

**AN EXPLORATION OF SCHOOL CULTURES ASSOCIATED WITH GOOD
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN TWO PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN LESOTHO**

BY

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DECLARATION

I, Amelia Tantso Rampai declare that this dissertation is my own and original work, and has never been previously submitted for any degree to any institution. All the sources I have used in this study are listed in the references.

AT Rampai

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Researcher

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Supervisor: Prof. V. Chikoko

DEDICATION

This research project is dedicated to:

- My son Moeketsi whom I am expecting to follow in my foot steps, and my husband Maloloja who is always supportive and appreciates my success in my studies.

ABBREVIATIONS

SADC – South African Development Community

FPE – Free Primary Education

UN – United Nations

UK – United Kingdom

UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund

ECOL – Examination Council of Lesotho

PSLE – Primary School Leaving Examination

LCE – Lesotho College of Education

MSC – Management School Committee

SAC – School Advisory Committee

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I encountered several challenges in the production of this work which sometime caused me stress and pain. But the support from the following people led me to a successful completion of this work. It is a great pleasure to express my thanks for their contribution.

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- Above all, God my Provider who made my work possible.

ABSTRACT

This case study was located in the qualitative research approach under interpretive paradigm. The study explored school cultures associated with good academic performance in two selected primary schools in Lesotho, which perform well academically. It aimed to find out the types of school cultures of those schools and how they sustain their cultures. These schools are located in the Leribe district around Maputsoe area.

The study was conducted by means of semi-structured interviews. Eighteen teachers were interviewed. The intention was to interview ten teachers in each school, but two teachers in Maliba School declined. Observation and document analysis methods were used for data production and verification.

The findings of the study revealed several aspects involved in striving for good academic performance. There were lots of similarities in the findings in both schools. They were categorized into themes namely, time management, rituals and ceremonies, relationships within the school, teaching and learning processes; and school improvement and development. The findings revealed that subject teaching is the most appropriate technique and teachers choose subjects according to their expertise, so that every teacher imparts knowledge to learners satisfactorily. This practice also allows the adoption of various methods. Teachers manage to attempt several lessons in a day successfully.

The findings revealed that openness among the colleagues is important because they disclose their problems and get assisted. The conducive environment allows dedication and commitment to work. A support from the principal and colleagues which results from good relationships empowers teachers in their work.

This study recommends that the government should allow subject specialization for primary teachers and they should be trained for that. Good time management should be part of school culture as well as commitment.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study which seeks to explore school cultures associated with good academic performance in two selected primary schools in Lesotho. Culture has been considered as a significant factor in the production of good school results, which is why Moloji (2002) states that school culture plays an important role in students' achievements and school effectiveness. Moloji (2002) adds that school culture should be seen as a whole-school development intervention. What this means is that school culture should be regarded as a vital instrument for reducing ineffectiveness within the school. It is therefore important to explore the culture of the school and see how it relates to the kind of performance which the particular school presents.

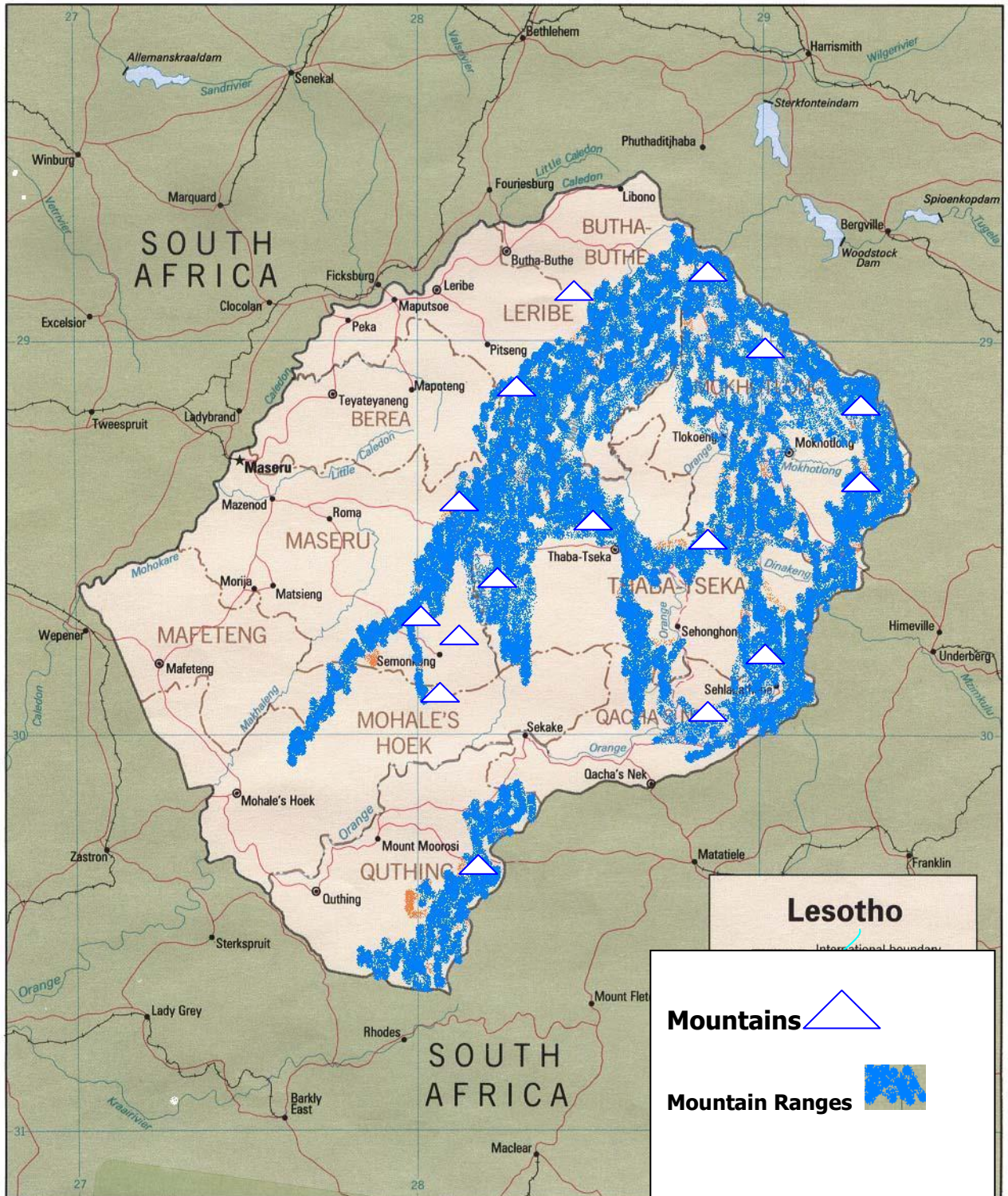
This chapter addresses eight issues. It starts by explaining the background and rationale of the study. After this I move to the context of the study. This is followed by the statement of the problem; the research questions; the limitations of the study; the significance of the study; the definition of terms; and the structure of the study, in that order. In the presentation of the context of the study, the names that are used to describe the schools selected are pseudonyms.

1.2 Background and rationale of the study

It is important to provide a brief background of Lesotho in relation to education and some of the problems associated with it. Lesotho is a small and poor African country. It covers an area of 30,355 square kilometres of which one third consists of lowlands and the rest, mountains (Lemena, 2000). It has a population of about 1,872,721 (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Figure 1 illustrates the geography of Lesotho in terms of lowlands and highlands and the ten districts. Only the ranges and the high peaks are originally depicted on the map and this caused me to make some additions on this map.

MAP OF LESOTHO

Figure 1.



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Source: Geographic guide maps of Africa

<http://www.geographicguide.com/africamaps/lesotho.htm>

Lesotho is poor and research indicates that poverty results in children being over-age before they are sent to school, or that they are not sent to school at all (Sebatane, Ambrose, Molise, Mothibeli, Motlomelo, Nenty, Nthunya and Ntoi, 2000). Due to the above-mentioned problem, many Basotho are either illiterate or lowly literate. As a result, most of them are unemployed or underemployed, and they have historically been unable to pay for their children's education for many years. Most Basotho men who were able to pay for their children's education worked in South African mines as migrant labourers. Due to the decline in the world economy in the 1990's which led to a decline in the price of gold and the closure of some of the mines, most Basotho lost their jobs through retrenchment, and the conditions of poverty became worse in the country (Ramaqele, 2002). As a result, the number of parents who could not afford the payment of school fees for their children either at primary level or secondary level increased rapidly.

The Lesotho education system has three levels prior to tertiary level: primary level with a duration of seven years (Standard One up to Standard Seven), junior secondary level with a duration of three years (Form A up to Form C) and senior secondary or high school level with a duration of two years (Form D up to Form E). The focus in this study is on level one of Lesotho education (primary level).

From the 1990s, the government of Lesotho began to express concern about the early drop-outs in primary schools and child labour within the whole country. SADC Convention 182 indicates that, in 1996, SADC member states held a meeting where they discussed the issue of child labour in the member states. They agreed that studies should be conducted to reveal the problems which contributed to child labour. The findings indicated that poverty and the spread of HIV/AIDS were the key contributing factors. Before the studies were conducted in all SADC member states, the estimated percentage of children aged 10-14 who formed part of the working population in Lesotho was 19% (Convention 182). This means children aged 15-16 were not included, but it is obvious that they also formed part of the working population in the country. This situation was a crisis, and policy measures which aimed at redressing the problem of child labour were developed. The Lesotho government, as part of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) introduced and implemented the policy of Free Primary Education (FPE) in the year 2000. This was to address the following problems: the fast increasing number of illiterate citizens, the number of school drop-outs and child labour, and to fulfil the education policy which states; "primary education is compulsory and available to all" (Lesotho Government Gazette,

1993, p.42). However, Mulkeen and Chen (2008) state that free primary education is for all but is not compulsory in Lesotho.

Furthermore, in 1999 the United Nations (UN) assembled to discuss the situation of education in the member countries. Several issues such as new ideas, innovative approaches, and research results from its members were discussed. This was undertaken with the assistance of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). In this assembly it was argued that silent chronic emergencies like persistent poverty, the increasing number of children living on the streets, the school drop-out rate especially among girls and the HIV/AIDS pandemic had an adverse impact on education (Pigozzi, 1999). UNICEF makes a great contribution towards addressing the issue of child labour and school drop-outs. The States recognised the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this progressively on the basis of equal opportunity, they decided to:

- (i) Make primary education compulsory and available to all;
- (ii) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates (Pigozzi, p.2)

Free and compulsory education is implemented in many countries of the world to address the issues of child labour and learner drop out. In line with this, Lewin, Hui, Little and Jiwei (1994) report that the main reported reason for drop-outs and child labourers in China was family economic difficulties. As a result, a nine-year compulsory education plan was implemented and funded by the government. Also, the issue of inadequate educational materials seems to be a common problem, as Lewin et al. (1994) indicate that poor physical conditions of buildings and furniture, low educational quality, drop-out and repetition rates, shortages of teachers among others are the main challenges facing compulsory education in China. This tells us that while compulsory education is globally recommended to address the issues of child labour and drop-out rates, this policy is faced with a number of challenges.

As a member of the SADC experiencing child labour and school drop-out problems , Lesotho implemented free primary education (FPE) to alleviate these problems. Free primary education was implemented in 2000, while in other SADC member states it was implemented earlier. For example, in Malawi it was introduced in 1994 (Free primary education backfires, 2009). In Botswana it was introduced in 1980 (Botswana; report: Part 1: Descriptive Section, 2000).The implementation of FPE was done with the assistance of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the SADC

region. UNICEF/Burundi (2009) states that, due to the challenges of HIV/AIDS and poverty, school fees were a significant barrier in keeping children out of school, and the policy of “Free Primary Education for all children” opened schools for those children (UNICEF/Burundi, 2009). UNICEF/Lesotho (2009) also indicates that free education gives children orphaned by HIV/AIDS a chance for a better life.

Even though FPE is good, it brings about some challenging conditions in schools. Since the year 2000 when FPE was introduced, schools are experiencing huge enrolments and classrooms are overcrowded, while educational resources are inadequate. High pupil-teacher ratios are some of the burning issues with teachers experiencing heavy workloads and struggling with educational activities in order to bring about school improvement and effectiveness. This is especially the case because Lesotho’s education is examination-oriented. In most primary schools, one teacher is supposed to teach as many as 11 subjects on his or her own (Mulkeen & Chen, 2008). Even though the situation is so demanding for teachers, some schools are steadily coping and are performing very well in terms of their academic results. The question is therefore how these schools manage to do this.

However, from the year 2004 to 2006, the Examination Council of Lesotho’s (ECoL) statistical records of Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) results show a gradual decline in academic performance. The overall pass rate of all Lesotho primary schools in three consecutive years was as follows: in 2004, 88.1% of learners passed; in 2005, 85.4% passed and in 2006, 80.2% passed (ECoL, 2006). It was only in the year 2007 that a slight difference in terms of improvement occurred. The overall pass was 83.1% (ECoL, 2007), and the difference between the overall pass rate of 2006 and that of 2007 was 3.1%. This decline in pass rate has become a matter of concern to the country. In this context, ‘passing’ the PSLE means a student has completed the primary level course successfully and achieved a minimum pass in three subjects: English, Mathematics and Sesotho, and has achieved 30% upwards in ancillary subjects.

Some schools are producing high academic performances which range between 95% and 100%, while the performance of struggling schools is as low as 45% (ECoL, 2006). Although the average percentage pass borders around 80%, something needs to be done to assist the underperforming schools, and to prevent the gradual decline of schools’ performance. If this issue cannot be addressed, the development of the country will be at risk, because for a country to improve and develop, it needs

educated and skilled citizens. If the standard of education is deteriorating at the foundation phase (primary level) it means that the standard of education within the whole system of education is likely to deteriorate, and the system will produce citizens who do not fit into society.

So far I have not found evidence of studies conducted in Lesotho on school cultures associated with good academic performance. However there are studies that were conducted in other countries such as the United Kingdom (UK). For example, Fink (2000) conducted a study at Lord Byron School to find out the type of school culture practised in this school, and how it related to the good academic performance. Ngcobo (2005) conducted a similar study in South Africa. For a school to perform well or poorly there must be something influencing that situation. The literature made me aware that one of the contributing factors to the performance of the school is school culture. I was therefore interested in exploring school cultures that exist in the two selected schools and how their cultures relate to their academic performance.

This study is thus conducted with the purpose of developing an understanding of school cultures that promote high academic performance. Hargreaves and Hopkins (1993, p.229) advocate that, “the good school is one that can demonstrate quality in its aims, in oversight of pupils, in curriculum design, in standards of teaching and academic achievement”. Therefore, values, beliefs and norms which are the main aspects of culture (Moloi, 2002, Fink, 2000 & Prosser 1999) need to be considered by every school seeking to improve its performance.

1.3 Context of the study

1.3.1 The context of Maliba Primary School

This school is in a semi-urban area and is close to Maputsoe town and Nyenye industrial area. Most of the villagers are factory workers while others are crop and livestock farmers. Factory workers work for very low wages. Due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, many women are widowed and rely on small wages from the factories. Many children are orphaned as a result of this pandemic and were unable to pay school fees before the implementation of FPE. As a result, some of them left school prior even to the completion of primary education and became child labourers. The school draws much of its roll from five neighbouring villages.

There are 34 teachers in this school. Out of these two are intern teachers, one is an unqualified volunteer teacher (unpaid), and two other qualified teachers are pursuing their studies as part-time students. There is one non-teaching staff member (a night-watchman). In Lesotho, we have one college of education. It enrolls a very limited number of student teachers and there is fierce competition for admission. The college has also opened a special programme for part-time students who are working as unqualified teachers only. That is why people prefer to volunteer for a teaching job. The volunteer teacher in this school is looking for admission into the college.

This school has an enrolment of about 1 587 pupils. The roll could increase or decrease before the end of the year, as the Education policy allows learners' admissions all year round. In the Lesotho school context, 'class' refers to 'grade'. From Class One up to Class Three, each class is divided into three sub-classes or streams. From Class Five up to Class Seven each class is divided into two streams. Class Four is the exception with five streams. Even though the classes are subdivided, they remain large. Class One has 254 pupils and each sub-division has about 84 pupils. Class Two has 253 pupils. Class three has 242 pupils. Class Four has 291 pupils. Class Five has 162 pupils. Class Six has 185 pupils. Class Seven has 200 pupils. The medium of instruction in this school is English from class 1 to class 7. Cleanliness is the norm, and they have a slogan which stresses neatness, tidiness and cleanliness. Their school motto also emphasises devotion to their work. This school has produced good results almost every year since the early 1990s, regardless of the context.

1.3.2 The context of Ntatai Primary School

This school is located in Maputsoe area. The population of Maputsoe is composed of people from all the ten districts of the country. People overpopulate this place due to some 'pull' factors within this area such as the availability of jobs in the factories, and opportunities for opening businesses. Some people are in small businesses such as selling small goods like fruit and vegetables, jewellery, Basotho hats and other products in the streets and market-places. Some have built shacks and opened small businesses such as selling clothes and take-away foods. The children in this school are from diverse backgrounds.

