

An investigation of the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of learners at a Linmeyer School in Johannesburg

by

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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE IMPACT OF PEER PRESSURE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS AT A LINMEYER SCHOOL IN JOHANNESBURG

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



Tiana de Oliveira

Date: September 2025

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mom, dad and sister, who have always been there to support me in all of my academic endeavours. I thank them for their continuous encouragement and for always being a shoulder for me to cry on.

To my partner, thank you for always listening to me complain about how stressed I am, and for allowing me to dedicate so much time to my studies.

And finally, to my friends and colleagues who continually motivated me to keep going.

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Thank you.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of learners in a school located in the suburb of Linmeyer in Johannesburg South. The study aimed to explore the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of learners in the school. The researcher employed the qualitative research approach. One school was studied as a case study to determine the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of learners. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Bandura's Social Learning Theory were used to theoretically underpin the study. The interpretivism paradigm was used to collect data for this research study. Eleven participants were purposively selected to participate in this study. Data were collected using document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis and graphs were used to analyse the data. The findings indicated that the learners had minimal to no experience with the negative impacts of peer pressure on their academic performance. Participants acknowledged that peer pressure is, in fact, an issue that they have witnessed among other learner peer groups within the school. Peer pressure can result in positive or negative academic performance. It is, therefore, recommended that the school, teachers, school policy makers and stakeholders implement policies and academic strategies that will promote positive peer pressure and positive peer relationships that can lead to positive academic performance and social development of learners.

KEYWORDS: Academic performance; peer pressure; school; stakeholder; strategies; learners

ABSTRACT (Afrikaans)

Hierdie studie het die impak van groepsdruk en akademiese prestasie van leerders in 'n skool geleë in die voorstad Linmeyer in Johannesburg-Suid ondersoek. Die studie het ten doel om die impak van groepsdruk en akademiese prestasie van leerders in die skool te ondersoek. Die navorser het van die kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering gebruik gemaak. Een skool is as 'n gevallestudie bestudeer om die impak van groepsdruk en akademiese prestasie op leerders te bepaal. Bronfenbrenner se Ekologiese Stelsels Teorie en Bandura se Sosiale Leerteorie is gebruik om die studie teoreties te ondersteun. Die interpretivisme-paradigma is gebruik om data vir hierdie navorsingstudie in te samel. Elf deelnemers is doelgerig gekies om aan hierdie studie deel te neem. Data is versamel deur middel van document-analise en semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude. Tematiese analise en grafieke is gebruik om die data te ontleed. Die bevindinge het aangedui dat die leerders min tot geen ervaring gehad het met die negatiewe impak van groepsdruk op hul akademiese prestasie. Deelnemers het erken dat groepsdruk inderdaad 'n probleem is wat hulle onder ander leerlinggroepe binne die skool waargeneem het. Groepsdruk kan lei tot positiewe of negatiewe akademiese prestasie. Dit word daarom aanbeveel dat die skool, onderwysers, skoolbeleidmakers en belanghebbendes beleide en akademiese strategieë implementeer wat positiewe groepsdruk en positiewe groep-verhoudings sal bevorder. Dit kan lei tot positiewe akademiese prestasie en sosiale ontwikkeling van leerders.

TREFWOORDE: Akademiese prestasie; groepsdruk; skool; belanghebbende; strategieë; leerders

ABSTRACT (isiZulu)

Lolu cwaningo luveze umthelela wokucindezelwa kontanga nokusebenza kahle kwezemfundo kubafundi esikoleni esisendaweni engaphansi kweLinmeyer eGoli eNingizimu. Ucwangingo luhlose ukuhlola umthelela wokucindezelwa kontanga nokusebenza kahle kwezemfundo kubafundi esikoleni. Umcwangingi lusebenzise indlela yocwaningo olusezingeni eliphezulu. Esinye isikole kwakuyizifundo njengesibonelo sokunquma umthelela wokucindezelwa kontanga nokusebenza kahle kwezemfundo kubafundi. I-Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory kanye ne-Bandura's Social Learning Theory zasetshenziswa ukuze kusekelwe ucwaningo ngokwethiyori. I-paradigm ye-interpretivism yasetshenziswa ukuqoqa ulwazi lwalolu cwaningo.

Abahlanganyeli abayishumi nanye bakhethwe ngenhloso yokuthi babambe iqhaza kulolu cwaningo. Idatha yaqoqwa kusetshenziswa ukuhlaziywa kwedokhumenti kanye nezingxoxo ezinesakhiwo esincane. Kusetshenziswe i-Thematic namagrafu ukuhlaziya ulwazi. Okutholakele kuveze ukuthi abafundi babenolwazi oluncane noma abanalo nhlobo nemithelela engemihle wokucindezelwa kontanga ekusebenzeni kwabo kwezemfundo. Abahlanganyeli bavumile ukuthi ingcindezi yontanga empeleni lena yinkinga abayibonile phakathi kwamanye amaqembu ontanga yabafundi esikoleni. Ukucindezela kontanga kungaholela ekusebenzeni okuhle noma okungekuhle kwezemfundo. Ngakho-ke, kunconywa ukuthi isikole, othisha, abenzi bezingqubomgomo zesikole kanye nababambiqhaza basebenzise izinqubomgomo namasu emfundo azokhuthaza ingcindezi yontanga enhle kanye nobudlelwano obuhle bontanga obungaholela ekusebenzeni okuhle kwezemfundo nokuthuthukiswa komphakathi kwabafundi.

AMAGAMA ANGUKHIYE: Ukusebenza kwezemfundo; ingcindezi yontanga; isikole; ababambiqhaza; amasu; abafundi

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AI	-	Artificial Intelligence
CASS	-	Continuous Assessment
COVID-19	-	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
DBE	-	Department of Basic Education
IEB	-	Independent Examinations Board
ISASA	-	Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa
OISESA	-	Office of Independent Schools Evaluations, Southern Africa
QR Codes	-	Quick Response Codes
SASA	-	South African Schools Act
Umalusi	-	Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training
Unisa	-	University of South Africa

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The Department of Statistics in South Africa has revealed that there has been an increase in the number of learners who are dropping out of school. One of the factors contributing to this 3% increase in learners aged 15 years was owing to poor academic performance (Statistics South Africa, 2022). As a secondary school teacher for the past nine years, and as a researcher, I have observed a disturbing trend in my school regarding the pass rates of learners when they reach their adolescent years. The factors contributing to this decrease in academic performance are in abundance, but in my personal experience, peer pressure plays a significant role. The learners who participated in this study attained distinctions in primary school. However, when they reached Grade 8, they experienced a decrease in academic performance. This is a concerning trend because, as a teacher, it is important to ensure that learners maintain a good academic record. Therefore, uncovering the root or the source of the decrease in academic performance of Grade 8 learners is imperative. Hence, I conducted this research study to investigate the changes in the academic performance of the learners when they reach secondary school, with an interest in peer pressure.

Many factors can impact a decrease in a learner's academic performance. Some of these generalised factors include support (or lack thereof) from parents and teachers (Peng, Sun & He, 2022), poor teaching methods (Isa, Mammam, Badar & Bala, 2020), tough transitions between different phases of schooling (Ryan, Fitzmaurice & O'Donoghue, 2021) and poverty (Chioke, 2021). Other general factors may include lack of school funding, educator conflict, inadequate teaching and learning materials (Oguejiofor, Anyakaorah, Ekechukwu & Ogbuanya, 2021), lack of feedback or lack of learner engagement and participation (Namale, Upoalkpajor & Ayambire, 2021), increased academic workload (Baba, Akalor & Kenter, 2024) and peer pressure (Tuteja, 2022) – the factor which is of interest in this study. Some of these factors, among others, have been experienced by the participants in this study.

The major issue to be addressed on the part of the researcher was the impact of peer pressure and the academic performance of learners. While numerous other factors arose, the researcher was interested in the learners' experiences of peer pressure and academic performance. A combination of some of the factors identified above (among many others) was to blame for the learners' decrease in academic performance.

Numerous studies have researched the impact of peer pressure and academic performance. Studies conducted by Tuteja (2022) in Delhi, Mordi and Onoyase (2023) in Nigeria, and Fujiyama, Kamo and Schafer (2021) in the United States of America (USA) focus on peer pressure and social networks, and how these aspects affect learners' academic performance. These studies are based on learners of varying ages who are in different stages of their education. Tuteja (2022) notes that teenagers' academic results are deeply affected by peer pressure, and the consensus among the teenagers was that the school should be more involved in mitigating these negative impacts. Mordi and Onoyase (2023) and Fujiyama et al. (2021) also identify a correlational relationship between the peer group and a learner's academic performance.

In my experience as a researcher and a teacher, I have observed that peer pressure experienced by children can result in negative consequences as far as academic performance is concerned. However, peer pressure experienced by learners need not always be viewed in a negative light. Nisar, Khan and Kolbe-Alexander (2022) are of the view that South Asian learners in Australia who have positive relationships with local peers engage in healthy behaviours, such as riding bikes, walking and participating in group sports. In terms of academic performance, Absin, Chohan, Dalay, et al. (2022) have found that peers can encourage one another to improve their academic performance. In line with the foregoing studies, this study investigated the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of learners in a Linmeyer school in Johannesburg South. It is hoped that the results of this study will contribute to a greater understanding of peer pressure and academic performance. It is further hoped that this study implicates the implementation of school policies to address instances of peer pressure and/or decreased academic performance.

1.2 Rationale

The Department of Statistics in South Africa has noted a 3% increase in the number of 15-year-old learners who are dropping out of South African schools (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Some of the reasons behind this increase include illness, disability, lack of finance, family commitments and lack of interest (Statistics South Africa, 2022). However, the greatest factor causing this increased dropout rate is poor academic performance (Statistics South Africa, 2022). The researcher is a teacher who has been teaching at a secondary school for nine years. The researcher noticed a significant decrease in the academic performance of Grade 8 learners. In the researcher's experience, this decrease has been influenced by peer pressure. However, some learners continue to thrive in their Grade 8 year (Ryan et al., 2021). It was, therefore, important for this research study to uncover the reasons that are behind the decrease in academic performance of the Grade 8 learners who were purposively sampled in this research study.

1.3 Significance of the study

This study aimed to investigate the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of secondary school learners in a school in Linmeyer, Johannesburg South. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the literature about the impacts of peer pressure and academic performance in secondary schools as it applies to learners in the Johannesburg South region. Learners, teachers, principals, parents and other school stakeholders may benefit from a deeper understanding of peer pressure and the impact it has on learners' academic performance. The study will assist teachers, principals, parents and other school stakeholders to understand the impact of peer pressure on the emotional and social development of a learner, which may contribute towards an improved learners' well-being.

A deeper understanding of the relationship that exists between peer pressure and academic performance can assist schools and stakeholders in working towards improving positive learner relationships and academic performance. Furthermore, it is envisaged that the strategies uncovered and provided in this study will assist teachers, principals and school policymakers in creating academic and social policies that will protect, support and encourage learners in

their academic endeavours and social spheres. The school policies may also assist the teachers and stakeholders in designing better academic strategies that will promote positive peer pressure, which can improve academic achievement.

1.4 Problem statement

The researcher has observed a decrease in the academic performance of Grade 8 learners. When the learners transition from primary school into secondary school, they come with good academic results but struggle to maintain the good marks throughout their secondary schooling years (Oguejiofor et al., 2021). The Public Servants Association of South Africa, (2019) argues that there has been a significant increase in the number of secondary school learners who are dropping out of school because of numerous factors in South Africa. However, the learners under investigation in this study are not dropping out of school, but their decrease in academic performance is concerning.

The researcher observed a decrease in the academic performance of the learners in the school under investigation who came from the feeder school into Grade 8. However, the causes of the decline in academic achievement in this school context were not clear. This study aimed to investigate the impact of peer pressure and academic performance once the primary school learners are enrolled in secondary school.

1.5 Research questions

1.5.1 Main research question

What is the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of learners in a Linmeyer school in Johannesburg?

1.5.2 Secondary research questions

1. How could peer pressure among learners cause a decline in their academic performance?
2. What challenges does the school experience as a result of peer pressure?
3. What motivates peer pressure?
4. How can the challenges of peer pressure be mitigated to improve learners' academic performance?

5. What remedial strategies could be employed by the school and stakeholders to curb the impact of peer pressure and academic performance?

1.6 Aims and objectives

1.6.1 Main aim

The main aim of the study was to investigate the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of learners in a Linmeyer school in Johannesburg.

1.6.2 Objectives

1. To discern how peer pressure among learners causes a decline in their academic performance.
2. To identify the challenges that the school experiences as a result of peer pressure.
3. To ascertain the sources and impacts of peer pressure.
4. To explore how the challenges of peer pressure can be mitigated to improve learners' academic performance.
5. To establish remedial strategies that can be employed by the school to curb the impact of peer pressure and academic performance.

1.7 Definition of key concepts

1.7.1 Academic Performance – An indication of a learner's performance in a particular subject. It is based on the results attained upon completion of formative and summative assessments (Roy, Dutta, Tanni & Rahman, 2023). In this study, academic performance refers to the Grade 8 learner's overall academic results for Grade 7 and Term 1 of Grade 8.

1.7.2 Learner – The South African Schools Act (SASA) No. 84 of 1996 defines a learner as a "person receiving education or obliged to receive education". The school under investigation refers to learners as "students". However, this study uses the term learners in line with the SASA No. 84 of 1996.

1.7.3 Peer Pressure – The influence of a friend or group on an individual, usually to behave in a certain fashion or to do something that is deemed acceptable by

the peer group (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). In this study, peer pressure refers to the impact that the peer group has on learners, especially those with a good academic performance.

1.7.4 **Stakeholder** – Any person who is internally or externally involved in the education process (Bolling, 2024). In this study, stakeholders refer to learners, teachers, parents, alumni, and the school board.

1.7.5 **Vaping** – The process of inhaling flavoured vapour, often containing nicotine, through a variety of vaping devices (Tsiapakidou, Mahmood & Savona-Ventura, 2023). In this study, vaping refers to the use of electronic devices that enable the user to inhale flavoured vapour, which contains nicotine.

1.7.6 **Impact** – the Oxford English Dictionary defines impact as the positive or negative effect or influence that something or someone has on something or someone else (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). In this study, impact refers to the effect or influence that peer pressure and academic performance have on Grade 8 learners.

1.8 Theoretical framework

In this study, two theories were utilised: the Ecological Systems Theory (1979) by Urie Bronfenbrenner and the Social Learning Theory (1977) by Albert Bandura.

Bronfenbrenner believes that humans' (specifically children's) social development is a product of their social environment (Navarro, Stephens, Rodrigues, et al., 2022). Bronfenbrenner identified four concentric 'systems' that influence social development. They include the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). (For more information, see 2.2.1).

Bandura's belief lies in that humans' (specifically children's) social development and learning is a result of their modelling the behaviours of role models present in their lives (Bandura, 1969). Bandura identified four processes that contribute to the learning of social behaviours through observational learning. These processes include attention, retention, reproduction and motivation (Bandura, 1969). (For more information, see 2.2.2).

1.9 Research design and methodology

1.9.1 Research paradigm

This study made use of the interpretivism paradigm. Interpretivists acknowledge that all human experiences are subjective and are based on one's interpretation and creation of meaning (Creswell, 2007). The researcher made use of the interpretivism paradigm as she aimed to uncover the meaning of phenomena (peer pressure and academic performance) as they are experienced by individuals. The researcher believed that to do so, she would need to talk to someone who had experience or knowledge of peer pressure and academic performance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To get answers to the research questions, the researcher asked research participants a series of broad and open-ended questions. These types of questions elicited an unrestricted series of responses, where research participants felt comfortable interpreting the questions and responding accordingly (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The reason for selecting this paradigm lies in the notion of experience. Each learner had their own ideas, opinions and experiences with peer pressure and academic performance. To understand the phenomena of peer pressure and academic performance, the researcher consulted the research participants (learners, teachers, and principals) who had experience and knowledge of these phenomena. Open-ended questions allowed for research participants to share their thoughts without restrictions, which provided a wealth of valuable data regarding the topic and the relationships between all elements involved.

1.9.2 Research method

This study made use of a qualitative research method. This method focuses on humans and their ability to create meaning as a source of data (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). This method gave the researcher insight into participants' values, beliefs, behaviours and relationships by researching and understanding their experiences with peer pressure and academic performance (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The data collected from a qualitative study is described as being "rich" (Oranga & Matere, 2023). This can be attributed to the fact that qualitative research makes use of open-ended questions for data collection, allowing participants to interpret, describe and elaborate on their responses (Oranga & Matere, 2023).

This study investigated the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of learners. The study examined behaviours, values, opinions, motivators, distractions, and beliefs of individual participants. Each participant is unique, in that they have their own experiences and contexts. A qualitative research method accommodated this individuality in the collection and analysis of the data, as data were interpreted with an open mind with little to no preconceived ideas. Moreover, participants were given opportunities to answer open-ended questions about the various topics relating to peer pressure and academic performance and provide as much information and elaboration as they pleased. The researcher was also able to expand on the research questions and ask for clarification on responses, which resulted in a rich data set.

1.9.3 Research design

One case study was used in this research study. Yin (2018) defines a case study as a research method that seeks to understand a phenomenon as it exists in the real world. Accordingly, the case study research design was used as the study aimed to explain the impact of peer pressure and academic performance in one Linmeyer, Johannesburg South school. This study was based on a small group of research participants and focused on their individual experiences of peer pressure and academic performance.

Yin (2018) encourages the use of case studies as a research design if the researcher aims to explain a phenomenon in detail. Furthermore, Yin (2018) maintains that, by selecting a case study as a research design, the researcher acknowledges that the phenomenon or phenomena under study is multi-faceted and will require input from those who have experience of or with the phenomenon or phenomena. The impact of peer pressure and on academic performance are multi-faceted phenomena that were understood upon consultation with people who have experienced it. To understand the impact of peer pressure and academic performance, people with knowledge or experience of these phenomena (learners, teachers and principals) were consulted to develop an understanding of the phenomena in the real world.

1.9.4 Location

This study was conducted in one secondary school in the Linmeyer suburb in the south of Johannesburg.

1.10 Sampling

1.10.1 Sampling technique

Purposive sampling was used in this study. Purposive sampling involves the process of selecting research participants based on their experiences and opinions about the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2009). This selection ensured that participants could answer research questions about peer pressure and academic performance.

