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RUNNING HEAD: DIFFERENCE IN PERFORMANCE

**THE DIFFERENCE IN PERFORMANCE BETWEEN SCHOOLS SITUATED IN THE
URBAN AREAS AND THOSE IN THE RURAL AREAS OF LESOTHO**

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Abstract

Since 1998, the rural schools in Lesotho have been performing relatively poorly in the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) Examinations in comparison with the high schools studied in the urban areas (Senekal, 2005: 1). It is the researcher's opinion that many schools in the rural areas experience difficulties when attempting to attract learners because parents have generally lost confidence in those schools. Even in countries like Uganda, data from the Ministry of Education suggest that, in terms of academic performance, urban learners continually outperform rural schools at primary and secondary levels (Ministry of Education, 2002). This paper specifically sought to identify factors that contribute to the difference in performance between schools situated in Urban Areas and those in Rural Areas in the Botha-Bothe district of Lesotho.

Keywords: rural education, teacher performance, urban learners

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BACKGROUND

Taking into account the present needs of both the rural scholars and their schools, relatively little systematic research has been done. This statement is supported by the fact that less than 6% of research done in schools included rural schools, even as a percentage of the sample. Families served by rural schools include families in socio-economic distress as well as families led by single or under-educated parents (Harder and Sullivan, 2008: 471). Beyond rural schools simply being underrepresented, they often face serious resource issues, including a lack of economic support from businesses and corporations.

With regard to the COSC examinations, schools in the rural areas in the Botha-Bothe district of Lesotho perform less satisfactorily than those in the urban areas. The statistics below, from 2009 to 2010, act as a testimony to this.

Table 1.1 Performance of the four high schools sampled from 2009 – 2010

		2009			2010		
		Pa	To	%	Pa	To	%
Urban							
BC	Community School	43	78	55	31	78	40
BB	High School	43	69	62	57	68	84
CY	High School	14	59	24	16	31	52
SP	High School	33	49	67	53	11	46
				(52%)			(55%)

Key:

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Pa: Number of learners who obtained at least a third class passes percentage.

To: Total number of learners who sat for the examination.

%: Number of those who passed as a percentage.

Table 1.2 Performance of the four high schools sampled from 2009 – 2010

		2009			2010		
		Pa	To	%	Pa	To	%
RURAL							
KK	High School	15	54	28	13	52	25
QA	High School	04	26	15	07	34	21
QH	High School	08	29	28	10	32	31
SC	High School	15	57	26	23	74	31
				(24%)			(27%)

Key:

Pa: Number of learners who obtained at least a third class passes percentage.

To: Total number of learners who sat for the examination.

%: Number of those who passed as a percentage.

According to Table 1.1 and Table 1.2, the average performance for the two years (2009 – 2010) shows a clear distinction in performance between the two areas. During the said periods, the urban areas averaged 52% and 55% pass rates, while the rural areas averaged 24% and 27% respectively. Permission to quote the schools by their names was granted by the principals of each school. The two schools whose principals refused to grant permission to quote results of

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their schools were not included in the study. In order to respect the identity of the schools that provided figures, only abbreviations are used (e.g. KK, BC, etc.).

HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

HO1: There are no significant differences in the administration of schools in the urban and rural areas of Lesotho.

HO2: There is no significant difference between the morale and attitude of educators at the high schools in urban areas when compared to those of the educators working at the rural area high schools.

HO3: There is no significant difference in classroom management between educators operating within high schools in the urban areas and educators at the rural area high schools.

HO4: There is no significant difference in the level of workshop attendance between educators at the urban area high schools when compared to that of the rural area educators.

METHODOLOGY

A combination of the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach was used in this study. With the quantitative approach, subjects can be examined, allowing the researcher to generalize on what he/she found from a sample and then apply that to a population. With regards to this paper, this is exactly what happened with the data that was collected through questionnaires.

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The items were answered using a five-point Likert Scale, where the options were: *always, often, not sure, seldom and never*. When analyzing the data, these options were converted into numbers using a computer program called SPSS (Wellington, 2000: 106).

