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**Retaining learners in primary schools in the East London Education District:
Policy Implications**

BY

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Education

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DECLARATION

I, Nomaroma Kumanda, declare that this dissertation submitted for the Master's degree in the Faculty of Education at the University of Fort Hare, is my own work and has not been submitted by me or anyone else for Masters at this or any other tertiary education institution.

I also declare that all the sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....

Nomaroma Kumanda

January 2015

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late parents Mr Thanduxolo Kumanda and Mrs Adelaide. This, I know would have made you proud.

AKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to acknowledge all the people who gave me their support and guidance during the period of this study.

Firstly, I thank God for opening these doors for me without Him I would not have been where I am today.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate different ways of retaining learners in teaching and learning practices in grade seven classrooms. The study was conducted in two East London Primary schools. The research took the form of a qualitative interpretive case study focusing on a study sample. The qualitative methods allowed the researcher to gather data in order to describe and interpret teachers' knowledge in retaining learners in grade seven classrooms.

This critical analysis explored the literature relating to retention of learners if they fail to meet proficiency requirements. The research made use of a qualitative, mixed-method, and meta-analysis techniques to collect and analyse the data. The study is systematically analysed and categorized according to three themes: retention and social promotion policy effectiveness, causes of dropping out and identification of curriculum and program options. The findings suggested that retaining learners may have some positive effects in the short-term, but that may diminish with time and age. Early detection of academic deficiencies by teachers can possibly prevent negative psychological effects and dropping out due to retention.

Student retention in public schools is comparatively poor in traditional education and in some contexts, embarrassingly low. Literature on the subject of student retention in public schools indicates that even when interventions are designed and undertaken to improve student's retention, they tend to fall short. The main aim of this dissertation therefore is to better understand and measure learners' attitudes and perceptions towards the effectiveness of learning. In view of this, it is hoped that the study can determine how these strategies can be used optimally to improve student retention at lower grades in the East London District in Eastern Cape. The findings at its best indicate what possible method that could be used to improve retention of learners, by enhancing their teaching/ learning and improving the efficacy of Eastern Cape school's existing student support system.

Keywords: Learner retention, Gross Enrolment Ratio, Net Enrolment Ratio, School drop-out, policy implication

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Student retention is an increasing concern in many schools because of the high non-completion rates. Retention does not only have an impact on individual learners and their families, but also produces a ripple effect on postsecondary institutions, the workforce and the economy. In view of this, the Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in the South African Schooling System was appointed by the Minister of Education, the Honourable Mrs GNM Pandor in April 2007 to conduct an investigation into the extent of learner retention and dropout in the schooling system.

Before the appointment of the ministerial committee, there had been a major concern about why learners drop out. Education specialists suggested many reasons in this regard, including but not limited to:

- teachers and school principals not having skills to teach the learners,
- confusion of the teachers by many educational reform efforts in the last 15 years,
- language differences in the classroom,
- poor infrastructure and demonstration facilities in school laboratories.

It is worthy to note that dropouts are more common in higher education as compared to any other phases (Karen, 2007). Literature suggests that there is a need to provide children with quality education so that they are better equipped to compete in today's tough work environment. There is also increasing recognition that education has a key role to play in South Africa's future prosperity. Education is vital in enabling the country to have suitable and qualified people who are needed to build the South African economy. Furthermore, there is a need for children to lead successful lives, and one of the best ways of helping them achieve this goal is by providing them with best education possible.

Thus, to create a better education for children in South Africa, retention as a remedy for poor academic performance has been hotly debated and extensively studied for decades. In an era emphasizing educational accountability, policies of determining grade retention based on learners' scores on standardized tests have been adopted by many states and school districts in an effort to end social promotion. Improving the quality of teaching in South African schools continues to be a central focus of educational reform. The rationale behind retention is that it gives low-achieving learners an extra year to catch up with the grade-level standard. The assumption is that by catching up on prerequisite skills, learners should be less at risk for failure when they go on to the next grade (Shepard & Smith, 2009).

1.1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Grade retention also known as non-promotion, flunking, failing, being held back, or the gift of time, refers to the repetition of a current grade by the learners (National Association of school Psychologist, 2011). Regardless whether it is used to address low performance or behaviour problems, research generally has not found favourable achievement or adjustment outcomes for learners who are retained. Nevertheless, retention rates have been rising. This trend appears to be heavily influenced by the most recent reform movement emphasizing national or state-wide educational grade-level standards and accountability (the No Child Left behind Act of 2001) and the accompanying grade-level tests to determine which learners are promoted to the next grade (National Association of school Psychologist, 2011).

In this regard, the mystification of higher education in the US, now standing at 14 million learners and counting, has also magnified the issue of student retention and persistence in our nation's high schools. Over one third of beginning postsecondary learners leave after two years of study without a matric, and only half of them are known to achieve their goals (Berkner & Cataldi, 2002: 10). Since these learners receive a public subsidy to attend these institutions, and because higher education is a big government- sponsored industry, retention is at the heart of the high school cost dialogue on Capitol Hill and in state capitals. Even with the knowledge that higher education serves the public, especially open door institutions, politicians are

keenly aware of the inefficiency and expenses of our system and are therefore beginning to ask for greater accountability among high school administrators.

Moreover, learner grade retention in schools has taken place for several years (Holmes, 2006) and is predominately used within the elementary schools in the early grades (Silberglitt et al, 2006). Educators are aware of learners who were retained at the middle school level or even started kindergarten late because their parents did not feel they were ready (Larsen & Akmal, 2007). Another study was undertaken by Stone and Engel (2007), who studied 22 elementary learners retained because of Chicago's new policy on social promotion and focused on the intervention of retention. These learners were most often exposed to the same material used in the previous year. Although access to remedial support varied, learners reported little guidance from teachers and generally did not change their learning strategies. However, it is worthy to say that learners with high levels of instructional support who altered their learning strategies during the retained year were relatively more academically successful.

Hence, this study is being conducted during the transitional period, when the existing curriculum, the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) is being changed into Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). Its brief was meant to identify the challenges and pressure points that impacted negatively on the quality of teaching in schools as a means to propose mechanisms that can address these challenges (DoE, 2010). Motshekga (2011) emphasized the fact that the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement is being used as a starting point for filling in gaps, reducing repetition and clarifying where necessary.

The South African Admission Policy for Ordinary Public Schools (2008) limits grade repetition to a maximum of one year per school phase. This translates to a maximum of four years in the twelve years of schooling. This policy recognises that grade repetition seldom results in better learning achievement and frequently has the opposite effect. While there is a cap on the number of repetitions allowed in the schooling system, the policy cautions that this limit should not be construed as promoting automatic promotion.

Even in the absence of test-based promotion policies, the extent to which South African school systems have retained low-performing learners in the same grade has varied considerably over time. Proponents of retention have long argued that low-performing learners stand to benefit from an improved match of their ability to that of their peers and from the opportunity for additional instruction before confronting more challenging material. Stone and Engel (2007) also contend that the threat of being held back and the creation of grade cohorts that are more homogenous in ability could yield benefits even for higher-performing learners. In the 1960s, however, concerns that retention hinders the social, emotional, and cognitive development of at-risk learners led many educators to call for learners to be advanced to the next grade with their peers regardless of their academic performance. Although systematic data are scarce, this push for so-called “social promotion” appears to have reduced the incidence of retention nationwide (Motshekga, 2011).

By the same token, grade retention has been an accepted remedy for educational conditions known as underachievement and as such is becoming prevalent at all levels of schooling worldwide (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2005). Although it might be seen as a common antidote for children’s underachievement at school and high dropout rate, it has been questioned in South Africa (McGrath, 2006).

1.1.2 DROPOUT RATE

Dropout rate by grade is defined as the proportion of pupils from a cohort enrolled in a given grade at a given school year who are no longer enrolled in the following school year (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2009). The purpose is to measure the phenomenon of pupils from a cohort leaving school without completion, and its effect on the internal efficiency of educational systems. In addition, it is one of the key indicators for analysing and projecting pupil flows from grade to grade within the educational cycle.

Dropout rate by grade is calculated by subtracting the sum of promotion rate and repetition rate from 100 in the given school year. For cumulative dropout rate in

primary education, it is calculated by subtracting the survival rate from 100 at a given grade (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2009). On the other hand, the report on Learner Retention in the South African Schooling system defined learner retention as the continued participation of a learner in the formal schooling system until the completion of the compulsory schooling phase. Learner retention is the complement of dropout. It is an indicator of the efficiency or quality of the schooling education system (Department of Education, 2008). Dropout rate is derived by analysing data on enrolment and repeaters by grade for two consecutive years. A good quality data is important in calculating this indicator. The quality of data collected by the Department influences the accuracy of the dropout rate. Therefore data from National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) has been used to calculate dropout rate by grade in 2007/2008. However, the Department has reviewed its survey instruments and envisages that the data quality would improve. This can enable the Department to calculate this indicator accurately and estimating the level of implications it has on the policy.

1.1.3 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In the South African education, reducing the number of learners who do not acquire basic reading skills in the early grades remains an urgent priority. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2011), one third of all fourth grade learner and fully half of black and Hispanic fourth graders fail to demonstrate even a basic level of reading proficiency. Improving on this record may require that the states provide learners at risk with reading difficulty access to high-quality early childhood education programs. The state should also help districts to develop early identification systems so that struggling learners can be targeted for intervention. It should also take steps to improve the quality of instruction in grades. Although often overlooked, the latter is critical given the evidence that schools often assign less experienced and less effective teachers to those grades, which are typically excluded from state accountability systems. Policies encouraging the retention of learners who have not acquired basic reading skills by third grade are no substitute for the development of a comprehensive strategy to reduce the number of struggling learners. Yet the best available evidence indicates that policies that include

appropriate interventions for retained learners may well be a useful component of a comprehensive strategy.

Interestingly, after the initial spike to 21,799 (13.5 per cent) retentions, the number of South African learners retained in third grade fell steadily in the six years following the introduction of its test-based promotion policy, reaching 9,562 (5.6 per cent) in 2008. This decline was due primarily to a reduction in the number of learners failing to meet the promotion standard.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The study measured the phenomenon of pupils from a cohort leaving school without completion, and its effects on the internal efficiency of the educational system. Learner retention in South African schools is a costly and problematic issue. While learner's enrolment has increased ten-folds since the mid-2000s to approximately 14 million each year, the ability to keep learners in school remains a difficult challenge. Put differently, half of the learners who enter the gates of high school education fail to realize the dreams and aspirations that led them there in the first place. Thus, almost a decade since the promulgation of Circular 13 of 2002, learners' retention in school has resulted in the roaming of streets during school hours. This observation seems to get the researcher to share the view that learners dropping out is as a result of retention (Hallam, 2008). This dropout of learners has a negative influence on the South African economy, and it increases the rate of unemployment. This unemployment rate is coupled with the fact that the learners who drop out of school are easily pushed to take drugs and also to teenage pregnancy among other crimes.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study sought to investigate how learners can be retained in schools in terms of repeating the class with the intentions of decreasing dropout. The study focuses on the policy implications.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.4.1 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

- How are learners retained in primary schools?

1.4.2 SUB QUESTIONS

- What strategies are used to retain learners in schools?
- What are the views of learners on grade retention?
- What are the implications of policy in retaining these learners?
- How is the curriculum program options for learners who are retained applied?
- What strategies are put in place to avoid promoting learners socially rather than educational?

1.5 ASSUMPTIONS

Using a variety of terms to describe retention and its antithesis (including persistence, attainment, completion, graduation; attrition, dropout, learner departure), researchers long presumed that every learner's ultimate goal was to secure a grade. More and more, however, scholars realized that learners are a diverse group with diverse objectives. Reason (2009) points out that individual learners define their goals, which means that a learner may successfully persist without being retained to a grade if, his/her goal did not mandate the completion of a school.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The researcher assumed that there may be several reasons for the general silence in the literature and lack of available data on school retention practices in South Africa, as opposed to the prevalence of retention. Not all countries in the world use grade retention as an educational practice, (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2008). Another reason may be that while grade retention

might exist in South African schools, its practice may be less frequently questioned by South African educators. The findings of the study may reveal further reasons which were not considered at the outset of the study that might account for the general dearth of literature on school retention in South Africa. In view of this, the study might therefore be important in that it can add to the general knowledge of grade retention in South Africa. Furthermore, it might significantly fill the knowledge gaps on school retention practices in some South African schools. This critical analysis might be able to assist school districts and teachers in determining their retention and social promotion policies and practices (Education Queensland, 2007).

1.7 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study focused on two grade seven classrooms selected from two primary schools: one farm school and one township school in the East London District located in communities that have high dropout rates. It made use of eight grade 7 learners, six grade 7 educators and four School Governing body (SGB) members that represent parents.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Learner retention

Learner retention is defined as the continued participation of a learner in the formal schooling system until the completion of the compulsory schooling phase. Learner retention is the complement of dropout. It is an indicator of the efficiency or quality of the schooling education system (UNESCO, 2007).

Gross Enrolment Ratio

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is the total enrolment in a specific level of education, regardless of age expressed as a percentage of the population in the official age group corresponding to this level of education (UNESCO, 2007).

Net Enrolment Ratio

Net enrolment ratio is the enrolment of the official age group for a given level of education expressed as a percentage of the population in that age group (UNESCO, 2007).

School Drop-Out

There are various understandings of what school dropout is and how it is interpreted and commonly found definitions are presented. In South Africa, there are specific official qualifying criteria for an Individual learner to be considered as a school dropout (NCES, 2002) and these are:

- The learner was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year;
- The learner was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year; and
- The learner had not graduated from high school or completed a state approved educational programme.

1.9 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

The thesis consists of six chapters.

Chapter one: Introduces the study

It discusses and provides the context, the rationale for this investigation, and an outline of the research objectives.

Chapter Two: Literature review

This chapter reviews the literature which presents empirical evidence about grade retention and its effects on learners' learning. Taking into consideration the factors involved in the practice of grade retention, the literature of this study encompasses teachers' beliefs, assessment for learning, moderation in assessments, classroom conditions, learning and motivation, and teaching intervention.

Chapter Three: Research methodology

This chapter explains the methodology in this qualitative case study. It describes how participants were selected, the collection and analysis of data in relation to the research questions. It also addresses the ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Chapter Four: Data presentation and analysis

This chapter presents the findings about mechanism and criteria teacher used to determine grade retention in grade 7. It also presents the findings relating to how teachers used assessments for learning, and teaching interventions that can prevent at-risk learners from being dropouts. Findings about factors that teachers believe inhibited student's learning, and teachers' beliefs about grade retention are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter Five: Discussion of findings

This chapter discusses the findings, using academic evidence in the literature review to compare and contrast the findings. It ends with a summary of the findings and conclusion.

Chapter Six: conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter provides recommendations that can improve learners' learning outcomes while reducing dropout rates in primary education in East London.

1.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter laid the groundwork and provided a framework for the study. It made known the researcher's intentions and why he/she is conducting the study. A broad background of the topic is given and the problem statement contextualized to inform and to explain to readers what urged an investigation into the learners' retention in schools in the East London Education District. The chapter also introduced the research questions and the sub questions which guided the study and the objectives are clarified. Key concepts were defined and applied in order to avoid any misunderstandings. A brief overview of each chapter has been provided in order to

give the reader an appetizer into the contents of each chapter and how the researcher went about conducting the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter aims to provide an overview of relevant literature on the retention of learners in school practices. Key to this study is the process of policy implementation within teaching and learning. In this case, the policy in question is the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS). In reviewing the literature, the researcher is keen on strategies at improving challenges in the RNCS for the enhancement of retention. Education teaching practices in grade seven that are regarded as the critical level of the General Education and Training (GET) Band Content Knowledge of the current curriculum (RNCS) reveals distinctive attributes of teaching practice (Fleish 2008). It is a necessary requirement that all South African teachers should learn what proved to be effective in the current curriculum so that they can implement the good practices in conjunction with CAPS in their classrooms (DoE, 2007). Fleish (2008) points to the classroom as the major source of the crisis in primary education.

The researcher discusses relevant literature and includes definitions of keys terms like, dropping out, finding who drops out, general factors related to dropping out, and drop-out factors specific to learners. Research regarding learners' attrition in the South Africa is very limited, and is virtually non-existent for the Eastern Cape Province. Relevant literature will be examined and used to probably develop a model for analysing the situation in South Africa.

Studies have shown that learners do not appear to benefit from being retained and that retention may increase their risk of dropping out (Ashyby, 2004). The researcher describes major conceptual frameworks that attempt to explain learner's retention. Although they all inform this study in various ways, the study design is most directly influenced by Tinto's (2006, 2007). Internationalist Theory and Reason comprehensive model clearly described below with an emphasis on the category of retention factors that Reason and Terenzini refer to as individual student

experiences. The study's more-specific emphasis is on subsets of categories such as learners' classroom and curricular experiences, since learner ratings data that was utilized encompassed the constructs.

2.1.2 Learner retention in other countries

In other countries such as America, literature has revealed that the American National centre for Education Statistics (NCES) has differentiated the terms by using retention as an institutional measure and persistence as a learner measure. In other words, institutions retain and learners persist. Another term commonly used with retention is attrition which is the process of learners leaving their education, primarily due to institutional structures and processes. According to Hagedorn (2006), there are at least two basic types of retention: institutional and system retention. In essence, it is the measure of the proportion of learners who remain at the same school from year to year. System retention focuses on a learner using system persistence as a measure. In this way, a learner who leaves one school to attend another is not considered as a non-persisted but a persisted. Retention within a major or discipline takes a more limited view of the topic by viewing retention within a major area of study, discipline or a specific department. The smallest unit of analysis is retention within a particular school which measures retention by course completion (Hagedorn, 2006).

In the context of Ghana, learner withdrawal is defined in terms of non-presence, signifying learners who remain recorded as present within a given program are deemed to be retained, while those recorded as non-present are withdrawn. Within these parameters any learner who repeats a given year or who changes program within their original institution is classified as present and thus retained (Hagedorn, 2006) The current data-monitoring system, however, does not allow for the tracking of learners across different institutions, and as a result a student who transfers from one school to another is classified as not having progressed (HEA 2010). The problem explored by Anderson & Whipple (2012) was that schools are at low performance levels. The purpose was to see if learners benefited from retention. The question asked was if educators are addressing the academic, behavioural, and

mental health needs of children when they propose grade retention. Anderson (2005) conducted a survey of children's ratings of 20 stressful life events and showed that by the time they were in the sixth grade, children feared retention most. George (2001) duplicated the study and noted that sixth-grade learners rated retention as the most stressful event higher than the loss of a parent or going blind. As a result of the study, the authors conjectured that retained learners experience lower self-esteem and lower rates of school attendance which are a predictor of dropping out of school. The next couple of reviews also addressed the problem of dropouts. Lloyd (2001) investigated high school dropouts and the question posed was whether characteristics, school performance, and achievement are indicators of the level of high school dropouts.

National studies conducted by the National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES) show that the number of schools offering learner education courses and the number of learners enrolling in high school education are increasing (Waits & Lewis, 2003). Even though there is much more learner's dropout in primary education, literature shows that retention rates are higher in primary than tertiary education (Moody, 2004). Researchers indicate the pervasiveness of the high retention rates and the clarion call to find strategies that might encourage learners, educators, and schools to become more effective in addressing this issue. Finding ways to decrease dropout in education classes and programs is critical both from an economical and quality viewpoint. High dropout rates have a negative economic impact on high schools. The costs for development, delivery, and assessment, as well as lost dropout revenue, result in wasted expenditures for the school (Moody, 2004: 205). In addition to the economic reasons, retention is a measure used to determine the quality of education delivered by an institution (Moody, 2004). If there is a high attrition rate, the perception is that the institution has a quality problem. Identifying the reasons why learners drop or fail courses is critical in determining what services and delivery methods the institution would need to provide in order to ensure successful completion of distant education classes (Nash, 2005).

California schools use retention in early elementary grades, but the state does not collect information either directly or from school districts on how frequently this practice occurs or whether grade repetition leads to academic improvement. In 2002,

the California Department of Education recommended against student retention on the grounds that research did not support the practice (George 1993). However, this recommendation conflicts with current state law that was enacted by Assembly Bill (AB) 1626 in 2000, which required that school districts should adopt a pupil promotion and retention policy to identify learners in grades through 8 who should be retained. The decision of whether or not to promote learners should be based on their grades, their proficiency levels on state wide assessments, and their performance on other academic achievement indicators as determined by the school district though teachers can recommend the promotion of learners who are not performing at the minimum requirements. AB 1626 does not cover other grades, such as kindergarten and the first grade, but school districts can choose to include them (George, 2001).

Given that California does not collect state wide retention data, we have chosen to examine the retention data of LAUSD, the largest school district in California, serving about 11 per cent of public school learners in the state. The district has a diverse learner's population, including large numbers of English Learner (EL) and learners from low-income families groups generally perceived to be at higher risk for grade retention (Burkam et al., 2007)

On the other hand, Finnish youth tend to start their academic studies relatively late compared to many other nationalities (Davies et al., 2009). Additionally, other studies (e.g. Kivinen & Nurmi 2011) have also shown that learners are able to find jobs faster than some of their European counterparts despite the long study times. This may be the result of combining work and study. In comparison, the dropout phenomenon seems to be less significant in Finland.

Also, Finnish learners emphasize the importance of internships and work experience during education (TEK 2012). Indeed, there seems to be three main elements under discussion in Finland:

- Entry of learners to the system (including admission and access),
- Progression and completion (including flexibility, course architecture and support), and

- Labour market outcomes (Ministry of Education 2007, 2010; OECD 2009).

In primary schools and high schools, the progress of studies in the new two-tier study structure has been followed in a national monitoring project “Monitoring, evaluating and developing study processes on the branch of technology” from 2005–2009 and afterwards. The premise for the study was the reform of the curriculum implemented in the year 2005 in accordance with the Bologna Declaration. Erkkilä (2010) professed flexibility in study, work load, financial support, effectiveness of teaching arrangements, interplay between work and study as well as student counselling and support were issues often raised in the project.

Furthermore, the study showed that learners entering on the basis of their matriculation examination results, gained on average the most credits in the first three years of studies in contrast to learners who entered based on their entrance examination results. These findings can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that learners admitted based on their matriculation examination results had already achieved high grades in mathematics and sciences in upper secondary school (Pakarinen, 2010). This is particularly significant since in many programs the learners are comprised mainly of 33 mathematics and physics, so prior achievement in these areas is an advantage.

