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Wits School of Education

Master of Education by Coursework and Research Report

Research Report (EDUC7031A)

A comparative analysis of chronic learner absenteeism in selected public high schools in Johannesburg

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Abstract

This study investigated the perspectives of principals and teachers on chronic learner absenteeism in selected public high schools in Johannesburg. The research study established the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism, identified the causes and examined the possible implications of chronic school absence. The study also found out how public high schools responded to chronic absenteeism. Moreover, the literature review provided an understanding of the research study.

The study used a qualitative design. The data was collected at two public high schools of two different socio-economic environments in Johannesburg, that is, High school A and High school B. High school A was situated in an upmarket suburb and High school B was in a township. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with school principals and questionnaires were administered on the teachers.

The findings were compared between the two schools of different socio-economic backgrounds. It emerged from the findings that chronic learner absenteeism was more pronounced in schools that catered for children from low-income households compared to schools that served learners from high-income households. The high incidence of chronic learner absenteeism at High school B was attributed to socio-economic challenges, difficult family circumstances, school-specific factors, personal issues and the time or season of the school year or day of the week. On the other hand, at High school A chronically absent learners missed school because of personal matters and the time or season of the school year or day of the week. Chronic absence had an adverse impact on learning and academic achievement. The study also found that public high schools in Johannesburg responded positively to chronic learner absenteeism in terms of providing learning support to absent learners when they returned to school. The schools also collaborated with parents and the wider community to tackle chronic learner absenteeism.

It is recommended that the Departments of Education, Social welfare and Health, policy makers, schools, parents and the community should work together as a nation to address chronic learner absenteeism to make regular school attendance a priority. It is envisioned that the issues explored in this study will contribute towards addressing chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools.

List of Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
CASE and JET	Community Agency for Social Enquiry and Joint Education Trust
CREATE	Consortium for Research on Education Access Transmissions and Equality
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HOD	Head of Department
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ILO	International Labour Organization
NEA	National Education Association
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NSNP	National School Nutrition Programme
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
STASSA	Statistics South Africa

UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
US	United States

Plagiarism Declaration

A comparative analysis of chronic learner absenteeism in selected public high schools in Johannesburg

University of the Witwatersrand

2019

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Masters by Coursework and Research Report

I declare that this is my own work. I have acknowledged all direct quotations and paraphrased ideas. I have provided a complete, alphabetised reference list, as required by APA method of referencing (described in the Referencing Handbook). I have not allowed, and will not allow, anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work. I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand will take disciplinary action against me if evidence suggests that this is not my own unaided work or that I failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Learner absenteeism is a serious issue in education across the world, both in developed and developing countries (US Department of Education, 2016). Absenteeism rates in developed countries range between 6- 8% (US Department of Education, 2016). Over six million learners missed 15 or more days of school between 2013 and 2014 in the United States, representing 14% of the learner population (US Department of Education, 2016). Demir & Karabeyoglu (2015) assert that absenteeism is higher at secondary school relative to other levels of education and is steadily increasing. To illustrate this, the authors above reveal that absenteeism rates increased in 2009- 2010 compared to 2008- 2009, from 1.1% in 2008- 2009 to 4% in 2009- 2010. In addition, Demir & Karabeyoglu (2015) indicate that the ratio of learners absent for more than 20 days of schools are secondary school learners.

According to research conducted by Community Agency for Social Enquiry and Joint Education Trust (CASE & JET) (2007) for the South African Department of Education, absenteeism rates in developing countries, precisely in Africa, are much higher than absenteeism rates in developed countries, at times as high as 50%. In some sub Saharan countries, daily school attendance rates can be less than 70% in some schools (CASE & JET, 2007). The prevalence of learner absenteeism in South Africa ranges between 5% and 15 % (CASE & JET as cited in Machingambi & Wadesango, 2011).

While learner absenteeism is a concept that is often used as a collective concept that includes several types of learner absenteeism, this study was focused on chronic learner absenteeism. Learner absenteeism occurs when a learner is not at school the entire day, for authorized or unauthorized reasons (CASE & JET, 2007). International scholars define chronic learner absenteeism as a situation whereby a learner is absent for 10% or more days in the academic year (Lara, Noble & Pelika, 2018). Likewise, Cook (2010) argues that chronic learner absenteeism is when a learner is absent from school for 20% of school year.

Chronic learner absenteeism is more pronounced in schools of low socio-economic backgrounds compared to high socio-economic schools. International literature highlights that school attendance may be contingent on the type of school, the environment in which the school is situated and the levels of poverty (Lara et al., 2018). In the similar vein, Nagaishi &

Roby (2016) argue that chronic learner absenteeism is more prevalent in schools in rural communities compared to those in urban areas in some countries in sub Saharan Africa. For example, in Mozambique, school attendance among learners residing in the urban areas is four times higher than that of learners living in the rural areas due to the social and economic difficulties the children are subjected to. In Machingambi & Wadesango's (2011) view, South African schools are diverse with regards to milieu, socio-economic status and various factors and these factors have a significant impact on school attendance. Otto (2006) states that high attendance at high socio-economic schools may be attributed to adequate resources and facilities at the school compared to poor schools which may not have the necessary resources, proper infrastructure and facilities.

There are several factors that pose a challenge to school attendance in South African secondary schools as elsewhere in the world (CASE & JET, 2007). These factors include five important dimensions, namely; socio-economic challenges, school-specific issues, family circumstances, personal matters and culture or cultural practices (Jacob & Lovett, 2017; Nsingi, 2016; Seokoma, 2015).

There are numerous socio-economic problems that cause learners to miss school. For instance, some researchers have identified problems such as, the inability to pay school fees and other costs including school uniforms, shoes, stationery and books contributes to school attendance (Sanzila, 2011; Phurutse, 2005). The lack of food to eat at school and at home may cause learners to miss school. Statistics South Africa (2016) reveals that 45% of children in the country live in households where there is not enough to eat. Some girls from poverty-stricken families skip school every month during their menstrual period because they do not have access to sanitary towels (Cook, 2014).

The International Labour Organization (2017) reveals that child labour is a socio-economic issue that deprives children of the opportunity to learn, both in developed and developing countries. According to Otto (2016) children may be absent from school because they spend considerable amount of time engaging in agricultural, economic and domestic work. This author also states that chronic learner absenteeism is correlated to public transport problems in the rural areas. Lara et al., (2018) assert that some children walk long distances to school, which may be unsafe especially for girls as they can get raped. These authors further add that both boys and girls may skip school because of the fear of being attacked by robbers on their way to school.

The impact of HIV and AIDS is highly correlated to school attendance (Otto, 2016). Some children are compelled to stay at home to take care of their parents who suffer from AIDS-related illnesses (UNAIDS, 2016). Children that have lost a parent or both parents miss school to take care of their younger siblings and to find jobs (Bergman, Bergman & Gravett, 2011). Teenage pregnancy is another socio-economic problem that leads to chronic school absence (Otto, 2016). To elaborate, this writer argues that some girls miss school because they are embarrassed of falling pregnant, some may be absent after giving birth to take care of their new born babies. In addition, teenage mothers may also skip school to collect their child's South African Social Security (SASSA) grants (Mboweni, 2014).

Jacob & Lovett (2017) claim that chronic learner absenteeism is caused by issues that occur within the context of the school. If learners perceive the curriculum and school subjects as boring and irrelevant to their lives they may not go to school. Also, if they do not understand the language of instruction, they are more likely to miss school (CASE & JET, 2007). Teacher incompetence or skill deficit may lead to absence (Machingambi & Wadesango, 2011). If learners have negative relationships with their teachers, they are highly likely to stay away from school, to avoid seeing the teachers (Gerhenson, 2016). Govender (2016) contends that teacher absenteeism greatly impacts on learner school attendance. Learners may not see the point of going to school if their teachers are consistently away from school. Big class size, poor school facilities and a lack of resources such as inadequate electrical systems, clean water, library, sports ground, desks, chairs and books may discourage learners from attending school (Baysal, Ocak, & Ocak, 2017; Otto, 2016).

Ncontsa & Shumba (2013) reveal that violence and crime are rife in secondary schools in South Africa. From time to time, schools are confronted with discrimination and intolerance, sexual harassment, bullying and gangsterism, therefore, learners may choose to stay at home for safety and security reasons (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). Clark (2008) holds the view that school policies on absenteeism are vague, and poor implementation of the policies portrays the wrong message about the importance of school attendance to the learners and their parents. If policies are not well defined, learners are more likely to be absent. Harsh school rules and regulations also contribute to learner absenteeism in South African secondary schools (Boissier, Chang & Gomperts, 2014). These writers explain that learners in secondary schools have reported that punishment for being late at school was so severe that they preferred to be absent on those days when they are very late (Boissier et., al, 2014).

Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) assert that family matters have a great influence on whether learners go to school or not. Family circumstances may include broken family structures, divorced parents, child-headed households, family feuds, alcoholic parents and drug abuse may cause a child to miss school (Bergman et al., 2011; De Loreto, Gage, George, Lou, Lunde & Sugai (2013). According to Corley (2012), if there is no proper environment for the child to do school work at home, the child is more likely to miss school. Ncontsa & Shumba (2013) indicate that inadequate parental involvement and support in a child's school experiences and the lack of parental monitoring and consistency in terms of school attendance may result in chronic learner absenteeism.

Jacob & Lovett (2017) argue that personal issues and characteristics of the learner are interrelated with chronic learner absenteeism. According to Lara et al., (2018) school absence increases with age and grade level. Gender has an influence on school attendance, however, there are contrasting views on which gender is more likely to demonstrate problematic attendance. Boissier et al. (2018) contend that learners may skip school because they are ill or have sustained injuries. Research highlights that learners whose academic performance is poor are more likely to miss school than high academic achievers (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). It is also argued that learners are more prone to miss school if they have a low self-esteem and negative self-concept (Otto, 2016). Furthermore, some learners may stay away from school because of the pressure exerted by their peers not to attend school to partake in activities outside school (Machingambi & Wadesango, 2011).

Chronic learner absenteeism has an adverse impact on learning outcomes. Jhemson (2016) contends that learners who are regularly absent from school miss out on the knowledge transmitted in the classroom. They lose out on the interactions and demonstrations made by teachers to explicate concepts. Consequently, absentees may lack understanding of concepts and subject matter, they may respond incorrectly to questions pertinent to content that was covered when they were away from school (Reid 2011; Attwood & Croll, 2006). Likewise, if learners are absent during lessons wherein group work or whole-class discussions took place, they miss out on the new ideas, knowledge shared, as well as the important teamwork and social skills (Jhemson, 2016).

School attendance has a significant impact on learner performance in assessments. Learners who consistently skip school may submit classwork and homework that is not complete because they do not understand the questions (Attwood & Croll, 2006). They may obtain low

grades in tests and examinations, ultimately failing and repeating the same grade (Jhemson, 2016). Learners may perform so poorly that they cannot understand the curriculum, therefore, may lose motivation in learning and drop out of school (Lewin, 2009). As a result of chronic learner absenteeism, teachers may have to divert some time into re-teaching and revising the previous lesson or lessons (Otto, 2016). This author explicates that such backtracking may be unfair on the regular attending learners since it takes time from the rest of the class.

On the other hand, learners who attend class regularly may do well academically. Clearly, regular school attendance is of pivotal importance as it lays a base for academic success. Hence, there was a need to investigate chronic learner absenteeism in South African public high schools, its causes, possible implications on learning as well as how this problem can be addressed to promote good school attendance.

1.2 Problem statement

The Bill of Rights chapter of the Constitution of South Africa (1996) proclaims everyone's right to education and children's right to basic education. This declaration by the Constitution is endorsed and supported by the South African Schools Act (1996), which affirms compulsory school attendance and the responsibility of parents to ensure that. Despite these provisions by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and the South African Schools Act, as well as the efforts by the White Paper 6 to maximize participation of all learners in the curriculum and culture of schools and to tackle barriers to learning, there are still children and young people that experience marginalization and exclusion, particularly silent exclusion from the education system due to chronic learner absenteeism which occurs for numerous reasons. These children may be officially registered at the school but are deprived epistemological access, they may be learning a little or not learning at all.

Chronic learner absenteeism is most prevalent in schools that are situated in low socio-economic environments relative to high socio-economic schools. The high incidence of chronic learner absenteeism in low socio-economic schools can be attributed to the challenges that learners experience such as poverty and other socio-economic problems, school-based factors, difficult family circumstances, personal issues and cultural factors (Jacob & Lovett, 2017; Nsengi, 2016; Seokoma, 2015). These hardships deny low-income children of their right to education, making it difficult for them to take advantage of the opportunity to learn at school. Comparatively, the incidence of chronic absenteeism in high socio-economic schools may be lower because the schools may have more resources, proper

infrastructure and facilities (Otto, 2016). The children may be from high income families which makes it possible for them to attend school regularly.

1.3 Rationale

There are several reasons that motivated the researcher to pursue the research study. The researcher's interest in conducting the study on chronic learner absenteeism at public high schools in Johannesburg was inspired by personal experience as a student teacher at a public high school in Johannesburg approximately three years ago when pursuing her Postgraduate Certificate in education (PGCE). The incidence of learner absenteeism was high at the school, daily. This was noticed through the class attendance register that had to be marked every morning, during register period and 15 minutes before the bell rang for home time in the afternoon. While, some of the learners missed school for valid reasons, as parents would report or communicate with the school about the child's absence, some learners would be absent for invalid reasons, as some parents would be surprised to find out through the D-6 communicator that their child is not at school.

Chronic learner absenteeism is under-researched in South Africa. There is a gap in literature concerning comparative studies on chronic learner absenteeism in Johannesburg public high schools. Davidson, Malcolm & Wilson (2003) argue that learner absenteeism has received little attention compared to other educational studies. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the body of literature on chronic learner absenteeism in South African public high schools. It is hoped that the results of the study will be published in academic journal articles, books and conference presentations. Therefore, the research findings will strengthen the arguments of other scholars and refute others. The study provides deeper knowledge and understanding of chronic learner absenteeism, and an accurate analysis of why some learners are consistently absent from school.

Chronic learner absenteeism greatly impacts on teaching and learning (Jhemson, 2016), hence the need to study the challenges that are brought about by chronic learner absenteeism, so that by articulating these problems, we find solutions to improve school attendance and ultimately improve academic performance. Chronic learner absenteeism is often overlooked and not tackled. The reality is that attention is focused only on daily attendance, not chronic learner absenteeism. Thus, it is important to track chronic learner absenteeism not just average daily attendance. Moreover, chronic learner absenteeism is a serious problem in South Africa, for teachers, parents, the community and particularly the learners.

It is hoped that this study will also benefit teachers, principals, public high schools, parents, department of education and policy makers to find ways to monitor and tackle chronic learner absenteeism. After the completion of the study, the schools' principals were given a copy of the research report in which they can acquaint themselves with the recommended strategies to address chronic learner absenteeism in their schools. The findings provide teachers and principals with an opportunity for reflection, and to further their understanding of chronic learner absenteeism. It is hoped that the research findings will also be used in the advocacy and development for policy as well as to improve existing policies on learner school attendance in South Africa. The findings of study and recommendations will serve as useful input for policy making.

1.4 Research questions

Main research question

What are the principals and teachers' perspectives on chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg?

Sub-questions

- What is the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg?
- What are the factors that cause chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg?
- What are the possible implications of chronic learner absenteeism on learning in public high schools in Johannesburg?
- How do Johannesburg public high schools respond to chronic learner absenteeism?

1.5 Research aims

Main research aim

To investigate principals and teachers' perspectives on chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg.

Sub-aims

- To establish the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg.
- To identify factors that cause chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg.
- To examine possible implications of chronic learner absenteeism on learning in public high schools in Johannesburg.
- To find out how Johannesburg public high schools respond to chronic learner absenteeism.

1.6 Breakdown of Chapters

This study was broken down into six chapters as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Interpretation

Chapter Five: Discussion of the Findings

Chapter Six: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This literature review first looks at the conceptions of chronic learner absenteeism and then the prevalence of learner absenteeism in South Africa. The literature compares the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools from different socio-economic backgrounds. Literature on factors that cause chronic learner absenteeism and their implications on learning, is then examined. The reviewed literature also explores ways in which public high schools respond to chronic learner absenteeism. The literature review ends with a theoretical perspective that provides a lens through which to interpret and understand the issue.

2.2 Conceptions of chronic learner absenteeism

According to Cook (2010) learner absenteeism occurs when a learner misses school for the whole day for any reason. International research states that chronic learner absenteeism is when a learner skips 10% or more of school days during the academic year for excused and unexcused reasons (Lara et al., 2018). Similarly, Stokes (2016) defines chronic learner absenteeism as a situation whereby a learner stays away from school for 18 days, which is equivalent to 10% or more of the school year. Also, Cook (2010) asserts that chronic learner absenteeism occurs when a learner is absent from school for 20% of the academic year.

2.3 The prevalence rate for learner absenteeism in South Africa

The prevalence rate for learner absenteeism in South Africa ranges between 5% and 15% (CASE & JET in Machingambi & Wadesango, 2011). These authors reveal that the number of days lost due to learner absence in secondary schools in South Africa was 4, 958, 020 in 2006 in Mpumalanga, Free State, Eastern Cape, Limpopo and North West. Regrettably, there is a gap in literature concerning the prevalence rate and comparative studies on chronic learner absenteeism in Johannesburg public high schools.

2.4 A comparison of learner absenteeism in schools from different socio-economic backgrounds

At a global level, chronic learner absenteeism rates are higher in schools situated in low socio-economic environments compared to those found in high socio-economic backgrounds (Lara et al., 2018). Research shows that the type of school, the environment in which the school is located, and the levels of poverty greatly impact on learner school attendance (Lara et al., 2018). These authors explain that learners from low income households and those attending at high poverty schools are more likely to exhibit consistent absenteeism. Stokes (2016) points out that the prevalence of chronic learner absenteeism is more pronounced in rural schools relative to those located in the suburbs. This writer indicates that at least 225 000 high school learners skipped school for 15 days during the academic year 2015 in the United States of America, especially in the rural community of South California. Schools in rural Philadelphia, Baltimore and Milwaukee demonstrate very high rates of chronic absence at 40% (Stokes, 2016). According to this author some schools in rural Cleveland and Detroit absenteeism rates can be 50% sometimes (Stokes, 2016). On the other hand, schools in suburb areas such as Los Angeles United school at 12% Long Beach at 11.6% and Simi Valley is 11.45%.

Stokes (2016) explains that Cleveland, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Detroit and Milwaukee are high poverty areas. The high incidence of chronic learner absenteeism can be attributed to the problems related to poverty such as the lack of necessities such as food to eat at home and at school, inadequate health care services, lack of clean water and school uniforms. The lack of transport to get to school, scarce resources at the schools, poor infrastructural facilities and sanitation impede regular school attendance (Stokes, 2016). Correspondingly, Reid (2011) contends that children from poverty-stricken families are more likely to stay away from school compared to children from privileged homes. This author adds that children from poor households may miss three or more school days per month. In contrast, the incidence of absenteeism in schools located in the suburban and urban areas is lower because high socio-economic schools may have more resources, proper infrastructure and facilities which may encourage regular school attendance (Stokes, 2016). The children may be from high-income households which enables them to attend school every day (Burdick-Will & Logan, 2016).

Nagaishi & Roby (2016) argue that chronic learner absenteeism is rife in some sub Saharan African countries. Daily attendance rates in some countries in Southern African can be below

70% in some schools in the rural areas. It may also be 50% at times and during certain seasons of the year such as the harvest season (Lewin, 2009). In Mozambique, secondary school attendance among learners living in urban areas is four times higher than that of learners living in the rural areas due to high poverty (Nagaishi & Roby, 2016).

Research shows that children from low-income households in South Africa are more likely to exhibit irregular patterns of school attendance compared to those from high socio-economic families (Boissier et al., 2014). These authors reveal that social and economic barriers deter low-income learners from attending school consistently. Similarly, Machingambi and Wadesango (2011) point out that South African schools are quite diverse with regards to socio-economic status, locale and other factors and these influence whether children go to school or not. These authors also assert that schools found in semi-urban locations are subjected to their own set of unique problems, causation and consequences of school absence. In South Africa, it has been found that children living in the farms are more likely to demonstrate problematic absenteeism from school than children staying in urban places (Otto, 2016). This is because children who reside in the countryside tend to engage in child labour in the farms, which hampers school attendance (Otto, 2016).

2.5 Causes of chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools

There are numerous factors that pose a challenge to regular school attendance in public schools in South Africa. The causes of chronic learner absenteeism fall into five categories: socio-economic challenges, school-specific matters, family-based circumstances, personal issues and cultural factors (Jacob & Lovett, 2017; Nsingi, 2016; Seokoma, 2015).

2.5.1 Socio-economic factors and chronic learner absenteeism

Socio-economic factors include the social and economic issues that cause learners to miss school, these entail the inability to pay school fees, lack of food, geographical location, child labour, transport, HIV and AIDS impact, teenage pregnancy and the lack of sanitary protection among girl learners.

School Fees

The inability to pay school fees is a hindrance to regular school attendance (Sanzila, 2011). Other costs including school uniform, shoes, stationery and books may cause learners to stay

at home (Phurutse, 2005). Sanzila (2011) explains that some learners may choose to stay at home because they do not want to be perceived as underprivileged by their peers at school.

Food insecurity

Stokes (2016) asserts that the inability to buy basic household necessities such as food poses a challenge to school attendance. Many children in South Africa frequently miss school because of the lack of food to eat at home and at school (Otto, 2016). The author adds that some children go to school without having eaten anything in the morning (Otto, 2016). According to a report by Statistics South Africa (2016) a third of children in Free state and Gauteng experience hunger every day. The report also indicates that 45% of children in South Africa stay in households where there is insufficient food (Statistics South Africa, 2016). While the National School Nutrition Programme which is administered by the Department of Education has been of benefit to 76.2% public high schools in 2015 in South Africa, a step in the right direction, the programme has been criticized (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Firstly, that the food scheme does not cover all secondary schools, the programme stops feeding school children at a certain grade. Secondly, the consistency of the service is uncertain in some areas (South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), 2016).

Child Labour

Child labour is prevalent in both developed and developing countries (International Labour Organization (ILO), (2017) and it is highly correlated to school attendance. According to a report on child labour by the International Labour Organization (2017), 218 million children around the globe, between the ages of 5 and 17 years are employed, and they work under unsafe conditions. The same report reveals that the prevalence of child labour in the African continent is 19.6% and that 1 in 5 children are in employment in Africa (ILO, 2017). Statistics South Africa (2017) indicate that out of the 112 million children in the country, 577 000 were in employment in 2015. These children were between 7 and 17 years of age, with 16 and 17-year-old being the most susceptible (Statistics South Africa, 2017). An estimated 20200 children were reported to have sustained injuries at work (Statistics South Africa, 2017), and this compounds school absence since they stay away from school until they are healed.

Sanzila (2011) argues that children assume the responsibilities and roles of the caretaker, in instances where the parent or parents have passed on. To elaborate, this author states that the eldest girl child usually takes the role of taking care of her younger siblings and boys are

compelled to find jobs to support the family. Consequently, the children who have now become caretakers miss school. Otto (2016) claims that child labour is more pronounced in rural communities in South Africa. This author highlights that girls may stay at home to do household chores such as fetching firewood and water, cleaning and cooking. Additionally, school attendance has been found to be higher for children who had never been engaged with any work compared to those who have (Budlender, 2007). Child labour deters regular school attendance since learners spend considerable amount of time fulfilling economic, agricultural and domestic duties back at home.

Transport

Some learners may skip school because of inefficient public transport systems particularly in the rural areas (Otto, 2016). Some learners walk very long distances to school, this can be unsafe for girls as they may get raped on their way to school (Lara et al., 2018). These authors further state that learners may also miss school to avoid being attacked by robbers in crime infested areas on their way to school.

