

EXPLORING FACTORS AFFECTING LEARNER MOTIVATION IN TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The word township in this regard includes places that were formally designed for black people during the apartheid period as residential areas and places formally known as homelands in South Africa. This is attested by Tshuma (2023) when he says, "The apartheid planning system resulted in townships (i.e., urban settlements) acting as dormitories for the labor requirements of the mining industry and later manufacturing and services during apartheid." Added to these areas are the informal settlements where people either occupy the land informally as residential places or are formally allocated by the government as waiting residents. Tshuma (2023) says the following about these places, "New urban townships have emerged characterized by rapid growth, large informal settlements, proximity to metropolitan areas, and their role as the first stop for new rural and cross-border migrants - for instance, Diepsloot in Gauteng and Khayelitsha in Cape Town." This study aims to explore the specific factors contributing to the lack of motivation among learners in township schools with the hope of contributing towards a solution. The data was collected using qualitative methodology, employing a secondary data collection method. This paper, however, does not suggest that all learners from township schools lack motivation to do their work.

Keywords: Townships, informal settlements, homelands, motivation

1. INTRODUCTION

Comparatively speaking, township schools generally tend to perform poorly compared to schools in the cities. This surprisingly includes even private schools as long as they are in the townships. This view is attested by Rammala (2009:1) and Adelle (2002:91) that poor performance at high schools is an international problem that has been linked to low socio-economic background of the learners. According to Munn (1996) and Louw (1993:26) it has been found that urban students tend to perform better than those in the rural areas. In his article titled, "Township vs suburban schools: Who performed better in Gauteng matric results", Mlambo (2024) says, "Despite attempts by education officials in Gauteng trying to convince parents that township schools were now performing on par with suburban schools, the data shows the historically advantaged schools were still performing better by at least 10%". There are many factors contributing to the poor performance of learners in the township schools other than the fact of socio-economic background.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mabena, Mokgosi and Ramapela (2021) conducted a similar study where they looked at factors contributing to poor learner performance in Mathematics in selected schools around Mpumalanga. Whilst this study covers five factors as has been indicated above, theirs has covered two which relates to poor performance

specifically in Mathematics, and that is teacher related factors and student related factors. Their findings in as far as teacher related factors was that teachers have in-adequate experience in teaching the subject and lack pedagogical content knowledge and skill to teach mathematics. In relation to student factors they found that there was a lack of motivation, ill-discipline and language barriers which amounts to contributing factors that cause poor performance in Mathematics.

Mbugua, Kibet, Muthaa and Nkonke wrote an article titled: "Factors Contributing To Student's Poor Performance in Mathematics at Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education in Kenya: A Case of Baringo Country, Kenya". In this article they looked at poor learner performance in Mathematics in the country of Kenya called Baringo. Their study looked at the school based factors, socio-economic factors and personal factors that contribute to the poor performance. The results of their findings was that under school based factors, the methods of teaching employed were identified as a contributing factor to poor learning whereby majority of teachers use discussion method, project method, lecture method and question and answer method. These methods contribute in poor learner performance because they do not actually engage the students. Under socio-economic factors the highlight of their results is that the circumcision, early marriages, family income and cultural constraints were indicated as the contributing factors to the poor learner performance in Mathematics.

The two articles have made their contribution in dealing with the issues of poor learner performance specifically on Mathematics. As has been seen, one is a South African scenario and one is an intercontinental scenario. Indeed the two mentioned articles identified some of the factors that are also identified by this article. However this article looks at the poor learner performance in general not just in Mathematics. It also covers more factors that contribute to poor learner performance. Poor learner performance cannot just be due to one or two factors, this will be seen as more factors will unfold in the discussion.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article is underpinned by three theories, which is Social Learning Theory (SLT), Social Cognitive Theory (SCLT) and Self Determination Theory. Bandura (1977) is known to be the main source of Social theory whereby social learning theory and social cognitive learning theory were derived from. This is attested by Green & Peil (2009) when they say, "By the mid-1980s, Bandura's research had taken more holistic bant, and his analyses tended towards giving a more comprehensive overview of human cognition in the context of social learning. The theory he expanded from social learning theory soon became known as social cognitive theory."

According to Muro and Juffrey (2008) the social learning theory has been known to be a bridge between behaviorist learning theories and the learning cognitive theories due to the fact that it encompasses attention, memory and motivation.

