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Editorial note:

Faculty of Humanities Teaching and Learning Colloquium 2025 (T&L Colloquium 25) hosted by the Faculty of Humanities, North-West University, South Africa took place in Rustenburg, South Africa, from September 9-11, 2025, with a rich and stimulating programme filled with inspiring keynotes, contributed papers, workshops and panels. This bi-annual colloquium brings together educators, researchers, students, policymakers, and community practitioners. The main theme of T&L Colloquium 25 was “Reimagining the Future of Humanities Knowledge and Pedagogy: Decoloniality, Technology and the Social Justice Imperative.” This special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Society And Education (JCSE)* contains Thirteen (13) selected papers presented at T&L Colloquium 2025. Selected contributions come from within and outside of South Africa and address a wide range of issues in humanities, decoloniality, technology and the social justice.

The introductory contribution by Tshifhiwa Ignatia Mashau provides an overview of research findings and trends related to the colloquium’s focus on the role of digital humanities and technology in supporting decolonial scholarship. The author’s article which titled “Decolonising digital health promotion in African higher education institutions: A justice-oriented literature review” develops a Digital Health Justice Framework to guide equitable and culturally responsive digital health promotion in African HEIs. A research article by Eyitayo Francis Adanlawo and Mpho Chaka follows with a discussion of emerging career pathways that foreground wellbeing and sustainable development, positioning humanities graduates as key contributors to sustainable and ethical futures. The authors identify novel professional opportunities in sectors including community engagement, policy development, and social innovation. They advocate for an expanded employability paradigm that integrates humanistic knowledge with sustainable development goals, underscoring the vital role of humanities disciplines in shaping resilient, inclusive societies.

The article by Nurain Aboo Mohammed evaluating the use of QR codes as a form of assessment in teaching and learning. The author confirms the potential of QR codes as both a useful and effective medium for assessment in educational settings. Samuel Chukwudi Agunyai and Victor Ojakorotu article “Analyzing the effect of the disconnection between the curriculum and Africa’s indigenous Knowledge on effective learning” argues that Africans’ realities still encompass indigenous knowledge on various levels that can be incorporated into the continent’s school curricula.

Other articles include: Examining the Impact of Digitalization and Inequality Post Covid -19 In Africa by Phuti Ignatius Moloto and Rosinah Pillay; The Omitted Conversation: Incorporating Teacher Union Scholarship for A Transformative Educational Agenda Within the Educational Landscape. Thembinkosi Zwane Trevor, David Matsepe; Examining factors behind an achieving institution: A scenario of secondary schools in Limpopo Province by Ngwako Solomon Modiba; Assessing the role of the COVID-19 catch-up recovery programme on learner performance in EFAL by Vele RJ, Tshikota and TM Badugela; Entrepreneurial Education and Sustainable Entrepreneurship Advancing Sustainable Development Goals in South Africa Through Small Businesses by Lazarus, M. and Beharry-Ramraj, A; Mitigating Grammatical Ambiguity In English Prepositional Phrases At Dzindi Circuit Secondary School, South Africa by Farisani Thomas Nephawe; Exploring the Usage of Metadiscourse in Research Proposals Written by Honours 74

Students by Mzamani Steven Khosa and Ernest Kwesi Klu; and Population Ethics and its implication for Developing Countries by Onwe Peter S. and Kelechi Johnmary Ani. Policy Windows and Missed Opportunities: An Institutional Analysis of How Teacher Unions Influence (or fail to influence) National Educational Policy Formulation by Zwane Thembinkosi Trevor, Matsepe David.

Editor,

Prof. Mpho Chaka

North-West University, South Africa.

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EXAMINING FACTORS BEHIND INSTITUTIONAL ACHIEVEMENT: A SCENARIO OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE

