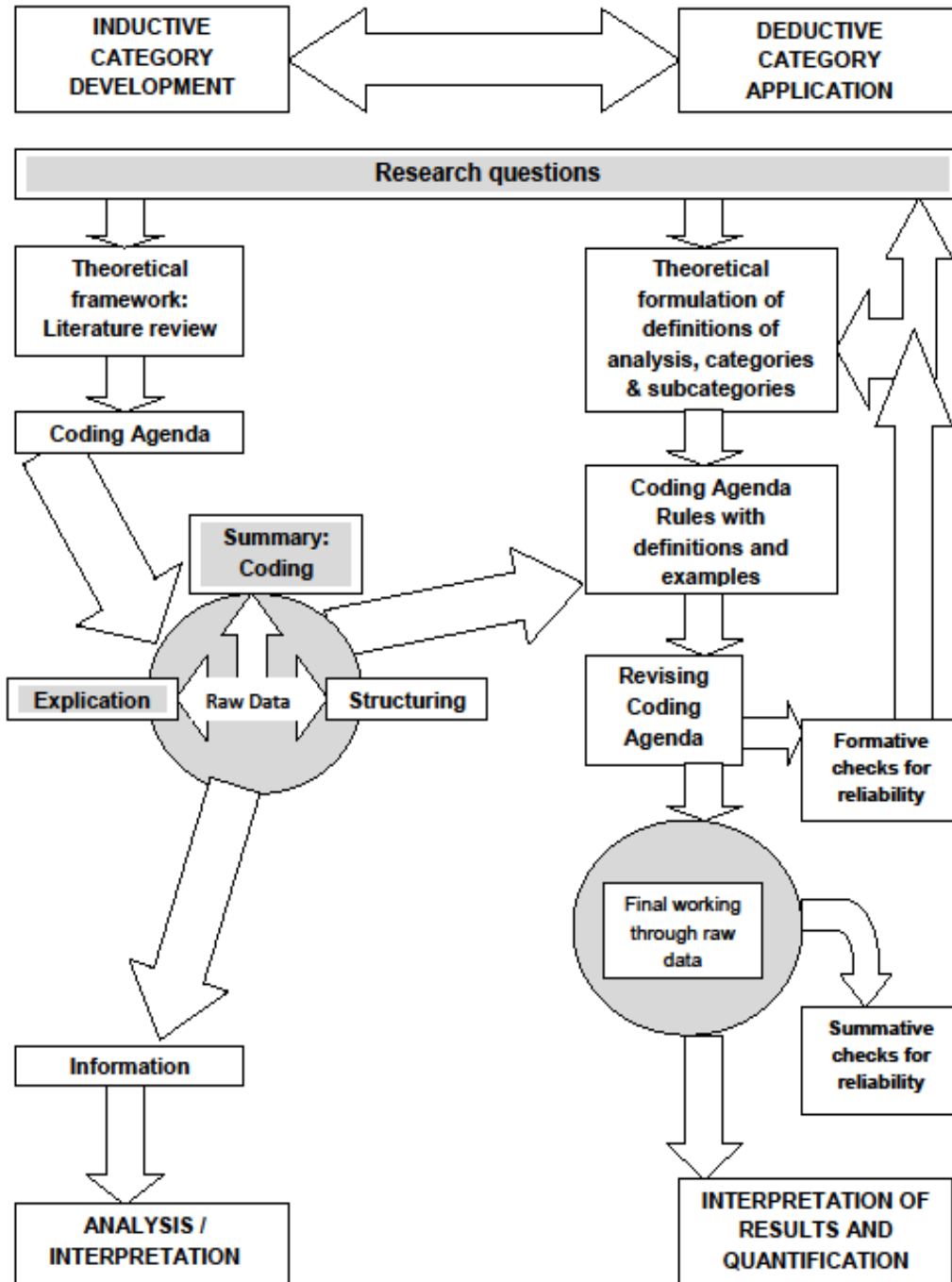


Figure 2: Adapted from Mayring (2000, p.11)

Inductive Category Development

In a qualitative content analysis study, the inductive category development is crucial in the data analysis process. “The main idea of the inductive category development is to formulate a criterion of definition, derived from the theoretical background and research question, which determines the aspect of the textual material taken into account” (Mayring, 2000, p. 12). The definitions serve as a starting point and help the researcher work through the raw data. The initial categories in this study were: (i) Views of absconding, (ii) why do learners abscond, (iii) consequences of absconding. These categories were refined as the researcher worked through the raw data. To summarize it, the essential information was reduced. According to Baboo (2011) this is referred to as coding explication. Relevant information from the data was extracted by using categories. The categories were revisited more than three times. Hence, this system is flexible and can be revisited (Baboo, 2011).

Deductive Category Application

In the deductive category application, the categories were applied to the entire raw data. In this study, categories were allocated to relevant texts on all transcripts. “The main idea here is to give explicit definitions, examples and coding rules for each deductive category, determining exactly under what circumstances a text passage can be allocated to a category” (Mayring, 2000, p. 13).

Furthermore, thematic analysis was employed as a technique for organising, analyzing and reporting sorted data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis was suitable because it helped me to classify and describe data in rich detail. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model was used as an analytical frameworks for the factors that contributed to absconding.

4.10 Reflection

Given the fact that the research study was conducted in the same school that the researcher teaches in, it was important for the researcher to be mindful of her own feelings and challenges that were encountered during the study. Occupying the position of a researcher and remaining objective was a vital factor for ensuring trustworthiness.

4.11 Trustworthiness

In a qualitative research study, validity and reliability are unclear and depend on the researcher's and participants' understanding of the data (Baboo, 2011). To enhance trustworthiness, before collecting data, a pilot study was done. It allowed the researcher to change and re-phrase the questions. According to Slavin (2007) it is important to pilot the instrument on samples that are similar to the actual participants hence the researcher used three learners from the same school. Analyzing data in a qualitative study includes establishing the trustworthiness of the data with regards to the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Mertens, 1998).

4.11.1 Credibility

This deals with how similar the findings of the research are to reality. Babbie and Mouton (2004) define credibility as something that is compatible between the realities that existed in the minds of the participants and those that are attributed. The credibility of this study was maintained by using triangulation, member checks, mechanically recording of data and own words of participants.

Triangulation

“Triangulation involves checking information that has been collected from different sources or methods for consistency across sources” (Mertens, 1998, p. 18). Triangulation was attained through the use of multiple methods for data generation, namely, focus group discussion, semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires and documentary sources. As mentioned earlier, the researcher went back and forth comparing themes between all data collecting tools which therefore add to trustworthiness of the study. These multiple methods established the credibility of the study which created a more complete reality (Patton, 1990).

Member Checks

After the researcher read through the transcripts, the participants were contacted and asked to review it, verify and confirm her understanding of their experiences during the data generation process. The purpose of this was to clear any misconceptions especially where the video

recordings were unclear. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) researchers may ask participants to view transcripts.

Video Recording of Data

Video tapes provide accurate records (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Since the focus group discussion and individual interviews were video recorded with the consent of the participants, this allowed for maximum accuracy of the interpretation. This also mitigated any human error.

Own Words of Participants

The words of the participants were used to substantiate information and interpretations of the results.

4.11.2 Transferability

Babbie and Mouton (2004) assert that transferability refer to the extent to which the findings can be applicable to other similar contexts. Without revealing the name of the school, ensuring anonymity was still maintained, a detailed description of the school context and socio-economic background of the community was given and hence the findings of this study can be applicable to other schools operating in a similar context.

4.11.3 Dependability

According to Mertens (1998) dependability is the degree to which the process of the research can be formally tracked. This means that all the research steps need to be traceable. This was attained by ensuring that the data collected on videotapes, participant's transcripts and notes from data analysis process will be kept in its original form at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for a maximum of 5 years and only the researcher and her supervisor have access to it.

4.11.4 Confirmability

Mertens (1998, p. 194) defines confirmability as “the ability of a researcher to explain the logic which informed the data analysis.” The theoretical framework in this study informed how the data will be interpreted.

4.12 Ethical Considerations

In educational research, ethics deals with the well-being of people to ensure they are not harmed as a result of the research being done (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). This study was conducted ethically, at all times following the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s ethical code of conduct. Cohen et al. (2007) contend that there are three main areas of ethical issues, i.e, informed consent, confidentiality and consequence of the research. Below are the ethical concerns that were taken into consideration.

4.12.1 Permission

Since this research study involved children, according to Lahman (2008) children are considered vulnerable because of their dependency on adults. The research proposal was sent to the University’s ethical board for ethical clearance. The purpose of this was to ensure that no human rights are infringed upon (Meda, 2013). Full ethical clearance was given from the ethics committee (**Appendix 1**).

Since public schools are governed by the Department of Education it was necessary to seek permission from the Department of Education. A letter explaining the purpose of the research and the significance of it was then sent to them to request permission (**Appendix 2**). Permission had been given from the Department of Education (**Appendix 3**) to conduct research in a public school. The study was discussed with the principal of the school since he needed to be aware about the purpose of the research. Permission had been given from the gatekeeper (principal) of the school (**Appendix 4**).

4.12.2 Consent of Participants

The participants in this study were learners and educators. It is voluntary and none of them were forced to participate, nor were they given any bribe of any sort, meaning that no participant received direct benefit from participating in the study. However, the information obtained could help the school curb absconding. Participants were told about the purpose of the study and the reasoning behind the choice of topic. Consent forms were given to all participants to sign, however, since children are under the care of their parents, consent was sought from their parents. Mertens (2012) argues that children should not sign consent forms. Commonly, researchers are required to obtain consent from the children's parents/guardians, therefore letters asking for consent from the parents were sent first (**Appendix 5**). Once parents agreed for their children to be part of the study, they had to sign the consent form (**Appendix 6**).

Participants were given a letter of participation ensuring that they understood what the research entailed and that they were freely willing to participate (**Appendix 7**) and (**Appendix 8**). They were told that they are free to withdraw from the study at any given time and not compelled to participate. Learner participants were told that since their parents have signed the consent for them to participate, they are not compelled to. Mishna, Antle and Regehr (2004) maintained that if parents give consent for the participation of their children, researchers must disclose to them (children) that they have a right whether they wish to participate or not. Once they agreed, all participants signed assent (learners) and consent (educators) forms (**Appendix 9**).