Research participants were selected based on the following two inclusive criteria:

- i. The learner participants belonged to a peer group and had a decrease in academic performance in one or more subjects in comparison with Grade 7 results.
- ii. The principal, deputy principal, head teacher, and class teachers have directly or indirectly experienced instances of peer pressure and changes in the academic performance of learners in the learner population.

The use of purposive sampling was advantageous as it allowed for the elimination of non-essential participants (such as those who did not experience a decrease in academic performance) from the population and decreased the chances of sampling error (Obilor, 2023).

1.10.2 Target population

Eleven (11) research participants formed part of the study. Four (4) learners from Grade 8 (there were four classes in the Grade 8 year, therefore, one learner was sampled from each class); one (1) principal; one (1) deputy principal in charge of academics; one (1) head of learner welfare; and four (4) class teachers were purposively sampled from the secondary school under investigation.

1.11 Research instruments

The research instruments that were used in this study included document analysis and individual semi-structured interviews.

1.11.1 Document analysis

The documents analysed in this study (school policies, learner academic reports, learner behavioural reports, examples of learner work) were made available upon request from the school principal, class teacher, parents and learners. Data pertaining to peer pressure and academic performance were selected, recorded and analysed prior to collecting data from the individual semi-structured interviews. Documents that contained important data or items of interest were photocopied (removing any identifiable details of research participants).

1.11.2 Individual semi-structured interviews

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal, deputy principal, head teacher, class teachers and learners. These interviews were used to collect data about the study. This data collection tool was used as it allowed the researcher the opportunity to ask direct questions about issues relevant to the study. Eventually, the researcher received detailed, experience-based responses from research participants. This study required data that were rich in quantity and quality to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

1.12 Data collection

Data were collected using the following research instruments: document analysis and individual semi-structured interviews. Data collection is an important component of the research process. The type of data that needs to be collected determines the method of data collection to be used (Merriam, 2002).

1.12.1 Data collection from document analysis

Once the school, principal, deputy principal, head teacher, class teachers and learners consented and assented to participate in the study, the researcher began by listing the documents that were of interest in the study (for more information, see 3.8.1). Documents were requested from the school principal, deputy principal of academics, head teacher, teachers and learners. Each document was carefully reviewed. Relevant data (pertaining to peer pressure and/or academic performance) were identified and recorded. Relevant data or items of interest were photocopied (excluding any identifiable details of research participants). Any additional ideas or notes the researcher had or came across were written in a notebook and eventually converted to a text file.

1.12.2 Data collection from individual semi-structured interviews

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal, deputy principal, head teacher, class teachers, and learners (for more information, see 3.8.2). Venues that were quiet were used. A previously prepared set of questions was ready. However, probing questions were asked where the need arose. Interviews were recorded using a recording device, with a backup power source present and sufficient space on the recording device to store the recordings. The researcher had a notepad ready to write down any ideas, questions and thoughts. The interviews took about one hour each. After interviews were conducted, the audio was transcribed to text and recorded digitally. All relevant notated data was also transcribed into digital data in a text file.

1.13 Data analysis

The researcher sorted through, transformed, modelled and interpreted the data (Alem, 2020) to gain the necessary information needed to answer the research questions. All data collected from the analysis of documents and the individual semi-structured interviews were pooled together to create a large data set. Duplicated data was considered as one piece of data. All data collected from the analysis of documents and the individual interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The software applications Transkriptor and Atlas.ti were used as tools to transcribe and code data, respectively.

1.13.1 Data analysis of documents

Documents were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes. These documents contained vast amounts of data. It was important to determine what data was important and relevant to the study (for more information, see 3.9.1).

1.13.2 Data analysis of individual semi-structured interviews

The individual semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Finlay (2021) identifies two types of thematic coding: scientifically descriptive analysis and reflexive thematic analysis. This study is based on the interpretivism paradigm. Therefore, the data provided were based on experiences of individuals and not on statistics or measurable trends (Finlay, 2021). Therefore, reflexive

thematic analysis was used to analyse responses to the interviews owing to the varied nature of participant responses (for more information, see 3.9.2).

1.14 Trustworthiness

For this study to be regarded as a credible qualitative research study, it was important to consider the following dimensions of trustworthiness:

1.14.1 Credibility

The researcher continuously cross-checked data and interpretations thereof to ensure its accurate representation. Research participants are essentially the owners of the data that they provide. It was, therefore, important to grant them the opportunity to review the interpretation and representation of data to ensure that their personal experiences and meanings were accurately represented. An external reviewer not associated with the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000) reviewed the data and findings to confirm accurate representation, ensuring the study's credibility.

1.14.2 Dependability

To ensure that the results of this study were dependable, the researcher used interrelated methods and detailed reporting of the procedures and methods used in the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Data were collected using two collection instruments (document analysis and individual semi-structured interviews). During data analysis, there was constant revising, comparing and referring-back to data collected and collated to ensure it had been interpreted appropriately. Every aspect of the study was documented in writing in great detail to ensure its dependability.

1.14.3 Confirmability

It is understandable for a researcher to enter into a study with some preconceived idea of what kind of results the study may yield. The researcher had prior assumptions but ensured that they did not influence the process of the study. Where applicable, the researcher acknowledged any limitations, personal opinions, assumptions and potential biases in writing but these elements did not influence the study as a whole.

1.14.4 Transferability

Transferability focuses on a study's findings and whether these findings can be related to those from similar studies (Schurink, Schurink & Fouché, 2021). If researchers want to replicate a similar study, they can do so by duplicating all the procedures and processes that the researcher followed when conducting this research study.

1.15 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance

Permission to conduct this study was granted by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the College of Education (CEDU) Research Ethics Committee (REC) at the University of South Africa (Unisa). Should any issues pertaining to ethics have arisen during the course of this study, the researcher would have written to her supervisors, the Chairperson of the CEDU REC, and the DBE.

Permission, informed consent and informed assent

Permission for the researcher to conduct the study was granted by the principal of the school. Informed consent to participate in the study was granted by the principal, deputy principal, head teacher, class teachers and parents of the learners. Learners also gave assent to be a part of the study.

Risk category

This study is ranked at Category 3: Medium Risk, as children under the age of 18 were involved. The topics of peer pressure and academic performance can be considered sensitive topics. Sharing the reasons behind one's negative behaviours or decreased academic performance may cause discomfort. While participant identities are not made known, their personal experiences form the basis of this study.

Risk related information

i. Potential risks

This study has been categorised as a Category 3: Medium Risk study. Four of the research participants are under the age of 18 and needed

parental/guardian consent to take part in the study. Discussing peer pressure and academic performance can be distressing or uncomfortable and may have made the research participants feel vulnerable. Potential discomfort in sharing poor results, potential of discussions outside of the interviews among research participants, potential discomfort in discussing sensitive topics (friendships and family life, among others) were other factors that needed to be considered.

ii. Steps prepared for potential issues

The researcher used the following steps during the data collection period to ensure the safety of research participants:

1. The researcher ensured that all participants understood the risk associated with the study.
2. The researcher had a plan in place to adequately identify risks and manage all discomfort or harm that may have occurred by involving a school psychologist. She was asked to be available during the data collection period, should the participants have wished to discuss the content and experience of the study. The researcher also prepared a risk register.
3. As the researcher, I managed potential risks throughout the duration of data collection.
4. As the researcher, I documented the process and performed a risk analysis on the selected risk, if needed.
5. The researcher had a plan for responses to control the risks and also provide evidence for an intervention plan in the study.

1.16 Limitations and delimitations of the study

1.16.1 Limitations

This study was conducted in one secondary school in Linmeyer, Johannesburg South. Therefore, the findings of this study are case-specific. They cannot be generalised or implemented in other high schools within the Linmeyer area or in other schools that are in Johannesburg South. Furthermore, only four learners and four teachers out of a much larger school population were purposively

selected based on the inclusive criteria of the study (for more information, see 3.5).

1.16.2 Delimitations

The researcher elected to focus on the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of Grade 8 learners as it is a concerning phenomenon that she has observed from the school reports. When the students join the secondary school, they come with good grades. However, because of the peer pressure, their academic performance deteriorates.

All participants were female, as they were the candidates who best suited the inclusive criteria (belonging to a peer group *and* having experienced a decrease in academic performance). The use of purposive sampling may have led to the exclusion of data-rich participants, such as those learners who may belong to a peer group but did not experience a decrease in academic performance. The use of open-ended questions in the semi-structured interview, and not other data collection strategies such as focus group interviews, for instance, may have led to more detailed information but not focused on the phenomenon under investigation.

The study took place at one specific secondary school in the Linmeyer suburb of Johannesburg South. This school was chosen owing to its proximity to where the researcher lives.

The theoretical frameworks used to frame the study were selected as they provided the most appropriate lens and concepts used (for more information, see 2.2).

The interpretivism paradigm was selected as it enabled the researcher to understand the learners' experiences of peer pressure and academic performance their own subjective reality (Creswell, 2007).

1.17 Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter One introduced the study and provided a brief outline of the procedures that were followed. This chapter included the study's rationale, aims, objectives, an outline of the methodology, and trustworthiness.

Chapter Two presents and discusses literature pertaining to peer pressure and academic performance from numerous journals, books and websites.

Chapter Three presents the methodology used to collect and analyse the data in this study.

Chapter Four presents the results and findings of the study.

Chapter Five presents the discussion of the findings and how these fit into the selected theoretical framework. The study's limitations have been listed and recommendations on how to improve peer relationships, academic performance, and the impacts of peer pressure and academic performance have been provided. Chapter Five also presents the conclusion to the study.

1.18 Summary

This chapter outlined the introduction, background of the study, methodology, and ethical considerations of this study. It also highlighted that peer pressure and academic performance are uniquely experienced by individual learners when they reach the adolescent stage. The researcher used the interpretivist paradigm to understand the phenomenon under investigation. This study made use of the qualitative research method. More importantly, the qualitative research method allowed the researcher to gain insight into these personal experiences. One case study was used to investigate the experiences of a small group of participants. Chapter 2 will present the literature review.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will firstly discuss the two theoretical frameworks that were used to undergird the study. Thereafter, a discussion of the existing literature pertaining to peer pressure and academic performance of learners follows. Different primary resources, such as journal articles obtained from numerous journals accessed via Google Scholar, the University of South Africa's (Unisa) library, and policies from official government websites were consulted. The existing literature discussed is based on both international and local studies, all discussing the phenomena under investigation in this study.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

In this study, two theories were utilised: the Ecological Systems Theory (1979) by Urie Bronfenbrenner and the Social Learning Theory (1977) by Albert Bandura.

2.2.1 Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979)

Bronfenbrenner believes that humans' (specifically children's) social development is a product of their social environment (Navarro et al., 2022). Bronfenbrenner identified four concentric 'systems' that influence social development. They are the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The microsystem incorporates elements that are directly related to the child, such as their friends and family (Guy-Evans, 2023). The mesosystem provides links between elements within the child's microsystems, such as the relationship between their parents, their peers and their school (Soyer, 2019). Elements within the exosystem are not necessarily directly related to the child but do indirectly play a role in their development (for example: society, the media, government and politics) (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Finally, the macrosystem incorporates the laws, customs and values specific to particular cultures that may directly and/or indirectly influence a child's development (Soyer, 2019). While the relationships between and the influences of each system play a significant role in a child's life, this study focused on the micro-, meso- and macrosystems. Within these systems, peer pressure and academic performance, along with numerous other

elements within a child's life, affect their social development. Focusing on these systems provided an understanding of peer pressure and academic performance as they present themselves within a child's life.

The Ecological Systems Theory aided the researcher in reducing the data load when analysing data (Sacred Heart University, 2023). With this theory in mind, the researcher analysed the data, seeking out particular elements and concepts that stood in line with the theory. Data pertaining to the microsystem (learners' family and friends), mesosystem (learners' relationships with peers, parents and teachers) and macrosystem (learners' values, cultures and religions) were highlighted in the dataset owing to their relevance in the study. The researcher was then able to compare and contrast data, and find similarities and contradictions, which ultimately led to the development of themes. Using the Ecological Systems Theory as a basis, the researcher was able to analyse and interpret the data as they related to each system. The findings confirmed the relationships within Bronfenbrenner's microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem. Furthermore, the findings confirmed that the participant's experience of peer pressure and academic performance are experienced within these three systems.

2.2.2 Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977)

Bandura postulates that humans' (specifically children's) social development and learning is a result of their modelling the behaviours of role models present in their lives (Bandura, 1969). Bandura identified four processes that contribute to the learning of social behaviours through observational learning. These processes include attention, retention, reproduction and motivation (Bandura, 1969). Learners are attracted to behaviours that receive positive responses or rewards and will, therefore, pay attention to these behaviours (Bandura, 1969). Learners may see particular peers having more fun or appearing more popular. They would subsequently pay attention to their behaviours, as they are attracted to the benefits and/or attention received by this peer group. Learners observe these groups over a period of time and retain information relevant to the behaviour in which they are interested. Retention, according to Bandura (1969), ensures that they can then model the desired behaviour as accurately as possible

to achieve the same or similar results. If learners note that their peers receive positive reactions and uplifted social status from other peer groups when they do not hand in work, they may retain that information if they desire similar results. The reproduction stage (Bandura, 1969) refers to the modelling of the retained behaviour to achieve the desired outcome. A learner would not hand in homework to receive the same recognition or uplifted status as their peers (the model). The final stage is the motivation stage (Bandura, 1969). The more a learner receives praise and recognition for a particular behaviour, the more likely the learner is to repeat the behaviour to achieve the same responses or rewards.

The researcher used the Social Learning Theory to guide the analysis of data pertaining to behaviours, both negative and positive. These data were sought out to understand how peer pressure and academic performance impact these behaviours and vice versa. Bandura's theory posits that children model the behaviour of those around them. It was important for the researcher to determine if learners were modelling positive or negative behaviours and how these behaviours impacted the child's social perceptions. The Social Learning Theory guided the researcher's interpretation of the data (especially the data provided by the teachers and principals), who had witnessed learners alter their social and/or academic behaviours to suit the peer group. Using this theory, the researcher could attribute some of these changes in behaviour to peer pressure.

2.2.3 The use of two theories

The researcher elected to make use of two theories due to their differing foci. Both theories address the social development of children. However, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory focuses on how the social environment shapes a child's social development, while Bandura's Social Learning Theory focuses on how the individual child shapes their own social development by modelling the behaviours of others. Utilising both theories allowed the researcher to view learners' social interactions and academic performance (and their subsequent impacts) from an environmental and individual perspective. Relying on one theory may have limited the opportunity for the researcher to view peer pressure and academic performance from both perspectives.

2.3 Literature review

There is a noticeable trend in the researcher's school where learners' academic performance decreases in Grade 8. There may be numerous differing reasons behind this worrying trend. However, the impact of peer pressure seems to be a common occurrence in the researcher's experience. The existing literature has a plethora of studies on peer pressure and academic performance, such as those conducted by Tuteja (2022), Nwamadi (2022), and Pasco (2021). These studies, in particular, note the deep impact that peer pressure (whether positive or negative) has on academic performance. The literature discussed next relates to peer pressure, academic performance and the numerous social and academic elements that revolve around these two phenomena. In line with the Ecological Systems Theory and Social Learning Theory, the literature addresses elements within a learner's microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem, as well as learnt behaviours, that can impact a learner's experience of peer pressure and academic performance.

2.3.1 Peer pressure

2.3.1.1 What is peer pressure?

Peer pressure is defined as the influence that a person or a group of people have on an individual/s (Che, Guan, Yin & Zhao, 2021). This influence can be either positive or negative. Also, depending on context, peer pressure can manifest in many different forms (as it is uncovered by the literature discussed in this chapter). Peer pressure is a global phenomenon experienced by children, adolescents and adults from all walks of life. Peer pressure is a common occurrence in the researcher's school. Grade 7 learners come from primary schools with good academic results, only to experience a decrease in academic performance in Grade 8.

Each year, in the school under investigation, the three Grade 7 classes are split into four classes in Grade 8. Additionally, it is important to explain that this class division is determined by the large number of new enrolments. The research conducted by Ives and Castillo-Montoya (2020), Üzümlü, Akayoglu and Yazan (2020), Abaido (2020) and Ladson-Billings (2021) has documented that learners bring their own cultures, personalities, opinions and experiences into the school

environment, creating an air of excitement and interest in something new. Therefore, learners may be exposed to a variety of different people. The formation of new friendships takes place on a large scale. However, not all of these friendships are positive. Peer pressure becomes more prevalent as these learners try to fit in with one another.

2.3.1.2 Sources of peer pressure

Chen and Deng (2022) identified some sources of or factors that influence peer pressure, namely, gender and the family environment. Chen and Deng's (2022) study is based on college-level learners. However, their findings remain relevant in the secondary school context. Chen and Deng (2022) argue that entering into a course where the majority of fellow learners are of the opposite gender exposes them to more peer pressure. Perhaps these learners are exposed to new groups who may appear more interesting and exciting (for example, groups who attend parties every weekend). Learners may find these behaviours attractive and change their own behaviour to better suit their peers. It is important to note that the school under investigation is a co-educational institution.

The family environment can influence a learner's perpetration of peer pressure (Chen & Deng, 2022). Positive relationships and interactions in the home create learners who are confident in themselves and their ability to form healthy relationships (Chen & Deng, 2022). However, family environments that are negative could lead to learners exhibiting negative behaviours and/or associating with a negative peer group. Learners from lower socio-economic, abusive or neglectful homes tend to have poor mental health (Bhawana, Ajay, Sharad, Ghai & Nandal, 2023). Learners who live in volatile homes, or in homes where parents are uninvolved, tend to develop bad habits, such as delinquency (Zakaria et al., 2022) and risky sexual behaviours (Ekundayo & Babalola, 2020). These learners may pressure other learners into engaging in the same negative behaviours. Learners in the school under investigation come from diverse family lives and structures, each influencing the type of person that they become.

The want or need for power and control over another is a common reason for the perpetration of peer pressure (Fauzia, 2021). Learners who can control their peers enjoy the feeling of superiority, while relishing in the perceived inferiority of

the peers they control (Fauzia, 2021). Having control over one's peers often gives learners a sense of belonging (Vyas & Gupta, 2020). Perpetrators and victims want to be accepted by the peer group and will often engage in or encourage others to engage in behaviours and activities that they typically would not engage in (Vyas & Gupta, 2020). The perpetration of peer pressure can be exacerbated further when perpetrators have low self-esteem (Ngo, Nguyen, La, Truong & Nguyen, 2023). Moreover, the fear of invalidation and rejection may contribute to the perpetrator's engagement in and encouragement of negative behaviours for the sake of belonging to a peer group (NICRO, 2024). These sources of peer pressure are contextual. The unique experiences of research participants in this study need to be considered.