The impact of HIV and AIDS

HIV and AIDS is one of the factors that hamper regular school attendance at secondary schools in South Africa (Otto, 2016). This can also be confirmed by the 115 167 AIDS-related deaths that occurred in 2018 (Statistics South Africa, 2018). Children have lost their parents to AIDS related illnesses, and this has culminated in a high number of child-headed households in South Africa. According to UNAIDS (2016), 4.8 million children lost one or both parents from AIDS-related illnesses in the year 2015. The Statistics South Africa general household survey reveals that there were about 90 000 children living in 50 000 child-headed households in the country in 2015. Due to the impact of AIDS some children are compelled to stay at home to take care of family members suffering from AIDS related illness, and to take care of their younger siblings after their parents have died (Bergman et. al., 2011). Govender (2016) points out that HIV and AIDS greatly influence teacher absenteeism. According to the Department of Education (2011) more than 4000 teachers died from AIDS related illnesses in South Africa in 2010. Govender (2016) argues that AIDS related illnesses dents teacher morale and culminates in extended teacher absence, which, in turn, encourages learner absenteeism. The same author explains that learners may see no point in coming to school if the teachers do not attend.

Teenage Pregnancy

Otto (2016) claims that teenage pregnancy is positively correlated to chronic learner absenteeism in secondary schools in South Africa. While some pregnant teenage girls may stay at home because they are embarrassed of falling pregnant, some girls may miss school after giving birth, to take care of their newly-born babies or young children (Otto, 2016). This author explains that although the education system in South Africa allows girls to continue with school after giving birth, some girls may drop out of school after giving birth. The teenage mothers may frequently miss school and ultimately drop out of school because of circumstances at home. Mboweni (2014) reveals that some teenage mothers miss school every month to collect their child's and their South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) grants

Lack of sanitary protection among girl learners

Underprivileged girls stay at home during their monthly menstrual period because of the lack of sanitary towels (Cook, 2014). According to the Department of Health (2016) seven million girls in South Africa, between the ages 13 and 19 years are absent for a week every month as they cannot afford to purchase sanitary pads. Correspondingly, Imbumba Foundation (2015) indicates that in South Africa, some girls miss 50 days of school of the academic year during the menstrual period. Cook (2014) contends that girls resort to unsanitary options such as utilizing newspaper and old clothes during that time of the month, which are very uncomfortable and puts them at risk of infection. Therefore, the learners may choose to stay at home than to be at school and constantly worry about leakage.

2.5.2 School-based factors and chronic learner absenteeism

School-specific matters entail the issues that occur within the context of the school which may influence attendance among learners. These factors include the content and methodology, teacher competence, learner-teacher relationship, teacher absenteeism, learner to teacher ratio, poor school facilities, punishment for late-coming, violence and crime in schools, school policy and rules on learner absenteeism.

Content and Methodology

Globally, precisely in the United Kingdom, for instance, Science and Mathematics lessons are frequently skipped by learners, because they perceive these subjects as inapplicable to their lives (Moseki, 2004). In South Africa, some learners perceive the curriculum and

lessons as irrelevant and school as tedious (CASE & JET, 2007). As a result, these learners are more likely to exhibit problematic absence. Language barrier may hinder regular school attendance if learners do not comprehend the instructional language (CASE & JET, 2007).

Teachers Competence

Machingambi & Wadesango, (2011) point out that if the instructional strategies are poor and lessons are long and not interesting, learners are more likely to stay away from school. The teaching and learning process may not cater for the learning needs, interests, strengths and weakness of the learners. These authors further add that teachers may fail to relate content knowledge or lessons to the real world, which may culminate in school absence. Research shows that some teachers are not qualified, and not properly trained to teach the new curriculum. Teacher incompetence may result in learners losing interest and motivation to learn, thus, missing school (Weeks, 2012).

Learner to Teacher relationship

According to Gerhenson (2016) the relationships between teachers and their learners have a significant impact on school attendance. If learners have negative relationships with their teachers, they may skip school to avoid seeing teachers. This argument aligns with Otto (2016) assertion that chronic learner absenteeism is higher in cases where teachers and learners have conflicting relations with learners. Likewise, Moseki (2004) claims that teachers that demonstrate negative attitudes, humiliate, and discriminate learners may culminate in learners' absence from school. According to Moseki (2004) demonstrating favouritism to some learners who may be performing well academically may dispirit learners who may not be doing well in class, which may lead to the low performing learners missing school.

Teacher absenteeism

Teacher absenteeism is another school-specific factor that influences chronic learner absenteeism in secondary schools in South Africa. The Department of Basic Education (2013) reveals that the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has the highest rate of teacher absenteeism, which, in turn, encourages learner absenteeism. According to a Human Science Research Council report (2017) there were 392 000 teachers employed at public high schools in 2012 in South Africa, with each teacher, on average, being away from school for 19 days. The total number of days lost in 2012, added up to 7448000 (HSRC, 2017). By the same token, Govender (2016) states that teacher absenteeism is one of the

factors that pose a challenge to regular school attendance in South African secondary schools. Teachers miss school to do shopping and some have other jobs while they are full-time teachers. This is problematic because learners may see no point of attending school if the teacher is regularly absent (Govender, 2016). This author adds that teacher absenteeism is more pronounced in low socio-economic schools compared to high socio-economic schools.

Learner to Teacher Ratio

Overcrowded classes and the shortage of teachers in some public high schools in South Africa is a school-based problem that causes learners to miss school (Baysak, Ocak, Ocak, 2017). CASE & JET (2007) reveal that the average learner-teacher ratio was 32: 9, learners per teacher in public high schools in South Africa in 2005. Also, 59% of the classes in the Eastern Cape, 60% of the classes in Mpumalanga, 64% of the classes in Limpopo and 22% of the classes in the Northern Cape and Western Cape, had classes comprising of 46 learners (CASE & JET, 2007). Overcrowded classes may result in some learners not being able to follow the curriculum, as a result, they may lose interest and stay away from school (Baysal et al., 2017).

Poor school facilities

Inadequate infrastructure, facilities and resources have an adverse impact on school attendance in public high schools in South Africa (Otto, 2016). The same author adds that some schools do not have clean water, proper electrical systems, a library, sports ground, books, desks and chairs to sit on. According to Cook (2014) most rural schools in South Africa do not have safe, clean and private toilets, this negatively affects both boys' and girls' school attendance, however, this is more pronounced among girls who go through their monthly menstrual period. Therefore, girls may not attend school when they are on their menstrual period because of the inadequate facilities and poor sanitation at schools (Cook, 2014).

Punishment for late-coming

Harsh school rules and regulations for late-coming contribute to chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools. In some African countries such as Uganda, most schools employ harsh discipline policies, rules and regulations, and these discourage learners from attending school (Agwot, 2014). In the similar vein, Boissiere et al., (2014) argue that learners in some public high schools in South Africa have reported that punishment for being late school was severe that they skipped school on days when they were very late. These authors state that, in

contrast with South African legislation that abolishes corporal punishment, some schools still use corporal punishment, which causes learners to stay away from school to avoid it.

School policy and rules on learner absenteeism

School policies and rules on absenteeism are likely to lead to chronic learner absenteeism. Clark (2008) contends that policies on absenteeism may be ambiguous and the implementation of the policies may give the wrong message to the learners and parents concerning the importance of regular school attendance. If the policies are vague, chronic learner absenteeism will persist. Boissiere et al., (2014) point out that stringent measures such as suspension from school and corporal punishment are ineffectual in curbing chronic learner absenteeism.

Violence and Crime in Schools

Research shows that violence and crime are positively correlated to chronic learner absenteeism. Ncontsa & Shimba (2013) indicate that schools, are from time to time spaces of bullying, intolerance, discrimination, sexual harassment, abuse and crime.

Harmon (2013) reveals that 60% of children are scared to attend school because they have been subjected to bullying. For instance, Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender learners are seven times more likely to be discriminated against or mistreated. Sexual harassment is another reason why learners may be absent from school; however, this is more pronounced for girl learners (Ncontsa & Shimba, 2013). Some girls are sexually abused by male teachers in exchange for money or food, which results in the learners disliking school, skipping school and eventually dropping out (CASE & JET, 2007).

According to Ncontsa & Shumba (2013) drugs and gangsterism may prompt learners to stay away from school. High schools in South Africa are reported to be intruded by gangsters and drug users. The Gangsters come inside school boundaries through holes in school fences to intimidate and harass learners (CASE & JET, 2007). Therefore, learners may stay at home because of safety concerns, especially if the school does not provide a safe and secure environment. Lara et al., (2018) point out that for learners that commute to school every day may frequently miss school if they stay in violent and crime infested areas. Furthermore, some learners have been reported to be absent from school due to xenophobic attacks in South Africa (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013).

2.5.3 Family factors and chronic learner absenteeism

Family factors are the issues that occur within the context of the home or family. These may include broken family structures and lack of parental involvement.

Disintegrated Family structures

Broken and changing family structures significantly contribute to chronic learner absenteeism. Orphans and children living in child-headed households are more likely to skip school frequently as they assume elderly care taking roles and responsibilities (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). The orphaned children are compelled to find jobs to enable family survival. Such responsibilities may prompt learners to stay at home (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Children who come from single-parent households, divorced parents and foster care homes are more prone to skip school than those that come from stable family backgrounds (Bergman et al., 2011).

Research highlights that children who are exposed to alcohol and drug abuse at home are at high risk of problematic absenteeism (De Loreto et. al., 2013). These writers add that if there are family feuds and children are exposed to abuse at home, school attendance may be negatively affected.

Lack of Parental involvement

There is a correlation between parental involvement and a learner's school attendance pattern. Kelly (2013) argues that, in contrast with the South African Policy on Learner Attendance (2010) compelling parents and guardians to ensure that their children go to school every day, there is inadequate parental involvement regarding their children's attendance. This author further states that parents do not engage themselves in their children's school matters. According to Ncontsa & Shumba (2013) children whose parents hold negative assumptions and perceptions about education are more likely to miss school. These writers explain that some uneducated parents may not see any value in education. If the parents had negative experiences with regards to their own education or were themselves chronic absentees, they may not be involved in their children's school experiences, particularly school attendance. Children may have the agency to skip school if no one encourages and monitors their school attendance. Moreover, parents' lack of awareness about the possible implications of chronic learner absenteeism may result in increased school absence among learners (De Loreto et. al., 2013).

2.5.4 Personal factors and chronic learner absenteeism

Learners' personal issues and characteristics may cause them to miss school. These personal matters include age, gender, illness, academic performance, psychological problems the learner may be experiencing and peer pressure.

Age

Age is positively correlated to chronic learner absenteeism. Lara et al., (2018) claim that school absence increases as learners progress to high school and higher-grade levels. Similarly, Demir & Karabeyoglu (2015) indicate that most of the learners that are consistently absent in education are in secondary schools, and learner absenteeism in secondary school increases with age.

Gender

Gender is also a personal factor that influences nonattendance in South African secondary schools. However, there are contrasting views about which gender is more likely to demonstrate problematic patterns of school attendance. Initially, research indicated that boys were more prone to miss school compared to their female counterparts (Newsome, 2008). On the other hand, Cooks (2014) believes that girls are more likely to miss school than boys. De Lannoy and Hall (2014) contend that there is no significant difference with regards to school attendance between boys and girls. According to Machingambi & Wadesango (2011) boys from poor backgrounds or single-parent households who are self-dependent are highly likely to skip school, to find jobs for family survival and their own survival. Cook (2014) argues that girls are more likely to be absent from school because of the lack of sanitary towels during their menstrual periods. Girls may demonstrate inconsistent patterns of attendance because of the devastating impact of sexual assault and violence they may be experiencing at school (Ncontsa & Shimba, 2013). Safety and security concerns may be a reason that prompts girl learners to miss school, particularly the risks related to walking very long distances to school.

Ill- health

Chronic learner absenteeism is attributed to learners' health problems. Boissiers et al., (2014) assert that chronic illness such as asthma causes learners to stay at home. Likewise, Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) state that chronic and minor illnesses such as flu and asthma, as well as injuries, may result in inconsistent school attendance. Limited access to health care amenities,

especially in high poverty areas, may result in chronic absence. Learners from low socio-economic environments, staying in improper houses that may cause health issues are also more likely to miss school (Boissiers et al., 2014).

Poor academic performance

Learners that experience challenges in learning may feel discouraged and may avoid school and stay at home (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). According to these authors learners that are not performing well in their academics are more prone to skip school than high academic achievers. Weeks (2012) claims that laziness, lack of motivation and commitment to learn influences chronic learner absenteeism.

Psychological problems

Learners are diverse in terms of skills, abilities, personalities, and experiences, and these can influence their school attendance patterns. Otto (2016) argues that children with a low self-esteem and negative self-image are more likely to be absent than those that have high self-esteem. According to this author learners with emotional problems, poor social skills are also most likely to show inconsistent school attendance patterns.

Peer pressure

Some learners may miss school due to peer influence. Machingambi & Wadesango (2011) contend that learners will be absent from school because of the need to be with their friends or peers. In the similar vein, Reid (2005) states that some learners are influenced by their peers not to attend school and are encouraged by their peers to take part in activities outside of the school with them.

2.5.5 Culture or cultural practices and chronic learner absenteeism

Cultural factors include the customs and rituals of a particular society or people. These include arranged marriages for girls and initiation practices for boys.

Arranged marriages

Culture greatly impacts on school attendance. According to a report by UNICEF (2016) arranged marriages are widespread in some rural regions in South Asia and America. The same report reveals that arranged child marriages are prevalent in the East and West Central Africa, as well as in some sub Saharan countries. An estimated 39% of girls are forced into marriage before the age of 18 years (UNICEF, 2016). Arranged marriages have a significant

influence on the girl child's school attendance as they miss school to take care of the family (Nsingi, 2016).

Initiation rituals

Cultural practices such as initiation ceremonials lead to chronic learner absenteeism among the boy learners (Malawoni, 2013). This author indicates that in Malawi and Kenya learners skip school because they are attending initiation rituals. In the same vein, boy learners stay away from school to attend initiation ceremonies in South Africa (Seokoma, 2015). This writer reveals that more than 400 illegally operating initiation schools have been closed down in South Africa. The illegal initiation schools exacerbate absenteeism as many boys end up being admitted and spending some time in hospital as a result of illnesses and infections culminating from the unsanitary initiation practices.

2.5.6 Other factors

Time or season of the year or day of the week

School absence is high at certain times or seasons of the school year and days of week. Sanzila (2011) argues that learner absenteeism is higher on Monday and Friday, which are the first and last days of the week. Similarly, CASE & JET (2007) indicate that high school learners in South Africa are more likely to miss school towards the end of the week; on Thursdays and Fridays. According to these researchers, school absence is lower during the middle of the week, that is, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) contend that school absences increase during certain seasons of the year. Learners are more likely to stay at home during cold and rainy seasons. According to these authors, learners may not have the necessary clothes to keep warm during cold weather and protective rain clothes. Furthermore, Lewin (2009) claims that in some sub Saharan African countries, daily attendance rates can be below 70% in some schools and can be 50% at times, during harvest season.

2.6. Implications of chronic learner absenteeism on learning

There is a positive correlation between learners' epistemological access and how much time they spend in the classroom. Irregular school attendance greatly impacts on learners' prospects for academic excellence and future career success (Boissier et al., 2018). This section examines how chronically absent learners are deprived of the opportunity to acquire

knowledge, peer insights and to understand subject matter. The adverse impact of chronic absence on performance in assessments is discussed. This section also looks at how chronic learner absenteeism contributes to drop-out, exclusion, grade failure and retention. To end, this section explores how teachers may have to reteach or revise previous lessons or lesson to help absentees catch up, which takes time.

2.6.1 Content knowledge and chronic learner absenteeism

Skipping school for several days culminate in learners missing out on content knowledge and important information imparted by the teacher. Jhemson (2016) points out that learning is progressive and lesson plans are created around progression in grasping concepts and content knowledge. Jhemson (2016) further adds that if a learner is not at school, they cannot take notes and understand the subject matter. Likewise, Reid (2011) argues that lessons are sequential in nature. If school attendance is irregular, the learning process will be disrupted because vertical knowledge builds up on each other. In addition, this author says that it is vital that learners master concepts at the beginning of a chapter to comprehend complex concepts that may follow. According to this author, if absenteeism persists, learners may not understand concepts, and this may lead to the misinterpretation of subject matter. Attwood & Croll (2006) argue that if learners lack an understanding of concepts, it may be difficult asking questions about what they do not understand because they are in a state of confusion.

2.6.2 Group discussions, participation in the classroom and chronic learner absenteeism

If a learner misses school on days in which collaborative work or activities were done in the classroom, the learner misses out on all the discussions, peer insights and new ideas (Jhemson, 2016). According to Gottfried (2014) irregular school attendance may lead to poor participation and coordination in the classroom. Rothman (2001) states that chronic absentees may be unable to make contributions or engage in class discussions with their peers. According to this author absentees may demonstrate poor performance in group presentations or projects due to insufficient preparation.

2.6.3 Performance in assessments and chronic learner absenteeism

Chronic learner absenteeism is highly interrelated with poor academic performance. Gottfried (2014) holds the view that learners who are regularly absent from school clearly get a few hours of learning, may obtain low scores on classes quizzes and tests. Otto (2016) asserts that

when a learner is not at school, they may miss out on the study guide or scope issued out in class, which may deter them from attaining good grades in their assessments. As a result, absentees may also not adequately prepare for tests and exams. According to Otto (2016) learners whose attendance is irregular may demonstrate poor writing because they cannot express ideas in a clear manner. This author adds that these learners may also give incorrect answers to questions related to the content that was transmitted in their absence. If learners do not understand questions, they may not submit their assignments on due dates or may submit incomplete work (Attwood & Croll, 2006).

Reid (2005) states that chronic absenteeism adversely affects learners' abilities. This author explains that learners' abilities are operative and effectual when are in class, which may positively influence on their academic performance. This suggests that their performance declines when they are regularly absent from school, which may culminate in learners failing and repeating the same class. Moreover, Ncontsa & Shumba (2013) highlight that poor academic performance may also result in a cycle of poor school attendance.

2.6.4 Drop out, exclusion and chronic learner absenteeism

Research shows that chronic learner absenteeism is usually an indication that a learner will drop out of high school (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Gottfried (2014) points out that poor academic performance because of chronic absence from school may cause learners to drop out. This author explains that when a learner feels she or he is not making academic progress in school work, they may become apathetic and cynical about completing school and therefore drop-out. By the same token, Lewin (2009) asserts that chronically absent learners' academic performance may be dismal that they cannot follow the curriculum. The author adds that learners may experience silent exclusion from school because of irregular school attendance. Silent exclusion means that they remain formally enrolled in school but may not be getting epistemological access (Lewin, 2009). The learners may stop going to school and quit before they complete the grade they are in. To elaborate on this, Lewin (2009) describes the Zones of Exclusion model. This model defines different patterns of exclusion that take place in the education system. According this model, learners who are silently excluded are found in Zones 3 and 6 of the model.

According to Cosnefroy, Lannegrand-Willems & Lecigne (2012) irregular attenders may lose motivation and interest in school if they feel alienated from their classmates or peers, teachers and school. This increases the chances of a learner dropping out of school Furthermore,

learners that exhibit inconsistent school attendance patterns can set a bad example and encourage absenteeism among other learners (Pehlivan, 2006). Correspondingly, Otto (2016) argues that poor school attenders may become role models as absentees are perceived as audacious and others want to be like them. Regular attending learners may observe and imitate their chronically absent peers and start missing school as well.

2.6.5 Reteaching and chronic learner absenteeism

As a result of chronic learner absenteeism, teachers may have to revise or teach the previous lesson to help absentees catch up (Otto, 2016). According to this author, teachers spend time backtracking and assisting absent learners when they return to school. In this author's view re-teaching for absent learners before moving on to the next lesson may be unfair to the regularly attending learners because this diverts time from the rest of the class. Regular attenders may be demotivated because of this backtracking (Arseven, Kilic & Sahin, 2016). However, Otto (2016) contends that at times teachers may not be able to reteach or revise due to time constraints.

Several scholars highlight the importance of school attendance as it lays a foundation for academic success and a bright future (Farrington, Jennings, Piquero, Ozkan & Rocque, 2016). Payne (2017) states that regular attenders acquire important knowledge, skills and values transmitted in the classroom. If learners attend school every day, they benefit from the different types of teaching methods and learning activities utilized in the classroom such as collaborative learning, class discussions, role plays and lectures and many more (Jhemson, 2016). According to Reid (2011) regular attenders may understand concepts, recall the information they have learned and apply it in real-life situations. This author holds the view that regularly attending learners have a better chance to ask questions and to enhance their understanding of the subject matter. Gottfried (2014) contends that regular attenders also stand a better chance to excel in assessments. Moreover, learners who do not demonstrate chronic school attendance problems have a lower chance of dropping out of school and failing (Gottfried, 2014; Reid, 2005).

2.7 Public high schools' response to chronic learner absenteeism

This section discusses the way in which teachers and schools respond to chronic learner absenteeism in terms of providing learning support. The importance of a class attendance register is highlighted in this section, and how it helps teachers to identify learners'

attendance trends throughout the academic year. It was also suggested in this literature section that all role players including the teachers, the school, peers, parents, family and the wider community should collaborate and work together to tackle the chronic learner absenteeism (Coetzee & Venter, 2016).

2.7.1 Learning support for chronically absent learners

Teachers need to identify as early as possible learners' school attendance patterns so that they can provide the necessary learning support and to take appropriate action with both absentees and their parents. Otto (2016) points out that utilizing a class attendance register can be useful to know those learners' who are not meeting the school expectations with regards to attendance so that teachers can focus on them. Otto (2016) further adds that a class attendance register can be used as a tool for monitoring absenteeism, as well as to support and enhance learning. Likewise, the Gauteng Province Circular Report (2017) indicates that class teachers must mark an attendance register every morning during the register period. According to this report, it is the responsibility of the principal to see to it that the attendance registers are marked for every class and these are checked and kept as stipulated in the South African Policy on Learner Attendance (2010). This circular report highlights the importance of record keeping as it allows the school to manage learner attendance and to provide the necessary intervention for the affected learners. Furthermore, CASE & JET (2007) mentions that using a daily attendance register, a weekly summary and quarterly reports can enable schools to tackle learner absenteeism.

The South African Policy on Learner Attendance (2010) states that the school must provide absentees with learning support when they return to school, to help them catch up with missed work and assessments. Similarly, CASE & JET (2007) indicates that learners who are identified with chronic learner absenteeism must be welcomed back into school and reintegrated in the learning process. It is imperative to provide learning support to learners who are chronically absent from school to keep them abreast with content knowledge and important information they missed when they were absent (Simmons, 2016).

Sheridan (2012) proposes that schools must arrange learning contracts to assist the chronically absent learners to catch up with missed work. Greenwood & McCabe (2008) refer to a learning contract as a document that may be completed by an absentee and subject teacher, this document outlines individual teaching process scheduled by teacher and learner. Green & McCabe (2008) explain that a learning contract has a section on school attendance,

subject participation and assessment requirements which the learner must sign. These authors stress upon the usefulness of the learning contract technique as it helps to improve the learner's behaviour in terms of school attendance and to enhance the child's academic performance. Simmons (2016) advises that teachers should schedule extra classes with absentees to help them catch up. This writer suggests that these extra classes can be held during lunch or preparation hour.

Otto (2016) asserts that there is a need for additional support such as tutoring, assistance with homework and mentoring to enhance learning for chronically absent learners. Mentoring may entail pairing the affected learner with a senior peer or elder, in which the mentor provides help and support to improve the mentee's academic performance. Boissier et al., (2014) state that schools must use data from the previous school year or the first month of school to identify chronically absent learners so that they can be allocated tutors or mentors. Lara et al., (2018) reveals that in the United Kingdom, tutoring involves programs to assist absent learners who have difficulties in learning, such as numeracy and literacy. According to these authors learners with such problems are assisted after school.

With technology evolving at a rapid pace, and with an increasing use of technology by children, Dailey (2015) proposes that teachers can create an online class blog to promote learning for absentees. Lessons, notes, important information and notices can be posted on the blog to enable absent learners to read and take part in learning in their absence. To illustrate, Dailey (2015) points out that learning graphics, videos and webpages can also be linked up to the blog to complement the learning process.