4.12.3 Confidentiality of Participants

According to Mertens (2012) researchers are required to reassure confidentiality to participants in a research study. Participants were assured that the researcher has respect for them and the school hence no material will be published which identified them. To enhance privacy, pseudonyms were used in the data analysis chapter. Learners were given false names while educators were identified as educator one, two and three. Even though the focus group discussion and interviews were video recorded, the participants were made aware of this on their consent forms (**Appendix 9**). They were asked for permission before video recording them. They were reassured that the tapes, transcriptions and interview schedules would only be viewed by the researcher and her supervisor (if need be) and thereafter would be stored away at the University

for a maximum of five years, and thereafter transcripts will be shredded and video tapes will be incinerated. Furthermore, participants were encouraged not to talk about other participants experiences as the privacy of others will be breached (Liamputtong, 2007). This in a way made participants feel comfortable and free to speak and also by hearing others stories and experiences, they did not feel like they are alone in a situation. All interviews were conducted in a quiet, private room in the administrative building of the school.

4.12.4 Protection from Harm

An in-depth investigation like this could be potentially harmful to some or all of the participants as unfavourable issues may be exposed. Since the learner participants revealed the factors that contribute to them absconding, this requires them to speak about their family background and sometimes the issues could be sensitive, hence a trained counsellor was on standby during all interviews and the focus group discussion to ensure that the participants suffered no emotional harm.

4.12.5 Feedback from the Study

After the researcher conducted the study, she consulted with the parents and the school about the emerging themes from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion and open-ended questionnaires without revealing the sources. Subsequent communication between the parents and principal regarding the findings allowed for action to be taken regarding absconding.

4.13 Conclusion

This chapter presented the research methodology that was used in the study. This included the paradigm, approach and data generation tools used in the study. The sample size and procedures were also discussed. Data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations and limitations were presented. The next chapter presents the discussion of the findings that emerged from the data generated.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented and described the research design and methodology underpinning this study. This chapter presents an analysis of the data generated from the interviews and focus group discussion. The findings are presented according to the themes and categories that emerged from the data. Furthermore, in the presentation of findings, participants' verbatim responses are also used. Existing literature from chapter two together with Bronfenbrenner's social ecological model (1979) are also infused in the discussion.

5.2 Analysis and Discussion of Findings

In this section of the chapter the researcher discusses the three themes that emerged from the one-on-one semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and one focus group discussion in response to factors contributing to high school learners absconding in a selected high school in Phoenix. The factors that contribute to learners absconding and the impact of absconding on the teaching and learning were grouped in the following themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data: **Theme One: An Exposition of Absconding**, **Theme Two: Factors Contributing to Learners Absconding**; and **Theme Three: The Impact of Learners Absconding on Teaching and Learning**.

5.2.1 Theme One: Exposition of Learners Absconding

The focus of this theme is on the exposition of learners absconding and the complex association with factors of absconding which participants spoke about. Exposition of absconding was not the main objective of the current study but all participants talked more about their understanding of absconding before talking about factors relating to learners absconding. This suggests that the participants provided a critical body of evidence exposing absconding as indeed a complex phenomenon as discussed in Chapter One. In addition it was established that absconding is particularly prevalent in the higher grades. This is affirmed by Baker et al. (2001) who state that

absconding is common phenomena in the age group of 15 year olds. From the entire set of data set in this case, repeated patterns of meaning were noted and finally three categories were identified as: *visible in school but not in class*; *early school leaving*; and *in-between between home and school*.

5.2.1.1 Visible in School but not in Class

Most participants made it very clear that their understanding of absconding is related to learners who come to school and are visible in the school premises yet do not attend classes. In this regard, Educator three remarked:

“Learners being present in school but not attending class or a particular subject.”

Chris concurred that:

“Absconding means not going to class.”

Educator one’s explanation also aligned:

“Absconding could also be if a child does not come to class, is in school but not coming for registration.”

In addition, participants also identified terms which are synonymous to absconding and explained how they used that in their own context. The following participants remarked their understanding of absconding.

Raymond said:

“We refer to absconding as bunking.”

Chris stated:

“We call it bunking and truanting.”

The findings of this sub-theme mostly match the existing knowledge regarding absconding. It is a common finding that many learners come to school but not necessarily attend classes physically. This matched the findings noted in the study by Dhruv et al. (2012) who refer to

absconding as children who attend school but do not regularly attend classes. Stoll (1990) asserts that this type of absconding is referred to as post-registration since learners are in school but do not attend lessons. In addition, it was found that learners are in school but do not attend registration. This makes it easier for them to abscond as it will be noted as them being ‘absent’ for the day. In this way, they are able to choose which classes they go to and which classes they abscond. Furthermore, previous studies have revealed different meaning and interpretation of absconding and use terms relevant to their own experiences and context.

Teaching or learning in different school contexts, the inevitable possibility exist that participants would use terms or constructs familiar to them and the context in which they live (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Furthermore, as stated earlier, in this study truancy will be referred to as absconding. It seems that the participants in this study were comfortable with terms such as ‘bunking’ and ‘truanting’ when referring to absconding. This is backed up by Wilson et al. (2008, p. 1) who believe that truancy is known as “Bunking-off”. From a South African perspective, this is concurred by Moseki (2004, p. 21) who maintains that most learners in South Africa use the term “bunking” when referring to absconding. In parts of Great Britain other researchers use terms such as “skipping off”, “mitching”, “dodging”, “skiving”, “bunking-off” and “going missing” to refer to truancy (Reid, 2000, p. 1). This is in line with Claes et al. (2009) who state that absconding takes a number of forms, therefore, this might depend on individuals’ experiences or context in which they live. Hence, the next sub-section discusses absconding which is referred to as leaving school early.

5.2.1.2 Early school leaving

This section speaks about how a few learners have the view that absconding means leaving school early, before the school day ends. Early school leaving can be done formally or informally. Formal school leaving entails leaving school with official permission from relevant authorities at school whereas leaving informally means that you do not obtain permission to leave. The quotation below refers to early school leaving but they do so informally which is not granted by the school authority. Only one learner associated the phenomena of absconding as leaving school early.

Cathy commented:

“It means to leave school early because of certain reasons”.

This was re-iterated by Cathy in her questionnaire:

“To leave school during school hours”.

The findings of this sub-section reveal that absconding is referred to as learners coming to school but leaving before the full duration of the school day. It can therefore be deduced that it is informally leaving school since they are not granted official leave, they are ‘illegally’ leaving the school property. According to Department of Education (2008) a learner cannot leave school during school hours if he/she does not have a letter from their parents or have received permission from the principal of the school.

After probing, it was established that absconding is not only confined to the classroom. It is for this reason that the next sub-section discusses absconding as wondering between home and school.

5.2.1.3 In-between home and school

After being probed, almost all the participants viewed absconding as coming to school and later on leaving school and wondering outside school. Some learners even state that their parents are under the impression that they are leaving home for school, however they do leave for ‘school’ but do not pitch up at school.

John commented:

“Leaving your house with school uniform and not attending school”.

Raymond: added:

“Some people say to their parents that they coming to school but they go out with their friends”.

Educator one expressed:

“Absconding is when a parent is aware that their child is coming to school but the child does not pitch up at school”.

In addition some learner participants associate absconding school with house parties, drinking and smoking. In their view when a learner absconds school, it means that they are attending house parties.

Mary suggested:

“Absconding is people planning a house party and then go to it.”

Raymond agreed:

“Absconding means that you go out with your friends and do all the wrong things like smoking and drinking.”

The above findings were supported by data from one-on-one semi structured interviews. It was found that learners associate absconding with being between home and school. Stoll (1990, p. 23) refers to this type of absconding as ‘blanket’ absconding. This means that learners leave home with the intention of going to school but do not eventually end up going to school. Other participants feel that absconding means not attending school or classes with their parent’s knowledge or consent. Learners are making their parents believe that they are going to school but in actual fact they are absconding.

It was gathered that the general understanding from the participants about absconding is learners being away from the learning process, whether in school or out of school. Moreover, for some learners absconding is associated with drinking, smoking and house parties. Reid (2000) found that most absconders are indulging in alcohol and smoking. Furthermore, Henry (2010) asserts that learners use drugs when absconding. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) the context is very important therefore it was found that participants’ in this context had a similar synonym when referring to absconding. A further analysis into factors that contribute to high school absconding in an urban school may provide insight in this regard as the researcher turns to discuss the second theme.

5.2.2 Theme Two: Factors Contributing to Learners Absconding

Since the study was based on the factors that contribute to learners absconding, participants were encouraged to talk about what led to learners absconding. Analysis of the data revealed that there are multiple factors that contribute to learners absconding. There was no obvious difference in the response of educators and learners – both provided various factors and reasons for learners absconding which when grouped together leaned towards relationships, particularly friends and peers. The next section discusses the factors situated in peer-to-peer relationships.

5.2.2.1 Peer-to-Peer Relationships

Since learners are in a setting that includes other children around the same age as them, similar interests and social backgrounds, they develop relationships with them and find themselves indulging in practices that the masses engage in, more often only because they want to be part of a group. According to Bronfenbrenner (1994) this is the interaction of child-child activities in an immediate environment over a period of time. Sometimes, these activities can lead them into trouble due to them being influenced by their peers, which is known as peer pressure.

Peer Pressure

All learner participants, with the exception of one, indicated that peer pressure was a factor that drives them to abscond. Scott (2007) asserted that peer pressure is a factor of absconding. From the responses, it seemed that some learners were unsure of what peer pressure actually meant. Once they were probed, only then did they reveal that it is due to peer pressure that they abscond. For most learners, they disclosed that peer pressure is a factor of absconding without having to be probed.

Researcher:

“....Are there other learners forcing you to abscond.....Peer pressure?”

Raymond:

“No.....My friends want me to be with them.”

Mike said:

“Sometimes I don’t feel right to come to school. Sometimes my friends also tell me not to come to school.”

Chris confessed:

“I wanted to be like them (friends). They were putting pressure on me to abscond.”

Peter uttered:

“Friends influence you to bunk.”

The findings from the questionnaires given correlate with the findings from the interviews. The responses indicate that learners are absconding due to peer pressure. Although few learners did not want to admit that it was peer pressure that was causing them to abscond, it was eventually revealed through probing. This could either suggest that some learners want to protect their friends or they do not want to seem like they are controlled by their friends. However, whichever way it is looked at, it is clear that a factor contributing to learners absconding is due to peer pressure. Furthermore, other learners admitted that they abscond because their friends tell them not to go to school or class and pressure is being put on them. This concurs with the findings of Monobe and Baloyi (2012) who argue that peer group influences play a role in absconding. In addition some learners want to abscond because they wish to spend time with their friends.