With the qualitative approach, data exist in a non- numerical form - that is, as reports of conversations (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1996: 74). The open-ended questions of a questionnaire do provide the researcher with data in the form of a verbatim report. In addition, the reports produced from the interviews also supply the researcher with a verbatim account. It was therefore found expedient to merge the two approaches to ensure a more accurate result.

Research Method

The researcher made use of the descriptive method because it permits one to collect information from a large sample of people relatively quickly and clearly. Inferential and descriptive statistics were used to organize, analyze and make inferences from numerical data. The descriptive statistics in particular are used for a convenient presentation of the information, while the inferential statistics are used for making inferences about the population from which the sample was taken (Litheko, 2002a: 10).

In line with the descriptive method used in the study, the researcher identified the population and the sample as well as the instruments to collect the data. The data analysis technique was designed to test the hypotheses of the study.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

Population

The population for this study consisted of all high schools in Lesotho.

Sample and sampling technique

The sample of the study was composed of all the high schools shown in table 1.1 and 1.2. The reason for limiting the sample to high schools in the Botha-Bothe district is that they were easily accessible. Another reason is that the district includes the two distinct areas in question - that is, rural and urban areas. This means that findings can well be generalized for the whole of

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Lesotho. Purposive sampling was used to identify the sample for the study. In purposive sampling, researchers handpick the cases that have to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgment of the case's typicality. In this way, researchers build up a sample that meets their needs (Cohen & Manion, 1997: 89).

INSTRUMENTATION

The measuring instruments used in this study were questionnaires and interviews.

Questionnaire

For this study, a questionnaire was developed to measure the educators' management skills, attitudes of educators towards work, the level of support provided by the principals to educators, as perceived by educators themselves, as well as educators' attendance of workshops. As indicated earlier, this section was concerned with factors that affect COSC examinations as portrayed by educators. Consequently, a two-page questionnaire was developed containing 30 items. The items were divided into two sections. The first section was concerned with the demographic information of the subject, while the second part measured the skills and the rest of the points indicated above.

Biographical Data

Biographical data provide descriptive information about an individual's personal background as well as experience (Litheko, 2002a: 12). The information includes age, gender, level of education, duration of experience, subjects in which one is trained as an educator, numbers of lessons one has in a week, and the area where one was brought up. Of these variables, *age*, *gender*, *level of education*, *length of experience*, and *the area in which one was brought up*, served as the independent variables of the study. The study was aimed at pinpointing whether there is any significant relationship between the individual independent variables and the dependent variable of the study, which is the results depicting the level of performance in COSC examinations.

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FACTORS AFFECTING THE COSC PERFORMANCE AS PORTRAYED BY THE EDUCATORS

As already indicated, the descriptive method of research allows one to collect information from groups of subjects for the purpose of summarization. Such information can be gathered through questionnaires. This part of the instrument was developed specifically for this purpose - that is, to collect information regarding the factors by way of answering the research questions, as shown in this paper.

Interviews

. In this study, the questions that were asked related to the effectiveness of the various Head of Departments with regards to the management roles. For the principals, on the other hand, the questions that pertained to their administration of the school as well as the role of the School Committee in the management of the school were asked. Heads of departments and principals were interviewed individually.

Data analysis

The researcher and his assistants did collection of data from schools. The Heads of Department administered and collected the questionnaires from respondents and kept them for collection by the researcher. Interviews were conducted, depending on the availability of the respondent, after the handing out of the questionnaires. Alternatively, it was conducted on another date agreed upon by the researcher and the respondent. The data were analyzed using the SPSS for Unix, Release 6.1 (Solaris 2.3) to test the four hypotheses.

The independent variables that influence the study are: age; gender; years of experience; education level of educators; subjects taught; major subjects and the place where an educator grew up. The dependent variable is the level of performance shown in COSC examination results.