Machingambi & Wadesango (2011) identify teacher incompetence or skill deficit as a factor that leads to school absence. These authors state that the teaching and learning process may not cater for the learning needs, interests, strengths and weakness of the learners. For that reason, there is a need for teacher training and development that focuses on building of skills to educate or train teachers on how to accommodate learners with diverse needs (Bornman & Donohue, 2014). Along similar lines, Moseki (2004) suggests that teachers should incorporate a variation of teaching strategies to cater for the diverse learning needs of all learners including absentees. Moseki (2004) further adds that the curriculum must be appropriate, and teachers must have the skills to teach it. In addition, this author above further proposes that teachers should implement study support and additional curriculum activities including vocation training to promote the learning of absentees.

Weeks (2012) argues that some learners stay away from school because of the lack of motivation, hence, the need for motivation. Edwards (2013) suggests that schools must provide counselling intervention that aim to improve the learner's school attendance. However, learners' referral for counselling may be contingent on the reasons for missing school, for instance, some learners may demonstrate problematic attendance because of difficult family situations such as the death of a parent, divorced parents and family feuds and so forth (Edwards, 2013). This writer further adds that learners may talk to therapists or a school-based social worker to tackle school attendance problems.

Otto (2016) holds the view that positive reinforcement encourages good behaviour rather than punitive measures in addressing school absence, particularly unauthorized absenteeism. This author advises that schools should acknowledge improved learner attendance and the school attendance rate, in general. Edwards (2013) suggests that incentive programs can also be put into practice to promote good school attendance.

Research indicates that learners miss school because of myriad factors including socio-economic problems, school-based issues, difficult family situations, personal matters and cultural factors (Jacob & Lovett, 2017; Nsengi, 2016; Seokoma, 2015). Therefore, it is incumbent upon the principal, the school management team and teachers to cultivate a benevolent and caring environment. Otto (2016) contends that schools must be concerned with the welfare of the learners and the challenges that may be hindering their school attendance. The South African Policy on Learner Attendance (2010) states that, if need be, learners should be referred to government or non-government social development agencies or intervention programmes for social support or assistance. According to this policy, principals may also seek for support from the district, if necessary. Furthermore, Coetzee & Venter (2016) point out that supporting chronically absent learners entails the collaboration of all role players, including the school, teachers, and adjustment of the curriculum, peer support, family and the wider community.

2.7.2 Parental involvement

Parents' involvement in their child's school matters and especially school attendance is an effective way to curb chronic learner absenteeism (Attendance works, 2013). Boissier et al (2014) argue that parents or guardians are key in promoting regular school attendance as they have the power to ensure that the children for whom they are responsible for attend school daily and punctually.

It is imperative to maintain regular communication between parents and the school concerning their child's school attendance (Boissier et al., 2014). Otto (2016) suggests that schools must communicate with parents through telephone calls or electronic text message if learners do not show up at school, to notify the parents of a possible problem. This author also states that a parents meeting must arranged if a learner skips 3 days of school without any communication.

The South African Policy on Learner Attendance (2010) states that principals are required to engage the parents regarding the importance of attending school every day, and on time. The policy also highlights the need for principals to raise awareness about the adverse impact of chronic school absence, that is, if learners miss school for 10 consecutive school days, they will be charged with a breach of school code of conduct and deregistered. Epstein & Sheldon (2002) argue that when parents are well-informed about policies in place or rules and regulations concerning school attendance and when they are cognizant of the correlation between school attendance and academic success rates, they are ideally positioned to communicate the importance of attendance to their children.

Educational visits to the homes of chronically absent learners should be done as a strategy to tackle chronic learner absenteeism (Lara et. al., 2018). During such visits, teachers engage parents or guardians, they urge parents to see to it that their children attend school every day, and to provide the necessary support to ensure that there is a reduction in absenteeism (Lara et al., 2018). These authors point out that during the home visits teachers also advise learners to continue engaging with schoolwork and reading while they are away from school. In the same vein, CASE & JET (2007) proposes that teachers should advise learners to read at home during their absence. Research reveals that in the academic year 2012 in the United States, 30% of high school learners were identified with chronic learner absenteeism, however, after doing home visits, and after 2 academic years, the rate decreased to 13% (Lara et al., 2018). Learners whose homes or parents were visited had their absence reduced compared to those who were never paid a visit (Lara et al., 2018). Given the above, school attendance improves when parental involvement is high.

2.7.3 Community involvement

Public high schools are urged to work with the wider community to tackle chronic learner absenteeism. Addressing this problem demands a lot of work and cooperation with the general public, community-based organizations and local businesses (Lara et al., 2018). Since

school absence is more prevalent amongst low-income children, schools should work with their families to identify the underlying causes of chronic school absence. For example, if learners stay away from school because health and socio-economic reasons, families can be referred to health and social services in the community that may assist in addressing these problems. Furthermore, a study of Otto (2016) found that South African police, in the past years, have helped to address absenteeism, by fetching learners who were loitering in dodgy places during school time and taking them to school.

2.8 Theoretical framework

There are several theoretical frameworks through which chronic learner absenteeism can be studied, however, the Ecological Systems theory as propounded by Bronfenbrenner (1977) is a theoretical perspective the researcher particularly thought was useful to explain and provide an understanding of chronic learner absenteeism and some aspects of it, as well as why the problem exists. The theoretical framework in this section also explains why the selected theory was applicable for use in the study. Finally, the theoretical framework applies the central tenets of the theory that are relevant to explain chronic learner absenteeism.

The ecological systems theory assumes that people are shaped by their social context, that how people behave is inextricably linked to the social groups, forces and relationships that make up the environment, including families, schools, peers, socio-economic, political, cultural interpersonal forces and power relationships (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana 2010). All these underlying forces interact with each other and, in turn, together they influence behaviour (Donald et al., 2010). The ecological systems theory is based on the premise that human behaviour cannot be explained by using a single generative mechanism. However, a person's environment system has manifold and mutually-influential levels of systems (Greenfield, 2011). This theory implies that chronic learner absenteeism is a multicausal phenomenon, that a linear model of causality cannot explain chronic learner absenteeism, and this is because the ecological systems theory objects reductionism (Sage, 2000). Reductionist explanations of behaviour considers a person solely in terms of one constituent (Sage, 2000). The factors that cause chronic learner absenteeism are complex, these include socio-economic challenges, school-based factors, personal issues and characteristics, family circumstances and cultural forces (Jacobs & Lovett, 2017; Nsingi, 2016; Seokoma, 2015).

The ecological systems theory assumes that people experience different environments throughout their lives and these environments influence their behaviour in varying degrees

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977). These environmental systems include the macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, microsystem and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The macrosystem entails the cultural context in which the child stays, for example, if the child lives in a developed or developing country, the socio-economic background of the child, his or her ethnicity, heritage and values (Donald et al., 2010).

The cultural context can explain the causes of chronic learner absenteeism. Cultural aspects such as ethnicity, race, and language differences can contribute to chronic learner absenteeism (Jacobs & Lovett, 2017). The causes of learner absenteeism pertaining culture may include the cultural practices such as the initiation ritual of boys and arranged marriages for girls in particular societies, racial and ethnic groups. Seokoma (2015) points out that the cultural practice of initiation has a significant impact on school attendance because it requires training which is a pivotal aspect of the cultural practice and this takes considerable time, sometimes up to two months. This author adds that the illegal operation of initiation schools in South Africa exacerbate the problem as some boys end up spending more time in hospital because of the infections and illnesses resulting from unhygienic initiation. Likewise, young teenage girls are forced into marriages in some rural regions in South Asia, some parts of America and in some African countries (UNICEF, 2016). Arranged child marriages have a significant influence on their school attendance, as they must stay at home and take care of the family (Nsingi, 2016).

According to research, chronic learner absenteeism is more pronounced among Black learners relative to their White peers (Jacob& Lovett, 2017). These authors explain that some Black learners are more prone to miss school because of their low socio-economic backgrounds. They also contend that culture may also cause absenteeism in that children that have English as their first language are less likely to be absent than learners that have English as their second language. CASE & JET (2007) indicate that learners may skip school if the language of instruction is incomprehensible.

Also entailed in the macrosystem level is the child's socio-economic status. Relating this to chronic learner absenteeism, research shows that children from poverty-stricken families are more likely to be absent from school compared to those from high socio-economic families (Boissier, 2014). Low-income learners exhibit irregular school attendance due problems related to poverty such the inability to pay school fees, the lack of uniforms, food insecurity, lack of transport to school, limited access to health care services and the lack of sanitary

towels among girls (Boissiers et al., 2014; Cook, 2014; Otto, 2016; Sanzila, 2011; Stokes, 2016).

In the ecosystems theory, the exosystem is a level that comprises of systems in which the child is indirectly involved but may impact on the people she or he has proximal relationships with. Donald et al., (2010) illustrate that what takes place at the parent's workplace may have an exosystemic effect on the family microsystem, and consequently, on the child's behaviour. Parents' work-family experiences are highly correlated to the child functioning or outcomes. According to Kreider, Lewis & Vespa (2013), these experiences may entail issues such a demanding job, tight work schedule, no provision for paid leave and a parent that works far from home. These authors argue that parents that have a stressful job may always be in a bad emotional state at home, they may demonstrate less appreciation and responsiveness when interacting with the child. Consequently, the child may exhibit emotional and behavioural problems.

Friedman & Greenhaus (2000) claim that children whose parents' jobs lack flexibility, control and security are more likely to demonstrate problematic school attendance. For example, these authors illustrate that if a parent gets demoted or loses his or her job, that would mean low income or no income at all. Relating this to chronic learner absenteeism, children from low-income households are more likely to miss school due to financial constraints. Also, if parents work far from home, children are highly likely to be absent from school (Cuong & Linh, 2013). In terms of job autonomy, the parent may have a tight schedule at work, which may culminate in not having time to take care of the children and making sure they attend school. Therefore, children miss school if parental involvement, monitoring and consistency is inadequate (Corley 2012).

The mesosystem encompasses a set of microsystems that influence one another. So, what happens in the family, with teachers and peer group can have an impact on how children respond or behave at school and vice versa (Donald et al, 2010). Correspondingly, Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) point out that difficult family circumstances contribute to chronic learner absenteeism. Challenges such as family conflicts, divorced parents, single-parent households, child-headed households, parents that are alcoholics, and lack of parental involvement may cause a learner to stay at home (De Loreto, et al., 2013; Kelly, 2013). Also, learners may be absent from school because of what happens between them and their teachers (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). Learners may stay away from school if they have negative relations with

teachers. For instance, if teachers embarrass and discriminate against learners on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, physical disabilities, academic abilities and many more (Moseki, 2004). Learners may also be discouraged to attend school if teachers favour other learners more than others (Machingambi & Wadesango, 2011). Relating to peers, some learners may make a conscious decision not to attend school because they are avoiding being bullied by their peers at school. Research highlights that children that experience bullying by their peers at school may start disliking school and may skip school (Coetzee & Venter, 2016).

Microsystem refers to the institutions that significantly influence the child's development and behaviour such as the family, school, community, and peers. This level involves roles, relationships, and patterns of daily activities that mould the child (Donald et al, 2010). Comparatively, the family, school and community are institutions that may influence a child's school attendance. Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) argue that the family and the issues that occur within the context of the household including broken family structures and the lack of parental involvement in a child's school experience and particularly school attendance can affect whether a child goes to school every day or not. Literature reveals that the school is a critical factor that can cause learners not to attend (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). These authors point out that issues such as the school environment, facilities, resources, teacher-learner relationships, policies and rules on absenteeism, and staff contribute to chronic learner absenteeism. Machingambi & Wadesango (2011) argue that peer influence is another factor that leads to chronic school absence. Reid (2005) states that some learners miss school because they are pressurized by their peers to engage in activities outside school.

The chronosystem is based on the notion that the environment does not just influence the child, however, children are also active participants in their own development (Donald et al, 2010). To elaborate on this, Donald et al., 2010 assert that children's own perception of their contexts is vital to how they engage with them. Donald et al.'s (2010) assumption aligns with CASE & JET's (2007) argument that the child's own attitude and perception of school may influence whether or not a learner attends school. According to these authors some learners may perceive school as boring and monotonous. The same authors further point out that if learners perceive the school curriculum and lessons as irrelevant, they are more prone to stay away from school. Moseki (2004) illustrates that learners may skip school to avoid mathematics and science as they perceive these subjects as challenging and inapplicable in their lives.

The chronosystem is premised on that children may be influenced by the perspectives, values and actions of those in proximal relationships with them, a child will then perceive and engage with her social context in the same way (Donald et al, 2010). Similarly, Ncontsa & Shumba (2013) claim that some parents hold negative assumptions and perceptions about education. According to these authors the parents may see no value in schooling, which may have an adverse impact on the child's school attendance. These authors also contend that if parents have negative experiences regarding their own education or were themselves chronic absentees, they may not get involved in their children's school matters, especially school attendance, which may lead to their children missing school.

However, Bronfenbrenner critiqued his ecological systems theory and provided a more developed theory, that is, the bio-ecological systems theory. In comparison to the theorist's traditional view, the bio-ecological systems theory stresses on the individual in the context of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). These authors also highlight how the individual and environments change over time. Nonetheless, the ecological systems theory remains relevant in providing an understanding of chronic learner absenteeism.

While the ecological systems theory supported investigation into chronic learner absenteeism, it had its limitations. For instance, the theory was not suitable to support and provide an understanding of the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism, its implications and the ways in which public high schools addressed the problem. The ecological systems theory mainly focused on the causes of chronic learner absenteeism. To address this limitation the researcher was of the view that future research on a similar study would use a comprehensive and more encompassing theoretical framework.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory does not give prominence to the significant role of the person in her or his own development. For example, the bio-ecological systems theory focuses on personal attributes such as age, gender, physical appearance and health, which influence behaviour, as opposed to the ecological theory. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Relating this to chronic learner absenteeism, learners' personal issues and characteristics including age, gender and ill-health may lead to learners skipping school (Demir & Karabeyoglu, 2015; Newsome, 2008; Cook, 2014; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). The researcher hoped that in future research, on a similar study would focus on the latest developed bio-ecological systems theory as a basis for a theoretical framework.

2.9 Conclusion

To conclude, the literature review has examined different explanations of chronic learner absenteeism. The prevalence rate for learner absenteeism in South Africa is indicated in the literature that has been reviewed in this chapter. The literature reviewed also revealed the number of school days lost due to absenteeism in secondary schools in South African provinces. However, there is a gap in literature regarding the prevalence rate of absenteeism in Gauteng, and comparative studies on chronic learner absenteeism in Johannesburg public high schools. Therefore, the study intends to close the gap by investigating chronic learner absenteeism in two public high schools in Johannesburg, in two different socio-economic environments. It has further shown that chronic learner absenteeism is often prevalent in schools situated in low socio-economic backgrounds relative to schools in the urban and suburban areas. This section has also revealed that chronic learner absenteeism is a multicausal phenomenon. For example, the literature review identified socio-economic problems, school-related issues, family circumstances, personal matters and cultural factors as contributing to chronic learner absenteeism. The review of literature demonstrated that chronic learner absenteeism has a negative impact on learning and academic performance. According to the literature reviewed in this section, chronically absent learners need to be provided with learning support. It was also suggested in the literature that all role players including the teachers, the school, peers, parents, family and the wider community should work together to tackle the chronic learner absenteeism. In addition, the ecological systems theory as propounded by Bronfenbrenner (1977) was identified to facilitate an understanding of chronic learner absenteeism.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methods that were utilized in the study. The chapter commences with a discussion of the research design, research paradigm and research approach. This is followed by a description of the research sites, sample, sampling procedures, data collection and research instruments. The data analysis process and trustworthiness are also presented. This section ends with a discussion of the ethical considerations pertinent to the research study.

3.2 Research design

The study used a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is a disciplined enquiry whereby the researcher investigates a phenomenon holistically or some aspects of it in its contextual setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). These authors explain that the researcher physically goes to the setting to collect data. In this study chronic learner absenteeism was investigated within its contextual setting, that is, in two selected public high schools. Qualitative research involves systematic and vigorous investigation of small groups of people to generate knowledge about the problem under study (De Lacey, Hammarberg Kirkman, 2016). Anderson (2011) contends that qualitative research is flexible, and it establishes an ideal environment for individuals to voice out their viewpoints, experiences and practices regarding the research problem of interest or under study. Furthermore, the results of a qualitative study are descriptive in that the researcher focuses on the process, meaning and understanding acquired through text (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Qualitative research design was best suited for the study to address the main research question and sub-questions. This is because qualitative research design deals with phenomena that is impossible to quantify mathematically such as perspectives, attitudes and meanings (Robson, 2007). This study investigated principals and teachers' perspectives on chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg, examined the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism, identified the causes and explored the possible implications of chronic learner absenteeism on learning as well as how schools responded to chronic learner absenteeism, and these are impossible to quantify mathematically. Singleton & Straights (2011) argue that qualitative research is exploratory and explanatory in its purpose, therefore

it was appropriate for the study. This allowed for in-depth exploration and understanding of chronic learner absenteeism.

The advantage of using qualitative design is that qualitative research methods such as face-to-face interviews allow the researchers to capture the participants' feelings and attitudes towards the problem under investigation (Robson, 2007). In this study, the face-to-face interviews enabled the researcher to better access the participants attitudes towards and feelings on chronic learner absenteeism. Another benefit of using qualitative research design was that it is an open-ended process. The open-ended questions allowed the participants of the study to respond in detail, in their own words and terms, which provided deeper knowledge on the problem. Moreover, qualitative design was best suited for the study because it provides comparable qualitative data (Singleton & Straights, 2011), this was an advantage since the study was a comparative analysis of chronic learner absenteeism between two public high schools in Johannesburg.

3.3 Research paradigm

This study adopted the interpretive paradigm. According to Edirisingh (2012) the interpretive paradigm is a qualitative approach to research that aims to uncover and explain the meaning and reasons for behaviour or an event. This author adds that the interpretive approach focuses on gaining deeper understanding and knowledge about a phenomenon from the perspective and experiences of the participants. Likewise, this study investigated principals and teachers' perspectives and experiences on chronic learner absenteeism. According to Anderson (2011) the interpretive paradigm employs naturalistic research methodologies that ensure adequate engagement between the researcher and participants such as interviews. In this study, interviews were conducted with principals to obtain in-depth knowledge and understanding of chronic learner absenteeism.

The advantage of adopting the interpretive paradigm for this study was that this approach is appropriate for exploring the meaning and underlying causes of a social phenomenon or event. The study sought to gain knowledge and understanding of the causes of chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg. The paradigm was also well suited for the study because it aims at exploring context-specific human behaviour and events (Edirisingh, 2012). Similarly, the study looked at chronic learner absenteeism in two public high schools from two different socio-economic environments, that is High school B situated in a township area and High school A in an upmarket suburb in Johannesburg. The

interpretivist approach was suitable for the study because it looks things that that cannot be quantified mathematically such as perceptions, ideas, thoughts, actions and feelings. Correspondingly, this study investigated principals and teachers 'perspectives and actions regarding chronic learner absenteeism.

3.4 Research approach

This study compared chronic learner absenteeism between two public high schools in Johannesburg. Therefore, a comparative research approach was used. According to a McMillan & Schumacher (2010), in a comparative study the researcher investigates differences between two or more groups on a variable. These authors state that the researcher makes a comparison based on descriptive data. According to the same authors above, comparative research may involve comparing and contrasting different institutions, social systems, groups or social phenomena.

Esser & Hanitzsch (2012) argue that a comparative study is a research methodology that aims to identify, explain and analyse similarities and differences of a particular subject in relation to particular environments. To elaborate on this, these two scholars explain that comparative inquiry seeks to compare two groups or more to develop concepts, to generalize and draw conclusions based on the identified similarities and differences that are related to particular environments of the two groups or more.

Azarian (2011) asserts that comparative research aims to examine and understand causal processes of a phenomenon by comparing and differentiating two variables or more. According to this author comparative studies give emphasis to contextualization. The socio-cultural backgrounds of the groups of interest or subject under investigation are taken into consideration. Moreover, comparative inquiry seeks solutions to the problem based on the knowledge of the different environments of the groups under investigation (Azarian, 2011).

Correspondingly, this study was a comparative analysis of chronic learner absenteeism in two public high schools in Johannesburg from different socio-economic environments. That is, High school A and High School B. High School A was situated in a high socio-economic environment, whereas High school B was in a low socio-economic environment. The socio-economic backgrounds of the schools were taken into account when comparing the incidence and causal factors of chronic learner absenteeism in the schools. The possible implications of

school absence were also compared as well as how the two schools responded to chronic learner in relation to the socio-economic environments.

Comparative research was appropriate for the study to address the research questions, particularly to identify the causes of chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools. This resonates with Ragin's (2014) argument, who points out that comparative research may help establish the causes or explicate why a problem exists. The comparative approach, that is, the differences that emerged from comparing chronic learner absenteeism between the two public high schools facilitated a deeper understanding of the problem. Correspondingly, Ragin (2014) states that comparative research provides new insights and knowledge about a social phenomenon since it focuses on the differences between the cases being compared. The author adds that the differences provide in-depth knowledge.

3.5 Research site

Qualitative data was collected from High school A and High school B. These schools were in two different socio-economic environments, High school A was situated in an upmarket suburb in the east of Johannesburg and High school B was in low socio-economic township, at Johannesburg north.

3.5.1 High school A

High school A was a public high school situated in an upmarket suburb in the east of Johannesburg. Most of the children at the school were from high-income households. The school was divided into Grade 8 to 12. The learner population was 800, and the teaching staff was 50. The high school was recognized as one of the best boys' high schools in Gauteng, in terms of academics, discipline and sports. Matriculants at the school sat for the Gauteng Department of Education preliminary and final examination through Further Education Training (FET). They also sat for the Advanced Mathematics Programme which they wrote separately under the Independent Examination Board (IEB). Over the past years, Grade 12 learners at High school A achieved outstanding matric examination results. Furthermore, the school produced several Rhodes scholars.

School fees at High school A were R47 150. 00 for Grade 8 learners, and R51 150. 00 for Grades 9 to 12. The school also offered scholarships to its learners who demonstrated high academic potential. High school A had 29 extra mural activities including sports and cultural

activities in which the learners were expected to participate to build their abilities, skills and interests. The school had adequate resources and proper infrastructure including a library with more than 1000 books, an internet serviced computer room with 60 computers, a well-resourced technology room, two science laboratories, a swimming pool, as well as sports grounds for summer and winter sports. Moreover, the school had proper toilets and sanitation services, a good water supply and electricity source.

3.5.2 High school B

High school B was a public high school in a township in Johannesburg north. Most of the learners at the school were from poverty-stricken households, with some of the learners living in the shacks around the area. High school B catered for Grade 8 to 12. The school had approximately 1000 learners and 48 teachers. According to the principal of this school, High school B was recognized by the Gauteng Department of Education as an average performing school. The Grade 12 class wrote the Gauteng Department of Education preliminary and final examinations. In the recent years, the matric pass rate has been fluctuating between 64 –90%.

With regards to infrastructure and resources at High school B, there was a library with a few books. There was a computer laboratory with 35 computers but no internet service. High school B had adequate toilets and sanitation services. There was a reliable water supply and electricity source.

High school B was a non-fee paying school. The school benefitted from the National school feeding scheme. This nutritional school program was part of the integrated food security strategy for South Africa, which was introduced in 2002, in which the learners were provided with a lunch meal from Monday to Friday. The school had one cultural activity, a choral music choir. However, in the previous year (2017) the school had a debating and soccer team but due to the lack of debating and football coach, the activities stopped.

3.6 Sample

According to Singleton & Straits (2011), a sample is a group of individuals who participate in a research study. The sample of this study included 14 participants. This included 12 teachers and two principals from the two participating schools, that is, one principal and six teachers from each school. The researcher's choice of teachers and principals was based on that they were ideally positioned to participate in the study. Teachers and principals play a pivotal role

in teaching and learning. Because the presence or absence of learners in the classroom has a bearing on the work of teachers and principals, an understanding of chronic learner absenteeism by teachers and principals would effectively contribute towards their work.

The researcher specifically chose Grade 11 teachers as those deal with learners only a year before they sit for their matric examinations and exit high school. Therefore, teachers at this level need to engage with chronic learner absenteeism more seriously and address it more vigorously at Grade 11.

