


Examining the Effects of Under-schooling on Learner Underachievement: The Case Study of Selected Secondary Schools in the Limpopo Province, South Africa



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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the origin of under-schooling which is known to be triggering learner underachievement in myriad secondary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The paper was motivated by diverse discourses around learner underachievement, most of which are mainly based on the perspectives of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and the Representative Council of Learners (RCL). The paper is conceptual and empirical in nature within the qualitative research paradigm. Narrative enquiry and interviewing techniques were employed to generate data. Out of the population of 15 secondary schools in one of the circuits in Vhembe district in Limpopo Province, South Africa, six were conveniently sampled. In each of the six sampled secondary schools, only representatives of the teacher components in the School Governing Bodies and Chairpersons of the Representative Council of Learners became research participants. Findings revealed that firstly, under-schooling starts with poor learner attendance rates for their lessons. Secondly, under-schooling is detrimental to learners' academic achievement. Thirdly, under-schooling is detrimental to the educational outcomes of learners. Fourthly, it is mostly created by learners from socio-economically disadvantaged families. Fifthly, under-schooling is aggravated by unmanaged learner truancy. Sixthly, under-schooling has the potential of leading to a high learner dropout rate. Lastly, under-schooling is aggravated by offering few hours of instruction by teachers. The researcher recommends equitable schooling to curb learner under-achievement in the secondary schooling sector. This findings of this paper add to the body of knowledge and literature as regards an unusual perspective of only teachers serving in the School Governing Body and the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) to underachievement of secondary school learners.

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since the creation of the nine Provinces in South Africa, from the initially four provinces, Limpopo Province has never been in the top three of the high-performing provinces in terms of matric results. This is the context within which this paper was written, namely, the legendary underachievement of the Limpopo Province in terms of the matric results. Modiba comprehends under-schooling to be a condition whereby a

school, be it primary or secondary, is not able to deliver instruction to registered learners for the entire identified schooling days as a result of multiple factors and impediments.¹ The unavailability of learners to schools during certain days, be they authorised or not, constitutes under-schooling, especially if no remedial lessons are going to be delivered to those learners to close the created teaching and learning gap.² Under-schooling could lead to underachievement. Evidently, the gap that this paper seeks to fill relates to comprehending secondary school underachievement solely and strictly from the perspectives of two vital internal schooling stakeholders, namely, teachers serving in the SGB and the Representative Council of Learners. That is why Lee accentuates that no school is established to underachieve and that every school stands a chance of underachieving in case unhealthy schooling conditions that trigger underachievement are not confronted.³ All factors behind the underachievement of a secondary school deserve to be addressed in order to allow the creation of conditions that orchestrate achievement. In the context of schooling, there is a school and a great school. The two categorisations of schooling are dissimilar. Frequently, a school refers to an ordinary secondary school, while a great school refers to an extraordinary educational institution on the basis of the educational outcomes produced. This is to imply that ordinary secondary schools could be associated with underachievement.⁴

One distinguishing feature of a great school is that it does not normally get involved in tit-for-tat leadership squabbles that could plummet learner outcomes. A great school is hardly associated with underachievement, and when underachievement accidentally occurs, it does not end up being normalised like it is the case in an ordinary school. Bambalele advises that searching for why some secondary schools remain ordinary in terms of their underachievement, and the causative factors of underachievement need to be unveiled.⁵ Where the attendance rate of learners is dissatisfactory, under-schooling could slowly be creeping into the schooling system. In the main, where there is under-schooling, an outlandish manner of teaching and learning, which is largely responsive to pupils' aspirations and values, could be missing.⁶ The thesis of this paper is that it is under-schooling that generates learner underachievement in myriad secondary schools in Limpopo Province. There is an urgent need to nip under-schooling in the bud, considering that it is detrimental to learners' academic achievement and results. The challenge of under-schooling is, in most cases, associated more with learners from socio-economically disadvantaged families. This signifies that learners from poverty-stricken households have a tendency to struggle to find value in schooling. This could be traceable to the reality that in those learners' families, schooling remains unfashionable. It is naïve to attribute under-schooling to a single causative factor. Under-schooling is such a complex occurrence, which at times results from shaky and inconsistent school leadership and management that fail to combat and curb excessive learner truancy.⁷

Schooling experience demonstrates that where learner truancy is simply out of hand, under-schooling quickly sets in. It takes tough and purposeful school leadership and management to arrest widespread learner truancy, whose presence at secondary school could be a guarantee of under-schooling. As if that is not enough, learner truancy could worsen into learner dropout. One could argue that learner truancy is a mild form of schooling disturbance, with a learner drop-out rate being a serious incident of discontinuing schooling by learners. To avert both learner truancy and drop-out rates, schooling environments need to be revolutionised to become vibrant, heart-warming and indescribably stimulating schooling atmospheres that

¹ N.S. Modiba, "Every Educational Journey Has a Destiny," *Capricorn District, Limpopo Province. Paper Presented to Motivate All Learners to Be Aware That Schooling Days Are Numbered 1* (2011).