RESULTS

Sample characteristics and data cleansing procedure

The sample was originally composed of 144 subjects for questionnaire and 32 subjects for interviews. The intention was to have all 144 questionnaires answered and 32 interviews

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conducted. However, out of the 144 questionnaires, that is, of the 18 sent to each school, 121 questionnaires were completed and were available for collection when the researcher returned for them. When the questionnaires were checked, no school had more than one missing case. This, in turn, ensured that all the questionnaires qualified for the study and indicated a response rate of 84%. According to Litheko (2002a: 98), a total response rate of 75% is satisfactory. Three heads of department in each school were targeted for interviews. This would make up a total of 24 subjects. It was the hope of the researcher that each school's principal would be available for an interview. This would then make up a total of 32 subjects interviewed. However, ultimately, only 20 heads of departments and 5 principals were available for interviews. For the descriptive statistics, means were calculated for the independent variables of the study that were age, gender, years of experience, level of education and the location of one's upbringing. The level of performance noted in COSC examination results was the dependent variable.

Biographical information of respondents and graphical representation

The questionnaire entitled: "Difference in performance between urban and rural high schools" was composed of 2 sections. The first section concentrated on the respondents' biographical information. The information sought was centered on the number of lessons per week and finally, the area in which the respondent grew up. The second part was composed of 22 items seeking various possible factors that contributed to the sample schools' decline in performance, as show in the COSC results. The items were to be answered using a 5-point Likert Scale.

The scale used the following categories:

Always (1); Often (2); Not sure (3); Seldom (4); Not at all (5)

The questionnaire sought information that ultimately answered the hypotheses of the study. The interviews for the heads of department and principals were rated and scaled down. That is, the responses to any question asked were scaled down to numbers ranging from 1 to 3, where 1 was a "Yes" response, 2 was a neutral answer and 3 represented a "No" answer. This was done so as

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to tabulate the information for analysis. The results of the interviews were analyzed separately from the questionnaires.

Responses according to gender

Of the 55 educators who responded in the rural area, 36 (65.5%) were females while 19 (34.5%) were males. All 55 educators answered the question. There were a total of 66 educators in the urban area - 30 (45.5%) males and 36 (54.5%) female. Both areas have a higher percentage of females than males, although, in the urban area, the difference is not significant. Judging by the gender distribution, one may make the supposition that gender biased schools are prone to poor performance.

Responses according to age of educators

Eighteen (18) (32.7%) were below the age of 30 while 37 (67.3%) were above the age of 30 in the rural area. In the urban area, 22 (33.3%) educators were below the age of 30 while 44 (66.7%) were above the age of 30. In the urban area, there is a slightly smaller percentage of older educators. One may deduce from the chart that younger educators are prone to producing better COSC performance. That means an educator who is below 30 years of age produces better results than one who is above.

Responses according to educators' years of experience

In the rural area, 33.3% of educators had less than 10 years' teaching experience, while 62.7% of educators had more than 10 years' experience in the field. In the urban area, 40.9% had less than 10 years teaching experience, while 59.2% had more than 10 years of teaching experience. One participant in the rural area did not answer the question, while there were 5 missing answers in the urban area. The higher percentage of experienced educators in the rural area than in the urban area perhaps indicates that good performance does not necessarily correspond to years of experience. That is to say, one would expect the rural schools to be doing much better than the urban schools due to the fact that they (rural area schools) have a higher percentage of

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experienced educators. On the contrary, it was found that the area with smaller percentage of experienced educators was yielding better results.

Responses according to respondents' level of education

For the purpose of the study, regarding the respondents' level of education of respondent, 1 = Masters or equivalent; 2 = Honours or equivalent; 3 = Bachelor's degree or equivalent; 4 = Diploma or equivalent; and 5 = Teaching certificate.

Of educators in the rural area, 50% had qualifications below degree level. In the urban area, there were only 40.9% of educators who had qualifications below degree level. There are a higher percentage of educators without degrees in the rural area than in the urban area. One may therefore attribute the low performance in the rural area schools to a shortage of degree-holders. Luckay (1998: 7) mentions the shortage of qualified educators as one of the factors contributing to poor performance in RSA Matric examinations.

