

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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6.1 Overview of the Study

The main aim of the study was to investigate the factors influencing learners' Grade 12 results in Limpopo Province. The basic research question was formulated as follows: "Why do Grade 12 learners in Thohoyandou and Mutale circuit co-ordinations perform better than Grade 12 learners in other circuit co-ordinations?"

The subsequent chapters examined, in different ways, the factors influencing Grade 12 results in Limpopo Province:

CHAPTER ONE: This chapter outlined the background to the research problem, by stating the problem, specifying the research objectives, and laying out the research approach. The proposed methods and structure of the research were described.

CHAPTER TWO provided a review of the research literature relating to the cultural and historical background of the school populations being considered, as well as possible school and teacher factors influencing Grade 12 results. This review was undertaken in order to establish a theoretical understanding of and a basis for developing the research instruments used.

CHAPTER THREE reviewed the research literature relating to learner factors such as language, motivation and family background possibly influencing Grade 12 results. This chapter, too, was undertaken in order to establish a theoretical understanding of and a basis for developing the research instruments used.

CHAPTER FOUR discussed and examined the rationale for the research design and methodology. The sample area and delimiters of the study were described.

CHAPTER 5 dealt with data presentation and the statistical analyses and interpretation of the results.

CHAPTER 6 summarized the research and the conclusions to be drawn, and made recommendations for further research and, where applicable, future policy on Grade 12 education.

6.2 Major Findings of the Study

6.2.1 Findings based on the questionnaires completed by teachers (quantitative data)

In the sampled schools most of the variables that could have been expected, according to the literature, to have an effect on Grade 12 results, in fact had had **no** effect, at least among the sampled schools.

The most significant variables which emerged from the analyses were those connected with types of contact – contact with the parents of learners, and contact among teachers as part of the school administration. A superficial but somewhat surprising finding was that frequency of staff meetings had no direct positive correlation with Grade 12 results but, instead, scheduled monthly staff meetings seem to have a greater effect than weekly ones. The fact that staff meetings were scheduled also seemed to favour better Grade 12 results.

Frequency of meetings with parents had a more direct relationship with Grade 12 results, suggesting that parental involvement, whether voluntary or not, did result in better student performance.

6.2.2 Findings based on interviews with school principals (qualitative data)

Even taking into account the fact that much of the information obtained from school principals could be considered biased in one way or another, it is

interesting that some of their comments confirmed the results obtained from the teacher questionnaires, without the principals being aware of those results. Principals who required frequent staff meetings did so on the grounds of teacher discipline, suggesting that these frequent meetings only occur when a school already has problems. A school with fewer problems would in all likelihood need fewer unscheduled staff meetings, so a match with better Grade 12 results is not surprising.

The principals also felt that it was advantageous to engage parents in the process of dealing with disciplinary problems of learners.

6.2.3 Conclusions

Assuming that statistically significant results can be used as a basis for noteworthy conclusions, I conclude that my main findings have to do with school management, and possible with the personality and style of school principals.

A school running calmly, with scheduled monthly staff meetings and no emergency ones can expect better Grade 12 results than those in which teachers are in need of monitoring by the principal. In addition the involvement of parents in students' work and behaviour can be expected to have a beneficial effect on the academic work of their children.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

This study sampled only a very small part of South Africa. Indeed, it sampled only a very small part of Limpopo Province, and that part was one that was already known for its good Grade 12 results.

The sample of schools was therefore small, so that generalization of the results cannot be easily justified. With only 168 teachers from a total of 24 schools, spread over two neighbouring districts in the same province, a great deal of internal uniformity could be expected. It could be argued that this

would make any differences more meaningful, but this assumption cannot be argued statistically.

It should also be borne in mind that the results themselves were taken from a specific time period, before many of the latest education policies had been instituted. Since the only results looked at were those for Grade 12, it should be recognized that the learners who produced them, had an educational background reaching back at least to the year when South Africa only started undergoing major administrative changes. The generally accepted teaching style has since shifted, if only temporarily, away from an authoritarian, top-down style.

Another consideration is that while it might be desirable to find causes and their effects reflected in Grade 12 results, this is not what the statistical techniques employed in my studies were able to accomplish. Only a dependency relationship can be revealed, not the direction of the dependency. With Grade 12 results constituting one variable, it can only be assumed that they are the dependent variable because the measurement of those results covered a single period of five years (2000 to 2005), whereas the other variables could be assumed to be pre-existing and longer-lasting. These assumptions therefore underlie any conclusions that may be drawn.

6.4 Recommendations

6.4.1 Recommendations relating to the study

In spite of all the limitations, the conclusions do suggest practical strategies that schools could employ to improve academic performance among learners. These are not the kind of strategies that need to be reflected in national policies, but they are certainly worth putting on the agenda of meetings where principals come together to make suggestions and implement decisions. These strategies could be described as follows:

- Establishing trust between principals and teachers and learners.

- Assisting teachers in working harmoniously with other teachers and learners.
- Establishing good communication between principals, teachers, parents and learners.
- Affective facets that need be assessed and attended to, include, *inter alia*, the following:
- **Visible** facets: Teachers' (and learners') initiative, participation in teaching and learning-related dynamics and co-operation in group contexts.
- **Hidden** facets: Teachers' (and learners') attitude **and** disposition towards teaching and learning-related facets; his/her self-confidence and perseverance.

6.4.2 Recommendations for further studies

Further studies obviously need to be much more broadly based; the better to aid generalization, but in this study some suggestions have been made that can be more fully explored. For instance:

- What is in fact the optimum frequency of staff meetings?
- Is there any other feature of staff meetings, other than frequency and scheduling that would favour Grade 12 results?
- Are the meetings with parents solely for disciplinary reasons, or is a generally good relationship being established?

To address the challenge of inadequate performance by learners in the research area effectively, a number of matters deserve attention. Training of teachers to deal with the issues referred to seems essential, as well as facilitation of parental guidance programmes and programmes that may enable the parent to help learners at home. It is therefore essential that the parents are empowered to become involved. Consideration should for example be given to the “training” of a number of parents who may in turn “train” others.

Refining the questionnaire used in this study and replicating of the study, involving a larger sample of respondents from different provinces, seems necessary.

Not being possible to explore with the sample used here, but still worth exploring, would be the matter of teacher language. Schools in which teachers and learners speak different languages would be worthwhile including in a sample for future study, as clearly cultural factors are also at work where relations between teachers and principal, between different teachers, and between teachers and parents have emerged as important.

Some way of manipulating the variables in order to show the direction of causality would also be useful. For instance: is it because Grade 12 results are poor that staff meetings are more frequent, or do frequent staff meetings *result* in poorer Grade 12 results, however unlikely that may seem?

6.5 Concluding Remarks

From this study the most significant finding (statistically, educationally and psychologically) seems to be that interpersonal relations are the best indicator of academic performance, either as cause or result. A school's resources seem of lesser importance, although some researchers have suggested that interpersonal relations may be easier in a well resourced school (Maree & Erasmus, 2006). On the other hand, working together in adversity, can also give rise to positive interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relations are obviously not something that can be legislated for, but if policy-makers can bear in mind the importance of such relationships in trouble-free management, not only Grade 12 results may benefit. It is a principle that can be applied across the board in many disciplines and administrations apart from education.