The sample size, the 14 participants were chosen because it was enough to adequately answer the research questions and to understand chronic learner absenteeism. Singleton and Straits (2011) assert that for qualitative research, the sample size must be smaller. These writers explain that a sample size should be big enough to address the questions and to adequately explicate the phenomenon under investigation. Saunders (2012) contend that qualitative research aims at attaining saturation. Saturation refers to when increasing the number of participants does not result in further valuable information or perspectives. According Saunders (2012), a smaller sample is appropriate in qualitative research, particularly if the aim of the study is not to construct theory, but to investigate a phenomenon is contingent on what is practical for the researcher and in the context.

3.7 Sampling procedures

Sampling involves establishing how representative participants of the study will be selected from the target population (Singleton & Straits, 2011). The sampling technique used for selecting the participants in this study was purposive sampling technique. Palys (2008) states that purposive sampling is when the researcher selects the sample because of their knowledge of the phenomenon under study and the characteristics of the population. Purposive sampling was appropriate for the study since it included teachers and principals. These participants were most likely to generate useful data for the research study because they had the relevant knowledge, experience and understanding on the issue of chronic learner absenteeism.

The researcher selected the sample by asking for the list of Grade 11 teachers from the school principals in each school. The participants were then randomly selected using the random number generator in Microsoft excel. The random number generator selects numbers that are allocated to each potential participant of the target population (Singleton & Strait, 2011). The advantage of randomly selecting the 12 participants is that it was representative of the target

population, it minimized researcher bias, and every Grade 11 teacher had an equal chance of being selected.

3.8 Data collection

Firstly, the researcher applied for ethics clearance from the Wits School of Education before conducting the study, and clearance was granted (**see Appendix II**). Secondly, permission and approval were acquired from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the study at the two public high schools in Johannesburg, High school A and High school B (**see Appendix I**). Lastly, permission was obtained to collect data through semi-structured interviews which entailed face-to-face interaction and to administer questionnaires on the participants from the Principal (**see Appendix III**) and the school governing body chairperson (**see Appendix IV**). Further, informed consent was obtained from the potential participants to participate in the study (**see Appendix VIII**). Each of the participants were provided with a participation information sheet and a letter of informed consent (**see Appendix VI**).

3.9 Research instruments

Data in this study was collected using two research instruments, namely, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with the school principals and the questionnaires were administered on the teachers.

3.9.1 Semi structured interviews

The qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews which were administered face-to-face with the two principals of the two participating schools. The semi-structured interviews comprised of open-ended questions. Single & Straights (2011) define semi-structured interviews as a method of research that entails a pre-established set of open-ended questions. In this study, the semi-structured interviews were structured under four sections, which included: the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism; causes of chronic learner absenteeism; possible implications of chronic learner absenteeism, and public high schools' response to chronic learner absenteeism. An interview guide (**see Appendix IX**) was used during the interviews. This comprised of a set of pre-determined questions which guided the researcher when conducting the semi-structured interviews. The same questions were asked to both principal participants, and in the same order.

Semi-structured interviews were best suited for the study because they allowed the participants to voice out their own views on chronic learner absenteeism. The open-ended interview questions allowed the participants to express their viewpoints in their own words and terms, as well as to provide new ideas. This generated rich and insightful data. The benefit of semi-structured interviews was that they allowed the researcher to access the attitudes and feelings of the participants of chronic learner absenteeism, as well as why they held particular viewpoints. This corresponds with Robson's (2007) claim that qualitative research methods such as face-to-face interviews allow the researchers to capture the participants' feelings and attitudes towards the problem under investigation. The semi-structured interviews were appropriate for the research study because they provided comparable data, which was relevant because this study was a comparative analysis of chronic learner absenteeism between two public high schools in Johannesburg. Furthermore, the interviews conducted with the principals were audiotaped (with their consent), for an accurate capture of the responses.

3.9.2 Questionnaires

The questionnaires were issued to all participating teachers (**see Appendix XI**). The questionnaires included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to collect data. The closed-ended questions were structured questions in which the answers were suggested, participants could only choose responses which matched the pre-decided categories. The questionnaire was divided into five sections. First, the questionnaire presented the biographical information of the participants in the form of a table, which included their age, gender, teaching subject(s), their highest qualification and years of teaching experience. Second, the questionnaire entailed closed-ended questions on the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism at the school. In this section the questions included ordinal data which was ranked, for example, *high, average, low or very low* to respond to the question. Third, the questionnaire contained questions on the causes of chronic learner absenteeism, in which the teachers ticked next to the right answer in the spaces that were provided. Fourth, the questionnaire encompassed closed-ended questions about the possible implications of chronic learner absenteeism, which included ordinal data. This data was ranked, for example, *strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree* in which the teachers had to choose from to respond to the question. Lastly, the questionnaire comprised closed-ended questions about how the public high schools responded to chronic learner absenteeism. The questions in this

section included data that was placed into a category known as nominal data, for example, *yes or no* responses.

Using a questionnaire to collect data presented some limitations. Some of the closed-ended questions were left unanswered by the participants. This resonates with Beiske's (2002) assertion that when utilizing a questionnaire to collect data, there is a likelihood that some questions may be skipped or not responded to by the participants. Popper (2004) states that questionnaires offer a restricted choice of answers. Therefore, participants may leave out certain questions unanswered. This author further explains that, this is disadvantageous as the researcher may gather insufficient data. In this study, this drawback was mitigated by using open-ended questions for every closed-ended question in which the participants responded in their own words and terms. The open-ended questions allowed participants to provide in-depth responses and to express freely their perspectives and experiences concerning chronic learner absenteeism.

Another limitation of using a questionnaire to collect data in the study was that the researcher could not observe the attitudes, facial gestures and body language of the participants, which could have served as useful form of data. Correspondingly, Lewis, Saunders & Thornhill (2013) argue that the demerit of utilizing a written questionnaire is that feelings and emotional reactions are not observed. As a result, valuable data may not be captured. These writers suggest that, to defeat this drawback, researchers must include a Likert scale. This is a response scale that utilizes a rating scale, for example, from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". Such a scale enables researchers to interpret feelings of the participants about the issue under investigation (Lewis et al., 2013). In this study, this limitation was addressed by using open-ended questions. Open-ended questions allowed participants to express their actual feelings and attitudes concerning chronic learner absenteeism. A Likert scale was also used in section C, which included closed-ended questions about the possible implications of chronic learner absenteeism which entailed ordinal data. The participants indicated to what extent they agreed or disagreed with each statement measured on a 1 to 7 on the Likert scale. This data was ranked, for example, strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree in which the participating teachers had to choose from to respond to the question. Using a Likert scale allowed for contention and strength in the participants' responses.

According to Singleton & Straights (2011) closed-ended interview questions provide comparable data. Closed-ended interview questions were well suited for the study because

the responses of the different participants provided comparable data. This was advantageous since the study was a comparative analysis. Also, the responses of the closed-ended questions were easy to compare and analyse because the questions were specific, and responses were pre-determined, therefore, demonstrated similar meaning. On the other hand, closed-ended questions may have provided a limited choice of responses, for example, if the appropriate answer was not included in the choice of responses. This limitation was mitigated by using the open-ended questions.

Below every question in each section there was space provided for the participants to expand on their responses in their own words. The open-ended questions allowed the participants to expand on their responses, to add new ideas and insight that may have not been included in the questionnaire responses. Furthermore, this approach was appropriate for the study as it enabled the researcher to get more in-depth knowledge and understanding of chronic learner absenteeism.

In addition, the reason interviews were only done with Principals and not with the teachers was because interviews are generally time-consuming (Singleton & Straights, 2011), since the teachers were more in numbers than the principals. On the other hand, questionnaires were administered only on the teachers and not principals, because questionnaires are relatively easy to administer with many people (Alshengeenti, 2014), unlike interviews, and 12 teachers responded to questionnaires in this study.

3.10 Data Analysis

The study used qualitative data analysis. According to Sunday (2005) qualitative data analysis involves the processes wherein, after the data collection process has been completed, the researcher explains and interprets the phenomenon under investigation. Bailey (2008) contends that analysing qualitative data entails reading the transcripts to establish similarities and differences, then grouping into categories and building themes.

After data collection, the researcher listened to the audio-recordings of the interviews with the two principals of the two participating schools and then transcribed on a notepad. The researcher read the transcripts, both the interviews and questionnaires, to be familiar with the data. The data was organized by looking for similar types of information, and underlying ideas were highlighted. The next step was coding, this procedure involved organizing the raw data into concepts, properties and patterns. Basically, coding entails giving labels to the raw

data (Graham, 2007). This author explains that coding is a crucial step in qualitative data analysis, as it gives meaning to the data collected. The data was read over again to identify causation, similarities and differences. Finally, similar types of data were grouped into categories and subcategories, relating contrasting ideas and ultimately developed main themes based on the research questions.

The data was organized, presented, analysed and interpreted into specific themes, and this is known as the thematic analysis technique. Thematic analysis was appropriate for the study because it is well suited to answer research questions that are related to people's perspectives and experiences concerning a social phenomenon (Singleton & Straits, 2011). Correspondingly, this study investigated the perspectives and experiences of principals and teachers on chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg. Thematic analysis was also well suited for the study because it is theoretically flexible; therefore, it can be used within different theoretical frameworks to answer different types of research questions (Singleton & Straits, 2011).

3.11 Trustworthiness of the study

According to Curtin & Fossey (2007), establishing the trustworthiness of a research study gives assurance that the research instruments were able to provide accurate and meaningful answers to the research questions and that qualitative research accurately represents the experiences of the participants. To ensure that qualitative research is accurate, four important aspects, such as, *credibility*, *dependability*, *transferability* and *confirmability* should be considered when conducting research (Nieuwenhuis, 2010).

3.11.1 Credibility

Credibility entails ascertaining that the findings of the study are truthful and plausible (De Lacey, Hammerberg & Kirkman, 2016). Credibility focuses more on the richness of the data than the quantity of the data gathered. In this research study, credibility was established through extensive engagement with the participants, using questionnaires on the teachers and interviews with the principals. Two different research techniques were utilized to obtain rich findings. Nieuwenhuis (2010) contends that credibility involves spending an extended period with the participants of the study to verify the data. These authors refer to "persistent observant", a crucial technique for establishing credibility. As a resident of Johannesburg, the researcher was ideally positioned to engage with the participants of the study for a long time

and to obtain pertinent and rich data regarding chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg.

3.11.2 Dependability

Dependability ensures that the findings are consistent and can be repeated over time and over conditions (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). In the study the researcher hoped to make certain that if the study was conducted with the similar participants in similar contexts in Johannesburg, the results would be consistent. For instance, dependability would be observed if the same study done at an up-market High school A and a township High school B was done in similar contexts and with similar participants, the results would be consistent. Dependability is also the extent that the study could be repeated by other researchers and that the findings would be consistent. Dependability in this study is illustrated through studies conducted by Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) on *Chronic absenteeism: Summarizing What We Know from Nationally Available Data* and Otto (2016) on *the Management of learner absenteeism at an urban secondary school in Guateng*, just to mention a few. The findings of this study resonate with those of Otto (2016) and Balfanz & Byrnes (2012), in that they were conducted with similar participants and in similar contexts.

3.11.3 Transferability

Transferability involves establishing that the findings of the study can be applicable to other contexts (De Lacey et al., 2016). “Other contents” may refer to the similar population, similar phenomenon or similar situation. According to Curtin & Fossey (2007) qualitative research studies are not generalizable, but the results of the study should be transferrable. These authors further explain that the findings can be compared with those of other studies and motivate for further research in those areas. Detailed descriptions can be utilized to demonstrate that the research results can be applied to other contexts. For instance, a rich description of the contexts in which the study was conducted, including an explanation of the research methodology, descriptions of the findings, the verbatim quotations extracted from the interviews and questionnaires provided enough information to allow for a replication in a similar situation.

3.11.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent of objectivity in the findings of the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). To elaborate on this, the author argues that findings should be based on the participants' responses and not on any possible bias or perspectives of the researcher. The same author further explains that confirmability establishes that the researcher does not skew the interpretation of what the participants said to suit a particular narrative. In this study, the findings were expected to be as neutral as possible. The researcher ensured that teachers and principals freely and independently voiced out their perspectives and experiences on chronic learner absenteeism. Furthermore, to ascertain confirmability researchers may provide a record which shows every step of the data analysis process that was done to give a justification for each step. This helps to demonstrate that the findings are an accurate depiction of the participants' responses.

3.12 Ethical considerations

Haines (2017) argues that it is of pivotal importance to respect the rights, to protect the dignity and welfare of the participants in a research study. This section presents how voluntary participation and informed consent was obtained from the potential participants. The section also discusses how privacy, confidentiality and freedom from harm were ensured by the researcher.

3.12.1 Voluntary participation

The first important issue that arose was the value placed on freedom of choice in research. For moral and legal reasons, the researcher did not force the participants into the research study. First, the researcher told the potential participants that participation was voluntary. The researcher made it known to the potential participants that there were no benefits, material or of monetary value to partaking in the study, and that there were no adverse consequences if they chose not to participate in the study. Second, the potential participants were each given a participation information sheet and informed consent form. The participation information sheet included a statement and explanation that participation in the study was entirely voluntary and that potential participants are at liberty to withdraw consent at any time without any negative consequences.

3.12.2 Informed consent

To obtain the participants' informed consent, the researcher provided each one of the potential participants with a participation information letter and informed letter of consent. The participation information sheet provided the potential participants with the understanding of the purpose and the procedures of the study. The participation information sheet also provided details of how much time was required of the participants and an explanation of how they were selected as potential participants. Furthermore, the potential participants signed the informed letter of consent if they agreed to participate in the research study.

3.12.3 Privacy

Stevens (2013) contends that it is crucial for a researcher to respect the privacy of the participants. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to represent participants and research sites. For example, the principals were referred to as Principal 1 and Principal 2, the teachers were also referred to as Teacher 1, Teacher 2 and so forth, the names of the schools were High school A and High school B to represent them in the study. The participants also did not write their names on the questionnaires. The interviews with the principals were conducted in a private venue in their offices. The teachers responded to the questionnaires individually, in their classrooms.

To ensure the security of interview data, the transcriptions of the interviews and answered questionnaires were kept in the researcher's room in a locker which is always locked in which no one has access to, except for the researcher. The audio-tapings were saved in the researcher's phone and laptop which were both finger-print password secured. The data was presented in the final research report which was submitted on the 15th March 2019 at the Wits School of Education. The data will be kept for 3 to 5 years at the Wits School of Education and will be destroyed after that.

3.12.4 Freedom from harm

Singleton and Straits (2011) highlight the need to respect the participants' right to safety. The researcher ensured that the participants were free from any kind of harm, and this included physical, psychological, social and financial harm. The interviews were done at a venue which was convenient and safe for the participating principals at the schools, that is, at their offices. The interviews were conducted at a time convenient for the principals, that is, after school. Similarly, the teachers responded to the questionnaires at a venue and time

convenient for them. The researcher travelled to the participants, so they did not spend money going to the researcher. The participants were also not made to feel uncomfortable during the interviews through embarrassing, humiliating and unnecessary questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comparative analysis and interpretation of the findings of the research study on chronic learner absenteeism conducted in two selected public high schools of different socio-economic environments in Johannesburg. These are High school A which was situated in an upmarket suburb, and High school B, which was in a township. The chapter commences with biographical information of the participants which is shown in the form of tables, that is, Table 4 (a) for High school A and Table 4 (b) for High school B. The tables show the gender, age, teaching subjects, years of teaching experience and the highest qualifications of the participants. Secondly, findings on the perspectives of teachers on chronic learner absenteeism are presented and compared between the two selected public high schools. A comparative summary of the key findings on teachers' perspectives is also presented. The data is organized, presented, interpreted and analysed into specific themes which emerged from the four research questions as shown in section 1. 4, chapter 1. The themes include; the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg, causes of chronic learner absenteeism, the possible implications of chronic learner absenteeism on learning, and public high schools' response to chronic learner absenteeism. Lastly, the chapter presents the perspectives of the schools' Principals on chronic learner absenteeism and a comparative analysis between the two public high schools. Furthermore, a comparative summary of the key findings on the principals' perspectives are outlined.

4.2 Biographical information for Grade 11 teachers (High school A)

Table 4 (a): High School A- Gender, Age, Teaching Experience, Teaching Subjects & Highest Qualification

Participants	Gender	Age	Teaching Experience	Teaching subjects	Highest Qualification
Principal A	Male	40 years	26 years	Mathematics & Physical science	Master of Education (Education policy and organizational leadership)
Teacher 1	Female	27 years	3 years	English	Bachelor of Education Honours (English Literacy)
Teacher 2	Male	32 years	8 years	Life orientation	Bachelor of Arts Honours (Media studies)
Teacher 3	Male	33 years	11 years	Geography & History	Master of Education (English Language)
Teacher 4	Female	23 years	2 years	English	Bachelor of Education Honours
Teacher 5	Female	32 years	6 years	Mathematics	Bachelor of Education
Teacher 6	Female	28 years	4 years	English	Bachelor of Education

Table 4(a) provides a summary of biographical information of the participants of the research study, which included six Grade 11 teachers and one Principal of High school A. Table 4 (a) shows that the study entailed four female and two male teacher participants at High school A, and a male Principal. The age range of the participants was between 23 and 40 years. The Principal was the oldest of all participants, aged 40 years. The youngest participant was Teacher 4, who was aged 23 years. In terms of the years of teaching experience, the Principal had the highest number of years of experience, that is, 26 years. Teacher 4, who was also the youngest, had the least years of experience, that is, two years. The table reveals that five participants held postgraduate degree qualifications, two participants had a Bachelor of education degree. In terms of the teaching subjects of the participants; two teachers, Teacher 5 and the principal were mathematics teachers, the principal was also a physical science

teacher. Teacher 1, Teacher 4, and Teacher 6 were English teachers, while Teacher 2 was a Life orientation educator. Teacher 3 taught geography and history.

4.3 Biographical information for Grade 11 teachers (High School B)

Table 4 (b): High School B- Gender, Age, Teaching Experience, Teaching Subjects & Highest Qualification

Participants	Gender	Age	Teaching Experience	Teaching subjects	Highest Qualification
Principal B	Female	47 years	20 years	History and Geography	Master of Education (Education policy and organizational leadership)
Teacher 1	Male	49 years	25 years	Physical science and Natural science	Bachelor of Science
Teacher 2	Male	32 years	10 years	English and Sesotho	Bachelor of Education
Teacher 3	Female	24 years	2 years	Life Science	Bachelor of Education
Teacher 4	Male	48 years	23 years	Physical science and Natural science	Bachelor of Science
Teacher 5	Female	51 years	25 years	English and history	Bachelor of Education Honours
Teacher 6	Female	52 years	21 years	Mathematics	Further Diploma in Education (Mathematics and science)

Table 4(b) provides a summary of biographical information of the participants of the research study, which included six Grade 11 teachers and one Principal of High school B. The table shows that the study entailed three female and three male teacher participants at High school B and a female Principal. The age-range of the participants was between 24 and 52 years. Teacher 6 was the oldest, aged 52 years, while Teacher 3 was the youngest, aged 24 years. Regarding teaching experience, Teacher 5 and Teacher 1 had the highest number of years of

teaching experience, they have been both teaching for 25 years. Teacher 3, who was also the youngest of all the participants, had the least number of years of teaching experience, that is, two years. In respect of qualifications, two participants held postgraduate degree qualifications, that is, the school Principal who also had the highest qualification, and Teacher 5. All the other participants had undergraduate degrees, four participants held Bachelor degrees, while one participant, Teacher 6, who was also the oldest held a Further Diploma in Education. The table indicates that two participants, Teacher 1 and Teacher 4 were physical science and natural science educators. Teacher 5 was an English and History teacher. Teacher 2 also taught English and Sesotho. Teacher 3's teaching subject was Life science, while the Principal was a history and geography teacher.

4.4 Teachers' responses to the questionnaire items

The following section presents teachers' responses to the questionnaire items on chronic learner absenteeism conducted in two selected public high schools of different socio-economic backgrounds in Johannesburg. These are High school A which was situated in an upmarket suburb, and High school B, which was in a township area. The data was organized, presented, interpreted and analysed into specific themes which emerged from the four research questions as shown in section 1. 4, chapter 1. The themes include: the incidence of learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg, causes of chronic learner absenteeism, the possible implications of chronic learner absenteeism on learning, and public high schools' response to chronic learner absenteeism.

4.4.1 Teachers' views on the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg

When the teachers were asked to describe learners' attendance at their schools, most teachers at High school A, precisely, four teachers, stated that there was high school attendance daily and throughout the academic year. However, two teachers mentioned that it was only a selected very few learners that missed school. Teacher 2 at the same school said, "*...we have good attendance here at school, it's only 2 or 3 learners that miss school on a regular basis throughout the year*". To confirm that point, another teacher said, "*We have high school attendance and especially in the higher grades*". Teacher 1 and Teacher 5 asserted that school attendance was average at school. Teacher 5 further explained that learners were

mostly present, and their absence from school was frequent on certain days of the week, such as Thursday and Friday.

On the other hand, at High school B most of the teachers, that is, four teachers, to be precise, pointed out that there was poor learner attendance at the school. One of the teachers at this school demonstrated that in a class of 50 learners, only 5 learners missed school daily, and this was the trend throughout the grades. To substantiate this assertion, Teacher 6 said, *“absenteeism is a problem at the school, but not as bad as in the previous years.* Likewise, another teacher said, *“the rate of learner attendance is low at the school, more learners become absent mostly at specific times like at the beginning of the term and towards the end of the term, after tests have been written”.* Two teachers at High school B indicated that school attendance was average at the school. One of the two teachers said, *“learner absenteeism is not very bad at the school, most of the learners attend school most of the time”.* In addition, Teacher 3 revealed that learner absenteeism at High school B gradually increased with the grade level, and that most learners who were identified with chronic learner absenteeism were in the higher grades, such as Grades 11 and 12.

These responses reveal that chronic learner absenteeism is a problem in public high schools in Johannesburg. The responses also indicate that chronic learner absenteeism is more prevalent in schools located in low socio-economic environments compared to schools situated in high socio-economic environments. The findings show that High school A which served children from high-income households had high school attendance relative to High school B, which catered for children who were mostly from low-income families.

4.4.2 Teachers’ views on the causes of chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg

When the participants at High School B were asked what they thought were the causes of chronic learner absenteeism at their school, socio-economic challenges, family problems, school-based factors, personal issues and the time or season of the year or day of the week emerged as the main causes of chronic learner absenteeism at the school. This is in line with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory which assumes that human behaviour cannot be explicated by using a single generative mechanism. However, a person’s environment system has various and mutually-influential levels of systems. The ecological systems theory is based on the premise that people’s behaviour is indivisibly linked to social groups, forces and

relationships that make up the environment, including the family, school, socio-economic environment, interpersonal and power relationships.

4.4.2.1 Socio-economic challenges and chronic learner absenteeism

Socio-economic challenges were the social and economic problems that caused learners to miss school regularly at High School B. These included poverty, HIV and AIDS impact, teenage pregnancy, teenage motherhood, alcoholism, drug use and gangsterism.

Poverty

All the teachers at High school B stated that most of the learners at the school came from low-income households, and, for that reason, they consistently missed school. One of the teachers at High school B explained that some of the learners came from homes that depended on the children's South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) grant, therefore, the learners skipped school because of the inability to buy school uniforms and shoes. This teacher said, *"most of the learners come from poor families, most of them are raised by grandparents and they live on their grandparents' SASSA grants and their own grants"*. Another teacher of the same view said, *"...some of the learners do not come to school because they do not have proper school wear, school uniforms and school shoes"*. Girl learners seemed to bear the brunt of poverty in High School B. For example, while they failed to buy food, pay for transport and keep themselves warm in winter due to poverty, Teacher 2 and Teacher 6 mentioned that some girls stayed away from school during their menstrual period because they did not have sanitary towels. To illustrate, Teacher 6 said, *"...I once had a girl in my class who missed at least three days almost every month...she revealed that she missed school due to the lack of sanitary pads during her monthly period"*. Clearly, poverty was one of the leading factors contributing to absenteeism in High School B.