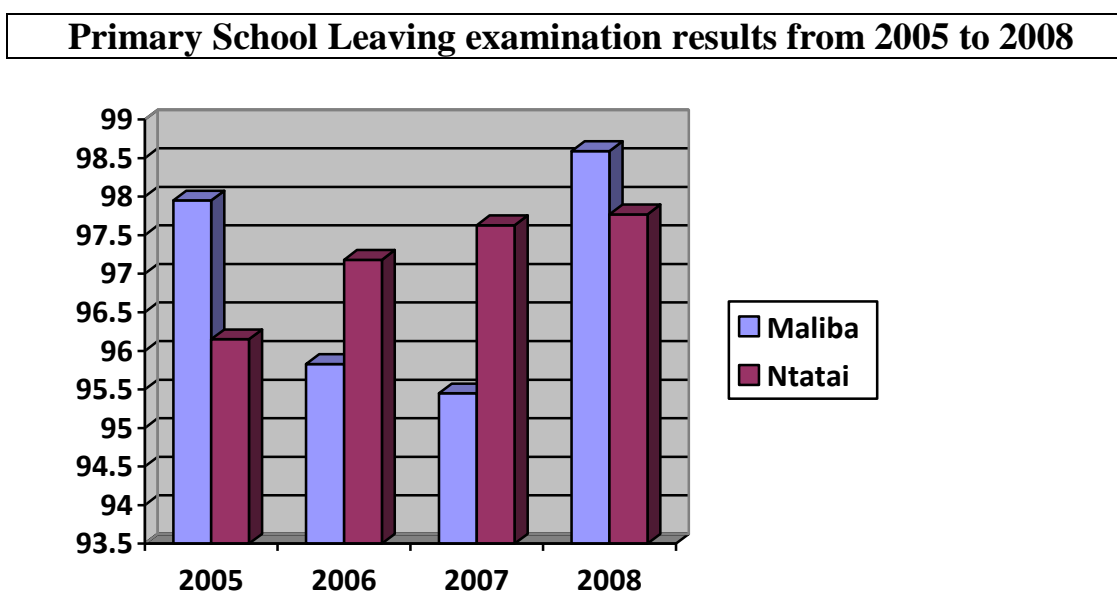
The school enrolment is about 1 043 and most of these are learners who have lost one parent or are orphans. The school has a severe shortage of classrooms. They have

eight classrooms, and according to their class rolls, from Standard One up to Standard Five, each class is supposed to have more than two sub-classes. For Standard Six and Seven classes, each is supposed to have two sub-classes. Due to a shortage of resources (classrooms) this does not take place. Each class is accommodated in one classroom. The class rolls are as follows: 164 pupils in the Standard One class; 154 pupils in the Standard Two class; 182 pupils in the Standard Three class; 171 pupils in the Standard Four class; 88 pupils in the Standard Six class and 78 pupils in the Standard Seven class. Only Standard Five with 206 pupils is divided into two sub-classes, but the sub-classes are still huge. These classes are difficult to manage and the teachers struggle with their work.

There are 21 teachers in this school. I was told that they have been granted one additional teacher who has not yet been employed. Out of 21, I was told that only a few of them are unqualified. Some are furthering their studies as part-time students. There is one non-teaching staff member (a night-watchman). The school premises are not as tidy as those of Maliba Primary School. This school has produced good results since 2004.

Graph 1 represents the performance of these two schools in five consecutive years (from 2004 to 2008). The figures in this graph are the percentage pass rates.

Figure 2.



1.4 Statement of the problem

The deterioration of the quality of education in Lesotho at primary school level is likely to lead to the deterioration of the quality of education within the whole system of education in this country. Education is the key to the development of the country, and a good standard needs to be maintained. Some schools are deteriorating academically while others are excelling. Therefore, this study seeks to understand the cultures of well performing schools.

1.5 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following key research questions:

- i. What school cultures does each of the two selected schools practise?
- ii. How do these schools sustain their cultures?

1.6 Significance of the study

This study is hoped to develop an understanding on how some schools in Lesotho are achieving good academic results while the majority of schools seem to be declining in this regard. Such knowledge may be useful to the Ministry of Education in general as it seeks to help schools improve. The study would also be useful to individual schools in particular as they also need to find ways of improving their performance. The study could also be a starting point towards theorising about how schools can function effectively under difficult conditions such as large classes and limited resources.

1.7 Limitations of the study

Due to time and financial constraints, this study was restricted to two schools. As a result, the findings may not be generalised. The entire focus is on school cultures, yet there may be some factors which contribute to academic performance. Although there are some factors other than school cultures, it is argued that “culture is the way things are done around a particular area or place” (Moloi, 2002; Fink, 2000; Stoll, 1999 and Hargreaves, 1999). Thus, school culture encompasses most of the factors that contribute to the academic performance of a school. This means that the educational activities within a particular school such as leadership and management activities, staff development, staff motivation, staff recruitment, to name but a few, are performed under the influence of the culture of an institution.

1.8 Definition of terms

School culture – This refers to the way things are done in a particular school (Moloi, 2005).

Organisational structure – According to Max (in van der Westhuizen, 1991), “organisational structure is a specific framework of established posts in which people carry out certain actions, and are so grouped that they can pursue a common goal.” It is therefore the pattern in which levels of members’ responsibilities are arranged to work towards achievement of organisational goals.

Leadership and management activities – leadership activities involve the responsibility for policy formulation and organisational transformation (Bush, 2008). This means that leadership activities involve developing a vision for an organisation and finding ways to fulfil this. Management activities involve carrying out agreed policy within the institution (Bush, 2008). This means that management activities are seeing to the implementation of policy.

Staff development refers to ongoing development programme which teachers are engaged in to enhance their knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to educate children more effectively (Lumby, 2003). This implies that staff development is about improving or updating teachers’ knowledge and skills with regard to their work.

Staff motivation refers to incentives, needs, tensions and other mechanisms that energise, channel and sustain staff behaviour (Steyn & van Niekerk, 2002). This means that staff motivation is a way of arousing interest in staff members in order to make them dedicated to their work.

1.9 Structure of the study

This research report is arranged in five chapters. Chapter One provides the introduction to the study. In Chapter Two I review the related literature. Chapter Three I explain my research design and methodology. In Chapter Four I present and discuss the study’s findings. Finally, in Chapter Five I summarise the study, draw conclusions and make recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The aim of the study is to explore cultures associated with good academic performance in two selected primary schools in Lesotho. This chapter aims to review literature on school cultures, particularly how school culture is linked to academic performance. The chapter unfolds as follows: First, I discuss the concepts of culture and school culture. Next I review literature on organisational structure and its influence on school culture. After this I examine some key theories of school culture. This is followed by a review on some studies conducted on school cultures. Next, I examine features of a sound school culture after which follows a discussion on characteristics of an effective school.

2.2 The concepts culture and school culture

Literature on school culture is associated with literature on school effectiveness, because good academic performance is a measure of the effectiveness of a school. Authors such as Fink (2000), Dimmock and Walker (2005), Bush and Middlewood (2005) and Ogbonna (1993) view culture as composed of the beliefs, values and norms of a particular group. Smith and Roodt (2003, p.61) identify the components of culture in this way:

Values represent the principles and standards valued by organizational members. Values are the foundation as to what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Values, though not obvious, operate uppermost in members' minds. Organizational members are able to recognize their values when challenged by others...Norms are related to values. Norms provide the unwritten rules that indicate expectations in terms of actions applicable in a number of situations. Norms within the business environment include appropriate dress codes...Values indicate what is important to organizational members and norms help to indicate what expectations are among organizational members...Beliefs are what people believe to be true or real.

These authors further state that norms stabilise organisational behaviour. The norms also provide a framework for common expectations and attitudes. The above quotation tells us that culture is defined by values, norms and beliefs and the role of culture is to reveal these through the behaviour of organisational members. Renschler (1992, p.4) advocates that, "values are the bedrock of any institution. They articulate

the essence of the organisation's philosophy about how it goes about achieving success".

Fink (2000) and Bush and Anderson (2003) describe culture as 'the way we do things around here' and also the way of life of a particular group of people. According to Tableman (2004), and Stoll and Fink (1996), the basic assumptions, values and beliefs are deeply embedded in the organisation and operate unconsciously. Fink (2000); Prosser (1999); Hargreaves (1999); and Moloi (2002) suggest that culture is not explicit and is hard to define, but that it can be observed through behavioural indicators. This made me aware that in a study of this nature it is important to include an observation method for data production. In a school culture either sound or unsound, there are sub-cultures that make up that one whole culture of a school. Thus, we talk of cultures when we refer to the sub-cultures that make up a culture of a school. On the basis of the above definition of culture, school culture can be defined as the way things are done in a particular school. Each school has its own values, norms and beliefs. Organisation culture such as in a school is influenced by organisational structure. In the next section I discuss this matter.

2.3 Organisational structure and its influence on school culture

According to Davidoff and Lazarus (2002, p.26),

Structure is the way in which individual and team contributions are combined within organisational units such as departments and committee; how these relate to one another; and lines of responsibility and accountability within and between these units.

In other words, structure is the pattern in which organisational members are arranged according to the levels of their responsibility, and they work hand-in-hand to fulfil the purpose of their organisation. Thus, organisational structure is the way members of an organisation are arranged according to levels of their responsibility in order to ensure that the organisation is operating in accordance with its goals. Davidoff and Lazarus (2002) further maintain that, structures and procedures need to be developed to ensure that aims and goals are pursued, and planning is done effectively. This means that without the organisational structure the aims and goals of an organisation cannot be pursued and the planning cannot be done in an effective way. This also tells us that the structure of an organisation has an impact on school effectiveness and improvement. To support this point, Owens and Valesky (2007, p.123) state that "The structure of an organization is the prime determinant of the behaviour of people in the organization." In line with this, Davidoff and Lazarus (2002) advocate that the structures and procedures of any school reflect and perpetuate the culture of a school.

It is very important to have a well functioning organisational structure that will impact effectively and positively on school culture for the school culture greatly impacts on learners' performance. In support of this, Barth (2002, p.7) advocates that "A school's culture has far more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the state department of education." According to Fink (2000), Moloji (2005), Dimmock and Walker (2005), Bush and Middlewood (2005), and Ogbonna (1993), organisational culture brings members together so that they can have a shared meaning and beliefs. This means that school culture brings staff members together in order to have the same focus towards academic performance and other goals and objectives. In line with this, Roy and Piperato (2002) point out that culture is viewed as an intricately woven quilt, and that the countless individual threads that are woven together represent the interdependent core values within the organisation. For a school to have a sound school culture there must be a well functioning organisational structure.

According to Bush (2003), there are different theories of organisational structure, such as bureaucracy, collegiality, and others. Each theory is important in a particular situation. Thus, a particular theory is practiced to suit a given situation. Bush (2003) asserts that bureaucracy stresses the importance of the hierarchical authority structure with formal chains of command between the different positions in the hierarchy. For example, Lesotho primary schools are typically hierarchically structured from the principal down to the learner:

According to Owens and Valesky (2007), theorists of bureaucracy believe that this theory helps in maintaining firm hierarchical control of authority and supervision of the subordinates, and the role of principal as inspector and evaluator at the top of the pyramid is stressed in this theory. It is also believed that adequate vertical communication is established and maintained in the bureaucracy. The orders from the decision makers are transmitted clearly and quickly down the line of hierarchy for implementation. Where members battle for agreement, bureaucracy is applied because the principal at the top of hierarchy makes the final decision. If the decision is made but never pursued, the principal as the authority at the top has to order the subordinates to pursue their decision. This information helps me in trying to understand how structure influences culture.

According to Bush (2003), theorists of collegiality believe that all members should be involved in decision-making and own the outcome of discussions. Bush (2003) points

out that collegiality is lateral or horizontal rather than vertical. That is, all teachers in a school are empowered to suggest and discuss their views and come up with a well informed decision. This practice is likely to make teachers feel committed in pursuing their decisions. For example, if the goals of the school are set together in a collegial manner, all teachers are willing to achieve them and they even develop strategies together for achieving those goals. Those strategies then form part of the school culture. Although applying the collegiality theory is important and necessary in an organisation, it is time consuming and sometimes the decision might not be reached. This is where bureaucratic theory intervenes because the principal by virtue of his or her authority is bound to make the decision. However, this theory informs my study in that collegiality is a culture that is likely to bring about cooperation among organisation members. Such cooperation is necessary in the attempts to achieve organisational goals.

In summing up this section, I observe that there is a relationship between organisational structure and culture (Bush, 2003).. Thus, if there is a sound school culture it means there is a well functioning organisational structure in that school. It is important to have a sound school culture for it impacts positively on learners' academic performance. Fullan (2008, p.58) postulates that, "Successful schools have a much more demanding culture – hunger for improvement, promoting excellence, holding hope for every child." In schools that have hunger for improvement certain standards are set to enhance improvement. This is confirmed by Elbot and Fulton (2008) when they point out that an enabling organisational structure develops a school touchstone to define how things are to be done in that school, and the draft of the touchstone is shared with students, parents and staff. A school touchstone describes the expected standards in several aspects of the school from the organisational members. Thus, for a sound school culture to prevail there needs to be an enabling organisational structure. The next section 'speaks' about some key theories of school culture that form the theoretical framework of the study.

2.4 Some key theories of school culture

This section focuses on theories of school culture that will help me to develop an understanding of the role of school culture in Lesotho primary schools in relation to academic performance. In this study I am positioning myself in the interpretivist paradigm because I want to gain an understanding of how teachers, principals and learners behave in schools, what they value and believe, and what their norms are. According to Cohen et al (2007), an interpretive paradigm is a lens through which a

researcher examines the participants' world. This paradigm strives to understand and interpret the world in terms of actors. In this paradigm the researcher wants to look closely at the situation in order to gain a deep understanding of how people behave towards a certain situation. These include their values and beliefs in that particular situation. All these will reveal their school cultures that influence the academic performance in their schools.

The way things are done in a particular school influences the academic performance of that school (Bush & Anderson, 2003). Similarly, Liebenberg and Barnes (2004) indicate that culture determines the success or failure of the organisation. According to Stoll (1999); Fink (2000) and Stoll & Fink (1996) culture is understood in terms of two domains namely 'social control' and 'social cohesion'. Social control is concerned with the behaviour of organisational members which is task oriented. That is, they are concerned with good quality of work. Social cohesion is concerned with the relationships of organisational members. That is there must be good relationships among members (Hargreaves, 1999). Therefore, the interest in this study is to see what the levels of the two domains are, and whether they contribute to good academic performance. Fink (2000), Dimmock and Walker (2005), Ogbonna (1993) and Stoll and Fink (1996) indicate that in schools where the two domains are kept at optimal levels, academic performance is high. Thus, if the behaviour of organisational members is task oriented, committed to results, and if their relations are good they work jointly and collaboratively. As a result, the performance becomes good..

Different types of school cultures include the formal or traditional school culture; the welfarist school culture; the hothouse school culture; the survivalist school culture; and the ideal school culture. Each of these is described in terms of the two domains, namely, social cohesion and social control (Stoll, 1999; Hargreaves, 1997; Fink 2000; and Hargreaves, 1999).. I discuss these school cultures below.

The hothouse school culture

According to Stoll (1999); Hargreaves (1997) and Fink (2000) in this type of school culture both domains (social cohesion and social control) are extremely high. The degree of educational activities is extremely high..This culture leads to good academic performance, but members work in fear and under pressure. There are very high expectations from both teachers and learners, but there is no support from and for each other. The Lesotho context is likely to reflect some elements of this school

culture, because according to our culture and the way we are brought up, we believe that to discipline a person, pressure and power should be exercised. Thus we have culturally internalised this myth, and we tend to apply it in every situation where discipline is needed.

The survivalist school culture

In the survivalist school culture, the undertaking of educational activities is extremely low. Both social cohesion and control are low (Fink, 2000 and Hargreaves, 1997). Neither collaboration nor collegiality exists within a school with this type of culture. They add that this type of school is said to exist in 'at risk' or breaking-down mode. In such a situation teachers do not feel free to ask for assistance with their work from their fellow teachers, because there is low social cohesion, and collaboration and so collegiality are hindered. As a result, expertise among teachers is ignored. The social control domain is also low because teachers are not able to discipline learners. In such a school culture academic performance is most likely to be low.

The traditional or formal school culture

In the formal school culture the two domains do not balance. The social control domain is high while the social cohesion domain is low (Fink, 2000; Stoll, 1999 and Hargreaves, 1997). The focus in this culture is on the discipline of members but the relationships among school members are ignored. This means that in this type of culture there is no culture of collaboration and collegiality. Teachers put pressure on learners and themselves, yet there are no good relationships between learners and teachers and among teachers. This is confirmed by Hargreaves (1999, p.50) who states that, "to students, staff are relatively strict, though institutional loyalty is valued". Therefore, academic achievement is likely to be either poor or moderate due to the imbalance in the domains.

The welfarist school culture

In the welfarist school culture the social control is low and social cohesion is high. The relationships between teachers and students are very friendly, but there is no struggle and striving towards school work. As a result, academic achievement is poor, and students end up blaming their teachers for not pushing them harder to do their work. In much the same way as in the formal school culture, there is no culture of collaboration and collegiality among school members Towards school work. This is also the case in some of the schools in Lesotho. There are some teachers who are too friendly towards learners. They drink beer with them after school hours and they have

love affairs with learners. At the end of the day they encounter difficulties in disciplining these learners and this situation permeates the whole school.