The study also showed that learner progression was the slowest among those who were not able to complete their compulsory mathematics courses during the first three years of their studies. In Ireland, the feeling that the learners have made the wrong choice of program was identified as the most significant factor contributing to dropout among higher education learners (Baird, et al., 2002). On the other hand, program choice also demonstrated to be a less significant factor as learners proceeded further with their studies. The fact that a majority of the learners were withdrawing from programs, which they initially ranked among their top three preferences also indicated a disparity between learners' expectations of a program before entering third level, and their experiences upon arrival (Baird, 2002). Based on this, Alexander, et al. (2003) revealed that retention was significantly associated with high school dropout status. This developmental approach to analysis also considered other early predictors of dropout including familial stressors, parental

attitudes and values, summer child care arrangements, the child's behavioural adjustment and attitude, personality traits, grades, test scores, and first-grade track placements. Alexander et al. (2001) suggested that retention was a significant factor contributing to a long-term process of school disengagement, which culminated in eventual dropout.

The results addressing the association between grade retention and dropout status clearly demonstrated that, early grade retention was one of the most powerful predictors of later school withdrawal. As discussed by Jimerson (1999), the short-term benefits of grade retention may dissipate and culminate in later school withdrawal and the likelihood of dropout is considerably greater for learners who have been retained more than once. Mann (2001) reports that learners who are retained in one grade are 40% to 50% more likely to dropout than promoted learners, and learners who are retained in two grades are 90% more likely to drop out. As a unique contribution to the current literature, this review should be used to guide future examinations of the connection between retention and later high school dropout. In addition, it may be used immediately to inform the general public, educational professionals, and policymakers about the association between grade retention and dropping out.

The literature of this study would therefore be divided into three aspects of school retention: context school retention, practices associated with retention and identifiable groups of children associated with school retention practices. Nevertheless, it would also look at increasing accountability at all levels of schooling which may have led to a range of school retention practices. In addition, the literature would discuss data gathered on school retention in South Africa and also consider the value of retention practices (Raver, 2004).

According to Cannon and Lipscomb (2008), grade retention in elementary school is a negative academic outcome in children's educational careers. As such, many efforts are made to avert this last-resort intervention. Yet retention occurs, and demonstrates that learners can benefit from it, at least in the short term. The probability of retention before the third grade is much higher for learners with certain risk factors, most notably poor academic performance, younger age and gender.

Cannon and Lipscomb (2008) again looked at the role of multiple risk factors, even after controlling academic performance and other factors. They found out that about one in 10 relatively younger boys with at least one additional risk factor are likely to be retained before the third grade. In contrast, generally fewer than two in 100 learners with zero or one risk factor are likely to be retained. The probability of retention can differ across schools even when learners have similar characteristics, suggesting a difference in school-level policies and philosophies about retention. These findings have several implications for education policy. The high probability of relatively younger learners being retained should be considered in light of the state's kindergarten entry-age cut-off date of December, one of the latest in the nation. Among LAUSD learners entering kindergarten in 2006 who were retained by the third grade, 41.5 per cent were born in September through November. What could be the effect on retention rates of the new California law that might have moved the date from December 2 to September 1? Researcher suggests that this change can likely reduce retention among those learners with fallen birthdays, that is, they would enter kindergarten a year older (Cannon & Lipscomb 2008).

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.2.1 SHULMAN'S MODEL OF PEDAGOGICAL REASONING

This study is underpinned by a theoretical orientation that upholds the relationship between the two main components of a learning environment, namely, retaining and learner dropout. Shulman's model of Pedagogical Reasoning, a Framework for Teacher Knowledge has much to offer to discussions of dropping out in multi Levels (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). This theory is supported by the Reflective Teaching Model that examines underlying assumptions and becomes a useful model to understand the interaction of dispositions (being), practice (doing), and professional knowledge (knowing). This knowledge is essential for what prospective teachers should know and be able to do. This visual model for teacher reflection has been adapted from the works of Sparks-Langer (2002).

Grade retention refers to the practice of keeping learners at the same grade level for an additional year. The rationale behind retention is that it gives low-achieving learners an extra year to catch up to the grade-level standard. As part of an increasing emphasis on standards and accountability, many districts are making decisions about grade retention based on student scores on district or state standardized tests. While eliminating social promotion has considerable intuitive and political appeal, it has also raised important concerns, partly because prior studies have shown that learners do not appear to benefit from being retained in grade and, indeed, that retention may increase their risk of dropping out of school (Jimerson, and Whipple, 2005). The purpose of this integrative review is to explore strategies for reducing attrition in education classes. Firstly, the issue of attrition in education within the context of higher education is presented. Prior research includes characteristics of learners who enrol and drop out of education programs and the reasons given for attrition in these schools. Secondly, major strategies effective in decreasing the attrition of learners in education classes are described.

The theory that provides a comprehensive theoretical framework that might explain why learners leave schools is Tinto's Student Integration Model. Here, persistence is hypothesized to be related to how well the individual's motivation and academic ability match the institution's academic and social characteristics. This match shapes a person's commitment to completing school and commitment to the institutions. On the other hand, Bean's Model of Student Departure, predicts persistence based on behavioural intention (1980, 1983). These behavioural intentions are shaped by beliefs and attitudes. Student's experiences within the institution, but also factors external to the institution can affect beliefs, attitudes, and decisions. Noting some gaps in Tinto's theory, a convergence model has been suggested that combines the major propositions embedded in these two theories. According to Tinto (2005), learners reported that work, family, study commitments, insufficient time, poor health conditions, and study load were the reasons why they withdrew from the program. Gender and geographic location of the learners were not found to be significant predictors of attrition between continuing and withdrawn learners. Furthermore, the relationship between the learners and the teachers, in terms of the learners' satisfaction with their communication with the teacher, is one of the factors that

distinguish learners who choose to continue or dropout. Along these lines, recent reviews of dropouts in web-based distance education concluded that communication or social interaction between learners and between the teacher and the learners represent a major factor in the decision to withdraw from school (Tresman, 2004).

2.2.2 TINTO'S INTERNATIONALIST THEORY

The New paradigmatic Internationalist Theory of Student Departure submits that retention is a function of the dispositions of individuals who enter higher education, the character of their interactional experiences within the institution following entry, and the external forces which sometimes influence their behaviour within the institution. In describing student dispositions, Tinto (2006, 2007) posits that learners' intentions as well as their motivation are inextricably tied to their persistence. In the case of interactional bases on experiences that are influenced by events occurring within the school that impact on learner experiences, Tinto's work is informed by social anthropologist study of rites of passage. Van Gennep (2005) describes stages of separation, transition, and incorporation through which individuals pass in order to establish membership in traditional societies. Tinto argues that the manner in which learners enter and become incorporated into a school, parallels these rites of passage. In this respect, learners must become increasingly familiar with its norms and patterns; and finally become incorporated into the life of the school, adopting its customs as their own.

As Tinto (2006, 2007) has explained, student involvement in the classroom is important to student retention because the classroom is for many learners the one place, perhaps the only place where they meet each other. Echoing this point, Reason (2009) indicates that the classroom may be the only context regularly inhabited by every learner. Attempts to increase learner engagement in academic settings are not only in keeping with the overall mission of higher education, but it also becomes imperative when classrooms become the only organizational context learners experience (Reason, 2009: 678). Yet, scholars have begun to recognize and examine the role of the classroom in the learner departure puzzle (Braxton, 2000). In fact, in a comprehensive review of persistence research, Reason (2009: 673) notes

that surprisingly little research exploring the connection between learners' in-class learning experiences and persistence. Perhaps the most noteworthy exceptions are studies of what are known as curricular interventions. Early research on the effects of learning communities (one curricular intervention in which a cohort of learners takes several courses together) on learner involvement and retention was able to establish a clear link between classroom practice, heightened involvement, and student persistence (Tinto, 2003).

Moreover, reflecting on the qualitative and quantitative results of his study of a learning community, Tinto (2004) inferred that the initiative was able to increase learners' likelihood of persisting because it enabled learners to develop a support network, a community within the larger community, one that helped them to bond to the institution. More recently, Keup (2005: 6) used a national dataset and followed-up surveys of freshman experiences, and found positive relationships between three curricular interventions first-year seminars, service-learning, and learning communities and the longitudinal process. Despite these studies of curricular programs and empirical evidence of their influence on persistence, examinations of learners' classroom experiences and interactions with school members are still scarce. It is worth noting that Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found evidence that learners make a number of cognitive gains during their early years, including gains in the ability to think critically and in post-formal reasoning. In 2001, Tinto argued that "we must reconstruct our theoretical models to include not only the classroom, but also the faculty and, in turn, pedagogy in our discussions of student persistence" (Tinto, 2001: 81).

In an impassioned discourse, he asserted that school members must be brought back into retention theories not only because contact with school inside and outside the classroom serves to directly shape learning and persistence, but also because their actions, framed by pedagogical assumptions and teaching skills, shape the nature of classroom communities and influence the degree and manner in which learners become involved in learning within and beyond those communities (Tinto, 2003). In other words, he surmises that school members exert more influence on learner retention than has been accounted for by researchers. Only a few years later, Tinto (2006: 7) bemoaned a related problem and one too common in academia

and disconnected to practice and research. The practice of trying to retain learners does not reflect the widely accepted notion that the actions of the school, especially in the classrooms, are keys to institutional efforts to enhance student retention.

Braxton (2000) corroborating Tinto's assertion examined the impact of specific teaching practices on learner retention. He hypothesized that active learning positively impacts learners' social integration, rationalizing that the additional classroom interaction with peers and school inherent in active learning helps learners develop a peer group (Braxton, 2000). They surveyed learners at a highly selective, private research university and found that school classroom behaviours in general and active learning in particular may constitute an empirically reliable source of information on social integration, subsequent institutional commitment, and departure decisions. The authors concluded more generally that faculty members' classroom behaviours influence the learner departure process.

2.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP ON LEARNER RETENTION

Many schools have launched recruitment and retention programs geared toward improving the success rates of low-income and other disadvantaged learners. These programs often use several strategies, such as learner mentoring, peer advising, and academic and social counselling to encourage at risk learners to remain enrolled (Ellis, 2000). Less discussed however, is the role of the Student Representative Council (SRC) president in developing, designing, and implementing successful retention efforts.

Yet prior research has demonstrated that principals of schools are often the key ingredient needed to implement these programs. For example, the Sallie National Retention Project illustrates the effects of junior leadership on retention. On successful schools efforts, school management team plays two important roles. First of all, the Head of Department (HOD) and school management team regularly monitor the school progression toward clearly stated school retention goals. Moody (2004) noted that nearly 90 per cent of the high-rate schools demonstrated that junior administrators regularly monitored information about progress in increasing

retention of learners was descriptive or very descriptive of their schools. Secondly, the principal is usually the one person at the school who can bring all the interested parties learners, parents, school, and staff together toward the goals of retention.

Sallie (1999) noted that the SRC president must coordinate strategies that can be developed to help increase learner success. The president must remain fully informed of the schools activities and help each of these units to contribute to the goal of raising learner achievement. Only leadership from the president can bring school units together for the purposes of raising retention rates (Sallie, 1999). Presidents can play other roles as well in their efforts to improve retention. According to Richardson, president of Morgan State University, the president should emphasize four areas in their schools to improve retention (Alliance for Equity in Higher Education, 2001) and also increase need-based financial aid for low-income, at-risk learners. In addition, they should use the school's social and cultural activities to keep learners focused and to encourage academic advising outside the classroom.

2.4 FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNER RETENTION

2.4.1 SCHOOL-RELATED REASONS

2.4.1.1 Academic performance

There are a number of factors which can affect the motivation of learners to remain in schools. These factors include the quality of teachers, student/teacher ratio, size of schools, safety of schools, and feeling of being welcomed at school (Frakline, et al 2008). Highly qualified and effective teachers have a strong influence on how successful learners can be in schools. The most significant factor affecting the 40 per cent gap between African American and Caucasian student achievement was teacher expertise (Palesel, 2009). Teacher expertise includes such factors as how well teachers comprehend their subjects and how well teachers understand strategies for reaching different kinds of learners. Low-performing learners who face learning barriers can reach higher levels of achievement if they are taught by high-quality teachers (Darling- Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Haycock, 1998). It is important

that effective teachers with a track record of success are available for at risk learners to help prevent them from dropping out of school.

A report from the National Partnership for Teaching in at risk schools (2005) came up with findings indicating that achievement gaps between economically disadvantaged learners and other learners can be reduced if disadvantaged learners are taught by highly motivated, successful, and experienced teachers. However, teachers who are inexperienced or unqualified are often assigned to schools with many challenges such as a high dropout rate. As a result, many underperforming and at risk schools receive teachers who are unprepared, inexperienced, or less qualified than teachers at other schools. Learners can benefit from a low student/teacher ratio (Nation Master, 2012). A low ratio suggests that teachers may have more time to spend with each learner, and thus this ratio can act as an indicator of the quality of education. However, this ratio needs to be quite low before any real effect on educational quality appears.

Local and national research identifies factors such as academic performance as predictors for school persistence that can play a huge part in retention of learners. In their longitudinal study, Makuakane-Drechsel and Hagedorn (2006) found that Grade Point Average (GPA) was the most significant predictor of persistence for both liberal arts and vocational community primary learners of South Africa, with financial aid being the second most significant predict.

2.4.2 ATTITUDES AND SATISFACTION

2.4.2.1. Individual reasons

Individual issues that can be the primary reason for dropping out include: low grades, poor daily attendance, misbehaviour, drug and alcohol use, and feeling alienated from other learners (Frakline & Meares, 2008). Low grades that result in retention are a very strong indicator of whether a learner would drop out (Alexander, 2000). Significantly Balfanz and Herzog's (2005) study indicated that more than half of sixth graders with the following three criteria eventually left school: attend school less than 80% of the time; receive a low final grade from their teachers in behaviour; and fail

either Maths or English. Eighth-graders who miss five weeks of school or fail Maths or English have at least a 75% chance of dropping out of high school (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). Ninth-grade learners who receive more than one failure in core academic subjects, and thus cannot proceed to the tenth grade, are at 85% (Allensworth & Easton, 2005).

Thus retention in middle grades, and even elementary school, is associated with dropping out (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Some studies on dropouts determined that 64% of learners who repeated a grade in elementary school and 63 per cent of those who held back in middle school left school without a diploma (Alexander, et al, 1997). Course grades and failure rates during the first semester indicate whether learners are making progress in their classes (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Some researchers consider final grades to be the best predictive indicator, as they suggest who is likely to struggle in the later years of school (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Research has also shown that learners with prior behaviour problems are most likely to fail during transition years and eventually drop out. Once a potential dropout reaches high school, course failure and poor behaviour often combine, thus leading to eventual drop out of school (Balfanz & Herzog, 2005). For drug and alcohol use, two groups of learners exist: learners who stay in school and are addicted or tend to use alcohol or drugs, and learners who are suspended or are expelled for doing so (Siegel, 2011).

In addition to academic performance, learners' attitudes and satisfaction also have an effect on retention and were prevalent themes within the retention literature. Segerstrom (2009) concluded that dispositional and academic optimism was associated with better motivation and adjustment, reduced drop-out rates, and higher GPA. Balfanz and Herzog, (2005) opined that with increased self-efficacy and a belief in a positive outcome, learners can succeed in the academic world. Allen (2008) also found that learners' commitment and social connectedness directly affected retention for finishing the primary level in their study.

2.4.3 SOCIAL SUPPORT AND FAMILY

2.4.3.1 Family reasons

In most cases, parents are the first group of teachers who have the responsibility to nurture and guide children from infancy through to adolescence. Some important family factors affecting school dropouts include: ineffective or non-existent parental support in schooling, teenage pregnancy, learners getting married, work and financial problems of parents, negative emotional reaction and sanctions for bad grades, and indulgent parenting style (Frakline, et al., 2008). High on our list of reasons is teen pregnancy considered as a possible reason why a higher proportion of girls than boys drop out of school (Lemani & Machakanja, 2003). Although it may affect the rate at which girls drop out of school, it is possible that teen pregnancy indirectly affects boys' decisions to drop out of school. Also access to schooling and likelihood of dropping out can be affected by family income (Little, 2008). Colclough et al. (2006) suggested that poverty influences the demand for schooling. They argue further that impoverished households have great difficulty paying school fees and other costs associated with education.

However, the opportunity costs of education also need to be considered since they increase as children grow older. To help with rising costs, there is increasing pressure on children to work and earn an income for the household. Therefore, as these children attain maturity, they are more likely to work than go to school. Vulnerable and marginalized children experience a higher-than average pressure to drop out of school as poverty combines with other factors relating to social disadvantage (Hunt, 2008: 52). For example, wealthy parents may be able to avoid school-related problems for their children by sending them to schools likely to meet their specific needs (Colclough et al., 2000). However, families without such wealth may be unable to afford alternative and/or private schools.

Another factor related to learners dropping out of school is a negative emotional reaction from the inability to achieve good or excellent grades. According to Schargel and Smink (2001), families can help to improve children's motivation, involvement at school, and the ability to overcome various problems. Some ways in which families

can provide such help include showing an interest in school policies, participation in school functions, providing a home where education is valued, volunteering in the school as often as possible and giving appropriate feedback. All these signs of engagement can help children get good grades and for teachers to obtain more information about learners (Schargel & Smink, 2001). Similar to the positive relationship between social integration and student retention, Nicpon (2006) found that higher levels of social support relate to greater persistence and fewer feelings of peer pressure but is not related to academic achievement. Specific forms of social support provided by the school such as cohorts (Harris, 2006) and teach communities (Tinto, 2004) help learners share academic experiences together, thus linking academic and social integration.

2.4.4 DROP-OUT RATE

Grade retention has been associated with the high probability of learners dropping out of school after being retained (Alexander, et al., 2003). Grade retention in many cases appears to contribute to learners' decision to leave school before graduation (Crissom & Shepard, 2004). Educators realize that dropping-out is a process and that it can start from primary school or before high school (Sandberg & Polesel, 2011). Analysis of dropping-out as a process is not conducted in Iran, as may be the case for other countries. Instead, Iranian educators focus on specific grade levels and do not look at continuous problems that may occur. Learners reported cumulative problems that are indicative of dropping-out being a process. Learners may leave school for a variety of reasons; such as disciplinary problems, academic failure, or even opportunities for employment. The way in which these reasons overlap makes it particularly difficult to create a profile for at-risk learners (Franklin, et al., 2008).

For many years, the Department of education faced several challenges in determining the dropout rate of learners from school owing to the unavailability of reliable data. The recent National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) has however, proved to be a useful source for this indicator. Since the NIDS data is only available for one year, no trend analysis could be undertaken. Strassburg (2010) found that

dropping out of schools is not a single event but is usually the result of a combination of inter-related factors that culminates to the eventual dropping out of school by the learners. Fleisch (2010:7) noted that poverty alone could not explain why children were not in school and identified other factors such as disability, family structure, not living with biological parents or grandparents, orphan hood, being eligible for, but not accessing social welfare and living in isolated communities which, combined with poverty, make children more vulnerable to dropping out of schools. Strassburg (2010: 40-41) also found that financial pressures and complex social processes such as teenage pregnancy and substance abuse combined with in-school factors such as lack of stimulation and support result in youth disengaging from their education and eventually dropping out of school. In 2009, on average 9% of learners who enrolled in schools were repeating the grade they were in the previous year.

In this regard, South Africa's level of repetition is high. International comparative information for primary schools for 2007 (UNESCO, 2010: 355) showed that South Africa's average level of repetition in primary schools (7%) was higher than the average level for developing countries (5%) and for developed countries (less than 1%). Repetition is much greater in higher grades than in the lower grades. This occurs as a result of teachers in the higher grades trying to deal with learners who have failed to master basic skills in primary school but who have nonetheless progressed from grade to grade. The percentage of repeaters in grades 9 and 10 are particularly high as schools gate keep in an attempt to improve their national senior certificate examination results which are publicly reported in a way that results of earlier grades are not.

The above vary from school to school since schools are complex and dynamic systems with many parts. Teachers, administrators, learners, parents, staff, policies, curriculum, and the physical environment just being a few of the many factors that interact to create a general school experience for learners. School climate has been used to describe the interaction of these variables and has been defined as the quality and frequency of interpersonal interactions that are present within the school system (Kuperminc et al., 2001). They also conceived school climate as a multidimensional construct encompassing interpersonal, organizational, and instructional dimensions.

While student perceptions of the school climate have been measured on the individual level (Loukas, et al., 2006), schools may also be judged to have positive school climates or negative school climates based on the aggregation of learner perceptions (Wilson, 2004). Jimeson, et al. (2002) conducted a systematic review of dropout literature that examined grade retention with both associative and predictive models. This review included many studies published between 1970 and 2000. Unlike the three meta-analyses, it did not use statistical methods to synthesize findings. Rather, the authors provided a narrative discussion of the findings from the studies. According to Dauber (2003) three types of comparison strategies were used in the retention literature: same-age comparison, same-grade comparison, and across-year comparison. Same-age comparison compares retained learners with their peers who are of the same age but promoted to higher grade levels.

Same-grade comparison uses performance of retained and promoted learners measured at the same grade as the basis of comparison. There are two variations of same-grade comparisons. In the first variation, outcomes of retained learners measured in a given year are compared with outcomes of the same age promoted peers measured a year earlier. Essentially, it involves comparing data from different years for the retained and promoted learners (Nagaoka, 2005). The second variation of same-grade comparison uses younger, non-retained learners as the comparison group. In other words, the comparison groups are in the same grade but are younger than the retained learners at the time the comparison is made (Hong & Yu, 2008).

2.5 CHARACTERISTICS OF RETAINED LEARNERS

The literature is fairly consistent regarding the characteristics of retained learners. In general, grade retention is associated with gender, race, age for grade, student mobility, family and parental characteristics, cognitive abilities, prior academic achievement, prior behavioural and socio emotional development, disabilities, and learner health (Nicpon, 2006). The researcher summarizes findings by five types of learner characteristics: demographics, family and parental characteristics, cognitive and academic functioning, socio-emotional and behavioural development, and

health. With respect to learner demographics, studies showed that retained learners were more likely to be male, minority and younger than their peers in the same grade. Specifically, boys were found to be much more likely to be retained than girls (Alexander, 2003). Most studies reported African-American learners as being at an increased risk for retention in comparison with their white peers, while some found that Hispanics were also more likely to repeat a grade than whites. Learners in the lowest-income quartile were over 40 per cent more likely to be retained than those in the highest quartile and among high school graduates; those in the lowest quartile were twice as likely to have been retained.

Retained learners also tended to have more school transfers (Brownell, 2007). The studies reported a significant association between grade retention and family characteristics. Retained learners were more likely to come from poor households and single-parent families. Parents of retained learners, on average, had lower IQ scores and lower levels of cognitive functioning, lower educational levels, lower occupational levels, lower parental value of education and less commitment to parenting responsibilities for their children's education (Hughes, 2006), lower expectations of their children's educational attainment (Raudenbush, 2005), and less involvement in school than parents of promoted learners.