This finding is consistent with the ecological systems theory's macrosystem environment. According to the macrosystem level, the socio-economic background, that is, the social and economic status of the child can shape how he or she behaves (Donald et. al., 2010).

HIV and AIDS

Most teachers at High school B voiced out that the impact of HIV and AIDs on children culminated in regular school absence. To elaborate on this, Teacher 4 asserted that some learners stayed at home because of the need to look after their parents and family members who suffered from AIDs related illnesses. Teacher 1 said, *"most learners here at school are orphans, it is either they lost one parent or both to AIDs related illnesses"*.

As a result of HIV and AIDS, most learners at High School B carried heavy family responsibilities, such as looking after their sick parents, heading families where both parents had died, and so forth. The impact of HIV and AIDS was, therefore, noticeable in the absence rates of learners at High School B.

Teenage pregnancy, teenage mothers

Two teachers at High school B revealed that some girl learners were absent from school because of pregnancy and teenage motherhood. A teacher contended that pregnant learners missed school because they were going to do medical check-ups at the clinic. The teacher added that sometimes the pregnant learners missed school because they felt ashamed about falling pregnant, as other learners mocked them. Teacher 4 said, *“we have high rates of pregnancy at our school, once they are pregnant, they hardly attend school”*. Teacher 3 at High school B stated that some girl learners who were mothers usually missed school at the beginning of the month because they had to collect their child’s support grant. This South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) grant, was paid on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th of every month. Furthermore, Teacher 6 at High school B said, *“...after giving birth, the girls skipped school quite frequently to look after their babies. As expected, absenteeism amongst these girl learners would increase during these periods of the month at High School B.*

Alcoholism, drug use and gangsterism

Three teachers at High school B highlighted that some boy learners stayed away from school to drink alcohol and to use drugs in the surrounding taverns in the township. Teacher 1 said, *“some of the boys here at school stay at street corners and taverns to drink alcohol during school time”*. Some learners missed school to engage in criminal activities in the streets. Two teachers mentioned that a few boys at the school were part of gangster groups of the township. To elaborate on this, Teacher 4 said, *“...gangsterism is rife in this township, our school boys are recruited by gangs to do robberies such as stealing cell phones, in turn, they pay them money which they use to buy alcohol and dagga”*.

In contrast, at High school A, a school of high socio-economic status, none of the teachers mentioned socio-economic challenges as a cause of chronic learner absenteeism. However, Teacher 3 at this school alluded to the fact that most learners came from rich families and that was a factor that significantly contributed to the good attendance at the school. Teacher 3 added, *“a vast majority of the learners come from high-income households, they have their basic needs catered for, and their exorbitant school fees are paid for without fail”*. To

confirm this argument, another teacher said, *“most of our learners come from financially stable homes, they have resources they need, transport, transport money, food to eat, books, the list goes on.* Teacher 5 at the school also said, *“parents pay a lot of money for school fees for their children to study here at school, so they cannot let that money go down the drain.”* Therefore, it was evident that the socio-economic background of the learner had an impact on whether the child attended school or not.

4.4.2.2 Family circumstances and chronic learner absenteeism

Family circumstances were the matters that occurred within the context of the home. These entailed broken family structures, lack of parental involvement and monitoring.

Disintegrated family structures

All the teachers at High school B claimed that broken family structures posed a challenge to regular school attendance at the school. Most of the teachers stated that some learners were orphans, it's either they had lost a parent or both parents. Teacher 1 explicated that some children at High school B stayed in child-headed households, they were the head of the family or they were taken care of by their older siblings. Teacher 5 said, *“...most learners here at school are orphans...they stay with their old and frail grandparents which influences their attendance patterns”*. Therefore, they regularly missed school to look after their younger siblings.

Lack of parental involvement

Four teachers at High School B pointed out that lack of parental involvement was a challenge that culminated in chronic learner absenteeism at the school. Teacher 6 said that parents did not attend meetings, in which important matters such as learner school attendance were discussed. Teacher 6 further added, *“...the parents are not actively involved in their children's education, they do not care, they do not come for meetings where we discuss important issues such as learner school attendance”*.

Some teachers at High school B indicated that the educational attainment of parents or caregivers and their view of education had a significant impact on their child's school attendance. Three teachers from High school B stated that some learners lived with their uneducated grandparents and parents, therefore, they did not care if their children attended school or not. They did not even encourage them to take their studies seriously. It was also mentioned that some learners had parents that worked far from home, thus, learners were not monitored by anyone regarding school attendance. Teacher 1 said, *“approximately 25% of*

our learners live alone in the shacks, they have no one to encourage them to go to school from back at home". Similarly, in the ecosystems theory, the exosystem is a level that comprises of systems in which the child is indirectly involved but may impact on the people she or he has proximal relationships with. Donald et al., (2010) illustrates that parents' work-family experiences are highly correlated to the child functioning or outcomes. According to this theory, what takes places at the parent's workplace may have an exosystemic effect on the family microsystem, and consequently, on the child's behaviour.

While at High school A none of the teachers mentioned anything about difficult family circumstances being a cause for chronic learner absenteeism at the school, three teachers indicated that there was high parental involvement at the school hence the good school attendance. Teacher 5 said, *"parents pay lots of money for school fees, therefore are actively involved in their child's school life and ensure that their children attend school regularly"*. Teacher 6 explained that there was meaningful communication between the parents and school, that the parents attended school meetings and teacher-parents' evening which were held termly. Teacher 6 added that issues such as learner absenteeism were discussed in the meetings. Also, Teacher 1 stated that parents were very much involved in their children's school work, including homework and other school matters. Teacher 1 said, *"some parents support and assist their children with school and home assignments"*.

Correspondingly, the ecological systems theory's mesosystem entails a set of microsystems that influence one another, what happens in the family and with teachers has an impact on how children behave at school and vice versa (Donald et al, 2010).

4.4.2.3 School-based factors and chronic learner absenteeism

School based factors were the issues that occurred within the context of the school. This included teacher absenteeism.

Teacher absenteeism

Two teachers at High school B asserted that teacher absenteeism was one of the problems that the school was facing and was a cause of learner absenteeism at the school. To explicate this point, Teacher 3 said, *"some teachers do not come to school on payday, sometimes they take a half day...such behaviour encourages learners to be absent during these days because they know their teacher will not show up"*. Teacher 4 who held the same view said, *"some teachers miss school on specific times such as month end, pay day and sometimes during the week to attend to family matters, it is a problem because learners copy from their teachers"*.

and miss school". This finding is in line with the ecological systems theory's mesosystem. According to the mesosystem, what happens with the teachers at school can influence how children respond or behave at school and vice versa (Donald et al, 2010).

In contrast, none of the teachers at High school A highlighted any school-based factors as a cause for chronic school absenteeism.

4.4.2.4 Personal issues and chronic learner absenteeism

Personal issues are the matters that affected an individual learner. These included lack of discipline and motivation as well as ill-health.

Lack of discipline and motivation

Four teachers at High school B pointed out that some learners at High school B were consistently absent from school because they lacked discipline and motivation. Teacher 1 said, *"some learners have a negative attitude towards school, they demonstrate a lack of interest and commitment, they act as if they are forced to come to school"*. To confirm the viewpoint stated above, Teacher 4 said, *"these learners lack motivation because some of their parents are not educated"*.

Ill-health

Most teachers at High school B revealed that personal issues were one of the reasons why some learners missed school regularly. Three teachers at the same school mentioned that some learners were absent from school because they were ill, however, some learners feigned illness just to avoid being at school. Teachers 5 said, *"some learners stay at home because they are sick"*. However, Teacher 6 stated, *"some learners lie about being sick to avoid being at school"*.

In the similar vein, all the teachers at High school A, which was a high socio-economic school, stated that the few learners that were identified with chronic absenteeism at the school were absent because of personal reasons such as ill-health. The teachers at High school A mentioned that learners skipped school because they were sick or had sustained injuries from sports. Teacher 2 said, *"...one of our learners has been absent for about half a month now due to a shoulder dislocation he sustained during the provincial rugby tournament"*. Teacher 1, who believed that ill-health was a cause of school absence, said, *"some learners miss school because of minor illnesses, they miss a day or two, not a lot of days"*.

4.4.2.5 Other factors contributing to chronic learner absenteeism

Other factors that influenced whether learners attended school or not included the season or time of the school year or day of week.

Season or time of the school year or day of the week

Two teachers at High school B pointed out that learners were mostly absent on Thursdays and Fridays because it was getting closer to the weekend. Teacher 6 at the above-mentioned school said, *“some boys do not come to school on Friday because they go to drink alcohol at local taverns”*. Teacher 1 at the same school said, *“...most learners become absent frequently at specific times, like the beginning of the term and towards end of term after tests have been written”*.

By the same token, three teachers at High school A indicated that learners were most likely to be absent from school at certain seasons of the school year and times of the week. It was revealed that learners were absent on Fridays and Mondays just to give themselves a long weekend. Teacher 2 and Teacher 5 mentioned that some learners missed school just a few days before they wrote tests and examinations to give themselves time to study. Teacher 2 said, *“some learners stay at home on days when they are not writing during examinations and tests week”*. Teacher 5 also stated, *“a few learners miss school days before starting their exams to prepare and after finishing their exams”*. According to the study, learners at High school A skipped school during winter season due to common colds or flu. Teacher 4 at High school A stated that school attendance was very high in the beginning of the school year and some learners started missing school towards the last term. Teacher 4 further said, *“towards the end of the year learners miss school because of fatigue and exhaustion from books”*.

The study reveals that there are numerous factors that pose a challenge to consistent school attendance at public high schools in Johannesburg. These challenges were identified as socio-economic, school-based, difficult family circumstances, personal issues and the time or season or day of the week. The findings show that the socio-economic status of the school, geographical location and poverty levels or family background of the child have a significant influence on whether the child attends school or not. From the study, it was found that most of the learners at High school B, a school situated in a low socio-economic environment, came from poverty-stricken homes, therefore, the high incidence of chronic absenteeism can be attributed to poverty. Moreover, learners from High school B also missed school due to school factors and personal reasons. Contrastingly, the findings reveal that most of the

children at High school A came from high-income households, which was a factor that contributed to the high school attendance at the school, all their basic needs were catered for, which enabled them to attend school regularly. The study demonstrated that chronically absent learners at High school A missed school primarily because of personal reasons and the time or season of the year or days of the week.

4.4.3 Teachers' views on the implications of chronic learner absenteeism

This section of the questionnaire required the participant teachers to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with each questionnaire item concerning the possible implications of chronic learner absenteeism on learning.

In response to whether chronic learner absenteeism had implications on learning, all the teachers at High school B strongly agreed that consistently missing school had an adverse impact on learning. Likewise, all the teachers at High school A strongly agreed that chronic learner absenteeism had a negative effect on learning.

4.4.3.1 Content Knowledge and chronic learner absenteeism

When asked if chronically absent learners missed out on content knowledge and information, all the teachers at High school B strongly agreed that chronically absent learners missed out on content knowledge and information. Three teachers at High school B pointed out that regular absence from school disrupted learning and ultimately culminated in gaps in content knowledge, especially if lessons were progressive. To elaborate on this, Teacher 5 said, “...*if many learners are absent, it is hard to go to the next lesson...but we continue because we have lesson plans for the week and term plan, therefore, absentees miss out on lessons*”. Another teacher said, “*learners who are always absent disadvantage themselves because they do not get to be exposed to their peer's opinions and insights*”. Correspondingly, all the teachers at High school A strongly agreed that if a learner was consistently absent from school, they lost out on content knowledge that was taught in the classroom. Teacher 1 at High school A said, “*absent learners miss out on the content knowledge and skills imparted in the classroom*”. To expand on the assertion, Teacher 5 said, “*an absent learner loses out on information and insights shared in the class, which result in knowledge gaps*”.

Chronically absent learners were more likely to misunderstand some concepts taught in the classroom. All the teachers at High school B strongly agreed that chronic absentees did not comprehend concepts taught when they were away from school. Teacher 6 who was a

mathematics teacher at High school B claimed that absentees missed out on teacher explanations of important mathematical principles, theories and skills. Teacher 6 explained that missing school regularly was problematic, especially in mathematics, where mathematical equations entailed precise steps that needed to be followed carefully to attain the correct answer. In such instances, learners missed some important steps leading to the right answer. Teacher 6 further said, *“the learners may be unable to work out mathematical equations if their attendance is inconsistent”*. Teacher 3 who held the same view, said, *“absent learners miss out on explanations of abstract concepts and if they do not master the concepts they will not understand the whole lesson”*.

Comparably, all the teachers at High school A strongly agreed that if learners were regularly absent from school, they developed general misconceptions of key areas of their subject content. Teacher 3 explained that learners missed out on the teacher’s explanation and important examples demonstrated in the classroom, thus, resulted in misunderstanding of the content knowledge. In the same way as with High school B, three teachers at High school A stated that lessons were sequential, therefore, if a learner was absent during the beginning of the chapter or new topic, they were unlikely to understand the whole chapter. Teacher 5 at High school A said, *“the first lesson of a new chapter is usually an introduction and it provides a conceptual explication of the topic, is very important”*. To elaborate, Teacher 1 said, *“if a learner misses a lesson which is related to the next one, the learner may not understand the next lesson even if he or she is back in class”*.

All the teachers at High school B indicated that on days when many learners were absent, it did not affect teaching and learning, as they proceeded to a new lesson. Teacher 1 said, *“we cannot wait for people who choose to miss school, we cannot disadvantage the other learners who are in class everyday”*. Teacher 6 at the same school explicated that the CAPS curriculum was fast-paced, for that reason and due to time- constraints, she continued with lessons. Teacher 6 added, *“CAPS compels us to be fast with our teaching, there is no time”*. Correspondingly, all the teachers at High school A stated that if a learner was absent, they proceeded with teaching, hoping that absent learners would catch up when they returned to school. To explain this point, Teacher 4 said, *“there is no time to wait for absentees, CAPS curriculum has specific and so much content to be learned in a day, there is no time”*.

4.4.3.2 Poor performance in assessments and chronic learner absenteeism

Responding to whether chronic learner attendance led to poor academic performance in assessments, all the teachers at High school B strongly agreed that learners who missed school regularly performed poorly in tests and examinations. Teacher 5 mentioned that some learners failed tests because they were absent when the scope was issued out in class and missed out on revision. To elucidate this argument, Teacher 1 at High school B said, *“learners’ academic performance is greatly affected by absenteeism...they remain handicapped in topics covered during their absence and thus perform badly in tests.* While most of the teachers at High school A agreed that regular absence resulted in poor academic performance, two teachers indicated that the few learners who were identified with chronic learner absenteeism at the school did not perform badly in assessments. One of the two teachers said, *“...our learners are hardworking, and we do our best to assist them where we can if they are affected by chronic absenteeism”.* On the other hand, Teacher 6 said, *“non-attendance does not really affect our learners’ performance in assessments because they miss a day or two of school, not much is missed”.*

4.4.3.3 Grade failure and retention and chronic learner absenteeism

When the teachers were asked if chronic learner absenteeism resulted in grade retention, all the teachers at High school B strongly agreed that most consistently absent learners failed and repeated grades. Three teachers at High school B explained that learners who missed school regularly never learned, for that reason, they failed tests which often resulted in failing the academic year. Teacher 4 said, *“frequently absent learners miss out on so much learning, that they can not catch up, they do not make it, they fail”.* To confirm this point, another teacher stated, *“almost half of the repeaters in my maths class this year, were always absent from school last year.* Conversely, all the teachers at High school A disagreed. The teachers at the school indicated that none of the chronically absent learners had ever failed. For instance, Teacher 2 claimed that the chronic absentees she had experience with, always performed well just like the regular attenders. The same teacher mentioned that the learners received the necessary learning support when they returned to school. To expand on this point, Teacher 6 said, *“...not really, learners at the school miss a few days of school, there is no significant effect on their overall performance... no, they do not fail”.*

All the teachers at High school B strongly felt that regular school attendance was of paramount importance. Three teachers at High school B stated that school attendance was imperative because learners acquired knowledge at school, if they skipped school frequently,

they missed out on the opportunity to learn. Teacher 4 from the same school pointed out that school attendance was fundamental as it was a baseline for a bright future. In addition, Teacher 4 further said, “*regular school attendance is crucial for high academic performance, learners who come to school every day demonstrate good performance in their academics*”. Similarly, all the teachers at High school A expressed that school attendance was important. The teachers at High school A were of the view that regular school attendance was pivotal for academic success. Teacher 6 said, “*...it is important that learners must attend school every day so that they do not fall behind academically*”.

These responses reveal that chronic learner absenteeism has a significant impact on learning or academic success. According to these teachers, learners who miss school regularly are likely to lose out on content knowledge and information that is imparted in the classroom. This was the case at High school B and High school A. Consequently, missing out on content knowledge results in misconceptions. The findings generated from the research study demonstrate that chronic learner absenteeism culminates in poor performance in assessments, grade failure and retention. However, this was more pronounced at the low socio-economic High school B. The study reveals that chronically absent learners at High school A which was a school of high socio-economic status, did not fail nor repeat grades.

4.4.4 Teachers’ views on how public high schools’ respond to chronic learner absenteeism

This section presents teachers’ questionnaire responses on how they provided learning support to chronically absent learners. This section also outlines the necessary interventions taken by public high schools to tackle absenteeism, also in collaboration with parents and the community at large. The teachers were required to give a Yes or No answer where appropriate and to elaborate on that.

4.4.4.1 Teachers’ role in providing learning support to chronically absent learners

When the teachers were asked if they provided chronically absent learners with learning support when they returned to school, most of the teachers at High school B asserted that they helped absentees catch up with their school work. However, the teachers explained that they only assisted learners who have been away from school for legitimate reasons, and they have also reported or have a doctor’s letter stating the reason for absence. Teacher 6 was of the view that absentees must take initiative to seek for assistance from their subject teachers

when they return to school. Teacher 6 further indicated that learners who were assisted are those that made an effort to arrange with the teachers. Teacher 1 and Teacher 4 at High school B stated that they helped absent learners during free periods. To expand on this point, Teacher 1 said, *"...as the teacher I provide learning material like worksheets the learner missed in her or his absence, I tell them to write what was written in their absence"*. However, two teachers from High school B highlighted that they did not assist learners because most of the learners missed school for illegitimate reasons. One of the two teachers felt that it was the learners' responsibility to ensure that they catch up with their school work. The teacher further added, *"helping learners who skip school for illegitimate reasons would further encourage more absenteeism as they would know that they will be helped with school work when they return to school"*.

On the other hand, all the teachers at High school A claimed that they provided learning support when learners returned to school. Teacher 3 said, *"I assist and guide absent learners when they return to school, but the onus lies on the learner to take responsibility for missed work"*. However, Teacher 2 and Teacher 4 at High school A expressed that they expected the absentees to make arrangements with their subject teachers when they came back to school. Teacher 2 said, *"learners are aware of the necessary steps to follow if they are absent and when they return to school"*.

In both schools, teachers held extra classes for absent learners when they returned to school. Most teachers at High school B asserted that they only had extra classes with learners who missed school for valid reasons, such as illness. Three teachers further added that learners were required to submit a doctor's letter to prove the legitimacy of their absence. To elaborate on this, Teacher 3 at High school B said, *"...I usually have extra lessons with them after school or sometimes during free periods"*. Correspondingly, all the teachers at High school A stated that the school arranged extra classes to assist absentees, they employed learning contracts, which involved individual teaching plans to help chronically absent learners. To explain this point, Teacher 1 said, *"learning contracts are helpful as they keep learners abreast with their school work and it also gives them the opportunity to ask questions on what they do not understand"*. Teacher 6 explained that the absent learners arranged with his subject teachers on how and when they could help him with the lessons and writing any assessments that were missed. Teacher 2 from the same school stated that if a learner was ill and had missed school for several days, sometimes the parents arranged with the school to have extra classes with the learner after school. To illustrate, Teacher 2 said,

“there was once a learner who sustained serious injuries during a rugby match, the parents arranged with me that I would go help the learner at his home after school”.

Most teachers at High school B indicated that they recapped on the previous lesson before they proceeded to the new one to help absentees catch up. Teacher 1 said that she summarised lessons missed by the learner or learners who were absent. To confirm this assertion, Teacher 5 said, *“I start my lesson by briefly summarizing the key ideas from the previous lesson to help learners who were absent to make connections to the new lesson”.* However, only two teachers said they did not recap. The two teachers explained that there was no time to recap because the teaching periods were short, that is, 35 minutes, while there was always a lot to cover in one lesson. One of the two teachers said, *“...going back to the previous lesson for learners who were absent disadvantages and wastes the time of learners who are at school every day”.* Comparably, at High school A most teachers said that they recapped on the previous lesson. Teacher 2 said, *“...for a learner who was absent the previous day, I do a 5 minutes recap to keep him abreast with missed work and to help him build on previous knowledge”.* Another teacher said, *“...I do a quick recap to enable the learner to understand the lesson that is coming next”.* However, two teachers indicated that they did not recap on the previous lesson before proceeding to the next lesson. Teacher 3 mentioned that there was no point in recapping because they held extra classes with absent learners.

All the teachers at High school B stated that they advised absent learners to read on the chapters that were covered when they were absent. Correspondingly, all the teachers at High school A asserted that they told the absent learners to read on what was done in their absence, to read their textbooks, on the sections that were covered.

All the teachers at High school B revealed that they advised chronically absent learners to consult their classmates on what was done in class, in their absence. In the same vein, all the teachers at High school A stated that they told absent learners to discuss with their classmates on lessons they have missed.

4.4.4.2 The Schools’ role in addressing chronic learner absenteeism

When the teachers were asked on the role played by the school in tackling chronic learner absenteeism, administrative procedures, particularly communication with the head of department and principal emerged as an effective strategy to monitor the problem. All the teachers at High school B revealed that they reported to the head of department and principal

if a learner or learners missed school consistently. Teacher 3 and Teacher 6 stated that they reported to the head of department on the second day of absence as stipulated in the school's policy on attendance, if there had not been communication from the parent or guardian about the absence of the learner. The head of department then reported to the Principal. Teacher 3 further said, *"...if a learner misses school for two days, on the third day if he or she is not showing up at school, I report to the HOD"*. Teacher 6 also said, *"...the school's policy on learner absenteeism specifies that a teacher must report to the HOD on the learner's second day of school absence...the HOD then reports to the Principal"*. Likewise, four out of six teachers at High school A claimed that they communicated with the head of department if a learner missed school. Teacher 1 said, *"if a learner misses school for two days, as the class teacher I have to report to the grade HOD, it is set forth by the school policy on absenteeism"*. The teachers indicated that they communicated with the head of department on the second day of absence. The head of department then communicated with the Principal. Two teachers at High school A mentioned that they did not report to the head of department because the parents would directly call them or the principal to report about their child's absence. Teacher 4 said, *"...some parents call me to let me know about their child's absence and when they will be back in class..."*.

The public high schools employed the schools' policy on absenteeism as a way of addressing chronic learner absenteeism. At High school B all the teachers stated that they applied the school's policy on school attendance. Four teachers at High school B pointed out that the policy declared that if a learner missed ten consecutive school days without notifying the class teacher or principal about the absence, they were deregistered. However, Teacher 5 revealed that the policy on attendance was not effective because learners would miss nine consecutive days and return to school on the tenth day. To illustrate, Teacher 5 said, *"these learners miss school for nine days and come back on the tenth day, which makes the school policy ineffective"*. This was problematic because in that instance, the school's policy on attendance did not apply. By the same token, all the teachers at High school A utilized the school's attendance policy to curb school absence. According to the school policy on attendance, as stated by Teacher 1, who said if a learner missed school, the school was supposed to be notified through the telephone, and if a learner returned to school he was supposed to bring a letter to the class teacher or Principal stating the reasons for being absent. Teacher 1 said, *"parents need to call the school to report about their child's absence so that*

we know...when the child returns to school they are expected to produce a sick note if they were sick”.

All the teachers at High school B indicated that the school did not utilize any kind of incentives including rewards, certificates and monetary incentives to motivate for school attendance. Teacher 2 said, *“school attendance is their responsibility...why should we reward learners for what they are supposed to do?”*. To expand on this argument, Teacher 6 said, *“the school does not reward learners for attendance...such rewards would not address the problem of absenteeism, learners miss school because of many issues rewards cannot solve”*. Comparably, all the teachers at High school A asserted that they did not use incentives to encourage learners to attend school regularly.

