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## Factors Affecting Low Performance of Junior Learners in a Developing Country: Southern Region of Botswana

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### Abstract

The study was triggered as a result of declining performance of learners in Botswana and it was aimed at finding solutions that would enhance sound academic performance in junior secondary schools. A phenomenological design was selected for the study while a qualitative approach was adopted using focus group interviews as the source of data collection from participants. The findings of this study revealed that the inability of the government of Botswana to implement job satisfaction measures in educators inhibited adequate transfer of knowledge to learners, which resulted in a decline in performance. Learners' gross misconduct and their parents' inability to counsel them contributed to their decline in performance. Also, learners and educators admitted that the current system of education should be replaced with another productive system. Another finding of this study confirmed that learners are tired of corporal punishment and they want it to be replaced with detention. The study recommendation is that the Ministry of Education of Botswana should apply motivational and job satisfaction factors to encourage educators to adequately transfer knowledge to learners.

**Keywords:** *academic performance, factors, education, junior secondary school*

## **Introduction**

The declining performance of Junior Certificate learners in Botswana is a worrisome factor to the whole Ministry of Education and the government (Moswela, 2014). Learners are considered to be the leaders of tomorrow, therefore, reasonable measures should be implemented to ensure that learners' academic careers are improved to a reasonable standard (Moswela, 2014). In this regard, there is a need for the government to implement effective strategies aimed at enhancing academic performance thereby improving the declining performance of junior level learners.

The education system in Botswana has been undergoing a reform process for the past two decades, especially amongst the junior certificate learners in four Lobatse Junior Secondary Schools in the Southern Region of Botswana (Dibapile, 2012). According to Chisholm and Chilisa (2012), Botswana's government adopted a nine-year Basic Education Program in the 1980s, a few years before the emergence of the Jomtien Conference, which attempted to globalize the concept. The context of education restructuring brought the Curriculum Driven Test Development Model (CDTDM) in 1992, which was aimed at increasing the content of the syllabus and to enhance learner performance in both primary and junior secondary schools. Despite the slow rate of transformation, Botswana has relatively financed education to the extent that it is regarded as one of the best countries in Africa in terms of the teacher-pupil ratio and the number of certified teachers (Chisholm & Chilisa, 2012).

### **Research Problem and Focus area**

The curriculum blueprint (2007) says that the major aim of the junior secondary education program is to develop learners, encourage competence and academic excellence. The curriculum blueprint highlights all the necessary factors needed to ensure success in the education sector. To enhance learners' academic performance, the national Development Vision was established in 1996 to assist in mass education and to increase the level of literacy in Botswana to enhance competitive education (Chisholm & Chilisa, 2012).

Despite these struggles to enhance quality education, the country thrives in universal and quality education (Mohiemang & Pretorius, 2012). According to Botswana Examinations Council (2013), the academic report of junior learners in 2012 and 2013 indicated that there was a remarkable decline in performance. With regards to this deteriorating performance, there is a need to determine the causes of the declining performance of junior certificate learners in Botswana and the measures to improve learners' average performance.

### Literature Review

According to the Curriculum blueprint (2007) and Mohiemang and Pretorius (2012), the principal aim of educating learners in Botswana is to improve them so that they can acquire special skills and to develop the awareness of the interrelationship between science, technology, business, arts and society in everyday life. The Botswana Curriculum blueprint (2007) stipulates that learners' critical thinking, problem solving ability and inquiry skills should be well developed. Therefore, it advocates that learners should be guided by all stakeholders throughout the learning process in order to attain the desired objective. Moswela (2014) claims that stakeholders of learners' academic performance are people involved in leading and directing learners towards their competent development. These stakeholders include parents, teachers and the government.

Parents' involvement in learners' education is considered necessary to guide and cultivate the spirit of reading amongst learners because schools alone cannot do the job of educating children without parents' consistent support (Moswela, 2014). Scholarly research has proved that learners' cognitive academic development starts with their parents, who assist them in acquiring fundamental knowledge and some special skills at an early age (Isaiah & Nenty, 2012). Possibly, there is a link between educators and parents to establish co-operation to enhance change of attitudes and to encourage success in learning and better developmental outcomes (Moswela, 2014).