The ideal or effective school culture

In the ideal or effective school culture both domains are at optimum level. Expectations and support for achieving good standards of education are high. Members of the school organisation are supportive of one another in order to reach the optimum level of the two domains (Fink, 2000; Stoll, 1999 and Hargreaves, 1997). Tableman (2004) and Ajeheb-Jahangeer and Jahangeer (2004) state that principals play a key or primary role in motivating and supporting the staff and students, in developing an effective school and in giving of their best. Due to this support they work comfortably because they feel free to raise their problems and to voice their views concerning their work. As a result, collaboration and collegiality occur spontaneously and willingly because members are not pressurised to do their work (Fink, 2000).

This study intends to study the cultures of the two selected schools in the light of the school culture types described above. In the next section I move on to discuss some specific studies on school culture.

2.5 Some studies on school culture

Fink (2000) reports that a study conducted at Lord Byron School in UK indicated that the culture of that school was characterised by the following features: shared meaning, responsibility for success, collegiality, continuous improvement, learning for everyone, risk-taking, and openness and respect for differences. Members of that school had a shared meaning towards the mission and goals of the school. The principle of good academic performance was the responsibility of each staff member for the success of students. Teamwork, partnership, interdependence and collegiality were valued in this school. The way the school valued continuous improvement and commitment to work became a source of frustration and exhaustion in the school because they felt that if there was no evidence of improvement, it meant they were letting the whole school down. They valued and believed that learning was for everyone in the school and staff members searched for innovations for good academic performance. 'Trial and error' was valued in the teaching and learning processes. The views of others were respected and there was allowance for discussion of ideas. Due to the above identified aspects, the academic performance in this school was high, because members worked hard but under pressure.

According to Torrington and Weightman's (1993) findings at Valley High and Summerfield High schools in the UK, the prevailing cultures were the hothouse school cultures where the two domains (social cohesion and social control domains) were extremely high, and the academic performance was good, although members worked under pressure. The expectations of the school caused staff to feel pressurised at work. According to Fink's (2000) findings at Lord Byron School, the culture of that school was the 'ideal school culture' where both domains were kept at optimum levels. Members were supported to reach the optimum level of their work according to their capabilities, and 'risk-taking' was also valued. The ethic that people learn from their mistakes was valued. In other words, if a loop-hole occurred, they considered it a challenge that helped them to learn more about their work and improve it. This is clearly indicated in the importance of the cultures of the Lord Byron school, namely, continuous improvement, learning is for everyone, risk-taking, openness, and respect for differences, shared meaning, responsibility for success and collegiality. These attributes determined the school culture of Lord Byron School. Ajaheb-Jahangeer and Jahangeer (2004) share the same view as Fink (2000), when they state that a sound school culture reinforces educational goals and that, in such a culture, students are encouraged to participate and voice their opinions and views about topics and issues that are of great concern to them. This means that they too see the importance of openness and respect for differences.

In addition to being guided about what constitutes good school cultures, the studies above also revealed what research design I could adopt when conducting my study. The researchers I reported above used the 'case study' approach for their studies. For example, Fink (2000) conducted qualitative research in the Lord Byron School which was a case of one school. He interviewed teachers about the culture of their school in relation to their academic performance. The data revealed that the practices of that school contributed to the sound school culture of Byron School. Torrington and Weightman's (1993) study in Valley and Summerfield High Schools were also case studies where qualitative research was conducted. Teachers in these schools were interviewed. This research was conducted on a small scale and aimed to provide in-depth data in relation to culture and academic performance. The researchers in these studies adopted the interpretivist paradigm, for they wanted to gain a deep understanding of how teachers and learners behaved in these schools; what they valued and believed; and what the norms were which underpinned effectiveness in

terms of good academic results in those schools. I chose the case study approach in the light of these similar studies I further explain my methodology in the next chapter.

While the preceding section has revealed some of the features of a sound school culture, there is further literature in this regard. Therefore, in the next section I dwell a bit more on the features of a sound school culture. In that section, I shall continue to make reference to the findings of the studies I reported above as well as additional others.

2.6 Features of a sound school culture

Bush and Anderson (2003), Prosser (1999), Hargreaves (1997) and Moloï (2005) see school culture as the way things are done in a particular school, and add that culture is situationally unique. However literature suggests that although school cultures differ, there are some common features that bring about good academic performance. Such features make up what is regarded as ‘sound school cultures’ (Smith & Roodt, 2003).

A sound school culture leads to an improved and effective school, and one prominent feature of an effective school is good academic results. A sound school culture is composed of different cultural norms which go hand-in-hand to build up a whole-school culture. For example, where there is a sound school culture, there are cultural norms that lead to such a culture, and vice versa. In support of this, Stoll and Fink (1996), and Fink (2000) suggest that the following cultural norms underpin successful school improvement.

Shared goals or meaning – “we know where we are going”. This is where members of an organisation make a well-informed decision when setting the school goals, and are engaged in a joint focus towards what is supposed to be achieved. In the same way, the study which was conducted by Ngcobo (2005) in South Africa indicates that “common goals” characterise a good school culture which provides or results in ‘unity of being’. Fink’s (2000) findings reveal that “shared meaning” enabled Lord Byron School to prosper. Through shared meaning, the mission statement and a set of written goals were developed in this school. Thus culture is seen as a “unifying force” within the organisation because it brings togetherness in the organisation (Ajaheb-Jahangeer & Jahangeer, 2004). In every school there must be well set goals. In the process of setting the goals the whole staff should be involved in making well informed decisions. Through the shared goals and meaning, members of the school know where to start and where to go, for they know the goal they want to achieve. As

a result they strive for achievement. In line with this, Piperato and Roy (2002) indicate that “relevance” should be regarded as a core component of culture, for it reminds us that what we do in school must be meaningful and useful to students. In other words, there must be relevance between shared goals and school practices. This relevance illuminates a sound school culture. Also, Liebenberg and Barners (2004, p.10) assert that, “the members of a group want to hold on to their cultural assumptions, because culture provides meaning and makes life predictable”. Shared goals and meaning among organisational members as a feature of a sound school culture is important consideration in my study.

Responsibility for success – “We must succeed”. In Lord Byron School it was found that the major principle of good academic performance is the responsibility of each staff member for the success of the students (Fink, 2000). This means that the staff members in this school felt that it was their responsibility to make efforts towards their success and the students’ success. Torrington and Weightman’s (1993) findings are similar to the findings of Fink’s (2000) in this regard, for they also indicate that at Valley High School staff commitment and cohesion were the striking features of the cultures of that school. Teachers were committed to their work and worked well together. Their commitment and cohesion show that they too felt that it was their responsibility to bring about success in their school. If goals are shared in an organisation, this makes members feel that they are responsible for organisational success. If the prevailing culture within the school does not allow teachers to feel that they are responsible for a school’s success, commitment is not likely to feature in their culture. A wider involvement of teachers in educational activities provides an opportunity for responsibility, and this results in commitment (Mortimore et al, in Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1993). Sometimes, teachers are not committed to their work because principals deny them the responsibility for their work. Therefore, it is important to make them feel and notice that they are responsible for their work.

Collegiality – “We’re working on this together”. Stoll and Fink (1996) and Fink (2000) share the same view towards collegiality. Their findings indicate that collegiality leads to interdependence, and develops “togetherness” among staff members because they share ideas and discuss issues together. Torrington and Weightman’s (1993) findings reveal that co-operation, trust, cohesion and a sense of wholeness are the core values of the school culture at Summerfield High, and that these helped members to work together in a collegial way and further, that this happened spontaneously. Ngcobo (2008) indicates that at Umzamo High School,

communality is characterised by belonging and trust among the school members. Because of this ‘communality’ they strive to do their best to preserve the good name of the school, and collaboration among all members is spontaneous due to their sense of belonging. Thus, if members regard collegiality as central to their success, it means they have a feeling that they are all responsible for the school’s success. As a result they work jointly.

Continuous improvement – “We can get better”. According to Stoll and Fink (1996) more can be achieved in a school, regardless of how effective it is deemed to be. What this means is that, in a school, improvement should be considered as an ongoing or endless process. That is, the members of the school organization should always strive for improvement. Fink (2000) also indicates that teachers in the Lord Byron School valued continuous improvement which increased their commitment to work. In the same way Wolk (2008) argues that by helping students find pleasure in learning, we can make that learning infinitely more successful. For instance, every year in Lesotho there is a competition which involves a Maths and Science project for both secondary and primary schools. Rewards and certificates of participation are the incentives in that competition. In schools where learners are given the opportunity to join this competition, they enjoy this activity and keep on designing new projects every year. As a result, they keep on learning and gaining new knowledge in a joyful way.

Lifelong learning – “Learning is for everyone”. Fink indicates that in the Lord Byron School, teachers valued and believed that learning was for everyone; teachers and learners. The staff members strived for innovations for good academic performance and school-wide issues such as staff development. Barth (in Stoll & Fink, 1996) argues that learning is an ongoing process for both pupils and teachers. In other words, growth in terms of knowledge never stops. Thus in schools where ‘lifelong learning’ is part of the culture, growth and development are valued and this contributes to continuous improvement in relation to academic performance.

Lifelong learning might not be minimal in some of the schools in Lesotho due to inadequate teaching and learning materials and high pupil-teacher ratios. Teachers are forced to do minimal to search for innovations. Due to over-populated classrooms, they are not able to implement the curriculum effectively. For example, at primary level, teachers spend much time marking compositions in both English and Sesotho and this tends to retard progress in other subjects. Unmanageable classes due to overcrowding obstruct teachers’ time management. In most primary schools teachers

seldom teach Religious Education. They complain of unmanageable classes, and mention that due to this problem they concentrate more on subjects which are examined at national level and Religious Education is not one of them.

Risk-taking – “We learn by trying something new”. In this school it was found that teachers valued “risk-taking” whereby they learn from mistakes (trial-and-error) and carry out some experiments in the teaching-learning process. According to Stoll and Fink (1996), experimentation, trial-and-error and learning through failure are essential parts of growth which schools must adopt and value. This “risk-taking” contributes to “lifelong learning”, because, through experiments, they keep on gaining new knowledge. Therefore, this study explores the cultures of these schools and find out whether “risk-taking” exists. This helps to detect the type of teaching-learning processes in those schools, and what teachers value or regard as a source of good academic performance in their teaching activities.

Support – “There is always someone there to help”. According to Stoll and Fink (1996), the principal must always be there to provide support whenever it is needed. He or she must be a good listener, and should be very supportive to organisational members so that effective communication should exist between the principal and the person who needs to be supported. Support within an organisation strengthens collegiality and collaboration. Stoll and Fink (1996) maintain that collegiality refers to work-related interdependence, which is more concerned with personal availability, kindness and caring, where teachers and administrators make time for each other in order to provide support. This also tells us that a principal must have confidence and competence in his or her work so that the subordinate teachers can have trust and hope in his or her support.

Mutual respect – “Everyone has something to offer”. Stoll and Fink (1996) indicate that a good principal makes his or her subordinate teachers aware of their importance at work. The principal and the staff consider the differences between people as a mutually enriching source of strength. This implies that people learn from other people’s experiences to improve or broaden their knowledge. Therefore, they must respect and accept other people’s opinions to allow growth of their knowledge. Piperato and Roy (2002) suggest that shared leadership, relationships based on mutual respect and caring, collegiality, and a focus on performance are additional core values in a collaborative culture. They further point out that a “Teacher-student relationship

must be characterised by mutual respect, collaboration and concern” (p.1). This tells us that if “mutual respect” is kept at a good standard in a school, “support” may also be maximised. If organisational members realise and are aware of their importance at work, they work hard and this makes them responsible members. In this study, I might be able to detect this feeling during the interviews and observe it through different school activities.

Openness and respect for differences – “We can discuss our differences”. Fink (2000) indicates that in the Lord Byron School, teachers respected each other’s views. To them, criticism was viewed as an opportunity for self-improvement rather than a threat. All teachers were open to sharing and discussing ideas, and joy was one of the characteristics of the culture of this school. Negative emotions and disagreement are an acceptable part of adult communication (*ibid*). In this school they considered teacher disagreement to be critical in a collegial support group. In this study, document analysis will play a vital role in revealing how discussions are held in these schools. For example, a minute book will show how ideas of members are shared and discussed, and how agreements are reached. This is where the respect for differences comes in.

Celebration and humour – “We feel good about ourselves”. In the Lord Byron School, school members (teachers and students) celebrated their good performance through different school activities. Rituals and ceremonies such as combined student-teacher and teacher involvement with intramural basketball were some of the features of the Lord Byron School (Fink, 2000). According to Stoll and Fink (1996), “humour” seems to be a vital part of school culture for it reduces tension, maintains a sense of belonging, highlights shared meanings, enables difficult issues to be openly discussed and makes work and collaboration fun. Stoll and Fink’s findings indicate that in schools where celebration and humour form part of the culture, there is appreciation and recognition for teachers and students or learners who have worked hard at something, and this makes them feel happier than they were. As a result, members feel appreciated and motivated, and strive to work to their best ability. In line with this, Ajaheb-Jahangeer and Jahangeer (2004, p.252) advocate that, “The idea of reward is a great source of motivation since it helps the students to understand how hard work is valued”. This reminds me of one of our neighbouring schools where teachers celebrate for producing good school results almost every year, and learners are rewarded for performing well in class consistently, performing well in sports and

in other areas. Teachers always work hard in this school, and learners do so as well because they are motivated.

It is difficult to divorce an effective school from a sound school culture because a school cannot be effective without a sound culture, and a sound school culture is revealed by the effectiveness of the school. In the next section I discuss characteristics of effective schools.

2.7 Characteristics of an effective school

Hargreaves and Hopkins (1993) advocate that the characteristics of individual schools can make a difference to pupils' progress. They add that research on "effective schools" indicates that effective schools were characterised by the degree of academic emphasis, teacher actions in lessons, good conditions for pupils, and the extent to which children are able to take responsibility for their learning. Renchler (1992, p.4) provides views on effective school in this way,

Effective schools, that is, schools that demonstrate high standards of achievement in academics, have a culture characterised by a well-defined set of goals that all members of the school-administration, faculty, and students value and promote.

According to Hargreaves and Hopkins, quality in aims, oversight of pupils, curriculum design, standards of teaching and academic achievements and the school's links with the local community are to be demonstrated by a good school.

Mortimore et al (in Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1993, p.231) present the following key factors of school effectiveness:

1. Purposeful leadership of the staff by the head
2. The involvement of teachers
3. Structured sessions
4. Intellectually challenging teaching
5. Work-centred environment
6. Maximum communication between teachers and pupils
7. Record keeping
8. Parental involvement
9. Positive climate

According to Hargreaves and Hopkins (1993), all the above factors or characteristics are also used to describe effective school cultures. These factors are important and they need to be observed and considered when conducting this study. These authors describe the above factors in this way:

Purposeful leadership of the staff by the head

According to Mortimore et al. (in Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1993), in a purposeful leadership of the staff by the head, the head-teacher involves teachers in curriculum discussions and influence on the content of guidelines drawn up within the school. In this particular type of leadership, a head-teacher exerts a certain percentage of control over staff. S/he is also a knowledgeable person concerning educational activities and s/he is able to intervene where necessary. Therefore, in this type of leadership there are elements of collegiality and shared meaning.

Involvement of teachers

Mortimore et al. (in Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1993) suggest that in successful schools teachers are largely involved in curriculum planning, and play a major role in developing their own curriculum guidelines. Teachers are allowed to raise issues that affect school policy and issues that affect them directly. This helps the principal and the staff to find possible solutions and makes their work easy. For example, according to the Education Policy of Lesotho, from Standard One up to Standard Three, the medium of instruction is Sesotho. From Standard Four upwards English is the medium of instruction. In most primary schools, principals, together with their teachers, have made their own school policy that English should be the medium of instruction from Standard One because the English language seems to be a major problem for learners. Since this policy has been implemented, their school results have improved.

Structured sessions

In an effective school, learners' work is always structured or organised for each school day to ensure that there is always plenty of work to do. Learners are also helped to develop the skills necessary for managing their work independently (without constant support from their teacher). This reminds me of one of my neighbouring primary schools where learners in the upper classes are able to do classroom activities in the absence of their teachers. They peer teach in Mathematics, they do reading, and attempt the exercise which follows the reading and collect the exercise books for their teachers to mark.

Intellectually challenging teaching

In effective schools, teachers are encouraged to use questions of a higher-order which encourage pupils to use their creative imagination and powers of problem-solving. In this type of teaching, learners can manage to do a task independently, and teachers

only intervene with instructions. Thus, the learner-centred approach is valued. For instance, an activity such as the Science projects competition which I referred to previously forms part of intellectually challenging teaching.

Work-centred environment

This is where teachers devote their time to pupils' work and discussion. According to Mortimore et al. (in Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1993), in a work-centred classroom there is low level of noise and no excessive movement. There is only the movement which is generally work-related. Learners seem to enjoy their work and become eager to commence new tasks.

Maximum communication between teachers and pupils

According to Mortimore et al. (in Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1993), teachers need to have time to communicate with their learners and this may lead to success in promoting progress and development of learners. They add that it is important for teachers to devote most of their attention to speaking with individuals, because individuals have different needs and abilities in terms of learning.