All the teachers at High school B stated that they did not punish nor expelled chronically absent learners. Three teachers from the same school believed that punishment was not effective in tackling absenteeism because it does not solve the root cause. Teacher 1 said, *“punishment is not an effective tool to address absenteeism, it does not solve the problems that keep the children away from school...”*. However, Teacher 6 said, *“maybe if the learners were punished for missing school too much, absenteeism rates would decrease at the school”*.

Concerning expulsion, Teacher 5 and Teacher 2 stated that chronic absentees were deregistered if they missed 10 consecutive days of school, without any communication. In the similar vein, all the teachers at High school A claimed not to punish nor expel chronically absent learners. Teacher 2 at High school A explained that they did not punish the learners because they were often absent for legitimate reasons. To elaborate on this point, Teacher 6 said, *“punishment especially beating learners has a negative impact on the child, it does not really change the behaviour...”*.

As a response to chronic learner absenteeism, if a learner was going through difficult situations that resulted in regular school absence, they booked the learner for counselling with the school’s psychologist, as stated by all the teachers at High school A. Teacher 3 at High school A said, *“if an absent learner is faced with a traumatic experience such as death of a parent or guardian, if necessary, we refer them to counselling when they return to school”*. On the contrary, at High school B all the teachers pointed out that the learners did not have access to counselling services. Teacher 4 said, *“we do not have counselling services at the*

school, but there are community social workers in the township whose responsibility is to ensure the social welfare of children in the community”.

4.4.4.3 Parental and community involvement for promoting good school attendance

On the role played by parents and the community in addressing chronic absenteeism, most of the teachers at High school B asserted that there was inadequate parental involvement at the school. The teachers explained that some parents worked and stayed very far from home, therefore, did not attend meetings whereby issues such as school attendance were discussed. Teacher 6 said, *“some parents are not actively involved in their children’s school attendance matters, they do not care”*. However, it was also revealed that some parents did attend school meetings. Teacher 2 at High school B indicated that some parents were uneducated; they did not value education as much. As a consequence, the parents did not monitor their children regarding school attendance. Teacher 1 said, *“...there is a need for parents to take interest in their children’s school attendance, because missing school a lot will affect their child’s future”*. Of the same view was Teacher 6, this teacher said, *“...schools need to make sure that parents are made aware of the consequences of being absent, maybe they can start making sure that their children attend school every day”*.

On the other hand, all the teachers at High school A stated that parental involvement was great at the school. Teacher 2 said, *“it is the parents’ legal responsibility to make sure that their children come to school every day”*. The teachers pointed out that there was meaningful communication between the parents and the school. According to the study, at High school A, parents reported about their child’s absence beforehand and consistently attended school meetings, and parents-teacher evenings. Teacher 4 said, *“there is meaningful communication between the parents and the school, most parents always come for meetings and teacher-parents’ evening which we have every term”*. To confirm this point, Teacher 5 stated, *“parents pay lots of money for school fees, therefore are actively involved in their child’s school matters”*.

Regarding the role played by the community in addressing chronic learner absenteeism, most of the teachers at High school B held the view that absenteeism was an issue of the community. To expand on this, Teacher 1 from High school B mentioned that most learners were absent from school because of problems that emanated from society. For that reason, the community must be involved in addressing the problem of chronic absenteeism. Teacher 4 said, *“...a child’s school attendance should be a shared responsibility of the community,*

parents, the school and local people must come together and find ways to fight absenteeism in our township schools...". Teacher 2 at High school B said, *"...education is supposed to emancipate our learners from social injustices, for that reason, it is important that communities, not just teachers, come together and devise solutions to this problem".* "Conversely, all the teachers at High school A felt that absenteeism was not an issue of the community. Four teachers pointed out that absenteeism was an issue of the school in collaboration with the parents. Teacher 3 said, *"it is the parents' or guardian's responsibility to see to it that their child comes to school consistently, the school must ensure that the parents fulfil that statutory responsibility".*

All the teachers at High school B were in support of the idea that there should be sports and activities at community level to help keep learners from using drugs and alcohol. Teacher 6 objected to the fact that school did not have sports which she asserted was problematic. Teacher 6 said, *"it was better when we had a soccer team at the school, a year back, it always kept our boys busy".* Likewise, Teacher 2 said, *'sports are a great pastime, sports would help keep our youngsters away from smoking and drinking alcohol in the townships".* Similarly, all the teachers at High school A were in favour of community services and sports to keep young people from drugs, alcohol use and abuse. However, all the teachers at High school A mentioned that the school had 29 extra mural activities that kept their learners occupied rather than engaging in alcoholism and drugs. Teacher 6 said, *"children love sports, so schools and communities must have sports, so that learners are encouraged to come to school every day and to stay away from drugs".* Another teacher said, *"...maybe sports at community level would be a good way to prevent young people from using drugs".*

All the teachers at High school B cited that the community reported learners who were seen loitering in the township streets during school hours. Teacher 1 said, *"the principal receives calls from local people reporting learners who are seen drinking alcohol and smoking in taverns when they are supposed to be in class".* To confirm this assertion, Teacher 4 also said, *"...a lot of learners have been reported to be aimlessly wandering in public spaces during school time".* While all the teachers at High school A stated that they urged parents and the community to report learners who were loitering in the streets or town during school hours, the teachers mentioned that they had never received such reports because most learners missed school because of valid reasons.

The findings generated reveal that public high schools responded positively to chronic learner absenteeism. Teachers provided the necessary learning support to help chronically absent learners keep up with missed school work and assessments. For instance, they scheduled extra classes, arranged individualized learning plans, the teachers recapped on previous lessons before proceeding to a new lesson, learners were advised to read on their textbooks what they had missed out. The teachers also told the absent learners to consult their peers for discussion on what was done in the classroom. From the study it was ascertained that the schools played a crucial role in addressing chronic learner absenteeism. The teachers reported to the head of department if a learner demonstrated problematic attendance, who then reported to the principal. The schools employed the school policy on attendance, which affirmed that learners must attend school every day. The policy stipulated that parents must communicate with the school about their child's absence. According to the policy a learner that missed school for ten consecutive days was deregistered. Counselling interventions were provided to learners affected by chronic absenteeism; however, this was the case at high socio-economic High school A.

The study also established that parental and community involvement was imperative in tackling chronic learner absenteeism. The schools made efforts to communicate with parents about their children's school attendance. According to the study the schools held meetings with parents wherein issues such as absenteeism were discussed. The community reported learners that were seen loitering in the streets during school time, however, this was the case at High school B. The teachers recommended that there should be community services and sports to keep the school going youth engaged with productive activities instead of engaging in alcohol and drugs.

4.5 Summary of the findings on teachers' perspectives on chronic learner absenteeism: A comparative analysis

This study makes important findings based on the research questions. This section summarises the findings relating to each of the four questions.

In response to the question on the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism at High school B and High school A, the findings of the study revealed that chronic learner absenteeism was more acute at High school B, a school situated at a low socio-economic environment compared to High school A, located at a high socio-economic background.

With regards to the causes of chronic learner absenteeism at High school B and High school A, the findings generated from the study demonstrated that at High school B, chronic learner absenteeism was caused by socio-economic challenges, school-based factors, family circumstances, personal issues and the time or season of the year or day of the week. Socio-economic problems included poverty, HIV and AIDS impact, teenage pregnancy, teenage motherhood, alcoholism, drug abuse and gangsterism. Family circumstances were unstable family backgrounds and lack of parental involvement. Teacher absenteeism was a school-based factor that influenced extended absence at High school B. Personal issues included ill-health, the lack of discipline and motivation. On the other hand, at High school A, chronic learner absenteeism was a result of personal factors and the time or season or day of the week. Ill-health was a personal factor that caused chronic learner at High school A.

Findings on what the teachers in the study thought were the possible implications of chronic learner absenteeism revealed that school absence resulted in missing out content knowledge, peer insights and misunderstanding concepts and subject matter. For instance, while at High school B, chronic learner absenteeism culminated in poor performance in assessments and grade failure and retention, chronically absent learners did not perform poorly in assessments nor did they fail and repeat grades at High school A.

Another important finding in this study related to how public high schools in Johannesburg responded to chronic learner absenteeism. According to this study, teachers went out of their way to assist chronically absent learners. For example, subject teachers arranged extra classes and individual teaching plans to assist the learners. Teachers also recapped on the previous lesson before they proceeded onto a new lesson. Chronically absent learners were advised by their teachers to read on their textbooks, especially the sections they missed. The teachers also told the learners to consult and discuss with their classmates what they had done in class when they were away from school.

The study also found that administrative action was taken by schools in response to chronic learner absenteeism. For example, teachers reported to the head of department if a learner missed two days of school, the head of department then communicated with the school principal. Furthermore, the schools employed the school policy on attendance, which stipulated that the school should de-register a learner if she or he misses ten consecutive school days.

This study found that chronically absent learners at the two participating schools were treated differently in terms of specialist attention. For instance, while learners who missed school because of difficult circumstances at High school A were referred to a psychologist for counselling interventions, learners at High school B were not referred to a psychologist. Lastly, the schools also worked together with parents and the community to promote regular school attendance.

4.6 Principals' responses to the interview questions

This section presents the perspectives of the schools' principals on chronic learner absenteeism in the two selected public high schools in Johannesburg. These are High school A, a suburb school and High school B, a township school. A comparative analysis of the principals' responses is presented in four themes; the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism, causes of chronic learner absenteeism, the implications of chronic learner absenteeism and public high schools' response to chronic learner absenteeism.

4.6.1 Principals' views on the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg

When the Principals were asked to describe learner attendance at the public high schools, Principal 1 at High school A, which was a school that served children from high-income households, pointed out that school attendance was very high at the school. The principal indicated that the school did not have problems of chronic learner absenteeism. Principal 1 said, *"...on a daily basis I would say, we have school attendance of 97% at the school"*. The Principal stated that school attendance was particularly very good at the higher grades, that is, grades 10, 11 and 12, and that was because the learners at higher grades took their studies seriously as they were getting closer to Grade 12. On the contrary, at High school B, which catered for children from low-income households, Principal 2 asserted that chronic learner absenteeism had always been a problem at the school in the past years, however, the Principal indicated that school attendance was improving at High school B. The Principal stated that chronic learner absenteeism was average at the school. Principal 2 said *"...roughly I would say, 9 out of 100 learners are absent a day"*.

The findings suggest that chronic learner absenteeism is more pronounced in schools of low socio-economic backgrounds compared to high socio-economic schools. The findings show that High school A which served children from high-income households had high school

attendance relative to High school B, which catered for children who were mostly from low-income families.

4.6.2 Principals' views on the causes of chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg

In response to questionnaire item number 5, on what the causes of chronic learner absenteeism were, Principal 2 at High school B, pointed out that most learners missed school due to mainly socio-economic problems, family circumstances, personal factors and the time or season of the year or day of the week. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which argues that human behaviour cannot be explicated by using a linear model of causality. However, a person's environment system has various and mutually-influential levels of systems. According to this theory, people's behaviour is inextricably intertwined to social groups, forces and relationships that make up the environment, including the family, school, socio-economic environment, interpersonal and power relationships.

4.6.2.1 Socio-economic challenges

Socio-economic factors are social and economic issues that caused learners to miss school. These included teenage pregnancy, teenage motherhood, alcoholism and gangsterism and teenage sexual activities.

Teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood

Principal 2 of High school B cited that teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood posed a challenge to regular school attendance amongst the girl learners. The principal said, *"pregnant girls stay away from school because they are mocked by their peers sometimes"*. The principal stated that some girls missed a couple of weeks after giving birth. To elaborate on this, the principal said, *"...the girls stay at home because of the pressures that come with taking care of a new born baby"*. According to Principal 2 at High school B teenage mothers missed school in the beginning of the month because they had to collect the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) child grant which was paid from the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th of every month.

Alcoholism, drug use, gangsterism and sexual activities

Principal 2 at High school B also mentioned that the boy learners missed school to hangout in the streets and engage in alcohol use, cannabis smoking and gangsterism. The principal said, *"some of our boys are involved in gangsterism, they stay in the streets and engage in drugs,*

some of the boys are drug addicts". Moreover, Principal 2 indicated that the boys that did not have parents, who stayed alone in the shacks, invited their girlfriends, who were also learners in the school, to come over and engage in sexual activities.

On the other hand, Principal 1 at High school A did not mention any socio-economic factors as reasons for chronic school absence at the school. However, the principal at High school A indicated that the high incidence of learner attendance at the school was attributed to the fact that most of the learners came from high-income households, thus, all their basic needs were catered for. The Principal further added, "*...their exorbitant school fees, books, school uniforms, sports costumes, food to eat at school and transport were paid for without fail*".

The Principal at High school A revealed that the school had a scholarship fund that was founded by the school's principal and his wife to assist learners who had outstanding school fees due to the inability to pay because a parent had died or lost a job or for what so ever legitimate reason. The scholarship catered for school uniforms, shoes, sports custom, school bag, and the necessary stationery. Learners that were on this scholarship also collected food at the tuck shop for a certain amount daily during break-time. The Principal at High school A cited that the scholarship fund helped a lot to maintain good school attendance at the school.

This finding corresponds with the ecological systems theory's macrosystem environment. According to the macrosystem level, the socio-economic background, that is, the financial or social position of the child can shape how the she or he behaves.

4.6.2.2 Family-based factors

Family factors entailed the challenges that happened within the context of the home. Parental involvement was a factor that influenced whether learners came to school or not.

Lack of parental involvement

The principal at High school B highlighted that most of the learners at the school were orphans, whose parents had died from AIDs related illnesses and other causes. Principal 2 explained that the children did not have a parent or both parents and some learners stayed alone in their homes after their parents had died. Consequently, the children had no one to encourage them to go to school or to monitor their school attendance, hence, the irregular school attendance. Conversely, the principal at High school A pointed out that parental involvement was quite impressive at the school, which was one of the reasons why learners were encouraged to attend regularly. Principal 1 said, "*...the parents are highly involved in*

their children's academic lives and they communicate meaningfully, they participate in school meetings and events”.

This finding is in line with the ecological system theory. The mesosystem environment entails a set of microsystems that influence each other, what happens in the family and with teachers may influence how children behave at school and vice versa (Donald et al, 2010).

4.6.2.3 Personal Factors

Personal factors are the matters that affected an individual learner. This included ill-health.

Ill-health

Principal 2 at High school B asserted that illness was one of the reasons that contributed to chronic learner absenteeism at the school. The Principal added that learners stayed at home when they were not feeling well or went to the clinic. Likewise, Principal 1 at High school A voiced out that even though school attendance was very good at the school, there were a very few learners, 2 or 3 learners that were consistently absent due to ill-health, that is, illness and injuries. The principal at High school A further added that some learners missed school because they had sustained injuries during school sports.

4.6.2.3 Other factors

Other factors that influenced whether learners attended school or not included the time or season of the school year or days of the week.

Time or season of the year or day of the week

Principal 2 from High school B said that absenteeism was high on Fridays, that learners skipped school to chill at hangout spots and taverns at the township. Principal 2 said, “...some learners usually miss school on Friday because they want to drink alcohol and attend social events later in the day”. Similarly, The Principal at High school A stated that the learners missed school a few days before test week or examinations to prepare themselves.

The study reveals that there are several factors that pose a challenge to regular school attendance at public high schools in Johannesburg. These challenges were identified as socio-economic, family-specific, personal issues and the time or season of the school year or days of the week. The findings show that the socio-economic status of the school, geographical location and poverty levels or family background of the child have a significant influence on whether the child attends school or not. From the study, it was found that most of the learners

at High school B, a school situated in a low socio-economic environment, came from poverty-stricken homes, therefore, the high incidence of chronic absenteeism can be attributed to poverty. Moreover, learners from High school B also missed school due to personal reasons and some learners skipped school on certain days of week. On the other hand, the findings reveal that most of the children at High school A came from high-income households, which was a factor that contributed to high school attendance at the school, all their basic needs were catered for, which enabled them to attend school regularly. The study demonstrates that chronically absent learners at High school A missed school primarily because of personal reasons. They also stayed away from school at certain times of the school year or days of the week.

4.6.3 Principals' views on the implications of chronic learner absenteeism

When asked if chronic learner absenteeism had implications for learning, Principal 2 of High school B cited that chronic learner absenteeism had an adverse impact on learning. By the same token, Principal 1 at High school A stated that chronic learner absenteeism had grave repercussions for academic success.

4.6.3.1 Content Knowledge

Principal 2 at High school B said that consistent absence from school culminated in losing out on content knowledge taught in the classroom. To elaborate on this, Principal 2 said, *“when learners are not at school, they miss out on knowledge, life skills and the values that enable them to deal with life”*. Correspondingly, the principal at High school A stated that learners who were frequently absent from school missed out on knowledge and information imparted in the classroom, therefore, resulted in gaps in content knowledge. The principal at High school A said, *“absence disrupts learning, it results in gaps in content knowledge”*.

4.6.3.2 Performance in Assessments

Principal 2 at High school B asserted that chronically absent learners missed out on important knowledge, as a result, they performed badly in assessments. Principal 2 said, *“...if learners are in class every day, they will understand concepts, therefore, they will perform better in tests and exams*. The principal at High school B pointed out that learners who had missed several days of school, had a lot of work and catching up to do. “Principal 2 at High school B said, *“absent learners have lots of homework, classwork and tests to write when they return to school which is often overwhelming and culminates in poor academic performance”*. Principal 2 further asserted that learners missed assessments, which was problematic because

it meant teachers must spare time for the learner to write the test. On the other hand, the principal at High school A stated that even though chronically absent learners missed out on content knowledge, they never performed poorly in assessments because their subject teachers were supportive, in terms of helping chronically absent learners catch up on missed work.

4.6.3.3 Grade failure and retention

Principal 2 at High school B indicated that poor performance in tests and examinations often led to grade failure and retention. The principal explained that if a learner performed poorly in his or her academics and had been absent for twenty days or more in the school year, the learner never qualified to progress to the next grade, as stipulated in the school's policy on attendance. The principal at High school B also revealed that the school had a high failure rate and grade repetition throughout the grades. Principal 2 further added that the matric pass had not been very good. The Principal illustrated that in 2015, the school obtained a matric pass rate of 64%, whereby 278 learners sat for their matric exams, 98 matriculants failed and two did not finish writing all their exam papers. According to this principal the school had been fluctuating between 70% to 90% matric pass rate in the past years. The principal said, *"...even though there are many factors that cause learner failure in the school, chronic learner absenteeism has immensely contributed as well"*. On the contrary, Principal 1 at High school A did not mention anything about grade failure and repetition.

Furthermore, Principal 2 at High school B put emphasis on the importance of regular school attendance, boldly stating that it was imperative for academic success. The Principal said, *"regular school attendance undoubtedly leads to success in academics"*. In the same way, Principal 1 at High school A adamantly asserted that daily school attendance was important for effective teaching and learning. The principal at High school A said, *"...if learners are not in class, they do not learn, and the teaching process is disrupted...daily school attendance is vital for successful learning"*.

The findings show that chronic learner absenteeism greatly impacts on learning and academic achievement. The study reveals that chronic absence culminates in content knowledge gaps and misinterpretation of concepts. According to the data generated, chronic absentees performed poorly in assessments which led to grade failure and retention. However, this was the case in High school B, a low socio-economic status school. The study also reveals that

chronic absenteeism contributes to poor matric examination results and drop out. High failure rate and dropout were more pronounced at High school B.

4.6.4 Principals' views on how public high schools respond to chronic learner absenteeism

This section presents principals' responses on the role the played by teachers in providing learning support to chronically absent learners when they return to school. The role played by the principals in supporting absentees and how they promote good school attendance is discussed. This section also outlines the necessary interventions taken by school to tackle absenteeism, also in collaboration with parents and the wider community.

4.6.4.1 Principals' views on providing learning support for chronically absent learners

When the principals were asked on the role played by the schools to provide learning support to chronically absent learners, the principal at High school B asserted that the school provided catch-up programmes for learners who missed school because of legitimate reasons such illness, pregnancy issues or check-ups and childbirth amongst the girl learners. According to the principal, the absentees were assisted by their subject teachers after school. Principal 2 at High school B said, *"the teachers help the learners after school, they give them notes, handouts or whatever that was provided in class during their absence"*. The principal added that the learners were only assisted if their parents or guardians had communicated with the school and a doctor's letter was submitted when they returned to school. However, the same principal highlighted that the school did not assist learners that missed school for invalid reasons.

Moreover, Principal 2 at High school B revealed that due to the big class sizes and overcrowded classrooms as well as the high number of absentees sometimes, teachers did not have the time to re-teach or help every absent learner. In the similar vein, Principal 1 of High school A mentioned that the school employed learning contracts to help chronically absent learners, whereby a learner arranged with his or her subject teachers to help him catch up with school work and assessments which were missed. Principal 1 at High school A said, *"...teachers must make themselves available to assist absentees..."*. The principal at High school A also indicated that teachers used the class register to track school attendance, if they picked up a trend in a learner's school attendance it was immediately reported to the head of

department. First, the class teacher reported to the head of department, who then reported to the Principal.

4.6.4.2 Principal's role in addressing chronic learner absenteeism

Principal 2 at High school B spoke to the learners about the importance of regular attendance and the negative impact of chronic absence on academic success sometimes, during morning assembly. The Principal at High school B stated that the learners were also made aware of the school's policy on absenteeism, particularly how they could be disadvantaged if they missed 20 or more school days in the academic year. According to this principal the policy on school attendance was applied, that is, if a learner was absent for ten consecutive days, without communication from the parents or guardian, the learner was deregistered. However, the parents were informed before deregistering the learner. Principal 2 said, *"...non-compliance with the policy on school attendance has consequences"*. Furthermore, Principal 2 at High school B stressed upon learners' responsibility for their learning and academic progress. The Principal adamantly said, *"the learners must have ownership, and they must take charge of their learning because it is their education and their future"*.

On the other hand, Principal 1 from High school A indicated that it was his responsibility to ensure that teachers helped learners who had been affected by chronic absenteeism, to keep them abreast with their school work. The principal said, *"...as a principal I have to establish a participative and facilitating environment"*. The principal also stated that it was his responsibility to see to it that the teachers availed themselves for helping learners. The principal also ensured that some chronic absentees were referred to counselling or the necessary interventions if need be.

4.6.4.3 Parental and community involvement for promoting good school attendance

Regarding the role that was played by the parents and community in promoting good school attendance in public high schools in Johannesburg, the principal at High school B revealed that the school communicated with parents with regards to their child's school attendance, especially if the child exhibited problematic school attendance. Principal 2 at High school B cited that learner absenteeism issues were discussed with parents, the school governing body and all stakeholders during school meetings held every term. During these meetings the principal raised awareness of the importance of regular school attendance and the consequences of learner absenteeism on learning. The effectiveness of the attendance policies as well as how learner absenteeism can be dealt with at the school was always part of the

agenda in the meetings as stated by the principal at High school B. The principal at High school B said, *“if parents are aware of attendance expectations, their children and themselves can be held accountable for not complying with the specified standards and expectations”*

Likewise, Principal 1 from High school A pointed out that there was meaningful communication and engagement between the school and parents or guardians. The principal mentioned that the school held parents’ evening every quarter where issues such as school attendance were discussed, and parents always availed themselves. The principal further added, *“...parental involvement is quite astounding at the school”*.

Principal 2 at High school B held the view that chronic learner absenteeism was a result of societal factors, therefore the community had to play a role in addressing absenteeism in public high schools. The principal stated that during the meetings with the parents and community were urged to report and contact the principal or school immediately if they saw a learner loitering in the township streets during school hours. The principal revealed that in many instances the school had received calls about learners who were aimlessly lingering in public spaces during school time. Principal 2 at High school B suggested that local government should implement sponsored youth development programmes such as tutoring and mentoring children in the community, cleaning around the township, clearing litter, landscaping public parks to keep young people engaged and to stay away from drugs and peer pressure. Principal 2 added that sports at community level would also be a good idea to keep young people positively occupied. To illustrate, principal 2 at High school B said, *“there was once a local football club and boxing association at the township years back, however, it stopped when the boxing coach died and due to the lack of financial sponsorship for the football club”*. The principal highlighted that the sports kept their boy learners occupied after school and sometimes on weekends.