In comparison with their promoted peers, retained learners were found to fare poorly on cognitive and academic measures, including early academic standing scores or cognitive test scores and academic achievement prior to retention (Willson & Hughes, 2006). Retained learners often received lower ratings on socio-emotional and behavioural indicators than their promoted peers prior to retention. On average, retained learners had lower social skills, poorer emotional adjustment, and more problem behaviours before retention. They tended to have a lower self-concept, to display lower confidence, and to be less self-assured and socially competent (Defrance, 2008). They were usually rated less favourably by teachers on classroom conduct, peer relations, and school adjustment as well as were often reported to exhibit higher levels of inattention, absenteeism, and behaviour problems (Alexander & Dauber, 2003). Despite the fact that only three studies analysed the health conditions of retained learners, they all identified disability status and poor health as factors associated with an increased risk of grade retention. These health conditions

included deafness, speech defects, low birth weight, enuresis, and depression (Cox, 2008).

2.6 ADVANTAGES OF GRADE RETENTION

Different models have been proposed by different researchers to describe the key factors that were found to influence student achievement, school completion, or withdrawal. Researchers have taken lead in developing a wide range of models that attempt to explain the key factors contributing to learner retention in education (Braxton, 2000). Woodley (2004) discussed the strengths and weaknesses of some important learner retention models such as Tinto's Model, Sweet's Model, and Kember's Model. These models are widely used by researchers to predict retention trends and identify interventions to improve retention. The most commonly cited model for explaining learner retention is the one given by Tinto (1975). According to Tinto's model, the process of withdrawal depends on how learners interact with the social and academic environment of the institution. Researchers, however, tend to avoid more traditional concepts of 'social integration' and instead place more emphasis on external environmental factors such as the learners' occupation and family. Indeed, unlike learners enrolled in traditional bricks-and-mortar educational institutions, learners studying in systems are typically learners who do not have parents and are living in disadvantaged communities. Factors such as lack of time, poor attendance and not getting adequate time management issues vis-à-vis course content loads, have all been viewed to be factors compelling learners to withdraw from school.

Other related factors leading to withdrawal are reported in the literature, such as 'lack of guidance and lack of support from school. Researchers like Braxton (2000) and Woodley and Ashby (2004) have invested much time and attention to identifying the key factors that influence learners to withdraw from schools. Less work has been done to examine and develop specific remedies to improve learner retention in specific programmes of study.

Based on the literature, the common problems of distance learners can be summarized as lack of personal contact and immediate instructor feedback that some learners prefer, sense of isolation, requirement of pre-school orientation to help manage courses, requirement of the tutor support counselling sessions during course of study, Improved information and formative advices (Ashby, 2004). To sum this up, Ashby indicates that providing proactive and more robust learner support goes a long way to improve retention in schools. Some recent developments in the field of system indicate that e-Learning supported more-or-less addresses the common problems listed above; it does so by promoting learner retention and successful completion of coursework (Knight, 2007). By using bulletin boards, or chat rooms, learners can communicate with fellow learners and teachers. Teachers can provide feedback and advice through homework. Some schools are using e-Learning for the formative and summative assessments (Byrnes & Ellis, 2006). As mentioned earlier, infrastructure to support complete e-Learning programmes are not yet very prevalent in South Africa. Ellis (2006) indicates that frequent school-initiated contact with learners helps to improve contact; an intervention which this scholar found to have yielded positive retention effects. There are also studies that indicate that contact or intervention from the school is known to improve retention appreciably. According to Simpson's (2004), finding for intervention is a cost-effective activity when viewed in terms of the retention. Simpson also mentions several possible points to implement interventions as will be seen subsequently in this study.

2.7 CURRICULUM AND PROGRAM OPTIONS RELATED TO RETENTION

Franco & Patel (2011) explored the problem that school policies regarding learner failure of courses at the lower grades that generally focused on grade retention or social promotion did not address the learners' needs. The question asked was, what schools can do to help high-school learners pass their class and not drop out.

Franco and Patel (2011) also analyse a pilot credit recovery program for high-school learners. The authors' program was implemented in a large suburban high school in the Midwest. The learners were the freshmen who failed at least once in school and

were tracked until 2012. The interim results of the pilot program showed that learners recovered all of the credits which they attempted. Franco and Patel (2011) recognized the need for a different approach to retention or social promotion. A distinctive way of thinking has appeared among the followers of the old tradition of retention and social promotion. This group advocates a new outlook of possible alternatives to retention and promotion. For example, Potochnick and Stearns (2007) supported early intervention and programs for possible retention candidates. The issue addressed was the limitations and variety of research in early intervention programs. The problem was that dependent and independent variables were scrutinized, and previous studies using meta-analysis in intervention programs were systematically reviewed to make sure that they were justified.

2.8 RETENTION AND SOCIAL PROMOTION POLICY EFFECTIVENES

Several school districts are implementing or considering policies that tie certain proficiency requirements on standardized tests in order for a learner to be promoted to the next grade. Allensworth (2005), Perkins (2013) looked at policy proponents and practices of the Chicago Public Schools' end to social promotion policy. All studies had different research methods. Roderick, (2005) tracked eighth-grade learners over a 4-year period of time and concluded that policies did not benefit grade promotion standards due to higher dropout rate for retained learners as opposed to promoted learners. Nagaoka, (2005) analysed the progression of low-performing learners over 2 year and found that learners who were retained continued to struggle during their retained year. Engel and Stone (2007) asked if retained learners have the time to remediate poor skills. As a result, learners who had high levels of instructional support during the retained year relatively achieved more academic success. In Anagnostopoulos (2006) qualitative study on ending social promotion, he revealed that merit promotion policy based on passing test scores could result in problems for promoted and retained learners. Teachers could morally decide on the passing of learners and give more opportunity for learners to learn if they deemed those learners more worthy. Another trend is that school districts are not following district-wide retention policies. Bali et al. (2005) investigated school districts in Texas by conducting a mixed-method research project and found out that

not only were the achievement scores lower among the retained learners, but the demographic area played a key role in the retention rate.

Additionally, Stone (2007) focused on the influences of high school dropout to explore the association between grade retention and dropout status. Whereas most studies examining the effectiveness of grade retention report on short-term outcomes during elementary school and middle school, few studies focus on outcomes during high school (Jimerson, 2001). However, studies focusing on high school dropout which include grade retention in associative or predictive models, offer further information regarding the long-term connection between grade retention and high school dropout. Past literature implicates high school dropout as a potential deleterious long term correlate of grade retention (Jimerson, 2001); however, a systematic review of the association has not been presented. This investigation addresses a gap in the literature. In a systematic search of the literature that was conducted to identify studies of dropout that included grade retention as a potential predictor, descriptors such as dropout, dropping out, school withdrawal, academic failure, grade retention, grade repetition, non-promotion, grade failure, flunked, failed, retained, and other suggested synonyms were used to search reference databases (Jimerson, 2001). In addition, several studies reported that grade retention was found to be the strongest predictor of later dropout status. Braxton (2000) identified grade retention as the most powerful predictor of future dropout followed by excessive absences, and then frequent school changes.

In the second study, Lloyd (2001) examined characteristics of third-grade learners who later became high school dropouts and concluded that the dropouts were more likely to have been retained in grades one through three than high school. Overall, Lloyd (2001: 199) concluded that retention in grades one through three was a strong indicator of later drop out. Horsey, (2006) provided a report on who drops out of high school that discusses many important contemporaneous and early predictors. The results indicated that early grade retention increased the risk of dropping out by 30% to 50%. In the examination of indicators of progression through school, the authors suggest that grade retention has a more nearly independent status than performance as a determinant of failure to complete school (Horsey, 2006: 47).

On the other hand, the results of Anderson's (2005) study on the high school students demonstrated a clear relationship between high school dropout and early grade failure. High school dropout was reliably predicted in the seventh-grade using a combination of factors including retention, aggressiveness, low school achievement, Socio-Economic Status (SES), affiliation with peers who dropped out, and early parenthood. Overall, retention was among the strongest predictors of high school dropout. In view of this, it was found that retention emerged as a powerful predictor across all groups. Moreover, results of multivariate analyses demonstrated that subjects that were retained were more likely to drop out, independent of all other significant variables, which included mathematics achievement, grades, and nuclear family responsibilities. Since the participant's grades and test performance were statistically controlled, the authors suggest this pattern as strong evidence that learners who have been grade delayed tend to drop out because of the age disjuncture between themselves and their peers and the consequent lack of fit between the participant's peer group and classmates (Fleish, 2008: 37).

Retrospective designs contain flaws as well, including limited access to a range of socio-emotional and family data. Each of these caveats limits the generalization of the findings of the studies. However, given the various limitations, what is most striking is the confluence of the separate findings of each study. Although the studies span differing decades, locales, ethnicities, researchers, and designs, the results consistently indicate that grade retention is highly associated with later high school dropout. The results of this study addressing the association between grade retention and dropout status clearly demonstrate that early grade retention is one of the most powerful predictors of later school withdrawal. As Jimmerson (2002) professes, the short-term benefits of grade retention may dissipate and culminate in later school withdrawal (Jimerson, 2002).

In a nutshell, it is reasonable to assert that the likelihood of dropout is considerably greater for learners who have been retained more than once (Byrnes, 2008). Whipple (2006) reports that learners who are retained in one grade are 40% to 50% more likely to drop out than promoted learners and learners who are retained in two grades are 90% more likely to drop out. Upon reflecting on the short-term and long-term outcomes associated with grade retention, Dauber (2002b: 21) concluded it

could be said, that “we’ve won the battle but lost the war”. As a unique contribution to the current literature, this review should be used to guide future examinations of the connection between retention and later high school dropout. In addition, this review could be used immediately to inform the general public, educational professionals, and policymakers about the association between grade retention and dropping out.

2.9. PERSPECTIVES OF EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS

Research suggests that although teachers play a key role in the retention decision-making process, they are often unaware of the outcomes of retention (Smith, 1993). Teachers’ perspectives regarding the efficacy of grade retention are generally limited, as they are usually only aware of learner’s outcomes in the immediate years following retention decisions (Tanner & Combs, 1993). Teachers often have limited knowledge of learners’ progress beyond the elementary grades and thus do not know of the long-term trajectories after retention. Haberman and Dill (1993) are of the opinion that many teachers view retention as successfully improving academic performance and that it also results in more homogeneous grouping of learners within grade. Meanwhile, Tanner & Combs (1993) contrarily believe that teachers do not believe that retention is a motivating incentive for student achievement.

Furthermore, teachers appear divided about the effect of retention on learners’ self-concept and whether retention for the purpose of an extra year for growth and maturity is justified. In a survey of views on grade repetition, teachers and principals described common characteristics of retained children as under motivated and developmentally immature, while at the same time agreeing that emotional immaturity is an appropriate rationale for retention. Tanner & Combs (1993) emphasized that research findings must be effectively, efficiently and clearly communicated to teachers, educational policy makers, and prospective educators in order to inform decision making. Similarly, Tomchin and Impara (1992) believe that it is essential for schools to implement staff development in which teachers examine their own beliefs about retention as well as are presented with research evidence about the short-term and long term effects of retention or being trained in school wide classroom intervention strategies.

In addition to teachers, other educational professionals involved in the decision-making process, such as administrators, counsellors, and school psychologists, also should be acquainted with the research on grade retention emerging during the past decade. In particular, research during the past decade suggests that the popular belief that it is better to retain a child in kindergarten or first grade rather than upper grade is unfounded (Smith, 1999), and elementary grade retention may result in temporary achievement gains, but often these effects taper off and the learners eventually fall behind or show no gains relative to their socially promoted peers (Jimerson, 2003). Smith, (2000) summed up that the literature on kindergarten and first-grade retention in Kindergarten or first grade does not produce long-lasting academic gains, but rather increases the likelihood that the learner could become a high school dropout. The researcher includes learner's age, level, class, parents' educational level, family size and learners' achievement scores on reading, mathematics, and language assessments. As a result, 6 or 7 of every 10 later school failures were classified correctly by analysing the characteristics shown in the third grade. The problem explored by Brownell and Roos (2007) was also the high rate of high school withdrawals. The researcher determines if grade retention is harmful for learners and the participants were learners from a population-based repository in Manitoba.

The above investigation had three key controlling factors: socio-economic status, school changes and key school characteristics including stability of the student body. As a result of the study, retention was found to be a strong predictor of high school dropout rates. Given that learners' persistence constitutes an expansive body of knowledge and has been thoroughly reviewed by top scholars in the field of education (Reason, 2009), the review presented only the foundational concepts and most recent empirical studies pertinent to the study at hand. Also, although there is a large body of conceptual and empirical research on learners, this review focused on lower grades learners.

2.10. CONCLUSION

The literature underpinning the effects of grade retention on learners' academic and socio emotional outcomes was discussed. Firstly, an overview of the chapter was given, followed by the theoretical framing of the study that had to focus on grade retention and its effects. Key to this chapter as seen from the review is the fact that converging evidence suggests that grade retention alone is not an effective intervention strategy for improving academic and long-term life outcomes. In general, retention does not appear to benefit learners academically. Although some studies have found academic improvement in the immediate years after retention, these gains are usually short-lived and tend to fade over time.

Past research has consistently shown that retained learners are at significantly increased risk of dropping out of school. Overall, the literature indicates mixed findings on attitudinal, socio-emotional, and behavioural outcomes among the retained learners. Learner retention seems to converge around the findings that dropout rates at primary school level are significantly lower than reported in the media.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research design and methodology used to conduct the study. It explains the logic behind using the selected methods and techniques for the study. As noted in the previous chapters, learner retention should be in multi levels and underpinned by a theoretical orientation that upholds the relationship between the two main components of learning environment, namely, content knowledge of the subject and knowledge of the pedagogy of retaining learners. The study is concerned with strategies of retaining learners in school.

The chapter begins with the research paradigm where it outlines the beliefs of the paradigm. Furthermore, the chapter focuses on the research methodology, which is qualitative in nature. It outlines the various stages involved in the design and the implementation of the methodological plan that the researcher devised. The qualitative method is used in order to understand the views of the teachers and learners, the socio-cultural and educational contexts within which they study as well as why learners dropout or are retained in schools. The method was considered to be the most appropriate means of realising the aims of this research because it gives a greater degree of insights into the dropout and or retention of learners in schools.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Research paradigm is a set of fundamental assumption and beliefs as to how the world is perceived which then serves as a thinking framework that guides the behaviour of a researcher (Joker & Pennink, 2010). The adoption of the qualitative methods in this study is to allow the use of intepretivism. According to Bailey and Hennik (2011), intepretivists believe that reality is constructed by social actors and people's perceptions of it. Interpretivism is appropriate for this study as the researcher recognizes that individuals with their own varied backgrounds,

assumptions and experiences contribute to the on-going construction of reality existing in their broader social interaction (Hennik, 2011).

The appropriate paradigm used in this study is the interpretive paradigm. A paradigm provides a conceptual framework for making sense of the social world, and for guiding the approach taken. This study focuses on learners' retention practices to facilitate learning. Working with this paradigm opens up the opportunity to find out how the participants understand and implement the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) based on their teaching practice rather than theoretical knowledge. Within the research process, the beliefs a researcher holds is reflected in the way the research is designed, data collected and analysed, and how the research results are presented. The significance of a research paradigm is that it guides the researcher's actions (Cohen, et al., 2000).

3.2.1 INTERPRETIVE PARADIGM

All research, whether quantitative or qualitative, is based on some underlying assumptions about what constitutes 'valid' research and which research methods are appropriate. This underlying assumption also referred to as a paradigm is the researcher's epistemology. In other words, it is the assumptions that the researcher has about knowledge and how it can be obtained (Myers, 2009). According to Mertens (2005) a paradigm influences the way knowledge is studied and interpreted. It is the choice of paradigm that sets down the intent, motivation and expectations for the research. Without nominating a paradigm as the first step, there is no basis for subsequent choices regarding methodology, methods, literature or research design. The researcher thus had to approach the study with a certain paradigm or world view in mind (Creswell, 2009). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define a research paradigm as a basic set of beliefs that guide action. It can thus be regarded as the fundamental model or frame of reference used by researchers to recognize their observations and reasoning (Babbie et al., 2005).

The central concern of the interpretative paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. Cohen et al. (2000) argue that the interpretative paradigms strive to understand and interpret the world. According to Bassey (1995:12), the interpretive tradition is defined as a search for deep perspectives on particular events for theoretical insights. It may offer possibilities but not certainties as to the outcome of future events. The interpretivists believe in the descriptions of human actions as based on social meanings that people have (Cohen, et al., 2000). This study, therefore, gave grade seven teachers the opportunity to construct their understanding on how they retain learners and why they used such practices. The researcher was then able to place real-life events and phenomena into some kind of perspective. Terre Blanche (2006: 274) maintains that the interpretive paradigm relates to taking people's subjective experiences seriously as the essence of what is real for them. It also makes sense of people's experience by interacting with them and listening to how they construct their social worlds. This study therefore did not focus on isolating and controlling variables but on extending the expression to help understand the social world in which learners live (Brown & Dawling, 2004). This is in view with Ernest (1994: .24) who contends that the interpretive research paradigm "is primarily concerned with human understanding, interpretation, inter-subjectivity, lived truth (i.e. truth in human terms)". Thus, the interpreter would want to get closer to the phenomenon he/she is studying in order to understand the human experiences.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative approach is appropriate for this study as it is more suited to provide the researcher with the responses to the research questions. This is because the researcher attempted to gain an in-depth understanding of a situation under which teachers and learners experience in teaching practices on retention. According to Holiday (2002), qualitative studies set up research opportunities designed to lead the researcher into areas of discovery within the lives of people he/she is investigating. Patton (1980 as cited in Carson, et al. 2001) also asserts that using the qualitative approach helps the researcher to gather data which provides a detailed description of events, situation and interaction between people and things and providing depth and details.

Martens (2005: 229), describes qualitative research as a “set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible”. Carson et al. (2001) further maintain that the qualitative approach is concerned with things that really happen in organizations as researchers and people experience them.

Sarantakos (2000) posits that in a qualitative research, data collection involves dynamic process of gathering, thinking, evaluating, analysing, modifying, expending, gathering and thinking again. This is in addition to the fact that data collection in qualitative research is geared towards natural situations, everyday-life worlds, interaction and interpretation (Cresswell, 2009). Hence, the researcher organized this element of investigation to meet these methodological requirements. Beyond this notion, the researcher was engaged in the research situation or problem and was more tolerant, flexible, permissive and understanding. This ultimately shows that the nature of qualitative research dictated that this researcher employs techniques that were closer to the research situation so that the everyday-life situation is reflected fully and clearly in the findings (Cohen et al., 2000).

According to Maykut and Moorhouse (2000), to understand the world under investigation, people’s words and actions are used by qualitative researchers. In this study, the researcher attempted to capture the social settings of teachers by what they said and did. This is a kind of situation where teachers and learners interpret the world around them and gave the researcher an opportunity to understand the situation as it was constructed by the participants in the study. In acknowledging this view, Holiday (2002) maintains that qualitative research methods look deeply into behaviour within special social settings rather than at broad populations. Using the qualitative method further invoked the need to discover more about the information the teachers and learners provided.

According to Babbie and Mouton (2002), the emphasis of qualitative research is for the researcher to attempt to study human actions from the perspective of the social actors themselves. The implications are that the researcher needs to position him/herself to describe and understand rather than explaining human behaviour. Aaker, et al. (2001) maintained that certain research prospects in qualitative research cannot be observed and measured. It is for this reason that Babbie and

Mouton (2002) insist on the researcher knowing the actors perspective (the insider). These sentiments are echoed by Aaker et al. (2001) who suggest that the qualitative researcher should develop a longer, more flexible relationship with the participant so that the resulting data have more depth and richness of content. This also means a greater potential for new insights and representatives. Thus the researcher spent two months in the schools for data collection. Babbie and Mouton (2002) also see the primary aim of qualitative research as in depth description and understanding of actions and events. Chabanga (2004) argues that qualitative research means any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of qualification. The researcher chose to work within the qualitative approach with the aim of understanding the views of teachers and learners as they tell their own stories and interpretations pertaining to learner retention.

3.3.1 ADVANTAGES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

According to Kiewiets (2005: 27), the interview method has advantages and is always selected for the following reasons:

- It reduces interview bias and leads to easier analysis.
- It is context dependent and free from the influence of the interviewer so that a more objective view of the social world of the participant emerges.
- It is done individually.

A questionnaire is basically a list of questions that a researcher compiles to assemble information (Mqulwana, 2010:52). Questionnaires were designed to gather information on reasons for massive dropout of learners from schools and how this can be stopped in order to encourage those who dropped out to re-enrol. With regard to the design of the questionnaire, the researcher used both open ended and closed questions. The response to open-ended questions can be used to find reasons for opinions or attitudes of a specific participant. Questions were fully and well structured. According to Kiewiets (2005:24), a self-administered questionnaire has advantages, which include:

- As all questionnaires are identical, it provides a homogeneous stimulus to the potential participant and eliminates the possibility of the impersonal effect encountered in both the telephone survey and postal survey.
- In a relatively short time, data may be obtained from a large number of people.

Secondly, the qualitative research instruments are said to be more in-depth and contain comprehensive information. The study made use a case study design to investigate the in depth knowledge and understanding on learner retention instructional practices in grade seven classrooms. It used strategies and observations to describe the context or natural setting of the variables under consideration as well as the interaction of the different variables in the context. The researcher collected data through the use of interviews in which the teachers and learners had the opportunity to talk about both dropout and the causes of learner dropout.

3.3.2 DISADVANTAGES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

One of the major disadvantages of qualitative research is that the subjectivity of the inquiry leads to difficulties in establishing the reliability and validity of the approach and information. Such situations were avoided in this research, as the researcher avoided situations where leading suggestions were asked or where the participants were judged. In order to ensure credibility, the researcher remained non-judgemental throughout the process and reported what was found in a balanced way. This paradigm has also been criticised for being contemplated at early or exploratory stages of a study (Silverman, 2000). To minimise such situations, the researcher used document analysis as a means of trying to estimate the extent of the problem in learner retention practices of grade seven classrooms. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001), the qualitative methods do not follow any strict rules. This means that researchers are cautioned not to allow mindless inventive process. Qualitative research should be done artfully, but it also demands a great amount of methodological knowledge and intellectual competence.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Cohen et al. (2010) define research design according to its utility, in describing procedures for conducting a study, the purpose being to assist to find appropriate answers to the research questions. The research design used in this study is the case study design. The choice of this design is guided by the idiographic character of the research that focuses on understanding individual behaviours. The choice is also influenced by the notion that a case study can characteristically be qualitative and best studied as a separate type of qualitative research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to Creswell (2003) research design in a qualitative context is the entire process of research from conceptualizing a problem to writing the narrative. Mouton (2001) also posits that a research design is the blueprint, a detailed plan, a map of the various elements of research and how they relate to each other. This study views the research design as the framework that details how the researcher intends conducting the investigation (Chabalala, 2005). The design is the blue print in terms of which the study is conducted (De Vos., 1998). It is from this perspective that Saunders et al (2003:125) believe that the research design chosen must suit the nature of the research being undertaken.