‘Being with Friends’

This sub-section deals with using absconding as an escape mechanism to be with their friends. Some learners use absconding as a form of escape since they are unable to meet their friends. These learners are absconding just to hang out with their friends.

Raymond said:

“There are no issues at home, we just like to bunk because we like being with our friends.”

Mike maintained:

“...I like going outside and joining my friends because we cannot see them during the weekends because they stay too far away.”

Moreover, the findings indicate that learners are absconding simply because they want to be with their friends. Since some learners live far away from their friends, they are unable to see them after school, hence they use up school time to socialize with their friends. According to Meda (2013) it is important for a person to interact with other people in their environment and that influences growth. Furthermore, some learners abscond to avoid taunting by their peers.

Avoid being Teased

Some learners end up absconding because they avoid being teased or name called by their friends.

Peter:

“Ay if you don't abscond with them they call you a 'Lamo' things like that.”

The findings further reveal that these learners are absconding because their peers are name calling them if they do not abscond. In order not to bear the embarrassment due to the name calling, these learners rather abscond with their friends. Rossouw (2003) maintained that if children do not conform they expose themselves to verbal abuse from their peers. Other learners indicated that they abscond because they want to smoke and consume alcohol since they are unable to do that at home.

'Mirroring' Absconder's Behaviour

This sub-section deals with learners absconding due to mirroring the acts of absconders.

Mike:

“Other younger learners will be influenced by our actions and they will soon learn our ways which will lead to another generation of us.”

Chris:

“The smaller grade pupils watch and learn and also want to try absconding.”

The findings reveal that another contributing factor of learners absconding include other learners at school modeling the same behaviour as the absconders. They develop a positive attitude to absconding believing that it is okay since the school does not do much to curb the issue. Other learners at school believe that it is okay to abscond therefore they too abscond. Wilson et al. (2008) agreed that learners who attend school might emulate the actions of absconders. In addition Chimwamurombe (2011) proclaims that learners observe actions of others and thereafter repeat it.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

The intake of drugs and alcohol is a common phenomenon happening in high schools. Peter mentioned:

“We abscond to smoke and drink.”

Raymond agreed:

“Some boys they like to smoke at school because at home they can't smoke.”

The findings further reveal that since learners are unable to smoke and consume alcohol at home, they use school as a method to do so. According to Baker et al. (2001) absconding starts with learners craving to smoke. Furthermore, in Cape Town, South Africa, absconders are dealing with drugs (Chimwamurombe, 2011). This is backed up by Rodriguez and Conchas (2009) who believe that absconding leads to smoking and drinking alcohol. In the process they are missing classes/school to socialize with their friends and involve themselves in drug and alcohol abuse. Therefore, it is safe to say that the above reveal that these learners abscond due to factors that lie within peer-to-peer relationships.

According to Dhruv et al. (2012) the factors of absconding are complex. However, Claes et al. (2009) claimed there are three kinds of factors that contribute to absconding. Since learners do not operate in isolation, there are factors around them that contribute to them absconding. These

factors are situated in the individual, family and school level (Claes et al., 2009). However, the findings of this study reveal that there are no individual factors of absconding. Factors situated within peer-to-peer relationships were dominant and reveal a process whereby individual children connect or influence others with everyday challenges in their school-life. This corroborates with the idea of the micro-system (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The above factors are a combination of ‘pull’ factors. According to Moseki (2004) these are factors that attract learners to abscond.

It was also found that apart from peer relationships influencing learners to abscond, other factors within the school also contributed to learners absconding. This will be discussed in the next section.

5.2.2.2 Learner-Educator Relationships

A second category emerging from the findings was the negative learner-educator relationships within the school context. Most participants spoke about the negative working relationship they have with the educators. Educators are supposed to care for and support all learners, particularly provide pastoral care to those in need, as it is clearly articulated in the Norms and Standards for educators (Department of Education, 2000). In the quotation below, John indicates some educators do not care much about those learners who are absconding. The extent of absconding makes some educators to care less about learners to an extent of ignoring learners performance. The participant in this study spoke eloquently about not being cared for in the following statement:

John added:

“Teachers do not care as much if you pass or if you have good marks because most of the time we are not in the class so you will be like a person that does not exist because teachers do not really care about us.”

Learners often think about their relationships with their educators in a positive way. Positioning educators as caring and supporting instill a sense of hope for many children, even those facing challenges in their daily lives (Khanare, 2012). However, the expression of learner-educator relationship within the current study has been found negative. As a result learners feel unwanted

and uncared for – all which might increase learners absconding. This agrees with the findings from Attwood (2006) who found that learners dislike for school occurs when they feel unwanted. This gives an impression that learners have little faith in their educators. Caring for those in need, in this case learners who abscond, is an important role of an educator's trajectory (Department of Education, 2000) and hopefully this learning will help learners who abscond to try and remain in school and become more positive persons in the future.

Bronfenbrenner (1989) argued that the microsystem analyses the relationship between the individual child and the immediate settings, which in this case is the school, as this has a direct impact on the developing child. This system should foster the need for a learner to receive love and support. This implies that educators should dedicate their time to ensuring that learners are consistently feeling loved and wanted in the class at all times. However, Engelbrecht et al. (2003) stated that educators find it very difficult to divide their attention among learners due to time and number of learners in the class. All learners reported that the relationship they shared with their educators was not a good one. It was established from the interviews and questionnaires that there was either fear for the educators or total disrespect. It was found that some learners abscond because they are afraid of the educators for various reasons. Others absconded because they did not like their educators since they would shout at them all the time.

Cathy mentioned:

“I am scared that she (the educator) will shout at me.”

Peter said:

“.....I abscond when I am scared of a certain teacher.”

Chris stated:

“Teachers were annoying because they scold the wrong people.”

Furthermore, this was backed up by Peter in his questionnaire when he said:

“Certain teachers are unpleasant.”

Educator 3:

“If a learner does not like a particular teacher then he/she chooses not to go to that specific class.”

The findings reveal that learners are absconding because they are scared of educators. Reasons for learners being scared range from them not completing tasks to disrupting the lesson. These are regarded as flight responses since they abscond out of fear. Moseki (2004) regarded this flight response as a defense mechanism. Furthermore, some learners chose to abscond simply because they do not like their educators. Studies have shown that there is no correlation between absconding school and the subject they abscond (Moseki, 2004). However, Pomeroy (1999) believes that absconding occurs in schools where there is an unfriendly relationship between learners and educators. Attwood (2006) concurs that a correlation exists between the dislike of school and lack of relationships with educators. If students feel ignored, misunderstood, devalued, or disrespected by their educators, they are likely to react negatively (Hallinan, 2008). Although educators are aware of learners absconding due to the lack of rapport between them and the learners, no educator participant mentioned that an effort was made to change their attitude to learners or use a different approach toward them. Strand (2012) maintains that when learners restored the relationship between teachers and learners, they developed a positive attitude towards school. Furthermore, Lehr et al. (2004) states that the relationships between learners and educators are vital in keeping learners involved in school. It is for this reason that a dearth of good relationships between children and educators in the classroom could be followed by absconding (Reid, 2008). Attwood (2006) agrees that this bad relationship results in a negative school atmosphere, which may lead to non-attendance. However, according to Chimwamurombe (2011) educators face a challenge to maintain an atmosphere that is conducive to learning and as a result they end up shouting at learners. It is for this reason that this factor influences learners to abscond. It is important for educators to understand a learner's background and the problems they encounter. This will enable educators to empathize with learners and not to be so 'harsh', as learners perceive them to be.

An educator is able to react positively to circumstances if she/he understands a learner's situation (Mugabe, 2013). This justifies as to why schools employ guidance counsellors. Unfortunately at this particular school, there are no counsellors to help learners with issues and with the demanding workload it is not possible for educators to teach and counsel at the same time.

Furthermore, some learners feel that the methods of teaching that educators are using are not inclusive of the entire class.

When a learner does not understand the educator's method of instruction, it is with ease that a learner would fail, which therefore contributes to the learner's dislike for school which results in learners absconding. Most learner participants indicated that they absconded directly or indirectly due to the educator's teaching technique.

Mary said:

"...Some of the teachers you cannot really hear what they are saying or maybe they think we understand, well I do not understand so I just do not come to class at all."

Mike uttered:

"...Some subjects are very boring and make me sleep."

Mary said:

"I hate going to class because we don't have worksheets and we always writing notes."

John confessed:

"The school work and homework was becoming too stressful."

Mike mentioned:

"Too much of work sir gives us."

The findings disclose that learners do not understand what is being taught. Strand (2012) believes that absconding stems from not comprehending the work taught. As mentioned earlier, this confirms that learners do not share a good relationship with educators since they are unable to ask for assistance when they find difficulty in their work. Learners require a clearer understanding of the educator's instruction and perhaps further assistance during the lesson. This concurs with the view of Rutter (1983) who believes that if the educator's instruction is more clear and empowering, learners will want to participate in the lesson. Furthermore, learners are finding that their lessons are boring. Rodriguez and Conchas (2009) state that children abscond school because it is boring. The educational technique at a school makes a difference (Pellerin,

2005). This is a direct implication of the methods used by the educators. It implies that educators are not innovative in their teaching strategy. A study conducted by Sheppard (2005) found that 53% of the 209 students included in her study were absconding because they did not like their school lessons. Similarly, in my study, learners abscond because they feel that the lessons are boring. In addition, since the school is in a financial crisis, educators are unable to make worksheets for the learners therefore resources such as chalkboards are used. Although educators are not directly responsible for this, indirectly they are blamed because their lessons are deemed boring since learners are writing for the entire lesson. Other learners feel that school work is demanding and they are unable to cope with the workload hence an escape mechanism from that would be to abscond. Since the learners feel that they are not been given assistance they believe that the work load is overwhelming. These factors are regarded as ‘push’ factors since these factors force learners to abscond. Moseki (2004) stated that inapproachable teaching staff, poor teaching style and classroom management are regarded as ‘push’ factors.

This is an implication that the method of teaching drastically needs to be altered in order to accommodate these learners. According to Department of Education (2001, p. 6) inclusive education is defined as: “enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners.” It is evident, according to learners that educators do not ‘understand’ them hence in order to create that ‘inclusive’ zone there needs to be compassion and understanding. This is in line with Bronfenbrenner (1989) who believe that inclusivity falls under the macrosystem since this system does not only affect the learner but also the school practices. However, some scholars disagree and believe that learners abscond due to school phobia. According to Bloom and Smith (2001) school phobia is when a child refuses to go to school. Yoneyama (2000) presents an exploration of four helpful discourses that inform the argument on school phobia in Japan. The discourse includes: psychiatric discourse which can be regarded as mental illness, the behavioural discourse which is known as pupil laziness and the socio-medical discourse which is learner fatigue (Yoneyama, 2000). These discourses criticize learners and their parents for “not fitting into” school. The next section looks at a further insight into school discipline and how that plays a role in absconding.