Record-keeping

The record-keeping refers to pupils' work progress, pupils' personal and social development details which are recorded and kept for reference sake for the next teacher (Mortimore et al. in Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1993). This is very important because it helps the teacher to gain insight to each individual's ability and personal development. If the work of pupils is recorded, it provides a history of the school performance in each class from year to year, and this helps teachers to see whether there is improvement or deterioration in pupils' progress. This record-keeping facilitates continuous improvement.

Parental involvement

The findings of Hargreaves and Hopkins (1993) show the positive influence of parental involvement on pupils' progress and development. Thus, in schools where parental involvement is valued, there is success in pupils' academic performance. They further indicate that educational visits and good attendance at meetings to discuss children's progress is important, and creates good relationships between head-teacher and parents or between the school and the parents. As a result, the head-teacher is able to access parental assistance for school operations. Parents also appreciate helping their children with their school work because their involvement in

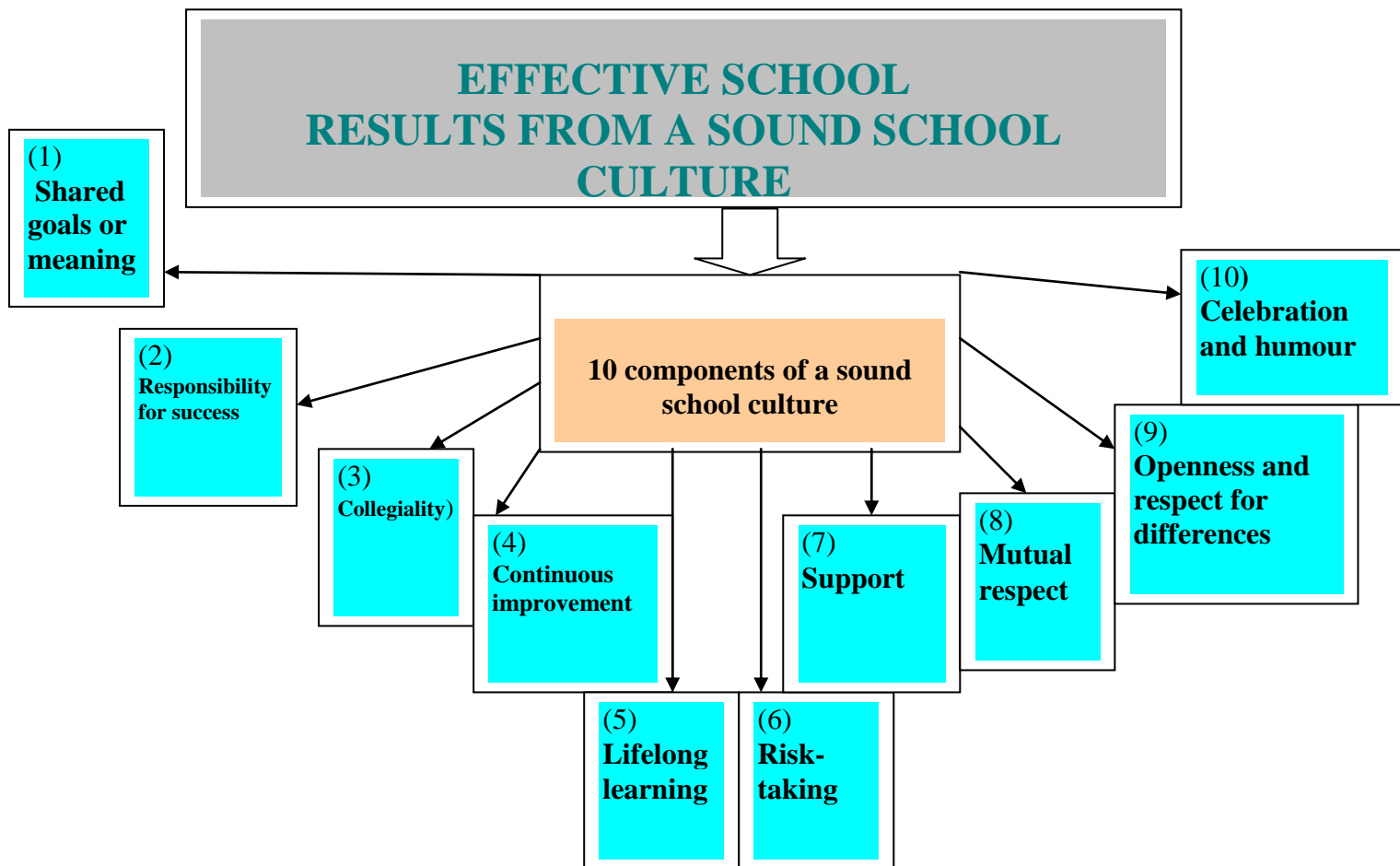
their pupils' educational development makes them aware that they are also the agents of their pupils' success.

Positive climate

According to Hargreaves and Hopkins (1993), an effective school has a positive climate and the overall atmosphere is more pleasant. There is less emphasis on punishment and critical control. A greater emphasis is placed on praise and reward which seem to be beneficial to the school in general. They maintain that in a positive climate, teachers actively encourage self-control on the part of pupils, rather than emphasising the negative aspects of their behaviour. As a result, progress and development are enhanced. In line with this, Renchler (1992, p.4) advocates that "A school-level culture press in the direction of academic achievement helps shape the environment (and climate) in which the students learn". In Mortimore et al's study, as cited in Hargreaves and Hopkins (1993) they found that the positive attitudes of teachers towards pupils seemed to be important, and that good communication between teachers and children resulted in positive effects. For example, teachers have interest in children as individuals and not just as learners, and this fostered progress in pupils' academic work. Again, their findings indicate that the positive climate in an effective school features several issues such as: involving pupils in the presentation of assemblies; teachers eating their lunch at the same tables as the children; organisation of trips and visits; and the use of the local environment as a learning resource (Mortimore et al. in Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1993). It is therefore important for the teacher to create a positive climate for pupils, and for head-teachers to create a positive climate for the teachers. This study will be conducted in the light of the discussed cultural norms and characteristics of effective school.

The relationship between an effective school and a sound school culture can be represented by figure 2 of my own design below:

Figure 3



2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature on school cultures. The main focus was on school cultures associated with good academic performance. The hothouse school culture and ideal school culture are found to contribute to good academic performance, according to the findings of the research conducted in other countries. The literature suggests that the levels of two domains (social cohesion and social control) determine the type of culture in a particular school. For example, in a sound school culture, the two domains are at optimum level, while in an unsound school culture either one or both of the domains are at a low level.

The next chapter discusses the research methodology in this study. This includes the research design and the instruments for collecting data, and the limitations of the methodology.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore school cultures associated with good academic performance in two Lesotho primary schools. In this chapter I describe the research design and methodology of the study. In order to achieve this, I first explain the research design and then move on to the data collecting instruments namely, interviews, observation and document analysis including some of their weaknesses and how I attempted to address them. Thirdly, I describe how I selected the respondents. Next I moved on to the data analysis procedures, then the limitations of the study. I also briefly explain how I enhanced the trustworthiness of data as well as ethical considerations before summarising the chapter.

3.2 Research design

This study is located in a qualitative research approach for it explores the cultures of two primary schools that perform well academically. Therefore, I adopted the case study design. According to Nieuwenhuis (2007, p.75), case study is a “systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest”. Yin (in Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p.75) states that a case study is:

...an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple source of evidence are used.

In a similar way, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.253) characterise a case study in this way, “case studies can penetrate a situation in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis” and one of their strengths is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognising that context is a powerful determinant of both cause and effect. Yin’s definition and the characteristics given by Cohen et al. possess some commonalities, for they both refer to real contexts in a case study. According to Nieuwenhuis (2007), a case study is used to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, and it is often focused on a system of action and the case is a “bounded system”. Thus, the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions in connection with school cultures were answered through the adoption of a case study methodology. The case study approach was suitable for this study because the focus was on the uniqueness of each of the two schools (Cohen et al., 2007). I also adopted the case study approach because I was informed by the

literature that suggests that similar studies used this way. To illustrate, Fink (2000) used this approach to explore the culture of Lord Byron School. Torrington and Weightman (1993) also used this approach to explore the cultures of Valley High and Summerfield High Schools..

3.3 Sample and sampling procedures

According to Cohen et al. (2007), a sample refers to a subset of the total population from which data should be obtained for research purposes. Therefore, sampling refers to the process of selecting respondents in the study. In this study, data were gathered from two primary schools which perform well academically. One primary school is in a semi-urban area and the other one is in an urban area. The respondents were teachers and principals from the two selected schools. I purposively selected these schools because they are closer to my residence and I have good relations with the principals of these schools. It was thus easy for me to access information from these schools. In the two schools, the number of female teachers far exceeded that of male teachers. Therefore, I failed to balance the ratio of my sample in terms of gender as I was intended.

The intention was to interview ten respondents from each school including principals and deputy principals. At least five teachers from the lower classes (classes 1 - 4) and five from the upper classes (classes 5 – 7) were to represent the teachers in each school. However, two teachers at Maliba Primary School declined to take part therefore a total of eighteen teachers was interviewed; eight at Maliba School and ten at Ntatai School. Each of these teachers had taught in these schools for a period of more than two years. On this ground I believed that they would have reasonable of the cultures of their school and that they would share this experience with me during the study. Therefore, the selection of respondents in this study took the form of purposive sampling. According to Cohen et al. (2007), in purposive sampling as the name suggests, the sample has been chosen for a specific purpose. I thus chose teachers and principals for a specific purpose, as my research intended to study the type of culture and its influence within their schools. These respondents were directly experiencing the prevailing cultures within their schools, and so I believed that they would provide rich information I needed for this research. Cohen et al. (2007) also suggest that one of the strengths of case studies is that they are strong on reality and provide insights into other similar cases.

3.4 Data collection instruments

3.4.1 Observation

Nieuwenhuis (2007, p.83) defines observation as “the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them”. Henning (2004) states that the information gleaned through observation fills the gaps inevitably left by interviews, and observation is used only as a supplementary method. In other words, in some case studies interviews cannot produce sufficient data on their own; this needs to be supplemented by observation.

I observed the behavioural patterns of teachers with regard to their interaction with the school environment so as to gain an insight into the culture of their school. The entire school’s activities such as assemblies, lunch times, staff meetings, school’s starting and ending time, and more were observed. This helped me to see what the staff members valued and believed in their organisation. Nisbert and Watt (in Bell, 1993) assert that interviews reveal only how people perceive what happens, not what actually happens. Therefore, direct observation may be more reliable than what people say in many instances. In this case, observation was appropriate for this study.

I used unstructured observation. Observation allows the researcher to go into a situation and observe what is taking place before deciding on its significance for the research (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Thus unstructured observation allows the researcher to record what he or she observes, and then to decide which information is relevant to the study. Furthermore, Cohen et al. (2007, p.258) stress that “at the heart of every case study lies a method of observation”. Observation helped me to see how teachers and learners valued working time and how they valued commitment to their work. In each school, the observation period for day one was six hours (from 8.00 am to 2.00 pm). For other days that were scheduled for interview sessions, observation also continued in order to verify the respondents’ information. For Example, I observed if teachers’ nick names were used by both teachers and learners. I originally intended to observe some extramural activities in each school for a period of a week. This did not happen because it was time for quarterly examinations and there was no time for such activities. The data were recorded by means of writing, and a template, as suggested by Nieuwenhuis (2007) was used. This is where I made a table of what I observed in different activities. Date and time of occurrences were given and the observed occurrences were written in point form. I made anecdotal record of the events as they

unfolded. According to Nieuwenhuis (p.85), anecdotal records “are short descriptions of basic actions observed capturing key phrases and words, and should be objective with no self-reflective notes”.

Observation method was the first instrument in my data collection. This instrument came first with the intention of having a picture of how things were done in those particular schools without communicating the situation to anybody. I also hoped that there might be some alternations in my interview schedule due to what I observed. This method have some weaknesses in that the researcher might spend time on noting down a lot of what s/he observes, some of which might be of less value to the study. Therefore, in my observation I tried to note everything which was relevant to my study. Bell (1993) maintains that if the researcher is familiar with the context, this familiarity may cause her or him to overlook aspects of behaviour which would be apparent to a non-participant observer seeing the situation for the first time. To minimise this weakness, I did not conduct the study in the school where I teach or where I have taught.

3.4.2 Document analysis

According to Bell (1993), document analysis is used to complement information obtained by other methods. Thus, in this study, document analysis complemented the information that was generated through observation and interviews. Bell (1993) asserts that critical analysis of documents aims to discover whether a document is both genuine and authentic, that is, whether it reports truthfully on its subject. School registers and clock books helped me to see the pattern of attendance of both learners and teachers and this concurred with some of their values. I analysed school policies, mission statements, visions and mottos to see if what was written down tallied with practices within the school. I had to do this because sometimes there could be a mismatch between practice and what is written down. For example; in Ntatai Primary School, one of their school policies reads, ‘Teacher-pupil communication should be in English from Class One to Class Seven’. However, I did not experience this during the data production period. To capture document analysis data, I noted the important points for my study.

The weakness of this instrument is that, sometimes, a researcher might be denied access to school documents and this can hinder triangulation of methods.

3.4.3 Interviews

Kvale (in Cohen et al., 2007, p.349) defines an interview as “an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest”. He adds that an interview has a specific purpose and is often question-based, with the question being asked by the interviewer. I used the semi-structured interview method. Nieuwenhuis (2007, p.87) states that, a semi-structured interview “allows for probing and clarification of answers”. I interviewed the respondents individually. This allowed the interviewees to express their views freely. Some people are shy to express themselves among a group of people, or in the presence of their authority figure (principal). In my interviews, I used the three probing strategies, namely, detail-oriented probes (where the interviewer probes the interviewee in order to provide detailed information of what he or she is talking about), elaboration probes (where the interviewee is probed to elaborate on what s/he is talking about) and clarification probes (where the interviewee is probed to clarify his or her point) in order to obtain the maximum amount of data to verify that what I had heard was actually what the person had meant (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

The responses from the respondents were their own views, and they were not influenced by group members. The common responses that were given thus strengthened the richness of information. The interview for each respondent was aimed to last for a minimum time of 20 minutes, and a maximum time of 40 minutes, and the duration for interviews ranged between 20 and 35 minutes. In Maliba School, we had the interview sessions in a room which I was told was the old staff room. In Ntatai School we had them in the principal’s office as they did not have enough accommodation. The noise from learners was very distracting because most of the time they were playing outside their classrooms. Due to a shortage of space for examinations, learners had been divided into groups and these groups wrote in turns. When one group was writing, the other one was playing outside. There were thus always learners playing outside the classrooms. Besides this, the rooms in both schools were conducive to interviews. The interviewer and the interviewee were comfortable holding their conversation. Interviews were conducted in both Sesotho and English. Sesotho is their first language and English is the medium of instruction in all schools in Lesotho. To avoid misunderstanding and to allow for good expression, I decided to use both languages. I asked the questions in English. If the interviewee seemed not to understand, I code switched and clarified the question in

Sesotho. The interviewees were allowed to use either English or Sesotho depending on the language they felt comfortable to use. The interviews were recorded.

The interviews were transcribed and where the respondents responded in Sesotho, they were translated into English. The transcription was verbatim. The recording of interviews was done with the permission of the respondents. The focus areas in these interviews were: (i) how the processes of teaching and learning are handled; (ii) how school development and improvement are catered for; (iii) and how the relationships within the school are and maintained.

Interviews were my third and last instrument because I believed that some of the questions might be modified or altered due to information obtained from observation and document analysis, and these first two instruments informed some part of my interview schedule. Even though interviews help to obtain rich information they also have some weaknesses. In fact each method has its strengths and weaknesses. Information may become distorted due to different factors. This is explained by Cohen et al. (2007) when they suggest that, “The respondents may well feel uneasy and adopt avoidance tactics if the question is too deep”. It was my responsibility as the interviewer to try, at all costs, to establish a rapport which would enable the interviewee to respond freely. Again, interviews are time-consuming. I had to be vigilant enough to be able to read the interviewees’ body language such as facial expressions and to try to make sense of such language.

3.6 Data analysis

In qualitative research the process of analysing data is intertwined with that of data production. Nieuwenhuis (2007) writes that data collection, processing, analysis and reporting are intertwined in qualitative studies. Therefore, in this study, data analysis began when data production began. During data collection, I engaged in the initial coding where the emerging common words, phrases, themes or patterns (emerging codes) were grouped together. Nieuwenhuis (2007) adds that when analysing qualitative data, the goal is to summarise what has been seen and heard in terms of common words, phrase, themes or patterns that could aid the researcher’s understanding and interpretation of what emerges. After the initial coding, the data were summarised and organised with the assurance that the categories were relevant to what the study sought to achieve. I summarised the data by putting common responses into categories. Thus categories were important when analysing this type of

data. It was vital to look carefully at the categories, and to identify how they were linked or related to each other (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). In other words, commonalities and relationships between categories were identified. I had to make meaning out of what had been obtained from the interviewees. Nieuwenhuis (2007, p.99) describes qualitative data analysis in this way:

Qualitative data analysis is usually based on an interpretative philosophy that is aimed at examining meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data. ...it tries to establish how participants make meaning of a specific phenomenon by analysing their perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences in an attempt to approximate their construction of phenomenon.