The social learning theory and the social cognitive learning theory are based on observation. The social learning theory uses observation, imitation and modeling whereas the social cognitive learning theory uses observation, understanding, prediction and changing human behavior. The relevance of these two theories in this article is that they both have elements of social and cognitive aspect which supports this research since it is about the behavior of learners and their cognitive levels. Self Determination Theory is a theory that was developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard, M Ryan in 1985 out of their work on motivation in 1970 and in 1980 (Ackerman 2018). According to Deci and Ryan (2008) this theory of self-determination is based on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. As it will be seen as the paper unfolds, the factors that contribute to poor learner performance are both intrinsic and extrinsic in nature.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This research has adopted a qualitative method of research. Guba and Lincoln (1994) speak of two well-known types of method of research which is qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative approach uses numbers and statistics whilst qualitative uses processes and meanings that are not measurable in terms quantity, amount, intensity or frequency. According to Polkinghorne (1989) qualitative research relies on the use of linguistic word rather than numerical data and employs meaning-based forms instead of those that analyze data statistically. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) support Polkinghorne that qualitative research is an open approach that involves naturalistic and interpretative methods. Qualitative research makes interpretation of a phenomena based on how people think of it. This view indeed supports this research because in this research, as a desktop research, interpretation of phenomena has been made drawn from what various sources which were consulted wrote about the poor learner performance in the township.

Guest & Flemming (2014) believe that there is a pure qualitative method of research and an applied qualitative method. Bickman & Rog (2009) define applied research method as a method that is striving to improve understanding of a particular problem with the view of contributing towards a solution. In this research a researcher strives to add in the endeavor to curb the problem of poor learner performance in the townships. Parkinston & Drislane (2011) say that there is a branch of qualitative research method that concerns itself with epistemology rather than with the process and context of data collection. This kind of method is also known as the desk research or secondary method where by a researcher reviews the work of other researchers in relation to the topic.

5. DATA COLLECTION METHOD AND DISCUSSION

The data was collected through desk or secondary method as has been explained in the paragraph above. Various secondary sources were consulted such as research articles, News Papers, Reports and books. These sources were analyzed using a documentary analysis method. According to Bowen (2009) the documentary analyses is a systematic procedure whereby documents are reviewed and evaluated. This method requires that data extracted from documents be examined and interpreted to elicit meaning in order to gain knowledge and understanding.

5.1 Factors Contributing To Poor Learner Performance

There is a general observation that when the matric results are released, most schools that are performing well are those in the cities and those in the townships and in informal settlements generally perform poorly. Since education is a partnership that involves the Department of Education (schools and learners), parents and communities, it is fair not to apportion poor learner performance blame to learners only but to look into contributing factors as well that involve this partnership. To deal with these factors effectively, we will categorize them into the following:

- student-related factors,
- factors emanating from the school environment (encompassing school policy, school governance, teaching staff, teaching, and learning material or teaching and learning aids, and school buildings),
- factors relating to parents,
- factors relating to the community (encompassing vandalism of property, attitude towards education/life, moral fibre or township culture, role models, etc.), and
- Factors relating to socio-economic life (encompassing poverty, unemployment, criminal elements, and drug influence).

5.1.1.Student-related Factors

For education to succeed, three stakeholders need to work together effectively. Such stakeholders are students, parents, and teachers. Students being the major stake holders have a fair share to play in order for them to enhance their education. However, there are factors emanating from the students themselves that inhibit their success.

a) Truancy

Truancy is defined as any intentional, unjustified, unauthorized, or illegal absence from compulsory education. It is absence caused by students of their own free will, and usually does not refer to legitimate excused absence one related to medical condition (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truancy>).

Masitsa (1995:94) states that truancy or absenteeism in township schools is a legacy of the period of the struggle against apartheid. He further claims that secondary school learners in particular, become insubordinate and disobedient to school authority. This is evident by their late coming to school and by leaving before time or even staying away from school for some days or even weeks.

This practice is more common in the township schools than in the city schools. This is attributed to the following factors:

- In the townships most of the time learners go to school by themselves. Since parents are less involved in taking their children to school, children are more vulnerable to such thoughts of bunking. In the cities, children are either transported by their parents to and from the school or are taken by special transport organized and paid for by parents. Therefore, the chances of truancy are very minimal.

- Learners in the townships prepare themselves to go to school. They are not helped because at times parents are not there or are less involved. This result in learners becoming demotivated to go to school. Even if they do go, they do so dragging their feet. In the cities, parents take part in their preparation to go to school even though in most cases they are helped by their house helpers. In this case, a learner gets motivated, and thus goes to school with confidence.