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Abstract

This paper explores a host of factors in secondary schools that earn for an educational institution a label of being an achieving school from the perspective of teachers serving in the School Governing Body and the Representative Council of Learners. The paper was motivated by diverse discourses about learner-achievement, most of which are mainly based on the perspective of professional teachers. This paper is conceptual and empirical in nature within the qualitative research paradigm. The question guiding this paper is: what are the host of factors in secondary schools that earn for an educational institution a label of being an achieving school from the perspective of teachers serving in the School Governing Body and the Representative Council of Learners? Narrative enquiry and interviewing techniques were used to collect data. Out of the population of 15 secondary schools in one of the circuits in Vhembe district in Limpopo Province, South Africa, twelve schools were conveniently sampled. In each of the twelve sampled secondary schools, only six representatives of the teacher components in the School Governing Body and six Chairpersons of the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) became research participants. Briefly, twelve research participants were interviewed and allowed to narrate their versions of achieving secondary schools. Findings revealed that achievement of a school could be ascribed to learner self-efficacy. In addition, achievement could be ascribed to learner-teachability. Furthermore, achieving schools are capable of turning around their underachievement. Moreover, achieving schools do pull everyone in one direction. Furthermore, achieving schools are capable of self-rehabilitating when distressed. On top of that achieving schools have a proactive proclivity. Finally, achieving schools are capable of rolling back grade repetition in no time. In conclusion, achieving learners make an achieving school contrary to the view that it is an achieving school that makes great learners. It is a host of factors that are behind a secondary school being viewed and regarded to be an achieving learning institution. The researcher recommends for schools to learn the art and tactic of picking themselves up and pulling themselves together especially after underachievement.

Keywords: Direction, Greatness, Performance, Proactive, Teachable.

Introduction

In the context of schooling, there are achieving schools and underachieving schools. The two categories of educational institutions are dissimilar. It is a host of factors that trigger each category of schooling. Hence the purpose of this paper is to explore a host of factors in secondary schools that earn for an educational institution a label of an achieving school from the perspective of teachers serving in

the School Governing Body (SGB) and the Representative Council of Learners (RCL). Frequently, achieving schools refer to a good results-producing learning institutions while their opposite refers to the underperforming schools (Kumalo, 2021 & Alanoglu, 2022). This is to imply that an achieving secondary school could be associated with the one that perennially yields impressive academic learner outcomes. Conversely, an underachieving

school is associated with a learning institution that perpetually struggles with brilliant academic outcomes (Sobuwa, 2021 & Maxwell, 2024). One distinguishing feature of an achieving school is that it does not normally get involved in a tit-for-tat leadership squabbles that could plummet the school achievement. On the basis of that an achieving school is hardly associated with underperformance and where underachievement accidentally occurs it does not end up being normalised. Bambalele (2019) advises that searching for why some schools are underachieving, the causative factors of underachievement need to be unveiled. For instance, affording royal treatment to learners has a potential, of leading to achieving secondary schools. Lack of such royal treatment could engender institutional underachievement. In achieving schooling, pupils are not likely to be exposed to monotonous pattern of teaching and learning. Achieving schools are associated with outlandish, manner of teaching and learning which are largely responsive to pupils 'aspirations and values (Allen 2014). The thesis of this paper is that it is achieving learners that make an achieving school not the other way round. Providing participatory teaching and learning space to the current secondary school learners is one of the surest ways of making them and their schools achieve. Van Deventer and Kruger (2010:) recount that 21st century secondary school learners achieve or underachieve on the basis of whether their school revolutionises teaching and learning or not. In achieving schools an enterprise of teaching and learning could have a monumental effect of enabling pupils to desire to achieve, and thus contribute to the creation of an achieving learners in an achieving school (Bada, Tengku, Ariffin & Nordin, 2024; Adanlawo & Nkomo-Asare, 2025).

The manner of teaching and learning in the 21st century secondary schools, needs to be such that the multitudes of learners inside and outside the classroom, are greatly enriched other than massively impoverished (Levin, 2011, Southey, 2012 & Mangena, 2021). As part of being taught differently for efficacious purposes, 21st century secondary school learners require to operate in a vibrant, heart-warming and indescribably competent schooling environment for their consistent achievement. Schooling climate in achieving educational institutions induces teachers to convey an air of serenity to keep nervous learners to be calm and focused to their school work. This becomes part of energizing the mind and inspiring creative thinking in an ebullient schooling space. Progressively instructed learners, stand to foster a credible and incredible classroom learning experiences that are embedded in an institution's radical ideological posture for the continuous achievement of schooling. Where secondary school learners in an achieving school are being taught competently, productively and efficaciously, they are likely to maintain the achievement status of their institution (Coetzee, Van Niekerk & Wydeman 2011, Bodibe, 2012, Memela, 2012 & Kumalo, 2021). Mangena (2021) contends that the distinction between achieving and underachieving schooling is in terms of how each responds and reacts to opportunities and challenges related to instructional practices. Evidently, to a great extent, achieving learners in achieving schools are likely to be decolonised due to their operational spaces being free from colonial entanglements. In addition, the degree of institutional stability in perennially achieving schools could run so deep. The same could be the degree of their organisational harmony. The converse is the case in underachieving schools (Bechtle, 2022 & Maxwell, 2024).