Zulu and Wolhuter (2013) posit that educators, school leaders and the government have a significant relationship with the misconduct of learners, whereas Chukwuere, Mavetera and Mnkandla (2016) believe that teachers or educators provide a suitable learning environment for all learners. The existence of different forms of misconduct is a resultant effect of negligence of educators and the government (De Wet, 2003). The studies of Moswela (2014) on the forms of misconduct reveal that the improper use of language, duty negligence, bullying, drug abuse, absenteeism, truancy, peer pressure, attitude towards school work, and dishonesty are the most frequent kinds of misconduct amongst learners. Learners' negative behaviors in the learning environment in Botswana contribute to the decline in their academic performance. Hence, the learner has a big responsibility for his/her own academic success (Moswela, 2014).

Job dissatisfaction has been viewed as one of the major causes of employees' turnover and unsatisfactory performance (Monyatsi, 2012; Dibapile, 2012). The school leader and teachers play an integral role in making sure that learners receive a quality education as they employ different strategies to control disruptive behaviors in the classroom (Dibapile, 2012; Isaiah & Nenty, 2012). Isaiah and

Nenty (2012) state that satisfaction is necessary to motivate teachers to invest their cognitive and affective capital in the teaching–learning process. This implies that job satisfaction plays a positive role in educators as guides to the learner’s future. Job satisfaction factors which should be applied to educators include salary, progression pace, workload, effective supervision, working relations, provision of accommodation, and training opportunities (Monyatsi, 2012). The teacher’s satisfaction level regarding their job should also be viewed as an important factor which can impact negatively or positively on the decline of the learner’s performance (Isaiah & Nenty, 2012).

In order to achieve academic excellence, it is the duty of the Ministry of Education of Botswana to combine all the factors to ensure that learners acquire a good and quality education to enhance development (Curriculum blueprint, 2004). Furthermore, the Curriculum blueprint (2007) says that the philosophy of the basic education programme will continually evolve to show the needs and directions of Botswana. The Ministry of Education is a policy body which formulates and strategically implements policies to enhance student learning and performance (Moswela, 2014).

## **Research Methodology**

The presented study adopts a social constructivist paradigm. The social constructivist paradigm helped the researcher to gain an in-depth knowledge through interactions with participants as indicated by Creswell (2014:8). A qualitative research design was used, which enabled the researcher to collect data from respondents using focused group interviews. Qualitative research ensures a deeper understanding of the study at hand (Chukwuere, Mavetera & Mnkandla, 2016). Table 1 presents the population of the study as adapted from Human Resource Management (2015) (Ministry of Education, Botswana).

**Table 1.** Population of the study

Name of School	No. of Educators	No. of Learners
Letsopa Junior Secondary School	44	478
Ipelegeng Junior Secondary School	51	458
Itireleng Junior Secondary School	45	461
Pitikwe Junior Secondary School	46	548

### Research Sample

Letsopa Junior Secondary School and Ipelegeng Secondary School were conveniently selected from schools due to their nearness to the researcher and the possibility to collect data at the quickest possible time. Furthermore, convenience sampling helped the researcher to collect responses from participants based on nearness and convenience. Data was collected from the educators and learners through focus group interviews with the aid of open-ended questions. The focus group interviews conducted were transcribed, sorted and arranged in themes. Central ideas were identified and the researcher coded and analyzed them with regards to the respective research questions. Table 2 and 3 present the samples selected from the two junior secondary schools.

**Table 2.** Sampling size of the educators

Name of School	No. of Educators	Selected Participants
Letsopa Junior Secondary School	44	10
Ipelegeng Junior Secondary School	51	10

**Table 3.** Sampling size of the learners

Name of School	No. Learners	Selected Participants
Letsopa Junior Secondary School	478	10
Ipelegeng Junior Secondary School	458	10

### Data Analysis

This section presents the results obtained from the two focus group interviews conducted with the learners and the educators. The focus group interviews in the two junior schools were conducted in two phases namely, Phase A and Phase B. Phase A presents the summary of the focus group interviews with the learners in the two junior schools, while Phase B presents the summary of the focus group interviews with the educators in the two schools. The focus group interview was captured with the help an audio tape and transcribed by the researchers (cf., the appendix). Also, the transcribed data was arranged into themes through coding of the collected data. Afterwards, the discussion of the results is presented.

