

**EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS AND EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF GRADE  
10 LEARNERS AT RISK OF SCHOOL FAILURE  
A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study deals with the perceptions and educational needs of learners at-risk of developing behaviours that may lead to school failure.

**Statement of the Problem:** Namibian educators face ongoing pressure to improve student achievement at grade 10 level. This improvement depends on teachers' and parents' understanding of educational needs of learners at-risk of school failure. The purpose of this study is to investigate this understanding through the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics that are predictive of school failure?
2. What perceptions do learners at risk of school failure have about themselves?
3. How do teachers and parents describe learners at risk of school failure?
4. How can learners at risk be encouraged to take charge of their own learning?

**Methodology:** Using a phenomenological approach, 32 grade 10 learners, 10 grade 10 teachers and 10 grade 10 parents of Khomastura Project School in Khomas educational region, Namibia, were interviewed. In addition, teachers and learners were observed. The interview transcripts and observation notes were analysed to reveal the educational needs and perceptions of grade 10 learners at-risk of school failure.

**Findings:** There were many risks identified. Examples of these were; sexual pervasion among learners, alcohol and drug abuse by learners, loss of morals and values and loss of respect and discipline. The study has also revealed constraints

under which these learners learn. Some of these constraints were in the form of living in overcrowded homes, walking long distances from home to school empty stomachs, and living with abusive parents or guardians. Their educational needs included parental support, learning support, motivation, self determination, appropriate learning and teaching materials, and writing and reading skills in English. Furthermore, the study showed that the perceptions of these learners on education ranged from; disinterest in school, lack of understanding of the role of education in life, and lack of a vision or goals to be achieved in life. These and other findings are analysed, interpreted and discussed in this thesis.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, and father, siblings and friends who have always been my strength and inspiration especially Nghelo and Kaboy. Without their attention, love, care and support I would never had come this far.

I also want to dedicate this work to the Khomastura Project School teachers in the Khomas Educational Region for their valuable contributions to this study.

## **DECLARATIONS**

I, Kashinaua Faustina Neshila, declare hereby that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher education.

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Date.....

Kashinaua Faustina Neshila

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

EFA: Education For All

ETSIP: Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme

HOD: Head of Department

JSC: Junior Secondary Certificate

MEC: Ministry of Education and Culture

MoE: Ministry of Education

NIED: National Institute for Educational Development

GRN: Government of Namibia

SACMEQ: Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality

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## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Independent Namibia inherited an education system that was characterized by acute disparities, inequalities and tensions (Amukugo, 1993). Prior to independence the Namibian education system had many imbalances and was divided into eleven ethnic education administrations. The result was that very few children went to school and of those who attended school few succeeded in their schooling careers (Namibia. Ministry of Education and Culture [MEC], 1993). In short, education in Namibia before independence was for the elite and not for all.

According to MEC (1993), schools for white children had more resources than schools for black children. There was no way of escaping the segregation of the apartheid system, because even for those who finished their schooling, the labour market ensured that the white man got a superior job over a black man (MEC, 1993). As a result the Namibian nation until today has two economic strata, that is: one which is rich and another which is poor. The latter is referred to as previously disadvantaged communities (Amukugo, 1993).

Namibia has made strides in the provision of basic education over the past 19 years after it attained its independence in 1990 from the South African apartheid colonial rule. While much has been achieved in terms of access to schooling, the quality of education, efficiency and equity issues have taken centre stage. According to Makuwa (2005), there has been increasing concern about the quality of education

that is being provided, in relation to the increasing expenditure on education. The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality second reported that 43% of grade 6 Learners were not able to read for comprehension (Makuwa, 2005). The situation has a serious impact on academic performance at grade 10 level in the sense that poor primary education will lead to learners being at risk of school failure.

Sadly, until this day many of the Namibian people residing in Windhoek live in poverty and are often located in Katutura, Otjomuise and Khomasdal, which are largely the three low-income suburbs. According to the World Bank (2005), close to 35% of the Namibian population lives on less than US\$ 1.00 per day. Knapp and Shields (1991) noted that learners at risk of school failure came from economically disadvantaged homes. Thus, the social inequalities inherited at independence will imply that learners from poor economic backgrounds are more at risk of school failure than others.

Amukugo (1993) noted that the Namibian education system, prior to independence, was efficient but not effective; as reflected by high repetition, drop-out and failure rates. On this, Mr Nahas Angula as the Minister of Education described the inherited education system as “rotten and corrupt from the bone to marrow” (Angula, 1990). This could be attributed to the fact that education before independence was dominantly teacher-centred (MEC, 1993). The learning activities focused on the teacher and learners were viewed as empty vessels that had to be filled with

knowledge (MEC, 1993). Most teachers taught without regard to the past experience and backgrounds of the type of learners in their classrooms. As a result, the teaching methods and practices promoted rote learning rather than knowledge with understanding (MEC, 1993).

The implication of this educational philosophy was that it produced unskilled youth and discouraged learning with a sense of achievement, and hence the high school failure and drop-out rates. The reality is that this leads to unemployment and an increase in social violence (Bowe, Ball & Croid, 1992). The Ministry of Labour (2002) reported that unemployment is highest among the unskilled (56%) and youth (40%). It should be noted that those without skills are often the last to find jobs and the first to lose them.

The most urgent challenge for the current education system is to increase learning achievement in secondary schools. Several sources of literature show that although enrolment and completion rates are relatively high, most children leave school without the foundation skills and competencies they ought to have acquired (World Bank, 2005 and NIED, 2007). In 2007, only 46% of the candidates who sat for the junior secondary school examination obtained the minimum level required for entry to grade 11 (NIED, 2007).

Therefore, educators should establish educational reforms that ensure excellence in education for all, or else an increasing number of Namibian youth will be placed at risk of school failure. It is from this young ethnically diverse population that the

next generation of scientists, engineers and mathematicians must be drawn to replace the retiring professionals (Tam, 2000). Thus, education and unemployment are inter-related and Namibia has experienced an alarming increase of youth unemployment in recent years (World Bank, 2005). Auala (1999) noted that excellence in education demands that those who exit from the education system should be able to respond meaningfully to the needs of the labour market and the society at large.

Considering the varied backgrounds of the learners in the classroom, it is important to know and understand the educational needs of all learners. According to Mclean (2003), understanding learners is helpful in developing an educational intervention that is useful, suitable and effective in ensuring that they succeed in school. Research conducted by Paul (1993) maintains that, school failure can be prevented if at-risk learners are provided with a coordinated set of educational interventions that satisfy their unique educational needs. This requires the teachers and society at large to realize that, although all learners are at risk, some learners are more at risk of school failure than others. Therefore, the challenge is to stimulate all learners to learn, while ensuring that the diverse needs of the learners at the greatest risk are met in a non-stigmatizing manner.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Progress towards better learner academic performance at grade 10 level has been slow. Educators face ongoing pressure to improve student academic achievement especially at grade 10 level (GRN, 2001). According to the World Bank (2005),

38% of the grade 10 learners in the Namibian Education system failed and are pushed out of the system with virtually no opportunities for further education, training or direct employment.

There is a great concern that the situation will not improve unless greater understanding of the learners' educational needs was attained by all education stakeholders with more emphasis on the roles of both teachers and parents. Failure to understand and meet the educational needs of the learners may lead to a large number of Namibian youth being at risk of school failure. Mayberry (2003) noted that, learners are at risk of school failure if they experience a mismatch between their circumstances and needs, and the capacity of the school to accept, accommodate and respond to their educational needs. The study sought to understand learning from the perspective of learners at risk and explore constraints that such learners face in school.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY**

The research was guided by the following research questions:

- 1.3.1 What are the characteristics that are predictive of school failure?
- 1.3.2 What perceptions do learners at risk of school failure have about themselves?
- 1.3.3 How do teachers and parents describe learners at risk of school failure?
- 1.3.4 How can learners at risk of school failure be encouraged to take charge of their learning?

#### **1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The results of the study hope to:

- Change the teachers' perceptions regarding the learning attitude, behaviours and educational needs of learners at risk of school failure through better understanding of their life situations revealed by the study;
- Widen the scope of prevention of school failure for learners at risk;
- Provide the Ministry of Education with a broader awareness of the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners at-risk of school failure;
- Make the teachers realise the need to change their attitudes and teaching methods that would lead to improved academic performance of all learners;
- Assist the school boards in developing strategies that would maximize parental involvement in education;
- Provide advisory teachers with assistance in developing guidelines for creating learning environments and materials that are learner-sensitive, and suitable to the needs of the learners.

The study is significant in the sense that there was no study carried out in Namibian schools to investigate the perceptions and educational needs of learners at risk of school failure. The research findings from this study would yield first-hand information with regard to understanding and embracing the perceptions and educational needs of learners at risk.

### **1.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study faced the following limitations:

- In Namibia not much research has been carried out in the area of this study. This limited the researcher with regard to literature review.
- The timing was a limitation as the learners were preparing for their final end-of-year grade 10 examinations. The researcher had to rush to interview as many learners as was required by the study.
- Also due to the timing, many teachers were invigilating examinations and it was difficult for the researcher to interview them. However, the number of teachers interviewed was reduced as five teachers felt that they were not comfortable with an audio tape-recorded interview. In the end, they wrote their answers down. As a result, the researcher could not probe or ask for elaborations on the answers provided.
- The recording instrument was stolen with the data, and the researcher had to redo the interviews. In some cases, learners gave different responses

compared to the first interview and others refused to repeat the interview and had to be replaced with other learners that met the requirements of the study.

- In few cases, the views expressed by the learners, teachers and parents during the interviews did not completely reflect the truth as some attempted to make a desirable impression e.g. one parent participant stated that her child had never failed a grade but the researcher knew that the child was repeating grade 10 at the time of the interview. It was assumed by the researcher that all answers given by the interviewees represented the truth even though it might not be the case.
- Some of the learners were not comfortable to take the researcher to their homes and meet their families; it took time before the researcher received a positive response from the parents.
- Language differences were also a limitation to the study. Most of the parents were more fluent in Afrikaans than in English. The researcher translated the interview into Afrikaans for better communication.

## **1.6 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

The study made use of different technical terms and these terms are defined below.

**1.6.1 Grade 10:** This is the last grade in junior secondary education of the formal basic education structure of education in Namibia. Learners at this level are aged



between 15 and 16 years and write a standardized national examination for the Junior Secondary Certificate (JSC) (MEC, 1993).

**1.6.2 Educational Background:** This term refers to the wealth of knowledge and social experience gained from the family, the community and interaction with the environment that a learner brings to school (Tam, 2000).

**1.6.3 Self-direction:** The person's ability to direct his or her own actions (Knapp and Shields, 1991).

**1.6.4 Immaturity:** In this context, immaturity will refer to the learner's lack of ability to examine his or her own thoughts (Young and Tyre, 1992).

**1.6.5 Learners at risk of school failure:** This includes learners in formal school that are not using their full intellectual potential to meet the school academic demands. Instead these learners appear lazy, disinterested in school, bored, rebellious and unable to relate to teachers (Knapp and Shields, 1991). They are learners who are academically disadvantaged and with low socio-economic status (West and Pennell, 2003).

**1.6.6 Learner-centred teaching:** This is an approach that presupposes that teachers have a holistic view of the learner, valuing the learner's life experience as the starting point for their studies (Tomlison, 1999).

**1.6.7 Maladjustment:** This is a term that describes an individual who has developed negative self-perceptions and severe anxiety as a result of intense conflict between personal and social needs (West and Pennell, 2003).

**1.6.8 Motivation:** This is an internal process that activates guides and maintains behaviour over time (McClean, 2003).

**1.6.9 Parental Involvement:** The amount of assistance the parents give the learner in her/his school work either directly or indirectly. It will include verbal encouragement, assistance in school work, direct reinforcement of improved academic performance, etc. (Lawson, 1991).

**1.6.10 School Climate:** Includes the interpersonal feeling tones, associated with informal interaction patterns, emotional responses to the group, and both the self-concepts of learners and their motivational satisfactions and frustrations (Kapp, 2003).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The first section of this chapter discusses the theoretical framework while the second section will focus on the perceptions held by the learners, teachers and parents faced with the phenomena of learners at risk of school failure.

#### **2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this section, a brief review of two theories of learning and a learning/teaching pedagogy are presented on which the study based its findings. The constructivism theory of learning was used to explain how learners actively construct their own knowledge from their experiences. Kolb's Experiential Learning theory shows how learners' experiences are translated into concepts that eventually build up into concrete knowledge. The learner-centred approach to the teaching/learning process showed that learning does not take place in isolation and explains that effective and meaningful learning takes place when learners actively integrate their experiences with the content to be learnt under the guidance of the teacher as a facilitator. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model would be used to obtain a better understanding of how an individual develops through a complex system of relationships that are affected by the surrounding environment. Furthermore, in this

study the theory was applied to discuss the interactions between the learners, parents, teachers, school and the community.

### 2.3 CONSTRUCTIVISM LEARNING THEORY

“I want to talk about *learning*. But *not* the lifeless, sterile, futile, quickly forgotten stuff that is crammed into the mind of the poor helpless individual tied into his seat by ironclad bonds of conformity! I am talking about *LEARNING* - the insatiable curiosity that drives the adolescent boy to absorb everything he can see or hear or read about gasoline engines in order to improve the efficiency and speed of his 'cruiser'. I am talking about the student who says, "I am discovering, drawing in from the outside, and making that which is drawn in a real part of *me*." I am talking about any learning in which the experience of the learner progresses along this line: "No, no, that's not what I want"; "Wait! This is closer to what I am interested in, what I need"; "Ah, here it is! Now I'm grasping and comprehending what I *need* and what I want to know!" Carl Rogers 1983: 18-19 in Rogers (2003).

Constructivism learning does not place learners at risk of school failure because learners are actively involved and motivated to achieve, since they own the learning process. Constructivism views learning as a process in which the learner actively constructs or builds new ideas or concepts based upon current and past knowledge (Muller, 1998). It follows that learning is an active process of constructing

knowledge rather than receiving it. Rogers (2003), noted that, the learner is not a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) but brings past experiences and cultural factors to the learning situation. Furthermore, he stated that learners come to the learning situation with already formulated knowledge, ideas and understanding and teachers should take into account learners' current conceptions and build from there.

This previous knowledge would be the raw material for the new knowledge they will create (Hartley, 1998). Teaching/learning is effective to the extent that it acknowledges learners' and teachers' experiences and brings the two together in a continuous process of dynamic interaction. According to Retallick, Cocklin and Coomba (1998), constructivism transforms the learner from a passive recipient of information to an active participant in the learning process. In most cases, guided by the teacher, learners construct their knowledge actively rather than just ingesting knowledge from the teacher or the textbook. The researcher would like to find out if what is in the literature is what is found in practice.

In the constructivist classroom, learners control their own learning process and they lead the way by reflecting on their experiences (Retallick, et.al, 1998). This process makes them experts of their own learning. Rogers (2003) stated that the primary goal of the constructivism learning theory is to help learners to learn how to learn. The teacher functions more as a facilitator who coaches, mediates, prompts, and help learners develop and assess their understanding and thereby their learning (Muller,1998). It should be pointed out that in the constructivist classroom, both the teachers and learners think of knowledge not as facts to be memorized, but as a

dynamic, ever-changing view of the world we live in and the ability to successfully stretch and explore that view (Newman and Holzman, 1997). Neither the teachers nor learners can be passive in the ongoing, active process of exploration of the physical and social world in which they are involved. Contrary to criticism by some educators, constructivism does not dismiss the teacher or the value of expert knowledge (Hartley, 1998). It simply modifies the role of the teachers to help learners construct knowledge rather than reproduce a series of facts.

Learners who are taught through the constructivism theory of learning, are believed to learn more and enjoy learning more because they are actively involved rather than passive listeners (Marek and Cavallo, 1997). Constructivism gives learners ownership of what they learn, since learning is based on learners' questions and explorations. Hartley (1998) noted that through a sense of ownership, learners, parents and teachers can really come to care about the education process which they feel they own. It should be noted that the sense of ownership motivates learners to learn and hence help cultivate a culture of learning for all learners. Teachers have the role to engage parents and learners and to establish a flexible, relevant and caring approach to learning for all learners whatever their background or circumstances (Shank, 2002). The researcher explored whether what is in literature is being practiced in the classrooms.

Fosnot (1996) noted that aspects of the constructivism learning theory can best be emphasized by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory.

## 2.4 KOLB' EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEORY

Fosnot (1996) described learning as a four-stage cyclical theory of learning with a holistic perspective which combines experience, perception, cognition and behaviour. Building upon the earlier work by John Dewey and Kurt Levin, the American educational theorist David A. Kolb believes “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p.38). The theory comprises four stages and one can begin at any stage, but they must follow each other in sequence.

- Concrete Experience ( or DO)
- Reflective Observation ( or OBSERVE)
- Abstract conceptualization (or THINK)
- Active Experimentation (or PLAN)

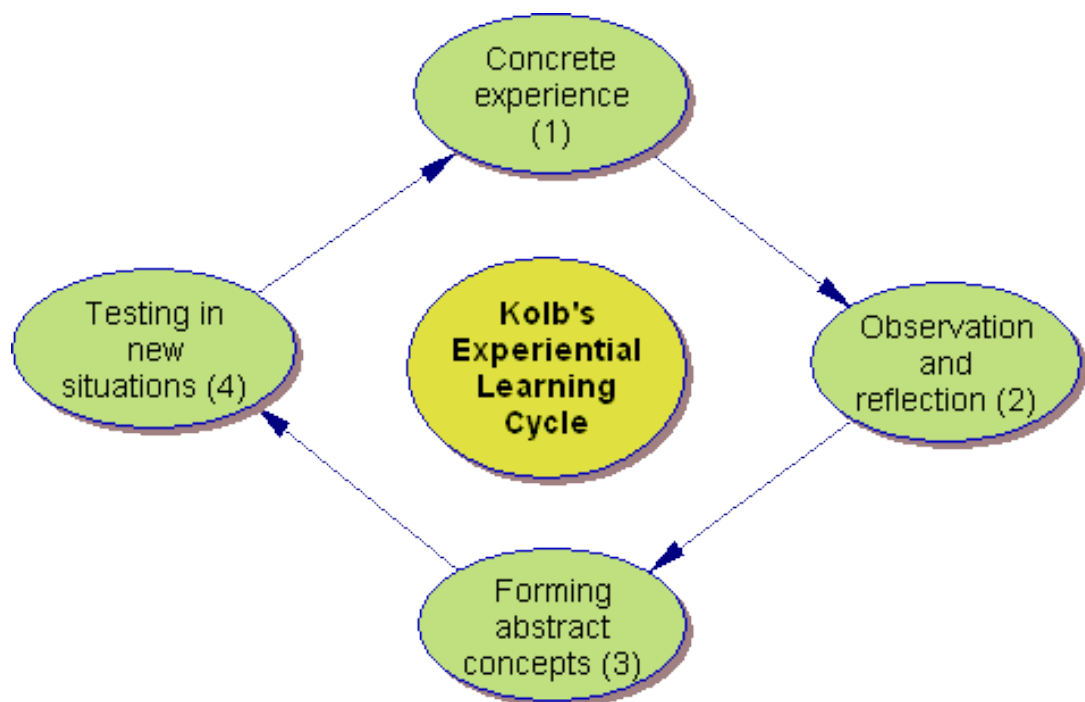


Figure 1. *Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle.*

Kolb (1984) explained the stages as follows:

**Stage 1:** Concrete Experience (CE), is where the learner actively experiences an activity such as a lab session or field work.

**Stage 2:** Reflective Observation (RO), is where the learner consciously reflects back on that experience.

**Stage 3:** Abstract Conceptualization (AC), is where the learner attempts to conceptualize a theory or model of what is observed.

**Stage 4:** Active Experimentation (AE), is where the learner is trying to plan how to test a model or theory or plan for forthcoming experience.

Kolb further identified four learning styles which correspond to these stages and the styles in turn highlight conditions under which learners learn better (Fosnot, 1996).

- **Assimilators**, who learn better when presented with sound logical theories to consider.
- **Convergers**, who learn better when provided with practical applications of concepts and theories.
- **Accommodators**, who learn better when provided with “hands-on” experiences,
- **Divergers**, who learn better when they are allowed to observe and collect a wide range of information.



Since the central aim of education in any society is to facilitate the optimal development of its members (especially, although not only the young), teachers need to adapt their teaching methods to accommodate the varied learning styles of the learners. For instance, teachers of learners at-risk must plan and prepare their lessons to meet the educational needs of their learners. Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (1997) stated that, the process of teaching cannot follow a single pattern, but variation according to the needs of different learners has to become more possible. Unless major changes occur in the teaching/learning process, “learning for ALL” will never become a reality. Doll (1993) noted that, teachers can only hope to induce changes in the learners’ ways of thinking if they have an inkling of the domains of experience, the concepts, and conceptual relations that the learners possess at that moment.

## **2.5 LEARNER-CENTRED TEACHING/LEARNING PEDAGOGY**

Learner-centeredness draws heavily upon constructivism, with the assumption that deep learning occurs when the learner is actively engaged in the construction of knowledge for himself or herself (Schmidt, 1996). It is a shift of focus from the teacher to the learner. Tam (2000) noted that, this shift reflects a desire to explore ways of making teaching responsive to learner’s needs and interests and allowing learners to play a fuller, more active and participatory role in the day-to-day teaching/learning process. The issue here is: are learners at risk actively involved in their learning?

Therefore, it aims at developing in each learner a sense of responsibility for his or her own learning. This means listening to what the needs of the learners are (Muller, 1998). In learner-centeredness, learners' needs are kept at the centre of the entire teaching/learning process. The learners' varying educational backgrounds, learning styles and present life situations all have much to contribute to the process of effective learning (Tam, 2000). All in all, the teaching/learning process should take the whole learner into the whole environment along with past life experiences. What are the teaching practices used by Namibian teachers to ensure that their teaching is responsive to the needs of learners who are more at risk of school failure?

This learning paradigm focuses not only on what is learned, but also on how knowledge is acquired. It also enables teachers to recognize what knowledge a learner brings to the classroom and keeps, to empower learners within the learning process and prepare them to be life-long learners (Mahendra, Bayles, Tomoeda and Kim, 2005). The learning pedagogy empowers the learners to take control of their learning and hence they take control of their destiny. Jonassen (1995) noted that, through the learner-centred approach to teaching, the learners have access to resources that help them develop skills and self-awareness of their learning process, develop increasing independence in their learning and reach the highest potential in their schooling careers. It should be pointed out that, the learner-centred approach is not intended to replace existing teaching methodologies, but provides a framework for a variety of teaching methods geared to enhance learning (Blumenteld, 1991).