2.3.2 Impacts of peer pressure

The positive and negative impacts of peer pressure on numerous aspects of a learner's life are discussed in the next section.

2.3.2.1 Increase or decrease in academic performance

The impact of peer pressure on the academic performance of learners may either be positive or negative. A study conducted by Chen and Deng (2022) argues that college-level learners are motivated to work harder because of positive peer pressure in the form of shared academic goals and achievements. However, some learners felt as though the pressure to compete was harmful to their academic and overall well-being. Chen and Deng's (2022) study further indicates that peer pressure can affect the academic performance of learners well beyond the secondary phase of schooling. Learners who are exposed to negative peer pressure can develop mental barriers, such as depression and deterioration of mental well-being (Danish, Baloch & Rajput, 2023), which can have a negative impact on their academic performance.

Amaewhule, Douglas and Egbune (2020) assert that peer groups have a significant impact on a learner's attitude towards academic endeavours and interests. If the peer group shows interest in a particular academic programme or institution, then it is a sign of approval for the learner to show interest, while disinterest means that the learner should reject the academic program or institution (Amaewhule et al., 2020). Learners who associate with peers who have

a positive outlook and opinion on academics will be more likely to achieve (Xu et al., 2023). Peers who share a similar need to strive in their academics can be a positive impact on one another. The researcher has experienced instances of positive and negative peer pressure, which has resulted in the subsequent increase and decrease in academic performance of Grade 8 learners.

2.3.2.2 Academic motivation and demotivation

The peer group can impact a learner's academic motivation or demotivation. Absin et al. (2022) articulate that an atmosphere of friendly competition among peers can encourage academic motivation and good academic performance. Peers encourage learners to complete their work, hand their work in on time, or provide academic assistance and encourage each other to perform to the best of their ability in assessments. However, there is also a downside to this competitive atmosphere, as learners find themselves comparing results with their classmates, which leads to them feeling demotivated when they are not performing at the same level (Absin et al., 2022). Jabeen, Loona, and Khurshid (2021) argue that academic competition, whether friendly or not, can contribute to academic stress as learners feel the constant need to compare and compete with one another. The school under investigation places academic achievement in high regard. This could create a competitive atmosphere that could potentially increase the occurrence of peer pressure in the school.

The peer group can discourage a learner's interest and effort in their academics. Alvarez et al. (2024) accentuate that perceived motivation for academics can be reciprocal. If the peer group does not place high regard on academic performance, then the learner may follow suit (Alvarez et al., 2024). Additionally, if the learner does not place high regard on academic performance, then it may influence the academic perception of the peer group (Alvarez et al., 2024). Negative peer influences can push learners towards negative behaviours that neglect academics, such as missing lessons or not completing work on time (Reang & Kaipeng, 2022). The subsequent impact of these negative behaviours could be decreased academic performance. It is, therefore, important to consider both the peer group and the learner's impact on academic motivation and demotivation.

2.3.2.3 Changes to behaviour

The researcher often attributes a learner's negative behaviour to them 'just being a teenager.' However, there are usually numerous underlying reasons for the commission of bad behaviour (Bandzeladze & Arutiunov, 2020). The peer group is often the main source of bad behaviour as adolescents tend to model the behaviour of their peers to 'fit in' (Bandzeladze & Arutiunov, 2020). Learners who would not normally engage in negative behaviours find themselves abusing substances like alcohol and marijuana (Watts, Hamza, Bedewy & Moustafa, 2023) or engaging in delinquent behaviours (Reeta, 2020) such as vandalism of school property, just to impress their peers. The practice of peer-influenced vaping is a current issue being faced by the school under investigation.

Contrarily, Keyzers, Lee and Dworkin (2020) point out that the peer group could also play a role in discouraging negative behaviours. Learners who value academic performance tend to steer clear of negative behaviours (Keyzers et al., 2020). A positive peer influence can also encourage prosocial behaviours and the desire to do good for others (Kreidell & Duell, 2023). It is important to consider the type of peers with whom learners in the school under investigation associate. Understanding the group interests and dynamics can assist the researcher when determining the reasons behind the decrease in academic performance.

2.3.2.4 Influence on identity

The peer group can shape a learner's identity. Learners tend to mould themselves to fit the identity of the group (Spears, 2021). Fujiyama et al. (2021) argue that the type of friend group with whom learners keep company will determine whether the peer group's influence is positive or negative. The home environment is where learners are shaped in terms of their cultural identity (Kuramoto, 2022) and psychological functioning/well-being (Spinelli, Lionetti, Pastore & Fasolo, 2020). Parents shape the spiritual, moral, behavioural, and emotional aspects of their children, which plays a role in their child's self-confidence (Kurniyawan, Mulyaningsasi, Wuryaningsih & Sulistyorini, 2021), intellectual development (Ginsburg, 2022), educational development (Lehrl, Evangelou, & Sammons, 2020), and overall well-being (Gromada, Rees & Chzhen, 2020). The school and peers can either reinforce or discourage these

home-developed aspects. The school and peers can influence a learner's self-esteem, self-concept and self-efficacy (Tus, 2020), language (Nishanthi, 2020), character (Birhan, Shiferaw, Amsalu, Tamiru & Tiruye, 2021), and cultural identity (Kayama & Yamakawa, 2020). Each learner's unique experience of and exposure to peer pressure results in unique impacts on their identity. The school under investigation has a learner body that consists of numerous differing ethnicities, cultures and religions. As a result, learners may be exposed to numerous beliefs, behaviours and opinions that may differ from their own. The potential for positive or negative impact on a learner's identity is a great possibility.

2.3.2.5 Experiences that alter future behaviours

Negative influences of peer pressure can vary in their degree depending on individuals and the dynamics of each class and grade. Peers can influence smaller aspects of a learner's life, such as in appearance or personality. However, sometimes this influence can be more extreme. Adeniyi and Jinadu (2021) adumbrate that learners experience negative peer pressure which encourages poor behaviour. Learners feel threatened by their peers to engage in negative behaviours, such as consuming or becoming involved with drugs and alcohol. Underage drinking and drug use are detrimental to an adolescent's physical and mental development (NIH, 2020). These negative school-age behaviours are often pre-emptive of future, more aggressive drug and alcohol abuse (Adeniyi & Jinadu, 2021). The most prevalent substance abuse in the school under investigation is vaping. The potential of this negative behaviour continuing into adulthood is a strong possibility.

2.3.2.6 Positive impacts of peer pressure

Peer pressure does not always need to be associated with negativity. Laursen and Veenstra (2023) defend peer pressure by contending that learners need to be able to socialise and conform to peer groups, as it is an important experience in an adolescent's life. Socialisation with peers assists learners in developing positive behaviours, beliefs, and the ability to make positive choices (Smith et al., 2020). Peer pressure and conforming to one's social group is a normal process

and should be accepted and encouraged, provided it is taking the right direction (Laursen & Veenstra, 2023).

Learners who have interpersonal relationships that are of a high quality tend to perform to a higher academic standard. This is because they have a base that allows the learner to feel comfortable and confident in their abilities, as well as their place in the school (Kiuru et al., 2020). Learners who are happy and comfortable in their school environment tend to have better relationships, which in turn, increases academic performance (Kiuru et al., 2020). The school under investigation places academics in high regard. In some instances, this may encourage competitiveness, both positive and negative.

Positive peer pressure can positively influence a learner's mental well-being (Danish et al., 2023). Cruz, Torre, Castaños and Tus (2022) assert that learners who experience minimal exposure to peer pressure, are resistant to or are not easily influenced by peers, maintaining a healthy mental state. These learners experience more encouragement from their peers. Positive reinforcement and encouragement from peers can make learners feel more confident in their abilities, improving their overall well-being and subsequent academic performance (Danish et al., 2023). The school under investigation encourages positive relationships among learners by instilling the school's ethos in all aspects of school life. The majority of relationships are based on collaboration and service to others.

2.3.2.7 Peer pressure can have minimal or no impact on learners

Peer pressure can exist and have no impact on learners' lives or academic performance at all. Nwamadi (2022) discovered that there was no correlation between peer pressure and academic performance in secondary schools in Nigeria. Similarly, the results of Tuteja's (2022) study revealed that 11,8% of learners do not experience peer pressure at all. Other participants acknowledged that peer pressure existed within the school (20,9%) but they were not necessarily exposed to it. Nwamadi (2022) and Tuteja's (2022) studies speak to the uniqueness that is the human experience – learner interactions within the school environment may be unique to those learners and that school. This is an important consideration to take into account in the school under investigation.

2.3.3 School challenges as a result of peer pressure

In the following section, different challenges experienced by schools as a result of peer pressure are discussed.

2.3.3.1 Absenteeism

A concerning factor influencing academic performance in the school context is absenteeism. Learners are missing school owing to pressure from the peer group (Akkuş & Çinkir, 2022). These learners may be loitering around town (Cawe, 2023) instead of being at school, or meeting up at someone's house to consume alcohol (Quan, Magaya & Harding, 2022) or abuse drugs (Mogakane, 2024). Learners who engage in these behaviours are experiencing negative effects on their physical and mental health, and on their academic abilities and success as well. These learners who are absent owing to peer pressure miss critical lessons and do not seek academic support (Klein & Sosu, 2024), resulting in poor assessment results (Omolekan & Ajayi, 2023). Omolekan and Ajayi (2023) further explain that if the learners are not present at school, they do not get the opportunity to learn new work. Research studies have shown that these learners who were absent in class attempt to learn the work through self-study (Roul, 2020) or through asking their peers (Babayigit & Erkuş, 2022). In some instances, learners can be successful. However, some researchers have observed that oftentimes, when learners who missed a class teach themselves content on their own, it is not enough. In most cases, learners fail to thrive in their academic performance (Nigora, 2024). The school under study requires learners to seek academic support when they return from a period of absence. Parents are also required to provide a reason, and proof if necessary, for the learner's absenteeism.

2.3.3.2 Technology and academic performance

Numerous schools have introduced technological devices as teaching and learning tools in the classroom, as is the case in the school under investigation. However, learners are not making appropriate use of technological devices, such as cellphones, tablets or iPhones during class time, resulting in a negative affect on academic performance (Liu et al., 2020). Learners are playing games together during class time, which decreases their ability to concentrate on the lesson

(Navarro-Martinez & Peña-Acuña, 2022). Learners who spend more time on technological devices, such as cell phones, tend to pay minimal attention to studying and doing school activities, ultimately resulting in poor academic performance (Urien & Silas, 2024).

Learners are also using social media to communicate with one another, often during class time. Access to technological devices enables learners to access social media platforms such as Snap Chat and Instagram. Sadly, these platforms are not being used for educational purposes. Learners feel pressure from peers to engage in communication via social media platforms during class time. Having continuous access to social media also facilitates the formation of new connections and relationships among peers, some of which may be unsavoury (Bibi & Nawaz, 2020). Therefore, the use of the aforementioned social media platforms during class time for the wrong purposes can contribute towards poor academic performance (Bibi & Nawaz, 2020).

It is also important to acknowledge that technology and some social media platforms, such as WhatsApp and Instagram, can be used for teaching and studying purposes. Applications like *wati* are available on the WhatsApp platform where learners communicate through a chatbot about topics such as study tips, time management and university admissions (Rathod, 2024). Instagram allows both learners and teachers to follow accounts such as CNN for global news, “thedadlab” for learner-friendly science experiments, or “unisa_universityofsouthafrica” for information pertaining to studies at Unisa. Instagram has an innumerable number of accounts that can be beneficial for the teaching and learning process, provided the platform is used effectively by both teachers and learners (Amanda, Pratama & Pertiwi, 2024).

2.3.3.3 Substance use and abuse

In the Johannesburg South region, there is a growing concern about the use of substances among learners of school-going age (Mohale & Mokwena, 2020). The drug of choice among learners in the school under investigation is vape, which is a flavoured vapour, often containing nicotine, that is inhaled or smoked using a variety of vaping devices (Tsiapakidou et al., 2023). Statistics show that 31% of secondary school learners are abusing some kind of illegal substance, with the

majority of abusers being young males (Mohale & Mokwena, 2020). It is possible that this number has increased since 2020. Zemba (2022) attributes the frequent use of substances by adolescents to factors such as low self-esteem, influence from peers, and the availability and ease of obtaining drugs and alcohol. Substance abuse may result in cognitive delays which negatively impact a learner's academic performance, ultimately resulting in failure (Mohale & Mokwena, 2020). The challenge for the school is to try contain and prevent the continued use and abuse of substances within the school environment. The school reserves the right to search learners and their belongings upon suspicion or evidence of substance possession or use (South African Human Rights Commission, 2007). However, the way in which these searches are conducted needs to be strictly observed to prevent legal repercussions. For example, only the principal or a delegate of the same gender as the learner can conduct a body search provided the search takes place in a private space (South African Human Rights Commission, 2007). Disregarding these rules goes against the learners' rights and can create further challenges for the school.

2.3.3.4 School reputation

A school's reputation is defined as the perception and standing of the school in the eyes of various stakeholders, such as learners, parents and the community (Datta, 2024). In many instances, potential parents hear about schools through current parents of the school (Cantu, Varela, Jones & Challoo, 2021). It is, therefore, assumed that if current parents have a negative perception of the school, they will then share these negative perceptions with other parents (Cantu et al., 2021). However, if current parents perceive the school to have a good reputation, hard-working teachers and strong management, then prospective parents are more likely to select that school for their child's education (Venketsamy & Miller, 2021). Cantu et al. (2021) further assert that a school's academic success, positive culture and offering of extra-curricular activities increase the likelihood of school selection.

However, a school's reputation can be negatively affected by peer pressure. Peer groups encourage substance use, negative behaviour or general misbehaviour, which creates a negative school environment (Martínez-Fernández et al., 2020).

The negative behaviours of learners can create a negative reputation for the school (Cantu et al., 2021). Therefore, current and potential parents may perceive the school to be undesirable and may elect not to enrol their children for fear of the learners or general environment instilling negative behaviours in their child. The school under investigation has a strong reputation in terms of academics, good behaviour, extra-curriculars and teacher quality.

2.3.3.5 Teacher stress

Peer pressure, and the subsequent issues that stem from its perpetration, can cause great stress for teachers. The impact of peer pressure and its associated behavioural outcomes start in the classroom. The peer group is often the cause of learner misbehaviour in the classroom (Vongvilay, Fauziati & Ratih, 2021). Learners are encouraged by their peer group to tease each other or make rude comments to the teacher (Vongvilay et al., 2021). This misbehaviour during class time causes a disruption to the teaching and learning process. Teachers are often left to deal with these instances in the moment, on their own (Vidić, 2022). However, some teachers become aggressive in their approach to dealing with misbehaviour in the classroom, and may become coercive in an attempt to maintain current and future control (Orejudo, Navarro, Vicente & Cardoso, 2020). Furthermore, Vidić, Đuranović, and Klasnić (2021) buttress that teachers are often limited by rules that govern the way in which a teacher is allowed to deal with these instances of misbehaviour. Additionally, some teachers have not been educated or informed on how to deal with misbehaving learners appropriately and effectively (Vidić et al., 2021). The stress associated with dealing with learner misbehaviour and the subsequent disciplinary administrative load can cause teachers to experience burnout (Vidić et al., 2021) or become unsatisfied with their job, ultimately leading them to leave the field entirely (Hall, 2022). The teachers in the school under study have numerous policies in place that assist both the learner and teacher in dealing with issues of misbehaviour. The school under investigation also has a Head of Learner Wellness and an on-site psychologist, who both provide further assistance to teachers and learners.

2.3.4 Academic performance in South Africa

Each year, the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) World Competitiveness Centre publishes reports that rank countries according to competitiveness in, for example, education (Khuluvhe & Ganyaupfu, 2023). In 2022, South Africa was ranked 50th out of 63 countries globally in the field of education and training – a twelve-position improvement from their 2021 ranking of 62nd place (Khuluvhe & Ganyaupfu, 2023). While this is a great achievement, there is still a need to improve our current education system. An article on the South African Government Blog by Price (2023) highlights the progress made by the democratic government to improve the experience and availability of education for all. From 1996 to 2022, the number of learners (between the ages of 5 and 24) who were enrolled in and attended an educational institution increased from 70,1% to 73,4% (Price, 2023). 37.6% of young adults, aged 20 years and older, have successfully completed their secondary education, as of 2022 (Price, 2023). These successes can be attributed to numerous factors such as additional or external funding (Wildschut, Megbowon & Miselo, 2020), adjustments to education policies (Price, 2023), and increased support from family, peers and teachers (Naidoo & van Schalkwyk, 2021). As mentioned by Price (2023), changes to the education system have transformed South African education, shining a positive light on the future of school-going learners.

On the contrary, the Department of Statistics in South Africa revealed an increase in the number of learners who are not completing their requisite academic journey. About 3% of learners aged 15 years dropped out of school in 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2022). There were numerous reasons for this. Female learners were not completing their secondary schooling owing to pregnancies, illnesses, or immigration (Mokoena & van Breda, 2021). One of the main contributors to the overall school dropout rate was poor academic performance (Statistics South Africa, 2022). In the modern age, education can be a determinant of success in life. Academic performance is important throughout one's schooling career, with a focus on secondary school as the determining factor for entry into tertiary education. A common perception is that, without an education, one may not be successful in the future. Entering tertiary institutions requires a good academic record. It, therefore, becomes concerning when the

academic performance of learners decreases. This may be because of differing factors, such as the availability of school resources (Adebayo, Nzimande & Ngema, 2020). Teachers need to get to the root of the problem as soon as possible to prevent poor academic performance, especially in the higher grades of secondary schooling.

2.3.5 Strategies for mitigation of peer pressure

The impact of peer pressure can be far reaching for all school stakeholders (for more information, see 2.3.2 and 2.3.3). There are numerous school and national policies and laws in place to protect learners, teachers and schools from the negative impact of bullying. However, many of these policies and laws make no reference to peer pressure nor is there a stand-alone policy pertaining to peer pressure. Ajele, Ramadie, Idemudia and Ugwu (2025) and Nurhidayah, Aryanti, Suhendar and Lukman (2021) determined that there is a strong correlation between peer pressure and the perpetration of bullying. Peer pressure is often a precursor to the perpetration of bullying behaviours. For the purpose of this discussion, negative peer pressure and bullying will be used interchangeably as there can be an overlap in the associated actions. For example, pressuring a learner into calling another learner inappropriate names).