Similarly, with regards to community involvement the principal at High school A recommended that the community should assist in cases where learners missed school to engage in inappropriate behaviour in public. The principal said, *“the community should report to the parents or the school”*.

The findings reveal that the co-operation of schools, parents and the community at large is of paramount importance in supporting chronically absent learners as well as addressing chronic absenteeism in public high schools. The findings demonstrate that principals responded

positively to chronic learner absenteeism. They ensured that learners were provided with the necessary learning support and intervention they needed. The study reveals that the public high schools employed certain measures to monitor or manage absenteeism. These measures included the class attendance register, school policy on attendance, communication with learners and parents, parents' meetings and counselling for chronically absent learners, if necessary. However, counselling was pronounced at High school A.

4.7 Summary of the findings on the principals' perspectives on chronic learner absenteeism: A comparative analysis

This study makes important findings based on the research questions. In response to the question on the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism at High school B and High school A, the findings of the study reveal that chronic learner absenteeism was more pronounced at High school B, which was situated in a township compared to High school A, which was in a high socio-economic suburb.

Regarding the causes of chronic learner absenteeism, the findings show that socio-economic issues, family-based factors, personal issues and day of the week influenced chronic absenteeism at High school B. Socio-economic challenges included teenage pregnancy, teenage motherhood, sexual activities among the learners, alcohol use, cannabis smoking and gangsterism. Family-specific issues were broken family structures and the lack of parental involvement. Personal matters included ill-health. Likewise, at High school A, chronic learner absenteeism was a result of personal factors and the time or season of the school year or day of the week. Ill-health was a personal factor that caused chronic learner absenteeism at High school A.

Findings on what the principals in the study thought were the possible implications of chronic learner absenteeism revealed that chronically absent learners missed out on content knowledge, which culminated in knowledge gaps and misunderstanding subject matter. While the findings show that chronic absence resulted in poor performance in assessments at High school B, chronically absent learners at High school A did not demonstrate poor performance in assessments nor did they fail and repeated grades.

Another important finding in this study related to how public high schools in Johannesburg responded to chronic learner absenteeism. According to this study the principals played a supervision role in ensuring that chronically absent learners received the support they needed

from their subject teachers. The teachers arranged extra classes to assist the learners. Unlike at High school A, at High school B talks were held during assembly about the importance of school attendance and the possible implications of regular school absence. At High school A, a class register was used to track school attendance. Learners were charged with a breach of school policy on attendance if they missed school for ten consecutive days without communicating with the schools. This study found that chronically absent learners at the two participating schools were treated differently in terms of specialist attention. For example, learners who missed school because of difficult circumstances were referred to counselling. However, this was the case at High school A. Lastly, the schools also worked together with parents and the community to promote regular school attendance.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter reflects on the key findings in the research study as identified in chapter four. The discussion of the key findings is linked to existing literature and studies that have been conducted on chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools. The chapter ends with the limitations identified in the research study.

5.2 The incidence of chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg

The study established that chronic learner absenteeism is more pronounced in schools situated in low socio-economic environments compared to those that catered for children from high-income households. High school B, a school located in a low socio-economic township had a high incidence of chronic learner absenteeism relative to High school A, a school situated in an upmarket suburb. Although there is a lack of research specifically focused on chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg, this finding resonates with that of Stokes (2016), who states that chronic learner absenteeism rates are higher in schools situated in low socio-economic environments compared to schools in suburbs and urban areas. This author explains that the high rates of chronic learner absenteeism are influenced by challenges that emanate from poverty, such as limited resources, poor sanitation, improper facilities and infrastructure in the schools, inadequate transport systems and limited access to health care. The finding of the study is also in line with Nagaishi and Roby's (2016) argument that chronic learner absenteeism is rife in rural schools in sub Saharan Africa compared to those in the urban areas in the region. Daily attendance rates in some countries in Southern African can be below 70% in some schools in the rural areas during harvest season (Lewin, 2009). For example, in Mozambique, secondary school attendance among learners living in urban areas is four times higher than that of learners living in the rural areas (Nagaishi & Roby, 2016). A similar finding was revealed by Otto (2016) who contends that in South Africa, children living in the farms are more likely to demonstrate problematic absenteeism from school than children staying in urban places (Otto, 2016). According to this author children who reside in the countryside tend to have household and farm duties which hampers regular school attendance. Also, the lack of

efficient transport systems in the rural areas may also cause learners to skip school (Otto, 2016).

5.3 Causes of chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg

In this study, socio-economic challenges, family problems, school-specific factors, personal issues and the time or season of the year or day of the week emerged as the causes of chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg. In line with previous studies, as stated by Jacob & Lovett (2017), there are many factors that pose a challenge to school attendance in South African secondary schools. According to the above researchers, causes of chronic learner absenteeism fall into four categories: socio-economic challenges, school-based factors, family-specific circumstances and personal factors.

Socio-economic challenges that caused chronic learner absenteeism at High school B included poverty, HIV and AIDS impact, teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood, alcoholism, drug use and gangsterism. These results tie well with previous studies in which Machingambi & Wadesango (2011) assert that children from impoverished households are more likely to stay away from school compared to children from affluent homes. These authors indicate that learners from poverty-stricken households may miss three or more school days per month. Other scholars have shown that some learners missed school because they do not have the necessary clothes to wear when it is cold or raining, especially those that utilize public transport to school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). A similar pattern of results was found by Phurutse (2005), that the lack of money to pay school fees and other school expenses such as school books, stationery, uniforms may result to prolonged school absence. Concerning the issue of the lack of food to eat at High school B, it is evident from previous reports that 45% of children in South Africa stay in households where there is insufficient food (Statistics South Africa, 2016). The results can also be explained by Otto's (2016) argument that some children in South Africa go to school without having eaten any food in the morning, and that some children come from households where there is insufficient income to cater for their basic needs including food and clothes.

It is evident from literature that HIV and AIDS is one of the factors that hamper regular school attendance at secondary schools in South Africa (Otto, 2016). This finding can also be confirmed by the 115 167 AIDS-related deaths that occurred in 2018 (Statistics South Africa, 2018). Children have lost their parents to AIDS, and this has culminated in a high number of child-headed households in South Africa. According to UNAIDS (2016), 4.8 million children

lost one or both parents from AIDS-related illnesses in the year 2015. A Statistics South Africa general household survey reveals that in the year 2015 there were approximately 90 000 children staying in 50 000 child-headed households in the country. Children are compelled to stay at home to take care of family members suffering from AIDS related illness, and to take care of their younger siblings after their parents have died (UNAIDS, 2016).

A similar conclusion was reached by (Otto, 2016) that teenage pregnancy is positively correlated to chronic learner absenteeism at secondary schools in South Africa. Otto (2016) indicates that pregnant teenage girls may stay at home because they are embarrassed of falling pregnant. Some girls may frequently miss school after giving birth, to take care of their newly-born babies or young children (Otto, 2016). It is evident from existing literature that some learners missed school to collect their children's South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) grants (Mboweni, 2014). According to this author 9% of learners missed school on SASSA pay-days.

When linking these findings to prior studies, it must be pointed out that drug-dealing and gangsterism in South African secondary schools contributes to learner absenteeism (Otto, 2016). According to this author some schools are intruded by drug-dealers and gangsters, therefore, learners may stay at home for safety and security reasons.

On the other hand, at High school A, a school of high socio-economic status, none of the teachers mentioned socio-economic challenges as a cause of chronic learner absenteeism. However, the study revealed that the high attendance rate at the school was attributed to the fact that most learners were from high-income families, they had the resources and all their basic needs were catered for. This enabled them to get to school every day. The findings correspond with what was found by Burdick-Will & Logan (2016), that school attendance may be good in schools located in suburban areas because the children may be from high-income households with many resources which may enable them to attend school regularly. Similar results were also found in Otto (2016) that the good attendance in affluent schools can be attributed to the adequate resources and proper facilities at the school. Quite often, the schools in the higher socio-economic environments have small class sizes, sufficient teaching staff, therefore, school attendance is easy to monitor (Baysal, Ocak & Ocak, 2017).

This study also revealed that family-specific factors were the cause of chronic learner absenteeism at High school B. This study found that disintegrated family structures and the

lack of parental involvement influenced whether learners attended school or not. This finding is supported by Bergman, Bergman & Gravette's (2011) assertion that broken family structures may result in poor school attendance. These scholars argue that children staying in child-headed households and single-parent households are more prone to skip school than those from stable family backgrounds. Similar findings were established in Balfanz & Byner (2012), wherein they argue that children staying in child-headed households, in single parent households as well as multi-generational households miss school because they must take care of their younger siblings and family. These researchers further state that children may find work to enable family survival and such family responsibilities may cause some learners to stay away from school (Balfanz & Byner, 2012).

This finding is consistent with research showing that parental involvement in a child's education and school attendance are interrelated (Kelly, 2013). A similar pattern of results was established in Ncontsa & Shumba (2013) who claim that children whose parents' hold negative assumptions and perceptions about education are more likely to demonstrate problematic absence. The above authors explain that the parents may not be educated, therefore, they may not see the value in education. Ncontsa & Shumba (2013) further add that the parents may have had negative experiences or were chronic absentees themselves, hence, the non-involvement in their children's school matters and particularly school attendance. Correspondingly, literature as stated by Balfanz & Byner (2012) contend that children may choose to skip school if no one encourages and monitors their school attendance.

The study also identified some school factors as responsible for chronic learner absenteeism. This included teacher absenteeism at High school B. This finding is evident in existing studies, as indicated in the Human Science Research Council report (2017) that teacher absenteeism in South African secondary schools contributes to learner absenteeism. The report reveals that teacher absenteeism is more pronounced in the Southern African Development Community region (SADC). The report also shows that there were 392 000 teachers employed at public high schools in 2012 in South Africa, with each teacher, on average, skipping school for 19 days. The total number of days lost added up to 7448000 in 2012 (HSRC, 2017). This finding on teacher absenteeism corresponds with a report on the quality of high school education in South Africa, Govender (2016), stating that teacher attendance is a problem in South Africa and it encourages learner absenteeism. According to this report, teachers from low socio-economic schools tended to be absent more often relative to teachers in schools of high socio-economic status (Govender, 2016).

Personal issues emerged as one of the causes of chronic learner absenteeism at public high schools in Johannesburg. These included lack of discipline, motivation and ill-health. These results match with prior studies as stated by Weeks (2012) who argues that laziness, lack of commitment and motivation to learn has a significant impact on chronic learner absenteeism. Concerning ill-health, this finding is consistent with prior research showing that ill-health is one of the main reasons why learners are chronically absent from school, that is, injuries, chronic and minor illnesses such as asthma and flu in winter (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). According to these authors learners from poor communities are more likely to miss school because of inadequate health care services.

From the findings generated in the study, the season or time of the school year or day of the week was ascertained as a reason why some learners frequently missed school. This finding is in accordance with Balfanz & Byrnes' (2012) claim that school attendance decreases during particular seasons of the year, such as winter and rainy seasons. Learners tend to stay at home during these seasons because they may not have the necessary clothes to keep them warm and protective rain clothes. Correspondingly, as stated in literature, some learners may miss school during harvest season (Lewin, 2009). Daily attendance rates can be below 70% in some schools and can be 50% at times, during harvest season (Lewin, 2009).

Similar findings were obtained in Sanzila (2011) who indicates that absenteeism is higher towards the end of the week, that is, on Thursdays and Fridays. School absence is lower during the middle of the week that is, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

5.4 The implications of chronic learner absenteeism

The study established that chronic school absence had grave consequences on learning and academic achievement. Chronic learner absenteeism culminated in learners missing out on content knowledge and important information, misunderstanding concepts, performing poorly in assessments and ultimately failing and repeating grades. Regarding content knowledge and chronic learner absenteeism, it is evident from literature that absentees miss out on content, important information, learning objectives and instructions (Jhemson, 2016). The above author contends that learning may be disrupted if learners miss lessons that are progressive, in the beginning of the unit, because vertical knowledge builds up on each other (Jhemson, 2016). These results tie well with Reid's (2011) argument that it is imperative that learners grasp concepts at the beginning of the unit to better understand more complex concepts that may follow. According to Reid (2011) learners miss out on the explanations of the teacher

and the specific illustrations which the teacher may use to explicate and simplify abstract and complex concepts. Consequently, if learners miss out on content knowledge and information, it may culminate in misunderstanding the subject matter (Otto, 2016).

The findings on groups discussions, participation in the classroom and chronic learner absenteeism align with what was found by Jhemson (2016) that absentees who skip school on days when the class engaged in group work or discussions, lose out on new ideas and peers' insights.

The findings pertaining performance in assessments and chronic learner absenteeism, correspond with prior studies as confirmed in Gottfried (2016) who indicates that chronically absent learners get a few hours of learning, may get low test marks and class quizzes. This is because they may have missed the guidelines or scope that was issued out in class when they were absent. Similar findings were established in Otto (2016) who argues that absent learners may not adequately prepare for tests, because they may not have notes, they may write incorrect answers to questions related to the content knowledge that was imparted in the classroom when they were absent. These results are also in accordance with what other scholars have found, they reveal that learners' abilities are operative and effectual when they are in class, therefore, being absent may have an adverse impact on academic performance (Attwood & Croll, 2006). Ultimately, poor academic performance may lead to grade failure and retention (Rocque, 2016).

Concerning reteaching and chronic learner absenteeism, comparable findings were previously reported in Otto (2016) who asserts that teachers may have to reteach or revise preceding lessons to help absentees catch up with lost time. According to Otto (2016) teachers dedicate time on backtracking and assisting absentees, which may be unfair to regular school attenders, because it takes their time. In line with existing literature, some scholars show that regularly attending learners may be demotivated because of this reteaching (Arseven, Kilic & Sahin, 2016).

5.5 Public high schools' response to chronic learner absenteeism

From the study it was found that learning support for chronic absentees included arrangements such as learning contracts for individualized teaching and extra classes after school and during free periods. Teachers advised absent learners to consult their classmates and to read on their textbooks what was covered during their absence. Teachers had to

reteach or revise the previous lesson or lessons to help absentees to catch up. It emerged from the study that schools used class attendance registers to monitor attendance. In addition, learners who missed school due to difficult circumstances were referred for counselling interventions. However, this was the case at High school A.

These findings on assisting absentees are consistent with the stipulation of South African Policy on Learner Attendance (2010), that schools must provide support to a learner who has been absent to keep up with school work or assessments missed.

These results mentioned above are correspondent with previous findings in Simmons (2016) who suggests that schools must arrange extra classes during preparation time or after school to assist learners who have missed school for an extended period. The above author explains that extra catch-up classes provide learners with the opportunity to keep up with the missed lessons, classwork and tests. According to the same author extra classes also offer a chance for the learners to get clarity and ask questions on what they do not comprehend. In line with the findings is Sheridan (2012) who advises that schools must arrange learning contracts to assist the chronically absent learners to catch up with missed work. The findings revealed are in accordance with Simmons' (2016) argument that teachers must empower chronically absent learners' classmates to help their peers keep up with school work. The classmates can share their notes and discuss with the absent learners what they did in the classroom in their absence (Simmons, 2016).

The findings generated from the study on the schools' role in addressing absenteeism align with previous research that the importance of record keeping, that is, utilizing a daily class attendance register to address or manage learner absenteeism (Otto, 2016). The findings tie well with the previous reports as indicated in the Gauteng Province Circular Report (2017), that teachers should mark a register every morning during register period to manage absenteeism. According to this report keeping a record of class or school attendance allows teachers to keep track of school attendance, to identify chronic absentees and provide the necessary support.

The findings correspond with Edwards' (2013) assertion that learner absenteeism may be a result of the lack of motivation, for that reason it is imperative to refer learners for counselling intervention. This author argues that schools must implement counselling programs that focus on improving learner school attendance. Edwards (2013) advises that research must be conducted to see what counselling interventions would work best with

learners depending on the cause for absenteeism. Furthermore, the scholar adds that it is imperative that school counsellors must work with class teachers and parents.

The study revealed that school principals played a supervision role in ensuring that chronically absent learners were provided with the necessary support. According to this study, principals employed the schools' policy on attendance. For example, if learners missed ten school days, consecutively, and without communication from the parents or guardian they were de-registered. This finding resonates with the provision of the South African Policy on Learner Attendance (2010) which states that principals must see to it that learners are provided with the necessary support they need. The same policy stipulates that school principals must charge irregularly absent learners with a breach of the school's code of conduct or deregister the learners if they missed school for ten consecutive days without any explanation.

The findings generated from the study revealed that parental and community involvement are important in curbing absenteeism. The schools regularly communicated with parents or guardians concerning their child's attendance. Meetings were held at the schools to discuss such issues as school attendance, the importance and possible implications of chronic absence. The community reported to the school if learners were seen loitering aimlessly in public spaces during school time. However, this was evident at High school B.

These findings correspond with existing literature which demonstrates that tackling chronic learner absenteeism entails the partnership of all role players, including the school, teachers, and adjustment of the curriculum, peer support, family and the community (Coetzee & Venter, 2016). These authors state that meaningful engagement with the parents and community involvement to eliminate the chronic learner absenteeism among learners is critical, by firstly addressing its root causes. Likewise, Edwards (2013) argues that schools should work together with parents to identify the causes of chronic absence, for example, geographical location, transport problems, health issues and so forth, as well as how these can be addressed. In line with the findings is Boissier et al.'s (2014) argument that parents, or guardians are key players in promoting school attendance because they have the power to ensure that their children attend school.

A similar finding is ascertained by Otto (2016) who highlights that communication with parents about their child's inconsistent school attendance is crucial. The writer above suggests that schools should contact parents telephonically and may send electronic messages

if learners show problematic attendance. Otto (2016) further explains that communication may raise awareness about the importance of regular school attendance and the impact it may have on the child's academic success. According to this author when parents are cognizant of the correlation between school attendance and academic success rates, they are ideally positioned to communicate the importance of attendance to their children.

5.6 Limitations of the study

Due to time constraints, the study included only school principals and teachers as participants, and not the learners identified with chronic learner absenteeism. Bringing consistently absent learners into the conversation and getting their perspectives would have provided deeper knowledge and understanding of the chronic learner absenteeism and insight on how to deal with the problem.

The study included only two public high schools in Johannesburg, High school A, a school situated in a high socio-economic suburb in the east of Johannesburg and High school B in a low socio-economic township, north of Johannesburg. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to all schools situated at high socio-economic environments and those found in townships in Johannesburg, as communities and schools have their own dynamics and variables.

The study does not fully explore the diversity of schools in Johannesburg, the study focused on schools of two socio-economic environments, suburbs and township areas, it does not reflect the challenges relating to schools in other settings, such as informal settlements, rural communities and private schools.

5.7 Conclusion

In a nutshell, the discussions of the findings reflected on the key findings of the research study. The discussions were related to literature and prior research studies conducted on chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools. The discussions of the key findings were also linked with the research questions in which the themes emerged. To end, the limitations identified in the study were discussed.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a concise summary of the key findings of the study. This study aimed at investigating principals and teachers' perspectives on chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg. The chapter further related to the sub-questions, research methodology and findings from the data collected. The findings related to the research questions are discussed. The chapter ends with conclusions and recommendations.

6.2 Summary

The study was guided by the following sub-questions:

- What is the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg?
- What are the factors that cause chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg?
- What are the possible implications of chronic learner absenteeism on learning in public high schools in Johannesburg?
- How do Johannesburg public high schools respond to chronic learner absenteeism?

The qualitative study was conducted in two public high schools in Johannesburg, which were from two different socio-economic environments. High school B was situated in a low socio-economic background and High school A was found in a high socio-economic environment. The study comprised of 14 participants, 2 principals and 12 teachers from the 2 participating schools. The study included 1 principal and 6 teachers from each school. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The principals were interviewed face-to-face using semi-structured interviews, which included open-ended questions. The questionnaires were administered on the teachers, these comprised of open-ended and closed-ended questions.

The following findings were identified from the study:

Firstly, the study found that chronic learner absenteeism was more acute at schools of low socio-economic background compared to schools of high socio-economic environments. The incidence of chronic learner absenteeism was established to be higher at High school B, a school situated in the township compared to High school A, found in an upmarket suburb.

Secondly, the study ascertained that the causes of chronic learner absenteeism at public high schools in Johannesburg included socio-economic challenges, family-based factors, school-specific matters, personal issues and the time or season of the year or day of the week. Socio-economic problems that influenced school absence at High school B were poverty, food insecurity, lack of transport and clothes, SASSA pay-out day, and the lack of money to buy sanitary towels among the girl learners. HIV and AIDS, teenage pregnancy, teenage motherhood had a significant impact on regular school attendance. Family-specific factors that caused learners to frequently skip school at High school B included broken family backgrounds; orphan-hood, child-headed households and single-parenthood. Lack of parental involvement was another family-specific issue that led to excessive school absence at the school B. Teacher absenteeism was a school-based factor that contributed to chronic learner absenteeism at High school B. Personal issues that caused learners to stay away at the same school entailed illness, laziness and lack of motivation.

On the other hand, the good school attendance at High school A was attributed to the fact that most learners came from high-income households, they had their basic needs catered for, and their exorbitant school fees are paid for without fail. However, chronically absent learners missed school because of personal reasons such as illness and injuries. The time or season of the year or day of the week also influenced school attendance at High school A.

Thirdly, the study found that chronic school absence had a significant impact on learning and academic achievement at public high schools in Johannesburg. Chronically absent learners did not acquire content knowledge and crucial information imparted in the classroom. These learners missed out on teacher' explanations and important examples as well as peer opinions and insights. Lessons were progressive, thus, if learners missed school at beginning of the chapter, they missed out on the important introduction and explanation of the key concepts. As a result, the learners misunderstood the subject matter. While at High school B chronically

absent learners performed poorly in assessments and ultimately failed and repeated grades, at High school A frequently absent learners did not fail assessments nor repeat grades.

Finally, the study revealed that teachers went out of their way to assist chronically absent learners. For example, subject teachers arranged extra classes to assist the learners. Teachers also recapped on the previous lesson before they proceeded onto a new lesson. Chronically absent learners were advised by their teachers to read on their textbooks, especially the sections they missed. The teachers also told the learners to consult and discuss with their classmates what they had done in class when they were away from school. According to this study the principals played a supervision role in ensuring that chronically absent learners received the support they needed from their subject teachers.

The schools made efforts to tackle chronic learner absenteeism. At High school A, a class register was used to track learners' school attendance patterns. Unlike at High school A, at High school B the talks were held during assembly about the importance of school attendance and the possible implications of extended school absence. Teachers at the schools reported to the head of department if a learner missed two days of school, the head of department then communicated with the school principal. The schools employed the school policy on attendance, which stipulated that the school should deregister a learner if she or he misses ten consecutive school days. Chronically absent learners at the two participating schools were treated differently in terms of specialist attention. For instance, while learners who missed school because of difficult circumstances at High school A were referred to a psychologist for counselling interventions, learners at High school B did not have access to counselling services. Parental and community involvement played a role in addressing chronic learner absenteeism. There was meaningful communication and engagement between the parents and schools, as well as the wider community concerning chronic learner absenteeism. However, parental involvement was more pronounced at High school A compared to High school B.

6.3 Conclusions

Learners are more likely to be absent from school if they are from low-income households compared to those from high-income households. This can be attributed to the socio-economic problems, family-specific challenges, school background and personal issues they experience. These difficulties make it impossible for the learners to attend school every day. On the other hand, children from rich families are more likely to attend school frequently. This is because they may have the resources which enable them to attend school regularly.

Learners are disadvantaged, with regards to learning if they regularly miss school. Learners lose learning time, miss out on lessons, assessments and ultimately fail.

Different measures and practices were implemented by the school community including teachers, principals, parents and wider community. Teachers provided learning to support chronically absent learners. Principals ensured that absentees were provided with the help they required. Parental and community involvement is also very important in tackling chronic absenteeism in public high schools.