The learner-centred approach emphasizes a shift in attention away from what is to be taught to include how and with whom it will be taught (Schmidt, 1996). It should be pointed out that, how children learn and develop is dependent on the social relationships around them, at school, the relationship between the learners themselves, between learners and teachers and between learners and parents. It should be pointed out that, in most Namibian schools the teaching situation is not favourable for learner-centred education. Teacher training is one major constraints in this issue as many teachers lack the understanding of how to put in practice learner-centred teaching and lack of teaching resources makes it difficult for the few trained teachers to exercise this teaching pedagogy. It should be noted that textbook shortage, ill-equipped libraries and laboratories, impede the progress towards an education which is learner-centred (NIED, 2003). Teaching and learning will be enhanced when learners have text books which they can use at school and take home to read, in addition to other materials they use in the classroom environment.

Since learning is a constructive activity that learners themselves have to carry out, the role of the teacher is not to dispense knowledge but to provide learners with opportunities and incentives to build it up. Simply put, it calls for learning which is learner-centred but teacher-controlled in the way that there is always something the learners are called on to construct (Fosnot, 1996). NIED (2003), stated that better learning takes place in classes with a teacher who shows that s/he cares for the learners, is both enthusiastic about and confident in the subject matter, who has created good relationships between the learners and who has a good relationship with and involves the parents.

Learner-centred learning concentrates on learner motivation towards learning. The teaching involves getting to know the learners, finding out what they know, their misunderstandings and creating a context of learning which encourages learners to actively engage with the subject matter intervening with the objective of changing them (Mahendra, et.al. 2005). Individual diversity of the learners should be kept in view throughout the teaching/learning process. Learners at risk of school failure have individual differences that determine how they learn and unless they are acknowledged in the classroom, these learners will not experience success in their learning. Fosnot (1996) noted that, there is a need to produce learning materials that are flexible and responsive to learner needs and learning pace.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that, often than not, when teachers are troubled about the high school failure rates, they seek to understand why individual learners did not do their best to improve their end results. Perhaps we (teacher, parents and all educators) did not do our best to make learning responsive to learners' educational needs (Weiner, 2002). Fensham, Gunstone and White (1994) stated that, when learners' educational needs are not met, learners are at greater risk of school failure or dropping out of school. The researcher (being a teacher herself) noted that there was a need for educators to go beneath the surface of educational reforms and look at the deeper questions and issues related to the teaching/learning process and especially efforts should be on understanding the type of learners we have for successful learning of "ALL" learners. Despite all the challenges ahead, individual diversity of the learners should be kept in view throughout the

teaching/learning process. Kapp (2003) noted that there is a need to produce learning materials that are flexible and responsive to learner needs and learning pace. What do we need to know about our learners, their learning and performance, to create, design and support effective learning experiences for them?

## **2.6 BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL MODEL**

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model can help us better understand how an individual develops through a complex system of relationships that are affected by the surrounding environment. It should be noted that the environment in which the child grows is very important because it is understood that the environment plays an important role in the child's life. Bronfenbrenner argued that the child lives through and develops in multiple contexts, each with the potential to independently, or in interaction with other contexts, influence the ways in which development occurs (Gershoff and Aber, 2006). Homes, neighbourhoods and schools are some of the most important contexts for children.

According to Marton and Booth (1997), the home background characteristics have strong influence on learners because from early childhood up to the age of 18 years. Children spend about 92 percent of their time under the influence of their parents/home rather than the school. Home characteristics such as parental level of education, wealth, nutrition and health, possession of books and other educational materials, as well as parental interest in the education of their children help create enabling conditions for learning. It is clear that learning does not happen at school alone and that the home has an important influence on learning.

It has been noted by Lawson (1991) that, a child does not grow in a vacuum, but connected to the people in his/her environment. The relationship between a school and its wider community is important as the two institutions influence each other. Newman-Carlson & Horne (2004) indicated that, the influence of the child's individual characteristics, the family, the school and the community are interrelated. The different systems that influenced the development of individuals were explained by Gershoff and Aber (2006, p642) as follows:

- **Microsystem:** This system consists of family members and the individual's immediate social group such as; peer group, religious setting, and classroom. It has a direct influence on the child.
- **Mesosystem:** The relation the child has with other systems is called the Mesosystem. For example the interaction in peer groups in the classroom, the family members interacting with each other or with the teacher i.e. the teacher influences the parents and the parents affect the teacher, and these interactions affect the child.
- **Exosystem:** This system contains the community at large, including neighbourhood, social networks, work-related structures, and government agencies. It affects the child in an indirect way.
- **Macrosystem:** This system represents the largest environment that influences and in turn is influenced by the individual, individual's culture, belief, etc.

In this study, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model was helpful in determining the extent to which the school environment as a Microsystem contributed towards

developing behaviour in learners that may lead to school failure. It should be noted that the child's home environment (Microsystem) has an effect on his/her academic achievement at school, and the school environment (i.e. overcrowded classrooms and shortage of textbooks) in turn could create an environment where learners are likely to be at risk of school failure.

## **2.7 CHARACTERISTICS THAT ARE PREDICTIVE OF SCHOOL FAILURE**

Defining what is meant by learners at risk is an extremely important but far from a simple matter. Different authors defined learners at risk differently but with the same concept affected by poor academic achievement. Knapp and Shields (1991) defined learners at risk as, disadvantaged children; the children of poverty who are most likely to experience school failure. Learners at risk are those who are unlikely to succeed at school. West and Pennell (2003) noted that learners at risk are those who are academically disadvantaged and with low socio-economic status.

According to Buttler-Por (1987), learners at risk are believed not to be using their full intellectual potential in meeting the school's academic demands. As many teachers have observed, there are children of all ability levels in every classroom, whose school work falls below their capabilities and the expectations of their parents and teachers. West and Pennell (2003) agreed that, indeed learners at risk have a large gap between their academic achievements (school performance) and their potential.

Learners at risk appear in many guises. Some are lazy; disinterested in school, bored, rebellious, and unable to relate to teachers and others are having difficulties with one or more subjects (Buttler-Por, 1987). Parker (2003) also noted that, at-risk learners tend not to participate in activities at school and thus do not identify with the school. Mayberry (2003) noted that, inadequate academic performance of a large proportion of the children has led them to be defined as being at risk of school failure. The research issue here is whether this is how Learners at Khomastura Project School also appear.

According to Mayberry (2003), the central dilemma is that we have framed the problem incorrectly and as a result, have been looking for solutions in the wrong places. Mayberry (2003) argues that, learners are not at risk but are placed at risk. Learners are placed at risk when they experience a significant mismatch between their circumstances and needs, and the capacity or willingness of the school to accept, accommodate, and respond to them in a manner that supports and enables their maximum social, emotional, and intellectual growth and development (Mayberry, 2003). There was a controversy about whether learners are placed at risk or are at risk by their own doing. The researcher wished to explore in depth the understanding of this phenomenon in the Namibian context from the perspective of the learners themselves.

## **2.8 FEELINGS AND PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNERS AT RISK OF SCHOOL FAILURE**



According to Whitmore (1980, p120) learners' views can be divided into two perspectives as given below:

1. "Something is wrong with me – I don't know why I can't do well as others in my class, why I always seem to be different, why everyone is disappointed in me or doesn't like me"
2. " I went to a terrible school – the teacher was mean and didn't understand me, and the kids were mean too and the work was stupid"

Learners at risk blame the school or more often themselves. All of them, to varying degrees, had integrated the feedback from teachers, parents and peers to conclude that they were the problem – something was wrong with them since school was "Okay" for everyone else (West and Pennell, 2003). Buttler–Por (1987) noted that, learners at risk evidenced self-hate, frustration, and hostility in response to pressures and demands in the classroom to complete tasks successfully in a limited amount of time, according to rigid expectations and procedures. Teacher's criticism and peer reactions were perceived by the learners at risk in a way that created feelings of personal reflection, or isolation, which accelerated the development of a strong dislike for school. The researcher compared whether these findings were applicable to Namibian learners at risk of school failure.

It should be pointed out that learners at risk have a low self-concept as they perceive themselves as "inadequate, helpless and perhaps worthless" (Parker, 2003). That is, they see themselves as not being able to achieve or benefit from school. As a result they are continually defensive in order to maintain their integrity (West and Pennell, 2003). Learners at risk may have very low self-esteem created by their perceived

failure to meet the expectations of others, to be liked, and to feel capable of succeeding at school. Since West and Pennell's (2003) research was not conducted in Namibia, the researcher wanted to find out whether their findings apply to Namibian learners at risk of school failure in the study. Therefore, the research issue was: Do Namibian learners at risk perceive themselves helpless, worthless?

## **2.9 TEACHERS' AND PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNERS AT RISK OF SCHOOL FAILURE**

Teachers perceive the problem school failure as primarily related to the student's attitude and effort (West and Pennell, 2003). Even with a "Learning disabled" child, the teachers repeatedly focus on the belief that if the child would just try, really apply himself and behave appropriately in class, great progress would be made (Knapp and Shields, 1991). It has been noted that teachers are unsympathetic with the aggressive child who is disruptive in class (Buttler-Por, 1987). However, there might be a case where teachers try their best to encourage the learners at risk to study hard and experience success in their school career. The aim of the researcher is to find out whether the situation is the same or not when it comes to teachers in this study.

More often than not, the argument regarding school failure is that, the learner brought failure upon himself; what can you expect from him given his poor behaviour in the classroom? It is clear that teachers need help in understanding the reasons why children, who are quite capable of making good progress, take no interest in classroom learning activities (Zilli, 1971). Teachers wish the child would

direct his/her disruptive energies towards achieving in school work. Mayberry (2003) noted that, often teachers regard the child as emotionally and socially very immature or 'maladjusted', and thus they expect to find the solution to the problem in the child deciding to "shape up" and use his/her God-given talents toward achievement. West and Pennell (2003) share the same argument that there was a tendency for the problem to be viewed as the child's problem, which was created by his immaturity or maladjustment. The researcher is of the belief that learner indiscipline in the classroom is the main root of school failure as it affect effective lesson delivery and alternatively meaningful learning in the classroom.

Parents view learners at risk as their failure at attempting to change their child's school behaviour (West and Pennell, 2003). However, initially they viewed the school positively as trying to help their child and contacted the school to communicate their child's problems or difficulties (Whitmore, 1980). However, not long after, they felt that the school began to lay all responsibility for the problem on the child and his parents- "a poor home background" (Knapp and Shields, 1991).

It has been observed that, the parents ended up feeling quite critical of the school and its failure to solve their child's problems with learning and behaviour (West and Pennell, 2003). They see the problems of learners at risk as the responsibility of the schools and the child, but they foremost hold the school responsible for conditions in the classroom which they believe both created and maintained the problem (Whitmore, 1980). Parents, furthermore, criticized the school personnel for shifting

blame to the child. Thus, they felt caught between the child and the school (Zilli, 1971).

## **2.10 HOW LEARNERS AT RISK OF SCHOOL FAILURE CAN BE ENCOURAGED TO TAKE CHARGE OF THEIR OWN LEARNING**

This question was approached from two angles: the role of the teacher and the role of the school in assisting learners at risk to achieve their best in school work. It was believed that since the phenomenon of learners at risk manifests itself mainly at school, it should be treated by the teacher within the classroom situation (Berman, McLaughlin and Mcleod, 1995). It should, therefore, be pointed out that effective intervention should take place within the classroom situation, where learners at risk presented both a problem and a challenge.

Collier (1995) noted that, the problem of learners at-risk may, in many cases, have its roots in failure to provide appropriate educational experiences in the early school years. As such, the school and the teacher have the greatest potential for successful intervention. However, most of the reported remediation efforts involved counselling learners at risk and their parents by psychologists or counsellors often outside the school and usually without the participation of the teachers involved in the education of the children (Diaz and Carnal, 1999). Furthermore, effective intervention can be informed by school factors which are conducive to the onset of the problem (West and Pennell, 2003). The school factors such as: attitudinal factors, curriculum and teaching methods, and teacher variables contributed to the problem of learners at risk of school failure (Collier, 1995).

“... schools themselves can be barriers to learning. Rote memorization and repetitions can stifle curiosity. Punitive discipline can discourage innovation, experimentation and critique. Unchallenged learners lose motivation to follow and join in the class activities. When teachers disrespect learners, the learners come to have little respect for themselves ...” (MEC, 1993, p.34)

Teachers therefore had the role of fulfilling the basic needs of a learner in the learning situation, so that the learner can benefit from the educational experience provided by the school. It was believed (West and Pennell, 2003) that, understanding of these needs has a practical value for teachers, since it can help in shaping the teachers' attitudes to individual needs, selecting appropriate curriculum experiences and teaching methods and encouraging the creation of personal and peer interactions. This would motivate the learner to maximize her/his efforts towards enjoying learning for the sake of learning (Mayberry, 2003). In addition to that, knowing the learners provide the teacher with the tools and motivation to undo the harm caused by external factors and to develop the child's desire to enhance her/his achievements in school (Bermann et al., 1995).

It has been observed by West and Pennell (2003) that, there is a need for the teacher to create a secure classroom environment, emotional and social, in which every child can feel safe to express feelings of fear and insecurity, knowing that neither the teacher nor the learners will laugh at them when they make a mistake (Berman et al.,

1995). Only then can the child begin to enjoy learning experiences provided by teachers and have a good chance to thrive in school (Parker, 2003).

Ideally, the class climate in our schools must enable the child to perceive her peers and her teachers as trustworthy (West and Pennell, 2003). This requires a teacher, who demonstrates his/her respect for each individual child, introduces teaching strategies which help him/her become aware of each child's needs and a flexible approach to the curriculum. This makes it possible for the individual child to express his/her specific needs, weaknesses and strengths, (Tharp, 1998). As a result, these practices transfer the teacher's trust of all the learners to each individual child. West and Pennell (2003) noted that, the awareness that each child and his/her work is worthy of the teacher's attention reinforces the learner's trust in others, or helps develop it in him/her if it was not possible for him/her to acquire this trust during early childhood at home. It is important to stress that care must be taken to reinforce each child's trust. When the teacher believes in the learners at risk's ability to change and progress, the child does not lose trust himself/herself and results can eventually be very rewarding (Hixson, 1993).

Motivation is another factor that hinders children in academic performance and thus places the children at risk of failing (Diaz and Carnal, 1999). Nonetheless, all children are curious and they seem to have an inborn need to find out how things work and understand the world around them (Rogoff, 1991). This need to discover, understand and learn constitutes a strong intrinsic motivational force in the child's teaching (Tharp, 1988). It is clear that for children whose curiosity, for some reason

or another, has not been encouraged at home, the school has a vital role in fulfilling this important motivational need (Buttler-Por, 1978). It is believed, by West and Pennell (2003), that no significant learning can take place without motivation. Therefore, clear and interesting tasks which give the child opportunities to understand and discover why things happen can be appropriate for every age group and curriculum area (Collier, 1995).

In order to enhance intrinsic motivation, the learning situation should provide opportunities to follow individual interest (Buttler-Por, 1987). Children should be encouraged to invest efforts in areas that they are interested in and to experience enjoyment from their efforts (Whitmore, 1980). The joy experienced by the child from these accomplishments can serve to motivate him/her to invest efforts in other curriculum areas (Berman et. al, 1995). The researcher noted that when teaching does not relate the subject content to the real life situations of the learners, in most cases the learners tend to lose interest in the lesson and withdraw from the learning activities instead they had sleep or draw own things whilst the lesson was in progress.

In addition to that, learners at-risk need more assurance from their teacher than do other children in class that can cope with their work (Buttler-Por, 1987). This assurance can enhance the child's confidence in his ability to improve and help him understand that his success can be attributed to his own learning and not to luck (Buttler-Por, 1987). When the child realizes that his efforts are the cause for his improvement, he will probably be motivated to increase efforts in other curriculum

areas (West and Pennell, 2003). These factors play an important role in the process of revising underachievement behaviour inherent in learners at risk (Tharp, 1998).

Since children differ in their abilities, interests and styles of learning, they will also differ in the learning experiences which are motivationally appropriate for them. As such, when the work is undemanding, when success is so easy that there is no challenge, then there is no joy in accomplishment (West and Pennell, 2003). Thus, all children including children at risk need a stimulating learning environment and experiences in order to arouse their interest in any learning assignment (Knapp and Shields, 1991).

Buttler-Por (1987) noted that, prolonged frustrations and boredom may drive children to drop out of the learning situation in school and “choose” to become underachievers. These children may show their frustration in passive resistance to learning, do hardly any work and spend most of the time in school secretly reading (Whitmore, 1980).

Furthermore, this behaviour not only misleads the teacher into underestimating their abilities, but also prevents these children from acquiring sound learning habits without which further intellectual development cannot take place (Buttler-Por, 1987). Others become aggressive and disruptive in class. These children soon attract the teacher’s attention and as a result they are wrongly labelled, as emotionally disturbed (West and Pennell, 2003), a factor which reinforces, their underachievement.



In conclusion, if some of those above-mentioned factors (motivation, assurance and teacher support) are satisfied, and learners at-risk are more likely to succeed in their school career. Their success will only materialize when schools realize what factors contribute to learners being at risk of school failure in order to accommodate them (Berman et al., 1995). Therefore this study investigated some of the educational needs that lead to Namibian learners being at risk of school failure.

### **CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The main focus of this chapter is to describe the methods that were used in the study to collect and analyse data. This includes the research design, population, the sampling techniques, the research instruments, pilot study, data collection procedure, ethical considerations and the methods of data analysis.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The study made use of the qualitative design in order to gain understanding and insight into the world of the research participants (Shank, 2002). The qualitative research relies on the collection of non-numerical data such as words and pictures. The qualitative research design was appropriate for this study because the data collected was to be in the form of words and behaviours as they occur in their natural environment (Shank, 2002). A case study was used for this research to make an in-depth investigation of a group of individuals and allow the researcher to learn as much as possible about the phenomenon of learners at risk of school failure.

### 3.3 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

The sample was selected using critical-case purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the researcher solicits persons with specific characteristics to participate in a research study (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). For example, people may be chosen because they hold a particular position or they possess a particular attribute relevant to the study. Teaching at Khomastura Project School( for teacher-participants) and being a grade 10 learner with a very poor performance in the April Examination (obtained an average of 30% and below) (for learner-participants) and the required social characteristics were to be relevant attributes of the participants of this study. This yielded a sample of the study that consisted of 12 boys and 20 girls from the grade 10 learners and 10 parents and 10 teachers from Khomastura Project School. This made a total number of 32 learners, 10 parents and 10 teachers and a grand total of 52 research participants.

Table 1 provides the frequencies on the biographical variables of the learners who were interviewed.

Table 2 provides the frequencies on the biographical variables of the teachers who were interviewed.

Table 3 provides the frequencies on the biographical variables of the parents who were interviewed.

**Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to residential locations in Windhoek, Namibia**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Katutura	22	69
Otjomuise	5	16

Khomasdal	3	9
Others	2	6
<b>Total</b>	32	100

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents in the sample according to years of teaching experience**

Number of teaching years	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)
0-4	4	40
5-10	5	50
More than 10	1	10
<b>Total</b>	10	100

**Table 3: Distribution of respondents in the sample according to family size**

Size of family	Number of parents	Percentage (%)
Less than 5	3	30
5	5	50
More than 5	2	20
<b>Total</b>	10	100

### 3.4 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The researcher was the main instrument in the collection of much of the data. This was preferable because the researcher also taught the participants in the study, thus making her part of the sample. The advantage here was that the researcher was able to be an observer and had the opportunity to work closely with the participants in the study and share common experiences. In addition to that, this enhanced the researcher's insight into interpersonal behaviours and motivations, and relationships (Shank, 2002).

A standardized open-ended interview was used to gather information on the participant's experiences, knowledge, opinions, beliefs and feelings. The purpose of open ended interviewing was not to put things in the participant's mind but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed (Shank, 2002). The data collection during the interview was tape-recorded for willing participants. Otherwise, the researcher took short-hand notes during the interview and expanded them immediately after the interview session. In a few cases the interview was administered as a questionnaire for some teacher-participants who did not have time to sit for the interview.

The researcher used more than one method (interview and observation) to collect data to emphasize the strengths and the weaknesses of the data-collection techniques. The advantage here was that the researcher was able to verify interview information with observation events. The observation schedule focused on observing the physical setting (classroom where teaching and learning took place), the participants (learners and teachers), activities in school (interaction between the learners and between the learners and teachers) and conversations (emotions expressed as teachers and learners were talking).

### **3.5 PILOT STUDY**

A pilot study was done on a small number of grade 10 learners in another similar Project School (Highline Project School) in order to find out whether the research instruments (interviews and observation schedule ) were understood or not. It helped the researcher to know whether the questions asked were appropriate and relevant.

In addition, it was useful to find out whether the type of data obtained could be meaningfully analyzed in relation to the research questions.

The interview was administered to 5 grade 10 learners, and 5 grade 10 teachers. All the respondents understood the questions and answered accordingly. In the case of parents, the researcher interviewed 5 parents from the neighbourhood and it became clear that parents were more comfortable with expressing themselves in Afrikaans. Parents' interview questions were translated into Afrikaans for the parents to understand.

### **3.6 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES**

A letter was sent to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, requesting permission to conduct the research in the school. The letter stated the purpose of the study and its significance. A second letter was sent to the Director of Education and the Inspector of the Khomas Education Region, seeking permission for the study. The principal of the school was requested in writing and his permission sought. The researcher attached the observation schedules and interview schedule to the letters. The researcher made follow-up phone calls to ensure that the letters reached the intended persons. Learners were interviewed after school so as not to interfere with the teaching and learning hours. The researcher interviewed the teachers, mostly during break time because they would be in a more relaxed mood and during after school hours. Then the observation was done during the free periods of the researcher and when teachers had given their consent.

### **3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The researcher firstly informed the participants about the study and obtained informed consent, to ensure that participation in the research was voluntary. The information about the study was provided to the participants to avoid deception. The principal, teachers, learners and parents were assured that the information obtained from them was for research purposes only and would be treated with confidentiality. All research participants were informed that they had the right to remain anonymous and the confidentiality of both the participants and the data would be protected. The interviewees were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. The data was analysed according to the information provided by the research participants during recorded interviews or written notes that was cross checked with the data from the observation schedule; the raw data in the form of recorded CDs and notes will be kept by the researcher confidentially for a period of two years after which it will be erased and destroyed. Furthermore, the parents and teachers were assured that the questions were not harmful to them and their children/learners. All the participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

### **3.8 DATA ANALYSIS**

Content analysis was used to capture meaning from the collected data. Each interview was then transcribed to find meaning. The data was organized into categories using the Microsoft excel spread sheet (Johnson and Chritensen, 2004). Verbatim quotes of the research participants were used as low-inference descriptors to support the categories identified; in this way the reader can hear how the

participants thought and felt about issues and experiences. The researcher then divided the text data into meaningful inductive categories guided by the research questions and the interview themes. Descriptive frequency tables were used to indicate the common responses given by the respondents. The main categories were then brought together into one whole, followed by interpretation of data where the researcher explained the findings, attached significance to particular results and placed patterns into an analytic frame work.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH RESULTS**

For ease of understanding and interpreting data, the presentation of results will be as follows:

Firstly, a report on the results from the learners' interview will be given. Secondly, the findings from the teachers' interview will be presented. Thirdly a report on the results from the parents' interview will be given. Lastly, the findings of the classroom observations will be presented.