² Gil Keppens, "School Absenteeism and Academic Achievement: Does the Timing of the Absence Matter?," *Learning and Instruction* 86 (2023): 101769.

³ N. Lee, "Teaching Is the Ultimate Step in the Acquisition of Wisdom and Knowledge," *Sowetan*, May 3, 2023.

⁴ Y. Sobuwa, "Teacher Handbook Calls for Change in Classes 2021.," *Sowetan*, April 19, 2021.

⁵ P. Bambalele, "Rapetsoa Acts on Violence as He Reworks Our Cry," *Sowetan*, October 4, 2019.

⁶ J. Allen, *As a Man Thinketh* (New York: Dover Publications, 2014).

⁷ W.J. Levin, "Why Our Education System Is Failing," *The Star*, October 5, 2011; C. Southey, "Teaching Ruin and Warring Wallahs," *Mail and Guardian*, April 12, 2012; M. Mangena, "Rallying to Defend Democracy," *Sunday World*, April 18, 2021.

continue to attract and keep learners at the learning sites. Schooling climates in great educational institutions are known to induce learners to take schooling seriously. This serves to energize the mind and stimulate creative thinking by learners in an ebullient and admirable schooling space. Expectedly, efficaciously instructed learners stand to foster credible and incredible classroom learning experiences that are embedded in a secondary school's radical ideological posture for preparing students for greatness. Some of the measures directed at reducing and arresting under-schooling and thus learner underachievement include ensuring that no single learner misses any lesson.⁸ Approaching the underachievement of public secondary schools from the point of view of under-schooling is indeed refreshing. Evidently, as much as underachievement in secondary schooling could be triggered by some factors normally taken for granted, the same applies to achievement in secondary schools. Factors of achievement and underachievement are antithetical in the context of a secondary schooling sector.⁹ Clearly, the problem of under-schooling as experienced in myriad secondary schools in Limpopo Province and beyond owes its origin to a host of factors inherent in secondary schools. Some of those factors include disabling contextual factors, schooling environments that are not revolutions and the non-involvement of the secondary school learners in the subject allocation process of their secondary schools.¹⁰

This paper, therefore, examines the origin of under-schooling, which is known to be triggering learner underachievement in myriad secondary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Examination of under-schooling is done from the perspectives of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and the Representative Council of Learners (RCLs). The second objective relates to diminishing under-schooling in view of its potential to reduce a secondary school into a perennially underachieving institution. On the basis of that, the research question guiding this paper is: *how can under-schooling be approached for its ultimate elimination in the secondary schooling sector?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature approaches under-schooling to be of great disservice to the expected quality schooling of learners. This is on the basis that under-schooling prevents excellent scholastic performance of learners due to learners having been exposed to mediocre schooling or schooling that is simply below the set standard. Hence, Olivier and Owen advise that secondary schools that perennially underachieve may, among others, be struggling to provide their learners with adequate schooling opportunities enjoyed by top-performing secondary schools.¹¹ The review of the literature points out that top-performing secondary schools are capable of mending broken pupils psychologically and spiritually.¹² This is to imply that not all learners always come to school being psychologically and spiritually stable and ready for the schooling business. Some groundwork has to be done to ascertain that all learners are in the right frame of mind to assimilate what is being taught to them. Where there is under-schooling in partnership with psychologically and spiritually challenged learners, then secondary school is facing double trouble. That there is under-schooling suggests that a secondary school is a crisis-riddled educational institution. Such a secondary school has to frequently apply its good corporate governance culture and brand to reform and revolutionise its state of affairs to shed off its undesirable under-schooling condition. Available literature is not mute on the point that, normally, learners who contribute to the prolonged existence of the condition of under-schooling are those from socio-economically disadvantaged families. The reason is that in those families, schooling is not

⁸ S. A. Coetzee, E.J. Van Niekerk, and J. L. Wydeman, *An Educator's Guide to Effective Classroom Management* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2011); K. Bodibe, "Change Is Inevitable," *Daily Sun*, June 5, 2012; S. Memela, "Prophetic Intellectual Leaders," *Sowetan*, June 20, 2012; N. Kumalo, "Autum: A Time to Harvest Spiritual Growth," *Sowetan*, April 19, 2021.

⁹ Kumalo, "Autum: A Time to Harvest Spiritual Growth"; Mangena, "Rallying to Defend Democracy."

¹⁰ D. Meador, "The Role of the Principal in School," 2019, www.thoughtco.com; Keppens, "School Absenteeism and Academic Achievement: Does the Timing of the Absence Matter?"

¹¹ C. Olivier, *The DNA of Great Teachers* (South Africa: Learning Design, 2012); J.O. Owen, *How to Lead: The Definitive Guide to Effective Leadership*, 4th ed. (London: Pearson, 2015).