This should be in accordance with the research questions and the aims of the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Henning (2004) argues that content analysis or data analysis in qualitative research is about converting the “raw” data to final patterns of meaning. It was therefore my duty to make meaning out of the raw data and interpret them.

Cohen et al. (2007) postulate that a widespread agreement of responses provides characteristics of data. For example, there might be absolute agreement on the response to a question or some questions, as occurred in my interviews. Once again, the coded data were decoded in order to increase the meaning within the interpretation, because coding is defined as the segments of data with symbols, descriptive words or unique identifying names (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Data from the three sources were triangulated because they had emerged from different data instruments with the aim of producing one solid item. To support this, Henning (2004) maintains that “triangulation” is supposed to indicate that by coming from different angles towards a measured position you find a true position. Jick (in Ivankova, Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) states that in a study, observation, semi-structured interviews and documents are triangulated to better understand the research problem.

3.7 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was ensured in this research by employing multiple methods of data collection namely observation, interviews and document analysis (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). According to Maree and van der Westhuizen (2007), crystallisation refers to the practice of validating results by using multiple methods of data collection and analysis. Therefore, the involvement of these three methods of producing data in this qualitative research (case study) was to facilitate crystallisation. Nieuwenhuis (2007) further states that crystallisation is used to improve credibility and trustworthiness.

Neuwenhuis (2007) and Bisschoff & Koebe (2005) share the same view that credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are key criteria of trustworthiness. According to Bisschoff and Koebe (2005), “trustworthiness” provides assurance that the research instrument is capable of providing accurate meaningful answers to the research question or questions. I ensured trustworthiness by tape-recording all interview proceedings, as well as quoting verbatim from documents. Also, the transcripts were returned to the participants to ensure that what was written was what they had said and this ensured the validity of the information.

3.8 Limitations of the study

This study deals with the cases of two primary schools in Lesotho which perform well academically. It was therefore conducted on a very small scale which obstructed the results from generalisation. The major focus was on school cultures associated with good academic performance, yet there could be other factors that influence good academic performance.

3.9 Ethical issues

I asked the respondents to complete the informed consent declaration form which explained the nature of the study; the right to voluntary participation, to non-participation, withdrawal and rejoining the project; and more. This was to enable the participants to participate with a clear understanding of what was expected of them. I also asked for permission to undertake research in the target community as Cohen et al. (2007) advice. This means that I gained access and acceptance from the gatekeepers (principals). The gatekeepers were also provided with information on the nature and the purpose of the study.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the research design and methodology of the study. The research design and instruments for data production are discussed. The weaknesses and limitations are identified, as well as the means of addressing them. The next chapter presents and discusses the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR
DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This study aimed at exploring school cultures associated with good academic performance in two selected primary schools in Lesotho. As reported in Chapter One, these schools are performing well academically. The data were produced through the use of semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis. The data from these methods are woven together in the presentation. I begin this chapter by reporting on the respondents after which I move on to the context of the schools as I found them during data collection. I then present the main findings through themes. The themes were informed by the data I obtained. The themes are as follows: time management, rituals and ceremonies, the relationships within the school, the teaching and learning processes, responsibility for success and commitment to work, remedies for some of the FPE challenges, school improvement and development. There are lots of similarities in the findings from these two schools.

4.2 The respondents

1. Eighteen teachers (eight from Maliba Primary School and ten from Ntatai Primary School) were interviewed. The intention was to interview ten teachers from each school, but two teachers in Maliba School declined to participate, and the number of respondents was reduced to eighteen.

Table 1 summarise the biographical information of the respondents.

Table 1: Biographical data of respondents: Maliba School

Maliba Primary School			
Experience	Males	Females	TOTAL
2yrs	0	0	0
3-4yrs	2	0	2
5-6yrs	0	3	3
7yrs and above	0	3	3
TOTAL	2	6	8

Table 2: Biographical data of respondents: Ntatai School

Ntatai Primary School			
Experience	Males	Females	TOTAL
2yrs	0	0	0
3-4yrs	2	1	3
5-6yrs	1	2	3
7yrs and above	1	3	4
TOTAL	4	6	10

4.3 The context of the two schools

In Maliba Primary School there are 34 teachers. Out of 34 there are 3 male teachers. I managed to secure two male teachers among my respondents because the third one had less than two years experience in this school. The principal and the deputy-principal are not allocated to any class. They concentrate on school administration. For example, they check teachers' work in general which includes daily lesson plans, schemes and records of work done and make sure that the work is done properly. They check questions for examinations and make sure that they are set in accordance with what teachers have taught. There are nineteen classrooms, one office for the principal, one old office which is now used as the small school library, and the school kitchen. There is no staff-room. Although they have a number of classrooms, there is still congestion in the classrooms. The school enrolment as already mentioned in Chapter One is 1,587.

In Ntatai Primary School there are 21 teachers. Out of 21, 4 are male teachers. I managed to interview those four males and six females. Only the principal is not allocated to a class. He concentrates on school administration. Because he does not have a class to teach, he is able to visit the classes and see how teachers teach with the intention of reviewing their strengths and weaknesses so that assistance can be provided. In this school they have eight classrooms, and the congestion is worse than in Maliba Primary School. The enrolment of Ntatai Primary School is 1,043. In both schools there are caterers who provide lunch for learners. Maliba is a church school. It is guided by the government policy on education, church policy and school policy.

Ntatai is a government school. It is guided by the government policy on education and school policy.

4.4 The main findings

4.4.1 Time management

At Maliba Primary School I observed that the clock book seemed to be used to enhance punctuality among teachers. The starting time and the closing time for the school are kept precisely. Teachers and learners are always punctual, and teachers always clock 'in' and 'out'. All teachers indicate the time at which they arrive at school and the time they leave. Everybody must be precise about the time s/he writes. The information from the clock book indicates that teachers are always punctual and present. What I observed was in line with what is included in the school mission statement, namely, "punctuality, discipline, cleanliness". These three items seemed to be the principles which lead teachers to work hard. Teachers only miss school on rare occasions as the principal or deputy-principal records the reason for their absence. The point of not missing school emphasises the value of time.

A large percentage of learners arrive at school an hour before the actual starting time. Learners are expected to arrive at 7.30 a.m. and go on with their school work in their classes, and they do just that. Learners who arrive during the process of the opening assembly are considered to be late-comers and they are punished for that, either by sweeping their classroom surroundings, or by collecting papers if there are any. There is a time set aside for sweeping for all learners, but the late-comers are made to sweep at an odd time because it is a punishment. The working time is profitably utilised. For example, lunch time is precise and is never exceeded. Due to the huge enrolment, the school has three places for assemblies. Classes 1 and 2 assemble together. Classes 3, 4 and 5 assemble together. Classes 6 and 7 assemble together. This is because the school wants the assemblies to be manageable to avoid time wastage. "We do not have enough space for assembling them together; besides, they are not easy to control when they are together", one of the teachers said.

One of their policies which emphasises the good use of time is, "No teacher is allowed in another teacher's class without permission". This means that the principal should be convinced of the reason for going to another teacher's class and then grant

permission. Also at Ntatai School there is a policy which reads as follows, “No visitors to teachers during teaching hours except if the authority finds it necessary”. This tells how they value their teaching time. Thus, according to the cultures of these schools, teachers should not misuse working time.

When it comes to lessons, I observed from the learners’ exercise books that all subjects are taught according to the time-table in both schools. This indicates good time management. However, in both schools the learners’ work in some subjects is not marked regularly. Teachers do not manage their time when it comes to marking. One teacher at Ntatai Primary School mentioned that the problem of overcrowding gives learners the opportunity to hide their books during the marking process. This was however not the case with all teachers.

At Ntatai Primary School, the school starts at 7.45 am. Most of the learners are always punctual. The same thing applies to teachers, and the school policy says, “Teachers should always clock in before the assembly starts”. It seems that it is possible for learners to be punctual as long as their role models (teachers) value punctuality. Some learners do not respect the bell, but these are very few in number. It was hard to observe how they utilise their lunch and break times because examinations were being conducted. Due to the huge enrolment and the shortage of classrooms, teachers have resorted to dividing learners into smaller groups and making them write the examinations in turns. Hence, while one group was writing, the others were playing outside, and when all groups were through with the examination for the day, teachers were busy marking until the end of the day. They also use a clock book just as Maliba does.

I observed that at Maliba School, teachers and learners seem to respect and value working time because they go to assembly immediately when the bell rings. Almost all teachers ensure that there is order at assembly. They show a great respect for the bell and for time. Learners utilise the time for assembly with order and respect. They attend pre-classes (classes before the actual classes start) without being pushed. They seem to be conscious of time, and they present good behaviour and commitment to their work.

The above practices seem to suggest the existence of an optimal level of social control in the school culture in line with what the literature explains. That is, the way they utilize the working time indicates that the behaviour of organisational members is task

oriented. These practices reveal that continuous improvement and responsibility for success are valued.

4.4.2 Rituals and Ceremonies

In both schools they assemble as one of their rituals. In both schools they begin a day with a hymn and a prayer at the assembly as part of their ritual. They assemble for special announcements, and for acknowledgement of achievements. Their assemblies are formal, and teachers work jointly to keep order at these assemblies. At Maliba School, after the prayer, learners sing the national anthem and recite their school motto, greet their teachers and then march to their classrooms in rows. Classes 4 to 7 follow the same procedure but they march to their classrooms with a chorus. The way they behave at the assembly suggests that they are disciplined and well-organised, and that such learners are likely to be controllable and to be taught with success. At Ntatai School some teachers do not value the morning assembly. They do not assist teachers who are responsible for the assembly (who are on duty). They just stand behind the learners and ignore the disorder caused by learners. There is no teamwork at the assembly. Learners do not behave well at the assembly either. There is unwanted noise, as if they are not concentrating during the assembly progress. Late-comers keep on joining the prayer while it is in progress. Learners march to their classrooms after assembly.

In both schools at the end of each year they have a farewell for Class Seven learners. Parents and members of the two committees; the Management School Committee and the School Advisory Committee (MSC and SAC) are always invited to these ceremonies. It is at this ceremony that learners are rewarded for their good behaviour, good academic performance, good performance in extramural activities, and others. They are praised, and encouraged to keep up the high standard. The school believes that if they praise learners in public, they encourage them to work hard to maintain or to improve the standard of their behaviour and performance. Thus rituals and ceremonies form part of their cultures. At Ntatai School, teachers are also rewarded for their achievements at this ceremony. One respondent at Ntatai Priamry School had this to say, “Teachers who have performed well are praised in our staff meeting, and we also award them certificates at the end of the year.” At Maliba School teachers are not included in the rewards, and one of the respondents in this school reported, “Teachers who have performed well receive a verbal reward only. We just say ‘congratulations’ and nothing else. I remember Class7 teachers for last year who

produced very good results. We said ‘congratulations’ only.” According to Fink (2000), celebration and humour make members to feel good about their work. Thus, celebration and humour seem to characterise school cultures of both schools and they are likely to enhance the level the two domains, for it seems that celebrating good performance of learners enhances commitment and appreciation of good behaviour in them and make them feel good about their work.

4.4.3 Relationships within the school

When I asked teachers how they describe relationships among teachers and between teachers and learners, they provided similar responses in both schools. They indicated that there are very good relationships in each school either among the teachers, or between teachers and learners. All respondents in both schools reported good relationships in their schools. They indicated that they feel free to disclose their teaching and personal problems to their colleagues and get assistance. They said that this situation helps them to reduce their stress and to be able to do their work properly. One respondent at Maliba Primary School had this to say:

They are very good truly. You feel at home when you are with your colleagues. This is where we spend most of our time and we know each other’s problems and we share our problems. Every Thursday in the Morning Prayer we share our problems even our personal and family problems. We also share our happiness (anything good in your family) and celebrate it in that prayer. For example, this morning one of our colleagues told us that her daughter had a baby boy last night, and we shared that happiness with her.

Another respondent at the same school said:

We have good relationships. Our pupils are free to go to any teacher and ask for help. We try by all means to be open to them. We even have our own nick-names as teachers, and our learners are free to use those names. We are friendly to them but in a respectful way. We emphasise equality of teachers to our learners in terms of respect and knowledge. So our learners can go to any teacher and get assistance. Our relationships are good to the extent that we feel free to disclose even our personal problems or family problems to our colleagues. This helps us a lot because we reduce stress and get rid of frustration and we are able to interact with the school environment.

One respondent at Ntatai Primary School had this to say:

We have very good relationships in this school. We appreciate coming to work because the environment is conducive to us. We feel ‘home away from home’ when

we are at school. This makes us love our work. ...Our learners are very comfortable discussing their problems with their teachers. We have built a good friendship with them.

Another respondent at the same school also said:

The relationships between teachers and learners are good according to my observation. Every learner is free to go to any teacher and ask for help in connection with their work. If relationships were not good, they would not be able to approach any teacher. Our learners feel free to the extent that they even disclose their personal problems to us. For example, some orphans have nothing to eat in their families and they are able to disclose that problem to us. We listen carefully and assist them. This helps to avoid a negative impact on their learning. Teachers are also friendly to each other and feel free to disclose their teaching and personal problems to their colleagues. This helps us to ease our stress and to be able to concentrate on our school work.

One respondent at Maliba School mentioned that it is possible for them to cultivate good relationships in learners because it is what they practice among themselves. He put it in this way:

We consider ourselves as brothers and sisters. We teach our children to consider themselves as brothers and sisters who belong to the same family. The way we interact with our colleagues helps us to easily pass this on to the learners.

It seems that in both schools there was positive climate. That is, the overall atmosphere in both schools was pleasant and this makes organisational members to enjoy their work and be committed (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1993).

Although learners are supposed to feel free in their learning, their freedom should not be too loose so as to avoid deterioration in their learning progress. This is what the respondents indicated in their responses. For example; one respondent at Maliba School responded:

We have good relationships with our learners, but there is a limit to relationships in that learners should not be too relaxed towards us, at the same time they should not be shy to approach us when they have problems. They should know the boundaries between themselves and us. We are not too loose in our friendships with learners so that they do not become too loose and lose respect for us. All learners are free to go to any teacher with their problems and be assisted.

The social cohesion in this school is kept at optimal level with the assurance of maintaining the optimal level of social control domain at the same time. This is consistent with the views expressed by Stoll (1999), Fink (2000) and Stoll and Fink (1996).

The behaviour that teachers present when exchanging ideas in their two short staff meetings suggests the existence of a positive climate within Maliba School. I observed this in their short staff meetings and when they shared lunch together. Sharing lunch together is an indication of positive climate within a school (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1993). In interviews all respondents indicated that the relationships within their school are good, and that they help one another whenever there is a need for that. Punctuality, discipline and cleanliness are the key expectations at Maliba School, and teachers and learners behave according to these three aspects.

At Ntatai Primary School I observed that the behaviour of some teachers and some learners towards assembly discourages oneness in this particular activity, and diminishes the value of assembly. The reason for this is that some teachers did not participate actively at assembly as indicated earlier. This behaviour was persistent in this school. These teachers did not help to organise learners or control noise at the assembly. Among their school policies there is one which reads as follows, 'Teachers should make sure that they take part during assembly by organising their pupils to make them follow', but they ignore this policy. One of the respondents explained that some teachers do not attend the prayer because according to their faith they are not supposed to pray with people from different church denominations. Because it is a government school, there is no policy related to prayer and the principal has no way of urging them to attend the prayer. Besides assembly, I observed that there is good interaction among teachers and between teachers and learners. The way teachers exchange greetings every morning when they first meet suggests good interaction. The way they communicate within the school confirmed what they said during the interviews. They mentioned the existence of good relationships within their school among teachers and between teachers and learners.

According to the respondents, freedom within the school does not mean permission for poor behaviour, but it allows for the existence of a positive climate so that everybody is

able to work comfortably. The way the members interact with each other and the kind of support they provide for their colleagues and how they approach their activities, indicate good relationships within the school. This is consistent with the literature, for example Fink (2000) asserts that a culture with optimal social cohesion is revealed in good relationships among organisational members. Thus, social cohesion in these schools is high.

4.4.4 Teaching and learning processes

When teachers were asked to discuss their teaching and learning processes they provided more or less similar responses in both schools. The teachers indicated that they practise subject teaching (subject specialisation). This means that teachers are given the opportunity to teach the subjects in which they are competent. In the Lesotho context, the primary school teachers are not trained to specialise in subjects. This is confirmed by Mulkeen and Chen (2008, p.30) when they state that, “In Lesotho, teachers teach the entire curriculum without subject specialisation.” A teacher is supposed to teach all subjects in a class to which s/he is allocated. In these schools, they have made their own school policies that subject specialisation should be practised, and this forms part of their culture. Teachers who teach the same subjects, scheme and plan together so that they can help each other with teaching techniques. “Team work” is thus valued in these schools. All of the respondents at Maliba Primary School provided almost the same information regarding subject teaching. One respondent had this to say:

We do subject teaching in classes 5, 6 and 7. In higher classes we find it very important, because if a teacher knows Maths, we give him or her the chance to teach that subject if s/he is efficient. We do subject teaching so that you teach the subject that you are comfortable with. It is because sometimes, if you teach all the subjects, certain other subjects will suffer because you will keep on dodging those subjects. So, if you are comfortable with your subject, there could be perfection in your teaching.