The researcher designed the thirty items that appear on the questionnaire in such a way that he would be able to collect data that would help test the four hypotheses of the study. It was for the purpose of testing the four hypotheses that the thirty items were then regrouped into subjects so that the level of significance could be taken in relation to each hypothesis (not for analyzing the categories as such).

Table 4.11 levels of significance for each category

CATEGORY	P-value
ADMINISTRATION	0.284
ATTITUDE AND MORALE	0.366
CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT	0.833
ATTENDANCE OF WORKSHOP	0.038

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Level of significance: $p\text{-value} > 0.05$

The analysis provided above gives rise to the following result with respect to the independent variables: *age, gender, experience, level of education, subject taught*, and subject major, number of lessons and place of upbringing.

- Analysis of the t-test for the administration generally showed no significant difference for the two areas.
- Analysis of the results of the t-test regarding the attitude and morale of the educators towards work generally showed no significant difference between the two places with respect to the independent variables.
- Analysis of the result of the t-test focusing on classroom management generally showed no significant difference between the two places with respect to the independent variables.
- Analysis of t-rest results pertaining to the attendance of workshops generally showed a significant difference between the two places with respect to the independent variables.

The results of the t-test for the independent variables of *Age, Gender, Years of Experience, Level of Education, Subjects Taught, Subject Major, Number of Lessons* and *Place of Upbringing* contributed directly to the decisions taken regarding the four hypotheses of the study. To this end, the rejection or acceptance of the four hypotheses was greatly influenced by the t-test for the independent variables of the study.

DISCUSSION

According to the findings, there is no significant difference in the independent variables that were tested in the 22 items in relation to the two areas with regards to the levels of performance

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indicated in the COSC examinations - this is according to the t-test that was carried out. The independent variables were: age; gender; years of experience; subject major and subject taught; number of lessons each educator has in a week; educators' level of education and the area in which the educator was brought up in.

There were a reasonable number of respondents to the questionnaires. Of the 72 questionnaires sent out the rural schools, 55 were returned. This was a return rate of 76%. The urban area returns rate was 89%, which the researcher considered to be a good response.

Why do urban area schools do better than those in the rural areas?

Most respondents feel that the urban learners are exposed to a number of facilities that help them, even outside the classroom. Such facilities include national libraries that are mainly found in towns. Another factor is that the urban area's high schools are easily accessible. As a result, learners are free to go to school, even during weekends, just for studying, or even leave the school very late, being afforded the opportunity to read after school hours. This, however, would not be the case with the high schools situated in the rural area. The rural schools are not always easily accessible and learners often experience transport problems. Therefore, one could not afford to be left at school after hours, as one could very possibly be stranded due to the unreliable nature of the transport systems available. It is also believed that learners benefit from the presence of parents who are themselves educated. Typically, such parents show interest in the schoolwork of their children. Most parents in the rural areas do not take much interest in their children's schoolwork.

Most of the items that were on the questionnaire did not show any significant difference between the urban area and rural area high schools. Only a few items showed a significant difference. Those include item 12. In fact, the study shows that, according to the profile of the educators, the urban and rural areas are very similar. One is therefore justified in speculating that the circumstances at home play an important role. The researcher is of the opinion that the factors may well be found outside school. This is in agreement with Makhetha (2000: 9) and Mathibeli

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(1996: 98). It is important to note that there was also only a very slight difference in the overall attitude of the educators.

Findings of statistical significance

The result of the ANOVAS showed a statically difference between males and females with respect to differences in performance in COSC results in the urban and rural areas. The same behavior was shown by ANOVAS regarding *age, gender, years of experience, level of education, subject major, subject taught* as well as *place of upbringing*. This finding is not consistent with the predetermined assumptions and reviewed literature that a better performing area should have - for example, significantly more experienced educators and a noticeably higher number of educators with a high level of education.

Findings of mean difference significance

The statistics of mean differences were revealed regarding the two locations, that is, the urban and rural areas, with regard to the four hypotheses. According to Litheko (2002a: 148) and McMillan *et al.* (1993: 343-344), the results of inferential statistics may be statistically insignificant, but the mean differences among the variables might be educationally significant.