Literature review

Bechtle (2022) approaches achieving secondary schools as unusual schools while underachieving secondary schools are viewed as ordinary educational organisations. This is on the basis of the consistent learner underachievement in ordinary secondary schools. Hence, Bantwini and Moorosi (2023) together with Owen (2015) advise that secondary schools that perennially underachieve, may among others be struggling to accord their learners a royal treatment inside and beyond the classroom life. Maxwell (2024) points out that achieving schools are capable of mending broken learners psychologically and spiritually (Equal Education, 2018 & Meador, 2019). This they do through resetting their institutional confidence with both internal and external stakeholders for their continued magnificent learner achievement. Furthermore, achieving schools are able to avoid being crisis-riddled educational institutions. Such schools do frequently apply their good corporate governance culture and brand to remain stable and continue to experience inherent harmony. Jakes (2023) submits that learners that are studious are at the same time likely to be teachable inside the classrooms. This is praiseworthy because excellent and scholastic achievement of learners originates in the school's classrooms (Gqirana, 2016, Juan & Visser, 2017). Maxwell (2024) maintains that achieving schools do not place self-preservation interests of an individual member ahead of those of a school. Doing so could be tantamount to holding schooling and the country hostage educationally (Ramrathan, 2017). Bada et al., (2024) reveal that achieving schools are naturally resilient in educational pursuits and are known to be preferring action rather than idle talk. Their educational service to the learner population is largely recognisable. Apart from producing exquisite learner results which make almost everybody to

salute them, achieving schools do uplift their communities through innovation and encouraging problem identification and resolution. Such schools become change-makers in their own right and are ever poised to remain leading education providers. This portrays achieving schools to have an image of leading a society to a better and hopeful future (Zhu, Devos, & Li, 2011). Of peculiar nature is that achieving schools continue to redefine achievement for individual learners and for their educational institutions (Mangena, 2021). Zuze and Juan (2020) disclose that in achieving schooling, abiding by policies is commonplace. Furthermore, achieving schools are frequently never bereft of any ethics, solidarity and empathy. As a result of the existence and the prevalence of the mentioned traits, in achieving schools, it is rarer to have a learner loving to style herself a super or prime learner. Learners accept themselves as pupils who have to involve themselves in cooperative learning, displaying mutual empathy to keep the greatness of their educational institutions intact. The implication of the expressed point is that much as impressive scholastic pupil-achievement is envisaged in achieving schools, the personnel expected to produce that mouth-watering learner results, need to be made an integral part of the requisite results to be produced. Hence the emphasis of collaborative learning being underpinned by a spirit of learner-solidarity and empathy.

Alanoglu (2022) stresses that any form of marginalisation of learners in achieving secondary schools is alien. Having disclosed that good learner results produced in achieving educational institutions, commence in the classrooms of schools, it makes sense to argue that where pupils inside a classroom are fortunate to mingle and interact with great-teachers, that partnership could speedily counter perennial learner-

underachievement and replace it with impressive pupil achievement. Hence Lee (2023) unveils that it takes a great-teacher to convert an ordinary learner in an ordinary secondary school into a hero-learner, whose scholastic achievement is ever brilliant and continues to brand a learner's school as an achieving one. Masondo, 2015 and Kumalo, 2021 maintain that the complexity of schooling leads to a situation whereby some educational institutions keep on surviving the stigma of dysfunctionality and underachievement by virtue of having crafted a kind of identity that always associates a school with greatness and achievement. This implies that the kind of brand or identity which an educational institution is being known for could always under normal circumstances works for a school. Mangena (2021) attests that apart from the nature of a brand a school is being famous for, even the kind of an enabling climate at the school could contribute to the flourishing of a school. That is why Malepa (2021) stresses that the multiplicity of factors obtaining in an educational institution, are the drivers and the determinants of whether a schools becomes an achieving one or otherwise. One distinguishable feature of achieving schools is their perpetual strive for the excellent scholastic achievement of its pupils and the institution (Sobuwa, 2021). Teaching and learning in achieving secondary schools remain unique and efficacious for the sake of ushering in the scholastic achievement of pupils. Such is the hallmark of achieving schools (Lara, 2018).