**PHASE A:** This phase presents the research questions and the categories of the findings (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Learner interview

THEMES OF FINDINGS	CATEGORIES OF FINDINGS
<p><b>Question 1</b> Does the attitude of educators during the process of knowledge transfer demotivate you to follow up?</p>	<p>The educators’ attitude considered as discouraging during the process of knowledge transfer for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Making derogatory comments</li> <li>· Mocking students</li> <li>· Making abusive and insulting remarks</li> <li>· Inability to pay desired attention</li> <li>· Attention paid to better performing students</li> <li>· Educators’ callousness</li> <li>· Sending learners out of the class as a result of their inability to answer questions correctly</li> </ul>
<p><b>Question 2</b> Does the exhibition of misconduct by learners contribute to their decline in academic performance?</p>	<p>The learners confirm that the following misconducts contribute to the decline in their academic performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Disrespecting teachers</li> <li>· Alcohol and drug abuse</li> <li>· Missing classes</li> <li>· Stealing of school property, which leads to expulsion</li> <li>· Noise making</li> <li>· Eating and sleeping in class</li> <li>· Smoking in the school premises</li> <li>· Fighting in the school</li> <li>· Absenteeism</li> </ul>
<p><b>Question 3</b> Do parental guidance and attitude contribute to the declining performance of Junior Secondary Schools in the Southern Region in Botswana?</p>	<p>The learners said that some attitudes of their parents contribute to their declining performance for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Inability to provide the basic things they need for studies</li> <li>· Inability to visit them regularly in school</li> <li>· Inappropriate guidance and thorough observation at home.</li> <li>· Inadequate counselling</li> </ul>
<p><b>Question 4</b> What is the best strategy you consider necessary to stop and improve the declining performance in Junior Secondary Schools in the Southern Region in Botswana?</p>	<p>The learners suggested that the Ministry of Education should implement the following strategies to ensure effective performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Expelling the student that does not want to study and those that are involved in drug abuse</li> <li>· An end should be put to the use of abusive words on the part of students</li> <li>· Educators’ maximum support to each learner.</li> <li>· Proper counselling and encouragement by educators</li> <li>· Abolishment of corporal punishments and replacing them with detention</li> <li>· Effective guidance from parents</li> <li>· Parental visitations at regular intervals.</li> <li>· Parental provision of basic things needed by learners.</li> </ul>

**PHASE B:** The focus group interviews conducted with the educators are as follows (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Educators' interview

THEMES OF FINDINGS	CATEGORIES OF FINDINGS
<p><b>Question 1</b> Does job dissatisfaction demotivate you in giving learners the desired direction and academic guidance?</p>	<p>The teachers admitted that the inability of the Government to satisfy them demotivates them in giving their best to their learners, also other reasons are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Inability to provide a good working environment</li> <li>· High rate of student-teacher ratio</li> <li>· Lack of incentives and other fringe benefits</li> <li>· Inability to give promotion consistently</li> <li>· Excessive workload</li> <li>· Lack of salary upgrade</li> </ul>
<p><b>Question 2</b> Does the exhibition of misconduct by learners contribute to their declining performance in Botswana?</p>	<p>The educators confirmed that learners' misconduct has a direct and negative effect on their performance. Various kinds of misconduct are listed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Fighting in the school premises</li> <li>· Truancy</li> <li>· Involvement in sexual relationships</li> <li>· Engagement in drug and alcohol abuse</li> <li>· Absenteeism from school</li> <li>· Lack of respect</li> <li>· Pregnancy</li> <li>· Peer pressure</li> <li>· Not complying with educators' directives.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Question 3</b> Do parental guidance and attitude contribute to the declining performance of Junior Secondary Schools in the Southern Region in Botswana?</p>	<p>The educators stated that parents' inability to guide learners contributed to their decline in performance. The following reasons were given:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Parents do not show encouragement in their children's academic performance.</li> <li>· Parents lack the ability to guide and monitor their children.</li> <li>· Parents do not visit their children in school at regular intervals.</li> <li>· Parents do not provide their children with extra teaching arrangements to boost their capacity.</li> <li>· Parents do not provide their children with the basic things needed for learning.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Question 4</b> Do policy formulation and implementation by the Ministry of Education contribute to the declining performance of Junior Secondary Schools in the Southern Region in Botswana?</p>	<p>The educators declared that the current system should be abolished for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Every learner should pass all the subjects before being promoted to another level.</li> <li>· The introduction of mass promotion by the present system should be abolished to encourage competence.</li> </ul>