- Another factor that relates to preparation is that in the townships very few learners go to school having had a well prepared breakfast. Breakfast is an important meal of the day. This is attested by Freston where he says, "Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. When you feed yourself what your body needs when it needs it, that is love. So give your body some TLC and sit down and enjoy a good, substantial breakfast."

(<https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/k/kathyfrest498199.html> [27/03/2025])

Breakfast is a good way of starting a healthy day and it influences the daily dimensions of our being during the course of the day. This includes how we perform physically and mentally. In the cities, learners get a well prepared breakfast which gives them strength and energy for the day.

- In the townships, late coming is a school's responsibility. Meaning that it is a school takes responsibility to see to it learners do not come late. In the cities, late coming is the responsibility of parents. Each parent ensures that their children do not arrive late at school.

- In the townships learner's school related needs such as textbooks, school outfits, etc are most of the time neglected by parents, as such learners' motivation to go to school or to study is affected. Yet in the cities such needs are taken seriously by parents which makes learners to be motivated.

- In the township, parents are reluctant to attend school's parental meetings, let alone the one-on one meetings with the teachers of their children. In the cities, parents actively attend the school's parents meetings and they insist on one on one meetings with educators.

These are but just a few examples of some of the factors that contribute towards truancy in the townships. In the townships, learners feel that parents are less concerned about their education, and as such they end up not taking education seriously. Legotlo, et al. (2002:115) found that truancy is a major cause of poor results in the township schools.

b) Lack of Discipline

Mabeba & Prinsloo (2000:34) define discipline as a "disruptive behavior that significantly affects fundamental rights to feel safe, to be treated with respect and to learn." Since students lack discipline, they tend to misbehave and be disrespectful. Because of this, Moloi (2002:2) says "the learners lost a culture of respect and trust towards the educators." Rossouw (2003:414) continues to quote Andrews and Tylor (1998:1) that students who misbehave tend to perform poorly in school and tend to be absent frequently from school." Most of the time the prevailing mechanism of maintaining discipline is to involve the parents of a misbehaving student. This however works effectively in the cities. In the cities, if a student continues to misbehave, he or she can be expelled from the school. But in the townships, although this practice is done, very few parents respond positively to the matter of their children's discipline. Another contributing issue is the element of solidarity. Parents will not respond positively when they are called to school for their misbehaving children, but once such children are expelled from school, it becomes a communal issue. The aggrieved parents would want to stage strikes or protests against the school, disrupting the school's program, motivated by the mob psychology of the so-called 'injury to one is an injury to all'.

Moloi (2002:2) believes that the involvement of the youth in the liberation struggle which ended in 1994 caused them to develop arrogance towards adults, that is, both the educators and parents. This kind of behavior of learners is also exacerbated by the fact that the rights of young people over emphasized as opposed to their responsibilities and accountabilities.

5.1.2 Factors Emanating From The School Environment (encompassing school policy, school governance, teaching staff, teaching and learning material or teaching and learning aids, school buildings)

Factors that emanate from the school environment are also a major contributory factor to the lack of morale or motivation by township students in doing their schoolwork. Indeed, these are factors such as:

a) Late or Non-Delivery of School Materials Like Books

There is a tendency that very often schools in the townships will either run short of schoolbooks or other teaching and learning materials as compared to schools in the cities. The teaching and learning material is

often delivered late in schools it at all.

According to the report of IOL from the link below, it is said that in the Eastern Cape an outstanding 42 percent of top-up textbooks had not been delivered and many of the affected schools were those in the townships. It is also said that these schools have been facing a backlog in textbooks and other educational resources for many years.

<https://www.iol.co.za/.../e-cape-fails-to-deliver-textbooks-to-42-of-pupils-8076940>

“Hundreds of Port Elizabeth pupils have been forced to beg, borrow or steal textbooks and stationery because their schools have still not received their full annual allocation.”

www.sowetanlive.co.za/.../nelson-mandela-bay-schools-still-waiting-for-textbooks-and-s.

Although they are already in the final month of the first school term, at least 24 of the northern areas' 56 schools and more than half of the township schools have yet to receive their full quotas.

b) School Policy

According to Tok (2011) a school environment that contributes to quality teaching and learning consists of various elements, including: principal's and teachers' high- quality capacity, a school culture and climate conducive to teaching and learning, a sound school organizational structure, committed school teams and human resources management, conflict resolution, and school-community relationships. The school learning environment influences the teacher's teaching practice, their attitudes towards teaching and learning, and the learners' academic achievement.