#### **4.1 RESULTS FROM LEARNERS' INTERVIEWS**

The results were analysed as follows: Firstly, the results on the characteristics that are predictive of school failure were presented and analyzed. This was followed by a report on the perceptions and feelings of learners at risk of school failure. After that, the findings on teachers' and parents' attitude towards learners at risk of school failure were presented. Finally, a report on the learners' suggestions regarding improving their academic achievement for the better was presented.

##### **4.1.1 Results regarding characteristics that are predictive of School failure**

The first issue was to find out about the proximity of the school to the homes of the respondents.

The questions put to the respondents were:

- 1. Where do you live?**



## 2. Do you live close to the school? Explain your answer.

According to table 4, it appeared that 69% of the participants lived very far from school and therefore had to walk over long distances to get to school. Responses to question 2 yielded one category, namely, *walk long distances*. Some of the responses were:

### Walk long distances

Rose: *“No, it’s far and I take about one hour and half to reach school.”*

Karin: *“No, to be on time at school I have to wake up at four am.”*

Caroline: *“No, it takes more than one hour to come from home to school.”*

**Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to time taken from home to school**

<b>Time taken from home to school in minutes</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Less than 30 min	6	19
Approximately 30 min	3	9
More than 30 min	22	69
Does not know	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

The second issue was to find out how the learners travelled from home to school.

The question that was put to the respondents was:

## 3. How do you come to school?

The results in table 5 indicate that more than 80% of the respondents walked from home to school every day. The main reason given was that there was no money to pay for a taxi to take the learner to school. Therefore, the category identified was *lack of money for transport*. Some of the responses were as follows:

**Lack of money for transport**

Selina: *“Footing, there is no money for taxi.”*

Valaria: *“Sometimes on foot, sometimes dad brings me to school. I walk when there is no money for petrol or taxi.”*

Karin: *“Sometimes I come to school with a taxi, but my mother cannot afford it, so mostly I walk to school.”*

**Table 5: Distribution of respondents in the sample according to means of transport to school**

<b>Means of getting to school</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
On foot	26	81
By car	1	3

By taxi	2	6
Sometimes on foot or by car	3	10
<b>Total</b>	32	100

When learners were asked about their family structure, their responses were categorized as follows: *Single-parent households*, *orphans*, and *lack of parental care*. The question posed to the respondents was:

#### 4. Do you live with your parents?

The findings in table 6 showed that 34% learners did not live with their parents but rather with their guardians or with a single parent (in most cases the mother rather than the father). Twenty-eight percent of the respondents indicated that they lived with both their parents. Research findings have revealed that some of the reasons why learners were living with guardians (38%) were: parents died, parents divorced or the parent failed to support the learner. These reasons were divided into two categories *orphans* and *lack of parental care*. Some of the responses were:

##### **Single-parent Household**

Rose: “*No, I live with aunt.*”

Caroline: “*Yes, I live with my mother; my father is in Windhoek but he does not stay with us.*”

Frans: “*Yes, I live with my mother, my father died.*”

Irene: *“No, I live with my grandfather.”*

### **Orphans**

Naidine: *“I live with my uncle and aunt; they are my guardians. My mother died when I was in grade 2...”*

Selina: *“No, I live with my uncle from my mother’s family side. Both my parents are dead.”*

Winnie: *“No, I live with my grandmother and my aunt. My father died and my mother lives in Gobabis but holidays I go and visit her.”*

Wesley: *“No, I live with my grandmother. My mother passed away and my daddy stays in Swakopmund.”*

### **Lack of parental care**

Naidine: *“... my father lives in Windhoek but he is an alcoholic and does not support me financially.”*

Diana: *““No, I live with my grandparents, my parents are divorced. I was two years old when my parents divorced. At the age of 14 my mother left me and went to live in Angola.”*

Karin: *“I live with my mother and step-father. My biological father is nowhere to be found.”*

Lineekela: *“I live with my mother, my father left; I do not know where he is.”*

Rose: *“My mother died and my father ran away.”*

**Table 6: Distribution of the respondents in the sample according to family background**

<b>Main caregiver for the learner</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Single parent	11	34
Both parents	9	28
Guardian	12	38
<b>Total</b>	32	100

Question 5 and 6 aimed to investigate the issue of employment status and parental occupation from the respondents. The questions asked were:

**5. Are your parent(s)/guardian (s) employed?**

**6. What do your parents do?**

Responses to these two questions were organized into two categories: *unemployment*, and *low social economic status*.

Eleven learners indicated that one parent/guardian in their household was employed while twelve learners mentioned that two parents/guardians are employed in their household. Nine of the learners indicated that their parents/guardians were

unemployed. Overall, the results seem to suggest that most of the respondents came from homes where there was a source of income.

However, findings displayed in table 7 show that 19% of the parents/guardians of the participants were employed at low-paying jobs such as cleaners, waitresses, and road contractors, to mention but just a few. A certain percentage (13%) of respondents indicated that their parents/guardians owned a business. Included in the percentage (68%) are the learners who did not know what their parents do for a living. Some of the responses were as follows:

### **Unemployment**

Wesley: *“Unemployed”*

Lineekela: *“No; we get some money from my aunt.”*

Monica: *“Only my father (is employed but the mother is not).”*

### **Low economic status**

Emily: *“She (mother) is a domestic worker.”*

Frans: *“She (mother) is a Waitress.”*

Paulina: *“Mother is a domestic worker; my father works for multipack; he transports alcohol to another country”.*

Epson: “*She (mother) sells Kapana (roasted meat).*”

Naidine: “*My uncle sells cars (salesman) and my aunt is a chef in a hotel.*”

**Table 7: Distribution of respondents in the sample according to occupation**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Domestic worker	6	19
Businessman/woman	4	13
Others	22	68
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

Questions were posed to the learners to find out about the things that take place in their neighbourhoods or society. The main categories identified were: *lack of role models, lack of parental care, poor social climate, fear*. The questions asked were as follows:

**7. What are some of the things you see or hear when you are in your neighbourhood?**

**8. Have you ever witnessed any violence on your street?**

#### **Lack of role models**

Findings show that society exposes learners to different life experiences that seem to be negative. Most of the respondents have indicated that the people in the community were always swearing, drinking, and smoking and were often making noise. In addition to that, the learners were exposed to various acts of violence in the

community, to activities such as: people fighting, robbing others, stabbing and in some cases killing each other, not to mention witchcraft. Some of the individual responses were:

Hafeni: *“I see corruption, children influenced by their parents badly (in a bad way), and people drinking. On a daily basis, I see acts of robbing and no one come to the rescue [of victims].”*

Levi: *“I see kids smoking, taking drugs and involved in criminal activities e.g. robbing people of their things”.*

Joseph: *“When my nephew gets drunk, he beats up his girlfriend.”*

### **Lack of parental care/ parental supervision**

Results seem to indicate that learners spent a lot of time on their own without parental supervision. In one instance, the learner stated that the parents did not care.

Hafeni: *“Parents do not care about their children and these kids do whatever they want to do.”*

Neils: *“I see children of 15-18 years old drinking and smoking on the street.”*

Saara: *“Young girls (teenagers) that are getting pregnant by big guys( sugar daddy’s); sometimes the older woman come and fight with the young girls over the guys.”*

### **Poor social climate**



Twenty eight of the respondents indicated that they witnessed violence on the street. Many cases seem to revolve around the fact that their houses were often located next to a shebeen (local pub). As a result, they see drunken people fighting and often stabbing each other with knives. Respondents further stated that most of the houses in their neighbourhoods play very loud music and this is not conducive to learning. Some of the responses were:

Anna: *“There is a shebeen nearby our house and there often people are fighting over alcohol. The noise is so much you cannot even study.”*

Caroline: *“I hear a lot of noise...”*

Justus: *“People are screaming, fighting, people are partying, even in the middle of the week.”*

Wesley: *“People fighting, people swearing, music is played loud.”*

## **Fear**

Learners stated that they were afraid of the violence that occurs in their neighbourhoods. The main reason for this fear was mainly due to incidences of learners being bullied, beaten or raped almost on a daily basis; while other respondents indicated that they had personal experiences of the violence in their communities which seem to stem from alcohol. It appears that learners developed both long-term and short-term fear for their well being. For example, they were

afraid of being physically harassed. They also had future concerns that they will just end up unemployed like their parents. Some of the responses were:

Mercy: *“Yes. My cousin was attacked by a gang of guys which ended up beating her. I felt hurt and no longer feel comfortable walking on the street. I am scared that the gang might decide to come back and finish what they have started one day.”*

Monica: *“I used to see a lot of fighting, like my brother, he has beaten me with a stone, because apparently I was looking at him with ugly eyes and he was drunk. I was crying and feeling so bad and the doctor advised me to go to the police and I said no, I do not want to report him because he is my brother (her father’s child). We are 16 children altogether.”*

Selina: *“Our location is “very dangerous”. One lady (my aunt) was stabbed across my street because of her own money.”*

Hafeni: *“The parents are not employed and their kids will also end up unemployed.”*

Questions 9 and 10 dealt with the issue of safety of the learners within their communities. The following main category was identified: *lack of safety*. The questions put to the respondents were:

**9. Would you say it is safe to walk from your home to school? Explain your answer.**

**10. Have you ever been attacked while walking in the street? Explain your answer.**

**Lack of safety**

Twenty two respondents stated that it was not safe to walk from home to school because there were robbers at the corners of their streets. Their experiences were classified into three categories; *physical pain, sexual harassment, and loss of valuable possession*

**Physical pain**

Venon: *“If you do not have money they will beat you.”*

Karin: *“Yes, someone touched me with a knife (held to her neck) and took all the money. I just kept quiet and cried a lot.”*

Anna: *“They push you or threaten to beat you up.”*

Handura: *“No, thieves come and say “Give the phone and if you do not have they kick you on the buttock and you go.”*

**Sexual harassment**

According to table 8, approximately half of the respondents indicated that they had been attacked while walking in the street, but the other half, excluding the few who did not answer the question or were nearly attacked, have responded that they were never attacked. Some of the responses are as follows:

Emily: *“Yes, I was attacked last trimester. There were two of us going to school to collect our reports. One man touched my breast and my lap. After that they instructed us to run while they were throwing stones at us. I was afraid to be stabbed because that is what they do usually if you do not have a cell phone or money.”*

Joseph: *“Yes, I walk in a group, but one day I had an accident on my way from school to home. I have seen my friend get raped and afterwards she (the friend) killed herself (committed suicide)”.*

### **Loss of valuable possessions**

Respondents stated that there are robbers, also referred to as ‘smokers’, who sit in river beds and ask for their personal items such as cell phones, money or even clothes. Some of the responses are:

Hafeni: *“It is safe in the morning. Afternoon time it is not safe, there are guys who are throwing away our books, violating girls on their private parts, taking learners’ cell phones and rings. During the rainy season, school books are thrown in the rivers.”*

Selina: *“No; there are tsotsies (thieves and thugs) on the street who grab our things on the way to school. It is not safe to walk there alone.”*

Paulina: *“No, the place of the funeral (cemetery) that the learners pass through is too bushy and [one] cannot see if there is a person hiding in there. A girl from our school was raped there.”*

On the other hand, ten respondents indicated that it was safe to walk from home to school. Some of the main reasons that have emerged from the research are: they always walk in small groups; they are well-known in their respective locations; and mainly because their paths from home to school do not pass through riverbeds. Some of the responses were:

Tom: *“Yes it is safe because there are always many people walking to work at the same time I come to school”*

Findings revealed that some of the reasons of those who were not attacked included, luck, prayer and precaution to never walk alone.

**Table 8: Personal experience of violence**

<b>Learners attacked</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	15	47
No	15	47
No answer	1	3
Almost	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

#### **4.1.2 Findings regarding perceptions and feelings of learners at risk of school failure**

Questions 1 and 2 tried to find out the learning interests of the learners. The question asked was:

**1. What do you think is your best subject?**

**2. Why do you like this subject?**

Learners' responses seem to suggest that 31% of the respondents prefer studying languages, closely followed by science subjects (31%). However, a greater number (35%) of them preferred subjects in the field of social sciences such as Geography, Business Management, and Agriculture (see table 7). Respondents indicated that their choices were linked to subject-teacher attributes such as kindness, and explaining the subject well. Their reasons were divided into the following categories: *teacher's attitude*, *teaching method*, and *understanding of the subject, interesting and challenging instructions*. Some of the respondents stated the following:

**Teacher's attitude**

Lineekela: *"The way the teacher is teaching, she is not shouting, she is just nice and she explains well."*

Saara: *"Actually the teacher is very nice, she teaches very nice and explain good."*

**Teaching method**

Daline: *"Because the teacher is teaching the subject very nice."*

**Understanding of the subject**

Irene: *"Because it is easy."*

Gina: *“Because I pass it without studying and it’s interesting.”*

Mercy: *“It is easy, interesting and it involves less work.”*

Naidine: *“Sometimes I like Physical Science because in this class I am able to express myself and because I understand everything that is going on in the class.”*

### **Interesting and challenging instructions**

Frans: *“It is a challenge and it is interesting.”*

Diana: *“I am interested in learning about the past, and Life Science is also interesting for me.”*

**Table 9: Distribution of respondents according to best subjects**

<b>Best subjects</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Sciences (Maths, Physical sc, Life scienc)	10	31
Languages(English, Afrikaans, German)	10	31
Others(Geo, Agriculture, Business M.)	11	35
None	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

The third question posed to the learners was about their worst subjects. The question put to the respondents was:

### **3. What is your worst subject(s)? Explain your answer.**

According to table 10, a substantial number of respondents (66%) indicated that they had learning difficulties in science subjects, mainly Mathematics and Physical science. On the other hand, a small percentage (12%) of the learners mentioned experiencing difficulties with languages, especially English and German. Respondents stated that their academic achievement was affected by teacher attributes, learner's history with the subject, learners' attitude towards the teacher and the subject, among others. The main categories identified were; *learners' negative attitude towards the subject and subject teacher, teachers' negative attitude towards the learners, learner's history with the subject, learning difficulties, and poor literacy skills*. Their comments were stated as follows:

#### **Learners' negative attitude towards the subject and the subject teacher**

Saara: *"Maths and physical science. I have a problem with the teacher, I do not like the teachers of these subjects."*

#### **Teachers' negative attitude towards learners**

Tom: *"The teacher does not teach, s/he just give us handouts. When you ask her a question she says that you are lazy and did not want to do your home work. The teacher also uses bad, insulting words. For example, the teacher says "look at your face it looks like a baboon."*



Hafeni: *“I do not understand the subject because the teacher does not explain very well. He (the teacher) makes my life a living hell. There is poor teacher-learner communication in the accounting class.”*

Frans: *“If the teacher is lazy it makes the subject boring and so I would not want to study it, because the teacher is also lazy”.*

### **Learner’s history with the subject**

Emily: *“I have been failing Mathematics since grade 1 at primary school.”*

Daline: *“Mathematics. I am always failing it, I only passed up to grade 7.”*

Suzan: *“Geography. I “always” fail in Geography and I passed it only once.”*

### **Learning difficulties**

Emily: *“Mathematics, because I do not understand, it is very complicated; even if I try it is just not working. The lessons are not interesting. I do not do my Maths homework because I am not interested.”*

Diana: *“Mathematics. I am not good at mathematics even at primary school. I just do not get it.”*

### **Poor literacy skills**

Neils: *“German. I cannot read and understand German.”*

Wesley: “*English, because my reading is very low.*”

Handura: “*I do not know some words to read.*”

**Table 10: Distribution of the respondents in the sample according to worst subject**

<b>Worst subject</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Sciences	21	66
Languages	4	12
Others	7	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

The fourth issue was about the value of what was taught in school from the learners’ point of view. Question 4-5, 8, 10 provided important data on that:

**4. What are some of the things you learn in school?**

**5. Are the things you learn important to you? Please explain your answer.**

6. Responses were about learners’ feelings; therefore, it will be moved to that section.

**8. What would you miss about school?**

**10. What are some of the things you like in school?**

The responses to these questions tended to focus on two categories: *academic and non-academic categories, and value of what was learnt*. Most of the learners

mentioned that they had learnt about life, respect, discipline, things that they had learnt through the hidden curriculum. However, few of the learners referred to subject-related content and skills such as reading and writing and how to plant crops in Agriculture.

However, more than 90% of the learners have indicated that they value what they are being taught in school (see table 11). For many of the respondents what they learn in school prepares them for life. Most of the respondents indicated that the knowledge they gain through school was important for their future careers, and some believed that it was essential for successful integration into society. In addition to that, eighteen of the respondents indicated that they would miss the non-academic activities of the school and twelve of the respondents stated that they like the non-academic activities of school such as sports, talking and playing with friends, and the prize giving ceremony. Their opinions were as follows:

### **Academic**

Handura: *“I just learnt my name and how to count.”*

Hafeni: *“I have learnt about electricity, regional geography, rivers and minerals.”*

Rose: *“I learnt to read and write and singing.”*

Tom: *“I like the learning process, especially the teacher who teaches with jokes. Some teachers come to school with stress from home and take it out on us”*

### Non-academic

Karin: *“I like non-academic activities such as prize giving ceremonies, when we have to wear casual clothes instead of school uniforms and sport activities”*

Winnie: *“I have learnt how to love, respect each other and obey rules and to respect elders.”*

Tom: *“Alcohol and drug abuse in TADA”*

Joseph: *“I learnt how to address people, respect and to communicate with each other.”*

### Value of what was learnt

Justus: *“Yes, because they (things learnt in school) can guide you through life.”*

Epson: *“Yes; if my mother receives a letter from the school I can read it for her.”*

**Table 11: Views on the importance of what is learnt in schools**

<b>Relevance of what they learnt in school</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	30	94
No	1	3
Some	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

Learners were asked about their perceptions on attending school. The question posed to the respondents was:

**7. Would you come to school if you had a choice? Explain your answer.**

Thirty-one learners responded in the affirmative and only one respondent answered in the negative. Most of the learners would have chosen to come to school for different reasons. As for the one respondent who indicated that he would not have preferred to come to school, his reason indicated problems with his stepfather. Some of the reasons for coming to school include: becoming a better person in life and avoiding becoming a street child. Some learners think that home is too boring while others are at work. The main categories identified were; *family problems, better jobs, role model, boredom, and obtaining a certificate*. Some of the responses are as follows:

**Family problems**

Neils: *“No, because my father and I are arguing too much and he often says he will not pay my school fees.”*

**Better jobs**

Venon: *“Yes, because without school you will not get a proper job.”*

Emily: *“Yes, I will come to school to study and become a professional somebody in life.”*

Neils: *“Yes, if you cannot read no one can give you a job.”*

Oprah: *“Yes, to learn about things that I do not know; I do not want to become a street kid.”*

### **Role model**

Mercy: *“Yes, I want to have my own future and be a role model to others.”*

Justus: *“Yes, I want to be a role model for my siblings.”*

### **Boredom**

Anna: *“Yes, because to stay at home is boring, and one has nothing to do. And I like to come to school and learn about things.”*

Saara: *“Yes, because when I stayed at home this Friday, it was quiet and it was not nice.”*

### **Obtaining a certificate**

Wesley: *“Yes, because I want to have my grade 10 certificate”.*

Question 9 was to find out about whether the learners found learning to be an enjoyable experience or not. The following question was asked:

**9. Do you enjoy learning? Explain your answer.**

Table 12 shows that 53% of the respondents experienced learning as an enjoyable process, but a small group of the respondents (19%) indicated that they did not enjoy learning. Twenty eight percent of the learners indicated that they found learning enjoyable on some occasions only. Respondents stated that learning was enjoyable if it gave the learners an opportunity to understand school work, was interesting and enhanced learners' literacy skills.

Respondents indicated that learning was not enjoyable when done in overcrowded homes, or a learner has too many house chores to do. In that case it was described as an exhausting activity, boring and may cause headaches for some of the learners. The responses given revealed the following categories: *poor subject understanding, interest or the lack thereof, overcrowded homes, temptations, and poor literacy skills*. Some of the individual responses were:

### **Understanding**

Caroline: *'Yes, learning helps me to understand my school work.'*

Joseph: *"Not actually, it leads to headaches and my eyes pains when I read without glasses."*

Karin: *"Sometimes I enjoy learning when I study something that I understand."*

Suzan: *"When I do not understand, I become confused and do not know how to do the work."*

**Interest**

Frans: *“Learning is boring, sometimes one tries hard but the work would not enter your mind. It makes me feel very sad and like I want to cry and it is very disappointing.”*

Oprah: *“Yes, learning is interesting.”*

**Overcrowded homes**

Selina: *“No, I live with too many people at home and I have too many chores to do.”*

**Temptations**

Levi: *“Sometimes I enjoy learning during night-time because no one will disturb me while learning, but during the day-time I am tempted to do other things rather than learning.”*

**Poor literacy skills**

Wesley: *“No, because I do not know how to read.”*

Handura: *“Not nice, because I do not know how to read some words.”*



**Table 12: Views on enjoying learning**

<b>Enjoy learning</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	17	53
No	6	19
Sometimes	9	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

The eleventh question posed to the learners was:

**11. Do you expect to pass all your exams at the end of the year? Explain your answer.**

Twenty one of the respondents stated that they would not pass all their exams at the end of the year while seven respondents were sure that they would pass all their exams. Four of the learners indicated that they had some doubts about their results at the end of the year. Furthermore, respondents pointed out that they would not pass because subjects were difficult to understand, they do not study some subjects, did not like the subject teacher and poor reading skills, to mention but a few. Their reasons were divided into the following categories: *understanding, poor literacy skills, laziness, learner-teacher relationship, and time*. Some of their reasons are as follows:

### **Understanding**

Bennie: *“I do not know, it is not easy to pass any of them. Subjects are difficult to study. English is very difficult to understand.”*

Tom: *“No, because I do not understand the notes given in my subjects (he cannot read).”*

Karin: *“No, I have “no hope” in two subjects. These two subjects are very difficult for me.”*

Paulina: *“Not really, because some subjects I will not study because I will not attend to them and I do not like them do not study a subject that I do not understand.”*

### **Poor literacy skills**

Wesley: *“No, I do not learn and I cannot read.”*

### **Laziness**

Diana: *“No, I put very little energy in my studies for some of the subjects and the subjects are too complicated.”*

Justus: *“I am lazy and I do not study, when I walk from school to home I become lazy.”*

### **Learner-teacher relationship**

Saara: *“No, some subjects that I do not like the teachers, I do not pay attention in those classes.”*

Joseph: *“I do not think so. The teachers reject our questions and they will say: Why don't you listen? Or where were your ears when I was explaining the work?”*

### **Time**

Selina: *“No I do not have time to study. I am always cleaning and even on Sundays there is no rest as I have to wash clothes. Every day I finish all chores around 10 o'clock in the evening and after that I am exhausted, I simply go to bed and do not bother with my school work.”*

On the issue of feelings of learners at risk of school failure, question 6, 18-22 provided important data on that.