¹² Equal Education, "School Infrastructure," 2018, www.equaleducation.org.za; Meador, "The Role of the Principal in School."

likely to be a priority, and even when learners decide to stay away from schooling with no apparent reason, it becomes no issue.¹³

The study of literature unveils that where there is under-schooling educational outcomes of a secondary school are not likely to be brilliant. This signifies that the condition of under-schooling, when not being contained, becomes too detrimental to the academic achievement of learners.¹⁴ Under-schooling has a tendency to encourage learner drop-out rates. This comes about when a secondary school fails to instil in learners a sense of embracing schooling wholeheartedly to the level where coming to school daily and on time happens out of every learner's choice and volition, other than being coerced to do so. A secondary school that has succeeded in overcoming a condition of under-schooling could be capable of producing exquisite learner results, which make almost everybody applaud a school. The implication is that any secondary school dubbed to be offering inadequate schooling to learners is not likely to uplift its community through innovation and encouraging problem identification and resolution. Such schools do not become change-makers in their own right and are never poised to remain leading education providers. Such schools are ill-equipped to contribute to the course of eradicating unemployment, poverty, inequality and lack of social justice through adequate schooling.¹⁵ Of peculiar nature is that adequate schooling, as opposed to under-schooling, continues to contribute to the illiteracy levels defining a community within which a secondary school operates.¹⁶

Existing literature discloses that in under-schooling, abiding by education policies by secondary schools is no common place. Furthermore, where a condition of under-schooling exists, secondary schools are frequently bereft of ethics, solidarity and empathy. This is noticeable when learners begin by being truant in an unprecedented manner at school, followed by massive grade repetition, which introduces them to the ultimate drop-out rate. All the mentioned unpalatable behavioural patterns of learners in under-schooling institutions could be triggered by a host of factors. Some of those factors are from within the under-schooling setup, while others are from outside the under-schooling atmosphere. Literature review recounts that owing to the absence of solidarity, empathy and ethics in under-schooling, in such schools it is rare to have learners love to style themselves as super or prime learners. In addition, in the under-schooling set-up, learners do not involve themselves in cooperative learning, to display mutual empathy and to contribute to the improvement of their despicable under-schooling condition. The implication of the expressed point is that, just as impressive scholastic learner performance is anticipated in adequate schools, the personnel expected to produce those mouth-watering learner results need to be made an integral part of the requisite results to be produced. Hence, the emphasis on collaborative learning is underpinned by a spirit of learner solidarity and empathy. The review of literature stresses that any form of marginalisation of learners is not foreign in under-schooling institutions.¹⁷ Having disclosed that good learner results are produced in adequate institutions, commence in the classrooms of schools, it makes sense to argue that where pupils inside a classroom are fortunate to interface and interact with adequately caring teachers, that partnership could speedily contain perennial learner-underachievement, orchestrated by amongst others the under-schooling condition and replace it with impressive learner achievement. The review of literature unveils that it takes the involvement of all learners in the subject allocation process of a secondary school to transition that secondary school from an under-schooling institution into an adequate schooling with perennially brilliant

¹³ T. Gqirana, "Without Resources Rural Schools Will Continue to Underperform," *NGO News* 24, 2016, <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/without-resources-rural-schools-will-continue-to-underperform>; Mariette Visser, Andrea Juan, and Nosisi Feza, "Home and School Resources as Predictors of Mathematics Performance in South Africa," *South African Journal of Education* 35, no. 1 (2015).

¹⁴ Ramathan. L., "Learner Poor Performance; Provoking Bourdieu's Key Concepts in Analysing School Education in South Africa," *Southern African Review of Education* 23, no. 1 (2017): 23–36.

¹⁵ Chang Zhu, Geert Devos, and Yifei Li, "Teacher Perceptions of School Culture and Their Organizational Commitment and Well-Being in a Chinese School," *Asia Pacific Education Review* 12 (2011): 319–28.

¹⁶ Mangena, "Rallying to Defend Democracy."

¹⁷ Lee, "Teaching Is the Ultimate Step in the Acquisition of Wisdom and Knowledge."

learner results.¹⁸ Literature study further unveils that the complexity of schooling leads to a situation whereby some educational institutions keep on surviving the stigma of under-schooling and underachievement by virtue of having crafted a kind of identity that always associates a school with a desire to become a game-changer in the educational service of learners. This suggests that the kind of brand or identity that a secondary school is known for could always, under normal circumstances, work for that secondary school.

Apart from the nature of the brand, a school is famous for, even the kind of revolutionised schooling environment and culture at a secondary school could contribute to the flourishing of a secondary school, including transforming an under-schooling environment into an adequate school. The multiplicity of factors obtained in a secondary school is the driver and the determinant of the capability of a secondary school's transitioning ability into an improved version of itself. One distinguishable feature of adequate schools, as opposed to under-schools, is their perpetual strive for the excellent scholastic achievement of their pupils and the institution.¹⁹ Teaching and learning in adequate secondary schools remain unique and efficacious for the sake of ushering in the scholastic achievement of learners. Such is the hallmark of adequate schools, a feature completely missing in under-schooling institutions.²⁰