Lee (2023) reminds that when achieving secondary schools are pulling hard, they draw back and reconnect with themselves. This happens as magnificent learner results appear to be evading achieving schools. Achieving schools are known to be capable of creating time to reflect on the strides they have made in their past

educational journey, to learn from them and to be inspired to work hard for excellent learner achievement. Bada et al., (2024) depict achieving schools to be possessing restorative power. This is the kind of a peculiar strength that enables such schools to immediately bounce back after they have had mishap with their schooling results. Achieving schools do learn to achieve harmony within themselves by treasuring goodness and braving difficulties they face (Zwane, 2021). Such schools are capable of embracing the present and everything it offers rather than always being reactive to difficulties, some of which could descend a secondary school into underachievement. Malepa (2021) is emphatic that achieving schools are courageous to free themselves from things that can rob them of their achievement, their functionality and their harmony, which are tried and tested constituent elements of achievement for myriad educational institutions (Olivier, 2012 & Sobuwa, 2021). This section on the review of literature as regards the scholastic achievement of secondary school pupils in achieving schooling, was largely conducted from the point of view of the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) and the representatives of teachers serving in School Governing Bodies (SGBs) (Equal Education, 2018 & Maxwell, 2021).

Methodology

This paper is a qualitative case study. The problem which this paper pursues, namely, inconsistent scholastic learner achievement by some secondary schools, necessitated the design of the paper (Adedoyin, 2021). Furthermore, the objective of the paper which is to explore a host of factors in secondary schools that earn an educational institution a label of being an achieving school from the perspective of teachers serving in the School Governing Body and

Representative Council of Learners, as well necessitated that the paper follows a qualitative research paradigm as against the quantitative one (Creswell, 2021; Chaka & Adanlawo, 2025). The choice of the qualitative methodology was also informed by the reality that the paper is being underscored by two theoretical perspectives, namely, Interpretivism and by the Learning Organisation Philosophy (Moloi, 2005). The researcher saw a need to create a synergy between the two mentioned theoretical perspectives undergirding the paper and the qualitative approach as the overriding research methodology. The combination of the three, helped immensely in terms of illuminating issues of how scholastic achievement of pupils in secondary schools have to be comprehended from the perspectives of teachers serving in the School Governing Body and the Representative Council of Learners (Clark, 2010 & Equal Education, 2018). The researcher utilised the mentioned two theoretical perspectives, namely, Interpretivism and the Learning Organisation Philosophy to explore ways and means of ascertaining that the challenge of underachievement in secondary schools as associated with ordinary secondary schools, is better countered. Persistent underachievement by secondary school pupils, is a worrisome issue warranting attention precisely because it robs a school of an opportunity of being an achieving school. With Interpretivism and the Learning Organisation Philosophy underscoring this paper, as the selected theoretical perspectives, the researcher utilised them to decode what constitutes an achieving school from the perspective of teachers serving in the School Governing Bodies and the Representative Council of Learners. Amalgamating the qualitative research paradigm, Interpretivism and the Learning Organisation Philosophy aimed at maximising the strengths of the three

perspectives to comprehend in its entirety the raging debate of features of achieving schools (Ramrathan, 2017).

Combining the three, enabled the researcher to make in-depth understanding of how despite many years of independence in South Africa, there are still myriad secondary schools that are underachieving. Such an in-depth understanding is more than necessary in order to operate from an informed position with regard to what actually comprises an achieving secondary school? Out of the population of 15 secondary schools, in one of the circuits in Vhembe districts, twelve were conveniently sampled and in each school, a teacher representative in the School Governing Body and a Chairperson of the Representative Council of Learners became research participants. To conclude this item on the research methodology, there is a need to divulge that the narrative enquiry and the interviewing techniques were utilised to generate data for this paper (Moises, 2020). To be precise, six secondary school teacher representatives serving in the School Governing Body and another six Representative Council of Learners were given an opportunity of narrating from their own positions that which constituted an achieving secondary school. In addition, teachers and learner representatives were allowed to share that which they regarded to be the solution to the debated perennial underachievement by some secondary schools. To corroborate and triangulate the gleaned data, interviewing was conducted with those twelve research participants which provided the narrative enquiry. Altogether, a total of 12 research participants were interviewed regarding achieving secondary schools and scholastic learner performance. Interview responses were audiotaped for transcription purposes later-on. Briefly, the paper adopted the convenient purposive sampling technique from the sample size of twelve research

participants. Data that were generated through the narrative enquiry and the interviewing techniques were analysed through the thematic content analysis and the narrative analysis methods Both the narrative enquiry and the interviewing techniques emerged very helpful in terms of accessing information germane to a host of factors behind the achieving education institutions (Adedoyin, 2021 & Cresswell, 2021).