In question 6, the main aim was to find out about the happiness of the learners within the classroom. The question put to the respondents was:

### **6. What happens in the classroom that makes you feel happy?**

The research findings showed a triangle of agents that influenced the happiness of learners in the classroom. The learner, the teacher and other learners in the classroom play a role in the happiness of the learner. Some of the learners have mentioned that they are happy when a teacher is absent from the classroom, while others pointed out that teachers that used creative teaching methods coupled with a positive attitude towards the learner(s) and was enthusiastic about the subject being taught made them feel happy in the classroom.

A good relationship amongst learners has been singled out as an ingredient of happiness in the classroom, for example, working in teams and helping one another to understand the school work and a collective effort of participating actively in the lesson. Finally, some aspects of happiness were entirely dependent on the learner himself or herself; passing a test and understanding the school work or giving a correct answer in the class. Results also show some odd answers such as, happiness that was determined by embarrassing other learners, learners fighting in class or running around and playing in the classroom. The responses given revealed the following categories: teacher attitude, teaching method, peer relations, classroom climate, success, and co-operative learning. Their comments are stated as follows:

#### **Teacher attitude**

Karin: *‘Teachers get surprised when I get a correct answer and this makes me feel that I will study more for a teacher to like me.’*

Hafeni: *“I am happy if the teacher is excited; it makes me eager to learn.”*

#### **Teaching methods**

Selina: *“When the teachers are not in class I feel very happy. I do not understand what they teach us in class.”*

Rose: *“I am happy when teachers teach and make jokes in between. It is nice when they use creative methods.”*

**Peer relations**

Bennie: *“I feel happy when the teacher teaches very well and learners are good to me. I am also happy when learners do not answer my questions to the teacher on behalf of the teacher, it makes me feel stressed.”*

**Classroom climate**

Diana: *“I feel happy when all my classmates participate in the lesson instead of making jokes, in between conversations, laughing and teasing each other.”*

Neils: *“When people (learners) are fighting in the classroom, because there is more action.”*

Levi: *“Things that my classmates do, like teasing each other.”*

**Success**

Joseph: *“I feel happy when I know something and I answered a teacher’s question (academic) correctly.”*

Monica: *“When we wrote a test and I did pass the test, I feel so happy.”*

**Cooperative learning**

Tom: *“I also like it when we are able to work together and help one another to understand our school work.”*

Winnie: *“I feel happy when we are working in groups and all learners (in that group) are working together.”*

The next question aimed to find out the learners’ feelings regarding writing tests.

The question asked was:

**18. How did you feel when you had to write test?**

Nineteen respondents indicated that they felt afraid, nervous, stressed and frustrated when they had to write tests. Nine respondents mentioned that they were afraid of failing the test and often the reason for this fear was poor preparation for the test. However, it should be pointed out that two respondents hated studying, and therefore felt that it was not good to write tests at all.

Another point worth noting is that learners were afraid that the test questions would be based on the part of work that they did not study. On the extreme side, one respondent described a case of test phobia that he had not yet disclosed to his family or teachers. The categories identified were: *nervous, frustration, poor preparation, test phobia, fear, and negative attitude towards studying.*

**Nervous**

Bennie: *“I feel nervous, because after studying the things go away [he forgets]. I am really feeling worried.”*

Anna: *“Nervous, but I do not have fear of writing tests. I feel nervous if I did not study for the test.”*

**Frustrated/ stressed**

Winnie: *“I feel frustrated and scared that I will face difficult questions in the test. Sometimes I study but what comes in the test is different from what I have studied.”*

**Poor preparation**

Rose: *“Sometimes I am afraid of tests when I did not study.”*

Caroline: *“I panic, only when I did not study.”*

Emily: *“Sometimes I feel afraid if I did not study.”*

**Test phobia**

Joseph: *“When I am about to write a test, I start shaking and my hands become sweaty. Upon receiving the test everything goes blank. At the beginning (of the test) I struggle to read (fear made his reading ability poor) the questions. This started since I was in Grade 8.”*

**Fear**

Handura: *“I get scared and I do not know why.”*

**Negative attitude towards studying**

Diana: *“I do not like tests because I hate studying.”*

Levi: *“Writing tests is not good.”*

Question 19 aimed to find out about the classroom events that cause unhappiness for the respondents. The question asked was:

**19. What happens in the classroom that makes you feel unhappy?**

The main categories identified were: *respect*, *corporal punishment* and *lack of teacher encouragement*.

**Respect**

Sixteen respondents stated that they were unhappy when their classmates took their learning materials without permission, insulted their parents or teased the orphans.

Some of their comments are stated as follows:

Oprah: *“If learners say something bad to me e.g. you stink go and wash you! [yourself] Learners calling each other names e.g. dog, chicken and cancer girl.”*

Venon: *“When guys are teasing me, swearing at me. They are also teasing your mom, e.g. your mother is not walking well; she is limping (mother has a disability).”*

Joseph: *“I feel unhappy when someone says something bad to a vulnerable child.”*

Winnie: *“I feel unhappy when learners annoy me while I am studying e.g. noising and replying rudely i.e. why you not study at your home did?”*

**Corporal punishment**



Four respondents indicated that they were unhappy when the teacher or fellow learners beat them. Some of the respondents stated the following:

Handura: *“When a teacher beats me, I feel bad.”*

Selina: *“I feel unhappy when I do not learn and when teachers beat us.”*

### **Teacher attitude**

Seven respondents pointed out that they felt unhappy when the teacher said mean things to them. Some individual responses were as follows:

Rose: *“When a teacher insults me. Yes, they say you will just go on failing just because I am repeating grade 10.”*

Gina: *“Teachers insulting learners and noise making by learners.”* Die klaas maak my naar [ which means this class makes me feel like vomiting]. *Teachers sometimes call us” idiots “or “embezzles””*

Neils: *“When teachers are beating children. When teachers are saying children are stupid.”*

Tom: *“Teachers that say bad things to the learners, for example, your face looks like a chicken.”*

### **Failing a test**

One respondent indicated that she was not happy when she failed a test. This was how she put it:

Caroline: *“I feel unhappy when I have failed a test.”*

When learners were asked some of the things that their classmates do that they did not like in question 20; the categories identified were: *lack of respect, peer rejection, inappropriate behaviour, learning support, dishonesty and bullying*. The question put to the respondents was:

**20. What are some of the things that children in your class do that you do not like?**

The results show that some learners copied other learners' homework and paid a small fee for the service rendered. Among the things that learners did but were not liked by the respondents, was their disrespect towards teachers, e.g. laughing at the teacher, giving teachers names, etc. Results also indicate lack of respect among the learners themselves e.g. swearing at each other and boys touching girls on their private parts, puffing (farting) in class, just to mention but a few. Some of the responses were as follows:

**Lack of respect**

Tom: *“learners telling teachers “you are not my mother, you cannot tell me what to do.”*

Levi: *“Laughing at a teacher or saying mean things to a teacher. And giving teachers names e.g. volume (a teacher who talks in a very low voice), “zallie” (Slang word for mother).”*

Gina: *“Insulting each other’s parents; taking my things without permission.”*

### **Peer rejection**

Bennie: *“They interrupt me when I talk and I feel all alone (rejected by his peers).”*

### **Inappropriate behaviour**

Saara: *“Boys and girls that like to touch each other on the buttocks and when they (learners) show each other their private parts in class.”*

Diana: *“Boys like touching girls on their private parts (sexual harassment). The boys in our class do not behave mature, for example, they want to touch girls boobs (breasts) and bums (buttocks or behind) and they even try to kiss girls by force.”*

Neils: *“Puffing, (farting)”*

### **Learning support**

Emily: *“Learners that laugh at those who give incorrect answers in class”*

Monica: *“When they are making noise and when they laugh when one gives incorrect answer to the teacher’s question.”*

Naidine: *“Hulle breek mekaar af” (They are not encouraging each other) “especially the boys to the girls.”*

### **Dishonesty**

Anna: *“Asking for our home work or assignment to copy and pay N\$ 1 or N\$ 2”.*

### **Bullying**

Valaria: *“Children disobeying teachers, bullying others, not coming to school (absent) and bunking the classes. An example of bullying in our classroom will be: taking other children's properties by force, forcing them to give them money or beating them up after school.”*

Question twenty one was about feelings of learners with regard to their performance in tests. The question asked was:

#### **21. How did you feel when other learners perform better than you in a test?**

Most of the respondents indicated that they felt bad when other learners did better than them in a test. Others said they felt ashamed and embarrassed for **failing the test**. Some of the learners felt useless, hopeless and like they were the lowest in the class for obtaining a poor mark. Another group of respondents indicated that they felt jealous, even to the extent of wanting to beat the learners who have done better than them.

The reasons behind the low mark obtained in the test included: learner did not study because friends were not studying either; one learner believes that it has something to do with witchcraft and test/exam phobia. Results show that some learners blame themselves for not studying or having a short concentration span, while others believe it is the teachers' fault for not explaining well. Responses revealed the

following categories: *useless, hopeless, jealous, victim syndrome, teaching methods,* and *concentration span*. Their comments are stated as follows:

### **Useless**

Hafeni: *“I feel bad; we did the same work in class. I am useless. I am not worth doing anything in life.”*

Levi: *“But I must say I feel useless to write a test that I did not study for. There are times that I ask myself, what am I doing in school? It is better to quit and get a job.”*

### **Hopeless**

Paulina: *“I feel really hopeless because I studied for the test and the answers are gone. When I receive the test paper I just go blank.”*

### **Jealous**

Naidine: *“sometimes I feel jealous because I could have done better than that child. I feel angry and I want to beat up the person who has higher marks. Sometimes I do not study because I do not like the subject.”*

Diana: *“I feel bad. Sometimes I feel jealous because they passed and I could not make it, but I blame myself for failing because I do not study.”*

Winnie: *“I do not feel good and sometimes I feel jealous e.g. I think that I am bewitched that is why I am not passing.”*

### **Victim syndrome**

Venon: *“One side it is also my fault that I did not study. On the other side it's my classmates' fault that they were making noise in the class and I could not study.”*

Hafeni: *“I blame myself for my poor performance because I had the opportunity to learn, but I played.”*

Karin: *“Ashamed. If they can do it (pass the test) why not me? I ask myself, what is wrong with me?”*

Winnie: *“Sometimes I think the teacher has added marks for the other learners. I did not study and I blame myself for not studying but instead I was playing.”*

### **Peer influence**

Tom: *“When my friends do not study then I will also not study.”*

Bennie: *“I feel down. I feel like I am low in class because I did not study. When my friends come over I forget about the books.”*

### **Teaching methods**

Gina: *“I feel bad; I am not good; I am not good enough; I blame myself and only sometimes the teachers. Sometimes teachers did not explain just gave us notes?”*

### **Concentration span**

Rose: *“I blame myself for not passing because I have a short concentration span.”*

Responses to question 22 revealed the reason why learners failed to do their homework and will be integrated into question 14.

### **4.1.3 Results regarding parents’/ guardians’ and teachers’ behaviour towards learners at risk of school failure**

Data was collected from interview questions 12 to 17 and question 22 to get an overall opinion regarding the behaviours of parents, guardians and teachers towards the respondents. The questions asked were as follows:

The first issue was to find out the reactions of parents/guardians when they saw the learner’s report card. The question asked was:

#### **12. How do your parents/guardians respond when they receive your report card?**

Results show that few parents motivated their children to work harder; while others reminded the learner of their expectations. Another group of respondents have indicated that their parents say negative things and argue with the learner as they blame the learner for failing. In some cases, the parents demanded an explanation for failing as they were surprised by the poor results presented to them. Worst of all, some of the learners were threatened with negative options such as sending the learner to the farm if they fail and some of the learners ended up being beaten by their angry parents/guardians. The main categories identified were: *parents’*

*expectations, lack of appropriate motivation, victim syndrome and corporal punishment.* Some of the responses were as follows:

### **Parent's expectations**

Tom: *"My mother just keeps quiet, but dad complains and tells me he expects me to get A's in all my subjects."*

Suzan: *"Why do I pay the school fees if you do not study or do you not want to go to school? I am just wasting my money on school fees."*

Justus: *"My mother will cry and say; I told you to study. My father will try to kill me with words; we pay your school fees, give you shelter; we do not ask you anything and this is how you repay us?"*

### **Lack of appropriate motivation**

Rose: *"She behaves badly and argues with me about learning. She says I am good for nothing."*

Karin: *"My mother gets angry and says: Do you also want to end up like me? Do you want to become a cleaner? Do you want us to stay poor like this?"*

Gina: *"My mother threatens not to pay my school fees, and tells me that I will be sent to the farm if I fail."*

### **Victim syndrome**



Levi: *“She gets mad; her voice tone changes and she thinks that I am not serious. I also get angry, because part of it is not my fault.”*

Monica: *“She feels so bad and she will say why did you not pass all your subjects? And I will say they (teachers) said we must study these things but they did not come in the exam (misleading exam scope).”*

### **Corporal punishment**

Selina: *“He gets very angry and beats me up. He even threatens to send me to the farm and look after the cattle. My uncle is a mean man; he is rude and very strict. He expects me to stay in the house at all times.”*

The second issue was about parental support with the school work. The question posed to the respondents was:

### **13. Do your parents/guardians help you with your home work?**

Twelve of the learners stated that they did not receive parental support with their school work; but seventeen learners had indicated that their parents helped when they could. Three respondents indicated that they received help only sometimes. One respondent received help from siblings for a small fee. Respondents mentioned that their parents could not help because there was no time or they were not educated. The categories identified were: *learning support, time, and level of formal education*. Some of their statements were as follows:

**Learning support**

Diana: *“No she (mother) is not educated.”*

Selina: *“No, only my brother helps me sometimes with my home work if he is happy that day. Mostly he helps when he needs money to buy his cigarettes, so he helps me and I pay him. If do not have money to pay him, he will not help me.”*

Tom: *“My father told me that he does not have time to waste on my school work; it is my responsibility.”*

Suzan: *“No, my father does not have time for his children; he is always coming home drunk and my mother is very busy.”*

**Time**

Daline: *“No, he (father) is always busy at the shop.”*

Mercy: *“No she (mother) does not have the time.”*

**Level of formal education**

Lineekela: *“No, my aunt helps me; my mother cannot speak English; she cannot even read.”*

Naidine: “*They did not finish school, but they help me where they can.*”

Emily: “*No, she cannot read English.*”

The next questions posed to the respondents aimed to find out about the feelings of the respondents regarding homework and behaviour of teachers concerning failure to do homework. The questions asked were:

**22. How do you feel when teachers give homework?**

**14. How do teachers respond when you do not do your homework?**

Twenty two respondents stated that homework was not a problem as long as it was given in an interesting lesson, was not too much, not too easy and the learners understood the work. However, ten respondents felt that they do not like homework because it was tiring, irritating and took up much of their leisure time.

These results seem to indicate that respondents do not do their homework, and teachers responded to this differently. In some cases the learner involved was chased out of the class, beaten, or the teacher ended up giving up on teaching that lesson completely. Respondents stated that they failed to do their homework because they did not understand the instructions, no time, hunger, no electricity at home, and family problems. Furthermore, respondents indicated that they felt bad and guilty for not doing their work. Responses revealed the following categories: *corporal punishment, hopeless, understanding, time, poverty, and family problems*. Some of the individual responses were as follows:

### **Corporal punishment**

Caroline: *“Some teachers beat me or chase me out of the class or make you sit separate from the rest of the learners.”*

Frans: *“Some teachers beat us for not doing our home work.”*

Irene: *“They get angry and beat me.”*

### **Hopelessness**

Gina: *“They (teachers) get very angry and they sit down and get out of the teaching mood.”*

Justus: *“They (teachers) feel I gave you work and you throw it right back in my face.”*

### **Understanding**

Tom: *“Teachers get angry and do not even listen to the explanations that I give. I feel bad when I am the only one who did not do my home work, and teachers yell at me that I am lazy. But I did not do my homework because I did not understand it.”*

Levi: *“Sometimes I feel guilty that my homework is not done but there are just times when I do not care because it’s not my fault if I do not understand the homework.”*

Mercy: *“I did not do my homework because I did not understand it. This makes me feel that teachers do not really want to teach us and make us understand.”*

Levi: *“Sometimes we get too much homework and I simply decide not to do it at all because it takes too much time.”*

### **Time**

Oprah: *“The teachers are angry, beating and saying you had enough time to do your home work. But when I get home I have a lot of work (chores) at home as the eldest child.”*

Bennie: *“Sometimes homework is irritating and makes me become lazy. I do not have the time to do homework.”*

### **Poverty**

Hafeni: *“I do not do my homework when we have no food to eat and no electricity at home.”*

Joseph: *“Sometimes I just feel like not doing my homework, sometimes there is no electricity at home.”*

### **Family problems**

Paulina: *“For example, miss, you are having problems at home with your parents, and you do not concentrate on the work being done in the class, you are just concentrating on what your parents were doing and you just forget about your*

*school work. Maybe my mother and father are fighting or they are arguing and when you ask them something they answer rudely.”*

Suzan: *“Very rude. Some beat you and some chase you out the class. My father disturbs me very much, if you want to study, he comes drunk and starts quarrelling with us over small things. In the end, I do not have time for my school work.”*

The next issue was about the motivation that respondents received from teachers or parents. The question asked was:

**15. How do teachers or parents motivate you to perform better in your school work?**

Results presented in table 13 indicate that most (81%) of the respondents received some form of motivation from both teachers and parents. But a small number (19%) of them had indicated that they did not receive motivation from either parents or teachers. However, the number of actions or behaviours mentioned as examples of motivation was minimal. The category identified was *motivation*. Some of their actions were as follows:

**Motivation**

Tom: *“Teachers compare me to other learners and my mother says she wants to sit in my own house someday.”*

Anna: *“Teachers do not motivate me because they tell us almost every day that our class will fail.”*

Selina: *“The teachers say I must pull up my socks. But my classmates tell me that I will not pass grade 10 anyway and I believe them.”*

Diana: *“My grandmother reminds me of the poor and difficult life my mother lived in Angola and warns me that if I do not study I might end up just like her. The teachers tell me that I am working for my own future and this helps me focus on what I want to become in the future.”*

Mercy: *“My aunt reminds me of the needs of my parents and siblings that I will have to look after when I finally start working.”*

**Table 13: Distribution of respondents in the sample according to learner motivation**

<b>Motivation to learn</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Motivated	26	81
Not motivated	6	19

<b>Total</b>	32	100
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Question 16 tried to find out about teacher availability to provide learning support to the respondents. The question posed to the respondents was:

**16. Would you say that teachers are available for additional classes? Explain your answer.**

Many participants (47%) believed that teachers were available for additional classes after school for various reasons as shown in table 14. These reasons included: teacher wanting to help learners pass and the teacher would like to see the learners perform better. Forty one percent of the respondents, however, said some of the teachers were available and a small group (6%) of the respondents indicated that teachers were not available for additional classes at all. Some of their reasons were: learners' behaviour discourages the teachers; it was a waste of teachers' time and their efforts were not appreciated. The responses revealed the following categories: *learners' poor behaviour, and teachers' perception of learners' academic abilities.* Some of their comments were as follows:

#### **Learners' poor behaviour**

Winnie: "...*the learners' behaviour discouraged teachers to offer extra classes.*"

Suzan: "*I do not think so. Some do not have time for children. They have things to do and do not want to waste time with children who do not want to listen in class.*"



### Teachers' perceptions of learners' academic abilities

Anna: *"Teachers say they do not have time to waste because we will fail in any case."*

Tom: *"Some teachers are willing to offer extra classes, but other teachers feel that it is useless to give extra classes because there is no hope for us."*

Hafeni: *"Some teachers are willing to offer additional classes, but others think it is a waste of time to teach people who do not want to learn."*

**Table 14: Distribution of the respondents in the sample according to attendance of school-parent meeting**

<b>Parent school-meetings attendance</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Attend	22	69
Does not attend	9	28
No answer	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

The last issue was about parental involvement in the respondents' education. The question asked was:

**17. What are some of the things that you discuss with your parent/guardian after a parent meeting at school?**

The research has shown that nearly 70% of the parents/guardians attend school parent meetings as indicated in table 15. Findings seemed to suggest that some of the reasons for not attending parent-school meetings were: lack of time, often the parents work until late hours and some parents simply did not make the time and others had no money for the taxi to get to the school. After the meetings, learners and parents discussed issues such as: academic performance, learners' behaviour, and respect. In some cases, there was no discussion but the parents decided to side with the teachers and beat up the learner based on the talks between the parents and the teachers. The main categories identified were: *time*, *poverty*, *corporal punishment*, and *communication*. Some individual responses were as follows:

**Time**

Selina: *"My uncle does not go to school meetings. He feels that school meetings are about the same things said over and over again."*

Frans: *"My mother never attends a parent meeting because she is always working."*

**Poverty**

Rose: *“My aunt does not attend school meetings, but I think she came once. Yes, there is no taxi money and the school is far and school meetings are held in the evening. It is not safe for her.”*

### **Corporal punishment**

Hafeni: *“She beats me up. I will be pushed to study and will not be allowed to watch TV or go out of the house. This makes me feel bad, but if I disobey her, I will be cut off from getting food for a week.”*

### **Communication**

Karin: *“We talk about my behaviour and I have good manners at home but at school I behave differently. At school I am funny and I get more attention at school than at home.”*

Epson: *“She does not tell me anything.”*

**Table 15: Views on teacher availability for additional classes**

<b>Teachers' willingness to offer additional classes</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	15	47
No	2	6
Some	13	41
Do not know	2	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

#### **4.1.4 Findings regarding encouraging learners at risk of school failure to take charge of their own learning**

Questions 1-6 have provided valuable data on that. The first issue was about the respondents' knowledge of learners who dropped out of school. The questions asked were:

- 1. Do you know some learners who have dropped out of school?**
- 2. If, yes do you have any idea why they dropped out of school?**

Twenty eight respondents stated that they knew learners who had dropped out of school, while four respondents indicated that they had no knowledge of such learners. Many reasons for learners dropping out of school were revealed but some to a higher degree than others. For example, fourteen of the twenty eight respondents stated that learners dropped out of school due to lack of interest in school that was influenced by external factors such as peers, use of alcohol and drugs or family problems. The second most common reason given by eleven respondents was pregnancy; girls who fell pregnant and decided not to go to school anymore.