Lee mentions that when pulling hard, under-schooling institutions need to draw back and reconnect with themselves.²¹ This happens as magnificent learner results appear to be evading those secondary schools. Under-schooling institutions are not known to be capable of creating time to reflect on the strides they have made in their past educational journeys, to learn from them, and to be inspired to toil for excellent learner performance. Under-schooling institutions are depicted as not possessing restorative power. This is the kind of strength that enables such schools to immediately bounce back after they have had a mishap with their institutional results. The review of literature on under-schooling and underachievement in this paper was largely conducted from the point of view of the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and the Representative Council of Learners (RCLs).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This paper is a qualitative case study. The problem which this paper pursues, namely, under-schooling, which triggers learner underachievement, necessitated the design of the paper. Furthermore, the objective of the paper, which is to examine the origin of under-schooling, which is known to be triggering learner underachievement, is being examined from the perspective of the School Governing Body (SGB) and the Representative Council of Learners (RCLs), leading to the selection of a qualitative research design over a quantitative research design. Basically, the choice of the qualitative methodology was also triggered by the reality that the paper is being underscored by Interpretivism and by the Learning Organisation Philosophy.²² The researcher saw a need to create a synergy between the two theoretical perspectives undergirding the paper and the qualitative approach as the overriding research methodology. The combination of the three helped immensely in terms of illuminating issues of under-schooling and learner underachievement being comprehended from the perspective of teachers serving in the School Governing Bodies and the Representative Council of Learners.²³ The researcher utilised the mentioned theoretical perspectives to examine the origin of under-schooling and how it leads to learner underachievement in the secondary schooling sector. Persistent underachievement by secondary school pupils is a worrisome issue, warranting

¹⁸ S. Masondo, "How Superprincipals and Teachers Help Matrics Soar," *City Press*, January 11, 2015; Kumalo, "Autum: A Time to Harvest Spiritual Growth."

¹⁹ Y. Sobuwa, "Teacher Handbook Calls for Change in Classes," *Sowetan*, April 19, 2021.

²⁰ E.V. Lara, "School Identity in the Modern World," 2018, www.tieonline.com.

²¹ Lee, "Teaching Is the Ultimate Step in the Acquisition of Wisdom and Knowledge."

²² K.C. Moloi, *The School as a Learning Organisation* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2005).

²³ D. Clark, "Theory X and Theory Y, Big Dog and Little Dog's Performance Juxtaposition," 2010, <https://www.nwlinl.com>; Equal Education, "School Infrastructure."

attention precisely because it robs a secondary school of an opportunity to be an institution of choice and to provide quality and adequate schooling to all learners.

With Interpretivism and the Learning Organisation Philosophy underscoring this paper, the researcher utilised them to decode what constitutes the origin of under-schooling, which ultimately leads to learner underachievement. Amalgamating the qualitative research paradigm, Interpretivism and the Learning Organisation Philosophy aimed at maximising the strength of the three perspectives to comprehend in its entirety the raging debate of the origin of under-schooling and its concomitant aspect of learner underachievement.²⁴ Combining the three enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of how, despite many years of independence in South Africa, there are still myriad secondary schools that persist in underachieving as a result of their general under-schooling condition. Such an in-depth understanding was more than necessary in order to operate from an informed position with regard to the origin of under-schooling, which has an association with learner underachievement. Out of the population of 15 secondary schools, in one of the circuits in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa, six were conveniently sampled, and in each school, a teacher representative in the School Governing Body and a Chairperson of the Representative Council of Learners became research participants. To conclude this item on the research design, there is a need to divulge that the narrative enquiry and the interviewing techniques were utilised to generate data for this paper. To be precise, secondary school teacher representatives serving in the School Governing Body and Representative Council of Learners were given an opportunity to narrate from their own angles what constitutes the origin of under-schooling and learner underachievement from their own perspectives. In addition, teacher and learner representatives in the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and the Representative Council of Learners (RCLs) were allowed to share what they regarded as the solution to the debated perennial underachievement by some secondary schools.

To corroborate and triangulate the gleaned data, interviewing was conducted with those research participants who provided narrative enquiry. Altogether, a total of 12 research participants were interviewed regarding under-schooling and learner underachievement. Interviewing responses were audiotaped for transcription purposes later on. Both the narrative enquiry and the interviewing technique emerged as very helpful in terms of accessing information germane to the origin of under-schooling, which is known to be triggering learner underachievement in myriad secondary schools.²⁵

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings arrived at in this paper are in relation to the research topic whose focus is on examining the origin of under-schooling, which is known to be triggering learner underachievement in myriad secondary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The basis of the findings is the analysed data, which were generated through the narrative inquiry and the interviewing technique. Responses of the 12 research participants were examined as regards how under-schooling triggers learner underachievement in secondary schools from the viewpoint of the representatives of teachers and learners. As part of sharing and discussing findings in a clear and free-from-ambiguity fashion, the 12 research participants interviewed in this paper are being referred to as Respondents A up to F, referring to representatives of teachers serving in the School Governing Bodies and Respondents G up to L, referring to representatives of learners. That was done to protect the actual identities of those research participants. Paying attention only to teachers serving in the School Governing Bodies and the Representative Council of Learners ought not to create an impression that every time there is learner underachievement, it could be teachers and learners alone who are the instigators. A host of factors and variables are likely to be behind the achievement or underachievement of learners.