The DBE defines bullying as the physical, emotional or verbal abuse of a learner by another learner or a group of learners (DBE, 2021). Bullying and peer pressure occur on a daily basis both inside and outside of school (DBE, 2021). It is, therefore, imperative that the South African Government has laws in place to protect those who fall victim to bullying or peer pressure. This should be done to mitigate the negative impact of bullying or peer pressure, such as decreased academic performance and a decline in overall mental wellbeing (Salameh, 2023). The South African Government has developed the following legislation to protect children from the negative impact of bullying or peer pressure:

The SASA No. 84 of 1996 does not make direct reference to bullying or peer pressure. However, it does state that schools are responsible for developing their own Code of Conduct which must contain definitions and procedures pertaining to discipline, and subsequently, bullying or peer pressure. Therefore, the onus is on the school to ensure that learners, teachers and the school are protected

against the negative consequences of bullying or peer pressure. For school policies to be effective, they need to fall in line with the requirements as stated in the SASA No. 84 of 1996. Independent schools are also required to adhere to SASA No. 84 of 1996 requirements (Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa, 2024). The school under investigation has numerous school policies, all of which fall in line with the requirements of the SASA No. 84 of 1996 and ISASA. These policies cover a wide range of topics, such as academics, bullying, extra-curricular and social media (see section 4.3.1.2 for a comprehensive list of the policies at the school under investigation).

The Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 is in place to protect the rights of all children in South Africa (Children's Act No. 38, 2005). All children have the right to attend school. It is the responsibility of all school-related stakeholders to ensure that the child not only receives an education but that they feel safe in their school environment. The Children's Act declares that bullying by another child is considered abuse (Children's Act No. 38, 2005). Children have the right to be protected from abuse of any kind. Therefore, bullying or pressuring a child is an infringement on their rights and perpetrators are in contravention of the Children's Act. The intensity and frequency of bullying or peer pressure taking place in South African schools is continuous and difficult to eliminate (Fengu, 2024). Developing more serious punishments, such as jail time (Mangale, 2023) outside of the school policy may serve as better deterrents for the perpetration of bullying or peer pressure

The Child Justice Act No. 75 of 2008 provides the framework when dealing with children who are in contravention of South African law (Child Justice Act No. 75, 2008). The Child Justice Act No. 75 of 2008 acknowledges that children take responsibility and be held liable for their actions. However, the focus is on restorative justice and not punishment (Child Justice Act No. 75, 2008). The Child Justice Act No. 75 of 2008 does not include sections pertaining to bullying or peer pressure. However, it does include sections that prohibit children from causing harm to others. The Child Justice Amendment Act no. 28 of 2019 further adds that children as young as 12 years old can be held criminally liable if they are found guilty of causing someone harm.

The Protection from Harassment Act No. 17 of 2011 serves to protect adults and children alike from instances of harassment and the associated effects thereof (Protection from Harassment Act No. 17, 2011). Harassment refers to the direct or indirect infliction of harm in the form of stalking, verbal communication, digital communication or sexual actions, to name a few (Protection from Harassment Act No. 17, 2011). Harm refers to any type of mental, physical, economic or psychological harm (Protection from Harassment Act No. 17, 2011). The Protection from Harassment Act No. 17 of 2011 protects the rights of adults and children by allowing them the opportunity to apply for restraining orders against those who are causing them harm (Protection from Harassment Act No. 17, 2011). This Act is of great benefit for learners who have fallen victim to severe instances of bullying and peer pressure.

The Cyber Crimes Act No. 19 of 2020 serves to protect South African citizens from crimes that take place in the digital space (Cyber Crimes Act No. 19, 2020). Children of today rely greatly on their digital devices and social media for access to information and communication. However, this continuous access to the internet and social media has increased the prevalence of cyberbullying (a form of bullying that takes place in the digital space). The prevalence of cyberbullying among adolescents ranges from 15,2% to 46,7% (Paruk & Nassen, 2022). The Cyber Crimes Act No. 19 of 2020 and the Protection from Harassment Act No. 17 of 2011 serve to protect learners from instances of bullying and peer pressure in all forms.

The importance of school policies in curbing bullying or peer pressure is not to be underestimated. Learners are less likely to bully or peer pressure others if there are laws and school policies in place to deter them (Gaffney, Ttofi & Farrington, 2021). These laws and policies list the consequences for negative actions, which serve as deterrents for learners. The school under investigation maintains a strong sense of discipline among learners owing to the existence of these policies and the school's strict adherence to them and the South African law. Without these rules and policies, the school would not maintain its academic, emotional and spiritual structure.

2.3.6 Remedial strategies to reduce peer pressure and improve academic performance

Peer pressure can have a negative impact on a learner's academic performance (for more information, see 2.3.2.1). It is important for all school stakeholders, such as learners, parents, and teachers, to find solutions that will help improve peer relations, academic performance and their subsequent impact on one another. The following sections discuss strategies that can help improve the peer relations and academic performance of learners.

2.3.6.1 Strategies to remediate peer pressure

2.3.6.1.1 Learner-guided strategies

The SASA No. 84 of 1996 stipulates that secondary schools (Grade 9 to Grade 12) must have a representative council of learners consisting of learners from each grade (SASA No. 84, 1996). These learners are nominated by their peers to represent them regarding school matters. These learners are in direct contact with the teachers and the school and should voice the concerns of their peers where necessary. Msweli (2021) asserts that it is important to include these learner councils in making decisions pertaining to the school and its learners. These learner councils are also important sources of information for school management in terms of learner climate (Eke, 2022). Learner councils can play an important role in reducing the occurrence of peer pressure by consulting with the school about the current issues at hand. Learner councils can also help to develop strategies that would improve peer relations. These strategies would be relevant to the school population as they are developed by the learners themselves.

The impact of peer pressure can cause great stress and anxiety for a learner. Chen and Deng (2022) suggest countermeasures that would help learners to reduce the impact of peer pressure. These countermeasures consist of the internal and external methods. The internal method relies on the learner's ability to reduce the stress associated with peer pressure through self-awareness, value-building, and stress resistance (Chen & Deng, 2022). Learners who know their worth, value, and the path they wish to follow in life are at minimal risk of being affected by peer pressure (Mordi & Onoyase, 2023). Chen and Deng (2022)

articulate that family, exercise, and music therapy help to reduce the effects of stress associated with peer pressure (Chen & Deng, 2022). Any person, group of friends, activity, or hobby that helps a learner to relax are external forces that assist learners in dealing with peer pressure (Chen & Deng, 2022). Furthermore, learners who have had their mental well-being negatively affected by peer pressure should engage in physical activities, such as sporting activities, to improve their mental health and avert their attention elsewhere (Liu, Lu & Tang, 2022).

Learners need to develop the ability to resist peer pressure. The ability to resist peer pressure and to know the difference between right and wrong is a skill often developed at home. However, there are strategies that learners can teach themselves to employ when confronted with a situation of peer pressure. Hartney (2024) suggests that learners learn to say no and put boundaries into place when dealing with their friends. The friend group should know the learner's standpoint regarding, for example, vaping, and respect their decisions when engaging in such activities. However, the friend group may not always be accepting of these boundaries, leaving learners feeling like they do not belong (Singh & Chandel, 2022). In these instances, Durham (2023) emphasises the importance of learners being able to choose the right group of friends. This involves selecting peers who share the same interests and have the same negative opinion of, for example, vaping (Durham, 2023). However, developing these skills is something learners may not be able to do alone. Teachers and parents become responsible for ensuring that learners are taught these skills.

2.3.6.1.2 Teacher-guided strategies

Schools and teachers need to provide learners with factual knowledge and understanding of the concept of peer pressure. This can be done to develop learners who readily recognise peer pressure, know how to resist peer pressure and how to deal with peer pressure in an appropriate manner (Chen & Deng, 2022). Teachers can plan lessons that focus on peer pressure or become a pillar of support, especially where the teacher's subject does not lend itself to lessons centred around peer pressure. The school and its teachers play a valuable role

in identifying instances of peer pressure and developing strategies to prevent its occurrence.

Teachers can prevent the occurrence of peer pressure by teaching learners how to recognise instances of peer pressure (Bernard, 2021) and to identify the potential risks associated with particular actions (Sinha, 2023). The most effective lesson is to teach children how to say no to something to which they do not agree (Bernard, 2021). Learners should be taught how to be confident in themselves and in their perception of what is right and wrong (Sinha, 2023). Teachers should foster a classroom environment that supports a learner's choices and individuality – a classroom that is centred around positivity, inclusivity and open communication (Sinha, 2023). Teachers should also consistently monitor learners in the classroom space not only to control behaviour, but to maintain a positive dynamic (Ngwaka & Obiekwe, 2021). The school under investigation covers the topic of peer pressure in Life Orientation classes. Furthermore, the teachers, Grade Heads and school psychologist are available to learners should they ever wish to discuss any issues or negative experiences.

It is recommended that schools implement strategies to identify any instances of bullying (or peer pressure) and have programmes in place to prevent their impact and/or recurrence (Liu et al., 2022). The school can prevent the occurrence of peer pressure by developing a Code of Conduct that adheres to anti-bullying laws (DBE, 2021). Learners should be made aware of what constitutes as peer pressure and should know the consequences associated with it. Comprehensive anti-bullying and peer pressure policies are effective deterrents of negative behaviour in the school environment (Pritt, 2024). Schools should also maintain a positive school ethos that revolves around positive relationships, care and empathy (DBE, 2021). Continually promoting an atmosphere of love and respect will help to develop the type of learner that the school wishes them to become (DBE, 2021). The school under investigation has numerous policies in place to discourage negative behaviour and encourage a positive school ethos (for more information, see 4.3.1.2).

2.3.6.1.3 Parent-guided strategies

As is the case with teachers, parents play an important role in teaching their children how to recognise peer pressure. Parents should set out clear expectations for their children, teaching them the difference between right and wrong, and what type of behaviours are acceptable (Brotherson, Saxena & Zehnacker, 2023). Parents should be aware of the type of friends with whom their child is associating (Brotherson et al., 2023) and encourage them to make friends with children who align with their own values (Morin, 2024). However, parents cannot be present for every interaction a child has with their peers. Parents should teach their children how to recognise unsavoury friend interactions (Aquilina, 2024) and teach them how to say no to engaging in activities in which they do not wish to engage (Morin, 2024). Children should be taught to be assertive and not aggressive in these situations (DBE, 2021) to gain the respect of their peers and not create a feeling of hostility.

Parents also play a significant role in helping their child to deal with the negative impact of peer pressure. The most important and effective method, as identified by the DBE (2021), Brotherson et al. (2023), Aquilina (2024), and Morin (2024), is to simply be present and ready to talk about anything. Children who know that they have an adult on their side, ready to listen to and help them, encourages them to express their feelings and solve their problems. However, sometimes parents are not equipped to deal with the severe impact of peer pressure (or bullying). Parents can send their child for therapy should the impact of peer pressure be too complex for them to handle alone. Learners who have been exposed to peer pressure and are experiencing depressive thoughts and actions should receive help from therapists (Liu et al., 2022). It is recommended by Liu et al. (2022) that learners engage in therapist-guided group therapy sessions, where learners who have similar experiences can share their stories. The therapist can ensure that learners have a positive experience and that the negative impacts of peer pressure are appropriately and sufficiently dealt with. Learners whose mental well-being has been affected beyond school intervention and therapy should seek a more medical approach in the form of prescribed medication (Liu et al., 2022), although this is only recommended for learners who are experiencing severe negative mental impacts from peer pressure. The school

under investigation has an on-site psychologist who is readily able to assist learners and their parents should the need arise.

2.3.6.2 Strategies to improve academic performance

2.3.6.2.1 Learner-guided strategies

The most important stakeholder in a learner's academic journey is the learner. If a learner has experienced a decrease in their academic performance, the need or want to improve this performance has to come from them. Abdelrahman (2020) defines metacognition as a learner's ability to identify a problem, draw on their prior knowledge and develop strategies to solve the problem, while recognising possible benefits and consequences of the chosen solution. Learners who readily and successfully make use of metacognition are more likely to achieve academically (Abdelrahman, 2020) as they know what they want to achieve and are working towards a solution to improve their performance.

A learner's belief system and their ability to self-monitor affects their academic performance. A belief system refers to the core values, ideologies, and practices that are of importance to a person (Olawole & Oluwatoyin, 2023). Should a learner hold academics in high regard because it is what their parents taught them or it is something they are taught to value in life, then the chances of performing well academically are fairly high (Gamage, Dehideniya & Ekanayake, 2021). To perform well academically, learners also need to be strong self-motivators (Khan, Siraj & Mushtaq, 2024). Olawole and Oluwatoyin (2023) emphasise the importance of altering one's behaviour and practices to improve oneself, especially when it comes to academics. Similarly, learners should employ (or be taught to employ) self-regulation, which can assist in decreasing procrastination and improving academic performance (Ragusa et al., 2023).

Tus (2020) adds positive self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy to the qualities needed by learners to improve their academic performance. In the same vein, Mordi and Onoyase (2023) concur that a secondary school learner's self-esteem can have a significant impact on their academic performance. Learners who are confident in themselves and in their skills and abilities to do what needs to be done are more likely to achieve academically (Mordi & Onoyase, 2023).

On a classroom level, learners could engage in peer tutoring to assist or be assisted in improving academic performance. Alegre, Moliner, Maroto and Lorenzo-Valentin (2020) aver that peer tutoring can be effective in both primary and secondary schools. Abdurrahman, Abdullah and Osman (2020) found that learners improved their academic performance in Algebra when taught by fellow peers. Peer tutoring is an effective method for both the tutor and the tutee. Tutors may feel proud and motivated while assisting other learners, and at the same time, improve their own academic preparedness, teaching skills and communication skills (Wankiiri-Hale, Maloney, Seger & Horvath, 2020). Learners who are struggling academically benefit from peer tutoring as, for example, content may be explained by a peer at a more comprehensible level (Shenoy & Petersen, 2020). Offordile et al. (2021) state that low-achieving learners improve their academic performance if they are paired with and taught by high-achieving learners. Peer tutoring is also beneficial in terms of social skills (which could assist in dealing with issues of peer pressure) as learners bond over similar interests, life stories and struggles with academic content (Shenoy & Petersen, 2020). Abdurrahman et al. (2020) encourage the formation of discussion groups during and after different topics and sections of work so that learners learners can discuss material and practice techniques as a group, which may assist in better understanding for all. Binnaz and Mehmet (2021) highlight that learners who engage in peer tutoring groups where topics such as rules, communication, and peer pressure are discussed, may be less likely to fall victim to instances of negative peer pressure or becoming involved with the negative behaviours associated with negative peer pressure.

2.3.6.2.2 Teacher-guided strategies

A teacher's teaching method is instrumental in improving a learner's academic performance. Isa et al. (2020) accentuate that teachers who use effective teaching methods produce learners with good academic results. Conversely, teachers who make use of poor or ineffective teaching methods produce learners with poor academic results (Ha, 2021). Pasco (2021) recommends that teachers who are using methods that are yielding positive results continue to make use of them. Riihimaki and Viskupic (2020) add that changing the teaching methods to

suit individual learners will result in an improved academic performance, as not all learners learn in the same way.

Nja et al. (2022) introduce the idea of a flipped classroom. Harvard University (2024) defines a flipped classroom as one where lecturing/teaching time is minimised in favour of classwork that focuses on higher-order thinking. Using this unique approach to teaching can improve learner's academic results (Nja et al., 2022). Furthermore, learners who are taught using the flipped classroom method show preference over this method than traditional teaching methods (Nja et al., 2022).

Adopting a learner-centred approach to education improves the academic performance and results of learners (Li, Ding & Zhang, 2021). The advantages of a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning include developing communication, collaboration, and interpersonal skills; self-directed learning, where personal goals are at the forefront; task independence; increased interest in tasks; and increased interaction with peers and teachers (du Plessis, 2020). However, since the human experience is unique, the learners' life contexts and situations play a significant role in the effectiveness of this learner-centred approach (Li et al., 2021). Each learner experiences teaching strategies, learning forms, subjects, and learning environments differently (Li et al., 2021). It is, therefore, important that learners and their unique experiences and needs remain at the forefront of the learning experience, should a school and its teachers adopt a learner-centred approach.

Cutumisu, Schwartz and Lou (2020) investigated the use of design-thinking strategies to improve the academic performance of learners as it focuses on developing learner-orientated solutions to learning. In their study, Cutumisu et al. (2020) gave learners the opportunity to make use of design-thinking strategies through the use of critical feedback from the teacher. Learners were allowed to check the quality of their work before submission. Learners who were academic achievers before this study made use of this opportunity and made corrections and revisions where needed (Cutumisu et al., 2020). This opportunity, as well as the learner's use of the opportunity, resulted in a higher academic achievement

for the task (Cutumisu et al., 2020). However, this method may not be effective for those learners who have minimal academic motivation or interest.

2.3.6.2.3 Parent-guided strategies

Parents are instrumental in developing their child's emotional intelligence (Nurhayati & Rosita, 2020) and cognitive development (Lanjekar, Joshi, Lanjekar & Wagh, 2022). A parent's perception of academic success and failure can play a significant role in the academic interests and self-beliefs of learners (Metzger et al., 2020). Parents who are more readily involved in their child's schooling and who motivate their child to perform well academically are more likely to produce children who excel in their academics (Metzger et al., 2020). Darko-Asumadu and Sika-Bright (2021) contribute to this finding by adding that parents who are present and involved in their child's life typically have children who do well in their academics. Peng et al. (2022) aver that psychological support from parents and teachers also improves academic performance. Schools that foster a collaborative relationship between learners, teachers, and parents will produce learners who excel academically. It is important that the relationship between these stakeholders remains positive. The school under investigation maintains consistent communication between learners, parents and teachers to ensure that all parties are at the same level of understanding when it comes to a child's academic performance.

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the existing literature on peer pressure, academic performance and the impact of peer pressure and academic performance is in abundance. Peer pressure has a unique impact on learners depending on their own unique experiences. Peer pressure can affect a learner's academic motivation and subsequent performance, their identity, and their current and future behaviours. These changes to learners can create a negative school environment where schools are faced with challenges, such as absenteeism, misuse of technology, substance abuse, a negative reputation and teacher stress. Learners also have their own unique experiences with academics. Learners perform positively or negatively in terms of academics owing to numerous factors including individual abilities, attitudes, teaching styles, disabilities, and peer pressure. In the

researcher's experience, peer pressure is a prominent factor that can affect academic performance either positively or negatively, depending on the individual learner's experience. As a teacher, it is important that we ensure that learners are able to cope with the negative impact of peer pressure and maintain a good academic performance. Teachers, parents and learners alike should work towards developing an environment that encourages positive peer relationships and good academic performance.