Administration

The mean difference in performance in COSC examinations between rural and urban areas reveals that urban area is stronger on the administrative front. The urban area has a mean of 3.0741, while the rural area has a mean of 2.9089. The finding is consistent with MOE (1984: 29) and Genck (1983: 48-49) in the reviewed literature, both of which point out that a strong administration normally produces better results than a poor one.

Attitude and morale of educators

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The mean difference in performance in COSC examinations between rural and urban areas shows the urban areas as being slightly better than the rural areas as far as the attitude and morale of educators are concerned. The urban area has a mean of 2.5820, while the rural area has 2.4559. The finding is consistent with the opinions of Rakhoba (2000: 106) and Mbatha (1998: 6) in the reviewed literature.

Classroom management

The mean difference in performance in COSC examinations between the rural and urban areas shows that the urban area fared slightly better with regard to classroom management skills. Poor school management can equal poor classroom management. The finding is in agreement with the MOE (1983: 3) in the literature reviewed.

Attendance of workshops

The mean difference in performance in COSC examinations between rural and urban areas shows that the urban area is better than the rural areas in matters relating to workshop attendance. The urban area has a mean of 2.4044, while the rejection or acceptance of the four hypotheses was influenced very much by the t-test for the independent variables of the study.

CONCLUSION

The t-tests show that it is indeed difficult to find the factors that cause differences in performance between places. This is due to the fact that, when reviewing the four hypotheses, the level of significance has failed to show any notable difference between the rural and urban areas in three of them. Hanushek (1986: 1159) contends that good performance may be attributed to particular schools in any area. As for the study, it failed to achieve the aim. The aim was to establish the causes of the difference in performance between rural areas and urban areas high schools in

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relation to COSC examinations. This means that any school, whether in an urban or rural area, may perform very well in relation to the COSC results. But it has to be pointed out that children exposed to a culture of reading will normally perform better than those that do not have the privilege. This brings to the forefront the existence of libraries in towns and the pivotal roles that they can, and should, play. Parents who take a keen interest and put aside time to discuss school matters with their children also play a crucial role in the attitude of the child towards their education (Jubber, 1994: 171), Mathibeli, (1996: 98) and Pretorius (2000: 35-39). This is what Summer (1972: 155) refers to as the cultural level of the learner's background. Teaching load, although it has not been investigated in this study, has in the preceding studies not been found to be a strong variable in as far as performance of a learner is concerned. The findings are that whether an educator has many teaching periods or not, only his dedication to his/her work is what that can help produce good results (Moe, 1984:23). Another important element is good administration in schools. Schools that have firm yet flexible administration normally perform well. Administration that has vision normally creates an atmosphere conducive to good performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, the researcher offers recommendations that need to be considered in order to improve the level of performance in the COSC results. The recommendations are as follows:

- The Ministry of Education should regularly inspect all the schools. One of the benefits of this exercise would be ascertaining whether educators are teaching in accordance with the prescribed syllabus.
- The heads of department should see to it that the facilitation of learning is done promptly and that the suitable material (content) is delivered to the learners on time.
- At the end of the week, educators should submit a record of their work to the heads of department. This will enable the head of department at each school to monitor progress the educator's progress with regard to in teaching.

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- For every subject taught in South African schools, there should be regular compulsory national workshops held on a quarterly basis so that educators are all “on the same page”, so to speak.
- The principal must always make sure that heads of department hold meetings where feedback on the workshops attended is given and then discussed.
- The principal and the deputy, with the assistance of the heads of department, have to be allowed to make decisions concerning the development of the school. The school board can later be briefed and ask for clarification where necessary.
- There has to be minimum qualifications for parents to be eligible for candidature on school boards. This would help reduce the many uninformed school board members who, in most cases, throttle the development of a school. For example, an uninformed board can easily turn down the plan for the construction of a science laboratory claiming that it is a waste of money. The same board may find buying of items, such as televisions, as unnecessary luxury, whereas absence of such facilities may very well impact negatively on the school’s performance.