Another reason worth mentioning was financial problems; some learners dropped out of school because their parents were in a financial crisis and could not afford to pay for the school fees. A few cases of school drop-outs were linked to school failure that led to the learner giving up on school altogether or expulsion from school due to poor behaviour. The responses given revealed the following categories: *lack of interest, pregnancy, poverty, poor academic achievement,*

*alcohol and drugs, poor learner behaviour, peer influence, and learner-parent relationship.*

### **Lack of interest**

Frans: *“The child does not like school.”*

Gina: *“One said they were tired of school.”*

Oprah: *“Sometimes she says she is sick and tired of school and complains that teachers are beating too much.”*

### **Pregnancy**

Anna: *“Two learners, I heard they were pregnant and the other learners apparently got tired of school.”*

Diana: *“One girl dropped out of school because she failed grade 10 and her mother does not want to support her financially. No one cares; therefore she does not care either. She lives so far from school and there is no money for a taxi and her mother does not want to pay the school fees.”*

### **Poverty**

Tom: *“Yes, some dropped out of school because of financial problems and the situation at home. The parents lost their work.”*

**Poor academic achievement**

Rose: *“Because they failed grade 10.”*

Bennie: *“He thought that he might not pass grade 10, thus school is not good for him.”*

**Alcohol and drugs**

Neils: *“They started smoking and drinking and they decided there is no use for school.”*

Justus: *“I have a friend; he smokes dagga all the time and was at a nice school but he started bunking classes. Now he does not go to school; he is just drinking and smoking weed every day. He feels he is too big to go school anymore.”*

**Poor learner behaviour**

Lineekela: *“The manners, the learner's manners like swearing at teachers, got expelled out of school.”*

**Peer influence**

Selina: *“Because her friend got pregnant and now leaves with her husband (boyfriend) in backroom in her mother's house.”*

**Learner-parent relationship**

Karin: *“She had problems with her mother. They were always arguing over socializing and drinking together. Her mother dates younger boys than the daughter.”*

The second issue was about finding out what the respondents’ opinions were regarding making learning enjoyable. The question asked was:

**3. In your opinion, how can teachers make learning enjoyable for you?**

Responses given revealed the following categories: teaching method, lesson presentation, home work, motivation, and teacher attitude. Some of their opinions were as follows:

**Teaching method**

Venon: *“When they are teaching and ask questions to see that you understand.”*

**Lesson presentation**

Paulina: *“When they teach, we must not be feeling sleepy. They must present this lesson in an interesting manner.”*

Tom: *“Teachers must be interesting in the way they present their lessons. They should link what they teach us to real life issues and provide more examples to help me understand.”*

**Homework**

Selina: *“Teachers should give more class work instead of homework because my classmates can help me to do the work. And they (teachers) should do more exercises with us in class.”*

Monica: *“All learners must do their home work so teachers will be happy.”*

### **Motivation**

Diana: *“Teachers should not keep on complaining that our class will not make it (pass Grade 10).”*

Valaria: *“Teachers must be free with the learners (like they should help us more with our school work). They should tell us more about the subject and how interesting the subject is.”*

### **Teacher attitude**

Naidine: *“When they are happy and joyful when they teach us. I want teachers to feel free to teach us.”*

Hafeni: *“They must be happy to teach us, should not discriminate but treat us equally.”*



Emily: *“They should explain and ask questions to find out who does not understand and try to make other learners understand as well. Now learners who do not understand are simply ignored.”*

The third issue was about the role of the school in improving the respondents’ academic performance. The question asked was:

**4. Is there something that the school can do to make the grade 10 learners’ performance better?**

Twenty three respondents indicated that the school could do something such as: offer afternoon classes, build a library and science laboratory, provide text books, motivate learners, encourage competitive learning, and offer practical subjects. On the other hand, nine respondents felt that the school could not do anything because it depends on the learners’ hard work, prayer and faith in the learners’ academic abilities. The main categories identified were: *learning support, teaching and learning facilities, teaching and learning materials, motivation, curriculum, prayer, and learners’ attitude towards learning.*

**Learning Support**

Karin: *“Yes, the school should provide old exam question papers and offer afternoon study.”*

**Teaching and learning facilities**

Hafeni: *“Yes, the school should provide us (learners) with a laboratory and a library.”*

**Teaching and Learning materials**

Emily: *“The school should provide text books and previous question papers for each learner.”*

**Motivation**

Gina: *“The school should motivate the learners and talk to them.”*

Levi: *“Yes, the school should introduce self-esteem projects to increase our self-esteem. Learners are careless.”*

Suzan: *“Yes, they must motivate the children and the teachers must not be rude to them and they must not beat the children.”*

**Curriculum**

Josef: *“Yes, the school should provide different subject options (including home ecology). School should balance theoretical knowledge with what can be done with hands.”*

**Prayer**

Selina: *“Yes, the school should call for a pastor to come and pray for us to pass.”*

**Learner’s attitude towards learning**

Oprah: *“No, some of these children do not want to learn.”*

Diana: *“Learners should stop ignoring teachers and we must be serious, not everything is a joke.”*

Mercy: *“It is not up to the school, but it is the learners themselves, the learners should work more hard, should believe that they will make it and listen attentively. Some of the learners wait for the last day before examination before they start studying and some learners do not believe that they will pass.”*

The fifth issue was about the ideal classroom for the respondents. The categories identified were: *academic performance, learners’ behaviour, attitude towards learning, cooperative learning, learner participation, and teaching methods*. The question asked was:

### **5. What would you like to see happening in the classroom?**

Some of their suggestions were as follows:

#### **Academic performance**

Bennie: *“Learners passing with good marks. Learners concentrating in class and being self-disciplined. The learners do not do their school work. Learners are more into the things of the world e.g. TV, alcohol, boyfriends & girlfriends.”*

Anna: *“Improvement that is learners performing better in test and examination.”*

Neils: *“More excitement; all of us in the classroom must pass.”*

### **Learners’ behaviour**

Tom: *“I would like the learners to change i.e. make less noise in the class. And learners should not back-chat to the teachers.”*

### **Attitude towards learning**

Selina: *“Learners should change their manners towards their school work and become more serious with their school work. We must start working very hard, no more jokes; we must be serious.”*

### **Cooperative learning**

Naidine: *“Learners must be helpful to one another. They must stop making noise; they must always listen to the teachers; stop playing around in class and they must stop teasing one another.”*

Emily: *“Learners should help others to understand and learners [should respect] respecting each other.”*

### **Learner participation**

Winnie: *“Teacher and learners working together. Learners must be free to ask questions. Teachers that are strict make it difficult for learners to ask questions because we are afraid of being answered strictly.”*

Diana: *“Learners (we) should be involved in the learning process but quietly.”*

Levi: *“An increase of learner involvement in their teaching process. For example, teachers should allow learners to have a view of what they think about the topic to be taught.”*

### **Teaching methods**

Joseph: *“Lesson presentation should be interesting and help learners to remember what they are taught.”*

The last issue was about the parental support needed by the respondents to facilitate better academic performance. The question posed to the respondents was:

### **6. What can your parents/guardians do to help you succeed in your school work?**

Twenty eight learners in the sample have indicated that they want parents to support, motivate and show an interest in their school work by reminding them that they should do their homework, buying additional learning materials and have faith in their learning abilities.

However, four respondents mentioned that there was nothing the parents could do as learning was solely the responsibility of the learner. Another respondent pointed out that parents should recognize that learning could lead to loneliness. Their responses were divided into the following categories: *support with school work, emotional support, interest, motivation, and learning materials.*

### **Support with school work**

Suzan: *"They must help me with homework and do revision with me. I want my father to stop drinking."*

Anna: *"Nothing; this is my battle to fight."*

### **Emotional support**

Levi: *"I want her to realize that too much studying can be bad. Miss, too much studying may lead to loneliness because you miss not getting time to make friends. My grandmother is always saying study, study and study!!!"*

Emily: *"And she should reassure me that she will always be by my side through good and bad and that she will not look down on me. Sometimes parents say bad things to their children when they fail (she has failed grade 10 before.)e.g. "you are useless" or "you only[will always] stay in my house, you will never be able to be on your own."*

### **Interest**

Rose: *“She (mother) should help me with my studies e.g. ask what I have learnt for the day at school and ask me if I have homework.”*

Tom: *“Show interest in what I do at school by looking through my books and asking what I have learnt at school each day.”*

### **Motivation**

Hafeni: *“My mother should motivate me and inspire me to succeed.”*

Caroline: *“My mother should give me encouragement and help me with my school work.”*

Mercy: *“My aunt should understand that everybody deserves a second chance in life. I want her to have confidence in me (believe) that I will pass grade 10, instead of keeping telling me that I am going to fail already.”*

### **Learning materials**

Karin: *“She should buy me all the studying materials.”*

## **4.2 RESULTS FROM TEACHERS' INTERVIEWS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Firstly, a report on the teachers' feelings and perceptions of learners at risk of school failure will be given. Secondly, the findings on the educational needs of learners at risk will be presented. Thirdly, the academic performance of learners at risk will be presented. Fourthly, a report on the results regarding encouraging learners at risk to take charge of their own learning will be given. Fifthly, a report on the findings on



learners' attitude towards learning will be presented. Finally a report on the findings on parental involvement in education will be given.

#### **4.2.1 Results regarding teacher's feelings and perceptions towards learners at risk of school failure**

Data in this section was collected from interview questions 2-4, 6, and 10-11. The first issue was to find out whether the respondent has taught at another school before the present one. The question asked was:

##### **2. Have you taught at another school before? If yes, how did you feel when you first started teaching at this school?**

All teachers had indicated that they had taught elsewhere before teaching at Khomatura Project School. For some teachers, it felt like it was a demotion to teach at this school; the learners' competence is lower and hence the teaching pace was slow to accommodate these learners. Some teachers indicated that their experience of teaching at this school was frustrating, since the school did not have resources such as a laboratory, library, and computers. Other teachers indicated that it was difficult for them to deal with the realization that the learners at this school were not willing to learn and their attitudes towards learning will not change. Their responses were divided into the following categories: *frustration*, *ill equipped school*, *learning difficulties*, and *negative attitude towards learning*. Some of their statements were as follows:

##### **Frustration**

Mrs. Shiikwa: "*Yes. It was frustrating.*"

### **Ill-equipped school**

Mrs. Shiikwa: *“A new school was started with no resources (no computers, photocopiers, text books, no telephone, no labs or library, etc.).”*

### **Learning difficulties**

Mrs. Brown: *“Basically 80% of the learners are special cases, meaning that they have learning difficulties.”*

### **Negative attitude towards learning**

Mr. Davids: *“Yes, I have taught in three different schools. I thought I will change the learners’ attitude towards learning immediately. However, as time passed I realized that they are not changeable; they are hard to change. Learners are not willing to learn and are not motivated.”*

When teachers were asked **how they would have described their learners** in question 3, the categories identified were: *behaviour problems, commitment to school work, respect, poor literacy skills, motivation, academic performance, overcrowded homes, learning difficulties, low level of understanding, and poverty.*

Some individual responses were as follows:

### **Behaviour Problems**

Mr. Nashidengo: *“Well, it is hard to describe these learners, but in real fact they are so challenging, [have] attitudes problems, most of them do not seem to understand the importance of going to school.”*

### **Commitment to school work**

Mr. Kamati: *“They lack commitment to school work and they do not have a purpose for coming to school. Do not understand the role of school in their lives.”*

### **Respect**

Mr. Kamati: *“Therefore they are not responsible for their own learning; e.g. when being reprimanded learners chat back to the teacher. They use inappropriate language amongst themselves and even when they talk to teachers. They consider insults and abusive words as a normal way of communicating.”*

### **Poor literacy skills**

Mrs. Brown: *“Yes, at first it was difficult to come to terms with the fact that the people you are dealing with are not able to neither read nor write...”*

Mr. Davids: *“Special kids, because they are in grade 8 and above and they cannot read and write.”*

Mrs. Van Rooi: *“They lack in the school work; they cannot read and write.”*

### **Motivation**

Mrs. Shiikwa: *“Most of these learners are lazy, undisciplined, not motivated and already too big for their shoes.”*

Mrs. Mukuve: *“They are not motivated and because of that, they are not serious with school work.”*

### **Academic performance**

Ms. Garises: *“Our learners are a mixture of special kids and normal kids and it is not the average learners you expect to find at other schools. So I would have said they are below average learners.”*

### **Overcrowded homes**

Mrs. Cloete: *“For example, 20-25 people living in a house with only one or two sleeping rooms. Where ideally family is the parents and their kids for these learners they live with their family which include grandparents, uncles, aunts, parents and the children.”*

### **Learning difficulties**

Mr. Davids: *“Most of the learners here are transfer-cases; the school accommodates learners who are rejected by other schools for reasons such as behaviour problems, learning challenges, etc.”*

### **Low level of Understanding**

Mrs. Tjivikua: *“The level of these kids is not up to standard; a grade 10 learner and you cannot have a conversation at their level. Our learners are learners with low level of understanding.”*

### **Poverty**

Mrs. Van Rooi: *“Learners at our school they are from poor disadvantaged groups. Their basic necessities are not satisfied.”*

The fourth issue was to find out whether the teachers understood the learners at risk of school failure. The question asked was:

#### **4. Would you say you understand your learners?**

Two respondents stated that they understood the learners; two respondents, however, indicated that they did not understand the learners, while five teachers mentioned that they sometimes understand but sometimes do not and one respondent did not answer. Some teachers stated that learners’ behaviour was influenced by their home background, educational background and the school environment. Responses given revealed the following categories: *poverty, school environment, home background, educational background, and lack of positive modelling*. Some of their responses were as follows:

### **Poverty**

Mrs. Cloete: *“They are needy in the sense that the basic necessities that we have they do not have e.g. clothes, food, a bed, tap clean water and a toilet.”*

Mrs. Van Rooi: *“I observed that most of the learners come to school without eating bread in the morning.”*

### **School environment**

Mr. Davids: *“This school environment does [is] not accommodative and the learners are not motivated to learn.”*

### **Home background**

Mr. Davids: *“Home background; the parents are less involved in their kids school work and they do not put in enough effort.”*

Mrs. Van Rooi: *“They do not have a proper place to stay; they have to share the room with their relatives. The area in which they stay is surrounded by cuca shops that make noise all the time, so how can they study and do their homework under such circumstances?”*

### **Educational background**

Mr. Davids: *“And their educational background is poor; the foundation for secondary school was not properly laid.”*

Mrs. Tjivikua: *“It is the education system where they came from that made them like that. I cannot blame a child who cannot read; we need to do introspection and find out where we went wrong.”*

### **Corporal punishment**

Mr. Kamati: *“After being beaten in the principal’s office one period later he left school.”*

### **Lack of positive modelling**

Mr. Davids: *“Most of our learners are from poor background families, parents are not educated. One learner told me; why must I go to school if my mother did not even complete grade 1. I might not be able to pass because my mother could not pass either.”*

Mrs. Tjivikua: *“For example, a parent come and swears to the father in front of the kids with big words. The children see and observe and accept that it is right and so he/she come and say it at school. If it is morally accepted at their house then the child thinks it is acceptable everywhere. Even stealing, it sometimes starts at home with the parents.”*

Question 6 was about finding out the respondents’ experience in teaching learners at risk of school failure: The question asked was:

**6. How did you find the experience of teaching such learners?**

Respondents described their teaching experiences as challenging, demanding, requiring patience, involving spoon feeding and that learner-centred education was no option. The main categories identified were: *negative attitude towards learning, low level of understanding, demanding, curriculum, and learner-centred education.*

### **Negative attitude towards learning**

Mr. Nashidengo: *‘Challenging, hard to pull them to the expected line, as some even become rebellious against their own education.’*

Mrs. Cloete: *“Learners told me that they are here only because their parents want them to be here (at school). We are teaching people (learners) who do not want to be in school. School career is something that must pass by.”*

### **Low level of understanding**

Mrs. Mukuve: *“Challenging experience, in the sense that one has to be patient when teaching since time is needed to develop concept understanding in learners as they ALL seem to be slow learners if not special learners.”*

### **Demanding**

Mr. Kamati: *“Challenging and demanding, besides teaching the teachers are expected to accommodate the well-being of the learners. I cannot use the word normal to describe these learners; instead they should be referred to as learners with many special needs.”*



Ms. Garises: *“These learners are in another world; they are at school physically but mentally they are not there (mental absenteeism). They are busy thinking of other problems that they are going through. To bring them to class, it involves all the effort of life you can think of so that you can have their attention.”*

Mrs. Tjivikua: *“It is energy draining; teaching these learners is like trying to climb a mountain. The children are sapping my energy and they do not pay attention; when giving them instructions, you have to repeat it several times before they all understand what has to be done.”*

### **Curriculum**

Mrs. Van Rooi: *“We accommodate mostly learners who are good in practical subjects and quite a few that are good in academic work (theory). If we could extend our field of study to include practical subjects then many of our learners will be interested in school.”*

### **Learner-centred education**

Mr. Davids: *“Acquired an experience of spoon feeding; without it you will not be able to produce anything (learning will not take place). I have learnt to accommodate different learners. Most of the learners, about 98%, if not all are really, really slow learners.”*

Mrs. Tjivikua: *“Learner-centred education will never work here, simply because these children cannot do anything on their own. The fact that they cannot read, they cannot do anything independently from the teacher.”*

Question 10 aimed to find out about classroom events that made the respondents feel unhappy. The question asked was:

**10. What are some of the things that happen in the classroom that you are not happy with?**

Respondents indicated that they were not happy when learners made unnecessary jokes, used insulting words, were unwilling to answer questions unless forced to do so by the teacher, poor behaviour and negative attitude towards tests, homework, etc. Responses revealed the following categories: *respect/indiscipline, homework, learner absenteeism, punctuality, and interest*. Some of individual responses were as follows:

**Respect/indiscipline**

Mrs. Tjivikua: *“Behavior is getting out of hand on a daily basis. They cannot discipline themselves and they have no self respect; in fact these things do not exist in their vocabulary.”*

**Home work**

Ms. Garises: *“Giving learners work to do and they choose to ignore the work and when asked they give funny excuses that you do not even want to hear of.”*

Mrs. Mukuve: *“Homework not done, noising, low level of concentration.”*

**Learner absenteeism**

Mr. Kamati: *“Unnecessary jokes, insults, swear words, not willing to answer questions that they are asked, unless forced, poor attendance, negative attitudes towards tests, homework.”*

### **Punctuality**

Mrs. Shiikwa: *“Indiscipline, learners not being punctual. Learners not doing their homework and not have all the resources needed.”*

### **Interest**

Mr. Davids: *“The expression of willingness to learn from their facial expressions; it is clear that they are not interested to learn. Interrupting the lessons by talking to each other and they do not understand what is being taught.”*

The last issue was about the respondents’ feelings when marking the learners’ written work. The question asked was:

### **11. How do you feel when you are marking their written work?**

Teachers had pointed out that marking the learners’ work could be frustrating, demoralizing and at times stressful, as the teacher realized that majority the of the learners were still far behind in learning the objectives being evaluated. Some teachers felt like they had not taught anything to these learners at all. The categories identified were: *hopeless, poor literacy skills, and frustrating*. Some of the responses were as follows:

### **Hopeless**

Mrs. Tjivikua: *“I feel sorry for these children. They cannot put three simple words together to make a sentence. My heart is bleeding for these children; we need a great miracle.”*

Mrs. Brown: *“I feel like killing. Eighty percent of the work is missing most of the time.”*

### **Poor literacy skills**

Ms. Garises: *“It is a struggle; they do the work without any passion, and their writing is not legible. They write as if they are busy drawing a sketch. Their spelling (reverse letters) is an issue. Grade 10 and 11 learners have poor reading skills (they struggle with their reading skills). Their spelling is not correct and they are battling with reading problems.”*

### **Frustrating**

Mrs. Cloete: *“Sometimes I get so frustrated when a learner sits in grade 10 and they cannot read and write and that is a big problem. There is one learner in grade 10 who rewrites the question paper or writes in her mother tongue; when marking you have to sit there and try to figure out what they wrote.”*

## **4.2.2 Findings regarding educational needs of learners at risk of school failure**

Interview question 5 provided important data on that. The question asked was:

### **5. What are some of the educational needs of your learners?**

Their responses were divided into the following categories: *life skills teacher, remedial teacher, emotional support, school facilities, and food*. Some of the responses are as follows:

**Life skills teacher**

Mr. Nashidengo: *“They need to be explained and educated in some other areas that can help them get along with other learners from other performing schools, e.g. they need a well-trained life skills teacher so that they can be encouraged and motivated.”*

**Remedial teacher**

Mrs. Mukuve: *“Learning difficulties and most of all literacy. I mean they have not developed literacy skills that would have enabled them to excel in school.”*

Mr. Davids: *“Reading and writing; the school might need a teacher who is trained to teach young kids to read and write; the current teachers here are not trained in this area.”*

**Emotional support**

Mr. Kamati: *“Counselling; they have special needs that are being ignored. And they seem to have problems at home. Some may be in abusive homes; in terms of work load i.e. have many chores to do at home.”*

Mrs. Tjivikua: *“Remedial teaching and psychological help. These kids have wounds that need a psychologist. Children here are carrying many problems that teachers are ill-equipped to deal with and one day they might just explode. Half of the school needs psychological help to deal with issues of sexual harassment and loss of parents.”*

### **School facilities**

Mrs. Brown: *“We are in dying need of a library, which can also enhance the learning process at the school, a computer lab with internet access will also do, and of course a science lab; learners are only having the scientific names without seeing what really happens.”*

Mr. Davids: *“Learning and teaching materials; resources are not available e.g. there is no library, laboratory etc. This affect the motivation levels of the learners. Textbooks are not enough; I had to borrow a textbook from the neighbouring school to prepare lessons.”*

Mrs. Garises: *“Books; there are not enough text books. Broken chairs kids; have to run around looking for a chair before lesson starts.”*

### **Food**

Mrs. Van Rooi: *“But if the school can provide a feeding scheme e.g. a kitchen soup or bread for the learners who had nothing to eat in the morning.”*

### **4.2.3 Results regarding the academic performance of learners at risk of school failure**

Data in this section was collected through questions 7-8 and 13.