THEMES OF FINDINGS	CATEGORIES OF FINDINGS
<p><b>Question 5</b>                      What is the best strategy you consider necessary to stop and improve the declining performance in Junior Secondary Schools in the Southern Region in Botswana?</p>	<p>The educators suggested the following measures to enhance learners’ academic performance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· The motivation of educators through the revision of salaries, promotion, and fringe benefits so that they can work effectively to ensure academic success.</li> <li>· Workload should be reduced by the government by employing more teachers.</li> <li>· Learners should be counseled to ensure that they will desist from drug abuse, fighting, sexual relationships, truancy, disrespect, absenteeism and neglect of school work.</li> <li>· Parents should show maximum commitment in the guidance and monitoring of learners after school hours.</li> <li>· The present school system has been proved unproductive and should be replaced with another one to enhance academic success.</li> </ul>

**Discussion of findings**

The findings of this study were presented as per research questions. The findings from the two focus group interviews (Phase A and Phase B) were combined and discussed to elaborate the respondents’ opinions on the factors that lead to the performance decline of junior learners in Botswana. Here are the factors that lead to performance decline: job dissatisfaction; learners’ gross misconduct and inability to counsel and guide learners. Also, the participants suggested remedies to the declining performance, which are: change in the current education system and educators’ motivation and guidance of learners.

***Job Dissatisfaction***

The findings of the two focus group interviews on the effect of educators’ job dissatisfaction on the knowledge transfer process and the effect of educators’ negative attitude on learners during the knowledge transfer process. The focus group interviews conducted with the educators proved that the main reason for their inability to give their best to their learners is the inability of the government to provide the basic motivational factors for them (cf., Table 5, question 1). The educators stated that the government should provide an equitable work environment, well-earned incentives, fringe benefits, promotion and salary upgrade. Also, the educators said that the government should employ more educators to reduce the educator-learner ratio, which will help in reducing the available workload (cf., Table 5, question 5). In confidence, the educators added that the government’s ability to put these factors in place will enable them to give their best to their



learners, which will enhance their performance. These findings are in accordance with the findings of Isaiah and Nenty (2012) that the government should ensure maximum job satisfaction to educators. In support of this view, Moswella (2014) and Monyatsi (2012) asserted that the government should apply motivational factors to the educator to ensure an effective job performance and equitable transfer of knowledge to learners.

The focus group interview conducted with the learners confirmed that educators are not motivated in transferring knowledge to the learners equitably. This is observed by the learners in their making derogatory remarks of the students, mockery of the students, using abusive words, sending them out of class and attending to only high performing learners and negligence in moral counseling (cf., Table 5, question 1).

#### ***Learners' Gross Misconduct***

According to the two focus group interviews conducted with the educators and learners, it was discovered that the learners engage in misconduct, which has a direct effect on their performance (cf., Table 4 and 5, question 2). This misconduct, as highlighted by the two study groups, is fighting, alcohol and drug abuse, absenteeism from school, peer pressure, stealing, smoking in the school premises, pregnancy and lack of respect to the educators. These findings adapt the findings of Zulu and Wolhuter (2013) and Moswela (2014) in their study to suggest measures to checkmate the learners' misconduct which affects their performance.