Findings and Discussions

Findings arrived at in this paper, are in relation to the research topic whose focus is exploration of the host of factors in secondary schools that earn an educational institution a label of being an achieving school from the perspective of teachers serving in the School Governing Body and the Representative Council of Learners. The basis of the findings is the analysed data which were generated through the narrative inquiry and the interviewing technique. Responses of the twelve research participants were explored as regards the scholastic achievement of learners in achieving secondary schools from the viewpoint of the representatives of teachers and learners. As part of sharing and discussing the findings in a clear and free from ambiguity fashion, the twelve research participants interviewed in this paper are being referred to as Respondents A up to F referring to representatives of teachers serving in the School Governing Body and Respondents F up to L referring to representatives of learners. That was done to protect the actual identities of those research participants. Paying attention only to teachers serving in the School Governing Body and the Representative Council of Learners ought not create an impression that every time when there is scholastic underachievement in secondary schooling, it could be teachers and learners alone who are guilty. A host of other stakeholders account for the achievement or the underachievement

of secondary schools. (Adedoyin, 2021 & Cresswell, 2021).

Emphatically, a host of factors and variables are behind achievement or underachievement of learners (Bechtle, 2022 & Maxwell, 2024). However, the context of this paper necessitated that the focus be placed on the perspectives of teachers and learners in achieving secondary schools (Botha, 2017, Juan & Visser, 2017). In view of learner achievement of secondary schools having being debated from the angles such as the principal's leadership role, teacher leadership and others, the researcher felt a need to debate it this time from the unique angles of teachers and learners serving in the School Governing Body (SGB) (Maphela & Adanlawo, 2025; Lara, 2018, Meador, 2019, Rush, Duku, Glover, Kiggundu, Kola, Mislav & Moorost, 2019). Interpretivism and the Learning Organisation Philosophy as the selected theoretical perspectives, in partnership with the qualitative research paradigm, have been sufficiently instrumental in assisting in the analysis of data to ultimately emerge with these findings. Findings and discussion for this paper are the following: achieving schools have learner self-efficacy spirit, learners in achieving schools are teachable, achieving schools could turn underachievement around, incumbents pull in one direction in achieving schools,, achieving schools could self-rehabilitate when distressed, achieving schools have proactive proclivity and achieving schools could roll back grade repetition. Below are the unveiling and the discussions of results.

Achieving schools have learner self-efficacy spirit

Achieving schools acknowledge that they are populated by diverse learners requiring to be governed and regulated differently to produce magnificent results. Literature demonstrates that myriad 21st century

underachieving schools, are bereft of self-efficacious learners. These are learners that are evolutionary in nature and ever aware of the benefit and importance of schooling in their lives (Bernstein & McCarthy, 2011, Modiba, 2011, Mgxashe, 2011 & Mueller, 2011). Self-efficacious learners are in the main independent-minded and a marvel to teach in view of their devotion to their studies. Any achieving school bereft of such kind of learners could easily become an underachieving institution. On this matter, Teacher A of School E reasons that

“what sets one achieving secondary school apart from the rest is the number of scholars with self-efficacy spirit in that school at a particular academic year”.

RCL Chairperson C of School A reminds that

“just like other schools, every secondary school is built for all learners and

that it is the manner of persecuting teaching and learning with the attendant learner-results produced that raises one secondary school from being an ordinary school to the achieving one”.

The implication is that all education institutions could divest themselves of being underachieving secondary schools to become achieving secondary schools. This depends upon strategizing how to execute teaching and learning duties to convert its pupils into self-efficacious learners. Summing up what has been articulated by the research participants, it is vivid that 21st century learners are different and have to be diverse from their predecessors for the sake of making schooling functional and achieving educational institutions. Clarke (2009 and Equal Education, 2018) align themselves with the above when advising that failing to sow a spirit of self-

efficacy within learners stands to prolong the challenge of having too much underachieving secondary schools instead of achieving secondary schools identifiable among others by the bulk of learners being self-efficacious learners. These are the learners that are capable of creating achieving school as against increasing underachieving secondary school (Kumalo, 2021).