The first issue was about how respondents rated the academic performance of their learners. The question posed to the respondents was:

#### **7. How would you rate your learners' academic performance?**

Results in table 16 shows that many (90%) teachers rated the performance of their learners as poor, very weak and unsatisfactory. One teacher though pointed out that their performance in Afrikaans was satisfactory. The main category identified was *poor academic performance*. Some individual responses were as follows:

#### **Poor academic performance**

Mrs. Mukuve: *"Below average, the least you can expect."*

Mr. Kamati: *"Unsatisfactory, below satisfactory."*

Mr. Davids: *"Really unsatisfactory; I feel like I put more effort in my teaching but these learners are not passing. Despite my efforts, there is no learning change in the learners."*

When teachers were asked **what they thought were the reasons for the learners' performance** in question 8, the following categories were identified; *lack of motivation, poor educational background, poor literacy skills, lack of parental*

*support, alcohol and drugs, lack of teaching/learning facilities and materials, teacher and learner absenteeism, home background, and peer influence.*

### **Lack of motivation**

Mr. Nashodengo: *“Poor motivational inputs from their parents/guardians.”*

Mrs. Cloete: *“Learners lack motivation. They do not have a vision (they are not goal-directed).”*

### **Poor educational background**

Ms. Garises: *“Perhaps they were at a wrong primary school (they failed to manage to teach learners how to read and write).”*

### **Poor literacy skills**

Mrs. Shiikwa: *“Learners are not doing homework; a few learners not being able to read or write; poor comprehension of English.”*

Mrs. Van Rooi: *“Learners who cause indiscipline in class are those who cannot read and write; they cannot even construct a proper sentence and they do this to get the teacher’s attention.”*

### **Lack of parental support**

Ms. Garises: *“The support; parents are not so involved in their school work.”*



Mrs. Cloete: *“Not getting enough attention at home in terms of help with their school work.”*

### **Alcohol and drugs**

Mr. Nashidengo: *“Some learners involve themselves in alcohol and drug abuse and thus use up most of their time they were supposed to use to do their school work.”*

### **Lack of teaching/learning facilities and materials**

Mr. Kamati: *“Lack of learning facilities such as: laboratory, library, and computers.”*

Mr. Davids: *“Poor/lack of teaching/learning materials.”*

### **Teacher and learners absenteeism**

Mrs. Shiikwa: *“Absenteeism of teachers and learners.”*

### **Home background**

Mrs. Brown: *“We are dealing with learners, but we do not know their home backgrounds. What type of home do they come back to? Under what circumstances are they? These factors play a major role in these learners’ performances.”*

Mrs. Mukuve: *“Not getting enough attention at home in terms of help with their school work.”*

### Peer influence

Mrs. Van Rooi: *“They are not interested in the school itself. And the influence by other learners plays a big role.”*

**Table 16: Views on the learners’ academic performance**

<b>Academic performance</b>	<b>Number of teachers</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Satisfactory	1	10
Unsatisfactory	9	90
<b>Total</b>	10	100

#### 4.2.4 Results regarding encouraging learners at risk to take charge of their own learning

The issue in question 13 was about the respondents’ views on how the learners’ academic performance could be improved. The question asked was:

#### **13. What do you think can be done to improve the academic achievement of the learners?**

Their suggestions were divided into the following categories: *parental involvement, teaching facilities, teacher training, hostel accommodation, trained life skills teacher and counselling services, reading programme, and school curriculum.*

#### **Parental involvement**

Mrs. Tjivikua: *“The school does not get any help from the government and parents have a negative attitude towards payment of school fees.”*

Mr. Davids: *“Mechanisms must be in place to bring parents close to the school.”*

### **Teaching facilities**

Mr. Davids: *“Improve teaching/learning materials.”*

Mr. Kamati: *“According to me the provision of infrastructures and facilities that seriously lack at school, such as library, science laboratory, and enough text books to improve the learner: textbook rotation.”*

### **Teacher training**

Mrs Brown: *“The first thing I will suggest is that all teachers at the school should get training as to how to teach these learners to read and write. Teachers can also change their teaching methods.”*

### **Hostel accommodation**

Mrs. Shiikwa: *“If the school can get a hostel, it will reduce the number of problems experienced at school.”*

### **Trained life skills teacher and counselling services**

Mrs. Shiikwa: *“Schools should be provided with life skills teachers or counsellors, who can advise learners on their problems.”*

### **Reading program**

Ms. Garises: *“Start a reading program. If you cannot read fluently, it means learners will take a long time to study.”*

Mrs. Cloete: *“Literacy is a problem, this school needs learners who can read and write and they need a library and textbooks.”*

### **School Curriculum**

Mrs. Van Rooi: *“The school need a library, laboratory and offer subjects that learners are interested in.”*

#### **4.2.5 Findings regarding learners’ attitude towards learning**

Data in this section was collected using interview questions 9-10.

The first issue was to find out how the respondents described the learners’ attitude towards learning. The question asked was:

#### **9. How would you describe their attitude towards learning?**

All respondents stated that learners had a negative attitude towards learning. Their reasons were classified in the following categories: *high rate of learner absenteeism, homework, and interest, lack of motivation, care, and learning problems*. Some of the comments are stated as follows:

### **High rate of learner absenteeism**

Mr. Kamati: *“According to my observation, the majority of our learners display a not serious or rather negative attitude towards learning, considering the high absence rate, abstaining from learning tasks (homework, class work and bunking classes).”*

### **Home work**

Mrs. Tjivikua: *“Majority do not do homework every day; out of a class of 30 learners two will do homework. As a teacher you do not know if they understand the topic or not because we get this feedback from the homework. To what extent should one go to teach these children?”*

### **Interest**

Ms. Garises: *“With these kids the reason why they come to school is because they are forced by their parents and not because they have something they want to achieve through school. And because they are forced to go to school, they are not interested in what we are doing in the classroom.”*

Mrs. Cloete: *“Disinterested, they are not interested in school (negative attitude).”*

Mrs. Van Rooi: *“Half of the school has a negative attitude towards school. When I asked a learner why are you behaving like that? The learner said, because I do not want to be in school anymore.”*

### **Lack of motivation**

Mr. Davids: *“Very negative; they are not motivated; they are not willing to learn. They do not see the need to learn. They do not even know why they come to school; they see coming to school as a culture (habit). They might view school as a place to meet with friends and partners; most of them are more into affairs/relationships.”*

### **Care**

Mrs. Brown: *“Most of them do not know what is going on around them in the class; some are there for the sake of their parents wanting them in school. In general they do not care one bit.”*

### **Learning difficulties**

Mrs. Shiikwa: *“Some learners are not serious, I think because of their learning problems. They are usually responsible for the disruptions in class.”*

#### **4.2.6 Findings regarding parental involvement in education**

The main issue here was to determine how respondents viewed the school-parent relationship and hence parental involvement in education. The question asked was:

#### **12. How is the relationship between the school and the parent of the learners?**

The school-parent relationship has been described as poor, very bad, non-existent. However, some of the teachers indicated that it could be better. At present, parents only communicate with the school when called on the phone or asked to by the school. One teacher pointed out that teachers did not have a “personal relationship” with the parents; when they want to talk to the parents they must communicate

through the principal. Responses revealed the following categories: *poor parent-school relationship, poor parent attendance, poor teacher-parent communication, and no parental support*. Some of the responses were as follows:

#### **Poor parent-school relationship**

Mrs. Van Rooi: *“Very poor; we do not have the back up of our parents. Our parents do not avail themselves to help the school grow and develop. They do not support even their children with their school work; only 20 % of the parents support their children and it is only 20% of them who attend school parent meetings.”*

#### **Poor parent attendance**

Mr. Davids: *“It is a poor relationship; when the school invites the parents to a meeting, parents do not turn up.”*

Mrs. Mukuve: *“Most parents do not turn up for teacher-parent meetings and as a result they do not really contribute to the growth and development of the school.”*

#### **Poor teacher-parent communication**

Mr. Davids: *“I feel sad when I do not get to meet a parent of a learner that needs help. And sometimes I just throw in the towel; if the parent does not care why should I?”*

Ms. Garises: *‘Here and there, the school made meetings so that the parent could come to school and get involved in their children school affairs; but quite few of the*

*parents turn up for the meetings. Teachers do not have a personal relationship with the parents. As a teacher you are not allowed to communicate directly with the parent except through the principal. As teachers, we feel left out (parents communicate more with the principal than with teachers despite us wanting to talk to them)."*

### **No parental support**

Mrs. Tjivikua: *"Parents are not talking to their children about discipline and are less involved in their school work."*

## **4.3 RESULTS FROM PARENTS' INTERVIEWS**

### **INTRODUCTION**



Firstly, a report on the results regarding learner-parent relationship will be given. Secondly, the findings on parental involvement in education will be presented. Thirdly, a report on the results regarding parents' perceptions of learners at risk of school failure will be given. Finally, the results regarding encouraging learners to take charge of their own learning will be presented.

#### **4.3.1 Results regarding learner-parent relationship**

Interview questions 2-4 provided important data on this theme. The first issue was finding out about the respondents' relationships with the learners. The question asked was:

#### **2. Please explain your relationship with your child?**

Seven respondents indicated that there was no problem with their relationship with the learner and used words like, 'it was good', and 'it was alright' to describe their child-parent relationship. However, two respondents indicated that the learner was not free to communicate with the parent/guardian. One respondent stood out though as she mentioned that in her house it was all about rules and that communication was encouraged when the learner had a problem. The main category was *communication*. Some of the responses are stated as follows:

#### **Communication**

Grandma Katjimune: *"He is not open with me."*

Mrs. Mutinga: *"He is not free or open to talk to me. Thus far, his complaints were about one subject with no teacher."*

Mrs. Hoebes: *“There is no problem and she is open to talk to me; when she has a problem she tells me.”*

When parents/guardians were asked **why they decided to take their child to this school** in question 3, the following categories were identified: *no other option*, *impression on the parent*, and *school proximity*. Some of the responses were as follows:

**No other option**

Uncle Gariseb: *“It was the only school that accepted her; all the other schools were full.”*

Mrs. Mutinga: *“From primary school, he only got a place at Khomastura project School.”*

**Impression on the parent**

Mrs. Hoebes: *“Last year I was selling cakes at Khomastura Project School; everything looked neat and ordered and I decided my child should go here [come to this] school.”*

**School proximity**

Grandma Katjimune: *“It is the school that is close by.”*

The third question asked was about the type of activities that respondents do together as a family. The question asked was:

#### **4. What type of activities do you do together as a family?**

Five respondents indicated that there was nothing that they do together as a family. Some of the reasons given were that the parent had no time; had to work till late and the other reason given by a different respondent was that there was no money. The other half of the respondents mentioned that they did some activities together as a family such as: watch TV together, go to the park and the church together, sit at Christmas time with the whole family including uncles and aunts and plan for the year. The main categories identified were: *lack of parental care*, and *poverty*. Some of the statements were as follows:

##### **Lack of parental care**

Uncle Gariseb: *“They walk around with cousins and talk.”*

Mrs. Naruses: *“He does not go to church but we do, so there is nothing we do together.”*

Mrs. Daniseb: *“I am a single parent and I come from work tired; then I have to make food. There is no time to do something together as a family.”*

##### **Poverty**

Mrs. Shatika: *“We do what we can, money is a problem.”*

#### **4.3.2 Findings regarding parental involvement in education**

Data in this section was collected from interview questions 5-6 and 11.

The first question asked was:

**5. Would you say you are actively involved in the education of your child?**

Seven respondents stated that they were actively involved in the education of their children, while three respondents mentioned that they were not actively involved. Respondents indicated that they were actively involved in their child's education since they instruct the child to do homework, encourage him/her to study and check through the books; tell the child to go to school and pay the school fees and feed the child. The respondents who were not actively involved in their child's education had this to say: the child did not give the books to the parent to go through. Some of the children refused to talk about their poor academic performance with their parents/guardians, while some parents felt they could not actively be part of their children's education as they were not educated. Responses given revealed the following categories: *minimal parental involvement*, *level of formal education*, and *poor academic performance*. Some of the respondents stated the following:

**Minimal parental involvement**

Mrs. Hoebes: *"Yes, I am involved in her school; I tell her to do her homework."*

Uncle Gariseb: *"Yes, I pay the school fees and ensure that they have something to eat."*

Mrs. Shatika: *"In which grade is she now?"*

### **Level of formal education**

Mrs. Palmer: *“Not at all; I tell them I was not educated and had to start working at the age of 15.”*

### **Poor academic performance**

Grandma Katjimune: *“He is doing weak and I ask about his school work and he refuse to talk about it; he gets angry.”*

The next issue was to find out if the respondents had knowledge regarding the role of a school board. The question asked was:

#### **6. What is the role of a school board at your child’s school?**

Eight respondents indicated that they did not know the role of the school board and some simply had no idea what a school board was. One respondent stated that she knew the role of the school board, while one respondent indicated that she had not seen the work of the school board yet. The main category identified was: *lack of knowledge*. Some the responses were as follows:

#### **Lack of knowledge**

Uncle Gariseb: *“I do not know and I never saw the members of the school board.”*

Mrs. Naruses: *“I do not know anything about the school board.”*

Mrs. Mutinga: *“I have no idea at all.”*

The main issue in question 11 was to find out whether the respondents worked in consultation with the teachers to help their children perform better. The question asked was:

**11. What do you do in collaboration with the teachers to help your child learn better?**

All the respondents had indicated that they had not yet met with the teachers to explore possible ways of enhancing their child's learning. The main categories identified were: *minimal parental involvement*, and *lack of teacher-parent relationship*. Some individual responses were:

**Minimal parental involvement**

Aunt Willemse: *"I have met with the principal twice."*

Mrs. Palmer: *"I have not yet gone to school because of my work, I do not get time."*

**Lack of teacher-parent relationship**

Mrs. Shatika: *"We have never met with her teachers."*

Mrs. Mutinga: *"No I have not yet done anything with the teachers to find ways of helping my son."*

Mrs. Daniseb: *"No; I personally did not talk to the teachers."*

**4.3.3 Results regarding parents' perception of learners at risk of school failure**

Data in this section was collected from interview questions 7-10. The first issue was the respondents' future dreams for the learners. The question posed to the respondents was:

**7. What future dreams do you have for your child?**

Five respondents mentioned that they did not have any dreams for their children, and suggested that it was wise to wait and see if the child would manage to pass the grade 12. Nonetheless, three respondents hoped that their children would end up being teachers and another parent stated that the child should become a chef. One respondent indicated that they hoped that the child would become a pilot. The category identified was: *low parent expectations*. Some individual responses were as follow:

**Low parent expectations**

Mrs. Hoebes: *“If she can finish her school up to grade 12, only then can I dream. Because sometimes you dream for them; you struggle to bring them up but they cannot pass.”*

Grandma Katjimune: *“None”*

Mrs. Naruses: *“He is good at cooking; he should become a chef at some hotel.”*

The second question asked was about how the respondents react when presented with the learner's report card. The question posed was:

### **8. How did you react when you saw your child's report card?**

Two of the respondents described their actions and the rest focused on their feelings. One respondent reacted by reminding the learner that she struggled to financially support the learner. Another parent took matters further and opted to beat the learner. Seven respondents mentioned that their feelings were influenced by the results in the report card. If the learner passed, they felt happy and if the learner failed, they felt bad or disappointed. Another parent had to accept that the learner has never passed any grade in school. The categories identified were: *parental care, corporal punishment, poverty, and hopeless*. Some of the respondents stated the following:

#### **Parental care**

Grandma Katjimune: *"I never saw his report."*

Mrs. Daniseb: *"I have not seen the last report; he just told me that he failed two subjects; but I did not see the report."*

#### **Corporal punishment**

Mrs. Palmer: *"He did not do well the first term and I beat him up until the blood was flowing."*

#### **Poverty**



Mrs. Hoebes: “*One day I told her that I brought her up single-handedly (as a single parent) and that she should not disappoint me by not passing.*”

### **Hopelessness**

Mrs. Naruses: “*He has been promoted since grade 1 (means he has never passed a grade since grade 1 to date).*”

The ninth question asked was about the respondents’ views regarding the learners’ academic performance. The question asked was:

### **9. How is the academic performance of your child?**

Fifty percent of the respondents stated that the learners’ academic performance was average. Twenty percent of the respondents were unable to answer as they did not receive the learners’ report cards, while 30% of the respondents mentioned that the learners’ academic performance was weak or very weak (see table 17). The main category identified was: *poor academic performance*. Some individual responses were:

### **Poor academic performance**

Mrs. Mutinga: “*His academic performance is weak.*”

Mrs. Naruses: “*All his subjects were circled with a red pen (he failed all his subjects). His performance is not better.*”

Mrs. Shatika:” *She is performing very weak. My husband has many kids (16) and he failed to pay the school fees and because of that she did not get the report for the second term.*”

**Table 17: Parents’ views on child’s academic performance**

<b>Academic performance</b>	<b>Number of parents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Average	5	50
Weak	1	10
Very weak	2	20
No report card seen	2	20
<b>Total</b>	10	100

The tenth question was about respondents’ opinions on the things that affected the learners’ academic performance. The question asked was:

**10. What do you think are some of the things that affected his/her academic performance?**

Responses given revealed the following categories: *house chores, lack of parental support and care, peer influence, poor academic performance, home relations, and negative attitude towards learning.* Their opinions are stated as follows:

**House chores**

Mrs. Hoebes: “*When the examination starts, I do all the house chores by myself, so she can be free to study.*”

**Lack of parental support and care**

Uncle Gariseb: “*They do not live with their mother and their father passed away.*”

Mrs. Daniseb: *“Other children have both parents taking care of them and they get everything they need. In my case, my kids are just sitting by themselves and I do not have a permanent job e.g. this month I only worked once and I was paid N\$ 200.”*

### **Peer influence**

Aunt Willemse: *“Friends; they go walk around and when he gets back it is late and he is tired and just come and sleep.”*

### **Poor academic performance**

Mrs. Naruses: *“There is no problem with the school; he simply never passes. I do not know.”*

### **Home relations**

Mrs. Shatika: *“There is one brother disturbing her. Every day and every month he is arguing with her.”*

### **Negative attitude towards learning**

Mrs. Mutinga: *“He is not stupid; he simply does not want to study.”*

## **4.3.4 Results regarding encouraging learners at risk to take charge of their own learning**

Interview question 12 provided important data on that. The question asked was:

**12. Do you think there is something that can be done to help your child perform?**

Six respondents indicated that there was very little, if anything at all, that can be done; it all depends on the learner and some of the respondents mentioned that they had rather left it up to God. Four respondents felt that there was something that could be done like: the school could offer afternoon classes, the Ministry could build a school library and laboratory and teachers could give learners attention. Responses given revealed the following categories: *hopeless, learning support, and teaching/learning facilities*. Their comments are stated as follows:

**Hopelessness**

Mrs. Shatika: *“Sometimes these children are not academically gifted and when the teacher teaches they do not understand.”*

Aunt Tjitjo: *“I leave it all to God and I pray that the lord will help her with the future. There is nothing the school can do.”*

**Learning support**

Uncle Gariseb: *“Maybe offer after school classes so she can improve in the subjects that she is weak.”*

Aunt Willemse: *“There should be afternoon study; but it all depends on the teachers really.”*

**Teaching/learning facilities**

Mrs. Mutinga: *“Your school needs a library and a laboratory.”*

#### **4.4 RESULTS FROM CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS**

##### **4.4.1 Results regarding the physical setting of the school**

###### **1. Where is the school located?**

Khomastura Project School is located in Khomasdal, sandwiched by two well-known and well-established secondary schools, namely, Ella du Plessis Secondary School and Augustineum Secondary School. The school is surrounded by dry grass and with no sign of its name; it is therefore often than not mistaken for a village clinic or police station, given its appearance.

## **2. What is the physical set up in the classrooms?**

The classroom gave the impression of a lively atmosphere, with colourful posters on the walls and well-decorated charts of the learners' birth dates. On the other hand, here and there a broken chair could be seen leaning against the wall. The surface of the tables was disfigured with several writings such as the names of Namibian musicians Gazza or GMP and the Dogg being more common, insulting words and names of the learners. This was common in all the classrooms.

## **3. What sights, sounds, smells, tastes and textures are found in the classroom that the learners at risk use?**

Most of the sounds that were heard in the classrooms were of learners talking to each other and in some cases singing or screaming. Classrooms were often dusty and the tables were covered in red powder as a result of the floor tiles.

## **4. What learning materials are available to learners at risk?**

A small number of text books were the only form of learning materials for the learners. The school has a shortage of text books and in most subjects learners had to share the text books in pairs.

**5. What technologies are accessible to the learners at risk in the classroom?**

There was very little use of technology as the school has two computers for the teachers only and two overhead projectors, but only one was functioning and often was used by a single teacher.

**6. Do the teachers create classroom environments that are conducive to learning for all learners including the learners at risk?**

The situation in the classrooms was often not motivating learners to learn, as it was more a battle for the teachers to manage the learners' behaviour so that the lesson can start. There were many confrontations between the teachers and the learners arising from the learners' indiscipline.

**4.4.2 Results regarding behaviours of learners at risk of school failure**

**7. What are the learners at risk doing while teaching is taking place?**

In some cases, learners tended to do their homework of another subject, some were sleeping, day-dreaming, chatting on the cell phones or listening to music. In one class, a learner was polishing her nails, powdering her face or in some cases singing in the classroom. On a rare, occasion one learner screamed during the lesson for no apparent reason. Ironically, these learners do not show cases of reading other books or magazines during the lesson.

**8. How does the teacher motivate the learners at risk?**

Most of the teachers did not motivate the learners; instead they reminded them or warned the learners that given their behaviour and past performance, it was likely that they would not pass.

### **9. What happens when learners at risk are given home work?**

In many instances, homework was not done or the book had been left at home and some learners copied homework from others. Different teachers reacted differently but on more than one occasion teachers got angrier when it was the same learner who had not done homework all the time and chased the child out of the classroom. In some cases learners were given verbal warnings.

### **10. What happens when a learner at risk annoys the teacher?**

Some teachers said something to embarrass the learner, that is, “you are stupid, but you need not let everyone know,” while a few of the teachers would beat the child concerned or chase the child out of the classroom.

### **11. What happens on the playground?**

Some learners were seen behind the classes kissing each other, others were playing with water and some learners preferred to be together as they are from the same tribe e.g. Herero boys gather under a certain tree called the Herero mall. Some girls prefer using the boys’ toilet, and some girls sat on the boys laps outside their classrooms.

### **12. What are the learners at-risk and the teacher doing?**

When the teacher had to go and collect something at the office and the learners were given an activity to do in the book, some girls ended up comparing the size of



their stomachs in the classroom. In another class, the teacher sat down to mark the learners' class work and one boy and girl just kissed on the way to the teacher's table. It was noted that when learners were given group work, some saw that as a chance to chat and do nothing and occasionally a boy and a girl would have a minor fight over a text/note book. These fights ended with swearing words or an aggressive push of the girl.

### **13. How do the learners at risk behave toward one another?**

Learners were disrespectful towards each other, for example, grabbing other learners' learning materials without permission. On a few occasions where they asked for permission, they seemed to demand, insulting each other's parents and farting in the classroom. Learners liked to embarrass each other by teasing about one's appearance or home background. When a learner enters the classroom, the rest of the learners would shout the partner's name or the nick name of the learner that they know would make the learner feel uncomfortable especially in the presence of a teacher. Learners were reluctant to help others with school work, instead they would hide their work and claim they did not understand when approached for help.

### **14. What behaviours are repetitive and occur regularly?**

Most common behaviours included use of insulting words, fighting in class, not doing home work and bunking lessons that are after break. Occasionally, girls would fight over boyfriends and talk about it with teachers. It was very rare for learners to participate in the lesson.

**15. What is the nature of this participation and interaction?**

The interaction between the learners seemed to be negative and not constructive in the sense that there was no team work or acceptance into the learning community. It lacked respect for moral values and their behaviour tended to be inhuman.

**4.4.3 Results regarding activities in the school****16. In what events or activities are the learners at risk engaged?**

Learners were working on a class activity. They were required to read a passage in the text book and then answer the questions in the activity. However, few of them did the work required and the others were drawing or simply chatting to each other until the bell rang.