A research design outlines how the research is conducted from beginning to end (Mouton, 2001: 55). Since the purpose of this study is to understand the strategies and policies put in place to retain learners in school, the researcher was interested in gaining an in-depth understanding of the procedure in retention of grade seven learners through policy implication in two East London schools. Thus, a case study design allowed the researcher to explore this understanding. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) describe research design as a complete strategy to tackle a central problem by providing the overall structure that the researcher follows, the data he/she collects and the data analysis that follows. In view of the above, the researcher chose a case study research design for this study as its qualitative methods provided sufficient flexibility for describing, interpreting, exploring and explaining the process as well as the products of learner retention.

3.5 A CASE STUDY DESIGN

Bell (2001: 8) states that a case study gives an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in depth within a limited time scale. The greatest advantage of the case study, according to Bell is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific situation and tries to identify the various interactive processes at work. It also involves the collection and recording of data about a case: learner retention, and preparation of a report or a presentation of the case (Stenhouse, 2000: 49). Eisner and Peshkin (2004: 29) assert that a case study puts emphasis on practice, participation, reflection and interpretation. This study selected two grade seven classrooms from the two primary schools in the same circuit as case studies. The participants involved eight grade 7 learners who were facing the challenge and at a high risk of dropping out of school. These learners were from two primary schools; one farm school and one township school in the East London District, located in communities that have high dropout rates. Six grade 7 educators, and four SGB members that represented the parents formed part of the study.

The grade 7 classes were chosen because it was the exit class where learners were headed for higher learning. In cases where the learners were retained, they decided to dropout since they do not want to repeat a class. It is useful to stress that the grade 7 learners were between the ages of fourteen to sixteen that is a teenage stage easily influenced by peer pressure. It is also worthy to note that those learners from the farm school were over aged. They were expected to continue without meeting the requirements for promotion. Hence the probing in this study is what strategies can be used to retain learners with the avoidance of learner dropout. The purpose of the exploration was to establish what strategies educators should use in order to avoid learner dropout in the two schools. Secondly, it was meant to establish whether they had greater problems in retaining learners and also to compare the township and farm schools. The township school had good infrastructures with lots of resources and a large number of learners while the farm school had no structures, no resources and its grade 7 classrooms were taught under a tree outside. The researcher chose three senior teachers from both schools because they had experiences in learner retention.

A case study was more appropriate for the investigation because it is used to examine institutional retention and student persistence. Creswell (2007) defines this method as the study of a problem based upon the responses of participants who share common characteristics. While Leedy and Ormrod (2005) note that a case study can be used to understand the situational context of a set of practices in an exploratory fashion. The case study methods allows for the understanding of a situation in which the qualities are unique to the specific case, and allows the researcher to focus on specific problems within this setting while maintaining the ability to view the case as a whole (Thomas, 2011). The case study method, according to Leedy (2005) also allows the researcher to compile various types of data such as documents, interviews, and observations in order to illustrate and understand the bounded case. For this study the culture of the institution is not the primary focus, though it needs to be understood in order to describe the setting.

Yin (2003: 140) distinguishes between a single-case strategy and a multi-cases strategy by noting that whereas in a single-case strategy, a unique phenomenon is studied in a multi case strategy more than one case is studied. The multi cases approach allows the researcher to establish whether the finding of one case concurs with other cases (Yin, 2003: 140). For this reason, the multi-case type case-study design was preferred in this study. Another advantage of the case study design was that the researcher spent substantial time on the site and had personal contact with the activities and operations of the case, thus reflected and revised the interpretation of what took place on site (Denzin & Lincoln, 1997).

Aaker (2000) defines a case study as a comprehensive analysis of a single situation. Similarly, Babbie and Mouton (2002) describe a case study as an intensive investigation of a single unit. This emphasizes that an individual unit is a defining characteristic of a case study. A case in this study is an investigation into the possible teaching and learning strategies to retain grade 7 learners in two schools in the East London district. Gilham (2000) asserts that a case study investigates an individual to answer specific research questions and seeks a range of different kinds of evidences. Allan and Skinner (2004) also maintain that in a case study, the emphasis is on investigating contemporary phenomena in their real life context. To achieve this investigation, suitable resources and instruments are needed to carry

out the research. In this regard, the researcher used focus group, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The mere aim was to obtain factual information on retention strategies and its policy implication.

3.5.1 Advantages of using a case study design

Hua and David (2008) highlight a number of advantages and disadvantages for using the case study design which are as follows:

- A key strength is that it allows multiple sources and techniques in the data-gathering process.
- Data can be both qualitative and quantitative and can come from primary research as well as from secondary sources such as government publication, novels, etc.
- Tools for collecting data can include surveys, tests (my emphasis), instruments, interviews, and observation.
- It is able to provide rich and in-depth data on the behaviour of an individual or small group (David, 2008).

3.5.2 Disadvantages in the case study design

According to Hua & David (2008), there are a number of disadvantages in the use of a case study design:

- It provides little basis for “scientific” generalization, as it represents a ‘sample’.
- In a case study, the researcher’s goal is to expand and generalize theories and not to enumerate frequencies. Case studies ‘rely on analytical generalization where the researcher strives to generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory.
- And finally can also be ‘susceptibility to bias, as the researcher works quite closely with participants and might have difficulties in remaining detached.

Often, researchers are advised against single-case studies because the findings of such studies might not be applicable to other situations.

3.5.3 How to overcome shortcomings of the case study

A key strength of the case study method involves using multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process. These methods helped to determine in advance what evidence to gather and what analysis techniques to use with the data to answer the research questions. Another disadvantage of a case study is its findings are based on generalization. Any possibility of a generalizability of the findings can be avoided by using more variations in participants and procedures, and that might withstand and still yield the same findings which might be valid to support external similar cases. The researcher also escaped bias by providing transcripts of all the conducted interviews as this would temper the issues of reliability and validity of the data gathered and findings.

3.6 SAMPLING AND SAMPLE SIZE

In a qualitative case study such as this one, the research process of sampling was deemed important for data collection, interpretation and presentation of findings (Flick, 2009). Etymologically, the process of sampling is derived from the noun sample, which denotes a specimen, a selection of a small representative part of what is being studied (Maree, 2010). Regarding sampling, the emphasis is on the detail and quality of individuals or small group's experiences (Van Wyk, 2006). According to Mothata et al. (2004) a sample consists of individuals selected for the purpose of research from a large group of persons called the population. Adding to the explanations, Maree (2010) argues the sampling decisions as made for the explicit purpose of obtaining the richest possible source of information to answer the research questions. In this study the decision was to explore learner retention and the policy implication thereof. Hence, teachers and learners were selected from two public schools of the Eastern Cape Educational District as implementers of Circular 13 since the year 2002.

The researcher made use of purposive sampling to identify the research sites and the targeted population. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method (Saunders, 2003). For this type of sampling, the researcher relied on experience, ingenuity to deliberately obtain units of analysis in such a manner that the sample obtained was regarded as representative of the relevant case study (Welman, et al., 2007). According to Maree (2007), purposive sampling allows a researcher to select participants because of the defining characteristics that makes them holders of the data needed for the study. The study was conducted in the East London education District as earlier mentioned, where the researcher is working as an educator. Six teachers from two schools, in one circuit, were selected. The more the number of participants involved in the study, the better opportunities of the researcher for extensive probing of every single participant to express his or her detailed experiences on the topic. The responses explored were based on the results of the participants' answers from the case study. The teachers that were sampled, reflected different levels of employment in the schools such as the duration of their employment, their status of employment (permanent or temporal) and their qualifications in teaching grade seven as these contributed towards the implementation of their teaching and learning instructional practices as well as the retention strategies used in their different classrooms. Details of this will be discussed in the proceeding chapter.

The choice of the institutions was based on high dropout level in the area and their proximity to the researcher's work place as seen as a positive in terms of convenience. In addition, these schools are in the same circuit and the researcher established good professional relationships with the schools prior to the study. The researcher was introduced to the participants a few weeks before the commencement of the study. This gave the researcher the opportunity to explain the study to the participants, answer questions from them to allay their concerns and to obtain the participants' consent. A sample case was drawn from the sampling frame. A sampling frame included the actual list of individuals included in the study (Nesbary, 2000).

According to Patten (2004), the quality of the sample affected the quality of the research generalizations. Nesbary (2000) upholds that the larger the size, the

greater the probability that the sample would reflect the general case study. However, sample size alone does not constitute the ability to generalize. Patten (2004) states that obtaining an unbiased sample is the main criterion when evaluating the adequacy of a sample. He also identifies an unbiased sample as one in which every member of a school has an equal opportunity of being selected in the sample. Therefore, random sampling was used in this study to help ensure an unbiased sample. Because random sampling may introduce sampling errors, efforts were made to reduce sampling errors, and thus increasing precision, by increasing the sample size and by using stratified random sampling. Adding to the explanations, Maree (2010) argues the sampling decisions are made for the explicit purpose of obtaining the richest possible source of information to answer the research questions. Information was collected primarily from the program dropouts, although additional information was collected from the program director, this was not indicated under sampling, and the department secretaries.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES AND PROCESSING

The data in this study was collected through the review of school documents, and interviews. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) assert that the technique of field observation is fundamental in qualitative research. Owing to the research problem, the researcher found it essential to evaluate the codes of conduct for learners of the sampled schools, class and subject registers. Basically, 10 codes of conduct for learners served two important functions: to establish a disciplined school environment that is conducive to effective teaching and learning as well as to inform learners about ways in which they are supposed to conduct themselves (Squelch, 2010). As a data collection technique, interview is defined by Cormack (2004) as a process that occurs between two or more people who communicate, converse and negotiate for a specific aim linked to some agreed subject matter. The sole objective is to ascertain what other people feel and think about their worlds (Cormack, 2004). Demographic data was collected as the first step in the data collection process. Learner records were reviewed to obtain age, gender, and ethnic background, cumulative and current occupation. These data were entered into a spread sheet for later analysis. The data was also coded to classify each learner as a program

dropout. Attempts were made to contact some of the learners who dropped out of the program to solicit their willingness to participate in the survey. Davies (2008) argues that the researcher cannot investigate something without having contact with, or completely isolated from it. The instrument used as secondary sources in this research is policy documents such as retention policy books.

3.8 INTERVIEWS

According to Bernard (2005), interviews are a site of knowledge production that can be fashioned within a more or less distinctive interpretation frame. Interviews can best be seen as the spinal cord of any qualitative research and evaluation. According to Mertler (2006: 94), interviews are conversations between the researcher and participants in the study, in which the researcher asks questions from and of the participants. The interviews are not ordinary everyday conversations, but are constructed; they have a specific purpose; they are question-based, and the responses must be as detailed as possible (Cohen, et al., 2007: 349). Stringer (2004: 65) further argues that the interviewees must feel comfortable and safe to reveal their experience to a colleague or stranger and the interviewer must establish that trust before the actual interview takes place. In this study, the interviewer had a normal everyday conversation with the interviewees just as an ice-breaker. In the introduction, the researcher's main aim was to make the interviewees feel comfortable and relaxed so that trust could be established. This is because when there is trust, the interviewees would feel comfortable enough to discuss their feelings, perspectives and experiences in detail.

Interviews are methods of gathering information through oral quiz using a set of pre-planned core questions. According to Shneiderman and Plaisant (2005), interviews can be very productive since the interviewer would be able to pursue specific issues of concern that may lead to focussed and constructive suggestions. The main advantages of the interview method of data collection are:

- Direct contact with the users often leads to specific, constructive suggestions;
- They are good at obtaining detailed information;

- Few participants are needed to gather rich and detailed data (Genise, 2002; Shneiderman and Plaisant, 2005).

In line with the above, Abongdia (2013) opines that in interviews, the researcher is mainly a listener who lets the interviewees talk freely, while at the same time tolerating silence when the participants are thinking. The face-to-face interviews were very important as it helped the interviewer to probe the interviewees to express their attitudes as clearly as possible. The interviews ranged between 20 to 60 minutes depending on the different issues that arose, which might have required further investigation. At the end of the individual interviews, some of the learners (in the focus group discussions) were engaged in general discussions of retention used in East London place by the government in primary schools. This helped the researcher to gain more insights into their attitudes, and the underlying ideologies which helped to shape these attitudes. The researcher paid particular attention when there was a clear conflict between what was said and the participant's facial expression or body language, and gently tried to probe further in such cases. Depending on the need and design, interviews can be unstructured, structured, and semi-structured with individuals, or may be focus-group discussions.

3.8.1 UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The unstructured type of interviews allows the interviewer to pose some open-ended questions and the interviewee to express his/her own opinion freely. This requires both the interviewer and the interviewee to be at ease because it is like a discussion or brainstorming on the given topic. The direction of the interview is determined by both the interviewee and interviewer, not predetermined. According to Preece et al. (2002), it is difficult to standardise the interview across different interviewees, since each interview takes on its own format. However, it is possible to generate rich data, information and ideas in such conversations because the level of questioning can be varied to suit the context and that the interviewer can question the interviewee more deeply on specific issues as they arise; but it can be very time consuming and difficult to analyse.

3.8.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

According to Fontana and Fray (2003), semi- structured interviews provide a greater wealth of information. In such interviews the interviewer suggests the general time of the discussion and also poses further questions spontaneously in the development of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Welman and Kruger (2001) view semi-structured interviews as a much more flexible version of the structured interview. Unstructured interviews give room to the researcher to further probe and expand the participant's responses. This goes in accordance with Patton's (2002) view, who defines semi structured interviews as a flexible process that allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand interviewee's responses. It also involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of participants to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, programme or situation (Boyce & Neal, 2006).

Therefore, the semi-structured interview was relevant in this study because it allowed the researcher to probe with a view of clearing up vague responses or asking for incomplete answers to be elaborated on (Patton, 2002). This method of interview has features of both structured and unstructured interviews and therefore the researcher used open-ended questions (Govender, 2009) to give the participants an opportunity to elaborate or provide more relevant information if they opted to do so. This was advantageous to the researcher as it enabled him/her to be consistent with all participants. The researcher used a set of pre-planned questions for guidance in such that the same areas were covered with all the participants. The researcher interviewed two six grade 7 teachers, eight grade7 learners and four SGB parents. For educators, a one on one semi-structured interviews were conducted. The researcher met with the educators on four occasions for 30-40 minutes per session and 15-25 minutes on SGB. Whereas for learners the researcher used both focus group and one- on- one semi-structured interviews through the same research questions. On the part of the learners, the researcher met with each learner twice for 20 minutes each session.

3.8.3 Advantages of the semi-structured interviews

The greatest advantage of the semi-structured interview is 'its flexibility (Creswell, 2009). With semi-structured interviews, the researcher has a set of questions on an interview schedule but the interviews are guided by the schedule rather than being imagined. In this case, the ordering of questions is less important and the interviewer is free to probe any interesting areas that arise. This method of interview has features of both structured and unstructured interviews and therefore used both closed and open-ended questions. As a result, it has the advantage of both methods of interview. In order to be consistent with all participants, the interviewer has a set of pre-planned core questions for guidance such that the same areas are covered with each interviewee. As the interview progresses, the interviewee is given opportunity to elaborate or provide more relevant information if he/she opts to do so.

3.8.4 Disadvantages of the semi-structured interviews

Language can affect understanding between the researcher and the participants. This is especially true if the interviewer and the interviewee do not share a common vocabulary and meaning. There is a possibility that some elements of the interviews may not properly be understood by the participants or the responses not properly comprehended by the researcher. To avoid this, the researcher as well as the participant used gestures and code switching.

The researcher was aware that the participants may not always be willing to share all that was required to be explored and thus tried to make the atmosphere conducive by narrating some of her teaching experiences and the significance of sharing with other people.

3.8.5 Focus-group interviews

Richardson and Rabiee (2001) see focus-group as a technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected because they are purposive, although not necessarily representative of a specific sample. Participants

in this type of research are selected based on the criteria that they would have something to say on the topic and are within the age-range with similar socio-characteristics, comfortable talk to the interviewer and to each other. Preece (2001) sees focus group interview as less structured compared to the three categories of interview. This is because of the difficulty of bringing structure to a group, especially of youngsters. In such groups, people develop and express ideas they would not have thought about on their own. A representative sample was drawn from the subjects who were interviewed by the researcher by asking simple questions and further, moderating the responses from the group (Maughan, 2003).

Focus group milieu has the possibility of providing information about a range of ideas and feelings that individuals have about certain issues, as well as illuminating the differences in perspective between groups of individuals (Bernett, 2001). Focus group interview is less structured compared to other categories of interview because of the difficulty in bringing structure in a group; however, rich data can emerge through interaction within the group, for example, sensitive issues that could have been missed in individual interviews, may be revealed (Bernett, 2001). This type of interview can be conducted after a series of individual interviews, to further explore the general nature of the comments from different individuals (Shneiderman & Plaisant, 2005).

This study conducted a focus-group interview with the same learners the researcher used for semi-structured one-on-one interviews in order to triangulate data from eight grade 7 learners from two primary schools. They were also advised that they needed to respond only to the questions that they felt comfortable responding to. Learners were further advised that the session would be recorded, but that their names would not be recorded, and their anonymity was to be diligently maintained. For the purposes of the discussion, learners were asked to choose a name not their own, to be used during the discussion, so that their real names do not enter the record. Learners were always asked to respect the confidentiality of the other learners participating in the group interview, and not to repeat outside of the group comments made by other participants.

Two focus groups were undertaken between four learners in each school, with a total of eight learners involved. The first group consisted of four learners from the township school while the second group had four learners from the farm school. Learners were given verbal information about the study, prior to being asked for their consent to participate in the study. Again, before the interviews started, learners were asked whether the interview could be audio taped and were assured that the information would be used only for the purpose of the study. With learners' permission, focus group interviews were audio taped. The researcher allowed learners to talk without too many interruptions and facilitated the process by listening and probing as appropriate. Creswell (2002) states that probing as a research technique may be used to obtain information, clarify a point, or expand on ideas.

Focus group discussions took place in an informal environment during break time, so that learners should be relax and free to use a language of their choice. These interviews were later transcribed and later translated. The researcher met with the two groups of learners on five occasions and the interviews lasted for 20-30 minutes to get an in- depth information.

3.8.5.1 The advantages of using focus group

Focus group is important in the research process in that it is a socially-oriented research method that can capture real-life data in a social environment. It also allows for flexibility, have high face validity and produce speedy results. In addition, the group dynamics of a focus group often bring forth aspects of the topic that may not have been anticipated by the researcher. The focus group session interview process and interview questions was enhanced and strengthened by conducting a pilot session with representatives of the participant groups. Those in the pilot were not eligible for inclusion in the study. Also Bennett (2001) highlights that focus group interviews are quick and relatively easy to set up. Hence, the group dynamic can provide useful information that individual data collection does not provide and is useful in gaining insight into a topic that may be more difficult to gather through other data collection methods.

3.8.5.2 The disadvantages of focus groups

The disadvantage of focus group sessions is that it can be difficult to manage the participants in the focus group session. One risk associated with focus groups is the concern that one or more vocal group members might dominate the discussion and exclude the input of more quiet and timid participants. This type of situation could cause the data to inaccurately represent the group as a whole and not just a handful of participants (Goodwin & Happell, 2009). This type of situation might also create a “group think” where thinking focuses on only one perspective (Marrelli, 2008). However, dominant members can also make their fellow group members participate more freely because they have been open in their discussions and expression of their opinions (Goodwin, 2009). Focus groups can be difficult to schedule and organize because of the physical requirement of a group of individuals to be in the same place at the same time (Marrelli, 2008).

3.9 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Document analysis refers to the documents, whether public or private records, about the participants in a research study (Creswell, 2009). The documents were reviewed as a means of gaining additional insight into the participant’s experiences. The researcher can in his/her setting requests the official documents that are formal and structured, such documents might include minutes and agendas of meetings, statistical reports, annual reports, summary registers and process reports (De Vos & Soen 2007: 321). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2005: 413), the purpose of comparison is to eliminate researcher bias, as the researcher compares the observations, response from interviews to what is contained in the documents.

According to Brown and Dawling (2004), documents are an outcome of everyday activities. They therefore provide a researcher with the sort of data that could be used in answering the research questions. Some examples used in this study included records (portfolios), files, and class schedules. The purpose of document analysis was to provide additional information as well as to verify other data. For this study, teachers’ portfolios were analysed in an attempt to verify information from

interviews. The usage of documentary analysis was negotiated by the researcher through the school principals. The documents included the policy documents based on implementation, retention policy document and assessment, minute books for the promotion and retention meetings.

Cohen, (2007) define documents as artefacts, symbolic materials such as writing and signs, which tell the researchers about the inner meaning of everyday events and they may yield descriptions of rare and extraordinary events in human life. Creswell (2005) argues that document analysis takes place when information already exists to obtain comprehensive and historical information, or when the researcher needs to gain an impression of how a programme operates without interrupting the programme. The researcher used the policy documents that are based on how, what and when must the learners be retained specifically in grade 7 class. The researcher also asked the teachers file in order to see if they used these policies even when assessing the learners. These documentary data were particularly good sources for qualitative case studies because they grounded an investigation in the context of the problem being investigated (Merriam, 2001). There were evidences that were sought from the document analysis whether learning outcomes have been covered, term progress reports and homework time-tables.

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and gathering the interview transcripts, field notes and other materials that the researcher accumulates during data collection in order to increase his or her understanding of the phenomenon and ultimately to be able to present what have been discovered to others (Bogdan & Biklen, 2008). Hence, the culminating activities of qualitative inquiry are analysis, interpretation and representation of the findings (Patton, 2010). Data analysis is a process of bringing order, structure and interpretation to the mass of collected data which results in the production of patterns, themes, constructs and inferences. In this study, the researcher used content analysis approach to analyse the data collected through interviews and document analysis.

As earlier mentioned in chapter two, content analysis (CA) is a process of collecting and organizing data that have been discussed through interviews, field notes and various types of unobtrusive data that are often not amenable to analysis until the information conveyed has been condensed and made systematically comparable (Glesne & Peshkin's, 2005). In qualitative research, content analysis is essential as it outlines some general concerns such as behavioral responses to communication, psychological or emotional state of persons or groups and debates that are presented. According to Abongdia (2013), these are written documents, transcriptions of recorded verbal communication, photographs and video-tapes which are amenable to CA with the aim of answering the research questions as to which aspects of the participant's responses hint at the connection among stories. The reflectiveness of CA makes it easier to identify recurrent themes and patterns in the data (Van Dijk, 2001).