However, the context of this paper necessitated that the focus be placed on learner underachievement as triggered by under-schooling from the perspective of teachers serving in the School Governing Bodies

²⁴ Ramathan. L., "Learner Poor Performance; Provoking Bourdieu's Key Concepts in Analysing School Education in South Africa."

²⁵ Keppens, "School Absenteeism and Academic Achievement: Does the Timing of the Absence Matter?"

and pupils who are members of the Representative Council of Learners.²⁶ In view of learner underachievement in secondary schools having been debated from angles such as the principal's leadership role, teacher leadership, and others, the researcher felt a need to debate it this time from the unique angle of under-schooling.²⁷ Interpretivism and the Learning Organisation Philosophy, in partnership with the qualitative research paradigm, have been sufficiently instrumental in assisting in the analysis of data to ultimately emerge with these findings. The various themes that were established after the study were done as follows: under-schooling starts with poor learner attendance, under-schooling is detrimental to learners' academic achievement, under-schooling is detrimental to educational outcomes of learners, under-schooling is created by pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged families, under-schooling is aggravated by unmanaged learner truancy, under-schooling could lead to learner drop-out rate, and under-schooling could be reflected by few hours of instruction by teachers. The themes are discussed below.

Theme One - Under-schooling and poor learner attendance

Poorly achieving secondary schools acknowledge that they are populated by diverse learners requiring to be managed and led differently to produce magnificent results. Literature demonstrated that myriad 21st-century secondary schools are bereft of self-efficacious learners. These are pupils that are evolutionary in nature and ever aware of the schooling period they operate in, individually and collaboratively.²⁸ As a result of under-schooling, self-efficacious scholars are in the main becoming difficult to come by in the secondary schooling sector. Any secondary school bereft of such kind of learners could easily underachieve. On this matter, Teacher A of School E reasoned that *"what sets one secondary school apart from the rest is the number of scholars with self-efficacy in that school at a particular academic year."* RCL Chairperson G of School A posited *"just like other schools, every secondary school is built for all learners and that it is the manner of handling teaching and learning with the attendant learner-results produced, that raises one secondary school from being in a condition of under-schooling to moving on to become an adequate secondary school."* The implication is that all secondary schools could divest themselves of the condition of under-schooling to become adequate secondary schools. This shall require that such secondary schools strategize on the handling of teaching and learning duties to turn their pupils into self-efficacious learners. Summing up what has been articulated by the research participants, it is clear that 21st-century learners are different and have to be diverse from their predecessors for the sake of making under-schooling functional and achieving educational institutions. Clarke and Equal Education align their views with the above when advising that failing to sow a spirit of self-efficacy within learners stands to prolong the challenge of having too many secondary schools trapped in the under-schooling condition, instead of being adequate secondary schools identifiable amongst others by the bulk of pupils being self-efficacious learners.²⁹ These are the learners who create adequate schooling as opposed to under-schooling.³⁰

Theme Two - Under-schooling and poor academic achievement

Although all learners have the constitutional right to education, at times pupils snub and violate that right by creating under-schooling. That state of affairs could descend a school into a dysfunctional and underachieving educational organisation. Despite the existence of diverse grounds that could be triggering

²⁶ R.J. Botha, "The Role of the School Principal in the Case Study of Various Members' Perceptions," *Journal of Social Science* 30, no. 3 (2017): 263–71; Andrea Juan and Mariette Visser, "Home and School Environmental Determinants of Science Achievement of South African Students," *South African Journal of Education* 37, no. 1 (2017): 1–10.

²⁷ Lara, "School Identity in the Modern World"; Meador, "The Role of the Principal in School"; T. Bush et al., *External Evaluation Research Report of the Advanced Certificate in Education: 30-School Leadership and Management* (Pretoria: Zenex Foundation, 2019).

²⁸ A Bernstein and J McCarthy, "Teachers' Poor Value for Money: Incentives for Good Educators Need to Be Introduced but the Challenge Is Deeper than Training and Skills Only," *The Star* 5 (2011); Modiba, "Every Educational Journey Has a Destiny"; S. Mgxashe, "Time for This Carelessness with Our Lives to Be Stopped, Mr President," *Sowetan*, December 7, 2011.

²⁹ A. Clarke, *The Handbook for School Governors* (Cape Town: Kate McCallum Publishers, 2009); Equal Education, "School Infrastructure."

³⁰ Kumalo, "Autum: A Time to Harvest Spiritual Growth."