Achieving schools have teachable learners

Although all learners have the constitutional right to education, at times pupils snub and violate that right by resisting teaching. That state of affairs could descend a school into a dysfunctional and an underachieving learning institution. Despite the existence of diverse grounds that could orchestrate that pupils rebel against teaching, interventions by secondary schools are necessary to keep their schools achieving. Secondary schools are likely to remain achieving institutions when learners keep on achieving upon being assessed. Jakes (2023) unveils that in the main learners in achieving secondary schools are teachable in comparison to those in underachieving institutions. On that basis, whenever the number of achieving schools is not increasing, unteachable learners are likely to be having an undisputable share to that set up. The reason could be that schooling may not always be containing a complete value for them. That is why one of the research findings in this paper reveals that greatness by schools is traceable to scores of learners in those schools being teachable. This research finding is being supported by an RCL Chairperson G of School C who reports that

“in our own secondary school, nearly all the pupils are not so teachable and this could be traced to the rate at which nearly all the teachers keep

on complaining about how underachievement in the school keeps on mounting and being traceable to how much we pupils snub teaching”

. A teacher representative D of School E contends that

“converting at least half of the secondary school pupils to become teachable,

would require that the purpose of schooling be unequivocally clarified and

explained to every learner, with emphasis being on the point that every

learner schools for himself or herself not for his or her parents”.

On the basis of the utterances of the research participants, it is likely to take long before the number of achieving secondary schools begins to rise. The implication is that there are more underachieving secondary schools than achieving ones precisely because learners are not always teachable. Where learners are teachable, even when they are being assessed, they are likely to consistently perform and thus contribute to the increase of the number of achieving schools. Bechtle (2022) advises that in an educational institution, a challenge has to be identified and processes be put in place to formulate solutions based on the cause of that problem (Clarke, 2009, Fomunyan, 2017 & Meador, 2019). In this context, a problem is when pupils are not always teachable in secondary schools, a situation that compromises the number of achieving schools.

Achieving schools turn underachievement around

No secondary school clear with its mandate has to celebrate any form of learner underachievement. Any underachievement irrespective of its severity has to be addressed. Doing so would be confirming that the delivery of an

educational service has to promote and facilitate learner and institutional achievement. Those who lord over an educational institution and those ruled need to ascertain that there is always sufficient obsession and infatuation for the achievement of learners and their institution. Schools need to cultivate a culture of achievement. Where in one year a secondary school has faltered in terms of learner achievement, it timeously needs to know how to respond to the experienced challenge of underachievement. Hence, one of the research findings in this paper, is about secondary schools being capable of turning underachievement around. On this matter, Teacher representative C of School F stresses that

“secondary schools which will accurately be able to identify a host of factors

behind the underachievement of their institution, could survive in turning that underachievement around as a result of having successfully isolated the real cause of institutional underachievement”.

RCL Chairperson D of School B contends that

“ordinary secondary schools which could be perpetual underachievers are

likely to find it difficult to quickly counter their experienced

underachievement in comparison to achieving schools which arguably by

virtue of being used to performing, could be wise and experienced enough

on what went wrong which led to the set-up of underachievement which in

no time requires that a secondary school turns it around”.

The expressed views by the research participants, emphasise the need for secondary schools of this 21st century to be able to intervene as part of resolving their

witnessed underachievement difficulties. This could be done to create and sustain a culture of learner and institutional achievement at all times. Mkhabela (2011) and Ramphela (2011) remind that in the 21st century, institutions need to be populated by secondary school learners able to cajole one another to do tasks voluntarily, where force or coercion would never be imagined. Modiba (2012) and Juan & Visser (2017) articulate that current institutions deserve and are qualified to recruit and retain seasoned institutional incumbents who are capable of de-routinizing secondary schools to enable them to constantly enhance their efficacy as achieving learning institutions.

Pulling in one direction in achieving schools

Achieving secondary schools contrary to underachieving ones are able to mend broken institutional incumbents psychologically and spiritually. This matters in terms of ever galvanising almost everyone to contribute to the achievement of the mandate of a school (Arden, 2013 & Botha, 2017). Furthermore, achieving schools are also able to reset the organisational confidence of almost all the stakeholders for the continued good achievement of an institution. That is why one of the research findings relates to achieving schools being characterised by the learning institutions pulling in one direction. This is a confirmation of superb coordination of schooling activities. On this matter, Teacher C of School E narrates that

“having more than two decades as a classroom teacher within four distinct secondary schools, I have rarely witnessed secondary school incumbents being willing and enjoying to stop working at cross purposes, something which dominates in nearly all the underachieving secondary schools of this world”.