The data analysis consisted of field notes, transcripts of interviews and in depth analysis of documents. The analysis procedure involved the reading and re-reading of the field notes and interview transcripts (Maykut & Morehouse, 2004). In the process of analysis, the conflict with raw data was tested to check the validity of data that was used to conclude the study. This approach was used to improve the quality of data. When analysing the data for this study, the researcher concluded the study through the raw data she got from the learners, parents and educators with the help of the literature she read.

3.11 NEGOTIATING ENTRY INTO THE RESEARCH SITE

The researcher used the education district office and the principal at each of the schools as gatekeeper (Saunders et al., 2003). This was to ensure that access to the site and the research participants was secured and that the provisions in the department research policy were adhered to (DoE, 2007). To achieve this, letters were written to the Education District Office (Annexure 1) and the principals asking permission to carry out the research and soliciting their cooperation. In addition, each of the teachers signed a consent form indicating their willingness to participate

in the study. It was only after their permission was sought that the field work began. The gatekeepers were essential because they introduced the researcher to the target participants. The gatekeepers helped to remove prospective obstacles that would have otherwise inhibited the investigation. To make provision for data collection, letters were delivered to each school (Annexure 1) involved in the study and the leaflets with information about the study handed to teachers at the two schools. This was accompanied by response slips which requested teachers to participate in the study. The researcher physically contacted the other school and personally explained the purpose, procedures and processes to be followed when conducting the study.

3.12 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

The credibility criterion ensures that the results are believable from the perspective of the participants in the study (Trochim, 2006). The main point to consider is how congruent; how believable are the findings based on the data obtained and the conclusions drawn. Merriam (2002) states that in qualitative research, the findings of the study are interpreted through words, expressions or numbers gathered from the participants. She suggests that the meaning of the interpretation needs to be grounded on the participants' experiences and shared perceptions. Lincoln (2005) offers specific methods and strategies in which to accomplish credibility in qualitative research. These strategies include a member checks, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement in the field and/or with the participants, persistent observation, and the implementation of an audit trail (Lincoln 2005).

In qualitative research, issues of trustworthiness suggest that the research is credible when those familiar with the topic of the study recognize the findings to be true. It was deemed necessary to address trustworthiness. Trustworthiness of the findings was addressed in line with Guba's model of trustworthiness as presented by De Vos and Seon (2008):

(a) Truth value: This asks whether the researcher has established confidence in the truth of the findings for the participants and the context of the study. In this study, truth value was achieved by using triangulation in data collection.

(b) Applicability: This refers to the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and setting or with other groups. Applicability was achieved when through the limitations presented at the end of this chapter.

(c) Consistency: This refers to whether the findings would be consistent if the enquiry can be replicated with the same participants or in a similar context. In this research, consistency was achieved as same inquiry were replicated, using the same methodology with the same research design.

(d) Neutrality: It is the freedom from bias in the research procedures and results. The strategy accomplished is explained in the following section.

3.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

For the purpose of ethics, the researcher committed herself to stay open by informing the participants of the purpose and nature of this study. The researcher made sure that participation was voluntary and also sought permission from all the participants to take part and respond in the interviews (Annexure2). The researcher obtained permission for the recording of the interviews from the participants who also had the right to withdraw at any given point in time, or to ask for the information already recorded to be erased. Furthermore, the participants were made to understand that the recordings and transcripts were only to be accessible to the researcher and his/her supervisor. The researcher assured all the participants that they were all going to remain anonymous when doing the presentation of the data (Abongdia, 2013). Ethical considerations are essential concerns in the process of knowledge production. Doing research today without consent being sought from all participants may result in the questioning of the validity of the results and knowledge claims that might emanate from it.

According to Abongdia (2013), the essential purpose of ethical research planning is to protect the welfare and the rights of research participants. In order to satisfy these ethical requirements, the purpose of the study was explained very carefully to the research population in order to obtain permission to use the data, whether oral or written. Details about the research project were provided to all participants. The research information and letters of informed consent is found in the Annexure 1 & 2. In addition, consent forms were provided to those learners who were interviewed. The researcher was aware that the nature of reality and the possible knowledge of reality, with the status of truth claims, all have implications for the judgments and responsibilities of ethnographers. Thus the lack of an agreement about the methodology in and about ethnography was reflected within its ethical considerations. The researcher was therefore aware that in all researches that involved human participants, ethnography raised significant ethical concerns (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007).

The researcher maintained the high ethical measures throughout the entire study. The total research ran its course in an ethically correct manner (De Vos & Seon, 2008).

Ethical measures adhered to encompass the following:

The researcher competences- Having previously completed courses in research methodology and qualitative data analysis, the researcher is competent and adequately skilled to successfully undertake the proposed investigation (De Vos & Meganck, 2007).

Relationship with participants- The researcher ensured that a sound relationship is established between the participants and him. Aim of the researcher will be explained to the participants in order to provide them with an opportunity to decide in advance whether to take part in the study or not. The researcher was positive, encouraging, sensitive and a good listener during the interview (Bowling, 2007).

Confidentiality- It implies that the dignity of participants should be respected. Measures to ensure anonymity of the participants were employed. As the participants knew that the research would be reported anonymously, they were more

likely to provide honest information even if it was of a sensitive nature (Schenetter, 2008).

Informed consent- the researcher used the language that was understandable to the research participants in order to obtain their appropriate informed consent (McBurney, 2008).

3.14 DIFFICULTIES FACED IN THE STUDY

It is important to indicate that this study was not conducted hitch free. At the farm school the principal was negative because she said that researchers usually disturb the smooth functioning of schools. To overcome this barrier, the researcher made it clear that the study will take place during break times and after hours.

Secondly, when the researcher asked for school policy books, it was problematic as the farm school was not in a good condition and lacked good storage facilities. It was noticed that the school files were in the card box due to lack of book shelves, no neat space and worst of it all the day to day classes of the multi-grade were functioning outside in the farm school.

In the township school, the researcher found it difficult to make an appointment since the principal thought that this would disturb the writing of their Annual National Assessment (ANA) but the researcher convinced her that she would use break times with the learners and after school hours with the teachers. It took her about four weeks to call the meeting where she decided to give the researcher authority. The break times were too short and took only 30 minutes in which time the learners needed to eat from the school feeding scheme. As a researcher I begged them and bought lunch for them telling them that he/she will use only 15 minutes of their time.

The researcher found and obtained peer-reviewed articles that were published over the past many years, approximately 1988-2013 written in other languages and reported studies involving university students. Although the issues of retention and social promotion are not new, an influx of articles was evident that discussed in No

Child Left Behind (NCLB). The high stakes tests that are directly related to this act have caused an alarming concern regarding proficiency levels of learners. At-risk schools are likely not to make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) that has been required through NCLB (National Association of School Psychologists, 2011). As with other research conducted on learner retention, attempt to generalize from the current findings should be done with caution. The learner case included in this study was limited. While many of the findings are consistent with the predominant theories of retention, and in many ways, replicate the finding in other studies, these finding should not be de-contextualized from the unique characteristics of the school. It is believed that this study provides an accurate depiction of learner attitudes regarding during their entire period of schooling. Most of the information collected and monitored in this study is based on statistical data that already exists in government schools. Finally, it is also important to note that given the size of the group, and given the relatively small size of the institution; patterns found to emerge in the study may vary considerably in the years to come.

3.15 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the methodology of the study. It discussed the qualitative research design and methods used in the study. The interpretive paradigm and case study was used in the study. The data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and direct documentary. The discussion also focused on the population and sampling procedures, negotiated entry into research sites, data collection and analysis, credibility and trustworthiness, as well as the ethical considerations. The next chapter would focus on the presentation and analysis of data.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the researcher collected data through the use of semi structured interviews, focus group discussions and the documentary analysis. As mentioned earlier, six grade seven teachers, eight grade seven learners and four SGB parents participated in the study. The researcher used pseudonyms for the schools, teacher, parents and the learners to ensure adherence to ethical issues such as confidentiality, privacy and anonymity. In this chapter, interview data is presented first to provide information about the research participants. The focus-group data is presented in thematic form to highlight the key issues that arose within the interviews or from material added by the learners when they read through their interview transcripts.

4.2 Synopsis of the schools

School A

School A was a farm school which was situated away from the community. Learners went to school by bus. The distance between the school and the community has a direct effect on learner dropout. Without school transport, learners had to walk long distances, except for those who with parents who could afford taxi fares. School A was a disadvantaged school with old structures, fading paint and still using the pit toilet. There are usually no school activities on rainy days because of the shortage of classrooms. The school is unsecured because there is no fencing and learners move around freely without control. It is assumed that farm schools are inhabited by a low-income group that are believed to be heterogeneous thus representing multiple problems such as poverty.

The social and cultural base of the small farm communities is inadequate to serve as a support for the proper school. When the farm school closes due to the low enrolments, the community members hardly show concern for the fate of the school or the fact that their children's education is suddenly interrupted. There was even no water, forcing learners to use rain water from tanks. The learners come from the rural village with a lot of shacks and shebeens and their language showed no respect for each other. This community had a lot of street kids, an indicator that there was a high dropout rate. The language of instruction was English. The whole school had six classrooms and utilised the multi-grade system. Grade 7 was not a multi grade because that was where the senior phase started. There were 45 learners in the class with four teachers. There was no space for keeping record files and so boxes are used to keep the documents. There was no furniture and learners fought for chairs.

School B

In contrast to school A, school B was a township school situated in a very busy location but with lots of hawkers at the gate and lots of drug dealers in the community. The school was fenced, had a secured gate and well-structured with sufficient classrooms and a high number of learners. The researcher used a checklist when observing the facilities and neighbourhood of the school. School B was housed in permanent buildings with varying populations of pupils and classrooms. Although the classrooms were mainly stonewalled, they have open windows and the rooms were often cold in the mornings because the buildings were very old. The school did not have a playground for the learners because the yard was very confined. The language of learning and teaching is English. IsiXhosa is a dominant language in the area where the school is located. However, there are people from other ethnic groups who speak other languages. The school caters for learners from low socio economic backgrounds. The community comprises largely lower income earners like domestic workers, factory workers and hawkers.

However, there is a gradual influx into the area of relatively higher income earners including some professionals. In the classroom where the observation took place, the learners sat in twos with their desks directed towards the teacher's table located

at the front of the class. On the walls, there were a few displays of posters and charts. In school B, there were three grade 7 classes with 55 learners in each totalling 115. Learners walked to school because there were no school transports. In view of this, learners always arrived very late in school. School B has a lot of resources compared to school A, and had a safe place to keep materials. The school had cardboards in their classrooms.

4.3 Demographic Characteristics of the participants

The following table intends to present school A (farm school) teachers who participated in the study and are coded as participant (P1, P2, P3) 1to 3 for (school A) for the purpose of anonymity as mentioned in the preceding chapter. The researcher focused on grade 7 teachers and their learners as the source to reveal what teachers in East London primary schools do to assist learner retention. The age of the participants is also shown. There are four tables, two for school A and two for school B. Table A1 and A2 reflect the grade, gender and age group range of the research participants. And table B1 (farm school) and table B2 (township school) presents qualifications, number of working experience and even their class enrolment.

School A

Gender, grade and age

The following table (table A1) intends to present school A (farm school) where the participants were arranged by their gender, age and the grade that they teach.

school	Participant	Grade	gender	Age
A	P1	7	male	35
A	P2	7	male	40
A	P3	7	female	40

Table A1

The table above is from school A where the participants are arranged by their gender, age and the grade they teach. Teachers who participated in the study are coded as participant (P1, P2, P3) 1 to 3 (school A). Apart from the in-service courses that they were offered by the Department Of Education, they did not have formal training or qualification. All three participants were teaching grade 7 in the farm school.

School B

The following table (table B) intends to present school B (township school) where the participants are arranged in their gender, age and the grade they teach.

school	Participant	Grade	gender	age
B	P4	7	male	35
B	P5	7	male	44
B	P6	7	female	50

Table A2

The table above indicates that the data was collected from the two primary schools that have been coded as school A and B. Three grade seven teachers per school participated and the total number of participants in the table was three per school. There were two male and one female teacher.

4.3.1 Distribution of participants according to qualifications

The following table intends to present school A (farm school). This table shows the teacher qualifications, years of working experience and also the number of learners per class.

School A

School	Participant	Qualifications	Years of experience	Class enrolment
A	P1	Senior primary teachers diploma	7	50
A	P2	Diploma in Education + Hon. Ed (Senior phase)	15	55
A	P3	Diploma in education (senior phase)	20	55

Table B1

The table below indicates that three grade seven teachers per school participated and the total number of participants in the table was three per school. There were two males and one female teacher.

Table B2 is for school B also indicates the qualifications of the participants, working experience and number of learners per class. With regard to their educational qualifications, all the participants possessed formal qualifications ranging from Senior Primary Teachers Diploma (SPTD) to Honours in Education.

School	Participant	Qualifications	Working experience	enrolment
B	P4	Diploma in education (senior phase)	20	55
B	P5	Junior primary teachers diploma	10	65
B	P6	Diploma in education +Bed. Senior phase	17	60

Table B2

The table reveal that four of the participants, namely P1 and P2 from School A and P4 and P5 from School B were reportedly post level one teacher and the other one, P3 and P6 were the Head of Departments and all permanent teachers. With regard to teaching experience, Table 4.2 reflects that the participants varied. For instance, P1, P4, and P5 had teaching experience of between 7 and 12 years, P2 and P3 teaching experience was between 15-20 years and P6 had a teaching experience of 21 years.

4.3.1.1 Learner participants

Profile of the learners

The table below refers to learner participants of school A which was a farm school. The participants are represented as A1-A4, their ages, number of years in this phase and the grade where the data was collected. These learners were identified as risk learners.

School A:

School	Participant's name	Gender	Age	Year in phase	grade
A	A1	Male	16	3	7
A	A2	Female	14	2	7
A	A3	Male	15	2	7
A	A4	Female	13	1	7

Table C1

The table below presents school B (township school) where the participants are labelled as B5 to B8, their ages, number of years in phase and the grade of learners where the data is collected. Even these learners are identified as at risk learners.

School	Participant's name	Age	Gender	Year in phase	grade
B	B5	15	Male	2	7
B	B6	14	Female	3	7
B	B7	16	Male	2	7
B	B8	17	Male	4	7

Table C2

The two tables above representing the school profiles for both A (farm school) and school B (township school) are labelled as C1 and C2. Capital letter A stands for school A and capital letter B stands for school B. Number one up to number eight are the numbers of learners in grade 7 that participated in this study. And also the year phase means number of years in a phase. The learners' ages ranged from 13 up to 17. As stated in the education policy, the expected age for grade 7 is 14 years. A4 learner is 13 years old which means that she started school early. The criterion for selecting the participants was based on full time learners. Two focus groups were undertaken with four learners in each totalling the 8 learners. The first group consisted of four learners from the farm school and the second group consisted of four learners from the township school. Learners were given verbal and written information about the study, prior to seeking their consent to participate in the study.

All focus group interviews took place within the schools at a time that was agreed by the learners. Again, before the interviews started, learners were asked whether the interview could be audio taped and were assured that the information would be used only for the purpose of the study. With learners' permission, all focus group interviews were audio taped. The researcher allowed learners to talk without too many interruptions and facilitated the process by listening and probing as appropriate. Creswell (2002) states that probing may be used to obtain information, clarify a point, or expand on ideas. Focus group interviews lasted between 40 and 55 minutes against the 15 minutes that the researcher promised the learners. Again, all focus group interviews were conducted in isiXhosa and were immediately fully transcribed by the researcher and later translated into English. The questions for the

focus groups were developed from Tinto's theory and were similar to those used for individual interviews, with withdrawn learners in addition to further questions about their current experiences and what influenced them to continue their studies.

4.3.1.2 Parents as participants

Profile of the parents

The parents also formed part of the participants in the study. The table below presents schools as school A and school B, gender, age, highest qualifications and race of the parent participants. Parent participants are labelled as PA1 and PA2 (school A) and PB3 and PB4 (school B). Parents for both schools are represented in one table that is table D. all the parent participants are members of the school governing body (SGB).

Table D

participant	school	Gender	Age	Highest standard	Race
PA1	A	Male	48	10	Black
PA2	A	Female	53	6	Black
PB3	B	Male	55	8	Black
PB4	B	Female	50	6	Black

The profile of the parents was narrated in one table for both schools as mentioned. There were four participants two from school A and two from school B. The capital letter PA stands for school A and PB stand for school B. Meaning that PA1 and PA2 were participants from school A and PB3 and PB4 were participants from school B. All the parents who participated ranged between the ages of 48 to 55. All the parent participants were educated but not to the tertiary level. According DoE (2011) a School Governing Body is a structure that governs the schools. It stands in a position of trust towards the school.

4.3.1.3 Document analysis

Additionally, school documents relating to grade retention such as student reports, written exams, list of learners, school data and student's marked exams were requested and analysed to triangulate data sources. Analyses of these documents followed the report and analyses of the interviews. Document analysis refers to the documents, whether public or private records, about the participants in a research study (Creswell, 2002). The retrieved documents used in this study were the profiles of teachers, learners and parents participants. The documents were reviewed as a means of gaining additional insight into the participants' academic experiences prior to college as well as with regards to their perceptions of tutorial learning at the college level. Apart from the interviews, document analysis was one of the major sources of data collection for this study. From each of the two schools, parent information book, school annual reports and any documents considered relevant to the study were collected. School curriculum guidelines were used by the teacher as a basis for programming in school. Before the study was completed, two further curricular, the draft early years curriculum guidelines were introduced to school. Two other documents that the researcher considered relevant to this study was the state primary school teacher's hard book (DoE, 2010) and memo sent to all schools which were attached. This document was entitled repeating Grade: guidelines for Schools, (DoE, 2009).

As discussed in chapter two, the literature on school retention presented a significant finding for the study given the general dearth of available data on school retention in SA. As explained in chapter two, although the data drawn from Education Corporation Data Warehouse site was as much a finding of the study as this study data.

Parents

In addition, four parents (School Governing Body) were selected in order to obtain a better understanding of the social context of the learners. In the next section the four participants, as well as the focus group participants are briefly introduced. This

background information was obtained from the first set of questions of the semi-structured interviews. The initial phases were utilised to explain the purpose and procedures involved in the research processes, to complete the consent forms, to establish rapport and a relationship of trust between the researcher and the participants, and lastly to gain some background information. The information gathered helped to develop an understanding of the individual contexts. At the end of each interview, participants were asked to construct a collage of their ideal world where no barriers exist, with the aim to conclude the interviews in a positive manner.

The researcher conducted the interviews with four parents in this study, two from each school. And they responded to all the questions. The interviews took place between the individual parents interviewed by the researcher. It was noted that the parents were unaware of their children's retention problem and were informed by the researcher. The data collected showed that most parents were not committed to helping their children. During the individual meeting (interview) with the parents on the ways of retaining learners in school, some points of concern were raised. One parent was merely a guardian who did not have much knowledge about school work. Parents highlighted that it is not easy even to attend the school meetings because they work far and went from 6 AM and only get back at 7 PM. This is an indication that most of the parents did not have time for their children. Parents also mentioned that they prefer their children to remain in school. Some parents suggested that it would be easy if hostels were available.

In addition, parents commented on the ages of their children and blamed the government for the late start of primary which obliges the children to start at seven years. Due to this late start, children easily drop out because they consider their ages. One parent mentioned that other learners are having learning barriers so there is no time to assess the child in order to transfer to the suitable place.

4.4 Presentation and data analysis

The analysis of the data was completely qualitative. In analysing the data, the researcher focused on retaining learners in primary schools in the East London

district. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions as well as interviews with SGB parents as members of the community. One-on-one interviews and some interviews were used as a focus group interview with learners. This method of accumulating data resulted in a thick description, which proved the basis to an understanding of learner retention in primary schools. The literature study was discussed in Chapter two. The semi-structured interviews, the interview with the parent, and the focus group interview that took place on the school premises were transcribed and later translated by the researcher. Copies of the transcribed interviews were safely stored on the personal computer of the researcher. The notes made during the interviews were also stored in a safe in the researcher's office. The researcher carefully read through the notes several times to fully familiarise him/her with the data before starting the process of presentation and analysis. The researcher's analytic procedures used were to bring order, structure and meaning to the thick narrative data, to search for emerging themes, patterns, recurring general statements and regularities in the setting and the participants chosen for the study and to generate categories. The analysis of the data required disciplined examination while paying careful attention to the purpose of the research. The researcher carefully considered verbal and non-verbal data and applied data reduction strategies to the data.

Keeping in mind that the purpose of the study was to investigate ways of retaining learners in two public primary schools in East London education district, the following research questions guided the study:

- What strategies can be put in place to retain learners in school?
- What are the views of learners on grade retention?
- What are the implications of policy in retaining these learners?
- How is the curriculum program options for learners who are retained applied?
- What strategies are put in place to avoid promoting learners socially rather than educational?

In response to the research questions, themes that emerged from the data and for the purpose of saliency, two strands were quoted for each interview question precisely and italicised. The responses were grouped into segments through

interviews, focus group and document analysis. With the help of theoretical underpinning from the literature review the study made use of the following themes:

- The trend of Dropout
- Lack of Parental involvement and support
- Low learning outcome
- Learner attendance
- Influences
- Community outcome
- Challenges of dropout

Curriculum implementation of the above themes is based under qualitative analysis which is an inductive process that helps to understand and explore issues rather than test theoretical hypotheses. In this study the researcher made use of thematic content analysis as described by Seale (2004). This inductive process involved the comparison of the different units of data, after which common patterns or themes were identified. The first part of the process involved the coding and collation of the data. The next step involved sorting the different codes into potential themes within the different categories.

Thereafter, all the relevant coded data were collated within the identified themes. Care was taken to ensure that the main themes identified across all sources that captured the categories was comprehensive and needed to be reviewed and refined into a smaller number of dominant themes. Themes were then categorised into broader over-arching categories based on the research questions, the literature, the data and the theoretical frameworks. Throughout the process, the researcher was aware that the data within the themes should cohere together meaningfully, whilst there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes.

Therefore the researcher clustered the data into four segments as follows:

- Segment one, interviews from teachers.
- Segment two, focus groups from learners.
- Segment three, interviews from parents.
- Segment four, document analysis.

In the presentation of the data, the researcher used the interview data from teachers as segment one, focus group from the learners as segment two, parent interviews as segment three and document analysis as segment four. The themes that emerged from the data are presented below.

4.4.1The trend of Dropout

The first and the most important theme is the trend of dropping out from schools. It may lead to other themes like family economic situation, education level of parents and siblings and many more. When the learners are retained they usually dropout from the school.

4.4.1.1 Data segment 1 from interviews

The question that follows provoked responses on the trend of drop out from the teachers.