5.2.2.3 School Discipline

Significantly, the participants in the present study indicated that school discipline as another factor that contributes to learners absconding. Participants generally indicated that there is lack of discipline in their school which might be contributing to learners absconding. Some participants got angry when they spoke about the lack of discipline in their school and this is evident in how they describe their experiences. For example, one participant stated the following:

Mary postulated:

“There is no discipline what so ever.”

Cathy:

“Learners just walk out of some teachers’ class and they back chat the teachers.”

John:

“In some classes the educators have no control. Children do whatever they want to and that is why educators have to keep shouting all the time and no one wants to be in a class where the educator shouts all the time.”

Mike:

“Some educators don’t have control over the class so they send learners to stand outside. These learners use this time to wonder around school and disturb other classes.”

Earlier, it was demonstrated the significance of school discipline is important to curb learners absconding. In contrast, research has provided a critical body of evidence showing how lack of discipline in school influences learners behaviors and the ways in which those behaviors may manifest differently in absconding. Maheba and Prinsloo (2000) maintain that the lack of discipline in secondary schools in South Africa has been a great concern for educators. Rossouw (2003) maintains that these discipline issues prevail due to over emphasis on human rights. According to Wolhuter and Steyn (2003) discipline is one of the major problems encountered in Australian schools. Similarly, identifying lack of school discipline as contributing to learners

absconding has been found significant in other research in Africa. Nakpodia (2010) found that in Nigeria, discipline issues results in absconding of learners.

An identification of lack of school discipline is closely related to the concept of micro-system (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), whereby the environment within which the individual is situated may have a negative or positive influence. The participants in this study were able to demonstrate how lack of discipline has a detrimental effect on learners attendance, thus, becoming a path-way to learners absconding (Wolhuter & Steyn, 2003).

5.2.2.4 Safety and Security

Emerged from the findings were issues of safety and security through which learners absconding manifests. During the interview, some participants indicated how measures of security are a concern, thus, become path-ways to learners absconding. Some learners indicated that physical structures such as broken walls and fences make it very easy for them to abscond.

Mary exclaimed:

“I don’t think we have proper fences and walls because you get kids that abscond and there is a little hole in the fence where they run in.”

Raymond said:

“Mam the school buildings are so poor. We don’t have to worry about how we are going to get out of school, we can just jump the fence or walk over the broken walls.”

Mary uttered:

“The walls are broken, the school won’t fix it because learners will break it again, so they just leave it. It’s so easy to abscond.”

In these responses, it is apparent that factors contributing to learners absconding encompass a range of issues in the school and that poor infrastructure at school is important since it adequately contributes to learners absconding. Participants in the current study identify issues that the perceived measure of safety may be used by learners to leave the school unnoticed.

These comments further demonstrate learners may identify and show factors that contribute to learners absconding beyond person-person relationship.

Central to Bronfenbrenner's theory (1994) is the notion of person-environment interaction, whereby people interact with their surrounding other than people, such as, resources (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Thus, by identifying lack of school "fence" and holes in "school walls", the learners are using that as a means to abscond school other than being influenced by peers or educators alone. Lehr et al. (2004) found that school structures are essential in keeping learners engaged in school. This suggests that if schools are properly maintained and ensure that walls and fences are not broken down, learners will want to learn. However, from the interviews conducted, it can be understood that if a learner really wants to abscond he/she will do whatever it takes to abscond, including breaking down new walls or fences and with the school going through a financial crisis it is not possible to fix the broken walls and fences with ease.

Great effort is made internationally to get children into school (Harber, 2009). Both learner and educator participants believed that the safety and security with regards to human resources (security guards) needs to be looked at seriously. Parents send their children to school with the notion that they are safe at school knowing that there are security guards in place which will ensure their safety during breaks and change of lessons. However, Harber (2009) states that schools are not necessarily safe and secure.

Mary added:

"We have security guards but the security guards are not doing their job."

Cathy said:

"The security is not tight....They open the gate for us."

Raymond exclaimed:

"Instead of sending the children to class they are sending them outside...."The security in the school is smoking with the children."

From the interviews conducted, educators are aware of the careless security guards and still nothing has been done to eradicate the problem.

Educator One:

“I saw the guard opening the gate for learners to leave at half past 12. So how are having these guards here curbing absconding?”

The findings from the interviews and focus group discussion reveal that this is definitely a cause for concern because the security guards are not taking their job serious which is resulting in learners absconding effortlessly. Learners have indicated that there are security guards at the school, however they are not assertive and do not make an effort to ensure that learners are in class at all times. Some learners indicated that it is not safe at school as the gates are left unlocked and the security guards open the gates for the learners to leave school without even questioning them. Ideally the job of the security guard is to ensure safety at all times however, he is allowing learners to go out of the school property rather than guiding learners back to class. Furthermore, the security guards are taking bribes from learners. They are allowing learners out of school in exchange for money and cigarettes. In addition a big concern for both educators and learners was their views of the principal and the lack of assistance from management.

5.2.2.5 School Leadership and Management

Educator participants’ responses indicate that there is no assistance from the management. They feel that they cannot go willingly to their management and air their problems because if they do, there is no follow up and sometimes the management perceives these educators as not being able to manage their classes effectively.

Educator two:

“.....there is poor management.....there is no follow up.”

Researcher:

“...Do you get assistance from management?”

Educator three:

“...Some HOD’s get irritated and then they think that you are not doing your job as an educator to enforce or to ensure that the learners attend, and you are pushing your problem onto them.”

In addition, in highlighting the context of this school, the non-appointment of a permanent principal by the department of education has resulted in currently having an acting principal. In light of the views expressed by the learners during the interviews, it can be concluded that they have very little respect for the acting principal as they feel they are not treated with respect and dignity by him.

Mike said:

“...He (the acting principal) thinks he owns the school. He has no respect for us.”

All the learners said:

“We don’t respect him because he does not respect us.”

Furthermore, learners mentioned that if the acting principal steps down and the principal resume his duties again, there will be order in the school.

Researcher:

“When Mr S was the principal of the school was absconding rife?”

Learners:

“No.”

John said:

“Mr S understands children.”

Raymond agreed:

“He won’t just hold you like how Mr G holds you by your neck and takes you like a dog.”

The findings show that educator participants feel that there are poor management skills and they are not receiving much assistance from their management. They cannot rely on the support from the management. The policy of this school stipulates that all queries be brought to the management, however, educators feel that management is not following up on cases of absconding. This is backed up by the Department of Education (2010) that issues pertaining to irregular absence must be reported. Furthermore, it becomes a problem if they regularly send learners to the HOD's as it doesn't paint a good picture about their discipline skills. Therefore, some educators choose not to report incidents of absconding. Monobe and Baloyi (2012) stated that some educators do not even report absconding. This in turn influences learners to continue absconding as they know that nothing is done about it. Educator participants believe that learners are not taking the issue of absconding seriously because no example has been set to expose the severity of the issue. Moreover, it was found that learners of this specific school dislike the acting principal on the grounds that they feel that he does not respect them. These learners feel that respect is mutual and by them not receiving it, they cannot respect him. The participants also feel that when Mr S (the principal) was on duty, learners did not abscond so much and learners respected him because he shared a good rapport with them. Badgujar and Joshi (2013) believe that the success of the school depends on the ability of the principal. Bush et al. (2010, p. 162) maintains:

“The core purpose of principal ship is to provide leadership and management in all areas of the school under which high quality teaching and learning can take place”.

This almost suggests that the acting principal is autocratic in his discipline methods and this does not work well for this school. It is for this reason that Masekoameng (2010) believes that principals who are autocratic experience voluminous discipline problems at school. Clearly this is an indication that absconding has got out of hand since the appointment of the acting principal. It was further found that educators are not adhering to policies. This will be discussed in the next section below.

5.2.2.6 Engagement with Departmental Policies

The Department of Education (1996) has underlined that corporal punishment be banned. However, in countries like South Africa, corporal punishment is still being practiced (Nelson

Mandela Foundation, 2005). A few learners have stated that some educators are still enforcing corporal punishment as a method of discipline.

Mike claimed:

“He (the teacher) hits us sometimes when we don’t do our work.”

To reiterate, according to the Department of Education (1996) discipline should be corrective and nurturing. Yet some educators believe that corporal punishment is necessary with the notion that this will teach them not to repeat the mistake (Mugabe, 2013). However, the researcher disagrees with this statement since learners are still absconding even though corporal punishment is being used on them and besides, learners are just losing respect for their educators who use corporal punishment. Kimaryo (1998) believes that educators do not have to use corporal punishment to get learners to behave, they can praise good behavior and this in turn will reduce discipline problems. Although none of the participants indicated that they abscond due to being bullied, according to Harber (2009) educators can be guilty of bullying. Zdravomyslova and Gorshkova (2006) concur by saying that educators insult learners and even use physical force on them. From the interviews conducted we can see that learners are being bullied to some extent by the educators. Furthermore, participants are unsure if there are any policies on absconding as they have not been given any information on that.

Researcher:

“Are you familiar with any absconding policies from the department of education?”

Educator three:

“No I am not familiar with any of that.”

Researcher:

“Does the school have any policies from department of education?”

Educator three:

“I don’t know because they have not shown me anything.”

However, educators indicated that they are familiar with the absentee slip which they regard to some extent as a policy.

Educator three:

“I’m not too sure if it’s a policy but our school has a system whereby all the teachers will write down a list of learners who are absent for the day....and another learner will take it to all the other classes. So obviously if a learner’s name does not appear on that list it means that he was present for registration but chose not to come, for example, to maths class. So that is how I know he/she is absconding.”

In order for this to be successful, all educators need to be involved and complete this absentee list. Unfortunately, not all educators are filling in these slips.

Educator one:

“....Some teachers are not doing it..... What is the point of me or just a few teachers doing it when other teachers are not doing it.”