The research design and methodology used in this study are described in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in this study. The selected research paradigm, research design and research approach are described in detail in this chapter. Justification for the choice in location, target population, research instruments and methods of data collection and analysis are discussed. Ethical considerations are also explained.

3.2 Research paradigm

This study made use of the interpretivism paradigm. Interpretivists acknowledge that all human experiences are subjective and are based on one's interpretation and their subsequent creation of meaning (Creswell, 2007). The researcher made use of the interpretivism paradigm because she aimed to uncover the meaning of particular phenomena (peer pressure and academic performance) in the participants' lives. The researcher believed that to do so, she needed to talk to people who have experience or knowledge of peer pressure and academic performance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher asked the research participants a series of broad and open-ended questions to obtain the answers to the research questions. These types of questions elicited an unrestricted series of responses, where research participants felt comfortable in interpreting the questions and responded accordingly (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The reason for selecting this paradigm lies in the notion of experience. Each of the research participants had their own unique experiences with peer pressure and academics. To understand the impact of peer pressure and academic performance, the researcher purposively selected the following research participants: learners, teachers, and principals, because they had experience and knowledge about the phenomena under investigation. Open-ended questions allowed for the research participants to share their thoughts and experiences without a limit (Rosala, 2024). This provided a wealth of valuable information regarding the topic and the relationships between all elements.

The advantage of using the interpretivism paradigm is that it enables research participants to freely respond to the research questions. The answers to the

research questions emerged directly from the research participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

However, the interpretivism paradigm is not without its limitations. The findings of a study rooted in interpretivism often produce results that cannot be generalised, owing to its detailed focus on a phenomenon in context (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). The subjective nature of the study limits the possibility of applying the results to a greater population. Additionally, the subjective nature of an interpretivism study may lead to researcher bias (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). The data provided in an interpretivism study are open to interpretation on the part of the researcher. Owing to the intense focus on one particular phenomenon or phenomena and interpretivism's limited generalisability, a researcher's own values and opinions may influence the interpretation of results, ultimately distorting the validity and credibility of a study.

3.3 Research method

3.3.1 Qualitative research

The researcher made use of a qualitative research method. This research method focuses on humans (and their ability to create meaning) as a source of data (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The qualitative research method gave the researcher insight into participants' values, beliefs, behaviours and relationships regarding peer pressure and academic performance by questioning and understanding their experiences (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The data collected from a qualitative study are described as being "rich" (Oranga & Matere, 2023). This can be attributed to the fact that qualitative research makes use of open-ended questions for data collection, allowing participants to interpret the questions and to elaborate on their responses (Oranga & Matere). This study investigated the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of learners. The study looked at behaviours, values, opinions, motivators, distractions and beliefs of individual participants. Each participant is unique, with their own experiences and contexts. A qualitative research method accommodated this individuality in data collection and analysis, as data are interpreted with an open mind and little to no preconceived ideas. Participants were given opportunities to answer open-ended questions about the various topics and to provide as much information and elaboration as they

pleased. The researcher was also able to expand on the research questions and ask for clarification on responses, which resulted in a rich data set.

A qualitative research method was advantageous in this study as it allowed for intimate and in-depth data to be collected on a personal level for the purpose of understanding the individual's experience (Creswell, 2020). One-on-one interviews with research participants allowed them to provide data in their own words, sharing as much detail as they wished. The researcher had the opportunity to request clarification on responses. This was relevant to the study as research participants were able to explain their own personal views and experiences with peer pressure and academic performance. For the researcher to understand unique participant responses (and accurately analyse and report back on them), she had to clear up any misconceptions and record the data as accurately as possible. Another advantage of the qualitative research method included the flexibility of data collection methods (such as interviewing) and types of data (such as text or images) (Creswell, 2020). Numerous data collection methods and instruments can be used simultaneously or consecutively in the qualitative research method. Making use of different data collection methods is beneficial in a qualitative study as research participants may respond better to one data collection method than they would another. This ensures that data collected is as 'saturated' and accurate as possible. Document analysis and individual semi-structured interviews formed part of the data collection process in this study. These methods were not only used to collect data in isolation, but to compare and contrast the data. It also allowed the researcher more than one opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the data provided, unlike questionnaires or surveys, which are often anonymous and/or incomplete.

The qualitative research method also has its disadvantages. Qualitative research lays focus on people's personal experiences of a phenomenon and the researcher's interpretation thereof. This may create the potential for bias and/or misinterpretation on the part of the researcher (Babbie, 2016). Research participants and researchers may have different experiences and opinions of the school, peers, family, cultures and society, among others. Moreover, these experiences and opinions of research participants may not be in line with those

of the researcher, which could possibly result in leading questions or the disregarding of data.

The researcher needs to enter into the interaction with complete objectivity and allow for participants to share their data without the fear of being disregarded or misrepresented. These potential disadvantages were carefully considered by the researcher. The researcher overcame these disadvantages by maintaining an open-minded attitude towards participant responses. Another limitation of the qualitative research method is that of generalisability and how it is often ignored by the researcher (Williams, 2000). This study is based on the unique experiences of individual research participants and their lives, which may not be applicable to the greater population. The experiences of research participants and the outcomes of these experiences may not be applicable to other learners and/or staff members. However, Williams (2000) argues that generalising in a qualitative study is not an impossibility. It is dependent on the context and purpose of the study. Some of the experiences and opinions of the research participants were fairly common and may be applicable across schools and could potentially be generalised to a greater population. Perhaps, for example, research participants who believed that teaching methods are the main contributing factor to their poor academic performance, resonate with other poor performing learners in the same school, suburb or city.

3.3.2 Case study

One case study was used in this research study. The case study research design was used for this study as it aimed to explain the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of learners. Yin (2018) defines a case study as a research method that seeks to understand a phenomenon as it exists in the real world. Yin (2018) encourages the use of case studies as a research design if the researcher aims to explain a phenomenon in detail. This study was based on a small sample of research participants and focused on their individual experiences of peer pressure and academic performance. Yin (2018) maintains that, by selecting a case study as a research design, the researcher acknowledges that the phenomenon or phenomena under study are multi-faceted and will require input from those who have experience of or with the phenomenon or phenomena. The

impact of peer pressure and academic performance is a multi-faceted phenomenon that was understood upon consultation with people who have experienced it. To understand the relationship between these two concepts, people with knowledge or experience of these phenomena (such as learners, teachers, and principals) were consulted to develop an understanding of the phenomena in the real world.

Some advantages of case study research, and the results produced from it, include the opportunity to understand the complex life experiences of people, to share experiences in an academic format, therefore, allowing readers an opportunity to compare their own experiences with that of the participants, and possibly, create a pathway towards improving or changing a policy (Kekeya, 2021). The disadvantages of case study research include the possibility of research findings being overexaggerated or not entirely representative of the entire population under study (Kekeya, 2021). The case of peer pressure and academic performance of learners in a secondary school in Johannesburg South is a unique experience exclusive to these participants. It may be possible that the readers of the study will not relate to participants as they do not share the same or similar experiences. However, the researcher aimed to interpret the results with an open and global mindset. Participants are entitled to their own experiences and can express their feelings accordingly. The researcher compared the results of this study to the results of numerous other studies to align it within the existing body of literature. It is hoped that this alignment allows the reader to be exposed to the unique context of peer pressure and academic performance in Johannesburg South. Furthermore, it is hoped that this alignment allows the reader to generalise and draw similar conclusions in their own unique contexts.

3.4 Location

This study was conducted in one secondary school in the Linmeyer suburb, south of Johannesburg, Gauteng.

3.5 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used in this study. Purposive sampling involves the process of selecting research participants based on their ideas, experiences and

opinions about a topic. Their knowledge will assist the researcher in understanding their research problem and assist in answering the research question (Creswell, 2009). Research participants were selected based on the following inclusive criteria: the participants must be: a Grade 8 learner belonging to a peer group and they must have a decrease or experience a decrease in academic performance in one or more subjects in comparison with the Grade 7 results; a principal or deputy principal or class teacher that have directly or indirectly experienced instances of peer pressure and changes in the academic performance of learners in the learner population, and all participants must attend and/or work at the school in Linmeyer, Johannesburg South.

Purposive sampling in this study was advantageous as it allowed for the elimination of non-essential participants from the population and decreased the chances of sampling error (Obilor, 2023). Participants were chosen based on their perceived experience or knowledge of a decrease in academic performance and peer pressure. This selection was made to ensure that participants could answer the research questions about peer pressure and academic performance, and ultimately support or refute the researcher's main research question. Purposive sampling may have been disadvantageous in this study as it is a non-probability method of sampling (Obilor, 2023). The 11 purposively sampled participants who participated in the study cannot represent an entire population, owing to the unique nature of their own context and experiences (Tajik, Golzar, & Noor, 2024). To overcome this limitation, the researcher focused on the participants' unique experiences but interpreted them alongside the existing body of literature on peer pressure and academic performance.

The researcher chose participants based on specific criteria, as discussed above. These criteria were crucial in assisting the researcher and the research participants in responding to the research questions of the study. The disadvantage of using purposive sampling in this study is that purposive selection does not necessarily apply in larger populations (Thomas, 2022). This study was based on a single secondary school in Johannesburg South, which excluded the possibility of sampling from a greater population. This has resulted in the exclusion of data-rich participants from other secondary schools. The researcher

aimed to overcome this limitation by selecting participants she believed had the most valuable insight into peer pressure and academic performance. It is hoped that readers of this study can find similarities in their own contexts and experiences.

3.6 Target Population

Eleven (11) research participants formed part of the study. Four (4) learners from Grade 8 (there were four classes in the Grade 8 year, therefore, one learner was sampled from each class); one (1) principal; one (1) deputy principal in charge of academics; one (1) head of learner welfare; and four (4) class teachers were purposively sampled from the secondary school under investigation.

3.7 Research instruments

The research instruments used in this study included document analysis and individual semi-structured interviews.

3.7.1 Document analysis

Documents are an ever-present and important part of our lives as they can provide in-depth personal information related to an individual or entity (Wood, Sebar & Vechhio, 2020). The documents analysed in this study included: learner academic reports, learner behavioural and attendance reports, examples of learners' work, school policies and the SASA No. 84 of 1996. All the documents which were analysed in this study were made available upon request from the school principals, class teachers, learners' parents and learners. Data about peer pressure and academic performance were selected, recorded and analysed alongside the data collected from the individual semi-structured interviews. Sources from which relevant data or items of interest were taken were photocopied (removing any identifiable details of research participants).

3.7.2 Advantages of document analysis

Using document analysis provided some advantages for the researcher. An advantage of document analysis is that it is both economical and is not time consuming (Babbie, 2021). As stated by Babbie (2021), researchers are not necessarily required to spend a large sum of money for equipment or instruments to assist in the analysis of documents. Document analysis is a cost-effective and

unobtrusive way of collecting data. The physical presence of the author/owner of the document is not necessarily required and the action of analysing documents does not affect the participant (Babbie, 2021).

3.7.3 Disadvantages of document analysis

The disadvantages of document analysis may be the possibility of misinterpretation on the part of the researcher (Denzin, 2017). Trying to interpret what is meant by the author or owner of the document may be a difficult task without having their input. Incorrect interpretation may affect the overall results of a study. The researcher aimed to interpret the data in its actual state as is, with minimal to no opinion-based assumptions. In instances where the researcher wished to confirm particular data, she consulted with the document's owner in the individual semi-structured interviews. This was done to ensure the accurate interpretation of the data and to limit the potential of assumptions on the part of the researcher.

Additionally, Denzin (2017) points out the potential issue of authenticity and the need to establish authorship/ownership of a document. The researcher could rely on the authentic nature of the data as the school under investigation thoroughly checks each document before they are submitted or made public. For example, learners are required to produce and submit original work. Teachers are required to check for plagiarism, especially for tasks that count for marks. Moreover, Heads of Department are required to check subject marks for each learner to ensure accurate recording of results. Principals are required to create, proofread and share school policies, as well as check the final reports of each learner in the school before they are published. There were no concerns on the part of the researcher in this regard.

Once authenticity is established, documents are not guaranteed to contain correct and/or relevant data (Denzin, 2017). There was no need to overcome these potential shortcomings in the analysis of documents for this study as the researcher only selected documents that would contain data relevant to the study. Throughout the analysis of documents, the researcher was prepared to consult with the authors/owners of these documents where needed. When the researcher was unable to find the relevant information in a particular document, for example,

if there was no data in an example of learners' work that indicated a decreased performance in a particular subject, she consulted documents from other sources. For example, the researcher consulted the learners' academic reports to confirm a decrease in academic performance for the subject or subjects, despite no evidence of academic decline in the selected example of the learners' work. The researcher triangulated these documents, along with the semi-structured interviews, to ensure her representation of participants' data was as accurate as possible.

3.7.4 Individual semi-structured interviews

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal, deputy principal, head teacher, class teachers and learners. These interviews were used to collect data pertaining to the study. This data collection tool was used as it gave the researcher the opportunity to ask direct questions about issues relevant to the study. The researcher received detailed experience-based responses from research participants. This study required data that were rich in quantity and quality to gain a deeper understanding of the topic at hand, hence the choice of individual semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews allow for in-depth discussions about the topic at hand (Kakilla, 2021). The researcher used semi-structured interviews to collect data from research participants, as it gave them the freedom to respond to the questions as they wished. This opportunity for open responses assisted the researcher in uncovering new ideas and/or aspects to the questions that the researcher may have not initially thought of (Kakilla, 2021). While the researcher gave this opportunity to research participants, the interviews were guided by the list of questions that required a response for the sole purpose of answering the research questions. Research participants' responses elicited different questions being asked by the researcher, and encouraged research participants to ask questions as well. Research participants who feel comfortable in an interview situation tend to share data more willingly and openly (Swain & King, 2022). The more detailed the data, the more the researcher had to work with to come to accurate and representative findings. The researcher ensured that the discussions neither went off-topic nor over time by refocusing on the research

questions. The interviews took about one hour each. All data provided during the individual semi-structured interviews were recorded using an audio-recording device. The researcher wrote down notes where needed, in a notebook and converted the notes to a text file. After the individual semi-structured interviews were conducted, the researcher transcribed the audio to text and recorded the text digitally.

3.7.5 Advantages of semi-structured interviews

The advantages of using semi-structured interviews as a data collection instrument are that they allow for research participants to share information from their personal viewpoint (Creswell, 2009). This falls in line with the interpretivism paradigm that was used in this study (for more information, see 3.2). Interviews allowed the researcher to take control (Creswell, 2009) in terms of what topic was discussed and what data were necessary for the study. The interviews were also beneficial in terms of reaching data saturation, whether it be through increasing the sample size (Mwita, 2022) or through persistent questioning of participants. In this study, the point of saturation was reached through persistent questioning of research participants.

3.7.6 Disadvantages of semi-structured interviews

The disadvantages of semi-structured interviews, taken into consideration by the researcher, included the potential of limited data provided by research participants owing to unfamiliarity or sensitivity of the topic (Self, 2021). Research participants were in unusual situations and may not have felt comfortable sharing data. To eliminate this disadvantage, the researcher started asking the research participants biographical questions and also explained the importance of the study. This was done to break the ice and make the research participants felt comfortable. More importantly, this move helped in winning the trust of the research participants.

3.8 Data collection

Data were collected using two data collection instruments. Document analysis and individual semi-structured interviews were used to collect data in this research study. Data collection is an important component of the research process. The type of data that needs to be collected will determine the method of

data collection to be used (Merriam, 2002). Yin (2018) identifies four data collection methods: interviews, observations, collection and examination, and feeling. The data required for this study needed to be in-depth, descriptive and first-hand. Hence, the two data collection instruments used were the most relevant for collecting data in this research study.

3.8.1 Document analysis

Once the school, principal, deputy principal, head teacher, class teachers and learners consented and assented to participate in the study, the researcher began collecting the documents that were of interest. The documents (learner academic reports, learner behavioural and attendance reports, and examples of learner's work) were requested from the school principal, deputy principal of academics, teachers and learners where necessary. Other documents (school policies and the SASA No. 84 of 1996) were readily available to the public. Each document was carefully analysed. Relevant data (pertaining to peer pressure and/or academic performance) were identified and recorded. Relevant data or items of interest were photocopied (excluding any identifiable details of research participants). Any additional ideas or notes that the researcher had during data analysis was written in a notebook and eventually converted to a text file.

The following documents and policies were analysed in this study:

3.8.1 i. Learner academic reports and behavioural and attendance reports

School reports, behavioural reports and attendance reports were analysed to gain an understanding of the learner's level of academic performance. These reports indicated the learner's behaviour (for example, the accumulation of merits or demerits) and school attendance. A comparison between the learner's Grade 7 Grade 8 reports allowed the researcher to determine if there was a decrease in academic performance, changes in behaviour or changes in school attendance.

3.8.1. i (a) Graphs were used to present the data collected from the learners' academic reports. According to Verdinelli and Scagnoli (2013), graphs are used to organise, simplify and transform data. Furthermore, graphs are used to engage the reader's interest (Divecha, Tullu & Karande, 2023).

3.8.1 ii. School code of conduct and other policies

The school's code of conduct (policy) and other policies (anti-bullying, substance abuse, merits and demerits, and academics, among others) outlined the kinds of behaviour and performance that are acceptable and those that are not. It is possible that learners who have gone or go against this code of conduct have experienced instances of peer pressure.

3.8.1 iii. Examples of learner's work

Examples of learner's work, especially for the subjects where there was a decrease in academic performance, were compared. This was done to determine if there were any glaring differences in the quality of work, whether it was lack of effort or interest, or increased level of difficulty.