pupils to create under-schooling, interventions by secondary schools are necessary to arrest poor academic achievement traceable to the prevalence of the under-schooling condition. Adequate secondary schools are likely to remain viable when the achievement of learners after being assessed is impressive due to wholeheartedly embracing schooling. The review of literature unveils that, in the main, pupils in under-schooling institutions are not that teachable. On that basis, learner results from under-schooling institutions are of a disappointingly low level. This is caused by the fact that in under-schooling institutions, schooling does not always contain a complete value for every learner. Where secondary schools are experiencing a large scale of learner underachievement that could be traceable to learners not always embracing schooling. Evidence of such a state of affairs is likely to be poor academic achievement by learners in an under-schooling condition. That is why one of the research findings in this paper reveals that where there is under-schooling, it is likely to be accompanied by poor academic achievement by learners. This research finding is being supported by an RCL Chairperson L of School C who retorted *“in our own secondary school, nearly all the pupils are not so teachable and this could be traced to the rate at which nearly all the teachers keep on complaining about how underachievement in the school stubbornly refuses to disappear.”* A teacher representative D of school E contended *“converting at least half of the secondary school pupils to become teachable, would require that the purpose of schooling be unequivocally clarified and explained to them, with the emphasis being on the point that every learner schools for himself or herself not for his or her parents and that much as poor academic achievement is caused by them it is equally them who could eliminate them by stopping their secondary schools from being under-schooling institutions.”* On the basis of the utterances of the research respondents, it is likely to take a long time before the number of adequate secondary schools begins to rise. The implication is that there are more under-schooling institutions than there are adequate secondary schools. Where learners are teachable, even when they are being assessed, they are likely to consistently perform and thus contribute to the increase in the number of adequate secondary schools. Literature reviewed advises that in an educational institution, a challenge has to be identified and processes be put in place to formulate solutions based on the cause of that problem.³¹ In this context, the problem is under-schooling, which triggers learner underachievement.

Theme Three - Under-schooling and Socio-Economic Status Of Learners

No secondary school clear with its mandate has to celebrate any form of learner underachievement. Any learner underachievement, irrespective of its cause and severity, has to be resolved. Secondary schools need to cultivate a culture of adequate schooling and thus learner achievement. Where in one year a secondary school has faltered in terms of learner achievement, it timeously needs to know how to respond to the experienced challenge of underachievement, but having first established the causal factors. Hence, one of the themes established by the study was that under-schooling in secondary schools is created by pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged families. On this matter, Teacher representative C of School F stressed that *“secondary schools intending to overcome the challenge of learner underachievement occurring in under-schooling institutions, need to be in the know that it is learners from poverty-stricken families who when they are in majority in a school could consolidate the condition of under-schooling which is known to be breeding learner underachievement.”* RCL Chairperson K of School B contended that *“under-schooling institutions which could be perpetual underachievers basing everything on the kind of learner results they produce, are likely to find it difficult to quickly counter their experienced underachievement condition in comparison to adequate schools which arguably by virtue of being used to achieving, could be wise and experienced enough on what went wrong which led to the set-up of learner underachievement which in no time requires that a secondary school overcomes it.”* The expressed views by the research respondents emphasise the need for secondary schools in this 21st century to be able to intervene as part of resolving their

³¹ Clarke, *The Handbook for School Governors*; Kehdinga George Fomunyan, “The Ideological Ware as Key to Improving Learner Performance,” *Journal of Educational Studies* 16, no. 1 (2017): 108–25; Meador, “The Role of the Principal in School.”

witnessed learner underachievement difficulties. This is particularly necessary with the knowledge that it is under-schooling created by learners from socio-economically disadvantaged families, for whom schooling may not have any value or significance for them. Ramphela posit that in the 21st century, institutions need to be populated by secondary school learners able to cajole one another to do tasks voluntarily, where force or coercion would never succeed.³² Modiba et al. articulate that current secondary schools deserve and qualify for the deployment of seasoned institutional incumbents who are capable of de-routinizing secondary schools to enable them to confront under-schooling and learner underachievement.³³

Theme Four - Under-schooling and Unmanaged Learner Truancy

Learner underachievement in secondary schools stems from many factors. Any secondary school well-intentioned in overcoming under-schooling known to be triggering learner underachievement, has to identify such factors and confront them head-on. This is essential in terms of ever galvanising almost everyone to contribute to the removal of underachievement.³⁴ On this theme, Teacher representative E of School D narrated that *“secondary schools have a potential of contributing to the creation of adequate schooling as against under-schooling institutions in case they could resiliently and relentlessly concentrate on demoting the spirit of learner truancy in schooling which prevents the abolishment of learner underachievement.”* RCL Chairperson D of the same school reiterated that *“talking and acting unity-of-purpose by school members, ranging from teachers to learners, is more said than done, something confirming that lack of unity of purpose within the stakeholders in secondary schooling sector delays the neutralisation and the marginalisation of learner truancy which is as bad as learner underachievement due to both being products of under-schooling and both being the antithesis of brilliant learner achievement.”* The expressed responses of the research participants paint a bleak picture of how much some secondary schools still have to be converted into adequate schooling through encouraging a spirit of pulling together in one direction by everyone at school, to attain a single objective of suppressing learner truancy and learner underachievement, as sponsored by the under-schooling conditions in those schools. With everyone at secondary school being ready to cooperate for the subsiding of learner truancy, a secondary school’s single destiny of greatness by virtue of supplanting under-schooling with adequate schooling where learner underachievement and learner truancy are unknown and foreign, could be achieved. Mabote and Ramrathan assert that every educational institution strives for either its greatness or otherwise through the manner of consistently galvanising institutional incumbents to work hard for the production of magnificent learner achievement at all times, with little or no learner truancy at all.³⁵

Theme Five - Under-schooling and Learner Drop-Out Rate

That schooling is not as simple as portrayed is no exaggeration. The debate of under-schooling triggering learner underachievement and learner truancy is an indication enough that myriad factors are at play and capable of either building or collapsing a secondary school. Secondary schools that do not place the self-preservation interests of an individual member ahead of those of a school are likely to be capable of self-rehabilitating and dealing with any challenge faced, including learner underachievement and learner truancy.³⁶ There is a scenario of under-schooling triggering the learner drop-out rate. This can be aggravated by many factors such as those from learners themselves, from teachers, and from the type and kind of

³² M. Ramphela, “The Culture of Impunity,” *City Press*, August 14, 2011.