Q: How do you feel about learner's dropout?

The following extracts emerged from responses to the above questions from the teachers.

P3: I feel embarrassed as education is the investment for the future of the learners. Our country also needs highly educated citizen to curb the challenges faced by our country especially in this era of democracy.

P5: Very painful and embarrassing as the graph of the work drops and the future of the child is entirely doomed. The children are being prepared to be future leaders and respectable citizen to curb all challenges we are faced with. This is not good, it is very bad and we try to check the problem in such a way that most learners have challenges in their home.

4.4.1.2 Data segment 2 - focus group for learners

The following views emerged from responses to the above questions from the learners.

- A3: *Learner dropout is too much in our community there are many children who are not in school and they are between the ages of 14-18 years, whereas they supposed to be at school, by this statement I mean it is not a good to see learners staying at home during school hours.*
- B5: *It is their choice to stay home because they know that punishment was abolished, yes I feel depraved as I know that this is caused by the peer influence most of the time.*

4.4.1.3 Segment three, interviews from parents

The following views were obtained from parents based on the above question

- PA1: *There is no other way we can do yes we want our children to be educated but children of democracy do not want school they use to stay home complaining about many things.*
- PB3: *As much as I know that children head no one, after their decision. If they decided to leave the school they can, yes we feel bad that is why we always ask the department of education to come out with interesting things that can bring back children at school.*

4.4.1.4 Segment four, document analysis.

The following phrases were obtained from the policy document and were in line with the different responses based on the above theme.

Policy document mentioned some few types of dropouts that can be caused by learner retention. It distinguished dropouts as those learners who are leaving or have left school, tune-outs learners who are at school but disengaged from learning and force-outs - learners who are suspended or expelled from school because of their behaviour. Learners were ended staying home because these learners are misplaced in school.

The researcher agrees with the above comment because students walk to and from school yet do not participate in school activities. The researcher regards learners who do not participate in class activities as dropout because at the end of the year they do not have year marks, and this is also stated in the policy above.

4.4.2 Social promotion

The second theme arising from the data is social promotion. Primary schools were implementing or considering policies that tie certain proficiency requirements on standardized tests in order for a learner to be promoted or retained to the next grade. And also the researcher looked at policy proponents and practices of the public schools' end to social promotion policy.

4.4.2.1 Data segment 1 from interviews

The question below from the interviews with teachers elicited the theme of social promotion.

Q: What strategies are put in place to avoid promoting learners socially rather than educational?

The following are some responses from the interview based on social promotion;

P2: Learners should remain highly motivated, teachers must create positive learning environment. Teachers should help learners by focusing on (intervention) have developed goals and work towards them. The use of sports and other relevant activities to motivate the learners.

P6: Holistic development should be put into practice. Avoid all technological issues like televisions, cell phones, newspapers where there is gloom and doom instead application of programmes that create instils love for educators and education skill.

4.4.2.2 Data segment 2 - focus group for learners

The following views emerged from responses to the above question from the learners in their focus group discussions

B8: I believe that as learners we have different gifts and talents that means it is good to be promoted in what you are shining.

A4: The only thing I like at school is playing soccer sport and athletics, I can be very happy if the government can produce sport schools so that our talents exposed.

4.4.2.3 Data segment 3 from the parents

The following views were obtained from parents as responses to the question above and form part of the data.

PB4: We need brighter future to our children that is why we send them to school no matter what type of promotion as long they are not repeating the same grade.

PA2: Teachers in partnership with the government must consider the ages of the learners, coming out with other ways so that the learner must express their gifts.

4.4.2.4 Data segment 4 from the Document

The researcher noticed the following trend during the compilation of literature.

All the schools have some school policies including the policy documents that guide the teachers on how to retain learners social rather than educational. Whereas most schools did not open or use these policy document.

In all of the strands deduced from the above question, learners need to be motivated in order to illustrate their talents as much as the parents blame the department of education.

4.4.3 Policy implications

Another important theme arising from the data is policy implications. The following data strands on policy implications are quotes from the interviews, focus group discussions and documents that elicited the views of the teachers, learners, parents and even the policy documents on the alternatives to learner retention. Grade retention in elementary school is a negative academic outcome early in children's educational careers, and many efforts are made to avert this last-resort intervention. Yet retention occurs, and we find that learners can benefit from it, at least in the short term.

4.4.3.1 Data segment 1 from interviews

The following question from the interviews with teachers elicited the theme of policy implications.

Q: What are the implications of policy in retaining learners?

Below are the responses from the teachers from the one on one interview on the above theme.

P4: Department not allowing this practise. Age also does not allow this practise due to unforeseen reason and inevitable reasons, policies have to be applied.

P5: The department of education does not allow the practise but due to circumstances which are beyond the teacher's control this make teachers able to retain these learners. The reason being practicable reasonable.

4.4.3.2 Data segment 2 - focus group for learners

The following are excerpts from the responses of the learners from their focus group discussions pertaining to the theme above

B7: I think in terms of skills, values and knowledge I am steal lacking.

A2: I do not know I just find out when the results are released at the end of the year.

4.4.3.3 Data segment 3 from the parents:

The following views were obtained from parents as their responses to the question above on the proceeding theme.

PB3: Circular related programmes must be put in place even for us as parents to motivate our learners, the school must provide interesting programmes that instil love for education.

PA1: I believe that working together can help in the sense that when retention does occur, learners can make sizable gains in grade-level skills in the repeated year, even across subgroups with different risk factors,

4.4.3.4 Data segment 4 from the Document

The following phrases were obtained from the policy document about the policy implications which was consistent with the other tools.

Policy document state that some of the gains in proficiency and skills will benefit learners in the next grade level as well, although the longer-term outcomes are

uncertain. And found that entering school at an older age leads to a lower probability of retention. However, it recognize that those may be significant factors in retention decisions, albeit ones that can be subjective across teachers. Even include such variables as age and gender, which may be correlated with classroom behaviour.

All the strands state that the department of education supply the policy of retention but it needs some amendments. Grade retention is a negative outcome in learner's education careers. It can cause learner dropout. And retention might well be concerned that learners do not have similar access to this type of intervention across schools.

4.4.4 Learner attendance

Learner attendance was another emerging theme and showed the level of the learners and an indication of the learner's performance.

4.4.4.1 Data segment 1 from interviews

The following question from the interviews with teachers elicited the theme of learner attendance.

Q: What are the effects of learner attendance which can be resulted in learner retention?

P1: learners are threatened with retention if they do not meet academic standards or perform above specified percentiles on standardized tests. It is unclear if this threat is effective in motivating learners to work harder.

P4: At the end of the year learners want to be promoted even if they have poor attendance.

4.4.4.2 Data segment 2 - focus group learners

The following views from the learners elicited the theme of learner attendance based on the question above

A3: *Bad attendance may lead to the repetition of the class which is not right. To attend the school all the time make me to be bored. I do not think about repetition during the year round I only think about it at the end of the year.*

A4: *I am a bad attender because of my health situation I use to get sick for more than three weeks per- term staying in hospital meaning that I am not attend the school regularly. Generally most learners they stay for fun sometimes as a group influence or peer pressure.*

4.4.4.3 Data segment 3 from the parents

The following views from the parents elicited the theme of learner attendance as responses to the question above.

PA2: *Some learners see others staying home, walking up and down in the streets, not like to go to school they do the same with no reason.*

PB3: *It is clear that poor attendance can make the learner to repeat the class because on their absenteeism learners in school lot of work is done. And they cannot cash up.*

4.4.4.4 Data segment 4 from the Document

The following phrases from the policy document about the learner attendance seem to portray the usefulness of learner attendance.

The Policy on Learner Attendance of 2010 aims to promote punctual and regular school attendance and provides standardised procedures for recording and monitoring learner attendance. It also ensures that learners and their parents will be treated equitably across provinces. The Policy on Learner Attendance (2010:7)

stipulates that it is the responsibility of the parent to ensure that the learner attends school daily.

All strands agreed that there is poor attendance which can inevitably lead to the repeat of a class no matter what the reasons they come up with. This also indicates the fact that learners are bad attenders. But also, the strand of segment four sticks to policy procedures on how to handle learner dropout. All the strands reported that learner attendance in school is low. Given that poor attendance, particularly unauthorised absences indicate a trend in disengagement from school; learners' views on attendance can potentially give unique insights into ways to improve school attendance.

4.4.5 Parent involvement

This theme depicts parental involvement as a progression requiring intervention in terms of fundamental elements, representing the key stakeholders that play vital roles in promoting the educational outcomes of pupils. Although parental involvement is important for the quality of education in this study, the role of parents in education is limited to the long-established agenda such as attending parent-teacher meetings and receiving information from schools.

The following question from the interviews with participants elicited the theme of parental involvement.

4.4.5.1 Data segment 1 from interviews

The question below helped to provoke the role of parental involvement in the academic lives of their children

Q: Are parents and siblings encouraging learners for their studies?

The following extracts emerged from responses to the above question from the teachers.

P4: *We teachers are usually very positive and are not a hindrance to the parents coming to the school because we do understand this community we are living in. So, when they come they know they are supposed to come during break time, lunch time or in the evening so as not to interrupt classes and lose time for the pupils. So, they know when they can come for consultation.*

P4: *No, we actually want them to come, but external factors keep them away. But there are those parents who are not educated who to them, education is not important and they don't value it.*

4.4.5.2 Data segment 2 - focus group learners

The following extracts emerged from responses to the above questions from the learners.

A4: *The truth is no because I am an orphan and I stay with my grandparent my mother died with HIV related disease four years back and my granny usually want me to help her when she sell her fruit in the street and most of the time I became absent at school.*

B7: *Yes but not all the time because I notice that my father always ask me what grade I am doing this tell me that he is not serious about what I am doing because how can someone who stay with me did not know my standard.*

4.4.5.3 Data segment 3 from the parents

The following extracts emerged from responses to the above questions from the parents.

PA2: Yes I am concerned about my child's academic performance but I don't know how to help her because syllabuses have change meaning I don't understand.

PB4: I always said to my children read your books so that you can be a doctor one day but I don't have time to look at her book since I always tired when I get back from the work

4.4.5.4 Data segment 4 from the Document Analysis

The following phrases from the policy document talks on parental involvement in the lives of the learners.

Document analysis state that Parents needed to cooperate with teachers and help their children to improve the quality of education. They also needed to be educated regarding their roles and responsibilities as parents. The government should therefore have provided clear guidelines on the roles of the teachers and parents. This called for the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST to send out circulars regularly to inform schools, teachers, parents and the community what they should do. Use should be made of the mass media and local leaders to inform parents and the community what was expected of them. This would help to eliminate any misconceptions and all parties would act in an informed way (UNESCO, 2005: 211).

Teacher participants are always positive about parental involvement whereas learner participants raised their concern about parent's cooperation. They claimed that the lack of parents' support for their learning is another factor that inhibited learners learning outcomes for the parents are not playing their role in the educational life of their children.

4.4.6 Challenges of dropout

The above theme was selected because the researcher wished to show that there are challenges that can cause learners to dropout. Below are some evidences from the participants.

4.4.6.1 Data segment 1 from interviews

The following question from the interviews with participants elicited the challenges of drop out.

Q What are the challenges of learner drop out?

PA1: learners are easily influenced by peer pressure, even the poverty, unemployment of parents and poor family backgrounds, can play a significant role in the early dropout of learners at school.

PB4: In our communities there are so many taverns, which influence learners not to come to school, when they head that loud music at night which is a matter of serious concern. Thus, it seems that a wide range of social experiences contribute to learners dropping out of school.

4.4.7 Data segment 2 - focus group learners

The following extracts emerged from responses to the above questions from the learners in the focus groups discussions.

A3: There are many things that can cause drop out for example most of my friends are staying at the location they use to ask why school never end sometimes I feel not going to school and this makes me to think about living the school. Also I was about to leave the school when I head that I suppose to repeat grade seven.

B5: Uneducated parents, they lack knowledge in terms of education both my parents and siblings. And sometimes the owner of the farm where we are staying usually tell my parents that he is going to sell the farm so we must look for another place to stay. This makes me think that I cannot get the school in the other place I will stay home for the rest of my life.

4.4.7.1 Data segment 3 from the parents

The following extracts emerged from responses to the above questions from the parents.

PA2: Learners are walking long distances to come to school because scholar transport is not reliable for them and we are very poor, unemployed and we cannot afford to pay private transports. And consequently, female learners are targets of rape.

PB3: Learners are forced to look for employment at an early age because of the poor family background, poverty and irresponsible parents who are heavy drinkers.

4.4.7.2 Data segment 4 from the Document

The following view from the policy document is in line with drop out from the two schools.

Document analysis highlighted that grade retention does coincide with adolescent problem behaviour, lower socioeconomic backgrounds, having little school support from their families, performing poorly, having low self-esteem, and exhibiting history of absenteeism and having trouble in school.

Overall, the participants agreed with many different things that can cause learners to dropout, while the learners' focus group mentioned the grade retention as one of those challenges.

4.4.8 Community outcomes

4.4.8.1 Data segment 1 from interviews

The following question from the interviews with participants elicited the community outcomes.

Q. How do you feel when seeing other children at your age in your community dropping out of school?

The following extracts emerged from responses to the above questions from the teachers.

P3: They become irresponsible to their families and even to their entire community. They are always dependant to their parents.

P6: Mhhh community have big bad influence about learner dropout they also cited that children become irresponsible for their families and also to their communities. They also added that, they become beggars and drug users.

4.4.8.2 Data segment 2 - focus group learners

The following extracts emerged from responses to the above questions from the learners.

A2: I feel shame to them because they cannot do things by themselves and do anything for them. Most of the time they become drug users and always request money to buy.

B5: I feel very bad and I do not want to mix with them most of the time, because they are so jealous. And they use to criticism everything about the school.

4.4.8.3 Data segment 3 from the parents

The following extracts emerged from responses to the above questions from the parents.

PA1: I feel very bad because children do not want to go to school whereas they have free education.

PB4: There are those learners who are working in contractors in the road, I feel bad about their future because they work without education that means it's just temporal jobs after a while they will stay at home.

4.4.8.4 Data segment 4 from the Document

The following quotation is from the policy document obtained from the schools that formed part of the data for this study.

The document analysis just states the positive and encouragement on learner's progression. It motivate the learners to carry on mentioning that every learner has a right to learn

4.4.9 Parent related themes

The researcher also discovered from the parents' discussions and interviews that the same themes emerged as those from the teachers and learners. For example themes like parent involvement and policy implications. Some authors equate parental involvement with chaperoning field trips or volunteering for parents'-teachers'-associations (PTAs) or parents' committees. Others define it as attendance at an open house or signing homework.

4.4.9.1 Data segment 1 from interviews

The following question from the interviews with participants elicited the parent related theme.

Q. What do you think can be done in order to minimise the rate of learner dropout?

The following extracts emerged from responses to the above questions from the teachers.

P2: The government must come out with many different techniques of keeping children at school like activities that can attract learners like if the learner is not performing in the class there must be extra classes for those learners. Projects that can help those learners who are not good in the class. Something must be done that can attract the learners even when they are at home.

P5: Families must be involved in the school work and in the success of their children. And also families must let the children know the value of education and their importance to their future.

4.4.9.2 Data segment 2 - focus group learners

The following extracts emerged from responses to the above questions from the learners.

A1: It is good to check the age of the child before they might start the school. Government want children to start grade R at the age of six years that put the learners in a risk because once they fail they become alder in the class. Government must amend these policies. And also children must be motivated in school and at home.

B8: We must know that we have an important role to play in our children's education because most of the times we do not want to attend when we are called by the teachers for our children's performance.

4.4.9.3 Data segment 3 from the parents

The following extracts emerged from responses to the above questions from the parents.

PA2: I think working together teachers, parents and learners can be better.

PB4: Government must form hostels so that all children who are at the age of schooling must be kept in one secured place.

4.4.9.4 Document analysis

The following passage is from the school policy document.

School document stated that variety of alternatives to retention have been planned and has formulated an intervention plan to help learners succeed and avoid retention. It encompasses the following facets, which are intended to be implemented separately or together depending on the school's resources, time, and capability of encouraging parental involvement in education, encouraging the use of early education programs and preschool. This is to enable the learners to be ready, offering extended day, extended year and summer school programs for learners who are struggling and continuously monitoring student progress so that instruction can be modified and individualized (DoE, 2008).

They however emphasised their role in terms of their duties to their children and less importance was attached to their roles in assisting and supporting the school as an institution. Parents also noted and was confirmed by the entire dropout participants that family-related factors such as income was one of the major reasons for learners'

dropped out from school. Due to low incomes, their families could not afford to survive unless they left school and looked for a job.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter dealt with the presentation of the data collected for this study. It emerged from the empirical findings that primary school teachers, learners and parents are experiencing learner dropout due to learner retention and social problems affecting these learners. The researcher believes that both schools are trying their best to decrease the number of learner dropouts. However, the role played by the SMT and SGB is not sufficient or effective in rendering support to the learners. The schools need a structure called the Institutional Level Support Team (ILST) which could work together with the District-Based Support Team (DBST). This would make the support offered to schools more effective and would ensure that the needs of learners are addressed accordingly and to the best ability of the team. With a proper structure in place, more learners can be easily prevented from dropping out of school and they would be able to get support when needed. As learners spend a great deal of their time in the school environment, the educator has become an important role-player to assist learners in alleviating their social problems. It is essential that learners with social problems must at an early stage get professional help.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore and develop a greater understanding on retaining learners in primary schools during the post-compulsory phase of education in a specific school. This study is of importance because it strives to understand the retention phenomenon in order to devise strategies to overcome drop out from schools. It was believed that a more comprehensive understanding of the possible reasons for the occurrence of this phenomenon within a specific context can help those involved in the education process not only to understand it, but also to address the problem. The process was guided by the research questions. The study was a case study, as it explored the mentioned phenomenon in a particular case or bounded system through multiple sources of data collection. The following themes emerged from the data analysis as indicated in the previous chapter: The trend of Dropout, lack of parental involvement and support, low learning outcome, learner attendance, influences, community factors, Challenges of dropout, individual characteristics; family systems; peer group systems; the school system and the social context, environmental and community issues; educational system factors; local community factors and macro-system factors. The findings included in the categories and themes mentioned above are discussed in the following section. This is done by using the eco-systemic approach as framework. This model explains the direct and indirect influences that the various contexts can have on an individual's life (Swart & Pettipher, 2005) and also serve as a manageable way to organise the information.

The chapter outlines different measures that have been developed to directly address the issue of completion and early school leaving among disadvantaged and reluctant learners. Given the range of physical, structural and dispositional barriers associated with early leaving, there is no single approach that might work with all groups. For this reason, some of the initiatives can take an integrated approach providing support and guidance while also addressing welfare and personal needs.

Others may attempt to focus on individual groups or involve strategies targeting specific needs. The initiatives are broadly of two types. First, there are programs that tend to operate as prevention strategies, aimed at keeping persons already enrolled in school to remain by targeting the problems that often lead individuals to drop out. In targeting those at risk of dropping out, many of these programs address such issues as histories of failure, low self-esteem, lack of support and the lack of relevance of their study. The second group of programs tend to operate as recovery strategies, attempting to encourage individuals who dropped out of study to return to school or to further their education.

5.2 Objectivity and subjectivity

With the purpose of the study in mind, the researcher establishes the need to take note on objectivity and subjectivity. The research design for this study is a descriptive and interpretive case study that is analysed through the qualitative method (Preece, 2001). This researcher also believes that reality consist of people's subjective experiences that may adopt an inter-subjective epistemology and the ontological belief that reality is socially constructed. The researcher based the work on certain philosophical perspectives; it may be based on paradigm. However, the study has also footprints of the other perspective post positivism and supports different views (Seal, 2004). In the context of this study, individuals construct their own knowledge within the social-cultural context influenced by their prior knowledge and understanding. Researcher positions her/himself as the parameters of a constructivist epistemological discourse. The Interpretive approaches provide a greater scope to address issues of influence to ask questions such as why and how to produce an understanding of the context and the process whereby learning information influences and is influenced by the context (Stanford, 2008). The learning environment has to be created in such a manner that there is intimate relationship between the researcher and what is being studied, and learners can describe and express their unique individual experiences in the learning process.

5.3 Narration as a way of experiencing their experiences

This section presents the findings that were conducted with six teachers, eight learners and four parents in the district of East London. Participant's responses to the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions are presented under each question. The Survey responses are structured in the following form: segment one are responses from the teachers, followed by learners and then parents. After the responses from the participants there is analysis of policy documents. Additionally, school documents relating to grade retention such as student reports, written exams, list of learners, school data and student's marked exams were requested and analysed to triangulate data sources. Analyses of these documents follow the report and analyses of the interviews.

5.4 Retaining learners in primary schools

The study investigated possible strategies of retaining learners in school in terms of repeating the class with the intentions of decreasing learners' dropout. The study also focused on policy implications. The researcher assumed that there may be several reasons for the general silence in the literature and lack of available data on school retention practices in South Africa, as opposed to the prevalence of retention literature in South Africa. Not all countries in the world use grade retention as an educational practice, (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2008). Another reason may be that while grade retention might exist in South African schools, its practice may be less frequently questioned by South African educators. The findings of the study revealed however, that there may be further reasons which have not been considered at the outset of the study that might be accounted for the general dearth of literature on school retention in South Africa. The study is therefore important in that it can add the general knowledge of grade retention in South Africa and more significantly fill the knowledge gaps on school retention practices in some South African schools. This critical analysis could assist school districts and teachers in determining their retention and social promotion policies and practices (Education Queensland, 2007).

5.5 Education policy and implementation

The researcher asked the teacher participants about the policy implications on the two schools, the study revealed the information on the views in response to interview question where all the participants seem to agree that school policies and practices can help to decrease school dropouts. Discipline policies, grade retention policies, and the procedures affecting school transfers can all affect a student's decision to remain in school. Schools can rectify school dropout rates by addressing parenting practices, by encouraging parents to become involved in schools and offering parenting in-services. Schools also need to be more cognizant of ethnic and cultural differences if they want to improve. According to the DoE (2008) the Policy provision allows learners to repeat school grades for a maximum of four times in their school career. The Admission Policy for Public Ordinary Schools requires the norm of repetition at one per school phase, effectively allowing learners to complete a 12-year schooling career in 16 years. Also the researcher has done a comprehensive review on how grade retention can impact a student's academic, social, and emotional development. A majority of studies have evaluated the outcomes of grade retention separately. As Sheldon (2005) suggests, grade retention is not the best intervention for academic failure. Therefore, school personnel, including administrators, teachers, counsellors, and school psychologists, need to consider this information and make their decisions accordingly.