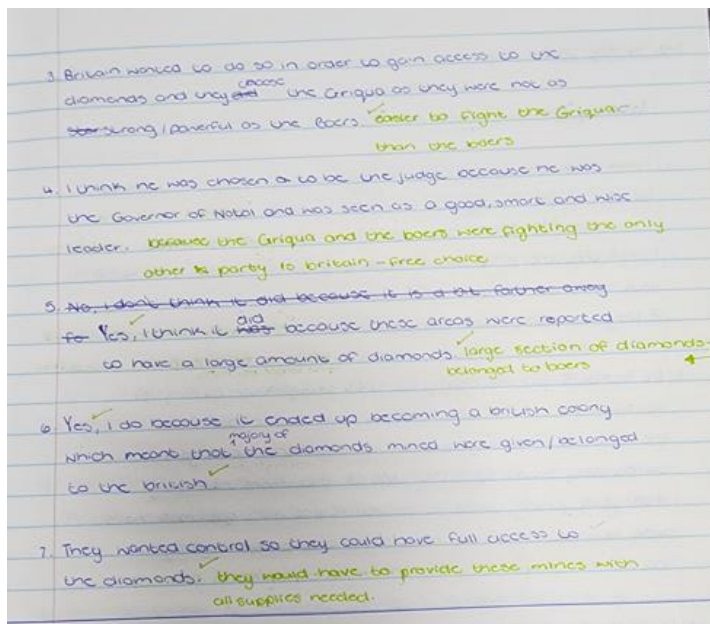


Figure 3.1: Example of classwork

EXAMPLE	Working out PAYE
How much do you earn per annum 30 000 per month = 30 000 x 12	(A) 360 000 ✓
Step 1: Which tax bracket do you fall into? (REFER TO TAX TABLE)A	321 601 - 445 100 ✓
Step 2: What is the flat rate of tax you have to pay in this tax bracket?	R67 144 (B) ✓
Step 3: Calculate what you earn over and above R1.	(C) $360\ 000 - 321\ 601 = 38\ 399$ ✓
Step 4: Calculate the % of each R above R1	(D) $38\ 399 \times 31\% =$ R11 903,69 ✓
Step 5: Calculate the total amount of tax you have to pay per annum.	$11\ 903,69 + 67\ 144$ $= 79\ 047,69$ B + D ✓
Step 6: How much tax do you pay per month?	$79\ 047,69 \div 12$ $= 6587,31$ ✓
Step 7: What is your NET PAY per month after taxes.	$30\ 000 - 6587,31$ $= 23\ 412,69$ ✓

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Figure 3.2: Example of digital submission

Film Review Test: Management Styles in "The Devil Wears Prada"

Instructions:
Watch the film "The Devil Wears Prada" and then answer the following questions. Make sure to provide detailed explanations and examples from the film to support your answers.

Part A: Multiple Choice (5 questions, 2 marks each)
Circle the correct letter a), b), c) or d).

- What is Miranda Priestly's management style?
 - a) Transformational
 - ☒ b) Autocratic / Authoritarian
 - c) Laissez-faire
 - d) Democratic
- How does Andy Sachs initially respond to Miranda's management style?
 - a) She immediately adapts and excels.
 - ☒ b) She quits on her first day.
 - c) She struggles and contemplates quitting.
 - d) She reports Miranda to HR.
- Which character exhibits a supportive and mentoring management style towards Andy?
 - a) Emily Charlton
 - ☒ b) Nigel Kipling
 - c) Miranda Priestly
 - d) Christian Thompson
- Miranda Priestly often uses which of the following tactics to maintain control over her employees?
 - ☒ a) Offering frequent praise and encouragement.
 - b) Threatening to fire them.
 - c) Providing opportunities for professional development.
 - d) Allowing them to make their own decisions without interference.
- By the end of the film, how has Andy's perception of Miranda's management style changed?
 - a) She respects Miranda's approach and seeks to emulate it.
 - b) She remains resentful and leaves the fashion industry entirely.
 - ☒ c) She understands the complexity and sacrifices involved in Miranda's position.
 - d) She decides to confront Miranda and demand better treatment.

33/35

Figure 3.3: Example of class assessment

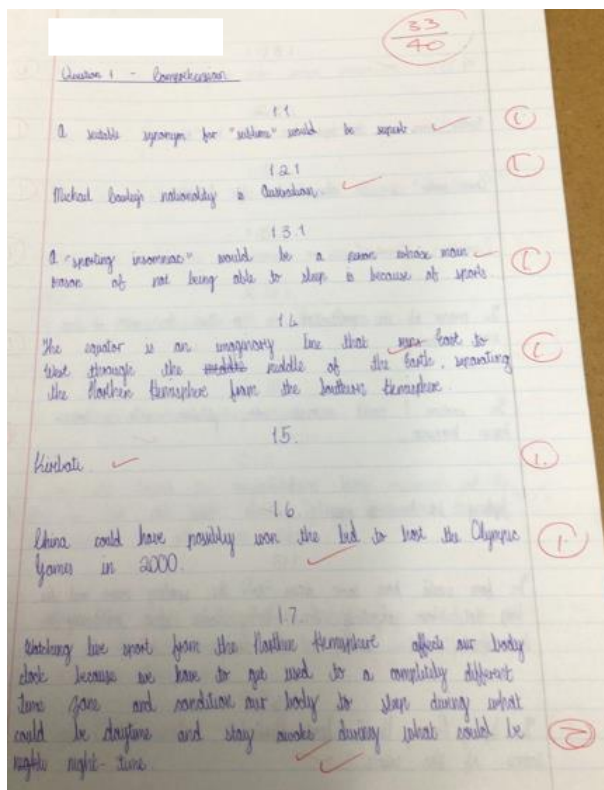


Figure 3.4: Example of summative assessment

3.8.1 iv. SASA No. 84 of 1996

The purpose of the SASA No. 84 of 1996 policy is to ensure that all schools are organised, governed and funded appropriately (SASA No. 84, 1996). The SASA No. 84 of 1996 also serves to make amendments to laws relating to schools and to provide guidelines for all matters related to schools (SASA No. 84, 1996). It is important to ensure that the school under investigation (and all stakeholders involved) complied with the Act.

3.8.2 Individual semi-structured interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with the principal, deputy principal, head teacher, class teachers and learners. Moreover, venues that were free from disturbances were used. A prepared set of questions was ready prior to the interviews. However, probing questions were asked as the need arose. Interviews were recorded using a recording device, with a backup power source present and sufficient space on the recording device to store the recordings. The researcher had a notepad ready to write down any ideas, questions or thoughts

of relevance to the study. The interviews took about one hour each. After the interviews were conducted, the audio was transcribed to text and was recorded digitally. All relevant data written by the researcher was also transcribed into digital data.

Semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth discussions regarding the topic (Kakilla, 2021). This opportunity for open responses assisted the researcher in uncovering new ideas and/or aspects to the questions that the researcher did not initially think of (Kakilla, 2021). While the researcher gave this opportunity to research participants, the interviews were guided by the list of questions that required responses for the sole purpose of answering the research questions. Research participants' responses elicited different questions being asked by the researcher, and encouraged research participants to ask questions as well. In addition, research participants who feel comfortable in an interview situation tend to share data more willingly and openly (Swain & King, 2022). The more detailed the data, the more the researcher had to work with to come to accurate and representative findings of peer pressure and academic performance. However, the researcher ensured that the discussions did not go off-topic nor over time. The interviews took about one hour each. All data provided during the individual semi-structured interviews were recorded using an audio-recording device. The researcher wrote down notes in a notebook and converted the notes to a text file, where necessary. After interviews were conducted, the researcher transcribed the audio to text and recorded the text digitally.

3.9 Data analysis

Data analysis is the process following data collection. Data analysis refers to the process where the researcher sorts through, transforms, models and interprets the data to gain the necessary information needed to answer the research questions (Alem, 2020). All data collected from the analysis of documents and the individual semi-structured interviews was 'pooled' together to create a large data set that had duplicated data. Duplicate data was considered as one piece of data. All data collected from the analysis of documents and the individual semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The software

applications Transkriptor and Atlas.ti were used as tools to transcribe and code data, respectively.

3.9.1 Document analysis

Documents were analysed using thematic analysis. Learners' academic, behavioural and attendance reports, examples of learners' work, school policies, and the SASA No. 84 of 1996 were analysed to identify recurring patterns. These documents contained vast amounts of data. It was important to determine what data were important and relevant to the study. Creswell (2012) suggests the following steps after data collection, when preparing for data analysis: preparation, reading and coding, all of which were used in the analysis of the data.

The relevant documents were sorted according to the various research participants. It was important to confirm authorship/ownership of documents, as well as their authenticity and credibility (Morgan, 2022). The authenticity of the documents was confirmed through school records and through consultation with the owners of said documents. Documents pertaining to learner results have to be authentic according to regulations put in place by the Independent Examination Board (IEB), Umalusi, Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa (ISASA) and the Office of Independent Schools Evaluations, Southern Africa (OISESA). The credibility of these documents was determined by these same regulations. Any concerns were addressed through consultation with the owners of the documents, apart from the SASA No. 84. Once the preparation of documents was complete, the researcher proceeded to read through each document, taking notes on relevant data of interest. Determining the meaning of the documents is the most pertinent part of the analysis. Comparisons were made between documents to determine any recurring patterns. Learner academic, behavioural and attendance reports were compared to identify any changes to results, behaviours or attendance. Once again, the owners of the documents were consulted when needed. After reading through the documents and making notes, the researcher began to assign codes to the data and matched these patterns with those created in the coding of the data provided in the individual

interviews. Once all of these patterns were collated, the researcher was able to identify recurring themes.

3.9.2 Individual semi-structured interviews

The individual semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Finlay (2021) identifies two types of thematic analysis: scientifically descriptive and reflexive thematic analysis. This study used the interpretivist paradigm. The data provided emanated from experiences of individuals and not on statistics or measurable trends (Finlay, 2021). Therefore, reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyse participant responses from the interviews.

Once audio-recorded data and notes were converted to a digital format, the following steps, as suggested by Finlay (2021), were used to analyse the data. The first step was to become familiarised with the data. Barkat (2022) suggests using the flexible notes system when preparing and familiarising oneself with data for analysis. The process involves having separate pieces of paper with different headings where the researcher writes down interviewee responses relevant to the key topics of the study (Barkat, 2022).

The second step, as suggested by Finlay (2021), is to generate basic codes. Commonly mentioned topics and patterns were categorised and appropriately named. Step three requires one to identify common themes. Preliminary codes based on the flexible notes system were compared and contrasted to find common occurrences between them. They were grouped under a theme. The fourth step requires the careful review of identified themes to determine if they are truly related or if there should be a separation or inclusion of themes. The fifth step is to provide a name and definition of the finalised themes. This was done using the collective descriptions and/or trends provided by research participants (or noted by the researcher) for specific topics related to a particular theme. The final step was to compile the 'report', which includes comparisons and inclusions within existing literature on the same/similar topic/s.

3.10 Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is prone to subjectivity owing to the nature of what is being studied (Kakar, Rasheed, Rashid & Akhter, 2023). Therefore, it was important for

the researcher to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the common experiences readers and writers may share (Stahl & King, 2020). A qualitative study that is trustworthy is one where readers are confident in the accuracy of a study and acknowledge that a repetition of a similar study may not yield the same results (Stahl & King, 2020). To ensure trustworthiness in this study, the researcher made use of triangulation.

Triangulation is defined as the process of cross-checking one's work using differing data collection methods to confirm the study's credibility (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). This study employed two methods of data collection to ensure trustworthiness, that is, document analysis and individual semi-structured interviews. The research participants were interviewed individually and, where necessary, had follow-up interviews to seek more clarity on the collected data. Documents pertaining to research participants were also analysed. Research participants were consulted for clarity if any data in these documents were unclear. Research participants were able to corroborate data that the researcher found in the documents in their individual interviews as well. Using these methods allowed for the comparison of data given by research participants in different settings.

Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggest four criteria to guide the researcher in ensuring the trustworthiness of a study, namely, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. To further ensure this study's trustworthiness, the researcher took into consideration the four criteria as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1986).

3.10.1 Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research refers to the researcher's representation of opinions, ideas and descriptions provided by research participants, and whether these have been accurately interpreted and presented (Schurink et al., 2021). Since qualitative research is based on the human experience, it is important to accurately represent these experiences to ensure a study's credibility. Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest the use of three "lenses", which are those belonging to the researcher, the participants, and the external reviewer. Firstly, the researcher continuously cross-checked data during document analysis and the individual interviews. The researcher continuously cross-checked the data to ensure her

interpretations thereof were accurately represented. Secondly, the research participants are the owners of the data that they provide. It is, therefore, important to grant them the opportunity to review the interpretation and representation of data to ensure their personal experiences and meanings were accurately represented. This was accomplished during the interviews and follow-up interviews, where needed. Thirdly, the supervisors in this instance acted as the external reviewers of the collected data, as they were not involved in the data collection process. Their review was necessary to ensure that the data collected was sufficient enough to respond to the main and secondary research questions. These supervisors scrutinised the collected data and pointed out gaps in the data, which led the researcher to conduct follow-up interviews or discussions with the research participants, where necessary. The follow-up interviews and discussions assisted in closing the gaps that were in the initial collected data. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), an external reviewer (or reviewers) plays a crucial role in reviewing the data and research findings and also in confirming the accuracy of the data representation.

3.10.2 Dependability

Dependability refers to a study's ability to maintain the truth of its findings through time (Schurink et al., 2021). To ensure that the results of this study are dependable, the researcher used interrelated methods and detailed reporting of the procedures and methods used in the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Data were collected using two collection instruments (document analysis and individual semi-structured interviews). The same questions and content were asked and analysed on the part of the researcher for both instruments to confirm accuracy and representativeness of the data. During the analysis of data, there was constant revising, comparing and referring back to data collected and collated from the documents and individual interviews to ensure it had been interpreted appropriately. Every aspect of the study was documented in writing in great detail to ensure its dependability – see Chapter 3 for Methodology and Chapter 4 for Findings.

3.10.3 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the need for the researcher to continually be reflexive and critical of themselves throughout the research process to ensure that the potential for bias and assumptions is minimised (Schurink et al., 2021). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) recommend that the researcher be open and honest when it comes to their own bias, limitations and assumptions. It is understandable for a researcher to enter into a study with some preconceived idea of what kind of results the study may yield. The researcher in this study had assumptions that peer pressure plays a role in academic decline (as per her own experiences) but ensured that they did not influence the process of the study. The researcher analysed and interpreted the data as they unfolded. Where applicable, the researcher acknowledged any limitations, personal opinions, assumptions and potential biases in writing but these elements did not influence the study as a whole. The researcher aimed to understand the impact of peer pressure and academic performance from the perspectives of the participants as they experienced it in their own Linmeyer, Johannesburg context.

3.10.4 Transferability

Transferability focuses on a study's findings and whether these findings can be related to those from other studies (Schurink et al., 2021). This study cannot be transferred because it is case-specific. Owing to the interpretivist nature of the study, the results may not necessarily be generalised to the greater population. However, if researchers want to conduct a similar study, they can do so by duplicating all of the procedures and processes used by the researcher when conducting this research study. Furthermore, it is hoped that the results of this study may resonate with the experiences of the readers.

3.11 Ethical considerations

3.11.1 Permission

The first step was to apply for ethical clearance from the CEDU REC at Unisa and the DBE. Once the researcher received ethics approval from these entities, the researcher sent a letter to the principal of the school that was involved in the study, detailing the purpose of the study, an outline of its process, and the intended outcomes and/or benefits for the school. Once the school approved and

allowed the researcher to conduct the study, the researcher distributed the information letters, consent/assent letters and consent/assent reply slips. Participants who consented/assented to the study returned their signed consent/assent letters to the researcher.

3.11.2 Informed consent and assent

Permission for the researcher to conduct the study was granted by the principal of the school. Informed consent to participate in the study was granted by the principal, deputy principal, head teacher, class teachers and parents of the learners. Once the parents of the learners consented to their child's participation, the learners received an assent form and assented to be a part of the study.

3.11.3 Voluntary participation

All participants were made aware (in writing and verbally) that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary. The participants were also made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any point in time, without any consequences on their part.

3.11.4 Confidentiality and anonymity

The researcher ensured that the details of each participant remained confidential. Each participant was assigned a code. Only the researcher is aware of the identity of each participant and their respective codes.

3.11.5 Potential risks and steps to overcome them

Four of the research participants are under the age of 18 and needed parental/guardian consent to participate in the study. Discussing peer pressure and academic performance can be distressing or uncomfortable and may have made the research participants feel vulnerable. Potential discomfort in sharing poor results, potential for discussions outside of the interviews among research participants, and potential discomfort in discussing sensitive topics (friendships, family life, among others) were other factors that needed to be considered by the researcher.

The researcher included the potential risks to participants in the information letter sent to participants prior to the study. Participants were informed in this letter that they were allowed to withdraw themselves and their data from the study at any

time for whatever reason. Before the interview, the researcher ensured that the interview environment was comfortable and private. She further reminded participants of the potential risks before commencing with the interviews, and informed participants that the school psychologist would be made available should they wish to consult with her. The researcher further assured research participants that they need only share what they choose to share and that there was no pressure to discuss anything they did not feel comfortable discussing. Participants were also assured that their documents would in no way be linked back to them. At the close of the interview, the researcher reminded participants once again that they were allowed to withdraw themselves and their data from the study at any time.

Throughout the data collection stage of the study, the researcher continually checked in with participants, ensuring them that she was available to discuss any concerns at any point in time.

3.12 Chapter summary

This chapter described, justified and disclosed the methodology and ethical considerations for this study. The research paradigm selected was the interpretivism paradigm. The choice lay in that peer pressure and academic performance are uniquely experienced by individuals. The researcher aimed to understand these concepts and their relationship. The interpretivist paradigm ties in with the qualitative research method, which formed the methodology of the study. Research participants create their own meaning based on personal experiences of peer pressure and academic performance. The qualitative research method allowed the researcher to gain insight into these personal experiences. A small group of participants formed part of the study, hence, the choice of a case study research design. The experiences of research participants are unique. The researcher aimed to understand the unique experiences of these particular participants within their own environment. Owing to the vast number of learners and staff at the school under investigation, it was important to represent the school's population with an appropriate sample. Participants were purposively selected as the researcher believed they possessed the relevant knowledge that would aid in answering the research questions.

Gaining relevant insight into the concepts of peer pressure and academic performance would require that the researcher select appropriate research instruments. Document analysis and individual semi-structured interviews were utilised as these tools would garner the most relevant data from research participants. Research participants provided valuable insight throughout each individual semi-structured interview. This, along with learners' academic, behavioural and attendance reports, examples of learners' work, school policies, and the SASA No. 84 of 1996, allowed the researcher to collect rich data. This, in turn, allowed for a deeper understanding of the phenomena of peer pressure and academic performance within the school context. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, where consistent themes were brought to the fore, allowing the researcher to answer the question: How does peer pressure affect the academic performance of learners in Linmeyer Schools in Johannesburg?