³³ Modiba, “Every Educational Journey Has a Destiny”; Juan and Visser, “Home and School Environmental Determinants of Science Achievement of South African Students.”

³⁴ P. Arden, *It’s Not How Good You Are, It’s How Good You Want to Be* (New York: Phaidon, 2013); Botha, “The Role of the School Principal in the Case Study of Various Members’ Perceptions.”

³⁵ M.D. Mabote, “Why Schools Underperform: Some General Causative Factors,” in *Capricorn District. Limpopo Province. An Educational Address during the Curriculum Roadshow Meeting with Mogodumo School Principals in Mogodumo Cluster Gathering.*, 2008; Ramrathan. L., “Learner Poor Performance; Provoking Bourdieu’s Key Concepts in Analysing School Education in South Africa.”

³⁶ Lee, “Teaching Is the Ultimate Step in the Acquisition of Wisdom and Knowledge.”

leadership and management exercised in a secondary school. As one of the findings in this paper, under-schooling and learner drop-out rates need to be comprehended in their context of occurrence. That is why Turner and Bambalele stress that it takes tried and tested managers and leaders in secondary schooling to arrest learner truancy and contribute to the overturning of an under-schooling condition into adequate schooling.³⁷ This perfectly resonates with the views of the research participants in this study. For instance, Teacher representative B of School A remarked *“in many secondary schools, both the experienced learner underachievement and learner truancy within the under-schooling institution are regarded to be a normalcy when in fact they are a precise indicator of a secondary school being bereft of management and leadership whose presence may have salvaged a secondary school and free it from such schooling crises that stand on the way of excellent scholastic learner achievement triggered by regular schooling attendance.”* RCL Chairperson H of School B emphasized that *“it is not impossible to put under control learner drop-out rate and subsequently flush it out completely out of the secondary schooling sector upon first ascertaining that every secondary school experiencing the drop-out problem establishes and determine factors encouraging and causing that condition in order to emerge with relevant and appropriate mechanisms to dismantle the problem.”* The expressed views explicitly suggest that since it is pupils who drop out of secondary schools, then in the 21st century, each school needs to be able to identify in advance such learners and offer them royal treatment as compared to their counterparts, as a strategy to entice them to recognise and love schooling. This stands to enable them to enliven the schooling set-ups, where the bulk of teachers populating those schools normally lament the lack of participation and dedication by potential school-quitting learners. The schooling challenge of dropping out learners could be construed to mean that 21st secondary school pupils are not in secondary schools as passengers, but active participants in the business of teaching and learning and thus deserve skilful and expert treatment to stay in the schooling system. Modiba, Gae, Gqirana and Lara sum this up remarkably when observing that nowadays, the nature of interactions between learners and teachers has to be different to enable learners to stop regarding drop-out as fashionable.³⁸

Theme Six - Under-schooling and Educational Outcomes of Learners

Botha reasons that under-schooling and poor educational outcomes are partners.³⁹ This implies that it is ever far-fetched to expect top-class learner achievement in under-schooling. One of the reasons is that under-schooling institutions are dealing with all sorts of schooling obstacles, like learner bullying, learner truancy, and learner dropout, some of which end up disturbing the production of excellent learner performance. The implication is that under-schooling institutions could struggle to get every stakeholder to work together seamlessly. The manner of leading and managing under-schooling is likely to acknowledge that learner underachievement in those schools does not happen in silos. What makes under-schooling institutions operate differently from top-notch schools is their encouragement of the culture of being reactive. On the basis of that, one of the findings in this paper relates to under-schooling institutions ever suffered from dissatisfactory learner outcomes. On this aspect, a Teacher representative A of School B stressed that *“in my experience of having served in an under-schooling institution for some years and currently in a competitive and learner achieving secondary school, I argue that in achieving secondary schools when exquisite learner results are not forthcoming, due to various reasons, such secondary schools are able to explore the concerted multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder interventions until the required learner achievement is attained.”* RCL Chairperson I of School E confirmed that *“secondary schools that are proactive in thought and practice could experiment with structural and formational changes in case they find themselves struggling for long with the envisaged good learner achievement, something totally missing in under-schooling where poor*

³⁷ A. Turner, *Born to Succeed*. (Britain: Falmer Press, 2000); Bambalele, “Rapetsoa Acts on Violence as He Reworks Our Cry”.”