The findings show that both learner and educator participants were unsure if there are any policies on absconding as no policies were made available to them. However, some educators regarded the absentee slip as a policy to some extent. According to the Department of Education (2010) there are two types of registers that should be marked at school, class register and a period register. Therefore the absentee slip is a policy since it aids in marking of the period register. This suggests that there is definitely a communication problem between management and educators since there is some confusion about the policies and what constitutes a policy. It is therefore for obvious reasons, that if educators do not have access to policies, learners are unaware if policies on absconding exist as there is no information to cascade to learners. Baker et al. (2001) stated that learners abscond when there is lack of comprehending policies. Moreover, according to responses, educators are not compliant with the absentee slips. Monobe and Baloyi (2012) asserted that policies need to be implemented. With some educators not being compliant, it poses as a challenge for other educators as they are unsure if learners are genuinely absent or absconding. School policies should be available to all stakeholders of the school so in that way educators know how to deal with absconders and absconders know what the repercussions of absconding are. That sets a more clear tone and affirms the seriousness of the situation. According to Mugabe (2013) policies such as school rules are the foundation to create discipline at school.

Earlier, it has been argued that schools are supposed to be truly safe and a center of care and support (UNESCO, 2007). Schools represent one of the most important ecological contexts for determining pro-social development among adolescents (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The reality from the findings reveal how learners lived experiences highlight multiple factors that challenge the value of school or schooling. In contrast to a critical body of evidence showing how schools are important in nurturing the life of many learners, the participants in this study spoke eloquently about the various factors and more generally, the factors that contribute to learners absconding in Phoenix. The factors are intersectional (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). By this, the researcher refer to the ways that peers, educators, school management, parents and community are visible and articulate and contribute to learners absconding. The participants show that learners absconding are influenced by various adverse contexts within the school environments. While efforts have been made to retain learners at school (Department of Education, 2010), poor implementation of policies was also evident as another contributing factor to learners absconding. The participants' responses thus seemed to reinforce the contention that schools are microcosms of the broader society within which they are situated (Donald et al., 2010). They recognise the relationship within the learners, school and community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and their ability to contribute to learners absconding and impact on teaching and learning, as seen further in the next theme below.

5.2.3 Theme Three: The Impact of Learners Absconding on Teaching and Learning in High Schools

In illuminating the embeddedness of factors that contribute to learners absconding, this third and last theme focuses on educational and social impacts of these factors in relation to teaching and learning.

Most participants believed that absconding had an impact on them and that one of the implications would be failing. However, some learners had the view that even though they absconded, they would still pass the year hence they were not too concerned about that. Other learners agreed that by them absconding, it has an effect on learners who attend school regularly. Conversely, some learners believed that by them absconding, it has no effect on the other learners. In addition it was found that absconding also affects educators. Claes et al. (2009)

maintained that absconding has an impact on school. Apart from absconding having educational effects, there are social implications as well. The effects of absconding on the academic and social outcomes of youth are highly interrelated (Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009). The fact that learners abscond and are away from school on a daily basis, they stand the chance of losing their friends. Hence this section will be divided into two parts: (i) educational effects and (ii) social effects.

5.2.3.1 Educational Effects on Learners

From conducting the interviews, it was found that absconding has huge educational effects in the context of teaching and learning. The majority of the participants were adamant that learners who abscond tend to be at the risk of poor academic results or guidance. Poor academic effects can be related to losing out on the taught content, scope for the exam and some of the participants stated the following:

Educator one said:

“The person that is being affected the most is the learner that absconded.”

To be more specific, one learner spoke eloquently about choice of subjects:

Peter:

“Like for me when I was in grade nine I was supposed to choose pure maths but I didn’t qualify because I was naughty and I used to bunk.”

Other participants mentioned that as a result of absconding they tend to lose classroom teaching which is related to classroom activities and understanding the subject matter. For example, some participants stated the following:

Chris stated:

“Even though at the time absconding is fun, but we know it affects us negatively because we lose out on lessons.”

This was also supported by an educator by saying:

Educator two:

“Obviously he/she is missing out on the lesson and when they copy the work from their friends, they are not gaining understanding that the teacher would have shared in the period.”

Other participants stated that there is a risk of failing examinations due to absconding. This is stated as follows:

Raymond said:

“If you are not going to go to class then you are not going to know what is coming out in the exam. If you don’t have the work, then you cannot learn and that’s how you are going to fail at the end of the year.”

Participants generally demonstrated that learners absconding has huge effects in relation to their academic work and performance, as indicated in the previous excerpts. Some comments revealed that learners who abscond do not understand the subject matter that their educators shared, hence they stand a chance of missing the scope for the examination, and as a result, stand a chance of failing the subject at the end of the year. Dhruv et al. (2012) asserted that absconding has a negative impact on learners academic performance, which the findings of the current study concur with. Similarly, the study by Wilson et al. (2008) showed that the major effects of absconding were academic underachievement. From a UK perspective, Reid (2008) found that absconding is associated with a lower level of academic self-esteem. Likewise, participants in the current study identified that absconding had detrimental effects for a learner, such as, *Peter*, since he could not choose pure mathematics in the FET phase because he did not fully attend lessons. He recognised that due to his absconding, he could not comprehend the subject matter and this led to him failing the subject. Moreover, Strand (2012) postulates that when a student does not understand the teacher’s instructions, it is easy for the student to fail, which consequently contributes to the student’s dislike for school.

5.2.3.2 Educational Effects on Educators

Research in South Africa and elsewhere has shown evidence on the multiple roles of an educator and the ways in which these roles may manifest unequally in teaching and learning (Department of Education, 2010). In the context of the study, the findings showed how learners absconding may have negative effects on educators in various ways. In the following excerpts, both educators and learners agree teaching is disrupted when the educator has to attend to fill the register for non-attending students, planning time is affected, and completion of syllabus and end of term or year assessments are also affected.

Educator one maintained:

“Time is taken from marking that register, time is taken for filling out the absconders forms, time is taken even when those learners come back you have to reprimand them and teach them positively.”

Educator two:

“It affects me because personally I am a teacher I don’t like to be ahead of the class if the learners are behind or try my best to make sure everyone is on par. So if learners are absconding, regardless if they are good or bad you still have to go back and teach.”

All educator participants and most learner participants agreed that absconding affects educators. Due to high levels of absconding educators are unable to move on to a new section as majority of the class is not there.

Educator two:

“I have to delay my teaching.”

Peter:

“Teachers have to accommodate some time for the learners that were absconding because work cannot go on without the average attendance in the class.”

Educator one:

“If a whole group of children do not come to class, what teaching can be done? And you see I have in some cases smaller classes because it is a specialized classroom. So if I have eight learners in a class for example and five of them abscond due to peer pressure, am I only teaching three? Which means I have to continue with syllabus or stop syllabus or not do the work and when those five decide to come back then do it?”

Not only are their teaching negatively affected but also the end of year assessment can be negatively affected, as in the case for Educator Three and Chris below:

Educator Three:

“...Other learners are being deprived and then what happens is that you probably cramp two days lesson into one lesson, or come end of term, the revision time is now being cut down because you are still doing syllabus work.”

Chris added:

“It becomes difficult for teachers because they can't assess us properly.”

Learners absconding permeate teaching and learning dynamics, affecting educators' planning time and their teaching time. The excerpts above, offer critical narratives of challenge that educators face and the pressures of teaching in the context whereby some learners abscond classes. The time to plan and teach is of broad concern for all the educators who have to deal with absconding issues. Choice, to teach or not to teach when other learners are absconding creates severe pressure for educators. As shown, educators might have to delay their teaching or have to repeat the lesson for the sake of those who abscond. The findings show that most educators are unable to teach since so many learners are not in class. This therefore causes stress for educators because they are now using up revision time to complete syllabus work instead of working on revision with the learners. Henry and Huizinga (2007) state that educational time is being lost as a result of absconding. Educators stated they use up personal time like their breaks to explain assessments or even assess learners. Dhruv et al. (2012) postulate that educators feel

that absconders add to their workload as they need to give them extra lessons to ensure that they understand. Similarly, Wilson et al. (2008, p. 14) postulated that absconding “adds to the workload” of teaching.

5.2.3.3 School Discipline

The prevalence of disruptive behavior shown by learners who abscond, impact on school discipline and subsequently have a negative effect on teaching and learning. Both educators and learners participating in this study indicated that teaching and learning are negatively affected by learners behavior especially those learners who abscond classes. They maintained that educators use their teaching time to try to establish the ‘whereabouts’ of certain learners. There is also a general feeling that learners who abscond classes are very disruptive and try to distract the teaching process and other learners who are learning. Thus, teaching cannot take place due to the negative impact of learners who abscond classes. The following participants expressed this as follows:

Raymond:

“...Every time I bunk the teacher is taking up time asking where were you at. Also we disturb other learners for their books.”

In addition, participants have shown that educators have to spend time dealing with disruptive behaviours and to maintain discipline in the classroom.

Mike said:

“When the absconders come back to class they tend to be a little disruptive and then the teacher has to shout at them to behave themselves...”

Educator three:

“Sometimes the learner that was supposed to be present in your class, they will walk around the school and then they stand by the other teacher’s door wanting to speak to them or to the learners. So they are also disrupting other teacher’s lesson during the time that they are absconding.”

The participants' responses above demonstrate ways in which teaching and learning is affected negatively when dealing with learners who abscond lessons, since it takes a lot of teaching time because the educators take discipline measures, such as, 'shouting' at these learners. While teachers are supposed to be providing pastoral care to all learners, including the most vulnerable ones (Department of Education, 2010), dealing with absconders is taking a lot of teaching time. They do not only disrupt classroom teaching but discipline in the school becomes questioned, as is the case for Peter and Educator One:

Peter:

"...when we bunk the teacher is forced to leave work for that day and do it another day because learners are not there."

Educator One:

"The whole school is disrupted. If a child, firstly absconds a lesson, that means that they are walking around the blocks, they are making a noise around the blocks, whether they are single or whether they are in groups of absconders. Reason being, if they are single, they are trying to get the attention of other children in other classes. If they are in groups then they are sitting under the stair-well, they are sitting outside a class, they are laughing and making a noise."

The findings show that due to learners absconding certain lessons or classes educational programmes are hampered. Many learners that abscond lessons tend to put pressure on the educator while trying to accommodate them back in class. The investigation revealed that educators have to spend more time taking attendance register and trying to establish the reasons for absconding from some particular learners. On the other hand, the findings revealed that most learners who abscond classes are very disruptive when they come to class. From some participants, learners who are absconding pose challenges to discipline, given the number of learners that abscond classes, play truant at the same time, and the negative influence they have on other learners. Claes et al. (2009) maintained that the 'good' learners in class also face the negative consequences of other learners absconding. Furthermore, participants mentioned that the children who come to school regularly find themselves helping those learners who abscond.