RCL Chairperson D of the same school reiterates that

“talking and acting unity-of-purpose by school members, ranging from teachers to learners, is more said than done, something confessing that stakeholders in myriad secondary schools do not easily pull in one direction with much of what they involve themselves in”.

The responses of the research participants are painting a bleak picture of how much underachieving secondary schools still have to be converted into achieving schools through encouraging a spirit of pulling together in one direction by everyone to attain a single destiny of the greatness of a school. Mabote (2008) and Ramrathan (2017) remind that every educational institution prescribes for either its greatness or otherwise through the manner of consistently galvanising institutional incumbents to work hard for the greatness of a school by encouraging pulling in one direction.

Self-rehabilitating when distressed

Educational institutions that are not placing self-preservation interests of individual members ahead of those of an institution are likely to be capable of self-rehabilitating (Zuze & Juan, 2020 & Lee, 2023). Such learning institutions are associated more with achieving secondary schools than with the underachieving ones. The latter are likely to battle to self-rehabilitate when distressing, on the basis of a number of factors one of which is the absence of dutiful spirit by the bulk of its internal stakeholders. That is why Turner (2000 & Bambalele, 2019) emphasise that tried and tested managers and leaders have to be deployed to underachieving secondary schools to pick up the level of educational service there to resemble that of achieving schools. This resonates with

one of the findings in this paper which is about achieving schools possessing a capacity of self-rehabilitating when distressed. A Teacher representative E of School B remarks that

“in many secondary schools, underachievement of pupils is ascribed to failure to involve learners in their own studies, a practice which is unlikely to minimise antagonism between pupils and teachers inside and within the school and which aggravates learner-underachievement”.

RCL Chairperson E of School B emphasizes that

“it is not impossible to get rid of all the underachieving secondary schools upon ascertaining that the operating secondary schools adopt the features of achieving schools to enable them to imagine themselves to be no underachieving schools but achieving secondary schools in terms of the produced impressive learner results”.

The expressed views explicitly suggest that since it is learners who create achieving secondary schools, then in the 21st century, these learners have to be treated differently and heterogeneously compared to their predecessors in as far as partaking in their own lessons goes. This stands to enable them to enliven the schooling environment, where the bulk of teachers populating those schools normally lament of lack of participation of pupils in their own school work. This matter could also be construed to mean that 21st secondary school learners are not in secondary schools as passengers, but active participants in the enterprise of teaching and learning. Modiba (2012), Gae, (2016) Gqirana (2016), Lara (2018) and Mncwango and Adanlawo (2025) sum this remarkably when observing that

nowadays, the nature of interactions between learners and teachers have to be different to enable learners to enable their secondary schools to self-rehabilitate when distressed by either teachers or pupils so that they remain achieving secondary schools.

Proactive proclivity

Botha (2021), Bantwini and Moorosi (2023) reason that achieving schools are capable of dealing with all sorts of schooling obstacles, like bullying, some of which could prevent the production of magnificent learner results. The implication is that achieving schools unlike underachieving ones are able to get every stakeholder to work together seamlessly. The manner of leading and managing in achieving schools is likely to acknowledge that underachievement or achievement in such schools does not happen in a vacuum. What assists achieving schools to operate different from underachieving schools is their discouragement of the culture of being reactive. That is why one of the findings in this paper relates to achieving schools having a proactive proclivity. On this aspect, a Teacher representative A of School B stresses that

“in my experience of having served in an underachieving secondary school

for some years and currently in an achieving secondary school, I argue that in achieving secondary schools when exquisite learner results are not forthcoming, due to the absence of the proactive culture there, they are able to explore the concerted multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder interventions until the required learner performance is attained”.

RCL Chairperson F of School E confirms that

“secondary schools that are proactive in thought and practice could experiment with structural and formational changes in case they find themselves struggling for long with the envisaged good learner results”.

One key lesson drawn from how achieving schools think and act is that, they attempt to prepare almost everything with astuteness and attention to details. Their proactive proclivity enables them to do something whenever faced with whatever scholastic impediment. This in short is what sets achieving schools apart from the underachieving ones. Ramphela (2011) displays her invaluable experience in schooling when accentuating the need to completely overhaul the South African education system to make it functional and to contribute to the transformation of underachieving schools into achieving ones. This is supported by Kuseka (2008) and Rush et al., (2019) when emphasising that secondary schools, need to learn to resort to their own witticism to wrench themselves out of the welter of difficulties of this century, some of which include the witnessed perpetual learner underachievement.