The respondents at Maliba School indicated that they value this practice because it gives teachers the opportunity to choose subjects according to their capabilities. This means that confidence and competence in their work helps them to produce good school results. In addition, subject teaching is one of their school policies.

At Ntatai Primary School all the respondents mentioned the practice of “subject teaching” as part of their “teaching and learning processes”. They consider teachers

who are very good in certain subjects to be specialists in those subjects. Teachers who do the same specialisations work as a team, and this enhances “oneness” among the staff.

In both schools, the “discovery method” is considered important. This is the method through which learners discover knowledge for themselves. In Lesotho primary schools, the pupil-teacher ratio has been a burning issue for many years. Now it is even worse due to FPE. In many schools one teacher teaches 70-100 pupils in one classroom. This ratio is far too high. The official ratio is 40:1 in Lesotho (Mulkeen & Chen, 2008). Although the discovery method exists, teachers know that this method needs careful planning and that it takes time to prepare a lesson using the discovery method. Due to the heavy teachers’ work-load as indicated earlier in Chapter One, teachers are unable to apply the discovery method, and inadequacy of resources contributes to their reluctance. In these two schools, teachers concluded that, if one teacher teaches less than four subjects, s/he may be able to prepare the lessons properly and apply the discovery method effectively. In the case of these two schools, the availability of human resources (teachers) allows them the opportunity to practice “subject teaching” and to find it easy to apply the “discovery method”.

Almost all teachers in the two schools see the importance of applying the discovery method. A respondent at Maliba Primary School indicated that:

A teacher should just be a facilitator, just to guide the children. All things should be done by the children in most cases. So we try to avoid this ehh... teacher-centred learning. Most of the time learners should be the foremost during the learning activities. We as teachers are just to guide them.

The same respondent added that:

Creativity develops in our children due to their involvement in Maths and Science projects. There is a lot of creativity because it develops children who are critical thinkers and are creative. We just facilitate them with what they need, but all the thinking and the process is done by the child. Finally, we find that these children are very creative because they think of other things that we are not even aware of. A child will tell you ‘I’m going to do this, which is going to be used for such and such, a purpose’, and you will notice that it is actually like that.

Another respondent at Maliba Primary School had this to say about the discovery method:

Our task is to facilitate and to provide appropriate terms for what they find out. We have noticed that in most cases the content that they have found by themselves is acquired differently from the content they get from teachers. It is not easy to forget such content. We encourage them to find things out for themselves and then we provide the appropriate terms. We practice knowledge construction.

On the first day of my arrival at Maliba Primary School, they held a short staff meeting. One of the items on the agenda was to acknowledge the achievement made by their three learners. These learners had won the Maths and Science Projects competition where learners design projects using their own creativity and ideas. So, if there are such learners in Maliba School, this suggests that the discovery method is applied effectively in this school. According to Mortimore et al. (in Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1993), this type of teaching develops independent learning in learners. It seems that the schools maintain an intellectually challenging teaching approach as part of their culture.

A respondent at Ntatai Primary School said:

We practise the child-centred approach or discovery method where learners make findings and come up with their findings. In this approach teachers are facilitators. This is the most appreciated and recommended approach in teaching.

It has been recommended, but a problem exists when one teacher teaches eleven subjects to 70 to 100 pupils. It is difficult to apply this method in such a situation.

A respondent at Ntatai School had this to say:

We give the learners the opportunity to find out for themselves. Our job is to facilitate during the learning activities. This is the most appropriate way of learning according to our observation. The learner-centred approach is far more highly encouraged than the teacher-centred approach in our education system. In the learner-centred approach we just add to what they find out.

Another teacher at the same school explained how the discovery method is used in this school. He said:

We also apply the discovery method within the grouping method. They do their own research but they are guided by our instructions. Sometimes they even discover things that were not included in the teacher's lesson plan...After their findings we discuss these together. This works very well for us and they do not easily forget what they have learned through discovery.

Teachers at Ntatai School stressed that the content or knowledge they (learners) discover by themselves is not easy to forget. One respondent had this to say:

I remember once when we were dealing with ‘exerted pressure’. I gave them materials and told them to do whatever they could think of. They came up with what I was supposed to teach them, and I provided the appropriate terms for what they found.

It seems as though even if teachers are teaching in the same school and in the same context, they still perceive things differently. One respondent from Ntatai Primary School provided this response regarding the “discovery method”:

We also use the learner-centred approach where learners manipulate materials and come up with content from their observations, but it does not work very well and I think one of the reasons is the overpopulated classrooms which result in unmanageable classes. Apart from that, the learners of today seem to be very different from the learners of the past. It is as if they are too lazy to think deeply or work hard. We are compelled to push them hard all the time.

This teacher also values the application of discovery method but he sees some obstacles that hinder the effective use it. The participation of Maliba School in mini-science projects shows that they value intellectually challenging teaching, and the discovery method itself is challenging. The teachers from both schools indicated that some of their teaching processes help the development of critical thinking and creativity in their learners. Ntatai School has not yet entered these competitions because parents and guardians are not able to support their children with the necessary materials for their projects.

The “grouping method” as one of the practices in the two schools is another tool for bringing about good academic performance. In most cases, teachers resort to the grouping method when they are tired of teaching. It seems as though they do not consider it very important to the teaching and learning processes. In these schools, the respondents indicated that the “grouping method” works for them. As long as most of their teaching and learning practices are discovery-method oriented, the grouping method cannot be ignored because a teacher cannot manage to monitor all of the activities in a large group. This is what I observed because the classes in both schools are too big. It is difficult to monitor all the learning activities unless the class is divided into smaller groups. Most of the respondents stressed the importance of the grouping method in their teaching and learning processes.

A respondent at Ntatai Primary School provided this information regarding grouping method in their school:

We use grouping and discovery methods most of the time. In their groups, we group them according to their abilities, sometime we look for different abilities and then we mix abilities during the grouping method, so that the slow learners will be able to gain or learn from the fast learners. The fast learners pull up the slow learners and this seems to be an effective method.

Another respondent at Ntatai Primary School added to this saying, “We use the grouping method in all classes. Since we have encouraged the practice of this method, our school results are very good”.

It seems that in these schools teachers want their learners to develop “mutual respect”, that is they want learners to understand that “everyone has something to offer” during the learning activities. They try to make them participate and feel that what they do is important. According to their responses, “discovery and grouping” methods complement one another or go hand-in-hand. They enhance intellectually challenging teaching and respect for others’ ideas.

In connection with this practice, a teacher at Maliba Primary School had this to say:

We encourage our learners to form groups for learning. Whatever they have learnt they must practise in their small groups or discuss it, so that they can be successful in their learning. At home and at school they must learn to work in groups – talking about what they have learnt. This practice leads to success. Whatever new topic they learn, we encourage them to talk about it in their small groups.

The teachers in the two schools mentioned that in their teaching and learning processes they do not rely entirely on teacher’s guides and suggested activities in the syllabi, but sometimes try their own devices. They indicated that for some subjects there are no teacher’s guides and their style of not relying on them makes them flexible and able to improvise. One respondent at Maliba School had this to say, “The lack of teachers’ guides for some subjects compels us to try our own devices. We try our own approaches and try to be flexible in our teaching”. Another respondent at the same school added:

We improvise and try our own approaches. Sometime you may find that the suggested activities in a teacher’s guide are not suitable for your plans, or do not work properly to serve your intentions, so you have to try your own devices.

At Ntatai School one respondent said, “We often try our own approaches because the activities in the teacher's guide are the suggested ones. It is not as if we must use them.” Another respondent from the same school responded in this way: “I always try my own approaches in many lessons. I only consult the teacher’s guide if my approaches fail or if I want to complement mine”. In most cases, teachers tend to be slaves of the teachers’ guides. If there is no teacher’s guide for a particular subject, they ignore that subject and make an excuse that there is no guide for teaching it. As a result, the performance in that subject becomes bad. For example, the primary schools spent several years without guides for Arts & Music, Health Education and Physical Education. Most teachers ignored these subjects because they did not want to improvise.

The response from the principal of Ntatai Primary School explained how they overcome the problem of the absence of teachers’ guides. He said:

Whether the teacher’s guides are there or not, we find our own way of tackling the topic. We always help each other if there is a problem handling of a topic. We do not consider the absence of a teacher’s guide as an obstacle. We are flexible enough to handle problems. Even if we can have a problem which is beyond our knowledge, I do not have a problem of consulting my neighbouring primary schools or secondary schools, and I know I will be assisted. I even invite the more experienced people or experts to come to our school if we have a problem concerning teaching and learning.

Subject specialisation seems to be vital to the academic performance of these two schools. It seems to ease teachers’ heavy work loads of teaching an unmanageable number of subjects. Each teacher now concentrates on a few subjects in which s/he is competent. The application of the discovery and grouping methods is more effective due to subject specialisation. It seems that a sense of responsibility on the part of a teacher in his or her subjects enhances the social control domain because every teacher works hard to produce good results in his or her subjects. This characterises the type of culture in their school. This is in keeping with Fink’s (2000) and Stoll and Fink’s (1996) assertion that effective school culture has both domains high.

4.4.5 Responsibility for success and Commitment to work

On the question of fostering commitment in teachers for the success of the school, most respondents mentioned that the practice of subject specialisation is a way of fostering responsibility for success in teachers, and commitment as well. Earlier in this presentation I indicated that according to the respondents, “subject specialisation” is one of the teaching practices in these two schools. Therefore, according to their responses, this practice is done to foster commitment to work and responsibility for success in their academic performance. Six respondents in Maliba School and ten in Ntatai School maintained that subject specialisation plays an important role in fostering responsibility and commitment to work. One of the respondents at Ntatai Primary School responded to the question of fostering this responsibility and commitment in teachers in this way:

We practise subject teaching in this school. If a teacher does not work hard in his or her subject, the performance in that subject will be poor or bad. Therefore, every teacher puts more effort into his or her subjects to avoid ridicule or being blamed for the deterioration of the school performance. The colleagues in the same class look after each other in relation to how work is done.

It seems to be important to orientate teachers at the first staff meeting of the year so as to update them on how things are done in the school, which ensures that they begin their work with the intention of working hard. Maliba’s school mission statement includes “high academic standards” and the last part of the statement says, “In striving for this mission, certain standards of conduct are expected from pupils, staff and parents”. Therefore, “responsibility” and “commitment” are part of the conduct that is expected from teachers. The deputy principal of Maliba Primary School provided this information in relation to the responsibility for success and commitment:

The first thing; we let our teachers, especially the new teachers know that in this school we work hard. In fact at the interview they (interviewers) normally tell them about this school and say, ‘In this school teachers work hard, so, if you feel that you won’t manage, just let us know now, or tell yourself that you will do what others do here.’

Apart from teachers’ orientation, in both schools, “responsibility for success” and “commitment” is fostered by showing appreciation for good work (teachers’ good work). Thus the schools motivate their teachers to deliver good work. For example, if

the results show high performance in certain subjects, a teacher or teachers who teach those subjects are praised for their good work as a means of motivation. Again, they value introspection after the school results, or after the results of whatever educational activity, so that they can see the loopholes and correct them. They sit together and assess their performance, that is, they identify their strengths and weaknesses from the previous year and try to find ways of correcting these weaknesses. One respondent at Maliba Primary School had this to say: “At the beginning of each year we meet and discuss our performance of the previous year. We say, 'Our performance last year was like this, so what should we do to improve it?’ ”

One teacher at Ntatai Primary School mentioned that;

A teacher who is the best performer or the best achiever is motivated by being awarded a certificate of good performance. This style has motivated all teachers to work hard. As a result they all feel responsible for our success.

This suggests that if the learners’ performance is high in certain subjects or activities, the teacher or teachers responsible for those are considered best achievers or performers and are rewarded for that.

Again the schools indicated that they orientate and demonstrate to new teachers how they do things in their school, and in this regard one respondent had this to say:

We talk to our colleagues about how we live in this school (how we do things). Maybe by ... We do as ... What we tell them is that we try to live what we talk about. For example, when we say, 'Here at Maliba School we need our place to be clean, we show (demonstrate) them. If we talk of cleanliness, clean surroundings, we set an example as models.

For both schools, appreciation of good work and orientation at the beginning of each year are considered important. Again, “introspection” after the results of any educational activity seems to play an important role in sustaining their school cultures.

Again, one respondent at Ntatai School indicated that the competitive spirit within teachers urges them to be committed and feel responsible for success, and she responded thus:

Apart from that, we have a spirit of winning. We are here to win and we have noticed that performance of our neighbouring schools is below ours. As we have a competitive spirit, we feel that our success is our responsibility.

According to this response, these teachers are competing for high academic performance with other primary schools. So, if their performance is above others, it means they have won the competition. Indeed, it is a competition, because in our country the schools with the highest performance are awarded a certificate of good performance and trophies by the Ministry of Education. These teachers seem to compete, even within the school, because every teacher tries to produce the best results in her or his subjects.

When it comes to extramural activities, each teacher is allocated a duty to perform but teamwork goes alongside all activities. They all participate, although there is a teacher delegated the responsibility for a particular activity. This is what teachers from both schools told me. One respondent at Ntatai Primary School had this to say:

We have different activities. In all activities each teacher has his or her own part to play. We make sure that everybody participates. For a particular activity there will be some teachers who are responsible for it, but, during that activity all teachers take part and see to it that learners are participating.

One respondent at Maliba Primary School had this to say:

At the beginning of each year we hold a staff meeting and list all the duties that we are supposed to do and be in charge of them. For example; culture, sports, dance club, science club, English club, environment, and others. Each teacher is allocated his or her duty, but they are given the opportunity to choose an activity which suit their own interest. Because they feel comfortable with the responsibility of their own choice, and even expertise, they put more effort into it and strive for a good quality of work. There is high competition in this school. Every teacher wants his or her club to be at the top. Since I have been in this school, there have been such clubs which play an important part in fostering responsibility for success in our teachers. Nobody will allocate a teacher a particular responsibility. Teachers volunteer and fortunately, they volunteer according to their expertise. Even if a teacher lacks interest and is not willing to commit himself or herself to the activity under his or her responsibility, the way we commit ourselves makes that teacher also feel committed.

These responses suggest that in schools where the performance of educational activities is high, teachers are delegated responsibility, but other teachers also understand that it is their responsibility to help those teachers for the success of the school, and this is where “teamwork” plays an important role. Therefore, they all feel that the success of the school is the responsibility of the whole staff, as Fink (2000) maintains that responsibility for success means ‘we must succeed’.

The respondents from both schools indicated that a positive climate allows room for commitment. For example; one respondent at Maliba Primary School explained:

Freedom of speech and freedom to express oneself make us enjoy our work and feel committed. We are free here, and even the principal tries to tell everyone to feel at home. Any problem we encounter, we share, because if you are comfortable, you are going to be able.

Under “relationships within the school” as reported earlier, one respondent in this school (Maliba) indicated that they all have their nicknames and that their learners are also free to use them. I observed this because I heard them using those names and this confirmed for me that a positive climate prevails in this school.

One of the practices which foster responsibility for success and commitment at Maliba School is that, the same teachers take learners from Class One up to Class Three, and others take them from Class Four up to Class Seven. Through this practice, teachers are accountable for learners’ academic performance for a number of years without blaming other people. One respondent in Maliba School stated:

We foster responsibility in this way; we have a routine of moving forward with our classes (learners/children). The Class 1 teacher takes the learners from Class 1 up to Class 3. The Class 4 teacher moves with the children from Class 4 up to Class 7. We practice this style in order to avoid putting the blame on each other. We also avoid the problem of learning about new learners every year because this prevents us from noticing, and correcting the loop-holes quickly. *Re leka ho boloka matla a chain ea rona ea ho ruta.* (We try to preserve a strong connection of the chain in our teaching). ...each teacher works hard because the blame will be upon him or her if the performance becomes bad. We have noticed that this encourages commitment and devotion among teachers because they do not want to be blamed for learners failing.

It seems as subject specialisation flourishes alongside different issues in these schools, for they mentioned it as one of their teaching practices, and they also mentioned it as their way of fostering responsibility for success and commitment to work in teachers. Old teachers set examples for new teachers. For example, they set examples on punctuality, devotion to work and a tidy environment and others. The respondents also reveal that acknowledgement of appreciation for teachers’ hard work is a good motivator and it can even invite competition within the school. In these schools, teachers do not only specialise in subjects, but they are also delegated responsibility for extramural activities according to their expertise. According to the responses from both schools, the existence of a positive climate in the school allows teachers to work according to their

capabilities and to try to achieve more every year. The responses suggest that the practice of teaching learners in three or five successive classes makes teachers more committed to their work.

During the interview sessions, teachers were asked how they foster responsibility in their learners with regard to their learning. In line with what has been reported under 'time management', four respondents at Maliba School indicated that in their school there is a routine of pre-classes (classes before school starts). Learners progress with their school work on their own (in the absence of the class teacher/s). They said that this practice fosters responsibility in learners. In this school, the practice of pre-classes encompasses the valuing of working time and responsibility in learners. One respondent in this school said that these pre-classes are part of the school policies and that this works as a warm-up session so that when the actual classes begin, the learners' minds are ready to absorb information.

This information was confirmed by what I observed. During my observation I noticed that learners from Class One up to Class Seven arrive earlier than the starting time, and that they do exactly what the respondents told me.