This is unfair to those learners who come to school on a regular basis. Wilson et al.(2008) concurred that regular attenders end up helping the absconder. From the responses, not much is being done about the absconding if not for the absconder themselves, then for the other learners who attend school regularly. Dhruv et al. (2012) asserts that absconding needs to be taken seriously as this affects other learners in the class. It was revealed that when these absconders return to school, they are very disruptive, almost seeking attention. This concurs with Wilson et al. (2008) who maintained that absconding affects regular attenders because when these absconders do return to school they are disruptive and demand educators attention as this disrupted the work of other learners in the class. This is backed up by Mokhele (2007) who asserts that teachers spend most of their teaching time dealing with learners misconduct, such as bunking and late coming.

In contrast, one participating educator was adamant that learners absconding does not affect the teaching and learning severely. Typical remarks by the educator were:

Educator three:

“To be honest, I teach the lesson as normal. If a certain lesson is planned for the day and if learner x and y absconded, I still teach the lesson.”

Some educators in the participating school reported that they are not affected because only a few of learners have been missing their classes. For example in a class of 35 learners, if ten learners abscond, there are still 25 learners to teach. Nevertheless, the findings of this study revealed that there was a general lack of discipline in class and within the school due to learners absconding. Such behavior shown by these learners were perceived throughout the participants’ responses as affecting teaching and learning negatively.

Another big stress for educators is that if learners perform poorly, then there is an impression that a given educator is not ‘teaching properly’ or the fault lies with the educator. Either way, the educator is blamed. Wilson et al. (2008) stated that educators in their study indicated that poor academic results suggest poor teaching strategies and this affects the school’s reputation. This therefore causes educators to stress more as their reputation becomes tarnished. Even though it is apparent to the learners that there are a lot of educational repercussions of absconding not only

for themselves but for other learners and the educators, however, they still choose to abscond. There are also social effects of absconding and this will be discussed in the next section.

5.2.3.4 Effects on Social Relationships

The findings concerning effects of learners absconding on social aspects focus on learner-learner relationships, learner-teacher relationships, school management and wider school-community relationships.

The empirical exploration revealed that learners absconding have a negative impact on the social relationships of the school. In this study, participants, especially learners, expressed the effects of interpersonal relationships, such as feeling lonely or disconnected from their peers even though they are absconding classes or school. This was expressed by the participants as seen in the following quotes:

Peter:

“Maybe if they (friends) don’t bunk and you bunk you might separate. They will think that I am a bad person because I am bunking.”

Mary:

“Because I don’t attend class regularly I feel like a stranger and all alone.”

The other social effects presented as those of negative relationship between the learners and educators, as shown in these examples:

Chris:

“We end up not being liked by teachers and end up failing.”

In some instances it was discovered that academic performance of learners who abscond school places much strain on educators, which, in turn, hampers the relationship between the educators and school management, and the school and community at large. The findings in this study

reveal that educators have to account for learners failures and the school's reputation. Some participants remarked:

Mary said:

“When the child gets low marks the teacher has to explain at the office why the child has low marks.”

Raymond:

“It affects the teachers because when we don't go to class and when we do bad in school, people will want to know from the teachers why we are doing bad and then the teachers become bad because they think that the teacher is not doing their job.”

Furthermore, absconding does not only affect the absconder itself but there are also repercussions for the school.

Educator two:

“It gives the school a bad name, because if the learners are walking outside of the school with their school ties on, then if anybody sees that, they are going to think that the school has no control so of course the school is going to lose out on business should you say.”

The responses from the interviews indicate that absconding has social effects as learners find themselves losing friendship due to them not being in the class so often and therefore they feel isolated. Malcom et al. (2003) confirmed that absconding can isolate learners from their peers in the classroom. Since learners are away from their classes because they abscond so frequently, they feel like strangers. This is concurred by Strand (2012, p. 12) who cited: “Because of their absences, it makes the students feel like abandoned and outsiders”. The findings of the empirical research further revealed that educators have to account for the academic performance of absconding learners by providing reasons in the school office and to protect the reputation of the school. Wilson et al. (2008) maintained that from her study, schools were afraid of losing their reputation due to learners absconding. No parent will want to send their child to a school if there seems to be no order in that school. If learners are seen out of school during school hours, it gives the school and not the child a bad reputation.

In South Africa, the context of the current study, according to the Department of Education (2000) the Norms and Standards for Educators forms the basis on which educators roles are built and provide guidelines regarding pastoral care, mediation, designing and administering learning programmes, individualizes assessment and support for learners, including those who abscond. The findings revealed that educators fully understand and are aware of their roles and responsibilities regarding the Norms and Standards for educators framework. According to the Department of Education (2000), every educator is an agent of change, thus, do have important roles to fulfill regarding the development and implementation of school policies that promote the well-being of every learners in the school, and to ensure that schools are true centres of excellence, care and support (Department of Education, 2010). The findings in this case reveal critical aspects at the macrosystemic level (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), where by the implications of policies and actions of educators or schools towards policies, have effects on the learners absconding in schools. Based on the three major findings presented and discussed in this chapter and consolidated within Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, it has been revealed that learners absconding are a complex phenomenon and it is a serious concern for schools, especially, in Phoenix.

5.3 Conclusion

Based on the discussion of the findings of this empirical research, firstly, participants' exposition of absconding had to be discussed in order to gain insight into their unique understanding. Secondly, the participants' perceptions of factors contributing to learners absconding were described and revealed that factors contributing to learners absconding are embedded in the rich ecological aspects within the school. The third and final theme was discussed, whereby the participants spoke eloquently about how learners absconding impact teaching and learning generally. The final chapter opens with an overview of the study, after which conclusion of findings are presented that emerged in the research. Recommendations arising from the findings of this study are presented and suggestions for further research are made in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the researcher presented data analysis and discussion of the findings of this study. This study focused on investigating the factors that contribute to learners absconding in Phoenix, Durban. The purpose of this study was to gain insight on why learners abscond school and how it affects them, educationally and socially. This final chapter begins by summing up the key findings of the study. This is followed by reflecting on the research process. This chapter also discusses the recommendations which hope to assist educators, principals and other interested professionals in improving existing situations regarding absconding. This chapter ends with a conclusion to the study.

6.2 Summary of the Findings

This study was guided by two research questions: (i) What are the factors that contribute to absconding of learners? (ii) How does absconding impact on teaching and learning? The following inferences were formulated from the themes that emerged and were discussed in the previous chapter:

6.2.1 Exposition of Learners Absconding

The findings of this theme showed that there is a broad understanding of the word absconding. There were three categories that were identified: visible in school but not in class, early school leaving and in-between home and school. The first category is referred to as post-registration absconding since learners attend school, mark themselves present at registration and then chose not to go to certain classes. Through research it was found that there are different terminologies for absconding. In some countries, with reference to South Africa, absconding is referred to as bunking. In other countries truanting is an alternate word used for absconding. It was also found that truancy and bunking were other words that were used to describe absconding in this particular context as children are influenced by their context.

It was found that other understandings of absconding meant leaving before the school day ends without consent from the school and parents. This is in line with Departmental policies that state that a learner cannot leave school during school times without a letter from their parents or permission from the school. Findings further revealed that some learners leave home with the intention of going to school but do not end up going to school. This is referred to as blanket absconding. Research findings indicate that absconding occurs on a daily basis and the majority of the learners in the FET phase are absconding.

6.2.2 Factors Contributing to Learners Absconding

Upon research it was found that the factors of absconding are multiple and complex. These factors have been outlined in chapter two, literature review, of the study. The first factor exposed was peer-to-peer relationships. Findings showed that some of the factors related to peer-to-peer relations were peer pressure. In addition, it was found that learners abscond because they want to be with their friends. Furthermore, learners also abscond because if they do not, their peers will tease them. Another factor related to peer relationships is learners absconding due to modeling the same behavior as absconders.

It was found that since learners are unable to smoke and consume alcohol at home, they use up school time to do so. The study revealed that there were no intrinsic factors located within the learner that contributed to learners absconding. These factors are regarded as pull factors since they attract learners to abscond.

The learner-educator relationship is another factor contributing to learners absconding. It was found that learners abscond because they are scared of their educators. The findings further revealed that learners abscond because they do not share a good relationship with their educators and as a result of this learners abscond. In addition, teaching methods are pushing learners to abscond since they did not understand subject content and the educator's teaching strategy. This therefore reveals that the lessons are not inclusive in nature and this goes against departmental policies which state that learning methods should meet the needs of all learners. These factors mentioned are regarded as push factors since they drive learners to abscond.

It was found that discipline at the school may be a contributing factor of absconding. Since some educators do not have control over their classes, and it shows the lack of seriousness, therefore learners use this as an opportunity to abscond. Poor school discipline relates to the concept of the microsystem.

Due to poor infrastructure such as broken wall and fences, this makes it easier for learners to abscond. School structures are vital in keeping learners at school. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that children interact with the environment and in this case, learners are interacting with the broken walls and fences and using it as a method of absconding. Furthermore, the school has security guards, but they are not doing their job therefore this contributes to learners absconding.

A sore point for participants was the lack of faith they had for leadership and management in that school. Educator participants felt that when issues of absconding were reported, not much is done about it hence learners continue to abscond. Other factors that contribute to learners absconding is due to the fact that corporal punishment still exists in this school. According to departmental policies corporal punishment is banned, however, studies revealed that corporal punishment is still being practiced at this school.

6.2.3 Impact of Learners Absconding on Teaching and Learning in High Schools

The findings show that absconding has educational and social effects. The participants indicated that absconding affects their academic performance. Educators are put under pressure as they cannot teach new content if so few learners are at school. Furthermore, this adds to the educator's workload as extra lessons may be needed to ensure learners understand.

Other learners are affected since educators are using up class time to reprimand absconders or enquire about them and as a result, other learners in class suffer the consequences. Educators are further stressed because if learners fail the year due to them absconding, it fuels an assumption that educators are unable to teach. Absconding has social effects. Due to the fact that learners abscond so often, they stand a possibility of losing their friends, therefore isolating learners from their peers. In addition due to learners failing, they develop a negative relationship with learners and vice-versa. However, this is not compliant with the norms and standards of educators as they

are not providing a pastoral care for learners. The fact that educators are not implementing policies at school, learners are facing the consequences of it.