Chapter 4 will present the research findings.

CHAPTER 4: INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 presents an interpretation of the research findings. Documents such as the SASA No. 84 of 1996, learner reports, the school code of conduct and policies, and examples of learners' work were analysed. Research participants were interviewed individually, using semi-structured interviews. Participants were asked a series of questions that allowed for a variety of thoughts and opinions regarding peer pressure and academic performance. Responses from the interviews, along with the analysis of documents, were analysed using reflexive thematic coding and analysis (for more information, see 3.9). The emerging themes are presented in this chapter. Theme 1 is presented using graphs.

Graphs were used to organise, simplify and transform data, as well as to engage the reader's interest (for more information, see 3.8.1 i. a).

Table 4.1: Emerging themes

Theme	Description
Document Analysis	
Theme 1	Observed decrease in academic performance
Theme 2	Rules, policies and discipline remediate the issues of peer pressure and academic performance
Individual Semi-Structured Interviews	
Theme 1	Peer pressure can be beneficial or disadvantageous
Theme 2	Motivations for peer pressure
Theme 3	Peer pressure creates challenges for the school
Theme 4	Peer pressure can cause a decline in academic performance
Theme 5	Other factors cause academic decline
Theme 6	Remedial strategies employed to improve academic performance and peer relationships

The researcher was able to develop the themes identified in Table 4.1 using thematic analysis. Once documents and responses from the individual interviews were analysed, the researcher was able to identify recurring patterns in the data. These patterns included similarities (or differences) in opinions, views and experiences. The researcher developed the following basic codes: Peer pressure and academic decline; Change in behaviour; Disadvantages of peer pressure; Advantages of peer pressure; Factors contributing to academic decline; Challenges for the school; Strategies for the school – peer pressure; Motivations of peer pressure; Rules, policies, discipline; Strategies for the school – academic performance; School and stakeholder strategies; Choice in peers; and Perception of academic performance. Once the data was categorised according to the various codes, the researcher compared codes to identify similarities and differences between them. The codes that shared similarities were grouped together under a theme, which was named according to the themes identified in Table 4.1. The researcher was then able to develop a report on the data as they fell within these themes, which is presented in the rest of this Chapter.

4.2 Research participants

The research study is based on one secondary school in Linmeyer, Johannesburg South. Eleven (11) research participants took part in the study. The participants were purposively sampled (for more information, see 3.5 and 3.6). Each research participant took part in an individual semi-structured interview where they were asked a set of research questions about the phenomenon under investigation.

Participant details are presented in Table 4.2:

Table 4.2: Participant details

Learners				
Participant	Age	Gender	Grade	
Learner 1 (L1)	14 years	Female	Grade 8	
Learner 2 (L2)	14 years	Female	Grade 8	
Learner 3 (L3)	13 years	Female	Grade 8	
Learner 4 (L4)	14 years	Female	Grade 8	
Principals and Teachers				
Participant	Age	Gender	Years of Experience in Teaching	Current Position
Principal 1 (P1)	48 years	Female	27	Principal
Principal 2 (P2)	53 years	Female	32	Deputy Principal
Principal 3 (P3)	35 years	Female	11	Head of Learner Welfare
Teacher 1 (T1)	38 years	Female	17	Grade 8 teacher and Grade Head
Teacher 2 (T2)	51 years	Female	27	Grade 8 teacher
Teacher 3 (T3)	28 years	Female	5	Grade 8 teacher
Teacher 4 (T4)	33 years	Female	10	Grade 8 teacher and Grade Head

4.3 Interpretation of the themes

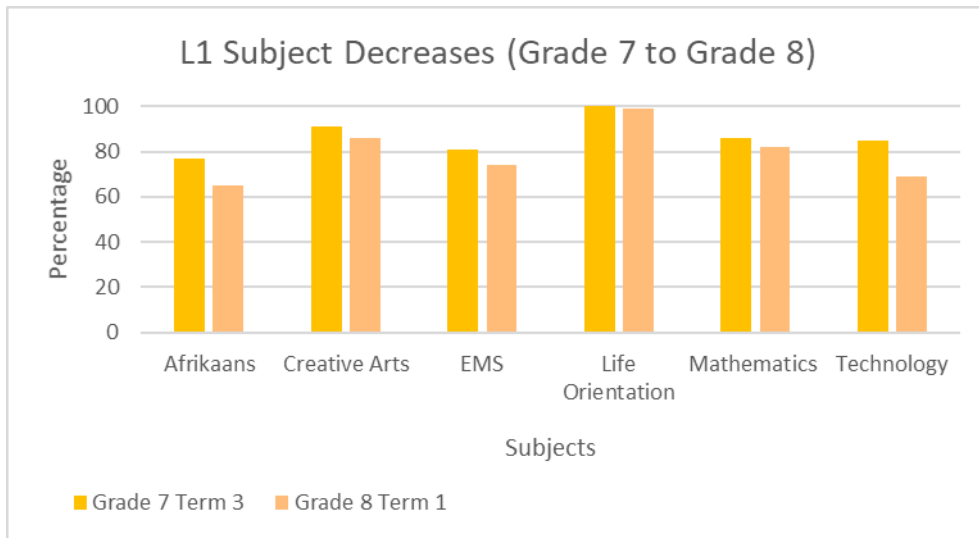
The following is the presentation of the themes that emerged from the research data analysis process.

4.3.1 Document analysis

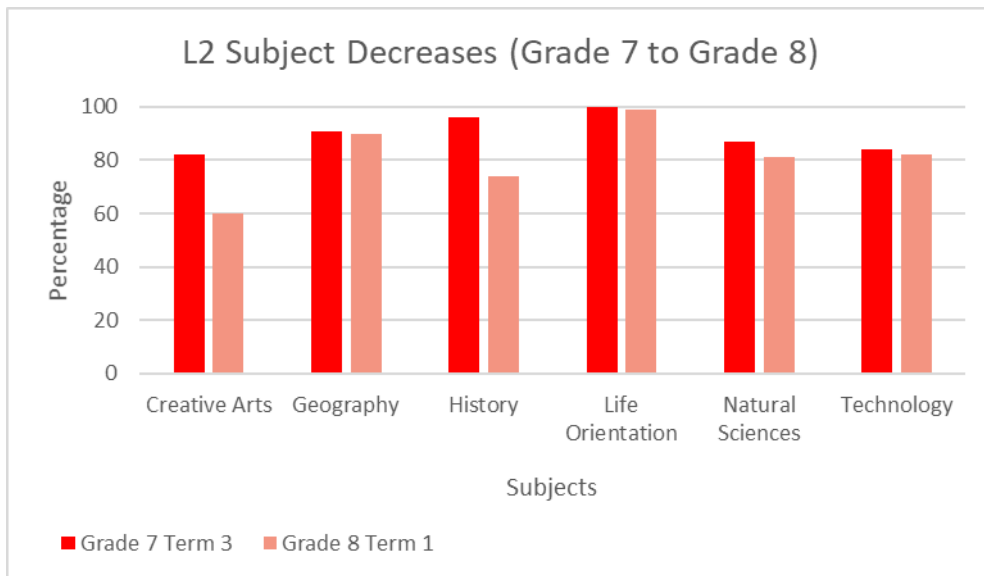
The use of graphs in this study was to enable the reader to engage with the data (Divecha et al, 2023). Using graphs in data analysis assisted the researcher in simplifying and summarising the collected data in this study (Verdinelli & Scagnoli, 2013).

4.3.1.1 Theme 1: Observed decrease in academic performance

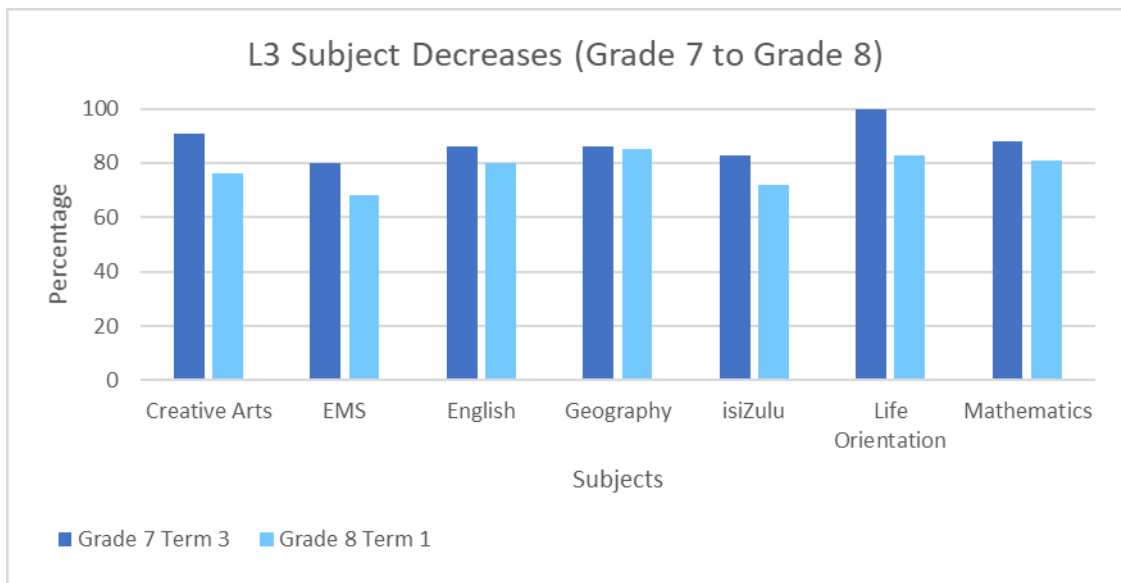
The researcher analysed the academic, behavioural and attendance reports of the learners. The academic reports of the learners revealed minor to significant decreases for specific subjects. The subject decreases for each learner have been presented in a visual format. This visual representation allows for an easier comparison between the results per subject for each learner. Furthermore, it is hoped that this visual presentation will aid in justifying the researcher's choice of learner participants.



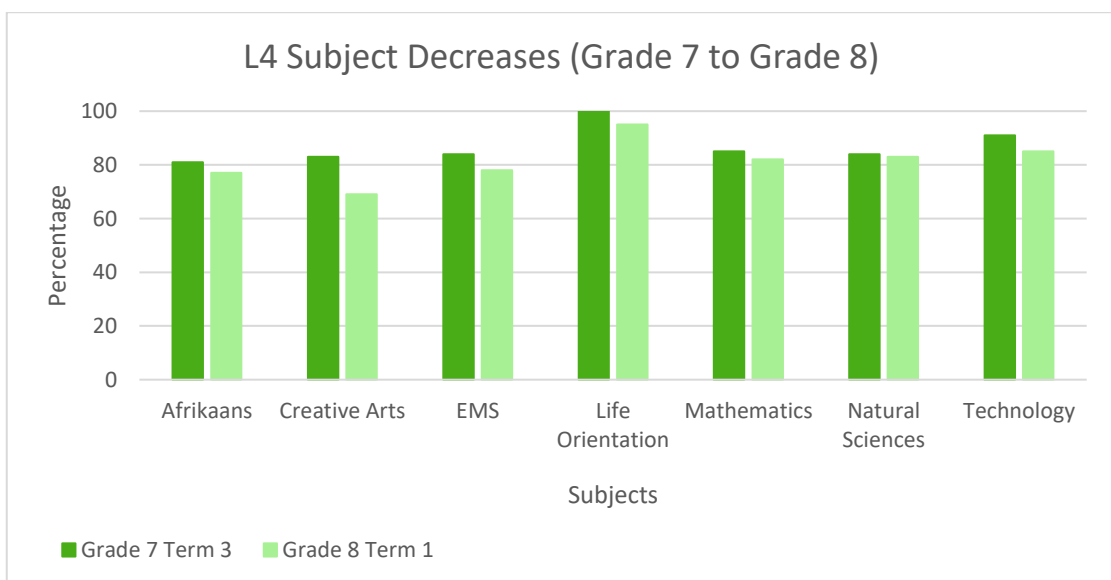
Graph 4.1: Subject decreases for L1



Graph 4.2: Subject decreases for L2



Graph 4.3: Subject decreases for L3



Graph 4.4: Subject decreases for L4

Detailed description of the data provided in the graphs

As mentioned earlier, it was important for the researcher to provide a visual presentation of the data provided in the learner's academic reports, as it allows for an easy comparison of individual subject results.

In the third term of Grade 7, L1 achieved seven distinctions (out of ten subjects). In the first term of Grade 8, there was a drop in the academic achievements of

six subjects (out of ten). These drops ranged from 1% to 16%. There has been an increase in results from Term 1 to Term 2 in four out of the six subjects that had initially decreased. L2 achieved ten distinctions in Term 3 of Grade 7. In Term 1 of Grade 8, L2 experienced a decrease in six subjects, with drops ranging between 1% and 22%. From Term 1 to Term 2 of Grade 8, L2 improved in four of the subjects that had decreased. In Grade 7, Term 3, L3 achieved seven distinctions. In Term 1 of Grade 8, L3 had decreased results in seven subjects, ranging from 1% to 17%. In Term 2 of Grade 8, L3 improved the results in two of the subjects. L4 achieved ten distinctions in term 3 of Grade 7. There was a decrease in seven subjects in Term 1 of Grade 8. These declines ranged from 1% to 14%. L4 improved in four of the subjects in term 2 of Grade 8. During the interviews, the learners acknowledged the decrease in academic performance and attributed numerous factors to the academic decline, such as peer pressure, teacher quality, difficulty of the work and interest in the subject. These factors are discussed in 4.3.2.5 Theme 5.

In terms of learners' work, evidence of class activities and assessments revealed a consistent effort across the board from Term 1 of Grade 8 to Term 2 of Grade 8, with one or two instances of missing work. All four learners displayed slight decreases in their larger assessments (summative assessments, alternative tasks and exams) when compared to their class assessments. However, learners still maintained a consistent effort to improve their Term 2 results by making notes, summaries, displaying creativity, neatness, self-marking, making corrections, preparing for longer tasks, providing detail, and completing work.

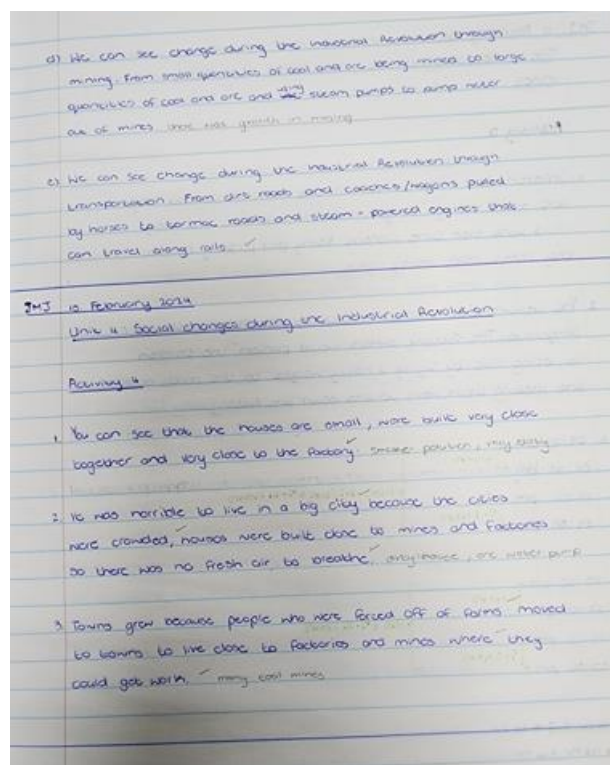
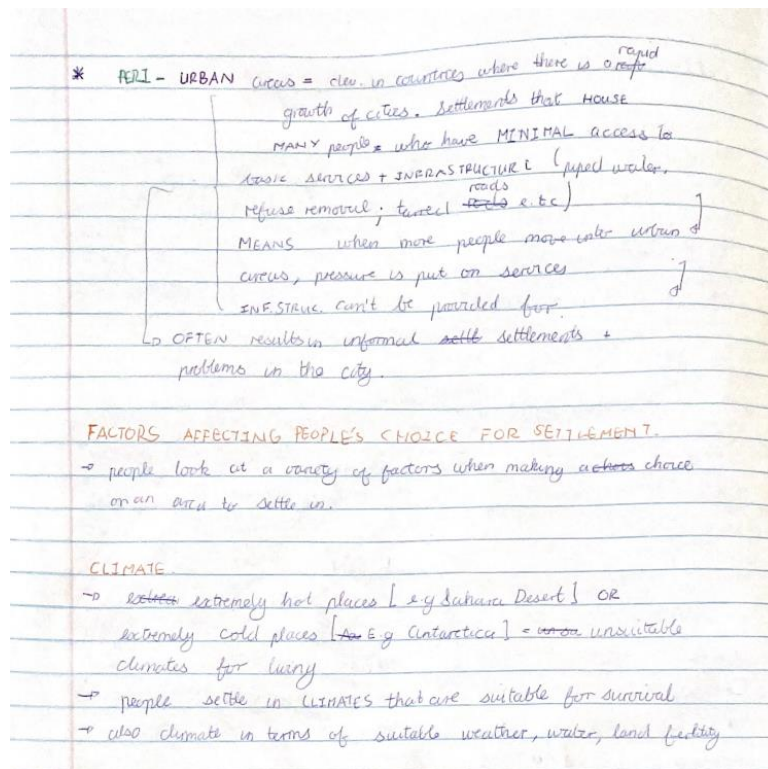


Figure 4.1: Examples of note taking and self-marking in learners' work

While the learners' consistent effort and improvement from Term 1 to Term 2 of Grade 8 was noted, there were some noticeable trends found in some of the learners' written work: unsure of spelling with multiple attempts to spell a word, inconsistent and consistent spelling errors, incorrect use of words, inconsistent or repetitive words or thoughts in longer pieces of writing, incomplete answers, crossing out of words, incorrect sentence structure, change in written fonts, and misunderstanding instructions.

1.7.2 Why, do you think, has Paris been given this nickname? (2)
 Paris has been given this name due to the ~~beeth~~
 beautiful Eiffel Tower that lights up and sparkles
 through the whole city.

1.8 How many times will Paris have hosted the Summer Olympics by September 2024? (1)
 Paris will have hosted the Olympics three times.

1.9 Mention two things that Paris is famous for, according to the passage? (1)
 Paris is famous for architecture and fashion.