At Maliba School they stream learners according to their performance after every quarterly examination. One teacher said:

We always encourage them to work hard. Every quarter after writing quarterly examinations, we reshuffle them and divide them according to their performance. For example, we have 3 streams in Class 6; Class 6A is for good performers, Class 6B is for fair performers and Class 6C is for weak performers. Our children know this system very well and they all strive to be in Class As, that is, they aim high.

This means that if the learner's performance fluctuates, s/he can find himself or herself being in three different classes in a year.

Another respondent at Maliba Primary School indicated as follows:

We have cultivated in our learners the tendency of coming to school earlier than the starting time. They do their class work in their classes. Sometime we even start to revise yesterday's work before we start a new lesson.... Our pass mark is strictly 50%. This makes our children work hard to achieve that percentage.

According to this response, 50% is the lowest percentage the school considers to promote their learners to the next class. They ignore 40% which is the legalised percentage for passing in this country.

Another teacher at Maliba School also emphasised this point:

We also make sure that there is variety of learning activities for learners to perform during the absence of the class teacher, and they do these in a very logical way. Class monitors keep order in the class. They are now used to this practice and our classes are always orderly.

Most of the teachers at Maliba Primary School mentioned that they always keep the learners busy with their class work in order to make sure that they utilise their learning hours profitably. This is verified by what I observed. I noticed that in their pre-class activities they proceed smoothly with their work in their classes, regardless of the presence or absence of the class teacher and there is order in their classes. This showed me that the activities for the new day are prepared in advance. Structured lessons (well-planned and organised lessons with a variety of activities to perform: Mortimore et al. 1993) are thus practised in this school. At Ntatai Primary School, teachers provided similar information regarding learners' responsibility for their learning. One respondent said the following regarding learners' responsibility for their work:

We try to make them understand that they learn for their own benefit. We give them time to study on their own so that they develop the habit of pushing themselves in their learning. There are some learners who are responsible for study time in each class (class monitors). They make sure that there is order in the class during study time or during the absence of the class teacher.

Another teacher from the same school responded in this way, "We do not tell our learners about the importance of learning and sit back. We tell them and help them to work hard. We do that by showing devotion to our work". Yet another teacher from the same school had this to say, "In the class they work in small groups.... I delegate the responsibility to the group leaders and they make sure that their group members participate fully in the activities". At Ntatai Primary School there are no pre-class activities, but one teacher mentioned that, in the upper classes learners volunteer to come to school earlier than the starting time, especially if they have not finished an activity on the previous day. In this school they also consider 50% upwards in terms of promoting learners even during the course of the year. This is also one of their school policies which say, "we strive for high quality education therefore we must promote pupils to other classes using 50%." In both schools there is school touchstone

for promoting learners consistent with Elbot and Fulton (2008) who emphasise the importance of school touchstone in a well functioning organisational structure and sound school culture.

The responses from both schools suggest that it is important to give learners the chance to learn on their own in order to develop an ability to work without being pushed, and to be responsible for their success in their studies. According to the responses, the streaming of learners according to their performance after the examination encourages a competitive spirit in learners as they want to be considered the best performers. The minimum pass used for promoting learners seems to invite commitment to work in learners, because for a person to achieve high marks, commitment is needed. The responses also suggest that if learners are always kept busy with well organised activities, they are likely to learn successfully. As Hargreaves and Hopkins (1993) argue, in an effective school the structured sessions (where learners always have activities to do) feature as part of the culture of the school.

4.4.6 Remedies for some of the FPE challenges

FPE seems to be good, but it has brought many challenges to teaching and learning processes in almost all schools, such as overpopulated classrooms, a shortage of resources, parents renegeing on their responsibility to see that their children have all the requirements for education, admissions without deadline, and other issues. The respondents in the two selected schools indicated that devotion to work, subject specialisation, and parental involvement in the learning of their children help them to overcome these problems. The respondents in both schools mentioned that they provide learners with several activities to make them work hard even at home during their spare time. All respondents in both schools said that FPE has brought many challenges to schools, but devotion to work is the solution to those challenges. Thus, the high level of the two domains defines their cultures.

When they were asked how they involve parents in the learning of the children, the respondents from both schools provided almost similar responses. For example; all respondents indicated that they have made it a routine that parents should help their children with their homework and sign to confirm that the child has done the work. This denies learners the chance to drag their feet in respect of their learning because

they realise that the teachers and the parents care about their learning. One respondent at Maliba Primary School said:

We involve them in this way: We are used to sharing with them because we share these kids with them. They have time to be with us and they have time to be with their parents. So we have to share with them to make a follow-up to see whether these children are following.

Another teacher at the same school responded in this way:

We involve parents by making them sign for their children's homework, to make sure that what is supposed to be done at home is done, and also to check their children's class-work. Whatever they are not happy with, they are allowed to come to school and meet with the class-teacher and discuss the child's problem. For example; a parent might say, 'My child is no longer progressing well, what is her or his problem?' Once a child notices that his or her parent cares, and that the class-teacher also cares for his or her work, s/he tries to put more effort into his or her learning. This is the way we maintain good relationships with parents. We all try our level best to end up achieving good relationships.

A teacher at Ntatai Primary School had this to say:

We ask parents to take the responsibility of looking at their children's work, be it a homework or daily class-work. They check whether their children are progressing well or not so that they can discuss their problems with their class teachers or even notify them about the problem they have identified in their children's learning. We have made it routine that parents should check and read their children's work and then sign and enter some comments.

This technique of involving parents in the learning of their children is good, but it seems to have some weaknesses according to one of the respondents from Ntatai Primary School. He reported that:

We tell our learners that every evening their parents should look at their school work and sign for it. Some parents help their children with homework, but I do not appreciate that. The reason is that they do not know how to guide learners; instead they do the work for them which is not good.

According to the responses on parental involvement, I found that for some parents the involvement of parents in learners' learning is a good practice because they know how to help a learner, while for others it is bad. In the learners' exercise books in both schools I found that only a few of them had their work signed for. In some learners'

exercise books very few entries were signed. This showed me that most parents do not manage to help their children.

Devotion to work and subject specialisation seem to cut across different issues related to good academic performance. I have reported earlier in this chapter how they contribute to good academic performance. They also contribute to overcoming some of the challenges brought by FPE. For example, one respondent at Maliba School reported that teachers provide remedial classes for learners who are behind others in terms of content and that they do this with ease due to subject specialisation. Late admissions cause a problem of learners who fall behind the others. If parental involvement was 100%, academic performance might be excellent because parental involvement in the learning of learners seems to revive their conscience towards learning. As a result they become committed to learning. The high level of teachers' devotion to their school work indicates that they have a feeling that they can get better irrespective of the situation. Stoll and Fink (1996) and Fink (2000) argue that where culture is focuses on continuous improvement, the organisational members are always striving for better achievement. As a result the social control domain is kept at optimal level.

4.4.7 School Improvement and Development

In this context, school "improvement and development" refers to the production of good academic performance, good performance in almost all educational activities and how teachers, parents and learners work together in order to bring about good academic performance.

When the respondents were asked how they acknowledge achievements in their schools and why is it important to do that: all the respondents in these two schools indicated that acknowledgement of teachers' and learners' achievements is a way of motivating them towards hard work, and hard work leads to school improvement and development.

Regarding acknowledgement of achievements, one respondent at Maliba Primary School had this to say:

We encourage our learners to take part in school activities such as Science projects, sports and culture, and others. We motivate the participants by catering for their trips to competitions. We motivate the winners by giving them some incentives. If a child wins a science project competition, we buy him or her a scientific present. We try to buy a present that is related to the child's project. For teachers who have achieved

something, we celebrate together as staff and say 'well done' to those concerned. We hold a small party for them.

Another respondent at the same school indicated that:

Learners who have performed well are brought to the front at the assembly and are praised with cheers and applause. The school also buys them presents as rewards for their achievement. This is a motivation for those learners. For teachers who have performed well, we hold a staff meeting and tell them that they have done a very good job. At the end of each year we go for a picnic and celebrate all the achievements during the year. This motivates us a lot and we see that our principal appreciates our hard work.

One respondent at Ntatai School had this to say:

We use verbal acknowledgement to encourage our children to keep up that standard. We also give them some incentives (small presents) for their achievements. Sometimes our principal offers us a special dinner or a lunch as an incentive for a particular achievement.... We see the improvement every year in our progress, and I think it is because our principal acknowledges our hard work that we are motivated.

Another respondent at the same school provided a similar response regarding achievements. She explained:

We give our learners some incentives when they have performed well. We normally discuss and agreed upon the type of incentive. This motivates our learners and makes them to put in a greater effort than before. At the end of each year we celebrate a farewell for the external class. On that occasion, we select learners who have worked hard from the first quarter of the year up to the last quarter (throughout the whole year) and give them presents as rewards for hard work. We give them presents in the presence of all learners and the parents. This motivates others to work hard. They develop that ethic of hard work so that they too can get awards at the end of the year. They enjoy our appreciation for their work. We also consider learners who have behaved very well for the whole year, and those who have kept their school uniforms neat throughout the year. They also get awards for such behaviour.

This information suggests that in both schools learners' achievements and teachers' achievements are valued and acknowledged. The methods of acknowledgment are quite similar. In both schools 'motivation' seems to be the 'core' of their acknowledgement, and they provide this motivation for the sake of school improvement and development.

When the respondents were asked how they assist teachers in their schools in terms of teaching techniques and professional development, they said that teachers who are good in certain subjects feel and understand that it is their responsibility to assist their colleagues where necessary, for the benefit of the whole school. They also said that sometimes they hold school-based workshops to equip their colleagues with the relevant skills and techniques.

For example, one of the respondents at Maliba School said:

In terms of professional development ... we assist others in many ways. If a teacher has a problem in tackling a certain topic, he or she has to approach the teacher who is skilled in that subject. We know our subject expertise in different subjects. We know who is good at which subject. We sit together and discuss how to deal with such a topic and the subject expertise tries by all means to help us. S/he can even provide the steps to follow when dealing with that topic.

Another respondent at the same school said:

Again we have organised that if we are Sesotho or English teachers, we have to meet and look at our topics. If I have any problem on a certain topic, I ask any of my colleagues to come and help, for I have mentioned that you may be able to teach a subject but be unable to teach a particular topic.

One respondent at Ntatai Primary School said:

We know our subject experts whom we regard as our resource persons in this school. If I have problem with a certain topic, I know who to consult, and every resource person is willing to help any teacher at any time. Sometime we have school-based workshops. The experts or a teacher who is trained in a certain aspect of education shares his or her knowledge with us.

In both schools teachers mentioned the importance of doing away with shyness when they lacked knowledge or the techniques to handle a certain topic, and the importance of sharing knowledge with others. They said that in their schools they are not shy to say, "I don't know how to tackle this topic. How can you help me?" In both schools, teachers noticed that for the school to improve and develop they need adequate teaching techniques and to be professionally developed, so, they try to help one another. The school mission statement of Maliba School indicates that certain standards of conduct are expected from the staff in order to fulfil this mission, and helping one another is part of good conduct. The school mission statement of Ntatai School indicates that they struggle to provide high quality education without any

discrimination. Therefore, helping each other with appropriate techniques, leads to the provision of high quality education.

When the respondents were asked how they get support from parents regarding school development, most of the participants in the two schools indicated the importance of sharing with the parents their views in connection with school development. They mentioned regular parents' meetings where they discuss school issues and plans. They regard this as a way of making parents feel that they are part of the school so that they can develop an interest in providing support to the school. According to Maliba School's mission statement, certain standards of conduct are expected from parents for the fulfilment of the mission. This is why they try to make them feel that they are part of the school. In the meetings they allow parents to suggest and make shared agreements towards school development and improvement. For example; one respondent at Ntatai School provided this information: "We consider them as part of the school and we let them know that they have a responsibility in this school". This information suggests that if parents share ideas with teachers in connection with school plans and make shared agreement it means that they contribute to the development and improvement of the school. Therefore, they are supportive of the school. In this regard, Hargreaves and Hopkins (1993) emphasise the importance of parental involvement in pupils' progress and development. They also argue that this involvement creates good relationships between parents and the school.

Teachers in both schools also mentioned that they invite parents to come to school for other issues concerning their children, namely poor performance and poor behaviour. A respondent at Ntatai School responded, "We normally call or invite a parent to come to school if a child's behaviour is very poor, so that we can assist the child to reform. They are supportive because they never resist our invitation".

A few of the respondents at Ntatai School do not see much support from the parents. One respondent at this school had this to say:

Parents consider this school as a government school and they do not offer any support. The only support we receive is that they acknowledge our good performance by telling us that we have done a good job. Regarding contributions in terms of money, they are not willing to contribute anything, even M1.00 (*RI.00*) for a film show as a means of fund-raising. They do not want to pay. They only contribute by helping their children with school work and we consider that as support for school

development because they help their children to work towards success. Therefore, they help us to produce good results, and that is part of school development.

Another respondent at the same school indicated:

I do not remember any support from the parents in connection with school development except the one I have mentioned, that is by assisting their children with schoolwork and helping to resolve the problem of the behaviour of their children.

If parents do not want to contribute anything in terms of money, they make life difficult for the school. Sometime the school runs short of chalk and scheme books and the teaching and learning processes cannot progress well without them.

One respondent at Maliba Primary School explained how parents are supportive to their school in relation to the discipline of the learners. She put it in this way:

Corporal punishment is not allowed in the education system of Lesotho. This policy contributed to the changing behaviour of our learners. They became wild and difficult to control. We called a parents' meeting and discussed this issue with them. They were allowed to suggest the remedy for this issue. They wrote a letter which they all signed. In that letter they indicated that they want corporal punishment for their children and they made a pledge that they would not blame teachers for using corporal punishment. They made this pledge because, according to the policy, a parent has the right to complain about a teacher using corporal punishment on his or her child.

This support is very important for school improvement and development because, if the learners' behaviour is poor, their learning can be affected negatively which leads to the deterioration of school. In both schools, teachers have different views regarding parental support. Some consider support from parents as a means of bringing income to the school, while others consider it as several things that parents do for the benefit of school development. That is why some are saying there is no support, while some say there is support from parents.

Regarding the question of how they set their school goals, both schools provided similar responses. All the respondents indicated that they set school goals together as a whole staff. Their principals seem to be democratic people who value working collegially. This means collegiality theory is practiced effectively in both schools. Teachers seem to be empowered to voice their views, and this situation makes them develop a great desire to fulfil or to reach their goals. One respondent from Maliba School explained:

We normally discuss together. Our principal prefers an open discussion with the whole staff and asks us to suggest what we intend to achieve in this year. We (the staff) discuss what we want to achieve and reach some form of agreement together. We look at the means of achieving such goals. If we succeed in our plans, we try to assess how and why we succeeded and keep that up. If we fail, we also assess how and why we failed and try to correct our plans. In short, I can say my principal is very democratic.

What I observed during their two short staff meetings testified that there was democratic situation in their school. My observation report for Maliba School provides information about how staff meetings are conducted in this school; “Only two short staff meetings were held during my data production. I observed that ‘there is room for teachers’ ideas’. Teachers were free to ask questions and to suggest options until an agreement was reached”. One respondent from Ntatai School stated: “We hold a staff meeting and talk about what we want to do and achieve. We discuss together and everybody is allowed to suggest ideas until an agreement is reached.” Another respondent from the same school said, “We normally hold a staff meeting and suggest our ideas and discuss them together until we agree together. After that we select the most important ones and prioritise them.”

In these schools teachers seem to value “shared goals” which give them a clear direction of where they are going (Stoll & Fink, 1996 and Fink, 2000). This is entirely consistent with the literature. To illustrate, Fink (2000) and Stoll and Fink (1996) assert that through shared goals and meaning members of an organisation know where to they are going. Setting goals together also indicates collegiality and a sense of high social cohesion.

4.5 Emerging issues

4.5.1. The cultures of the two selected schools and how they are sustained

4.5.1.1 Good time management is one of the cultures of the two selected schools. It emerged that high performance in schools is facilitated by good time management. In both schools, time management was highly valued. In both schools, teachers were good exemplars for learners, because what teachers were doing and valuing, was what learners were doing too. A culture of good time management is sustained through the use of a clock book and the implementation of school policies which address good utilisation of working time in these schools.

4.5.1.2 At Maliba, the learners were self-directed in their learning process. They highly valued their learning time and they seemed to enjoy the work they did with, or without a class teacher. It emerged that learners develop self-discipline towards their learning if teachers create the environment for such development. There is thus a culture of self-directed learners which is sustained through the practice of morning study (pre-class activities) in Maliba School. According to Mortimore et al. (in Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1993), in effective schools, learners are helped to develop skills necessary for managing their work independently through the help of structured sessions. The procedures at Maliba School are in line with what the literature advocates. It emerged that the pre-class activities (classes before the actual starting time of the school) with prepared activities make learners responsible and committed to their work and help develop the skill of learning independently. The way teachers made use of working time (devoting their time to work) in both schools revealed that teachers created a “work-centred environment” which had a positive influence on school academic performance (Mortimore et al. in Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1993). At Ntatai academic performance seemed to improve every year.