6.3 Recommendations for the Study

There are a variety of strategies to reduce the issue of absconding. These recommendations can be useful for the school in which the study was undertaken. Furthermore, schools that have a similar context can adopt these suggestions. These recommendations were made in line with the findings.

The issue of absconding is endemic. Absconding is likely to continue therefore it is imperative that there are suggestions to overcome this issue. The following recommendations may assist in reducing absconding:

- From the findings, it is evident that learners are experiencing problems within the school. The school should employ a guidance counsellor to assist with the problems. In this way, without disclosing the issues, educators are made aware of problems and they can take precautionary measures to avoid scolding the children or embarrassing them. This in turn will create a more pleasant relationship between educators and learners and they will want to come to class.
- Educators need to consider lesson plans that are inclusive in nature. This ensures that activities need to be well thought out and targeting all groups of learners. In this way all learners are involved in the lesson and there is no time for learners to feel 'bored'.
- There should be more interaction between educators and management. Management needs to seriously intervene when educators are encountering problems with absconding. They need to follow up closely on learners who abscond. Furthermore, ongoing workshops/meetings should be held perhaps once a week, where educators can express their problems so they are made aware that other educators are also going through similar issues, hence this lessens the stress. Also educators who might not be affected so badly with absconding can lend support and strategies that might be useful.
- Policies on absconding should be made available to all staff members so that they are familiar with policies and can implement them.

- Greater effort must be made to reach out and empower parents of children who abscond and the consequences of absconding must be outlined.
- Teacher exchange programmes between schools should be established to encourage a culture of learning and sharing amongst teachers and schools, with a view to reducing absconding in schools.
- Corporal punishment has been stressed upon and still being stressed upon. Educators are warned that corporal punishment is banned. However, educators are still inflicting corporal punishment. Educators need to look for alternate methods of disciplining such as positive reinforcement. Educators should give the “troublesome learners” the opportunity of running errands as this will show their importance in class and learners would want to be there and behave appropriately.

6.4 Reflection

Throughout the research study the researcher made notes about the process. This is referred to as field notes. It is from this that the researcher was able to reflect on the study. This reflection is very important as the researcher can use this to prepare, overcome or even avoid similar situations for further research studies. With any research process, it was not an easy task to accomplish since the researcher encountered many obstacles along the way. It must be noted that at times she felt like quitting, however, she stayed strong with the help of many people and was able to eventually overcome them. One of the most difficult tasks during this investigation was to get educators to participate in this study. One would assume that since the study was conducted in the same school that the researcher teaches in, it would be convenient as they are easily accessible, however it was not an easy task to get them to be participants. The researcher assumed that she possessed a good rapport with the educators at her school, however she has learnt from this study that she does not share a good rapport with them as she initially believed. Furthermore, questionnaires, a source of data generation which was given to learner participants, was not an easy instrument to obtain information as the participants did not hand it in timeously. In fact, one participant did not hand in at all. However, as mentioned above, with all obstacles that were encountered the researcher was still able to complete the research study.

6.5 Limitations of the Study

The context of the case under investigation is not indicative of the general situation of absconding in South African schools. The school serves a community that is between middle to low socio-economic background, limiting the generalisation to more advantaged communities.

Educator participants were reluctant to participate in the study and this made the data generating process dreadful. As a result of this, data was not collected according to time frame, creating a delay in the research process.

This study was limited to a small sample of learners in higher grades (grade 10 to 12) since absconding is rife in those grades.

The questions asked during the investigation may not have been answered in full. Furthermore, the study is set at a particular point in time and no follow-up study was done.

Although most of the learners speak English, some learners battled to understand certain questions. There is a possibility that during the video recordings, participants' behaviour might be modified to convince the researcher. This could lead to the Hawthorne effect. This is when people think they have to do better because they know that they are being watched or interviewed. To eradicate the possibility of this, questions were posed using different techniques and levels of questioning, and from the onset of the interview, the researcher stated that she is not looking for a specific answer. Nonetheless, important concepts about absconding can be drawn from this study.

6.6 Recommendations for Further Research

The recommendations for further research are outlined below:

- This study has only investigated factors contributing to learners absconding in one urban school. Since this is context-driven, a research study consisting of more than one school should participate in the study. Schools from urban and rural areas should be included as a comparative study to get more insight into the problem of absconding.
- Since the study aimed to target learners (determine the factors of absconding) and educators (to determine the educational effects of absconding), it would be interesting to

conduct an investigation into the school management and district officials' perspectives on absconding and how they could support schools with the issue of absconding.

- This research was done using a small qualitative sample. Future research can be done on a large scale using quantitative techniques to investigate the factors that contribute to absconding of children.
- Open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion were used as data generating methods in this study and extensive data was generated. However, other tools such as photo voice can be used for future research as some children are very visual and can articulate their issues about absconding by drawing rather than speaking.
- In this study, Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological theory was used to frame the study. For future research, other theoretical frameworks such as community based partnership theory could be used. The community based research theory allows for role players such as parents, learners, educators and district officials to be part of the study.

6.7 Conclusion of Study

The primary aim of this study was identify the factors that contribute to learners absconding and what effect it has on teaching and learning. The study provided an understanding of why these learners abscond school and how it impacts on their education. It can be concluded that there are different interpretations of absconding, depending on the cultural context of a learner. The study showed that there are heterogeneous factors that contribute to absconding and although numerous factors of absconding exist, for this particular school, factors within the school 'push' learners to abscond. This justifies the contention that every school is different and the solution to a problem depends on the context of the school. Hence, this study cannot be generalized. The study further revealed that absconding affects all role players of the school and not just the absconder.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1: Ethical Clearance Approval

APPENDIX 2: Letter of Permission from Department of Education

APPENDIX 3: Permission from Department of Education

APPENDIX 4: Letter of Permission from the Principal to conduct interviews at the school

APPENDIX 5: Letter requesting Permission from Parents for Participation of their Children

APPENDIX 6: Consent Form from Parents

APPENDIX 7: Letter of Participation from Educator Participants

APPENDIX 8: Letter of Participation from Learner Participants

APPENDIX 9: Consent/Assent from Participants –Educators and learners

APPENDIX 10: Open-ended Questionnaires for Learner Participants

APPENDIX 11: Semi-structured Interview Questions for Learner Participants

APPENDIX 12: Semi-structured Interview Questions for Educator Participants

APPENDIX 13: Focus Group Discussion Questions for Learner Participants

APPENDIX 14: Language Clearance Certificate

APPENDIX 15: Turn it in Report

APPENDIX 1: Ethical Clearance Approval



01 October 2014

Ms Areshna Jugnoohan (205506791)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/D480/D14AA
Project title: Factors contributing to high school learners' absconding in the Phoenix, Durban area

Dear Ms Jugnoohan,

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received on 28 May 2014, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the process have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Ms Fumana Khanani
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Marojele
Cc School Administrator: Mr Thoba Mthembu

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

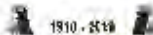
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APPENDIX 2: Letter of Permission from Department of Education

Attention: Dr Sishi

Head of Department of Education

Re: Permission to conduct a study at a Public School in Phoenix, Durban

My name is Areshna Jugmohan and I am completing my Masters degree (M.Ed) through the University of KwaZulu Natal, Student number: 205506761. I am required to do a research to write up a dissertation. Phoenix Secondary, Durban, KwaZulu Natal has been selected to participate in this research project. The title of my research is, **Factors Contributing to High School Learners Absconding in the Phoenix, Durban Area**. The rationale of the study emanates from a personal interest. On a daily basis, in a class of 32 learners, approximately seven attend lessons. This is problematic as it affects the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, local newspapers indicate that absconding is rife in the Phoenix area.

The importance of this study is as follows:

- The study will provide an understanding of why these learners abscond school and how it impacts on their education.
- This research will generate knowledge which may be useful in order to improve education for learners in the school.
- This study will enable the absconder to comment on their experiences. Thus, the research may come up with information which may lead to more durable solutions.

The study requests the participation of 6 learners (two from grade 10, 11, 12) and 3 teachers (one from grade 10, 11, 12) in interviews and focus group discussions (with learners). Participation is purely voluntary and participants will be at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time if they so wish and no harm will befall them. I will observe maximum respect to your institution and participants' anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study as well as in the reporting of findings. Information will be made available to all participants before publication of the study. Interviews will be conducted in the morning (before registration), and during breaks hence ensuring that instruction time will not be used.

I understand the nature of the research project and the use of data for research purposes and I give consent to the study at this school.

Signature _____

Date _____

Please feel free to contact me on:

Cell: 083 7879627

Email: areshnajugmohan@yahoo.com

Or my supervisor, Doctor F Khanare on:

Cell: 083 432 1772.

Furthermore, the school can be contacted for any queries on 031 539 1790.

Alternately contact the Research Office: HSSREC – Ethics on 031 260 8350 or snymanm@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you very much in anticipation.

Yours faithfully

Areshna Jugmohan

APPENDIX 3: Permission from Department of Education



education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Nomangisi Ngubane

Tel: 033 392 1004

Ref: 24/8/278

Miss A Jugmohan
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DURBAN
4091

Dear Miss Jugmohan

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS' ABSCONDING IN THE PHOENIX, DURBAN AREA"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 October 2014 to 30 June 2015.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Connie Kehologile at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (Pinetown District).

Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD
Head of Department: Education
Date: 03 October 2014

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

POSTAL: Private Bag X 9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa
PHYSICAL: 247 Burger Street, Anton Lembede House, Pietermaritzburg, 3201. Tel. 033 392 1004
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CALL CENTRE: 0860 596 363; Fax: 033 392 1203 WEBSITE: www.kzneducation.gov.za

APPENDIX 4: Letter of Permission from the Principal to conduct interviews at the school

I, _____ (full name of principal) hereby confirm that Miss Areshna Jugmohan has discussed the project titled “**Factors Contributing to High School Learners Absconding in the Phoenix, Durban Area**” The importance of this study is as follows:

- The study will provide an understanding of why these learners abscond school and how it impacts on their education.
- This research will generate knowledge which may be useful in order to improve education for learners in the school.
- This study will enable the absconder to comment on their experiences. Thus, the research may come up with information which may lead to more durable solutions.

The study requests the participation of 6 learners (2 from grades 10, 11, 12) and 3 Educators (1 from grade 10, 11, 12) in interviews and focus group discussions (with learners). Participation is purely voluntary and participants will be at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time if they so wish and no harm will befall them. I will observe maximum respect to your institution and participants’ anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study as well as in the reporting of findings. Information will be made available to all participants before publication of the study. Interviews will be conducted in the morning (before registration), and during breaks hence ensuring that instruction time will not be used.