#### ***Inability to counsel and guide the learners***

The two focus group interviews conducted with the learners and educators revealed that the parents are unable to counsel or guide the learners during their learning process. The educators stressed the effect of the parents' inability to visit the learners regularly in school to check their conduct (cf., Table 5, question 3). Other factors as highlighted by the interviews include lack of provision of necessary equipment needed for learning, provision of extra classes, providing encouragement in the case of performance decline and provision of exceptional guidance (cf., Table 4 and 5, question 3). In support of these findings, Moswela (2014) emphasised that the stakeholders of education should provide adequate guidance to ensure success in learners' academic performance.

#### ***Change in the current education system***

The educators claimed that the Ministry of Education should abandon the present education system and introduce another efficient system. Furthermore,

the educators emphasized the effect of mass promotion on the performance of form 3 students and suggested that every learner should pass all the subjects before being promoted to another form (cf., Table 5, question 4). In support of these findings, Moswela (2014) emphasized the importance of the Ministry of Education in establishing good and effective policies aimed at enhancing learners' academic performance.

### ***Motivation of educators and guidance of learners***

This section presents the suggestions of the learners and the educators on the measures needed to be implemented in the academic system to ensure excellent performance. The educators said that there were many factors which should be implemented to ensure success (cf., Table 5, question 5). These factors include educators' adequate motivation, employing other educators, which will reduce educators' workload. Also, the educators declared that the present education system has been a failure, thereby suggesting that it should be replaced with another one.

The learners suggested that the educators should put an end to the use of abusive words towards students, thereby encouraging maximum support and guidance from the educators and the parents (cf., Table 5, question 4). In this category, another vital finding of this study disclosed the rejection of corporal punishment and the need for other kind of punishment (detention) (cf., Table 5, question 4).

## **Conclusions**

The focus group interview conducted with the learners confirmed that educators are not motivated in transferring knowledge to the learners equitably. This is observed by the use of abusive words towards learners, sending them out of class and making derogatory remarks on them, whereas the educators stated that the learners' decline in academic performance includes misconduct such as alcohol and drug abuse, noisemaking during lessons, smoking in the school, fighting in the school, peer pressure, truancy, and gross absenteeism.

There is an indication from the educators that the parents do not provide adequate guidance or counseling to the learners at home, do not visit them regularly at school or do not have the ability to provide them with the basic things they need for studies. The educators further disclosed that the government's inability to provide a good working environment, incentives, fringe benefits, salary improvement and measures to reduce excessive workload demotivates them to give the best to

the learners. Also, the educators indicated that the current system of education has been unproductive as it encourages mass promotion of form 3 learners.

This study concludes that the decline in the academic performance of the junior learners in Southern Botswana is attributed to the attitude of both the learners and the educators, also the introduced education system, which has been considered unproductive.

## **Recommendations**

The recommendations of this study are as follows:

- The Ministry of Education of Botswana should ensure that educators are well motivated/satisfied to ensure that they will give their best to their learners.
- Educators should be cautioned against negative attitudes to their learners during the process of knowledge transfer, as this will assist in ensuring professionalism on their part.
- Learners should be well guided throughout the process of learning by all stakeholders to minimize their misconduct.
- Disobedient learners should be given corrective measures and the unregretful should be expelled from school.
- Educators should be encouraged to be good role models to their learners.
- The education system should be changed and replaced with a more productive one, which will encourage learners to pass all their subjects before being promoted to another form.
- Educators should be advised to be polite in the process of knowledge transfer while learners should be guided by all stakeholders of education.
- Furthermore, this study stresses the need for a change in the education system of junior secondary schools as the current one is considered unproductive, while the implementation of corporal punishment should be re-addressed as it is considered ineffective by learners.
- The presented study recommends that the Ministry of Education should improve their policy making as the existing policy is considered unproductive. Also, corporal punishment should be reviewed or replaced by detention as recommended by learners.
- There is a need, therefore, for further research to be conducted in this field, especially on corporal punishment and implementation of a new education system.

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# Appendix 1

Figure 1. Example of electronic mind maps created by students