³⁸ Modiba, “Every Educational Journey Has a Destiny”; W. Gae, “Primary School Learners’ Perspectives on Factors That Impact Their Learning and Wellbeing at School” (Stellenbosch University, 2016); Gqirana, “Without Resources Rural Schools Will Continue to Underperform ”; Lara, “ School Identity in the Modern World.”

³⁹ M. Botha, “Let’s Be Proactive and Not Vindictive When Dealing with Bullying Children,” *Sowetan*, May 5, 2021.

educational outcomes become the way of life and legendary owing to the under-schooling condition defining that secondary school.” Evidently, under-schooling has to be resolved due to harbouring unwelcome educational outcomes. Ramphela displays her invaluable experience in schooling when accentuating the need to completely overhaul the South African education system to make it functional and to contribute to the transformation of every schooling sector.⁴⁰ This is supported by Kuseka and Bush et al., who emphasise that secondary schools need to learn to resort to their own witticism to wrench themselves out of the welter of difficulties of this century, some of which include the witnessed perpetual learner underachievement, which is attributable to the condition of under-schooling.⁴¹

Theme Seven - Under-schooling and a few hours of instructions

Few educational institutions are able to underachieve this year and quickly turn the tide in no time. This is one attribute that sets apart an adequate school from an under-schooling institution. Southey and Omar assert that by virtue of experiencing emotional and spiritual freedom, adequate schools are able to rise from their ruins, implying quickly restoring learner achievement where learner underachievement was occurring.⁴² It is no secret that where pupils underachieve in great numbers, they become a liability rather than an asset for their school. Interventions are necessary to reverse learner underachievement attributable to under-schooling before such a state of affairs becomes legendary. One of the findings in this paper unveils that learner underachievement could result from under-schooling in the form of teachers spending a few hours of instruction with learners. Teacher representative A of School F narrated *“where the majority of pupils in a secondary school are simply disinterested in schooling because of having not been exposed to the value of attending lessons regularly, with the intention of acquiring knowledge, teachers could be tempted to spend few teaching hours with learners who regard schooling to be a place of whiling away time other than as a place of learning and development.”* RCL Chairperson J of School D also narrated *“it is a point beyond dispute that massive learner repetition which is associated more with few hours of instructions by teachers is likely to stay long in the schooling system as long as only a handful of instruction time is shared by teachers with their learners on a daily basis.”* The articulated concerns by research respondents, who are teacher representatives serving in the School Governing Body and the Representative Council of learners, over less instruction time by teachers, are indeed a concern worth overcoming by rolling back this kind of under-schooling, which aggravates learner underachievement. Bernstein and McCarthy, Fomunyan, Equal Education and Sobuwa contend that difficulties associated with limited instruction time in secondary schools require complex, comprehensive and dynamic approaches, inclusive of concerted multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder interventions for their elimination.⁴³

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings presented above, the following recommendations are made: there is a need to sow into pupils a sense of improving their lesson attendance rates in order to contribute to overcoming learner underachievement. In addition, schools need to galvanise every stakeholder to contribute to overturning under-schooling, which is detrimental to learners’ academic achievement. Furthermore, learners from socio-economically disadvantaged families need to be given special attention in schools as they are known to consolidate the concept of under-schooling, which triggers learner underachievement. Moreover, there is a need to prioritise dealing with learner truancy in the secondary schooling sector, as it is behind the perpetually

⁴⁰ Ramphela, “The Culture of Impunity.”

⁴¹ P. Kuseka, “The Power Within,” *Sunday Sun*, July 15, 2008; Bush et al., *External Evaluation Research Report of the Advanced Certificate in Education: 30-School Leadership and Management*.

⁴² Southey, “Teaching Ruin and Warring Wallahs”; Y. .A. Omar, “Wanted Political Entrepreneurs to Forge a Common Nationhood in SA,” *Sowetan*, October 4, 2019.

⁴³ Bernstein and McCarthy, “Teachers’ Poor Value for Money: Incentives for Good Educators Need to Be Introduced but the Challenge Is Deeper than Training and Skills Only”; Fomunyan, “The Ideological Ware as Key to Improving Learner Performance”; Equal Education, “School Infrastructure”; Sobuwa, “Teacher Handbook Calls for Change in Classes 2021.”

experienced learner underachievement. There is also a need for the secondary schooling sector to roll back the learner drop-out rate as triggered by under-schooling. There is also a need to ensure that educational outcomes at schools are ever pleasant to attract learners and parents to support the decimation of under-schooling and replace it with adequate schooling. Finally, there is a need for the secondary schooling sector to address the challenge of a few hours of instruction by teachers, as it is the problem that prolongs under-schooling. All the proposed recommendations are necessary in view of the perennial underachievement of some public secondary schools, especially in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the author examined the origin of under-schooling, which is known to trigger learner underachievement in myriad secondary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The narrative enquiry and the interviewing techniques, together with the two selected theoretical perspectives, provided a better context within which the entire paper had to be located and comprehended. The findings revealed that learner underachievement is associated with under-schooling. The conclusion arrived at in this paper is informed by the perspectives of teachers serving in the School Governing Bodies and the Representative Council of Learners as regards under-schooling and how it leads to learner underachievement in the secondary schooling sector.

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