Given the nature of the townships' environment, the above -mentioned qualities or characteristics are often minimally practiced in the township schools hence the learners' morale is negatively affected.

c) School Buildings and Overcrowding

Most of the schools in the townships are poorly built and not well maintained. They are often kept dirty and untidy. What makes matters worse is that they are vandalized. Some classrooms do not have doors or windows and during rainy or cold days, it is as if you are just outside. According to The National Education Management Study (2011) released by the Department of Basic Education in 2011, alleges that there are 24 793 ordinary public schools. It showed that:

- 3 544 schools have no electricity supply and 804 have an unreliable electricity supply;
- 2 402 schools have no water supply and 2 611 is an unreliable one.
- 913 schools do not have any ablution facilities, and 11 450 still use pit-latrines toilets.
- 2 703 schools have no fencing.
- 79% are without any library and only 7% have stocked libraries.
- 85% have no laboratory and only 5% have stocked laboratories.
- 77% are without any computer centers and only 10% have stocked computer centers; and
- 17% of schools lack any sporting facilities.

(<https://passmark.org.za/section27sources/2011%20NEIMS%20school- infrastructure-report-2011.pdf>)

The above-mentioned statistics is an indication of one of the contributing factors to the low morale of the township learners in doing their work. According to Nkzela (2015:24) the high learner-educator (LER) ratio is high in the township schools. She says Hall & De Lannoy (2012) warn against a high LER by stating that large classes make it difficult for learners to ask questions when they do not understand the work being taught. According to Masitsa (2003:223) a normal school classroom is designed to accommodate 35 learners, which means that any classroom accommodating more than 40 learners is overcrowded. In such a situation a teacher cannot adequately give learners the individual attention that is required. Pictures displayed in the hyperlink above show exactly how classes are often overcrowded in the townships.

d) Sporting Activities

In the cities, schools have different sporting codes, and sport is encouraged. Every school has proper sport facilities and students participate so that they can develop healthy minds. In the townships schools do not

have sporting activities. Those that are trying to develop some sporting facilities, such facilities are vandalized by community criminal elements. Almost half of the schoolyards that were supposed to accommodate sporting facilities are unused. Most children after classes hang around at the corners of the streets with drop outs who smoke cigarettes, drugs and consume alcohol, some still in their school uniforms.

5.1.3 Factors Relating To Parents

Parents are the most important of the learner's education. Before a child could even go to his or her second home which is a school, they come from their first homes where they live with their parents. A child spends an average of 8 hours of a day at school and the rest of the 24 hours at home as indicated in the figure 1 below.