**17. How are the activities organized and explained?**

On a few occasions the teacher had prepared a short presentation and realised that there was still time left and so decided to give learners an activity to keep them occupied. In most of the cases explanations were not given, except to direct the learners to the page of the activity in the text book.

**18. What resources are used in these activities?**

There are usually text books and copies of hand-outs

**19. How are the resources allocated?**

Normally, it is one text book between two learners; the textbooks were not enough. In some classes each learner had a copy of the worksheet.

#### **4.4.4 Results regarding the conversations of learners at risk of school failure**

##### **20. What verbal and non-verbal languages do learners at risk use for communication?**

It was collectively understood among the learners that learners from their school are referred to as Khomasturians. The girls, on the other hand, used the word “ngufgaf”- ugly boy and “chemical” means a handsome boy.

##### **21. Who talks and who listens?**

During lessons very few learners listened to the teacher as they are busy doing their own talking in between. Strangely, there was no clear order of this among the learners; anyone can talk and the rest of the group listens.

##### **22. What is the content of at-risk learners’ conversations?**

Learners talk freely about their events during weekends e.g. who did what in the club. One learner said; “I am not feeling well because I came to school without drinking alcohol today.” Sex was a common talk among the learners and they talked openly about how they had sex in the presence of the teacher. Many girls are mostly conversing about fashion and which teacher dresses well and who was the hottest or sexiest learner/teacher in the school.

##### **23. What beliefs does the content of their conversations demonstrate?**

It demonstrates that life is short and one must enjoy it while you can. School was nice in the sense that it reunites the learners, but the academic side of it was boring.

Learners had no future aspirations. It was as if they would remain learners for the rest of their lives.

### Summary

The main findings on perceptions of learners at risk of school failure were as follows:

- Most of the learners perceived learning to be not enjoyable, some of the given reasons were; negative teacher attitude towards the learners, poor understanding of the subject, learning difficulties as a result of poor literacy skills in English, teaching methods employed were not coupled with interesting and challenging learning activities.
- Most of the learners indicated that their parents had no time for school work.
- Most of the learners viewed school as a platform to a better job in the future and hence a chance to be a role model for others.
- Most of the learners indicated that teachers consider teaching them a waste of time.
- Most of the teachers indicated that they were frustrated with teaching learners that they perceived as having learning difficulties, behavioural problems, low motivation, poor literacy and negative attitude towards learning. Most of the teachers indicated that they were hopeless with this task.

- Most of the parents perceived their children as having poor academic performance because of peer influence, too many house chores and negative attitude towards learning.

This research study has revealed the following educational needs:

- Learners need learning support
- Good literacy skills
- Positive teacher-learner relationships
- Interesting and challenging learning instructions
- Learning materials e.g. textbooks
- Positive classroom climate that promotes respect and cooperative learning.
- Motivation
- Parental support with school work
- Teaching facilities e.g. library, chairs, and science laboratory
- Emotional support and moral education

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

An attempt was made in the preceding chapter to analyse and report the results of the collected data. The discussion will be carried out in the following way: firstly, the discussion of the results will be done according to the research questions of the study, followed by the recommendations and conclusions of the study.

#### **5.1 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS REGARDING CHARACTERISTICS THAT ARE PREDICTIVE OF SCHOOL FAILURE**

The discussion of the results on the characteristics that are predictive of school failure will be done in the following manner: Firstly the discussion of the home background of learners at risk of school failure, followed by the social background of learners at risk and then a discussion on the school climate.

##### **5.1.1 Discussion of results on the home background of learners at risk of school failure**

The findings from the learners' interview questions have provided some evidence that the majority of the learners at risk of school failure lived in homes that were affected by poverty. Many of them were orphans and lived in single-parent households or with guardians that were more often than not unemployed or employed in low paying jobs such as waitressing, domestic work, and road contractors. These results are in agreement with Knapp and Shields (1991) who also concluded that learners at risk of school failure were disadvantaged children of

poverty and are most likely to experience school failure. As a result of poverty, many of the learners had to walk long distances (see table 5) to get to school and in some cases they did so on empty stomachs. For example, Karin (learner) said: *“Sometimes I come to school with a taxi, but my mother cannot afford it, so mostly I walk to school.”*

The message that can be communicated here is that learners at risk of school failure find it hard to concentrate on learning tasks after walking long distances to get to school. As was reported earlier, learners slept during lessons due to hunger and exhaustion. This is a serious issue and the Ministry of Education, supported by the efforts of the school, should try to address the issue because no hungry child will be able to learn effectively.

Findings further revealed that learners at risk of school failure did not have sufficient parental support for school work. Anna (learner): *“No, he (father) does not get time for that, he is always out of the house.”* Teachers and parents stated that learners were not motivated to learn by the parents. Instead, they were threatened and subjected to corporal punishment if their report cards indicated poor academic performance. This negative reinforcement would not motivate learners as was hoped by the parents, but is more likely to increase the risk of school failure.

Consequently, the learners and teachers felt that parents had no interest in learners' school work. In addition to this, the majority of the parents were uneducated and could not help the learners with homework. As reasonable as this may sound,

parents should not hide behind this excuse; they could show interest in the learners' school work by asking learners about what they were taught that day; looking through their books or asking them to read their homework out loud. Tom (learner): *"My father told me he does not have time to waste on my school work; it is my responsibility."* Learners who believe that their parents did not care about their school work are likely to lose interest and commitment to school work, which might result in low motivation and ultimately poor academic performance.

However, for the few parents that were actively involvement in education, their involvement may be described as minimal. For example, teachers were of the opinion that school-parent relationship was poor or non-existent and there was no parental support to the school in terms of disciplining the learners and buying learning materials. Parents, however, felt that they did their part since they paid the school fees, fed the learners and instructed them to go to school. Mrs. Hoebes (parent) said: *"Yes I am involved in her school, I tell her to do her homework."* This was contradicted by one learner who pointed out that he left home wearing his school uniform but did not reach school, and his parents had never found out. Therefore, some of the parents might have said those things to create a good image of them. Based on the findings that 80% of the parents had no knowledge of the role of a school board, there is a need for parent-school discussions that would help parents understand their role in education. Mrs. Naruses (parent): *"I do not know anything about the school board."*



Also, emanating from the data were family problems experienced by learners at risk of school failure. It was reported earlier that some of the learners failed to do their homework due to disturbances from parents and siblings under the influence of alcohol, disputes between parents, and too many house chores. Suzan (learner): *“My father disturbs me very much, if you want to study; he comes drunk and starts quarrelling with us over small things. In the end, I do not do my home work.”* This means that learners were deprived of role models and were negatively influenced. One teacher stated that learners wasted much of their study time on using alcohol and drugs, while some learners laboured their time away on the house chores. Neils (learner) said: *“I see children of 15-18 years old drinking and smoking on the street.”* This communicates lack of parental supervision and care, and explains the teacher’s observation that there was a high rate of learner absenteeism, late coming and truancy. Furthermore, one learner stated that some learners dropped out of school because of alcohol and drug abuse; similarly these learners are at an increased risk of dropping out of school. Neils (learner): *“They started smoking and drinking and they decided there is no use for school.”*

### **5.1.2 Discussion of results on the social background of learners at risk of school failure**

Results on this question communicated the need for positive modelling in society. Exposure to activities of violence such as: robbing, stabbing, swearing, fighting, drinking and smoking will be carried over into schools, since learners are good imitators of adults. Levi (learner): *“I see kids smoking, taking drugs and involved in criminal activities such as robbing people off their things.”* For example, research

findings revealed that some learners considered swearing as the normal form of communication because that is what was accepted in society must be good for school as well. This argument was supported by Lawson (1991) who also noted that learners do not develop in a vacuum but instead they observe and experience the events in the society. Therefore, learners are at risk of being caught up in the cycle of violence. One learner stated that she saw young girls impregnated by older men; the message here is that without proper parental supervision, learners are at risk of engaging in risky sexual behaviour that has the potential to increase the risk of dropping out of school or being infected with HIV/AIDS. Saara (learner) said: *“I see young girls (teenagers) that are getting pregnant by big guys sometimes their older women come and fight with the young girls over guys.”*

Furthermore, research findings indicate that the social climate was a barrier to meaningful learning. The majority of the learners lived in a social setting consisting of many cuca shops that are always playing loud music and making loud noise that made it hard for the learners to study. Anna (learner): *“There is a shebeen nearby our house and there often people are fighting over alcohol. The noise is so much you cannot even study.”* Consequently, failure to study increases the risk of school failure.

It appears from the data, that there was lack of safety for the learners within the community and even more so when they walk from home to school. Many learners indicated that they had experienced violence either in terms of physical pain, sexual harassment or loss of valuable possessions on their way to school. Emily (learner):

*“Yes, I was attacked last trimester; there were two of us going to school to collect our reports. One man touched my breast and my lap. After that they instructed us to run while they were throwing stones at us. I was afraid to be stabbed because that is what they do usually if you do not have a cell phone or money.”*

If schooling was associated with danger or lack of safety, then many learners would prefer to stay at home and be safe. Learners could not concentrate in class because they were concerned and worried about their safety when they return home. Simply by virtue of attending school, learners were at risk of sexual harassment, rape, loss of learning materials and physical pain which have a negative influence on their academic performance and interest in school. As explained by Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model these Meso-systemetic difficulties unfortunately also occurred in the school.

### **5.1.3 Discussion of results on the school climate of learners at risk of school failure**

Research findings seemed to suggest that learners needed learning support from teachers to assist in their understanding of the subjects where they experienced learning difficulties. The practice of learners who laughed at others for giving incorrect answers was tolerated and accepted by some teachers. Some learners as a matter of concern indicated that they disliked some of the teachers. In addition to that, according to the majority of the learners, there was poor communication between teachers and learners. Poor teacher-relationships communicate lack of care and teacher support for the learners and have the potential to discourage learner

participation in the lessons. For example, negative teachers' responses to the learners such as labelling learners as stupid or telling them they will fail anyway could damage the learners' self-esteem. Tom (learner): "*Teachers that say bad things to the learners for example your face looks like a chicken.*" Learners with low self-esteem are more likely to experience school failure.

Also, emanating from the research data was the need for appropriate motivation from the teachers. For example, comparing learners' test performances and advising learners to pull up their socks are not positive forms of reinforcement and as in the latter case; it is easier said than done. Classroom climate encouraged competitive learning rather than cooperative learning thus denying learners with learning difficulties an opportunity to learn from the gifted learners through peer tutoring. There is more support on this in the work of Schmidt (1996) who noted that the way learners learn and develop is dependent on the social relationships around them. In addition to that, teachers felt that because they were unmotivated by their supervisors, they were justified in not motivating the learners. This, however, is not acceptable since motivation is an essential ingredient for successful learning, without which learners are at a greater risk of school failure; this perspective is given weight by Diaz and Carnal (1999).

The data also showed that the school was ill-equipped in terms of teaching/learning facilities such as: library, science laboratory, access to technology, shortage of textbooks and chairs. Mrs. Mutinga (parent): "*Your school needs a library and a laboratory.*" Another way of viewing this evidence is; learners are placed at risk

when the school cannot respond to them in a manner that supports and enables their maximum social, emotional, and intellectual growth and development (Mayberry, 2003). This means that, both teachers and learners found it difficult to teach/learn without the necessary resources.

## **5.2 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS REGARDING PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNERS AT RISK OF SCHOOL FAILURE**

Data discussion will be done in the following manner: firstly, a discussion on the learning interests of learners at risk of school failure, followed by the parents' and teachers' attitude towards learners at risk of school failure and then a discussion on the feelings of learners at risk of school failure.

### **5.2.1 Discussion of results regarding the learning interests of learners at risk of school failure**

Responses given on the learners' interviews revealed that the majority of the learners valued the non-academic activities of school more than academic activities. This shows that learners were lazy and had no interest in school work. Mrs. Shiikwa (teacher): *“Most of these learners are lazy, undisciplined, not motivated and already too big for their shoes.”* However it could also be that the curriculum was presented in a way that failed to attract the learners' attention. Levi (learner) noted that; *“They (teachers) must put some adrenaline in their teaching, be humorous, show interest in what they teach and make learners more interested in their subjects. As it is now, they make me feel sleepy and bored and they take out their stress on us learners.”* Owing to the learners' poor literacy skills, it was hard for learners to interact with

the curriculum thus finding joy in the non-academic school events such as prize-giving and sports which do not require literacy skills. As a result the majority of the learners indicated that they had learning difficulties mostly in the science subjects. In the same vein, Butler-Por (1987) argues that learners at risk appear lazy, disinterested in school, bored and has learning difficulties in some subjects.

Findings further revealed that some teacher attributes increased the risk of school failure. For example, negative teacher attitude towards learners made the learners dislike the teacher and the subject altogether. Saara (learner): *“No, some subjects that I do not like the teachers. I do not pay attention in those classes.”* In addition to that, the majority of the learners felt that the teaching methods used were not interesting and they lost focus of the lessons and did not find learning enjoyable. Learners who lack interest in learning would not be motivated to learn but are at a greater risk of school failure.

### **5.2.2 Discussion of results regarding the parents’ and teachers’ attitudes towards the learners at risk of school failure**

Findings from learners’ interviews showed that although the majority of the learners were not motivated by the teachers or parents, parents had unrealistic expectations. Tom (learner): *“My mother just keeps quiet, but dad complains and tells me he expects me to get A’s in all my subjects.”* From the learners’ perspective, parents have a victim syndrome; they mainly blamed the learners for poor academic performance. In an attempt to discourage poor academic performance, the majority of learners stated that parents used corporal punishment, which was more likely to

reinforce the belief that learners were failures at school work. Mrs. Palmer (parent): *“He did not do well the first term and I beat him up until the blood was flowing.”*

Furthermore, research findings revealed that the majority of the learners were in need of teacher-learning support to compensate for lack of parental support with school work. Although the majority of the learners indicated that they had poor behaviour, they felt that this was a good reason for the lack of teacher-learning support. Desperate to get assistance with school work, one learner paid her brother a small fee; this is a loud cry for help. Selina (learner): *“No, only my brother helps me sometimes with my homework if he is happy that day. Mostly he helps me when he needs money to buy his cigarettes, so he helps me and I pay him. If I do not have money to pay him, he will not help me.”* However, without this much-needed learning support from the teachers, learners are at an increased risk of school failure. In light of this, the school should introduce compensatory teaching to help learners with learning difficulties.

### **5.2.3 Discussion of results regarding the feelings of learners at risk of school failure**

Research findings from learners’ interviews showed that the majority of the learners performed poorly in tests. Learners felt stressed, nervous and afraid during tests due to poor preparation for the test. This shows that the majority of the learners had a negative attitude towards learning. Levi (learner): *“But I must say, I feel useless to write a test that I did not study for; there are times that I ask myself, what am I doing in school? It is better to quit and get a job.”* As reported earlier, the majority

of the learners blamed themselves for failing the test or the teacher for not explaining well. This experience of failure led the majority of the learners to perceive themselves as useless and hopeless. In the same way, Parker (2003) pointed out that, learners at risk have low self-concept of themselves as “inadequate, helpless, and perhaps worthless.” Learners that have no hope of achieving in school are at risk of dropping out of school.

Also emanating from the findings, there is a need for a learning classroom climate where learners could work together and help each other to understand the school work. Tom (learner): *“I also like it when we are able to work together and help one another to understand our school work.”* At present, the majority of the learners described the classroom climate as characterized by lack of respect, poor peer relations, bullying and inappropriate behaviour. Bennie (learner): *“They interrupt me when I talk and I feel all alone.”* For example, the majority of the learners felt that there was lack of teacher respect as some of the learners would challenge the teacher’s authority by back chatting to the teacher. Tom (learner): *“Learners telling teachers: you are not my mother, you cannot tell me what to do.”* These were the consequences of lack of parental supervision and guidance; learners were not taught morals and values by the parents as stated by the majority of the teachers.



### **5.3 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS ON TEACHERS' AND PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNERS AT RISK OF SCHOOL FAILURE**

Data discussion will be done in the following way: Firstly, a discussion on behaviours of learners at risk of school failure, secondly, a discussion on the academic abilities of learners at risk of school failure, followed by a discussion on the educational needs of learners at risk of school failure and then the attitude towards learning of learners at risk of school failure.

#### **5.3.1 Discussion of results regarding the behaviours of learners at risk of school failure**

Responses to questions on teachers' interviews revealed that the majority of the learners had behavioural problems and had no respect for either the teachers or learners. Despite the school rules that states that learners may not behave in a disgraceful, improper or indecent manner, in some cases it was indicated that learners behaved inappropriately. For example, the majority of the learners indicated that they felt unhappy when other learners showed their private parts in the classroom or were touching girls' breasts and buttocks. Diana (learner): *"Boys like touching girls on their private parts. The boys in our class do not behave mature (maturely), for example, they want to touch girls' boobs (breasts) and bums (buttocks) and they even try to kiss girls by force."* The message here is that learners were sexually harassed by other learners right on the school premises. This shows that there is a need to educate learners on appropriate and acceptable public behaviour and sexual conduct. The implication here is that learners who fail to develop social skills are likely to experience school failure.

Furthermore, the majority of the teachers maintained that learners had no interest in school and were always arriving late at school. It appears that teachers had nothing good to say about their learners; most of the teachers generally were very negative. Mrs. Mukuve: *“They (learners) are not motivated and because of that, they are not serious with school work. Some of them have got behavioural problems.”* However, learners might be late because they lived far from the school and had to walk over long distances to reach school. Karin (learner): *“No, to be on time at school I have to wake up at four am.”* Also, findings showed that the majority of the teachers were unhappy because of the indiscipline in the classroom; as such teachers reverted to corporal punishment in an attempt to restore order to the classroom. However, corporal punishment implies that learners learn in fear and not for the joy of learning itself, instead teachers should employ alternative ways of dealing with misbehaviour as described in the Ministry of Education draft titled discipline from within. It should be pointed out that corporal punishment is abolished from Namibian schools and a teacher who administers corporal punishment commits misconduct and should be given any disciplinary action, according to the Education Act section 56 (2001). As such, learners are likely to become rebellious against learning and would be at risk of dropping out of school. Mr. Nashidengo (teacher): *“Challenging; hard to pull them to the expected line, as some even become rebellious against their own education.”*

### **5.3.2 Discussion of results regarding the academic abilities of learners at risk of school failure**

Findings from teachers' interviews suggest that poor literacy skills were the main barrier to learning and as a result, the majority of the learners had learning difficulties which in turn could have resulted into their behavioural difficulties as mentioned before. Mrs. Brown (teacher): "*Basically 80% of the learners are special cases, meaning that they have learning difficulties.*" Further, the majority of the teachers stated that learners had a low level of understanding and their academic performance was below average. Also, emanating from these findings is the fact that learners were disadvantaged at primary school; where teachers failed to lay the foundation that would ensure success at the secondary level of education. The school failed to transform into a school conducive for learners at risk by not doing something to solve this problem.

Data also showed that when these poor literacy skills were reflected in the learners' written work, the majority of the teachers felt frustrated, hopeless and stated that their experience of teaching these learners was demanding and challenging. Clearly, the teachers have given up hope; one teacher stated that it would require a miracle to make these learners pass. Mrs. Mukuve (teacher): "*Below average, the least you can expect*" as she described the learners' academic performance. This has a negative impact on the learners' self-esteem; low teacher expectations increase the risk of school failure through the self-fulfilling prophecy. These findings were supported by Meighan (1986) who suggested that learners tend to perform as well as or as badly as their teacher expects.

### **5.3.3 Discussion of results regarding the educational needs of learners at risk of school failure**

Respondents had much to say to teacher interview question number 5. The majority of them suggested that learners did not have a well-trained life skills teacher to guide and motivate the learners. Although the school has a life skills teacher, it seems that s/he had too many promotional subjects and hence neglected her/his life skills duties. For example, one teacher stated that learners had many social/emotional problems that were ignored by the school; therefore, there is a need for a school counsellor who will work with the life skills teacher to give learners emotional support. Mr. Kamati (teacher): *“Counselling; they have special needs that are being ignored. And they seem to have problems at home. Some may be in abusive homes in terms of work load i.e. have many chores to do at home.”* Equivalent findings are drawn from the work of Diaz & Carnal (1990), in which most respondents reported that the remediation efforts involved counselling learners at risk and their parents, usually without teacher participation. The teachers should identify the vulnerable learners and refer them to the regional counsellor to ensure that learners received the emotional support they needed.

Furthermore, the majority of the teachers maintained that the problem of poor literacy skills could be reduced through remedial teaching by retired language teachers. The present teachers felt that they were not well-trained to assist in this regard. Finally, all teachers put stress on school facilities such as a library, science laboratory and computers; the presence, maximum utilization and integration of these have the power to motivate learners to study and perform well in their school

work. In addition to that, the majority of the teachers maintained that the school should try to provide food to the learners to maximize their learning opportunity.

#### **5.3.4 Discussion of results regarding the attitude towards learning of learners at risk of school failure.**

Findings from teacher interviews revealed that the majority of the teachers perceived learners as having a negative attitude towards learning. Mr. Davids (teacher): *“I thought I will change the learners’ attitude towards learning immediately, however, as time passed I realized that they were not changeable; they are hard to change. Learners are not willing to learn and are not motivated.”* One teacher stated that learners had a tendency to abstain from learning tasks such as class work, homework, and tests. This was as a result of the learners’ poor understanding of the instructions because the majority of learners could not read and write. The majority of the teachers were of the opinion that learners had no interest in what was taught in school mainly because they attend school to please their parents. Ms. Garises (teacher): *“With these kids the reason why they come to school is because they are forced by their parents and not because they have something they want to achieve through school.”*

The message communicated here is that the majority of the learners were not motivated to attend school. As a result, the majority of teachers stated that the school had a high rate of learner absenteeism. Findings from teacher interviews have provided a new definition of learner absenteeism; it appears that when a learner is physically present in the classroom but mentally elsewhere; this was also referred to

as absenteeism. In the same way Hixson (1993) noted that, we have more to fear when learners are mentally absent from learning experiences because it is a way of internally dropping out of school. It follows that learners who attend school physically but were mentally absent are at a higher risk of school failure since there was no learning taking place.

#### **5.4 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS ON ENCOURAGING LEARNERS TO TAKE CHARGE OF THEIR OWN LEARNING**

Data discussion will be done as follows: firstly, a discussion on the role of the school in encouraging learners at risk of school failure to take charge of their own learning; secondly, a discussion on the role of teachers in encouraging learners to take charge of their own learning, followed by the role of parents in encouraging learners at risk of school failure to take charge of their own learning, then the role of learners in encouraging learners at risk of school failure to take charge of their own learning.