6.4 Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations:

In view of health problems as one of the causes of chronic learner absenteeism, as identified in this study, it is recommended that public high schools should work with the Department of Health to ensure that learners who miss school due to minor illnesses such as flu and minor injuries have access to health care. Schools must have a clinic with a permanent nurse to address learners' health issues, especially those that come from poverty-stricken households and communities where there are insufficient health care amenities.

Considering that food insecurity was a factor that contributed to chronic learner absenteeism, there is a need for the Department of Education to expand the National school feeding programme to all public high schools particularly those situated in low socio-economic environments. This programme is part of the food security scheme for South Africa, which aims to tackle hunger among learners in public schools. It is suggested that instead of providing one lunch meal, learners should be provided with a breakfast meal before classes begin in the morning since some learners come to school without having eaten anything for breakfast. According to a report by Statistics South Africa (2016), 45% of children in South Africa live in homes where there is insufficient food.

Since some girls missed school due to the lack of necessities such as sanitary towels, there is a need for schools to work together with the Departments of Education and Health to provide girls especially those from poverty-stricken families with free sanitary pads monthly and throughout the course of the school year. The principal or teachers must hand out a pack of sanitary pads to each girl at the beginning of the month. Although various Non-Governmental Organizations and other initiatives hand out sanitary towels to underprivileged girls in public high schools in South Africa, the problem has not been tackled.

Given that disintegrated family structures including orphan-hood and child-headed households emerged as one of the causes of chronic learner absenteeism, it is recommended that schools should cooperate with the Department of Social Welfare to help orphans and child-headed households with their social and economic needs. Children who experience difficult family circumstances should also be referred to a social worker. A school must have a school-based psychologist or social worker (CASE & JET, 2007).

The Department of Basic Education must provide transport assistance to learners in who cannot get to school because of transport problems. For instance, in the Eastern Cape province 70% of public schools requested for a scholar transport subsidy from the provincial department, this was to help learners who had challenges with transport to get to school (CASE & JET, 2007).

There is a need for the Department of Education to include lessons about chronic learner absenteeism to subjects such as Life orientation, which is compulsory for every learner. Learners will acquire knowledge and crucial information with regards to absenteeism. Incorporating absenteeism lessons in the Life orientation syllabus will create awareness of the negative impact of chronic learner absenteeism and facilitate an understanding of the importance of regular school attendance. This will also foster critical skills such as discipline and punctuality. Furthermore, it is also recommended that the voice of the learner, guardians or parents should be considered in the development of educational policies.

The Department of Education must ensure that through the South African Schools Act (1996) and South African Policy on Learner Attendance (2010), parents are well acquainted with their role and responsibilities with regards to learner school attendance. Coming from the study, communication and parental involvement is of paramount importance in promoting regular school attendance. Therefore, there is a need for meaningful and consistent communication between public high schools and parents if the goal is to promote good school attendance. All public high schools should utilize electronic registration systems to manage attendance, for example, schools can use D-6 communicator to improve communication with parents. The D-6 communicator is an effective system of communication between the school and parents. Parents can download the app and log in the system on their desktops computer and cellular phones to keep up with the schools' updates about the latest events or matters and particularly issues concerning their child's attendance. Updates are made every day, such as the list of late comers and absentees.

Schools must hold workshops that aim to educate parents about the importance of school attendance and the significant influence it has on the child's education. During such workshops rules and regulations on absenteeism should be deliberated, as well as to share effective measures on getting the learners to school daily and punctually.

In view of teacher absenteeism as one of the factors that influenced learners to miss school, as indicated in the study, it is recommended that absent teachers must be held accountable by the Department of Education by employing stringent measures. Technologies such as daily biometric fingerprinting and cameras in the classroom must be put into place to help improve teacher attendance, which would, in turn, promote learner attendance.

6.5 Suggestions for further research

There is a need for future research to take a closer look at chronic learner absenteeism at public high schools, as it was established from the study that there were challenges that hindered regular school attendance. These included socio-economic challenges, family circumstances, school-specific factors, personal issues and time or season of the year or day of the week. It is therefore imperative to investigate chronic absenteeism by firstly examining its root causes. Future recommendations can be made based on the underlying causes of chronic school absence in order to promote good school attendance.

In the research study, school principals and teachers participated. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principals and questionnaires were administered on the teachers. It would have been beneficial if the study included learners who were identified with chronic absenteeism. Capturing the experiences of chronically absent learners and their perspectives would have provided deeper knowledge, insights and understanding of the problem of chronic absenteeism. Therefore, it is suggested that future research should consider engaging with the learners identified with chronic learner absenteeism to get their perceptions about school attendance, the reasons why they miss school and to share ideas on effective measures for promoting good school attendance.

The study included two public high schools in Johannesburg, High school A, a school situated in upmarket suburb in the east of Johannesburg and High school B which was in a low socio-economic township, in Johannesburg north. The findings could not be generalized to all schools situated at high socio-economic environments and those found in townships in Johannesburg, as communities and schools have their own dynamics and variables. It is

recommended that future researchers increase the number of research sites, the number of schools where data will be collected to improve the findings.

The study also focused on two socio-economic environments, suburbs and township areas, it excludes rural schools. Further research should be conducted in rural communities to reflect on rural school challenges with regards to chronic learner absenteeism, how learners can be brought back to class and provided with the learning support they need. Conducting this research in diverse socio-economic environments or geographical areas will facilitate a deeper understanding of chronic learner absenteeism.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: GDE Research Approval letter



GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

814141112

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	11 July 2018
Validity of Research Approval:	05 February 2018 - 28 September 2018 2018/157
Name of Researcher:	Mahlalela L.C
Address of Researcher:	PO Box 362
	Mzinti
	Malelane, 1352
Telephone Number:	076 538 1555 082 750 3401
Email address:	lungilemaziya408@gmail.com
Research Topic:	A comparative analysis of chronic learner absenteeism in selected public high schools in Johannesburg.
Type of qualification	Masters
Number and type of schools:	2 Secondary Schools
District/s/HO	Johannesburg East & Johannesburg North

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s

and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted: 1

	Making	education	a	societal	priority
priority					

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7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

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The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.

The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District Head Office Officials in the project.

A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.

A letter/ document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.

The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.

Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.

Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.

Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.

It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.

The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.

The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.

On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.

13, The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.

14. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards



Mr Gumani Mukatuni

Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 11/07/ Ap.lg

2

	Making	education	a	societal	priority
priority					

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

Appendix II :Wits ethics letter

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG



27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 • Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa
Tel: +27 11 73221 • Fax: +27 11 73009 • Email: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za • Website: www.wits.ac.za

Date:

Student Number: 1128178

Protocol Number: 2018ECE020M

Dear Lungile Mahlalela

Application for Ethics Clearance: Master of Education

Thank you very much for your ethics application. The Ethics Committee in Education of the Faculty of Humanities, acting on behalf of the Senate, has considered your application for ethics clearance for your proposal entitled:

A comparative analysis of chronic learner absenteeism in selected public high schools in Johannesburg

-

The committee recently met and I am pleased to inform you that **clearance was granted**. Please use the above protocol number in all correspondence to the relevant research parties (schools, parents, learners etc.) and include it in your research report or project on the title page.

The Protocol Number above should be submitted to the Graduate Studies in Education Committee upon submission of your final research report.

All the best with your research project.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Mabete'.

Wits School of Education
011 717-3416

cc Supervisor - Dr Misheck Ndebele

Appendix III: Letter to the school principal

Request to conduct research at the High School

23rd July 2018

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is Lungile Mahlalela and I am a Masters student in Education at the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of my Masters degree requirements, I am doing a research study on Principals and teachers' perceptions of learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg. I would like to invite you to participate in this research project. I would also like to invite four teachers from your school to participate in this research project. For you, the Principal, participation will entail responding to questions about experiences of and opinions about learner absenteeism in an individual interview. This interview will take 45 minutes of your time and will be held at a place and time convenient to you. With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview for accurate capture of your responses. With the teachers I would like to administer questionnaires, in which participation will entail responding to written questions about their experiences of and opinions about learner absenteeism in an individual session for 45 minutes.

Participation will be entirely voluntary. Your choice and the teachers' choice whether to participate will not advantage or disadvantage them in any way. There are no negative consequences for non- participation. I will respect all participants' right to privacy, ensure safety from harm and confidentiality. I will ensure that all interview transcripts are used anonymously, with pseudonyms being given to all participants and schools. Confidentiality will be maintained in the recorded interviews and any detail that might identify a participant or the school will be omitted in any published and written data. Also, participants have the right to withdraw from participation at any time during the research process, to decline to answer any of the questions asked in the interview, with no negative consequences or penalty.

All data collected (including electronic and hard copies of interview transcripts) will be kept securely in a locked cupboard in a locked office and will be destroyed by shredding or deleting within three to five years after completion of the study. The results of the research will be used for academic purposes only. This includes possible publications in academic journal articles, books and conference presentations. In any of these publications, I guarantee the participants' right to anonymity, and no names, institution names or any other identifying

information will be used. There are no foreseeable risks in participating and participants will not be paid for this study. There are also no direct benefits to participants if they choose to participate but I would expect that participation in the research to provide an opportunity for reflection, and that the results of the study would further an understanding of the issue of learner absenteeism. The research project has been cleared by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Education) of The University of the Witwatersrand [Protocol number is 2018ECE020M] and permission has been granted to conduct research by The Gauteng Department of Education, [Reference number 8/4/4/1/2].

If you are willing to give permission for research to be conducted at the school, please would you sign at the bottom of this form and return it to me as soon as possible. If you have any concerns or queries regarding my research, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Lungile Mahlalela

1128178@students.wits.ac.za

082 750 3401

Supervisor

Dr Misheck Ndebele

(misheck.ndebele@wits.ac.za)

011 717 3098 (office)

Principal permission for research granted:

Principal signature Principal Name

Date

Appendix IV: Letter to the school governing body chairperson

Request to conduct research at the High school

23rd July 2018

Dear Sir\ Madam

My name Is Lungile Mahlalela and I am a Masters student at the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of my Masters degree requirement I am doing research in Principals and teachers' perceptions of learner absenteeism in public high schools in Johannesburg. I would like to invite the school's principal and four teachers from your school to participate in this research project. For the Principal, participation will entail responding to questions about experiences of and opinions about learner absenteeism in an individual interview. This interview will take 45 minutes and will be held at a place and time convenient to the principal. With the principal's permission, I would like to audio record the interview for accurate capture of the' responses. With the teachers I would like to administer questionnaires, in which participation will entail responding to written questions about experiences of and opinions about learner absenteeism in an individual session for 45 minutes.

Participation is entirely voluntary. Principal's and teachers' choice whether to participate will not advantage or disadvantage them in any way. There are no negative consequences for non-participation. If they do choose to participate, I will respect all participants' right to privacy, safety from harm and confidentiality. I will ensure that all interview transcripts are used anonymously, with pseudonyms being given to all participants and schools. Confidentiality will be maintained in the recorded interviews and any detail that might identify a participant or the school will be omitted in any published and written data. If the Principal and teachers choose to participate, they have the right to withdraw from participation at any time during the research process, with no negative consequences or penalty. They also have the right to decline to answer any of the questions asked in the interview.

All data collected (including electronic and hard copies of interview transcripts) will be kept securely in a locked cupboard in a locked office and will be destroyed by shredding or deleting within three to five years after completion of the study. The results of the research will be used for academic purposes only. This includes possible publications in academic journal articles, books and conference presentations. In any of these publications, I guarantee the participants' right to anonymity, and no names, institution names or any other identifying information will be used. There are no foreseeable risks in participating, the Principle and

teachers will not be paid for this study. There are also no direct benefits to the Principal and teachers if they choose to participate but I would expect that participation in the research to provide an opportunity for reflection, and that the results of the study would further an understanding of the issue of learner absenteeism. The research project has been cleared by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Education) of The University of the Witwatersrand [Protocol number 2018ECE020M] and permission has been granted to conduct research by The Gauteng Department of Education, [Reference number 8/4/4/1/2].

If you are willing to give permission for research to be conducted at the school, please would you sign at the bottom of this form and return it to me as soon as possible. If you have any concerns or queries regarding my research, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Lungile Mahlalela

1128178@students.wits.ac.za

082 750 3401

Supervisor

Dr Misheck Ndebele

(misheck.ndebele@wits.ac.za)

011 717 3098 (office)

SGB Chairperson permission for research granted:

Chairperson signature

Chairperson Name

Date

Appendix V: Principals' invitation letter for participation

Wits School of Education



27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 • Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa

Tel: +27 11 717-3007 • Fax: +27 11 717-3009 • E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za •

Website: www.wits.ac.za

23rd July 2018

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is Lungile Mahlalela and I am a Masters student at the Wits School of Education. I am doing research to explore high school principals and teachers' perceptions of, and responses to learner absenteeism. As a high school principal, you are ideally positioned to comment on this and so to enable me to understand more about the perceived relative merits of ways in which schools and teachers respond to diverse learner needs, I would like to invite you to participate in my research project. Participation entails responding to questions about your experiences of and opinions about learner absenteeism in an individual interview. This interview would take about 45 minutes of your time and would be held at a place and time convenient to yourself. With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview for accurate capture of your responses.

Participation is entirely voluntary and your choice whether to participate will not advantage or disadvantage you in any way. There are no negative consequences or institutional sanction for non-participation. If you do choose to participate, I will respect your' right to privacy, safety from harm and confidentiality. I will ensure that all interview transcripts are used anonymously, with pseudonyms being given to all participants. Confidentiality will be maintained in the recorded interviews and any detail that might identify a participant or their school will be omitted in any published and written data. If you choose to participate, you have the right to withdraw from participation at any time during the research process, with no negative consequences or penalty. You also have the right to decline to answer any of the questions asked in the interview.

All data collected (including electronic and hard copies of interview transcripts) will be kept securely in a locked cupboard in a locked office and will be destroyed by shredding or

deleting within three to five years after completion of the study. The results of the research will be used for academic purposes only with possible publications in academic journal articles, books and conference presentations. In any of these publications, I guarantee the your' right to anonymity, and no names, institution names or any other identifying information will be used. There are no foreseeable risks in participating and you will not be paid for this study. There are also no direct benefits to you if you choose to participate but I would expect that participation in the research would provide an opportunity for reflection, and that the results of the study would further an understanding of learner absenteeism. The research project has been cleared by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Education) of The University of the Witwatersrand [Protocol number 2018ECE020M] and permission has been granted to conduct research by The Gauteng Department of Education [Reference number 8/4/4/1/2]

If you are willing to participate in the research project, please fill in the attached consent form. If you have any concerns or queries regarding my research, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Lungile Mahlalela

1128178@students.wits.ac.za

0827503401

Supervisor

Dr Misheck Ndebele

[\(misheck.ndebele@wits.ac.za\)](mailto:misheck.ndebele@wits.ac.za)

011 717 3098 (office)



Appendix VI: Teacher invitation letter for participation

Wits School of Education

27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 • Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa

Tel: +27 11 717-3007 • Fax: +27 11 717-3009 • E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za •

Website: www.wits.ac.za

23rd July 2018

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is Lungile Mahlalela and I am a Masters student at the Wits School of Education. I am doing research to explore high school teachers' perceptions of, and responses to learner absenteeism. As a high school teacher, you are ideally positioned to comment on this and so to enable me to understand more about the perceived relative merits of ways in which schools and teachers respond to diverse learner needs, I would like to invite you to participate in my research project. Participation will entail responding to a questionnaire of written questions about your experiences of and opinions about learner absenteeism in an individual session. This questionnaire session will take about 45 minutes of your time and will be held at a place and time convenient to yourself.

Participation is entirely voluntary and your choice whether to participate will not advantage or disadvantage you in any way. There are no negative consequences or institutional sanction for non-participation. If you do choose to participate, I will respect your' right to privacy, safety from harm and confidentiality. I will ensure that all interview transcripts are used anonymously, with pseudonyms being given to all participants. Confidentiality will be maintained in the recorded interviews and any detail that might identify a participant or their school will be omitted in any published and written data. If you choose to participate, you have the right to withdraw from participation at any time during the research process, with no negative consequences or penalty. You also have the right to decline to answer any of the questions asked in the interview.

All data collected (including electronic and hard copies of interview transcripts) will be kept securely in a locked cupboard in a locked office and will be destroyed by shredding or deleting within three to five years after completion of the study. The results of the research

will be used for academic purposes only with possible publications in academic journal articles, books and conference presentations. In any of these publications, I guarantee the your' right to anonymity, and no names, institution names or any other identifying information will be used. There are no foreseeable risks in participating and you will not be paid for this study. There are also no direct benefits to you if you choose to participate but I would expect that participation in the research would provide an opportunity for reflection, and that the results of the study would further an understanding of learner absenteeism. The research project has been cleared by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Education) of The University of the Witwatersrand [Protocol number 2018ECE020M] and permission has been granted to conduct research by The Gauteng Department of Education [Reference number 8/4/4/1/2].

If you are willing to participate in the research project, please fill in the attached consent form. If you have any concerns or queries regarding my research, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Lungile Mahlalela

1128178@students.wits.ac.za

0827503401

Supervisor

Dr Misheck Ndebele

[\(misheck.ndebele@wits.ac.za\)](mailto:misheck.ndebele@wits.ac.za)

011 717 3098 (office)

Appendix VII: Informed Consent Form for Principals

Wits School of Education



27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 • Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa

Tel: +27 11 717-3007 • Fax: +27 11 717-3009 • E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za •

Website: www.wits.ac.za

I am willing / am not willing*

to participate in the research project by being interviewed for this study in a 45-minute individual interview at a time and place convenient to me.

Permission to be audiotaped

I agree to be audiotaped during the interview Yes/ No*

I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only
Yes/ No*

I know that I can ask not to be audiotaped Yes/ No*

Please also indicate:

I have read and understand the “Invitation to participate in research and information letter”:
Yes/ No*

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that there are no negative consequences for choosing not to participate in this research: Yes/ No*

I understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time without any negative consequences: Yes/ No*

I understand that I can stop the interview at any time with no negative consequences to me: Yes/ No*

I understand that I have the right to decline to answer any of the questions during the interview and that there would be no negative consequences to me: Yes/ No*

I know that the researcher will keep my information confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed: Yes/ No*

I understand that the responses I give during the interview will be used as research data for academic purposes, and may be published in conference papers, journal articles or books: Yes/ No*

I understand that my responses will be used anonymously at all times and I will not be identified in any research publications: Yes/No*

I understand that the interview data will be kept securely in a locked office and will be destroyed within three to five years after completion of the research: Yes/ No*

Signature: _____

Date:

*Please circle your response

Appendix VIII: Informed Consent Form for Teachers

Wits School of Education



27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 • Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa

Tel: +27 11 717-3007 • Fax: +27 11 717-3009 • E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za •

Website: www.wits.ac.za

I am willing / am not willing to*

to participate in the research project by responding to a questionnaire for this study in a 45-minute individual questionnaire session at a time and place convenient to me.

Please also indicate:

I have read and understand the “Invitation to participate in research and information letter”:
Yes/ No*

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that there are no negative consequences for choosing not to participate in this research: Yes/ No*

I understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time without any negative consequences: Yes/ No*

I understand that I can stop the questionnaire session at any time with no negative consequences to me: Yes/ No*

I understand that I have the right to decline to answer any of the questions and that there would be no negative consequences to me: Yes/ No*

I know that the researcher will keep my information confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed: Yes/ No*

I understand that the responses I give in the questionnaire will be used as research data for academic purposes, and may be published in conference papers, journal articles or books:
Yes/ No*

I understand that my responses will be used anonymously at all times and I will not be identified in any research publications: Yes/No*

I understand that the questionnaire data will be kept securely in a locked office and will be destroyed within three to five years after completion of the research: Yes/ No*

Signature: _____

Date:

*Please circle your response

Appendix IX: Interview Schedule for Principals

Interviewer: Miss Lungile Mahlalela

Research Site: High Schools A and B Johannesburg

Date: July-August 2018

Interview Time: 45 minutes

Interview questions

The incidence of chronic learner absenteeism

1. How would you describe chronic learner absenteeism at your school?
2. Tell me about your experiences on learner absenteeism as the school principal?
3. What do you think are the causes of chronic learner absenteeism at your school? Or
What do you think are the factors that contribute to good school attendance?

Implications for chronic learner absenteeism

1. Do you think chronic learner absenteeism has an impact on learning?
2. What do you think are the implications of learner absenteeism on learning?
3. Is regular school attendance important? Why? / why not?

Public high schools' response to chronic learner absenteeism

1. What is the role that teachers play to address learner absenteeism at your school?
2. What is the role that the school plays to address learner absenteeism?
3. What is the role that you play as a principal to address learner absenteeism?
4. What is the role played by the parents and community in tackling chronic absenteeism in the school?
5. What can be done in collaboration with the parents and communities to promote good school attendance in schools?

Appendix X: Questionnaire for teachers

Please note that this questionnaire is strictly for academic research purposes only.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Section A is about your general background information. Please fill in the following table below in the space provided.

A.1. Age & Gender	
A.2 Teaching subject (s)	
A.3. Highest qualification	
A.4. Years of teaching experience	

SECTION A: THE INCIDENCE OF CHRONIC LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

Please answer the following questions by marking the appropriate answer with an X in the spaces provided next to the answer. Please further elaborate in the dotted spaces provided below.

How would you describe learners' school attendance at your school?

High	
Average	
Low	
Very Low	
It depends on the season of the year/ time of the school year/ day of week?	

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SECTION B: THE CAUSES OF CHRONIC LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

Indicate the causes of chronic learner absenteeism at your school. Please indicate the appropriate answer by making a tick (✓) on the spaces provided next to each category. Please further elaborate on the dotted spaces provided below.

What do you think are the causes of chronic learner absenteeism?

Socio-economic problems	
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School-based factors	
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Family-specific challenges	
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Personal problems	
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Cultural factors	
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Other factors	
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SECTION C: THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHRONIC LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

Please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with each statement measured on a 1 to 7 likert scale.

What do you think are the implications of learner absenteeism on learning?

Strongly disagree, 4=Neutral and 7= Strongly agree

Learners miss out on important content and information.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Learners will not understand concepts and result to misconceptions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Poor academic performance in assessments, e.g., tests and exams.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Learners may repeat grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Learners may fail matric examinations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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What do you think are the implications of chronic learner absenteeism on learning?

Strongly disagree, 4=Neutral and 7= Strongly agree

It disrupts teaching because lessons are sequential	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Absentees missed on group discussions and new insights	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Teachers had to reteach or revise previous lesson(s) for absentees	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Advise absentees to discuss with peers what they missed out.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Advise absentees to read their texts and sections covered during their absence.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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SECTION D: RESPONSE TO CHRONIC LEARNER ABSENTEEISM

Please answer the following questions by marking the appropriate answer with an X on the Yes or No options provided in the table below and elaborate in the spaces provided below.

If a learner misses a few days of school and it is their first day back at school, how do you respond to that?

I have extra classes with the learner(s) who were absent after school or meet them during break time.	Yes	No
I recap on the previous lesson(s) that the learner(s) that the learners missed I before proceeding with the new lesson	Yes	No
I tell the learner(s) to read on what they missed out	Yes	No
I tell the learner(s) to consult with her or his peers	Yes	No
It is not my responsibility to help absent learners	Yes	No

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What is the role that you play as a teacher to address learner absenteeism?

Report to the grade HOD.	Yes	No
Involve or communicate with parents.	Yes	No
Provide learning support.	Yes	No
Report to the principal	Yes	No
Addressing learner absenteeism is not my responsibility as a teacher.	Yes	No

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What is the role that the school plays to address learner absenteeism?

The school employs the school's policy on learner absenteeism	Yes	No
The use of incentives, e.g., rewards, certificates and monetary incentives.	Yes	No
Implementation of the National Nutrition Program	Yes	No
Parental and community involvement	Yes	No
Punishment or expulsion	Yes	No

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What can be done in collaboration with the parents and community to promote good school attendance?

Community must report learners that are loitering in town and public parks during school hours.	Yes	No
Motivational talks at community level.	Yes	No
Community service and sports to keep them off drugs and alcohol use and abuse.	Yes	No
Parents and community should consider mentorship programs and counselling services for learners that are affected by chronic absenteeism.	Yes	No
Learner absenteeism is not an issue of the community.	Yes	No

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