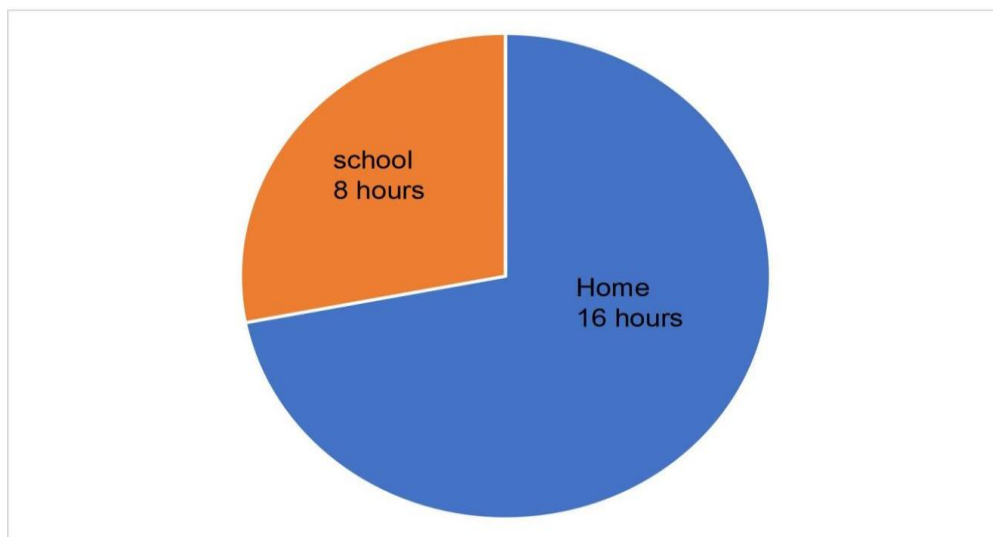


Figure 1

This means a 3/4 of 24 hours a child spends at home and only 1/4 of the 24 hours they spend at school. Therefore, a parent spends more time with the child than teachers do. Parents of the learners in the city schools tend to become involved in the education of their children by way of making sure that they check their books, they do homework together with them. They also converse with their teachers. In this way learners feel confident that their work at school has value because it is somehow appreciated. They also feel obliged to take their work seriously because parents are involved, and they work with teachers. In the townships parents are less involved in the education of their children. Very few parents spend time with their children doing school work. It is also very rare that a parent will take trouble to liaise with a teacher regarding the day-to-day progress of their children. Of course, some parents are affected by socio-economic factors like working far from home. They need to go to work early in the morning and come back late in the evening exhausted. But some parents during the week spend time on television soaps and on weekends they spend time on what is called, 'wie sien ons' or after-tears parties after funerals rather than spending time with their children and catching up. According to Letsosa (2010) friends of the deceased will immediately gather after the funeral and have alcoholic drinks and party with loud music to dance their sorrows away. But people go to funerals even if they do not know the family or the deceased person, in the name of Ubuntu just to spend time on such after-tears parties whilst neglecting their children. Very often whilst their parents are enjoying themselves at such parties, children are given lots of money to go out on their own to the malls.

5.2. Factors Relating To the Community (Encompassing Vandalism of Property, Attitude towards Education/Life, Moral Fibre or Township Culture, Role Models, etc.)

The community plays a big role in the influence of children either positively or negatively. For the fact that schools are built in the community therefore education takes place in the community as well. The township community is most of the time affected by issues like vandalism especially of schools, negative attitude towards education by those who dropped out, the moral fibre or township culture, and lack of good role models. Very often people who would be good role models in the township relocate to the cities. Some of them only come back to visit over the weekend. They do not start programme that will impact the youth positively, instead, they join the social clubs that they affectionately call "de-socials" [the socials].

5.2.1 Factors Relating To Socio-Economic Life (Encompassing Poverty, Unemployment, Criminal Elements, and Drug Influence)

According to APA Dictionary of Psychology, socio-economic life encompasses not only income but also educational attainment, occupational prestige, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class. It encompasses quality-of-life attributes and opportunities afforded to people within society and is a consistent predictor of a vast array of psychological outcomes.

<https://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status>.

The socio-economic life in the townships is also a factor that contributes to the challenges of low morale in learners. Tshuma, <http://sa-tied.wider.unu.edu/article/why-the-township-economy>, says, "In South Africa, approximately 40% of the working-age population and 60% of the country's unemployed reside in townships."

The fact that unemployment rate is so high in the townships particularly, learners become demoralized because they see no hope of learning. Parents who are unemployed cannot afford some of the necessary needs to support their school going children. These are just but few examples of issues that contribute to the low morale of learners.

6. RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Whilst it is true that township schools are somehow disadvantaged in terms of infrastructure and resources, it is also true that those are secondary factors that contribute to their low performance. The data that has been gathered in this research through secondary data collection method has shown the following results in terms of factors contribute to the low morale of township students.

- Student-related factors: students have a tendency of banking school out of their own free will, i.e. independent of other factors. As pointed out by Moloi (2000) they inherited a culture of ill-discipline and arrogance towards adult due to the fact that their rights are over emphasized than their responsibilities and accountabilities. Lastly in the townships, young people very often are not monitored when going and coming back from school because they go and come back by themselves. Therefore along the way they experience a lot of negative influence.

- Factors emanating from the school environment (encompassing school policy, school governance, teaching staff, teaching, and learning material or teaching and learning aids, and school buildings): Data has shown that township schools are highly affected by environmental issues such as infrastructure that most of the time is not up to standard. School buildings that are either poorly built or poorly maintained. Due to the fact that most township schools are non paying school fee institutions, they lack funding to erect proper sporting facilities that would help keeping learners focused. Where such facilities are built, they are vandalised by criminals from the local community.

- Factors relating to parents: With regards to factors relating to parents, the data has shown that parents of learners in the township schools turn to be less involved or even concerned about their children's school activities or affairs. This attitude has a negative influence to learners because they become demotivated and as a result pay less attention to their school work.

- Factors relating to the community (encompassing vandalism of property, attitude towards education/life, moral fibre or township culture, role models, etc.): Data has shown that learners in the township are negatively affected by moral fibre of the township where they live and go to school. Learners lack a moral reference because role models with bad influence are gaining upper hand that those with positive influence in the community.

factors relating to socio-economic life (encompassing poverty, unemployment, criminal elements, and drug influence): Data has shown that some learners are demotivated by socio-economic factors whereby their parents cannot afford to support them materially in as far as school needs are concerned. Poverty, unemployment, poor service delivery in-terms of water and electricity supply are some of the socio-economic factors shown by data that contribute to poor learner performance.

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