##### **5.4.1 Discussion of results regarding the role of the school in encouraging learners at risk of school failure to take charge of their own learning**

Responses to learner interview questions revealed that the majority of the learners indicated that the risk of school failure could be reduced through learning support such as additional classes and afternoon study offered by the school. Uncle Gariseb (parent): *“Maybe offer after school classes so she can improve in the subjects that she is weak.”* The majority of the parents were in agreement with the learners, that the school should offer learning support to help learners understand the school work.

As reported earlier, the majority of the learners had poor literacy skills that would have enabled them to succeed in school; unless this issue is addressed first, additional classes would not be effective.

Further, all the respondents (learners, teachers, and parents) stated that, teaching/learning facilities and materials have the potential to reduce the risk of school failure. Much of the learning takes place outside school and often than not, the majority of the learners affected by poverty do not have any access to books and learning materials at home to aid with the integration of what was taught in school. Therefore, a library would have ensured that learners had access to information and reading books that they could take home. However, once again, unless learners were able to read and write, a library would not be very effective in reducing the risk of school failure. Furthermore, this will require teachers to be role models to encourage learners to read and develop a reading culture which is lacking in the community and hence in the school as a meso-system.

From the findings of learners' interviews, learners revealed that the school and teachers should motivate them in order to reduce the risk of school failure. Suzan (learner): *"Yes, they must motivate the children and the teachers must not be rude to them and they must not beat the children."* This implies that the school has to create the desire for learning and increase the learners' interest in school. It is further suggested that the school curriculum should offer subjects/fields of study that are of interest to the learners. There is overwhelming support for this in Kohl (1994) who argues that a rich curriculum gives learners the opportunity to be successful not just

in academics but also in art, music, sports, community service, and in helping their peers. This perspective was shared by the majority of the teachers as well. When learners are interested in what is taught in school, they will be motivated to learn and reduce the risk of school failure.

Findings from the teachers' interviews further revealed that there was a need for the school to establish a reading programme that would help learners to acquire the essential literacy skills for successful schooling. Wesley (learner): "*No, I do not know how to read.*" Furthermore, teachers stated that they needed to be trained on how to successfully engage learners at risk in the learning process. Clearly, the majority of the teachers are at a crossroad of how to teach the learners and reduce the risk of school failure. In addition to that, the majority of the teachers maintained that home factors could be reduced by accommodating learners in a hostel. This might prove to be challenging for the majority of learners affected by poverty, since macro-systemic problems like poverty will continue interfering while learners are in the hostel e.g. no money for cosmetics and other basic needs for the learners.

#### **5.4.2 Discussion of results regarding the role of the teachers in encouraging learners at risk of school failure to take charge of their own learning**

The data from learners' interviews showed that the majority of learners would have enjoyed learning if teachers used creative teaching methods and promoted cooperative learning in the classrooms. This included that lesson presentation should be interesting so as to facilitate learner participation in the lesson through relating subject content to real life experiences. Joseph (learner): "*Lesson presentation*



*should be interesting and help the learners to remember what they are taught.”*

This perspective is given weight by Caine &Caine (1991) who noted that learners should have a way to relate to the subject in terms of what is personally important. This means acknowledging both the emotional impact and their deeply held needs and drives. All these, combined with positive teacher attitudes towards learners; teacher encouragement and motivation lead to happy learners in the classroom which fosters success in school. The majority of the learners stated that they would have been motivated if their academic performance was good. Experience of success in school has the power to reduce the risk of school failure through developing a high level of school satisfaction in learners.

The data also showed that the majority of the learners indicated that teachers gave too much homework or homework that was too easy for them. Consequently, learners were not motivated to do their homework. One learner stated that homework was useless and should not be given; instead the teachers should give more class work. Selina (learner): *“Teachers should give more class work instead of homework, because my classmates can help me to do the work.”* This shows that learners were happy to work in groups and have the learning support from both the teacher and learners that is lacking at home.

#### **5.4.3 Discussion of results regarding the role of the parents in encouraging learners at risk of school failure to take charge of their own learning**

Data from learners’ interviews indicated that the majority of the learners would thrive in school if they had parental support in their school work. Although parents

were uneducated, they should try to communicate care and interest in school matters. Mercy (learner): *“My aunt should understand that everybody deserves a second chance in life. I want her to have confidence in me that I will pass grade 10, instead of keeping telling me that I am going to fail already.”* Furthermore, the majority of the learners indicated that if parents motivated them, they would academically perform better. In the same way, the majority of the teachers indicated that parental involvement is crucial to successful learning. As mentioned earlier, this might require creating parent awareness of the role of the school board to actively involve parents in education.

#### **5.4.4 Discussion of results regarding the role of the learners in encouraging learners at risk of school failure to take charge of their own learning**

Research findings from learners’ interviews revealed that the majority of the learners needed to be active participants in the learning process. This however, could be achieved if the majority of the learners changed their negative attitude towards learning. Therefore, the majority of the learners stated that they need to be more serious in class and do their homework; it is time to shape up and no more jokes. Selina (learner): *“Learners should change their manners towards their school work and become more serious with their school work. We must start working hard, no more jokes; we must be serious.”* Also from these findings, the majority of the learners suggested that they had to improve their behaviour in the classroom. This shows that success in school requires learners to change and become more responsible, goal-directed and self-disciplined.

## **5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The results discussed above raised many issues concerning learners at risk of school failure. The recommendations that follow emanate from the results and discussions reported earlier and will be presented according to the following categories: *educational practice, educational theory, and future research.*

### **1. Educational Practice**

1.1 It became evident that learners at risk of school failure are vulnerable children that lived in single-parent households or with guardians. Many of the learners had no idea where their fathers were. The majority of the learners lived in abusive homes where they had too many house chores to do before focusing on their school work. In addition to that, learners did not have parental support with school work; this shows lack of parental care, supervision, and attention. Parental involvement in education was minimal therefore parents had no knowledge of the role of the school board. As a result, learners turned to teachers for love and care, and when their efforts fail, they lose interest in school. For example, poor learner-parent relationship was given as one of the reasons for learners' lack of interest in school. Therefore, they are at risk of dropping out of school.

1.1.1 Based on these findings I recommend that parents and the community should become more involved in the education of the learners. In addition to that parents should be made aware

of the importance of an active school board by the school through parent-school meetings.

1.2 Another issue that came out of the findings was that, learners at risk of school failure were affected by poverty; they had to walk over long distances to reach school; in most cases they did that on empty stomachs and as a result did not find learning enjoyable. Teachers and learners indicated that, learners slept during lessons due to hunger and exhaustion. It is the researcher's belief that a hungry learner will not be able to learn effectively.

1.2.1 Based on these findings, I recommend that the school with the help of the Ministry of Education should establish a feeding programme for the learners.

1.2.2 Furthermore, I recommend that the school should negotiate with neighbouring schools to accommodate some of the learners in their hostels.

1.3 The results showed that the majority of learners at risk of school failure are not safe when they commute to school. Nearly half of the learners who participated in the study had been personally attacked while walking in the street. Learners live in fear of being robbed, raped, sexually harassed or subjected to physical pain. As a result, learners are at risk of

being caught up in the street violence and this is incompatible with their education.

1.3.1 Because of these findings I recommend that the school should work together with the community to clear the riverbeds and reduce the risk of learners being attacked on their way to school. In addition the mindsets of the community should be addressed through educational community programmes through the churches, and shebeens and defence classes to empower girls and boys to protect themselves.

1.3.2 In addition to that, the school should ask the Ministry of Education (MoE) through the regional office and the Ministry of Defence to use defence force members to patrol the unsafe areas during the times that learners commute to school and back home.

1.4 It is also became evident that the school environment was not accommodative of the learners' educational needs in terms of providing emotional and learning support to help learners improve their academic performance. Teachers also lacked the willingness to make school a place of positive encounters for learners. The school lacked teaching/learning facilities and materials such as a library, science laboratory, computers, text books, and chairs. In addition to that, the

curriculum was described as exclusive of some learners who would have excelled in practical subjects than academics.

1.4.1 Based on these findings I recommend that the Ministry of Education should build a library, science laboratory and a computer lab and buy textbooks and chairs for the learners to ensure effective teaching and learning.

1.4.2 In addition to that, I recommend that NIED should consider revising the curriculum to make provisions for learners who excel at practical subjects and to ensure that the curriculum is accommodative of the interests of all types of learners.

1.5 Another issue that came out was that learners at risk of school failure have poor literacy skills. As a result, learners have low level of motivation and tend to perceive themselves as slow learners. For the majority of the learners, poor understanding of the subject content was the main reason for their failure to do homework.

1.5.1 Therefore, I recommend that the school should as a matter of urgency; appeal to the Ministry of Education through the regional office; to provide funds for remedial teaching in English to ensure that all learners can read and write.

1.5.2 In addition to that, the school should provide learning support for the learners through additional classes and afternoon study.

1.5.3 Moreover, I recommend that the school should establish a reading programme aimed at improving the learners' literacy skills and encourage learners to read.

1.6 Learners' indiscipline and negative attitude towards homework led to the occasional use of corporal punishment in the classrooms by some teachers. Furthermore, teachers indicated that they were frustrated and hopeless regarding teaching learners at risk and thought that they would require training on how to effectively teach these learners.

1.6.1 I recommend that the Advisory teachers should provide workshops that would help teachers understand the educational needs of learners at risk of school failure, find alternative ways of dealing with poor behaviour, and sensitize them on creative teaching methods that would make learning interesting for **all** learners.

1.6.2 I recommend that professional development as supported by ETSIP should become a daily part of teaching; by ensuring that teachers are exposed to professional development opportunities. The school can realise new learning for all

learners and ensure teaching that is responsive to a wide range of learners' needs.

1.6.3 Given the importance of homework in improving the learning outcomes; I recommend that, school boards, school inspectors, school principals as well as teachers should take the opportunity to encourage parents to ensure that the homework has been done, and show an interest in the homework by helping if they can and certainly looking at the school work of their children.

## **2. Educational Theory**

2.1 A theoretical issue that came out of the findings was that the majority of learners at risk of school failure attended school physically but were mentally absent from the learning tasks.

2.1.1 I recommend that teachers should be made aware of this issue for them to teach in such a manner that they effectively engage all learners in the learning tasks.

2.2 Another theoretical issue was that motivation to learn requires role models that society failed to provide for learners at risk of school failure. Positive modelling of community members who excelled at



school has the power to boost the level of motivation to improve academic achievement of learners; which was not the case for the majority of learners in this study. As a result, learners at risk of school failure feared that they too might end up unemployed like their parents or drop out of school like their peers.

2.2.1 Because of these findings I recommend that the school should invite community members that have excelled in school despite their disadvantaged backgrounds to motivate the learners.

### **3. Future Research**

2.3 Based on the point that majority of learners at risk of school failure were physically present but mentally absent from the learning tasks, I recommend that research be carried out on which school factors contribute to learners being at risk of internally dropping out of school as this study could not look into this matter.

2.4 Given the findings that the majority of learners at risk of school failure had low literacy skills, I recommend that a study be conducted on what factors influences the reading and spelling abilities of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## **5.6 CONCLUSION**

Good grades and a quiet classroom are often what a teacher values. But, what if learners come to class looking for something else? Experiences of school failure reach far beyond the context of school and education. The aim of this research was not to find a solution to the problem of school failure and underachievement. The focal point of the investigation was to explore the perceptions and educational needs of grade 10 learners at risk of school failure. The research was guided by the following questions.

1. What are the characteristics that are predictive of school failure?
2. What are the perceptions of learners at risk of school failure?
3. How do the parents and teachers perceive learners at risk of school failure?
4. How can learners at risk of school failure be encouraged to take charge of their own learning?

Responses to these questions have provided some evidence that a number of variables related to learners' home, social and school background and personal characteristics contribute to the risk of school failure. Mayberry (2003) is not alone in adopting the view that learners are not at risk by their own doing but are placed at risk by several factors that are beyond their control. Evidence from this study showed that in most cases, learners at risk of school failure are from poor single-parent households. Because of poverty, these learners walk long distances to get to school in unsafe neighbourhoods and arrive late at school. Consequently, learners are at risk of being robbed, bullied, sexually harassed, raped, and or subjected to

physical pain as they walk to school. This, in turn, increases the risk of learners dropping out of school.

Further evidence showed that learners at risk of school failure lack role models, combined with lack of parental support for school work. Teachers seemed to shift the blame on the parents, while they could not even buy a text book. Teachers failed to serve as role models; they used violence, swore and humiliated the learners. Learners at risk had low motivation and appear to be lazy and disinterested in school. Exposure to people in the community that were drinking, smoking, swearing and fighting implies that learners were at risk of alcohol and drug abuse as they imitate the trends in the society. Learners also indicated that they were afraid of ending up unemployed like their parents or dropping out of school like their peers.

The findings further revealed that both the teachers and parents blamed the child for poor academic performance. Teachers indicated that these learners lack commitment and were not interested in the school work. However, the main problem for all this lies with the learners' poor literacy skills that made it almost impossible for learners at risk to interact with the curriculum. Furthermore, teachers felt that learners were present physically but mentally absent. Being absent mentally or physically might not be due to the relationship between school and the learner, but simply due to the learner's life situations. *"Everyone says that I have difficulties to concentrate, but that is not true. I just concentrate on the wrong things"* (a learner in Henricksson, 2004, p.141). Teachers need to have some sense of what learners bring with them,

what defines their mood, present understanding, emotional state and readiness to deal with the subject matter and the world of school.

Also from the findings, the majority of the learners felt hopeless, useless and worthless as a result of poor academic performance; for example, when learners failed a test. As a result, learners at risk had low self-esteem and did not find learning enjoyable. They preferred non-academic activities of school to learning. Despite all these, many respondents (learners, and parents) were positive about reducing the risk of school failure through meeting educational needs such as; learning support and additional classes for learners with learning difficulties. In addition to that, all respondents were in agreement that provision of teaching/learning facilities such as a library, science laboratory and computers has the potential to reduce the risk of school failure. However, crucial to all these efforts is remedial teaching and a reading programme to ensure that all learners acquired good literacy skills for successful learning. Therefore, I concur with the general belief that the way to change the world is not through improving the learners but by improving the learners' world.

It is clear from the above-mentioned information that the majority of grade 10 learners have unique educational needs, which if not satisfied result in learners being at risk of school failure.

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## **APPENDICES**

1. Learners' Interview
2. Teachers' Interview
3. Parents' Interview
4. Observation Schedule
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**APPENDIX A****LEARNERS' INTERVIEW****Standardized open-ended interview for the learners**

I am Faustina Neshila conducting a research project on the grade 10 learners' perceptions and educational needs at Khomastura Project School. The research is a requirement for my Master of Education degree at the University of Namibia. Your answers to the questions I am going to ask you will help me understand your educational needs and concerns. The information gathered will be treated as confidential and used for research purposes only. I will appreciate it if you could answer the questions honestly. Thank you. Before we start, do you have any questions for me?

**QUESTIONS****A. Characteristics of the learners**

1. Where do you live?
2. Do you live close to the school? Explain your answer
3. How do you come to school?
4. Do you live with your parents?
5. Are your parents employed?
6. What do your parents do?
7. What are some of the things you see or hear when you are in your neighbourhood?

8. Have you ever witnessed any violence on your street?
9. Would you say it is safe to walk from your home to school? Explain your answer.
10. Have you ever been attacked while walking in the street? Explain your answer.

## **B. Learners' self Perception**

### **Learning Interests**

1. What do you think is your best subject?
2. Why do you like this subject?
3. What is your worst subject(s)? Explain your answer.
4. What are some of the things you learn in school?
5. Are the things you learn important to you? Explain.
6. What happens in the classroom that makes you feel happy?
7. Would you come to school if you had a choice? Explain your answer.
8. What would you miss about school?
9. Do you enjoy learning? Explain your answer.
10. What are some of the things you like in school?
11. Do you expect to pass all your exams at the end of the year? Explain your answer.

### **Teachers' and parents' behaviours towards learners at risk**

12. How do your parents/guardians respond when they receive your report card?
13. Do your parents/guardians help you with your school work?
14. How do teachers respond when you did not do your homework?
15. How do teachers or parents motivate you to perform better in your school work?
16. Would you say that teachers are available for additional classes? Explain

your answer.

17. What are some of the things that you discuss with your parent/guardian after a parent school meeting?

### **Learners' Feelings**

18. How do you feel when you have to write tests?
19. What happens in the classroom that makes you feel unhappy?
20. What are some of the things that children in your class do that you do not like?
21. How do you feel when other learners have performed better than you in a test?
22. How do you feel when teachers give you home work?

### **C. Encouraging learners at risk to take charge of their own learning**

1. Do you know some learners who have dropped out of school?
2. If yes, do you have any idea why they dropped out of school?
3. In your opinion, how can teachers make learning enjoyable for you?
4. Is there something that the school can do to make the grade 10 learners' performance better?
5. What would you like to see happen in the classroom?
6. What can your parents/guardians do to help you succeed in your school work?

THANK YOU!

**APPENDIX B****TEACHERS' INTERVIEW****Standardized open-ended interview for the grade 10 teachers**

1. How long have you been a teacher?
2. Have you taught at another school before? If yes, how did you feel when you first started teaching at this school?
3. How would you describe the learners you have at this school?
4. Would you say you understand your learners?
  3. What are some of the educational needs of your learners?
  4. How did you find the experience of teaching such learners?
  5. How would you rate their academic performance?
  6. What do you think are some of the reasons for their performance?
  7. How would you describe their attitude towards learning?
  8. What are some of the things that happen in class that you are not happy with?
  9. How do you feel when you are marking their written work?
  10. How is the relationship between the school and the parents of the learners?
  11. What do you think can be done to improve the academic achievement of learners?

THANK YOU!

**APPENDIX C**

**PARENTS' INTERVIEW**

**Standardized open-ended interview for Parents/guardian**

1. How big is your family?
2. Please explain your relationship with your child?
3. Why did you decide to take your child to this school?
4. What type of activities do you do together as a family?
5. Would you say you are actively involved in the education of your child?  
Explain your answer.
6. What is the role of the school board at your child's school?
7. What future dreams do you have for your child?
8. How did you react when you saw your child's report card?
9. How is the academic performance of your child?
10. What do you think are some of the things that affected his/her academic performance?
11. What do you do in collaboration with teachers to help your child learn better?
12. Do you think there is something that can be done to help your child perform?

THANK YOU!

**APPENDIX D****OBSERVATION SCHEDULE****Physical Settings**

1. Where is the school located?
2. What physical settings and environments form their classrooms?
3. What sights, sounds, smells, tastes and textures are found in the classroom that the learners at risk use?
4. What learning materials are available to learners at risk?
5. What technologies are accessible to the learners at risk in the classroom?
6. How do the learners at-risk allocate and use space and physical objects?
7. Does the teacher create a classroom environment that is conducive to learning for all learners including the learners at risk?

**Behaviour of learners at risk**

8. What are the learners at risk doing while teaching is taking place?
9. How does the teacher motivate the learners at risk?
10. What happens when learners at-risk are given homework?
7. What happens when a learner at risk annoys the teacher?
11. What happens on the playground?
12. What are the learners at risk and the teacher doing?
13. How do the learners at risk behave toward one another?
14. What behaviours are repetitive and which occur irregularly?

15. What is the nature of this participation and interaction?

**Activities**

16. In what events or activities are the learners at risk engaged?

17. How are the activities organized and explained?

18. What resources are used in these activities?

19. How are the resources allocated?

**Conversations**

20. What verbal and non-verbal languages do learners at risk use for communication?

21. Who talks and who listens?

22. What is the content of the learners' (at risk) conversations?

23. What beliefs do the content of their conversations demonstrate?

**End of the observation schedule.**



**APPENDIX E****REQUESTS FOR PERMISSION**

Dept. of Mathematics, Science & Sport Education  
 University of Namibia  
 P. O. Box 13301  
 Windhoek

The Regional Director ( Khomas Region)  
 The Ministry of Education  
 Private Bag 13236  
 Windhoek

Dear Madam

**Re: Request for Permission to Undertake Research at Khomastura Project School**

I am Studying for a Masters of Education degree at the University of Namibia. An important requirement of this program is the research project. For my research project, I have chosen to investigate the perceptions and educational needs of grade 10 learners at-risk of school failure at Khomastura Project School, in Khomas Educational Region.

I therefore kindly request permission to collect data using an interview and observation schedule from the grade 10 learners, teachers and their parent/guardian of the above mentioned school. I have chosen this school because the education statistics show that the school has a very low passing rate at grade 10 level.

I shall send a summary of the findings to the school that have participated in the study. And these findings will also be available at the University of Namibia library for public use.

Thanking you in advance for the anticipated favourable response.

Yours Faithfully

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Ms Neshila K. F.

Dept. of Mathematics, Science & Sport Education  
University of Namibia  
P. O. Box 13301  
Windhoek

The Principal ( Khomastura Project School )  
The Ministry of Education  
P. O. Box 70744  
Windhoek

Dear Sir

**Re: Request for Permission to Undertake Research at Khomastura Project School**

I am Studying for a Masters of Education degree at the University of Namibia. As part of the requirements for the Masters of Education degree, I am required to undertake research in the field of education. I have chosen to investigate the perceptions and educational needs of grade 10 learners at-risk of school failure at Khomastura Project School, in Khomas Educational Region.

For the findings of a study of this nature to be useful, honest views of concerned teachers and learners are important. The researcher hopes that the results of the study will provide insight in the educational needs of the current grade 10 learners at-risk of school failure in your school. This information could be used by the Ministry of education to improve the teaching and learning of such learners.

I therefore kindly request permission to collect data using an interview and observation schedule from the grade 10 learners, teachers and their parent/guardian of the above mentioned school. I have chosen your school because the education statistics show that the school has a very low passing rate at grade 10 level.

I would like to assure you that the responses to the interview will bear no name and will be treated confidentially.

I will be pleased to send a summary of the findings to the school for your information and action if you desire.

Thanking you in advance for the anticipated favourable response and co-operation.

Yours Faithfully

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Ms Neshila K. F.

**APPENDIX F**

### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Dept. of Mathematics, Science & Sport Education  
 University of Namibia  
 P. O. Box 13301  
 Windhoek

### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

#### **Title: Educational Needs and Concerns of Grade 10 Learners**

You have been invited to participate in the research about grade 10 educational needs and concerns. If you volunteer to take part in the research, I will need to interview your parents or guardian. The interview will take about 20 minutes of your time.

The information collected from you may be used by the Ministry of Education and your teachers to improve teaching and learning of grade 10 learners. If you volunteer, you may stop or withdraw from the study at any time and you will not be penalized for it. There are no risks from participating in this study. All information that you will provide will be treated as confidential and will be used for research purposes only. The recordings of your speech will be erased and your name and any other identifying information will not be revealed.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may call Dr H. Beukes at 061-2063435, The Chairperson of Postgraduate Studies Committee: Faculty of Education, University of Namibia.

#### **Agreement to Participate in Research**

I have read, or had read to me, the above study and had an opportunity to ask questions, which have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree voluntarily to participate in the study as described.

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Name of Participant

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Signature of Participant

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Signature of Witness

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Date

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Signature of Researcher

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Date