4.5.1.3 It emerged that the yearning for continuous improvement makes teachers committed to their work, and that this is sustained through introspection in both schools. School improvement and development are continuous processes in these schools, and teachers indicated that they appreciate seeing improvement in their schools every year; therefore they are always committed to work. This is in line with the literature, because Fink (2000) indicates that teachers in the Lord Byron School valued continuous improvement which increased commitment to work. Stoll and Fink (1996) also argue that school improvement should be considered as an ongoing or endless process in effective schools. If principals are not allocated to any class, they have an opportunity to supervise teachers effectively and notice where staff development is necessary. Thus, the bureaucratic theory is appropriate in this situation. Yearning for improvement brings about commitment in teachers and the culture of the school is seen by the optimum level of social control because teachers’ behaviour seems to be task oriented. Again, the teachers in these two schools strive for success regardless of the situation. Therefore, they all feel that the success of the school is the responsibility of the whole staff, as Fink (2000) maintains that responsibility for success means ‘we must succeed’.

4.5.1.4 In their staff meetings where they discuss issues including the setting of school goals in a democratic manner, they reveal the presence of “collegiality”, “mutual respect”, and “openness” in their schools which, according to Fink (2000), means that they value and prefer to work on an issue together; they believe that everyone has something to offer, thus their principals empower teachers to voice their ideas; and they are open to discuss their differences which lead to self-development. This situation allows teachers to work comfortably and according to their potential. When teachers are empowered to voice their views, it means there is involvement of teachers in the planning of school development including school curriculum planning. Where teachers discuss school issues collegially, social cohesion can characterise their culture. Mortimore et al. (in Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1993) contend that in successful schools there is involvement of teachers in curriculum planning. The way the school goals are set in these schools is similar. Their principals consider and respect the ideas of the subordinate teachers. Therefore, it emerged that empowering of teachers is one of the cultures of these schools and that this is sustained by collegiality. It seems that in both schools there was a positive climate. That is, the overall atmosphere in both schools was pleasant (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1993). Thus, members of the school organisation feel free to voice their views. According to Stoll (1999), Fink (2000) and Stoll and Fink (1996), the social cohesion in this school is kept at optimal level and this characterises their school culture.

4.5.1.5 Whatever they wanted to achieve they made a shared decision. Because they made decisions together, teachers felt appreciated and empowered. They found the environment conducive to them and they enjoyed doing their work. As a result, they worked hard. It is thus clear that hard work is one of the cultures of the two schools and that this is sustained by a conducive environment and motivation. The shared goals and meaning enable the organisational members to know where they are going, that is ‘what they want to achieve’ (Stoll & Fink, 1996 and Fink, 2000).

4.5.1.6 Subject specialisation is one of the cultures of these two schools. The practice of “subject specialisation” seems to be an important tool to foster responsibility and commitment in these schools. Due to this practice, teachers were able to apply methods which are very important for the production of high academic performance but are mostly ignored in many primary schools. “Responsibility for success” which means “we must succeed” (Stoll & Fink, 1996 and Fink, 2000) is developed in teachers through this practice. The availability of adequate human resources

(teachers) seems to be an advantage in these schools because subject specialisation is successful due to it. Being accountable for learners' academic performance for three or more consecutive years is one of the cultures in these schools. This culture enhances the responsibility for success.

4.5.1.7 There is a culture of hard work in these schools. Teachers' and learners' hard work was appreciated and acknowledged with the purpose of motivating them. Teachers and learners seemed to be motivated and tried to keep up the standard of their good work, that is, they strove towards "continuous improvement". A culture of hard work is sustained by appreciation and acknowledgement of both teachers' and learners' hard work in these schools. Teachers appreciated seeing the improvement every year in their school results. Verbal praise, presents, celebrations and certificate awards for high performance were some of the ways of showing appreciation. Stoll & Fink (1996) and Fink (2000) confirm that children appreciate knowing that teachers care about their good work, and the culture of celebration and humour brings about this situation. This is what was happening in these schools.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided the findings of the study together with discussion. The findings are presented in themes that are linked with the literature. Then the emerging issues followed. The next chapter provides a summary of the study, the conclusions of the study on the basis of what the data revealed, and my recommendations on what I have found.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This study aimed at exploring school cultures associated with good academic performance in two selected primary schools in Lesotho. This chapter summarises the study, makes conclusions and recommendations about the findings, and provides the overall limitations of the study.

5.2 Summary

Chapter One introduced the study by providing the background and rationale of the study and the context of the schools studied. The research questions are stated in this chapter. They are as follows:

1. What types of school cultures do the two selected schools practise?
2. How do these schools sustain their cultures?

In Chapter Two I reviewed the related literature. First, I explored the concepts culture and school culture. This was followed by an examination of theories of organisational structure and culture. Those theories are bureaucratic and collegiality. Next I reviewed the key theories of school culture. From there I moved on to some key studies on school culture. From there I moved on to features of a sound school culture and finally the characteristics of effective school were discussed.

Chapter Three addressed the research design methodology of the study. I explained the research design, sampling, data collection instruments, data analysis procedures, limitations of the design, trustworthiness and ethical issues. The chapter positioned the study within the qualitative research approach.

In Chapter Four I presented and discussed the findings. The presentation unfolded through themes generated from the data and informed by the research questions of the study namely time management, rituals and ceremonies, relationships within the school, teaching and learning processes, responsibility for success and commitment to work, remedies for some of FPE challenges, and school improvement and development.

5.3 Conclusions

The study reached the following conclusions:

5.3.1 In both schools the two domains are kept at optimal level, this means they are kept at the best level. This suggests at least in the schools that such practice is associated with high academic performance.

5.3.2 The schools practice a culture of good time management which is sustained by the use of a clock book, proper use of class timetable and school timetable for extramural activities. After clocking the principal checks if all teachers have written the correct arrival time. The clock book plays an important role in enhancing “punctuality and consistent attendance” among teachers. It also provides a picture of how teachers value working time and the pattern of their attendance.

5.3.3 Hard work is one of the cultures of these schools. This demonstrated by commitment and devotion to work. Further to this, hard work is appreciated through celebration and humour as a means of motivation for both learners and teachers. All the respondents mentioned that if learners’ hard work is appreciated they get motivated to work hard. Celebration and humour characterise their school cultures.

5.3.4 Sound relationships within each of the schools make people (the staff and the learners) enjoy their work and the school environment. An appropriate limit to the relationships between teachers and learners helps to avoid unacceptable behaviour among learners. Openness and respect for differences are valued within these schools to allow and maintain good relationships.

5.3.5 The practice of subject specialisation the two schools seems to enhance a sense of responsibility for success and commitment to work among teachers. All of the respondents seemed to enjoy this and according to their experiences, it eases their workload and helps them to maintain the high level of social control.

5.3.6 The orientation of teachers at the beginning of the year on how things are done in their school is important and helps in sustaining their school cultures. The orientation helps in inspiring teachers in building a sound school culture. Introspection after every educational activity plays an important role in improving the school performance and maintaining a high academic performance.

5.3.7 Being accountable for learners' academic performance for three or more consecutive years by allowing teachers to teach learners in more than two successive classes, helps teachers to maintain their responsibility for success and commit themselves to work.

Next I make some recommendations on the basis of the preceding conclusions.

5.4 Recommendations

I would recommend that for a school to improve its performance, good time management should be valued, because all activities within the school need to be given an appropriate amount of time. The accurate use of school and class time-tables accompanied by devotion to work should be espoused in good time management. Well-structured lessons and activities should symbolise good time management.

The behaviour of the school principal, teachers and learners, and parents should reveal what their school policies proclaim. Once a school policy is formulated, all members should abide by it to make it successful. Teachers should always set a good example for their learners. For example, when teachers talk of "punctuality", they need to be the first ones to be punctual, and then learners will follow. All activities which contribute to staff motivation and learners' motivation towards their school work should be preserved, for example, school ceremonies where teachers and learners are rewarded for their hard work seem to be a good motivator, therefore appreciation of hard work should be highly valued in schools.

The College of Education in Lesotho (Lesotho College of Education – LCE) which is the only college that produces primary teachers should recommend subject specialisation for primary teachers to the Ministry of Education.

Introspection at the beginning of the year is very important. It is important for teachers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the work of the previous year, so that the first step they take when they begin the year can be informed by their introspection. It is difficult for teachers to bring about improvement and development in their schools, when they are not able to extend their strengths and address their weaknesses in their educational activities. Introspection is the remedy for this. Teachers must be honest and frank during introspection, and they must accept

criticism. In an open discussion, they can first talk about their good work and how they managed to achieve such things and then move on to their failures and find out the reasons for those failures. Within the discussion there must be a sense of respect and dignity, so that teachers will be able to accept their weaknesses.

Learners should be helped to develop a sense of responsibility towards their learning so that the absence of a class teacher should not mean a time of relaxation for them, but a chance to do other learning activities.

It is important to adopt “collegiality” in decision-making because this makes teachers feel empowered and accepted, and they therefore work hard to fulfil their goals. For example, teachers should be involved in the setting of school goals so that they know that it is their pledge to fulfil those goals. Again, “collegiality” creates a conducive environment for teachers. Due to collegiality teachers feel strongly that they own the school (Fink, 2000).

It is important to have good relationships within the school for they create a positive climate for all members. It is possible to preserve a sound school culture if there are good relationships within the school. Teachers should not shy away from their incompetence in some area, and this will not happen if there are good relationships among them. According to Fink (2000) and Stoll and Fink (1996), openness and respect for differences in school make joy a characteristic of the culture of the school. Thus if a principal, together with teachers allows openness and respect for differences at school, good relationships may be fostered.

5.5 Limitations of the study

This study had some limitations. Due to time constraints only two schools were selected yet there are several primary schools which perform well academically. Due to the small sample size its findings cannot be generalised.

In my observation schedule I was meant to observe actual teaching, but I failed to do so because it was towards the end of the session, and teachers were busy conducting examinations. At Maliba School I failed to access documents because two weeks before I conducted my study, a burglary at the school resulted in the theft of some school property, while some documents including the log book, the staff meetings

minute book and others were damaged. I did not manage to triangulate some of their data as a result of this.

My respondents knew that I had selected their schools because of their good performance, and so they might have tried to provide information which was inclined towards good academic performance. Individual interviews were conducted yet the study was on school cultures which is a shared thing. May be if the focus group interviews were conducted they would have produced the richer information.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

University of Kwazulu-Natal
Edgewood Campus
Private Bag X03
Ashwood
3605

20-11-2008

Senior Education Officer
Education Office
Leribe. 340.

Dear Sir / Madam

RE: AN APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A STUDY

I am a Master of Education student at the University of Kwazulu-Natal at Edgewood Campus. I am conducting the study on school cultures associated with good academic performance in Lesotho Primary Schools. It is an academic study from which teachers and the Ministry of Education might benefit.

I am asking for permission to conduct this study in two schools which are under your supervision: Maboe Primary School and Maputsoe Community Primary School. I assure you that all the information will be used for the benefit of the study only.

If you agree to offer me this permission please indicate in the form of a signature below.

I understand the purpose of the study and hereby give my consent for permission.

Name _____

Signed _____ Date _____

Yours faithfully
Amelia T. Rampai (Mrs)
0738489201

Supervisor: Prof. Vitallis Chikoko
031-2603239

APPENDIX 2

A letter to the principal

University of Kwazulu-Natal
Edgewood Campus
Private Bag X03
Ashwood
3605

20-11-2008

Dear Principal

I am a Master of Education student at the University of Kwazulu-Natal at Edgewood Campus. I am conducting the study on school cultures associated with good academic performance in Lesotho primary schools. It is an academic study from which teachers and the Ministry of Education might benefit.

I am asking for permission to explore the culture of your school in relation to your academic performance. I want to assure you that I will not disclose your name and the name of your school. All information will be confidential to the researcher only.

Notes for the principals

1. Project title: An exploration of school cultures associated with good academic performance in two primary schools in Lesotho.
2. Respondents in this research are teachers from two selected primary schools that are performing well academically.
3. Those teachers are requested to provide information concerning their school cultures. Each interview session will take about 45 to 60 minutes and the intention is to have ten sessions in each school.
4. The benefit of participating in this study is that it will help teachers and principals to develop a well-defined culture for the benefit of good academic performance.
5. You are not going to be paid for participating and you do not have to pay anything for participating.
6. There will be no video recordings in the interview sessions; only audio and written recordings will be used, and the audio recordings will be done with your permission.
7. The information gathered will be used solely for this research and when the research is complete it will be destroyed.
8. Withdrawal from the interview will not result in any form of disadvantage.

If you agree to grant me this permission, please indicate that you have been informed about the study and understand its intention by providing your signature below.

I understand the purpose of the study and hereby give my consent for permission.

Name _____

Signed _____

Date _____

Yours faithfully
Amelia T. Rampai (Mrs)
0738489201

Suprvisor: Prof. Vitallis Chikoko
031-2603239

APPENDIX 3

Informed consent letter for participant

University of Kwazulu-Natal
Edgewood Campus
Private Bag X03
Ashwood
3605

20-11-2008

Dear Participant

I am a Master of Education student at the University of Kwazulu-Natal at Edgewood Campus. I am conducting the study on school cultures associated with good academic performance in Lesotho primary schools. It is an academic study from which teachers and the Ministry of Education might benefit.

I want to explore and understand the culture of your school in relation to your academic performance. I want to assure you that I will not disclose your name and the name of your school. All responses will be confidential to the researcher only. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time should you wish to do so.

Notes for the participants

1. Project title: An exploration of school cultures associated with good academic performance in two primary schools in Lesotho.
2. Respondents in this research are teachers from two selected primary schools that are performing well academically.
3. Those teachers are requested to provide information concerning their school cultures. Each interview session will take about 45 to 60 minutes and the intention is to have ten sessions in each school.
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5. You are not going to be paid for participating and you do not have to pay anything for participating.
6. There will be no video recordings in the interview sessions; only audio and written recordings will be used, and the audio recordings will be done with your permission.
7. The information gathered will be used solely for this research and when the research is complete it will be destroyed.
8. Withdrawal from the interview will not result in any form of disadvantage.

If you agree to participate in this study please indicate that you have been informed about the study and understand its intention by giving your consent in the form of a signature below.

I understand the purpose of the study and hereby give my consent to participate.

I understand that I am liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

Name _____

Signed _____

Date _____

Yours faithfully

Amelia T. Rampai (Mrs)
0738489201

Supervisor: Prof. Vitallis Chikoko
031-2603239

APPENDIX 4

1. Observation Schedule

Observation sessions will be based on the following: time management, staff meetings, rituals and ceremonies, behavioural indicators and some lessons in the classrooms.

- Time management

Usage of time and how it is valued in most of the school activities

- Staff meetings

Observing how the staff meetings are held and conducted, the existence of collegiality and involvement of teachers as well

The behaviour of teachers during the staff meeting; openness and respect for differences; and the value of shared goals or meaning

- Rituals and ceremonies

How the assemblies are held and conducted; the presence of an element of togetherness and co-operation among the staff

The behaviour of teachers and learners at assemblies

By observing the rituals and ceremonies the values of these schools can be noticed as Fink (2000, p.112-113) asserts that “school rituals and ceremonies tell an observer a great deal about who and what is valued in the school.

- Classroom lessons

A few lessons will be observed: two from the lower standards and two from the upper standards, to see how they cater for the following in the classroom context; responsibility for success, lifelong learning, risk-taking, structured sessions, intellectually challenging teaching and maximum communication between teachers and pupils and positive climate.

APPENDIX 5

Document analysis

The documents which are relevant to my study will be analysed.

- Staff minute books

- Log books and clock books

- Learners' exercise books for class-work

- School policies

- School mission and vision statements

In the minute books most sub-cultures might be revealed because the minutes indicate how issues are discussed among the staff members or members of the committee during the meetings. Thus sub-cultures like shared goals or meaning, collegiality, support, openness and respect for differences, responsibility for success and others may be revealed. Log books, clock books and school register books give a picture of the daily attendance of both teachers and learners and these shed lights on 'commitment'. Assessment books, records of achievement and learners' exercise books for class-work will help me to see if there is continuous improvement and intellectually challenging teaching. School notice boards, school policies, school mission and vision statements will help me to see how these emphasise the practice of some features of their culture.

APPENDIX 6

Interview schedule

The interviews will be based on the following:

(i) *Teaching and learning processes*

- Tell me about the teaching and learning processes that you encourage and practice in your school.
- How do you foster responsibility for success in your teachers?
- How do you foster responsibility if any, in your learners with regard to their learning?
- How is commitment fostered in this school, and how is improvement maintained?
- What challenges are brought by FPE in connection with the teaching and learning processes and how do you address them in order to keep up the good standard of improvement and success?
- How do you involve parents in the learning of their children?
- How do you acknowledge achievements in your school? Why is it important to acknowledge achievements?

(ii) *Relationships*

- How can you describe relationships among teachers and between teachers and learners?

(Do you feel free to disclose your problems in relation to teaching and learning in your school? If yes, how are you assisted, or how do you get support?)

- How can you characterise communication between teachers and learners in your school regarding learning?
- How can you explain relationships between the school and the parents/community?

(iii) *School improvement and development*

- How do you assist teachers (provide support) in your school in terms of teaching techniques and professional development, where necessary?
- How do you get support from parents, if any, with regard to school development?
- Explain how rituals and ceremonies or celebrations and humour are held in your school and the reasons for having such events.

- How do you set goals in your school?