Rolling back grade repetition

Few educational institutions are able to underachieve this year and quickly turn the tide in no time. This is one attribute that sets achieving schools apart from the underachieving ones. Southey (2012) and Omar (2019) remind that by virtue of experiencing emotional and spiritual freedom, achieving schools are able to rise from their ruins, implying quickly restoring learner achievement where learner underachievement was occurring (Zuze & Juan, 2020). It is no secret that where pupils underachieve in great numbers, they become a liability other than an asset for a school. Interventions are necessary to reverse such a state of affairs which in most cases is associated with poor

schooling. Hence one of the findings in this paper unveils that achieving schools are capable of rolling back grade repetition. Teacher representative A of School F narrates that

“where the majority of pupils in a secondary school are simply disinterested i

in schooling because of having not being exposed to the value of attending lessons regularly with the intentions of acquiring knowledge, grade repetition is likely to be the end results when assessments are being conducted”.

RCL Chairperson E of School D narrates that

“it is a point beyond dispute that massive learner repetition which is associated more with underachieving schools than with achieving

secondary schools due to various reasons such as lack of adequate order and discipline by both learners and teachers in underachieving secondary schools, is something that consumes much of the teaching and the learning

time to the level of ushering in unbearable learner grade repetition”.

The articulated frustrations by research participants, who are teacher representatives serving in the School Governing Body and the Representative Council of Learners over underachieving secondary schools churning out grade repeaters, is indeed, a concern worth overcoming by rolling back any form of grade repetition in those schools. Bernstein and McCarthy (2011), Fomunyam (2017) Equal Education (2018), Sobuwa (2021) and Shezi et al. (2025) contend that the difficulties associated with grade repetition in secondary schools transcend

the daily challenges faced by diverse educational institutions and require complex, comprehensive and dynamic approaches, inclusive of the concerted multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder interventions.

Recommendations

The basis of these recommendations is the discussed findings which are as follow: there is a need to sow in learners a sense of self-efficacy which stands to propel learners to be more dedicated to their schoolwork than ever before. In addition, schools need to encourage learners to remain leadable and teachable for their own benefit. Furthermore, the capacity to turn around underachievement by educational institutions, is essential, to keep the spirit of studiousness by learners alive and intact. Moreover, there is a need to create a healthy cooperation to galvanise everyone to pull in one direction for the educational prosperity of schools. There is also a need by schools to develop self-rehabilitating mechanisms when experiencing distressing schooling conditions. It is further judicious to encourage a spirit of proactive proclivity by all the institutional incumbents to enable schools to be self-reliant regarding overcoming the experienced schooling obstacles. Finally, there is a need for schools to craft internally built capacity and mechanism of speedily reversing the witnessed and experienced grade repetition known to be delaying the transition to achieving schools. This is necessary in view of the perennial underachievement of myriad public secondary schools especially in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Conclusion

As it has been displayed in the discussion of the findings of this paper, both the review of literature as well as the two theoretical frameworks underpinning the paper, namely, the Interpretative

perspective and the Learning Organisation Model, played a critical role in talking to the findings of the paper. In addition, the narrative enquiry and the interviewing techniques together with the two selected theoretical perspectives, provided the better context within which the entire paper had to be located and comprehended. Small wonder that the findings revealed that it is achieving learners that make an achieving school contrary to a view that it is an achieving school that makes great learners. Fundamentally, it is a host of factors that are behind a secondary school being regarded to be an achieving learning institution or not. The conclusion arrived at in this paper is being informed by the perspectives of teaches serving in the School Governing Body and the Representative Council of Learners as regards what makes an achieving school. Evidently, learning institutions, harbouring a perception of being achieving institutions end up living and acting out their perception of being viewed as achieving secondary schools.

Profile of the author

Prof NS Modiba has been in the employ of the University of Limpopo for more than a decade in the Department of Education Studies, School of Education, Faculty of Humanities. His position is that of a Research Professor in the mentioned department. Although his field of speciality is Educational Management, he is inter-disciplinary in his scholarship. This is being confirmed by myriad papers authored and published in SAPSE-Accredited Journals, that are inter-disciplinary in content and nature. He prides himself in remaining inter-disciplinary other than solely focusing his Journal articles on his research niche areas such as decolonisation of schooling, transformation, functionality, performance, leadership and management of educational institutions.

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