In addition, the participants raised questions about the impact of slow policy implementation, monitoring implementation, ineffective learner performance, monitoring initiatives and ineffective policies and their impact on learner performance and retention. The social promotion policy was specifically mentioned as being ineffective. A non-cohesive and stratified education system was also mentioned as a negative within the education system. One teacher participant queried the influence of changes to the Grade 7 syllabus (4.4.7.3). This participant thinks that such changes can lead learners who fail their exit grade following the old syllabus not being able to repeat the class. Another participant was specifically concerned that from his perspective, learner performance monitoring is too focused on exit grade results when there is an opportunity to effect changes that may assist learners.

Furthermore, the participant also queried the effectiveness or existence of interventions for learners in cases where performance has been evaluated at lower grades of the school system. In terms of retention policies, the researcher provided a number of suggestions for successful retention and further recommended both short and long-term retention programmes. These retention programmes focused on the determination of learner characteristics and needs. They also put inconsideration on academic and non-academic factors in the design of school programmes so that they are socially inclusive. The retention utilises early alert assessment and monitoring systems in schools based on test scores, attendance records, non-academic information derived from home and community surveys. The economic impact of retention programmes enable decision-making for interventions (transport, remediation, incentives to stay in school); coordinate mainstream retention in the planning of the school and not just add on to what teachers do, but with a designated coordinator in each school.

From the above discussions, we deduce that, grade retention in elementary school is a negative academic outcome early in children's educational careers, and many efforts are made to avert this last-resort intervention. Yet retention occurs, and this researcher finds that learners can benefit from it, at least in the short term. The probability of retention before the third grade is much higher for learners with certain risk factors, most notably poor academic performance and younger age. The probability of retention can differ across schools even when learners have similar characteristics, suggesting a difference in school-level policies and philosophies about retention (Bamford, 2006). When retention occurs, learners can make sizable gains in grade-level skills in the repeated year, even across subgroups with different risk factors though learners are not likely to achieve the same grade level scores as their non-retained peers. Researchers also find suggestive evidence that some of the gains in proficiency and skills can benefit learners in the next grade level as well, although the longer-term outcomes are uncertain. These findings have several implications for education policy. However, the underlying issue that retention addresses remains, for example that many learners struggle to master academic content and particularly those learners with multiple risk factors, regardless of their relative age in class, would benefit from additional attention and intervention (Elder & Lubotsky, 2009). If other options are not provided learners are threatened with

retention if they do not meet academic standards or perform above specified percentiles on standardized tests learners with sizable gains in skills, then retention may be an appropriate intervention. However, intervening early to prevent retention may be in the best interests of all. Also the researchers provide estimates of academic improvements that are reasonable to expect for at-risk learners and thus could be considered goals for interventions.

5.6 Factors influencing learner dropout

There are many factors which influence learners drop out from school and the researcher highlighted the influences of learner dropout as the theme with sub-themes, namely, school and societal or society. Language and literacy issues, barriers to learning, lack of learning support, professionals and learning support interventions; and teacher skill inadequacies for identifying and addressing learning problems and disabilities. Some of these have already been briefly highlighted in the previous chapter, particularly being the correlation between the socio-economic status of parents and educational attainment. This section of the report provides a synthesis of the factors influencing learner dropout that are emerging from the extensive literature review that was conducted as part of this investigation. In addition, the section highlights interventions that have been implemented by some countries to prevent dropping out from schools. Participants suggested that the academic difficulties (both intellectual and environmental) that a learner experiences may have a negative impact on their educational participation and completion. Learners' actual preparation for formal schooling was thought to negatively impact on their future scholastic endeavours. For most of the learners, it was their parents who influenced them the most. The parents' own experiences of having poor educational outcomes in the past meant that some families struggled to bring up their families and run a home. One learner participant described his families as disadvantaged in life because they were either unemployed, on a benefit, or in low paid employment (4.4.8.2: B5), and they did not want to end up in the same predicament.

Two participants credited the teacher's firm stance towards their behaviour as being a strong reason for her still being at school (4.4.3.1: P2). They knew that there were

difficulties to deal with like the problems of adjusting in a new school and area, but the teacher helped them to make the most at school. Social networks provide important opportunities for children's further learning that contributes to children's feelings of well-being. Peer groups, especially at junior primary school level, can profoundly influence learner's achievement. They can do so in positive or negative ways. Their influence can override parental expectations, and can also promote mediocre educational norms. When parents and children have access to local community institutions (e.g. libraries, medical facilities) and social agencies (e.g. to receive income entitlements), children's achievement can be enhanced beyond the level which schools alone can accomplish.

5.6.1 School factors influencing learner dropout

The researcher noted that both schools had dropout related factors like overcrowded classrooms, teacher-learner ratio and lack of learning materials (4.4.7.2: B7 & 4.4.8.3: PA2) as there was a question that needed the learners to voice their feeling about school. These factors were reflected in this study in varying degrees. Grant, (2006) asserts that young women who are focussed on their education are less likely to become pregnant whilst at school, and if they do become pregnant, they are less likely to drop out as a result of the pregnancy. The participants regarded teenage pregnancy as one of the reasons why learners dropped out of school. Furthermore, family circumstances were described as not conducive to learning and participants complained about experiencing concentration difficulties due to emotional issues (4.4.7.2: A4). Only two of the learner participants in this study responded positively when asked about their belief in the value of education. As six of the learner participants talked openly about their future aspirations, there is clearly a need to help them make the link and to realise the impact that education could have on their future.

The researcher portrayed in the study that learners who drop out of school are less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities; this may be an area that should receive attention. Additional complaints about school and its facilities were raised by learner participant. It became evident (Table B2) that additional support was needed

to manage the workload of the teachers at the school. Both schools were in need for an update that could provide a work space for learners and might increase learning ability especially as most of them found it difficult to complete their work at home. The township school did not have a sports field because of the space and the learner participants explained that they needed sports fields for their extra mural activities. The Ministerial Committee on learner retention in the South African schooling system also identified overcrowded classrooms, lack of adequate resources and aesthetics of the learning environment as factors that hampered educational activities (Progress report, 2007).

The study revealed that there were school factors as well as practices reinforcing and perpetuating marginalization of 'at risk learners'. The school factors and practices include extra levies charged by schools, teaching practices which precluded slow learners as well as those in difficult circumstances from fully benefitting from instruction emphasis on examinations; forced repetition; labelling; failure by teachers to understand how to handle learners with special needs in their classrooms; and unsafe school environments. The one on one interviews at the farm school indicated that schools continued to levy extra fees in the form of extra curricula activity fees, local examination fees, development fees, and extra tuition fees, among others. Both schools were identified as no fee schools but one of the parent participants mentioned that there were small amounts of fees paid by the parents for sport. This parent participant also said that it was a burden for children from poor families whose parents or guardians were unable to pay. This meant that learners from poor households were oftentimes told to stay away from school until such a time that the fees were paid. The participants revealed that some of these children ended up achieving low grades, repeating grades or dropping out of school altogether.

Another financial burden discussed by participants as a stressor to children from poor families is (4.4.8.1: PA1) the requirement for all school children to wear school uniforms. A child from a very poor family, was likely to have no proper school attire or have ill fitting, tattered clothing which exacerbated this child's low self- esteem, as well as likelihood of being singled out by other children in the school. In this regard, one learner participant mentioned that the children, who come from poor families as

far as the school attire was concerned, may become shy because they do not have good dresses especially uniforms (4.4.8.3: PB3). So, they feel shy and may drop out of school.

Based on the interviews, there was evidence to suggest that some teacher practices were precluding vulnerable children from gainfully benefiting from education. These practices included instruction which focused only on the average learners and therefore excluded the slow learners in classrooms, labelling, and teacher perceptions of learners that were negative, and forced repetition. In the surveys as well as interviews, participants indicated having a high teacher-pupil ratio in their schools, which made it difficult to attend to diverse learners needs. This means that the diverse challenging needs of learners with disabilities, slow learners, overage learners, orphans, and children from extremely poor families often went unattended. This finding was supported by Ackers et al. (2001) who observed that most grade repetition occurred between lower grades as well as between grade 6 and 7.

From the interviews, there was justifiable evidence that repetition caused frustration for learners who eventually would dropped from their schools. In the quest to post good school averages in the national examination, participants discussed a practice of recommending learners to repeat grades despite learners' wishes. Implied in these repetitions are that learners who did not perform well were retained. Another school factor that was identified as contributing to the marginalization of at risk learners was stereotyping. The language used by some participants reinforced the idea of stereotyping.

Learner participants in the interviews also discussed lack of adequate facilities such as toilets (4.2) and/or washrooms as a factor that made the school environments unsafe. In these discussions, they noted the lack of adequate facilities which was exacerbated by the poor quality of existing facilities. While this was discussed in interviews, it brought to the fore the need to ensure that all the schools need to have adequate amenities to serve all learners.

5.6.2 Societal factors influencing learner dropout

In this study poverty, cultural practices, and policy were grouped as the societal factors that teachers perceived as influencing the marginalization of learners. Poverty was identified by the two participants (teacher and parent), (4.4.8.1: PA1) as a factor that was manifested in child labour and lack of basic needs. In particular, participants noted that some learners in their classrooms came to school hungry due to their parents' inability to purchase food. For such learners learning and school participation was affected negatively.

Evidence from interviews also suggested that teachers ascribed to the notion that schools must save the children from their communities rather than work with the communities towards excellence and the schooling of the children. For instance, some teachers attributed the problem of poor academic performance in schools to alcoholism, community apathy towards benefits of learning, parental neglect, and lack of role models in villages and/or communities where the learners came from. In view of this, participants from the farm school stated that in their school the main problem that is actually causing dropouts is the lack of role models. Viewing that most parents were themselves dropouts, might not know the importance of education. Based on this, they might be unable to advise their children to go to school. So, even if they are called to school to be sensitized on the importance of education, these parents might not come because they do not see the need and therefore their children will not also see the need of going to school.

From the above argument, it can also be inferred that schools viewed the problem of learners drop out as purely a community problem and not a school problem. In other instances, community apathy towards the economic returns of basic education contributed to student dropout. For example, some participants in one question in the interviews from both schools stated that they have seen some learners drop out of school because of their home backgrounds. Participants stated that there must be an extra activity that can help the struggling learners. Time must be managed in order to accommodate those learners. Retention programs that focus on improving academic

performance are based on learner retention. In this study, it provides an answer to the question of common challenges for development that cannot be separated from the challenges presented by social issues and barriers to learning. A culmination of individual and societal challenges may result in learners not coping and consequently dropping out of school.

5.6.3 Dropout factor

The first and most important finding is that the primary reason why learners leave school is their family's economic situation. This reason was identified by all participants and was more critical than other socio-cultural influences. The problem explored by Brownell and Roos (2007) was the high rate of school withdrawals. The teachers also realized that dropping-out is a process and that it can start from primary school or before high school (Sandberg & Polesel, 2011). Local and national research identifies factors such as academic performance as predictors for school persistence that can play a huge part in the retention of learners. In their longitudinal study, Makuakane-Drechsel and Hagedorn (2006) found that Grade Point Average (GPA) was the most significant predictor of persistence for both liberal arts and vocational community primary learners of South Africa, with financial aid being the second most significant predict. Although the main influence for the learners was their community members, one learner participant from the township school also said that something they were involved in within the community had influenced them. He also cited one boy who belonged to a church's youth club who was encouraged by his pastors to do well in school. Most of the learner participants in this study acknowledged the part that various aspects of school life played in influencing them to stay at school, particularly the relationships they had with teachers.

5.6.4 Educational system factors contributing to dropout

International trends also influence or impact on the development of a new approach towards education in South Africa. This involved a shift since the 1998 towards integration and inclusion. The new focus was to develop a system that would cater for the needs of each and every learner and would accommodate diversity with the

aim of overcoming possible barriers to learning (Department of Education cited in Swart, 2004). After the election of the first democratic government, the new Department of Education committed itself to the provision of educational opportunities for all learners, especially those who dropped out of school or those who were experiencing barriers to learning (Education White paper 6, Section 1.1.5). This was made possible through the implementation of a policy of inclusive education, which is practice-based in a more equitable and just society, with equal opportunities for all (Swart, 2004).

The above-mentioned governmental policy appeared to have been implemented at both schools under study. Two learner participants from both schools said that no learners were ever refused entry into the school as far as they can recall. They explained that quite a number of learners and families were unable to afford this governmental acceptance of a policy of democracy and social justice has hopefully had an impact on all the other systems and interactions within systems related to individuals living in South Africa. It has hopefully influenced the manner in which people treat each other and given hope to those that were formerly disadvantaged by the former laws and policies. Part of the vision of inclusion is that school principals should aim to create a school that functions as a supportive and caring community (Swart & Pettipher, 2005). The teacher participants in both schools seemed aware of the practical implications of inclusion in schools, as the participants indicated that they were working towards creating a community school where learners would feel safe and supported. Learners in this study confirmed this as most of them indicated that they were happy at their specific schools.

Furthermore, the Ministerial Committee on learner retention in the South African schooling system suggested the following policy interventions to decrease learner dropout in the future. Thus, improving learner retention should focus on the post-compulsory school phase, the Department should investigate circumstances for learner absence on a regular basis and attempts need to be made to register all school-going-aged children not attending school, improving social networks to monitor and track learner attendance, addressing signs of low self-esteem and aggressive behaviour in early childhood as an association has been found between early measurable factors and behaviours and later school dropout, improving access

to early childhood development programmes; promoting a positive classroom climate and supportive personal relationships with learners with difficulties, and providing staff development programmes (Swart & Pettipher, 2005).

5.6.5 Local community factors contributing to and mediating dropout

Findings from this study indicated several community issues that could impact on the lives of the learners. Participants mentioned a decrease in gang activity, but indicated that violence was still prevalent (4.4.8.3: PA2). Substance abuse and teenage pregnancies were identified as important problems in the community which are affecting school attendance. Home circumstances were characterised by family conflict and over-crowded living conditions. Religion seemed to be a protective factor, but it was not explored in depth in this study. The participants identified a need for additional supportive community programmes, as the existing ones were overloaded. They also explained that they were not able to refer learners to outside schools.

The negative consequences of unemployment were experienced by all the participants. Most of them complained about the lack of money for basic needs and having to live in a high-risk community where unfavourable and poverty conditions prevailed. McWhirter (2007) points out that living in such high-risk communities, combined with other psychological stressors and dysfunctional families, can push individuals to higher levels of risk which can lead to drop out from school. However, Masitsa, (2006) states poverty alone cannot be isolated as a critical cause of learners dropping out of school. In view of this, there are interrelatedness of many factors that are regarded as the most significant demographic predictor by some. Even though poverty can be viewed as a psychological stressor, some learners may manage to accomplish academic achievements if they are goal-orientated, motivated or receive some support from their parents, school and community (Randolph, 2006; Dass-Brailsford, 2005). The findings from this study indicated that most learners cannot rely on support from their families due to uncontrollable situations. When this happens, it then becomes the responsibility of the school and the teachers to provide encouragement to motivate these learners towards their schooling.

Jimerson (2004) compare retained learners to promoted ones as he observed that retained children have low self-esteem. A complicating factor is that self-esteem levels may rise and fall depending on which grade the student is in when he/she is being assessed. It is common for learner's self-concept to lower as they get older, particularly during a learner's transition into middle school. Some studies have found that learner's self-esteem is higher in the repeated year (Finlayson, 2000), and other studies seem to find no differences between retained and promoted learner's self-esteem. There are some possible theories about why retained children's self-concepts are higher or indistinguishable from their regularly promoted classmates. One possibility is that the higher self-esteem ratings of retained children reflect defensive responding. When children with undesirable qualities are asked about those qualities they do not admit their feelings about themselves. Another possibility is that grade retention might enhance self-concepts because it provides retained children with some positive experiences through social comparison.

Retained children are placed in classrooms where the work should be familiar. Therefore, they may perform relatively better in this situation than they have in previous classrooms. In view of the fact that they are placed in a situation where they perform better than their classmates, their self-evaluations may be higher. A final explanation involves bias regarding past theories about grade retention. It is assumed that retained children may have low self-esteem because of their academic failures. However, some children may interpret achievement in mastery-oriented terms. These children may believe failure can be overcome through greater efforts or more experience (Plummer & Graziano, 2002).

5.6.6 Peer group system factors

Holmes and Saturday (2000) are of the opinion that, learners who have been held back a year report less adaptive strategies for avoiding failure and lower perceived ability to do well in school. One of the interview questions to the learners was finding out how they felt about retention. According to the findings, retained learners with

more physical maturity are more likely to rate their competence more positively than younger classmates. It also supports that retained learners found retention to be a negative experience and have less positive attitudes towards school. When children were asked if they had ever flunked a grade, the responses were more likely to be positive. The learners who did not admit to flunking a grade were able to identify other learners who were held back in a given grade. Therefore, these learners appear to understand the concept of grade retention. Interviews with retained learners evidenced that a majority of non-promoted learners reported harbouring some anger and sad about being retained. In this regard, the learners believe that the worst things about being retained was being laughed at, not being with friends, and being punished.

One of the learner participants' responses varied in terms of their friendships. Contrary to expectations, they did not identify peer relationships as a main motivator for attending school. Most of the learner participants spoke about the negative influence that their friends had on their lives especially in school. Brendtro (2002) as cited in WCED (2005) claim that young learners living in difficult home circumstances like absentee fathers, single parents, loss of parents etc. often feel deprived of the basic need to belong, which may result in the ability to socialise with their peers. He also identifies one of the biggest problems that learners face when they need to make decisions that do not conform to that of their peers, as they ran the risk of losing friends and playmates. Brendtro further states that it might be rewards of peer acceptance that keep adolescents at school rather than good grades or expectations and praise from teachers (2002).

One learner participant explained that they had a different circle of friends and described how difficult it was to break off the friendships. This seems to leave them with positive feelings of achievement, but with fewer friends who they prefer to socialize with in school. Some of the learner participants seem to have adopted a coping strategy of indifference to peer approval in order to guard themselves against the negative reactions of these peers. According to McWhirter (2007), peer groups provide a platform for young learners to experiment their social and interpersonal interaction skills that they can eventually use in the adult world. It would therefore be

beneficial to the learners at this school if strategies can be put into place to create opportunities for the development of positive peer relationships.

5.6.7 Contributing Factors to early Learner Dropout at School

One of the educators from the farm school mentioned that peer pressure, poverty, unemployment of parents and poor family backgrounds, play a significant role in the early dropout of learners from schools. The parent participants also indicated that learners walk long distances to school because the scholar transport is not reliable and their parents are very poor, unemployed and cannot afford to pay private transports. Consequently, many female learners are targets of rape. On a serious note, both the learner and parent participants mentioned that there were so many taverns in the community which influence learners not to come to school. One of the parent reported that many learners were forced to look for employment at an early age because of the poor family background, poverty and irresponsible parents who are heavy drinkers. With these numerous factors, it seems that a wide range of social experiences contribute to learners dropping out from school. The findings portray that factors which compel learners to drop out of school may stem from previous unpleasant social experiences that they had.

According to Reckson and Becker (2005:109), bullism and gangsterism result from wider social, political and historical contexts. This problem is exacerbated by factors such as unemployment, poverty, lack of community concern, poor school policies and inadequate social services (Reckson & Becker, 2005: 109). These factors can cause learners to drop out of school which can possibly lead them to a life of crime. MacMaster (2007: 278) believes that gangsters are rooted in multiple socio-economic and political causes that probably affect the lives of individuals, families and whole communities.

5.7 Learner Academic difficulties and school retention

In addition, some of the participants in this study mentioned past academic problems. This might include participants who either repeated a year or were

repeating a grade at the time that the study was conducted (Table C1). This suggests that they were at risk of dropping out of school. Even though research shows that the efficiency of grade retention has been a combative issue, several researchers have found that there is a relationship between school dropout and grade retention. Ferguson (2007) claims that retained learners are more likely to drop out of school and show aggression during the developmental phase of their adolescence. Hickman et al. (2008) confirm this stance when they note that learners who dropped out of school showed significantly higher levels of grade retention, absenteeism and behaviour problems.

Furthermore, findings from Ou and Reynolds (2008) show that grade retention can have an adverse effect on self-esteem and might lead to an increased risk of dropping out of school. Poor attendance may be caused by poor relationships with teachers, including teaching that does not match their expectations, learner's perception of the classroom or teacher as disorganised or uncaring. The data suggests that for the variable of attendance, student achievement was only significant in all subjects. In addition, correlation test showed a relatively weak relationship between attendance and achievement. The variable that had the greatest impact on student achievement was socio-economic status.

5.7.1 Future goals

Despite all the above claims, most of the participants in this study regarded finishing school as important and expressed the desire to complete their studies. In addition, most of them indicated that they had a definite future and work aspirations. Brailsford (2005) contends that individual characteristics, such as goal orientation, advantage, motivation and understanding of the self as having a measure of agency, all assisted learners in attaining academic achievement. The findings from Progress Report (2007) confirm an association between a lack of motivation and dropping out of school. In line with these findings, this study observed an apparent ability to consider some abstract possibilities for the participants in the future which suggest that most of the individual participants have attained a cognitive stage of formal operations, as described by Piaget (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). All the participants aspired to future work opportunities that could enable them to improve their personal, financial and

home circumstances. This ability to develop future ideals for themselves could be some form of evidence of an increased abstract thinking during youth that occurs as a motivator for attending school. A positive view of the future should therefore be identified as one of the several important factors for eventual academic success (Suh & Suh, 2007). In the same light, Jozefowicz-Simbeni (2008) states that youths' ability to develop future hopes and ideals for themselves and other people can act as a motivator in relation to school performance. This can explain why the participants of this study were at risk of dropping out of school due to academic difficulties and other barriers to learning and despite all these barriers, they continued to show some enthusiasm for school.

5.7.2 Internal locus of control and self-concept

A majority of the participants in this study showed internal locus of control and well developed self-insight and self-awareness. These participants appear to take some form of responsibility for what happened in their lives. Most of the learners at risk of dropping out showed confidence in their own abilities, and expressed pride in their ability to make their own decisions, such as subject choices, refusing to belong to a gang, and giving up substances even under trying conditions which at times put pressure on them to drop out of school (4.4.8.1: PA1 & 4.4.8.2: A3). Several systems also assisted some of them, such as supportive parents and teachers. In terms of self-concept, they seem to be able to differentiate what they were good at and how important certain things were to them, such as their family and their future. These findings suggest that most of the participants in this study have a reasonably well developed self-concept and internal control, which should be supported and strengthened in order to develop an increased self-belief about their own competence and educational abilities. Jozefowicz-Simbeni (2008) emphasises the importance of self-perceptions of ability as determinants of educational performance and success.