Please feel free to contact me on 083 787 9627 or Doctor F Khanare on 083 432 1772.

I, _____ (full name of principal) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of research project, and I give consent to the study in the project and the use of data for research purposes.

I understand that participation in the study is voluntary and all participants at my school are at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time should they desire.

Principal’s Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX 5: Letter requesting Permission from Parents for Participation of their Children

Dear Parent / Guardian

My name is Ms A Jugmohan, a Masters student from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Student number: 205506761. I am engaged in research work concerning factors that contribute to learner absconding and have selected this school as the study site. The research will be used for academic purposes only. The rationale of the study stems from a personal interest. On a daily basis, in a class of 32 learners, approximately seven attend lessons. This is problematic as it affects the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, local newspapers indicate that absconding is rife in the Phoenix area.

The study entails experiences of learners who abscond and its importance is as follows:

- The study will provide an understanding of why these learners abscond school and how it impacts on their education.
- This research will generate knowledge which may be useful in order to improve education for learners in the school.
- This study will enable the absconder to comment on their experiences. Thus, the research may come up with information which may lead to more durable solutions.

Learners will be interviewed, will participate in group discussions and will be handed questionnaire to answer. I am seeking your permission to allow your child to be a participant in this study, which will provide insight into ways of providing quality education. Participation will be voluntary and you are free to withdraw your child from the study at any time.

I promise:

- That all information regarding your child will be confidential and will not be divulged to educators, school managers, or learners. The only persons with access to information will be Dr F Khanare(Masters Supervisor) and I.
- That all written reports and accounts of this study will not identify the school or persons involved.
- That the information gathering process will not harm your child.
- That the information gathering process will not disrupt the teaching and learning situation.

Should you require any further clarification about the study, please feel free to contact me on 031 539 1790 or Doctor F Khanare on 083 432 1772.

Regards

Ms A Jugmohan

APPENDIX 6: Consent Form from Parents

I _____ (full name of parent / guardian) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document (**Appendix 6**) and the nature of research project, and I consent to the participation of my child:

_____ (full names of child) in the project and the use of data for research purposes.

I understand that participation in the study is voluntary and I am at liberty to withdraw my child from the project at any time should I so desire.

Parent / Guardian's Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX 7: Letter of Participation from Educator Participants

Dear Educator

I am completing my Masters degree (M.Ed) through the University of KwaZulu Natal, Student number: 205506761. I am required to do research to write up a dissertation. I am engaged in research work concerning learners who abscond. The research will be used for academic purposes only. The rationale of the study stems from a personal interest. On a daily basis, in a class of 32 learners, approximately seven attend lessons. This is problematic as it affects the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, local newspapers indicate that absconding is rife in the Phoenix area.

The importance of this study is as follows:

- The study will provide an understanding of why these learners abscond school and how it impacts on their education.
- This research will generate knowledge which may be useful in order to improve education for learners in the school.
- This study will enable the absconder to comment on their experiences. Thus, the research may come up with information which may lead to more durable solutions.

You are requested to participate in the study in which you will be scheduled for an interview which may provide insights into ways of providing quality education. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

I promise:

- That all information will be confidential and will not be divulged to teachers, school managers, or learners. The only persons with access to information will be Dr F Khanare (Masters Supervisor) and I.
- That all written reports and accounts of this study will not identify the school or persons involved.
- That the information gathering process will not harm you or anybody involved in the study.
- That the information gathering process will not disrupt the teaching and learning situation.

Should you require any further clarification about the study, please feel free to contact me on 083 787 9627 or Doctor F Khanare on 083 432 1772.

Kind Regards

Areshna Jugmohan
Student number: 205506761

APPENDIX 8: Letter of Participation from Learner Participants

Dear learner

I am completing my Masters degree (M.Ed) through the University of KwaZulu Natal. I am required to do research to write up a dissertation. I am engaged in research work concerning learners who abscond. The research will be used for academic purposes only. The rationale of the study stems from a personal interest. On a daily basis, in a class of 32 learners, approximately seven attend lessons. This is problematic as it affects the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, local newspapers indicate that absconding is rife in the Phoenix area.

The importance of this study is as follows:

- The study will provide an understanding of why these learners abscond school and how it impacts on their education.
- This research will generate knowledge which may be useful in order to improve education for learners in the school.
- This study will enable the absconder to comment on their experiences. Thus, the research may come up with information which may lead to more durable solutions.

You are requested to participate in the study in which you will be scheduled for an interview which may provide insights into ways of providing quality education. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

I promise:

- That all information will be confidential and will not be divulged to teachers, school managers, or learners. The only persons with access to information will be Dr F Khanare (Masters Supervisor) and I.
- That all written reports and accounts of this study will not identify the school or persons involved.
- That the information gathering process will not harm you or anybody involved in the study.
- That the information gathering process will not disrupt the teaching and learning situation.

Should you require any further clarification about the study, please feel free to contact me on 031 539 1790

Kind Regards

Ms A Jugmohan

APPENDIX 9: Consent/Assent from Participants –Educators and learners

I _____ (name of participant) have been approached to participate in the research entitled: **Factors Contributing to High School Learners Absconding in the Phoenix, Durban Area**

I understand that:

- The research is about learners absconding.
- My participation in the research is voluntary.
- My participation in the research will not affect my position as a learner / Educator or my relationship with other colleagues/learners at school.
- I can refuse to answer any questions asked.
- I can withdraw from the research process at any time.
- The researcher will use information from me in a way that will assure my continued respect amongst other learners, colleagues and the wider fraternity.
- The information obtained will be used with the strictest confidentiality.
- My identity will not be disclosed in the dissertation.
- Photographs of me will not be used in this thesis or any display related to the research.
- Learners/educators rights will be respected.
- The research interviews will not impact on my working time.

I **agree** to participate in a study that Ms A Jugmohan is conducting.

Name (of participant): _____
Signature _____
Date _____

Or

I **do not agree** to participate in this research study

Name (of participant): _____
Signature _____
Date _____

APPENDIX 10: Open-ended Questionnaires for Learner Participants

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRES (For learner participants only)

You are invited to participate in this study which explores the factors of absconding. The study explores further the ways in which these factors affect the teaching and learning in this school and the ways in which absconding can be addressed in schools. Participation in the questionnaire is voluntary and you are free not to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with or to withdraw from the study at any time. Any information given will not be disclosed to any member of staff.

Introduction by Facilitator

Hello, my name is Miss A Jugmohan. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this questionnaire in relation to the study mentioned.

1. What grade are you in?
2. What is your understanding of absconding? Give Examples
3. When did you start absconding? Please explain in detail
4. Why did you start absconding? Please explain in detail
5. Why are you still absconding? Please explain in detail

APPENDIX 11: Semi-structured Interview Questions for Learner Participants

1. What are some of the factors that lead you to abscond?
 - Briefly explain your family background
 - Do your parents work?
 - If so, where do your parents work?
 - What time do they come home from work?
 - Do your parents check on your work done at school/sign your books?
 - Do your parents attend parents meeting?
 - If no, why?
 - Do they phone in school and do regular checkups on your attendance?
 - How do you feel about yourself? Do you think you are popular?
 - Do you have a high self-esteem or a low self-esteem? Why?
 - How do you regard schooling?
 - Which subjects do you dislike? Why?
 - How would you regard your relationship with your teachers at school?
 - Are your teachers friendly? Strict?
 - Are you aware of any absconding policies at school?
2. What are the main reasons for you absconding school?
 - Are you easily influenced by your friends?
 - Where do you normally hang out when you abscond?
3. How does absconding impact on your learning?
 - How are your grades?
 - When you do return to class, do you understand the work being taught?
 - Do you update your books?
 - Do you write the examinations/tests?
 - Are you afraid of failing the year?
 - What would your parents do if you fail the year?

APPENDIX 12: Semi-structured Interview Questions for Educator Participants

1. How do absconders generally perform at school?
2. Why do they perform the way they do?
3. How is their performance in comparison to other learners who attend school regularly and are in the same class?
4. What are some of the challenges that you experience with absconders?
5. How does the absconding impact on teaching and learning?
6. Are there any absconding policies at the school?
7. Are the policies implemented?
8. What assistance do you get from management?
9. What is being done to eradicate the problem of absconding?

APPENDIX 13: Focus Group Discussion Questions for Learner Participants

1. Why do you abscond?
2. How is the schooling in this specific school?
3. Are the teachers strict?
4. Are they able to maintain discipline?
5. What are the absconding policies in this specific school?
6. What are the repercussions of absconding?
7. How does absconding affect your learning?
8. Would you like to reform and stop absconding?

APPENDIX 14: Language Clearance Certificate

25 Maple Crescent
Circle Park
KLOOF
3610

Phone 031 - 7075912
0823757722
Fax 031 - 7110458
E-mail:
www.benlucasc@telkomsat.net
saths.govender4@gmail.com

Dr Saths Govender

24 NOVEMBER 2015

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN


LANGUAGE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

This serves to inform that I have read the dissertation titled:

**FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LEARNERS ABSCONDING IN A HIGH SCHOOL
IN PHOENIX** by A. Jugmohan.

To the best of my knowledge, all the proposed amendments have been effected and the work is free of spelling and grammatical errors. I am of the view that the quality of language used meets generally accepted academic standards.

Yours faithfully


DR S. GOVENDER
B Paed. (Arts), B.A. (Hons), B Ed.
Cambridge Certificate for English Medium Teachers
MPA, D Admin.

APPENDIX 15: Turn it in Report



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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction
The introduction chapter outlines the background and scope of the study. It states that the research is a quantitative study designed to explore the role of the teacher in the development of the student's problem-solving skills. The study is a descriptive study of the student's problem-solving skills and the teacher's role in the process. A list of objectives of the research is provided to guide the reader. The study is a quantitative study that is designed to explore the role of the teacher in the development of the student's problem-solving skills. The study is a descriptive study of the student's problem-solving skills and the teacher's role in the process. A list of objectives of the research is provided to guide the reader.

1.2 Background to the Study
The background of the study is a quantitative study that is designed to explore the role of the teacher in the development of the student's problem-solving skills. The study is a descriptive study of the student's problem-solving skills and the teacher's role in the process. A list of objectives of the research is provided to guide the reader. The study is a quantitative study that is designed to explore the role of the teacher in the development of the student's problem-solving skills. The study is a descriptive study of the student's problem-solving skills and the teacher's role in the process. A list of objectives of the research is provided to guide the reader.



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