5.8 Personal difficulties

Several participants in the study referred to experiencing personal difficulties on a daily basis which has an impact on their ability to cope at home and at school. This appears to place them at risk of not completing school. These difficulties included: undesired living conditions at home, embarrassing behaviour by family members, family conflict, health difficulties and substance abuse with their implications. Masitsa (2006) identifies the factors related to the home environment as the most important causes of school dropout. This includes issues such as unemployment of parents, lack of parental support, ill-health, family conflict and drug abuse to name but a few (Masitsa, 2006). Risk factors within the family, such as poverty, neglect, abuse and inconsistent parenting, can also be seen as causes of negative short-term behavioural outcomes such as truancy, underachievement, discipline referrals, antisocial behaviour and experimentation with drugs and alcohol (Sprague & Walker, 2002).

5.8.1 Drug Usage

Drug use and abuse emerged as an important contributor to experiencing personal difficulties in this study. Four of the six participants identified as being at risk of dropping out of school owned up to have used or that they were still using them. It becomes evident that the learners from the township school seem to realise the possible dangers of methamphetamine use, and that they might be aware of the negative impact it has on their behaviour and their interest in school. Four of the participants reported that they had successfully stopped the use of drugs. One participant explained that drug (medicine) use formed part of his spiritual beliefs and also that he uses them in a responsible manner. Based on the forgone argument, this researcher believes that the drugs offer some form of escapism and the willingness to accept others and the world in general the way it is. The findings from this study show that regular drug use by the participants can lead to absenteeism from school, a loss of interest in academics and behavioural changes. The participants further reported a high prevalence of aggressive and oppositional behaviour amongst the grade 7 learners in particular which often resulted in the

teachers enforcing disciplinary measures in the form of care. This reportedly presented challenges for teachers. The challenging behaviour can be attributed to the high prevalence of methamphetamine use, which seemingly has decreased over the past three years due to an apparent popularity shift from methamphetamine use to medicine use. It is therefore justifiably evident from the findings that substance use and abuse contribute to the learners' lack of interest in school, absenteeism, aggressive and oppositional behaviour which usually result in dropping out of school. Research shows that heavy adolescent marijuana use lead to drop out of school and continued marijuana use during adulthood (Green & Ensminger, 2006). In their findings, Townsend et al. (2007) also show a constant relationship between high school dropout and substance use. All the participants in this study appear to be aware of the possible consequences of substance abuse and seem to show their appreciation for the support they receive from the school and other outside support organisations to stop using substances.

5.9 The school and community

The findings are suggestive that the distance between schools and the community has a direct effect on learner dropout. Most learners travel a distance of approximately 10 to 15 kilometres to school, which affect their school attendance when the weather is too hot, too cold or when it is raining. These learners are also victims of sexual abuse while walking to school. It has been brought to light that the principals and educators might not be sensitive to this problem although it had adverse consequences with regard to poor attendance of learners.

Furthermore, this study predicts that poverty amongst learners contributes to learner dropout. It emerges that learners were unable to successfully complete their school careers due to lack of basic school needs and hunger. The families of these learners are unable to provide them with basic school needs such as school uniform and stationery. These families are also unable to provide food and therefore causing the learners to spend their whole school day hungry and unable to concentrate. Considering that access to nutrition in schools in the form of the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) has proven that it encourages concentration and good

attendance in class, learners can hardly concentrate and thus would underperform academically. This therefore would result in retention and consequently dropout in some cases.

5.10 The Distance between the School and the Community

Findings from this study also portrayed the impact distance between school and community had on learner performance. One of the learner participant indicated that the distance between their community and the school was less than 3 kilometres which was manageable and therefore there was no need for them to use transport to go to school. In contrast to this, another learner complained of the long distance that existed between the school and community and unfortunately not all parents can afford transportation for their children (4.4.8.3: PA2). Most learners from school A noted that the distance from their community to school is approximately 15 to 20 kilometres, which had a great effect on their school work as mentioned earlier. Most of the learners from school A stated that the principal and their educators were doing nothing to rectify this problem even though it caused poor learner attendance at school every day. Deducing from the responses of the learners above, it is critical for every school to arrange scholar transport when the learners live 5 kilometres and beyond from school because one of the reasons for learners' dropout is the distance between the community and the school.

5.11 Teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in schools

From the analysis and fieldwork, it was evident that the learners were very positive about involvement and believed that it was a helpful and useful concept but they were not clear what it entailed.

5.11.1 Parents' perceptions of their involvement in schools

Parents, regardless of their economic and literacy levels, are still their children's first teachers and the family remains the primary source for learning even after children go to school. Parents need to be involved in the education of their children for it to be

effective. According to Cotton and Wikelund (2001:18), Parents are concerned about their children's academic performance but do not always know how to express this concern or how to intervene. In line with the teachers, parents believe their role in the schooling of their children is very important and they would like to foster their children's performance.

A low level of education often goes hand-in-hand with unfavourable socio-economic conditions (Mills, 1983). Yet, parents can still have a strong influence on the educational results of their children independent of such conditions. In view of this, Bridge and Mohan (2002: 2) note that strong parental involvement is essential for educational progress and success. It has the potential to lessen the gap in achievement between children from high and low-income families respectively and it is an important component of academically and socially effective schools. Machen *et al.* (2005: 14) observe that although effective parental involvement is crucial in the education of children, it is far from a reality in most primary schools.

5.11.2 Teachers' understanding of parental involvement and its benefits

The researcher viewed parental involvement as parents' knowledge and awareness that education is important for their children and that providing education to them might offer them a better future. In this light, it can be concluded that parents are not bothered about their children's education as they were before the introduction of the Free Primary Education (FPE). One teacher participant felt that there should be total involvement but because of (FPE), parents have taken it to be the work of teachers. However, some parents would want to work with the teachers so that they can develop the education of their children (4.4.7.3: PA2). Consequence of this FPE then is the lack of parents on the educational life of their children, and only visit when called for by the administration. Teachers need moral and financial support. The government support is not enough. Parents' involvement makes them to partner and own the school which is what they need in order to help improve the school's performance.

The practice of grade retention has been studied and researched for educational and political purposes. Schools are being pressured to improve the quality of education. As a result, many are enforcing more rigorous retention policies. It is important for learners to meet the rigid grade-to-grade promotion standards that are being imposed as part of educational reform efforts. With increasing numbers of learners being retained, there is a push for more educational research to support the effectiveness of grade retention as a remedial strategy for academic failure. The research participants indicate that grade retention is an insufficient remedial strategy for promoting student achievement, particularly over the long term. Considering the costs of grade retention, one would assume that there should be research supporting its effectiveness as an intervention. Rather, retention practices are used even though there are minimal studies to support retention as an intervention. In view of this, Jackson (2001), asserts that those educators who retain pupils in a grade do so without valid research evidence to indicate that such treatment can provide greater benefits to learners with academic or adjustment difficulties than promotion to the next grade. Previous studies confirm some characteristics that make learners more susceptible to grade retention. Learners who generally come from low socio-economic backgrounds, and their parents usually have lower educational attainment are probable victims of the system. Most retained learners are living in one-parent households (Jimerson, 2001).

Lower levels of parental involvement in the schools also have been shown to predict grade retention. Alexander (2001) thinks that more boys than girls are retained and the majority of detainees are ethnic minority learners. Learners are more likely to have academic difficulties before they are held back by a grade. Reading and mathematics achievement have been found to be significant predictors of grade retention. Teacher participants describe the learners having difficulty getting along with peers and being more maladjusted in the classroom. Retained learners were also ranked as less popular compared to their promoted peers. However, it is difficult to tell whether this factor is a cause or consequence of non-promotion (Alexander, 2000).

The researcher rounds up here by postulating that, academic achievement does not improve after a learner has been retained because most of these learners dropout from the school. A national survey indicates that a lack of parental support and becoming a parent are the primary reasons young learners drop out of school. The educator participants recognize that many teens are dealing with issues at home, and are searching for more options to meet the needs of all learners (Townsend, 2007). A lack of parental support and the challenges of teen pregnancy are among the primary factors driving learners to leave school. Primary school survey shows a lack of support and encouragement from their parents as the reason they quit school (Jimerson, 2003). Another teacher participant said that young learners drop out after having a child of their own. Department of Education estimates that 40% learners drop out each and every year.

5.12 CONCLUSION

The evidence from this study suggests that grade retention is enacting the curriculum very differently from the way the curriculum developers intended. In the final chapter, the findings of this study are described in relation to the theories discussed in the literature review. The implications of the findings are also discussed, as well as the weaknesses of the research. Schools are being pressured to improve the quality of education. As a result, many are enforcing more rigorous retention policies. It is important for learners to meet the rigid grade-to grade promotion standards that are being imposed as part of educational reform efforts. With increasing numbers of learners being retained, there is a push for more educational research to support the effectiveness of grade retention as a remedial strategy for academic failure. Finally, there is need for a more longitudinal and controlled studies to be done on grade retention that matches promoted and retained learners by grade level, sex, chronological age, mental age, achievement test scores, adjustment, and socioeconomic status (Holmes & Saturday, 2000).

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The study has revealed the efforts made by both parents and the education department to retain learners and reduced dropout rate. The main concern of this study was to investigate the association of retaining grade seven learners in order to avoid learner dropout with the advanced teaching understood in the new programme. In this concluding chapter, the researcher summarized the findings of learner retention in two primary schools in the East London District. It presents a summary of the study, including the conclusions derived from both the literature review and the findings of the study. It also includes recommendations, suggestions for further research and the limitations of the study. Individual interviews, focus group discussions and documents analysis were used to obtain accounts of the experiences of six teachers, four parents, and eight learners. In chapter four, the qualitative design and methodology were described. In addition, chapter five presented the findings of the study in relation to the research questions. In a nutshell, the purpose of this chapter was to present a summary of the study to formulate and to suggest recommendations based on the research results.

6.2 An overview of the study

As deduced so far from the study, various factors seem to cause problems regarding learner retention, namely, the lack of a functional policy in schools on retention, learner dropout, illiteracy of many parents in the community, parental contributions and commitments, time constraints, means of transport to school, and the lack of parenting skills. Hand in hand with this, teachers are not trained to promote retention as they only offer little assistance to learners to improve their learning skills. As a result, they do not view learner retention as either their responsibility or part of their role. In view of this, they make little attempt or none to teach learners how to be

involved in learning. In the sections that follow, the conclusions drawn from the literature are discussed and subsequently, a summary of the findings obtained.

6.3 Relating the findings of the study to the research questions

This study set out to explore the lived experiences of teachers, parents and even learners at two East London primary schools. A brief overview of learner retention in education is presented and then followed by a brief history of the South African education. The theoretical framework on which this study was based and expounded on the main research problem was formulated as follows: *retaining learners in primary school*. Consequently, the aim of the study was to develop recommendations for the design of an effective learner retention programme suited for public primary schools so that pupils, teachers and parents can derive the greatest possible benefits from the implementation of this programme. An overview of the qualitative research design including sampling, data collection, data analysis and presentation is provided. In this study the researcher matches up the interview questions with the literature in order to listen to other voices on learner retention because the success of our nation's learners is up to us as teachers, parents and even the learners. They all have crucial roles to play and together can break through many of the barriers promoting learners drop out of school.

6.4 Research question 1: What strategies can be put in place to retain learners in school?

In relation to the above research question, the narratives of most participants in the study indicated a support for learners to remain in school and to reach their goals. There is a dire need for a policy that supports learner's active involvement in education. Government involvement in education is recognized generally as fundamental. UNICEF (2007: 1) states that achieving the goal of education requires universal commitments. The declarations and conventions described in the literature chapter attest to the need to hold governments accountable, especially in relation to learners. The learners as the centre of all these challenges also have a say on grade retention and strategies to fight underachievement and dropout.

6.4.1 Research question 2: What are the views of learners on grade retention?

According to Jimerson (2001), the use of grade repetition as a strategy to address academic underachievement or deal with difficulties associated with poor socio-emotional adjustment is ineffective to the learners. Anderson (2005) presents compelling evidence that grade repetition is the most powerful predictor of drop out. Meanwhile the learners in this study mentioned that repetition does not solve the problem of academic underachievement. Retention sends a message of failure to them, who then may suffer from long-term, self-esteem and engagement problems. This results in a student being overage during adolescence, increasing the risk of disengagement from school. Learners make the following points:

- Repetition in first through third grades is a strong indicator of later drop out.
- Repetition increases the risk of drop out.
- And repeating a grade or grades during elementary school reduces the likelihood of pursuing post-secondary education.

Other studies that identify grade repetition as a strong predictor of drop out include less negative view of grade repetition. In particular, Alexander et al. (2003) argue that grade repetition in the early primary grade helps prepare low achieving learners for better performance in later grades. The positive effects accrue to the learners who have repeated only once after the first grade. However, this short-term benefit seems to dissipate with time. Kenny (2003) makes the observation that each group of repeating learners show improvement during the year of repetition and regress in the year following repetition and concludes that grade repetition tends to benefit only a minority of learners. Thus as can be deduced so far, retention then has implications for both the learner and policy makers.

6.4.2 Research question 3: What are the implications of policy in retaining learners?

Implementation of policy in the region under study has gone some way towards ensuring quality education delivery that includes equal access, progression, retention

and completion for learners. Among what a majority of the learners in the study suggested is free education for all policy that penalises child abuse and government intervention in providing a good school environment for learning and good school structure. The interviews and data compiled, show that most learners' progress has been delayed in school because of the policies, especially at local levels that not only make education of children free but also compulsory. Both retained and socially promoted learners have negative testing experiences. Although retention slightly reduces the problem of behaviours, no support was offered for the negative effects of retention.

6.4.3 Research question 4: How is the curriculum program options applied for learners who are retained?

In an attempt to improve learners' aptitude for success and help find appropriate interventions, Johnston (2010) found that the instructional studies must be guided by research and evidence and then used to increase knowledge and student academic performance. A curriculum survey found that teachers and psychologist have a significant impact on a student's promotion and retention. They both have similar instructional options and recognize the need for possible learning alternatives to increase student academic performance. Thomas (2011) wondered if enhancing learner outcomes of low-performing learners would close the gap on achievement and eliminate the need to promote or retain. Based on this, he thinks that a learner-centred approach can improve cognitive functions and that if learners feel challenged, fostered, and valued, they are more suitable to find academic success (2011). Franco and Patel (2011) address the issue of dropout prevention as a pilot project to recover credits that were failed. In this regard, they show that learners recovered all credits. The study shows that tutoring on individual skills by scaffolding information appear to be effective over time.

6.4.4 Research question 5: What strategies are put in place to avoid promoting learners socially rather than educational?

Research indicates that learners who are held back do not succeed at a higher level than those learners who are socially promoted, and perform less than socially

promoted learners within the next year. Socially promoted learners learn what is equivalent to half of a year more than retained learners in the same grade (Hong & Raudenbush, 2005). The study shows a small gain in academic achievement right after completing a retention year. Most studies show that retention has no long term academic benefits in terms of the amount of content material the learners indulge in. Some researchers suggest that retention may even be academically harmful in the long term (Moser, 2012). For instance, learners retained in elementary school have less perceived competence and less persistence related to their schooling.

6.4.5 Research question 6: What do you think can be done in order to minimise the rate of learner dropout?

According to the DoE (2008), completion programmes require a primary focus on student engagement, particularly on finding ways to enhance learners' interest in and enthusiasm for school, sense of belonging at school, motivation to learn and progress in school as well as the value they place on school and learning. Engagement is multi-dimensional and involves academic and behavioural (observable indicators such as classroom participation and attendance) cognitive and psychological components (internal indicators such as self-monitoring and a sense of belonging).

Parent-child communication about school must increase motivation and feelings of support amongst this cohort. Many learners in the focus groups reported home communication supporting the value of school, encouragement and support to complete school tasks as aspects that facilitated retention in school. This concurs with Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) having found that parent-child conversations at home were valuable in terms of enhancing children's school achievement, progression and sustainability.

6.3.6 Research question 7: What Impact does retention has on learners?

The bulk of the literature reviewed in this study researched the effect of retention on learners' academic performance. This involved several issues pertaining to retention

practices like the significance of school district policies, potentially high dropout rates, and the level of academic achievement after a student is retained. Most researchers stated that in the long-term, no effect is evident on a retained student's academic performance. It was also noted, school district retention and social promotion policies differ. Some district policies are stricter than others according to the size and demographics of the school district, and as pointed out by Brownell (2007), retention was a strong predictor of high school dropout rates. According to Anderson (2012), retained learners experienced lower self-esteem and lower rates of school attendance, which are also a predictor of dropping out of school and not achieving academic success.

In conclusion, Anderson, (2012) submits some strategies to help struggling learners such as, providing a fresh curriculum for those who are retained to prevent boredom. Intensive, focused tutoring in summer school and before- or after-school programs have been shown to help low-achieving learners, whether they are retained or not. Finally, close monitoring of learners who have been retained for problems such as disruptive behaviour and poor attendance can provide signs of disengagement from school, which can be an early predictor that the learner is on the way out. In view of this then, the researcher recommends that:

- Learners should be provided with safe learning environments where the government provides the learners with infrastructure and stationary.
- Learners should be encouraged to go to school regardless of their age and background by introducing different varieties of sport codes as our country needs more educated individuals.
- Efficient career guide policies should be implemented at early grades and not focus on higher education.
- Further research is required in order to entail the countries dropout rate and learners performance.

6.4 Conclusion

The researcher believes that these recommendations can lead to a shift from the obstacles outlined in this study towards retaining learners in schools. It is also noted

that the government, educators and parents have a great role to play in retaining learners in schools. It finally concludes that learner retention remains an increasing concern in many schools not only in the East London Education District but across South Africa as a whole because of the high non-completion rates. Thus, the impact of retention is not limited to the individual learners and their families, but also produces a ripple effect on postsecondary institutions, the workforce and the economy as a whole.

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Annexure 1

P.O BOX 15288

BECON BAY 5205

20 AUGUST 2014

Letter requesting permission to access schools

Dear Sir

I am a student at the University Fort Hare (East London), studying Masters in Education degree. I implore your indulgence to permit me writing to request permission to conduct research in two primary schools. I would be grateful if you would grant me access to observe as well as conduct interviews. The aim of my study is to investigate strategies to retain learners in school and particularly grade seven classrooms. Should you allow me the opportunity to use your school as a research site data will be collected through document analysis and interviews.

The school teachers and learners are assured of complete anonymity at all times. The teacher participant will be allowed to access the final report before it is being submitted to the institution to ensure that the details are accurately recorded and reported.

Your cooperation is highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

N KUMANDA

ANNEXURE 2

Interview schedule

Teachers

How are learners retained in primary school?

- Retained through poor performance
- Absenteeism from school
- Bad behaviour

What strategies are used to retain learners in schools?

- Parent attention
- Teacher to teacher remedial failures
- Intervention by other stake holders to accompany and to prove that learners be retained

What are the implications of policy in retaining these learners?

- Department not allowing this practice
- Age also does not allow this practice but due to unforeseen and inevitable reasons, policies have to be applied.

How do we apply curriculum program options for learners who are retained?

- Learners cannot be retained for more than 3 years in a phase. Study guide and homework skills could help put this into practice.

What strategies are put in place to avoid promoting learners socially rather than educational?

- Holistic development should be put into practice.
- Avoid all technological issues, television, cell phones, newspapers, where there is gloom and doom instead.
- Application of programs that create love for educators and educational skills

Do you think teachers have an impact on learner dropout, and why?

- Bad behaviours of teachers leading to inefficiency like drinking, late coming, involvement with learners, unmarked and work well looked after, results in children leaving that school.
- Abusive treatment and favouritism towards some learners, neglecting others, stressed and without love.

On your database how many learners dropped out in a year?

- It is very difficult to tell, since other learners were dropped on terms, starting second term up to fourth term. It is about 22% per year.

How do you feel about learner's dropout?

- Very painful and embarrassing as the graph of the work drops and the future of the child is entirely doomed
- The children are being prepared to be future leaders and respectable citizens to curb all challenges we are faced with.

Interview Questions

Parents

What highest grade have you achieved?

- Form Four, in the olden days there were no standards, form four was standard eight and it was a big standard as compare with standards and grades of these days.

If you were given the chance to go back to school, what would you consider?

- Seriousness, that means always working very hard in my books, knowing what I want in future.

What do you think is the main cause of learner dropout?

- Learners do not have dreams, they think they go to school for their parents, they like walking up and down in the streets during school hours, but at the end of the year they do not want to fail.

How do you feel about learners' dropout?

- This is very bad because it causes a lot of robbers in our community and sometimes children dropout at younger age without knowing the importance of education.

As a parent, do you think the implementation of retaining learners will give positive or negative outcomes, why?

- Mhhhh- it brings negative outcomes because even, since they do not want to work very hard at school but they do not want to be retained.

What do you think can be done in order to minimize the rate of learner dropout?

- Government must come out with many different techniques activities that can attract learners
- Drama-so that if a learner find difficulties in the class, and must change the career or talent and also there must be something that can attract learners at school.

Interview Questions

Focus group with Learners

Are your parents and sibling encouraging you on your studies?

- Hmmm- no they do not encourage m. I have no mother, I am staying with my aunt, she is a drunker, she does not care about me

How do you see yourself in this grade, do you consider yourself successful?

- It was very difficult in such a way that I repeated grade four and six, but I hope one day I will be a doctor.

What might cause you to drop out of school?

- As I stay in this farm, sometimes there are no buses that take use to school and it takes about a week, sometimes I think I want to live school.

How do you think your life would be if you were to drop out?

- No I don't want to drop out but because of the way I am living at home I do not see my future as bright.

How do you feel when you seeing other children your age in your community dropping out of school?

- It is not good but it seems as if they are happy.

What are your views on grade retention?

- Teachers must not retain us (learners) because if I was not repeating these two grades may be now I would be in grade nine.

ANNEXTURE 3

Document

Department of Basic Education

Report on Dropout and Learner Retention Strategy

To

Portfolio Committee on Education

June 2011



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Policy on Learner

Attendance
Frequently Asked Questions
(FAQs)



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE
REC-270710-028-RA Level 01

Certificate Reference Number: ABO041SKUM01

Project title: **Retaining learners in primary schools in East London: Policy implication**

Nature of Project: Masters

Principal Researcher: Nomaroma Kumanda

Supervisor: Dr J.F Abongdia

Co-supervisor:

On behalf of the University of Fort Hare's Research Ethics Committee (UREC) I hereby give ethical approval in respect of the undertakings contained in the above-mentioned project and research instrument(s). Should any other instruments be used, these require separate authorization. The Researcher may therefore commence with the research as from the date of this certificate, using the reference number indicated above.

Please note that the UREC must be informed immediately of

- Any material change in the conditions or undertakings mentioned in the document
- Any material breaches of ethical undertakings or events that impact upon the ethical conduct of the research

The Principal Researcher must report to the UREC in the prescribed format, where applicable, annually, and at the end of the project, in respect of ethical compliance.