1.10 Besides the sporting events, what else is the Olympics about? (1)
 The Olympics are also about embracing cultural exchange.

1.11 How will the 2024 Paris Olympics celebrate cultural exchange? (1)
 Fans from all over the world cheering on athletes
 from all over the world, traditional dances at
 ceremonies and trying different French foods.

beautiful
 beautiful
 beautiful
 beautiful

Your answer should include:

- Opinion on the impact, both positive and negative (2 marks)
- An explanation of why you think this is the impact and provide examples from the film (4 marks)

I think it had a positive impact because it gave
 her more confidence as well as an ego boost
 And not made her capable of working in a
 toxic environment.

Figure 4.2: Examples of multiple attempts at spelling and incomplete answers

Behavioural and Attendance Reports

The four learners' behavioural and attendance reports were analysed. None of the learners have received demerits for behavioural offences. However, the few demerits (for L2 and L3) that were issued were for incomplete homework. The attendance reports revealed that the four learners are consistent in their school attendance. The data from the interviews revealed that these learners take pride in their efforts at school and aim to do well in all aspects of school life, such as academics and extra-curricular activities.

The days absent throughout Grade 7 and Term 1 of Grade 8 ranged between two and seven days, the majority of which were sporadic. The only concern was for L4's Grade 7 year where ten consecutive days were not recorded by the teacher.

4.3.1.2 Theme 2: Rules, policies and discipline remediate issues of peer pressure and academic performance

4.3.1.2.1 Policies pertaining to peer pressure and academic performance

The school under investigation has numerous policies in place pertaining to different aspects of school life. In this study, the researcher analysed the following school policies: Anti-Bullying, Community Service, Computer and Internet Use, Detention, Substance Abuse, Extra-Curricular Awards, Academics, Academic and Prestigious Awards, Merit/Demerit, Sport, Social Media, and the Code of Conduct. In many instances, the policies overlapped with one another. For example, the Code of Conduct contained introductions and explanations of the contents in other policies, such as Academics and Merits/Demerits. Some of the policies that contained data relating to peer pressure and academic performance are discussed next.

4.3.1.2.2 Academic and Academic Awards policies

The secondary school under investigation in this study has a detailed and descriptive academic policy in place. The policy details aspects such as teacher responsibilities (e.g., providing the highest quality of teaching), Head of Department responsibilities (e.g., monitoring and mentoring teachers in the department, arranging meetings and pre-moderating assessments) and learner responsibilities (e.g., catching up on work missed and seeking academic support) towards academics. The school's academic policy lays out the expectations of all

involved in the academic process, such as learners, parents, teachers, department heads, Grade Heads, the deputy principal and the principal. Processes for testing, enrichment days, examinations, parents' meetings and homework are some of the few procedures that are detailed in the policy. The policy does refer to the issue of cheating and briefly outlines the punishment for it. This is the only negative aspect of the policy. The rest of the policy is aimed at guiding learners towards a prosperous academic journey. The academic and prestigious awards policy lists numerous academic awards per grade and includes the requirements needed to obtain them. This policy serves as a source of encouragement towards academic achievement.

4.3.1.2.3 Extra-Curricular Awards policy

Learners in the school under investigation are required to do at least one extra-curricular activity per term. Termly or yearly awards are offered as an incentive to encourage learners to participate and perform to the best of their ability. An important part of the awards criteria is learner sportsmanship and behaviour. Learners must always be good representatives of the school. The sports policy outlines a code of conduct that is to be followed by all learners when participating in extra-curricular activities. Some of these points include accepting and abiding by the rules, controlling one's emotions and attitude, and maintaining discipline. The policy also lists the types of behaviours that are unacceptable both in and out of school, especially when representing the school in an extra-curricular activity. Some of these unacceptable behaviours include: drinking, smoking, vandalism, slander, sexual harassment, swearing, cheating, and disregarding authority.

During the interviews, some participants highlighted the importance of rewarding learners at different school levels. P1 stated that there needs to be some form of goal set for learners to achieve, which P1 believes is accomplished through the Extra-Curricular Awards policy and the Academic Awards policy.

4.3.1.2.4 Community Service policy

The school in this study has a strong ethos with the expectation that learners adhere to it. An important aspect of school life is community service. The policy outlines the type of learner the school wishes to produce. Some of the values the

school wishes to instil in learners include empathy, compassion, responsibility and solidarity

4.3.1.2.5 Merit/Demerit policy

Behaviours or achievements that are desirable are listed alongside an assigned point value, such as academic achievement, donations, good work ethic, and prefectship. Negative behaviours such as lateness, incomplete work, misbehaviour, vandalism, truancy, verbal abuse towards teachers and peers, assault, bullying, cheating and possession of illegal substances, are listed and assigned a point value as well. Rewards (e.g., vouchers) and punishments (e.g., detentions, suspensions and expulsions) are listed per level of accumulated points for both merits and demerits.

4.3.1.2.6 Substance Abuse policy

The school under investigation has a substance abuse policy. This policy references the SASA No. 84 of 1996 and outlines the school's legal right to address any issues involving substance abuse. The SASA No. 84 of 1996 stipulates that the school has a legal right to:

- address any situation involving substance abuse, and
- to act on and administer punishment should any substance abuse be suspected among the learners.

Additionally, the SASA No. 84 of 1996 outlines the procedures that will be followed and the types of punishments that will be issued should a learner be found in possession of drugs.

The school under investigation has experienced a rise in the number of learners who are vaping on school property. In the interview with P2, it was stated that learners need to be punished for their actions to discourage other learners from repeating the same behaviour. Policies such as the Substance Abuse policy serve this purpose.

4.3.1.2.7 Anti-Bullying policy

During document analysis, the researcher discovered that the school's anti-bullying policy does not focus on specific incidents or examples of bullying. Rather, the anti-bullying policy defines what bullying is, what the different types of

bullying are, how it can be avoided and why it should be avoided. Additionally, the anti-bullying policy outlines the expected punishment that wrongdoers are likely to receive. As a researcher, I have observed that this policy may result in unintended consequences because of potential ambiguity with regards to peer pressure as a form of bullying. The challenge with this policy is that it does not provide specific examples of bullying or of peer pressure. What one person perceives to be harmless coercion (e.g., writing inappropriate messages on the bathroom door with a group of friends) another may perceive as negative peer pressure (e.g., vandalism, which is against the school's Code of Conduct). This gap in detail could subject the policy to various interpretations according to the reader's understanding. In this instance, the readers are the learners, parents, and teachers. Moreover, the lack of specific incidental detail in the anti-bullying policy can lead to unnecessary disagreements where the definition of concepts such as peer pressure are not clearly defined by providing scenarios similar to the situations in which learners are likely to find themselves.

4.3.1.2.8 Computer and Internet Use and Social Media policies

The school under investigation has policies regarding the use of school computers, the Internet and the use of social media. The Computer and Internet Use policy outlines the use of both school and personal devices inside and outside of the school area. Similarly, the Social Media policy encourages the positive and safe use of social media both inside and outside of the school. Both the Computer and Internet Use and Social Media policies are designed not only to protect the school, but to ensure that learners are kept safe both in the online space and on social media.

4.3.2 Individual semi-structured interviews

4.3.2.1 Theme 1: Peer pressure can be beneficial or disadvantageous

4.3.2.1.1 Benefits of peer pressure

All 11 of the research participants acknowledged that peer pressure can be a positive force in a learner's life. The participants identified academic achievement as one of the main benefits of positive peer pressure. Peer groups offer inspiration to other learners to achieve, especially when they are achieving.

Learners found internal motivation to work harder to achieve along with their peer group. The belief that peer pressure can have a positive impact on academic performance aligns with the results of Chen and Deng (2022). However, the focus of Chen and Deng's (2022) study is on the impact of peer pressure on college-level learners and this study focused on secondary school learners.

The general consensus for positive peer pressure and academic performance can be summarised as follows:

L2: *"I've definitely experienced academic peer pressure from some of my friends, and that's helped me bring my grades up a lot."* [This increase in academics is confirmed in L2's academic report for Grade 8 Term 2].

P3: *"Where I have two learners that could be highly academic and they kind of put the pressure on each other to perform well."*

T1: *"As long as the idea around it or the group's energy is of a nature that they want to achieve, and as I said, it doesn't have to just be academically – in any form, as long as there's a positive energy within the group."*

Some of the research participants indicated that learners or peers can motivate each other to perform. This can ultimately result in learners receiving good academic results:

L2: *"I've had to send notes to a few people. I've had a few notes sent to me, too."*

L2 confirms that even though she witnesses instances of peer pressure, the learners see the need to support each other with their school work. These positive, academic-orientated relationships, as displayed by L2, encourages learners to perform better. However, this is dependent on the mindset of the peer group, their level of ambition and their want to excel (Khan, Athar, Mehmood & Khan, 2023).

According to participants, peers help a learner grow as a person, and develop their spirituality and maturity. Positive peer influences encourage learners out of their comfort zone and help to develop their confidence in social situations. Peers play an important role in the type of person one becomes (Laursen & Veenstra,

2023), which falls in line with Bronfenbrenner's theory of social development. Those who share positive energy with the group can make a positive difference in a learner's life. Peers also encourage learners to participate in extra-curricular activities, help learners uncover their strengths, and become positive influences in their lives (Fujiyama et al., 2021).

4.3.2.1.2 Disadvantages of peer pressure

Peer pressure can also have a negative impact on various aspects of a learner's life. Peer pressure can cause a decrease in academic performance (Alafiatayo, Salau & Ebebe 2021). It can also encourage risk-taking behaviours (Siraj, Najam & Ghazal, 2021) and cause an increase in substance abuse (Mohale & Mokwena, 2020).

Research participants corroborate these disadvantages:

L1: *"If you do give in to peer pressure, then your whole personality changes and you just become like everyone else and not your own person."*

P2: *"I think it adds a lot of emotional stress because you're constantly trying to be something you're not."*

T4: *"They don't think for themselves. I think after a while you've been influenced by the people around you that you basically just go on what they say."*

While all participants agreed that peer pressure has its disadvantages, the examples or experiences offered differed for each individual. Some participants spoke about a change in a learner's behaviour. When their focus lies deep in the peer group, learners lose interest in previously appreciated leisure activities or lose focus in their academic goals, to fit in to what the peer group deems appropriate. The majority of participants stated that learners may engage in activities that they normally would not partake in, such as vaping, bullying people online, drinking, sending inappropriate pictures online or doing drugs. Learners make decisions on the spot without considering the repercussions of these decisions or how these choices will affect them and their future. Participants, especially the learner participants, mentioned that the fear of being left out, being

made fun of or losing friends often leads to behaviours that are atypical. Misbehaviour and misconduct are believed to be a source of peer pressure (Liu et al., 2022). Behaviours like laughing with friends at the expense of another, partaking in activities that one does not agree with, or disregarding and being rude to a teacher, are done to please the peer group and maintain friendships. Learners feel compelled to take part in activities they do not necessarily agree with (Paul & Anburaj's, 2022). Learners do not want to lose their place in the group, feel like they do not fit in, or be perceived as an "outcast" by people outside the group. However, as pointed out by the principals and teachers, conforming to and participating in negative activities often leads to learners being perceived in a negative light by their peers and teachers.

Participants mentioned a change in personality as a negative impact of peer pressure. This is appropriately stated by:

L4: *"You won't be comfortable in being yourself because you're actually not being yourself. You want to be the person that other people think you are."*

Peer pressure can affect a learner's psychological well-being (Danish et al., 2023) and their self-esteem (Mordi & Onoyase, 2023). Learners who feel pressured to be a part of the "in-crowd" conform to the attitudes and behaviours of the group, altering their personality to be better suited. The need or want to conform can be a source of peer pressure (Liu et al., 2022). However, altering one's personality to suit the ideals of the peer group can cause emotional stress, nastiness towards others (friends and parents), physical illnesses, mental issues, anxiety, depression (Danish et al., 2023), unsurety in terms of identity especially where identities are based on the group (Spears, 2021), and a weak self-image.

4.3.2.2 Theme 2: Motivations for peer pressure

More than half of the participants stated that the key motivator of peer pressure is the need or want for power. Others attributed this motivation to the need for control or the want to rule over others (Fauzia, 2021). Perpetrators of peer pressure feel powerful when they can control others:

L3: *"Power and control can be like a drug in itself."*

P1: *"Some people like that sense of power and by being the bully, the aggressor, getting other people to do what you've said, they thrive on that."*

P3: *"Peer pressure is the easiest way for a weak person to show their power."*

Perpetrators may derive their strength and recognition through the control of others. P3 stated that perpetrators are held in high regard if they have "gotten away" with some kind of negative behaviour. Their power lies in that everyone looks up to and seeks affirmation from them. This type of power ties in with L2's idea of popularity:

L2: *"A lot of people see popularity as a ladder, and they feel like they should have to step on other people to get up into that ladder."*

The period of adolescence is one where learners seek acceptance and belonging (Dudi, Yadav & Sangeeta, 2023). The participants stated that learners give into peer pressure simply because they want to be liked, they want to belong, they want to fit in or they want to stand out:

T1: *"Even the ones who feel like they don't want to belong, they actually just want to belong in a different form of it."*

L3 added that learners fear being alone:

L3: *"Let's say they're going to a tuck shop, then I would also want to go to the tuck shop because I don't want to get left behind."*

Learners fear not being accepted:

T1: *"They want to feel like they belong; they want to be accepted for who they are."*

Learners fear not being good enough:

T1: *"You've got learners who feel as if they are perhaps not good enough."*

P3 further adds that learners with stronger personalities tend to dominate those who are weaker or who are looking to fit in somewhere.

Participants listed other factors to be considered when determining the motivators of peer pressure. Fauzia (2021) identified familial relationships as a motivator for the perpetration of bullying. In the researcher's experience, learners who are labelled as bullies are typically the ones who perpetrate negative peer pressure. Similarly, P1 identified the learner's home life as a motivator of peer pressure as follows:

P1: "I also think often there's something underlying going on with that person in their home or that something has happened in their life, and they might be masking that, and therefore, acting out in that way."

L3 attributed this motivation to "*childhood trauma*" where negative experiences in the home contributes to the perpetration of peer pressure. Households that promote certain behaviours, such as drug and alcohol abuse, could produce learners who see this behaviour as normal. Learners who do not have a good moral basis instilled by parents may become perpetrators (Yang, Li, Gao & Wang, 2022). Furthermore, learners who experience moral disengagement are more likely to perpetrate peer pressure in the form of cyberbullying (Yang et al., 2022).

According to participants, learners who are manipulated, not valued, neglected, or not shielded from negative behaviours in the home, may also become perpetrators of negative peer pressure. There are numerous negative effects on children who are victims of child abuse, which could lead to the perpetration of peer pressure in the form of bullying (Hamstra & Fitzgerald, 2022).

T4 adds that learners who have experienced instances in their childhood where they had minimal control could lead to the perpetration of peer pressure:

T4: "It can also be something that happened, that can be a personal thing as well, where ... someone did something to them when they were small and they didn't feel in control and they changed."

An interesting motivator mentioned by L4 is the role that siblings play. In their experience, a learner who is the only child tends to have a controlling personality:

L4: "When you're at school, there's this group of other people and you feel like, okay, I have to now do this so that I'll at least have friends because I

don't have siblings and I think that causes them to be controlling and kind of be the friend-group leader."

Additional motivators identified by participants include: the perpetrator's own inner insecurities, their own inner pressure or issues, and feelings of worth when controlling others. Chen and Deng (2022) assert that learners who have good self-worth can resist peer pressure. Further motivators identified by participants included having a narcissistic personality, having the want to manipulate, to rebel, to influence others, or having experienced pressure themselves from another source.

4.3.2.3 Theme 3: Negative peer pressure creates challenges for the school

Participants highlighted numerous challenges that can be faced by schools because of negative peer pressure. Participants mentioned that a school's reputation can be greatly affected by negative peer pressure, especially in instances where learners are, for example, vaping or bunking school:

L3: *"It can provide a bad reputation for the school."*

P3: *"It's very damaging from a public relations perspective."*

T3: *"You can see how schools' names have been tarnished through the repercussions of learners' choices that they have made."*

According to L3, the reputation of the school influences an outsider's perception of the quality of learners who attend it. The culture within a school has a large role to play with regards to the kind of learners it produces. L2 reported that their parents did not want them to attend a particular school because of the reputation of the learners that go there. L3 mentioned that a 'no-care' and 'no-need' attitude of learners towards education can create a negative perception of the school.

Further challenges can arise when a school's reputation has been put in a negative light. Parents of currently enrolled learners may wish to take their children out of the school owing to negative behaviours and actions taking place. As L1 states:

"...they will not want their kids to end up like that."

In other instances, parents may try to get involved in negative situations, placing pressure on teachers and the school to solve the problem. Some participants reported that prospective parents may not want to send their children to a school with a bad reputation. Participants also indicated that parents talk among themselves and with external parents which could, as L4 states:

... change *“other people’s views on that specific school.”*

This could be another catalyst for parents to remove their child from a school. These results tie in with AlHassani and Wilkins’s (2022) study on how an institution’s reputation influences their retention of learners.

Another challenge associated with the school’s reputation is the perception that they create for themselves. L3 suggested that the perception that universities may have of a school with a bad reputation could contribute to learners being overlooked by the university.

L4 mentioned that the way a school deals with absenteeism can influence people’s perception of the school’s level of care. L4 reflected on an incident experienced by their relative regarding their school attendance after an incident of bullying:

L4: *“Their reputation could be affected because then other parents might think, the school doesn’t care whether my child is coming to school or not.”*

T4 spoke about a school’s reputation being affected based on how they deal with negative situations:

T4: *“If you were aware of something and it turns out very bad that the child takes their own life, it does have a reputation because where did you step in?”*

However, a school’s actions and reactions to certain events will shape the external person’s view. Being able to escape this perception may be a very difficult task:

P3: *“People always want to focus on the negatives. They’re not going to remember a school getting excellent results or hosting a charity event or excelling on the sports field, they’re going to remember the negatives.”*

L1 and L2 mentioned that peer pressure creates an environment where learners want to or feel comfortable in disregarding their teachers' and the school rules. Learners begin consuming alcohol at school, smoking a vape in the bathroom, skipping school, and disregarding uniform requirements, because their peers are doing it. Smoking and alcohol consumption are, unfortunately, a common practice among secondary school learners (Meilani, Hariadi & Haryadi, 2024). These practices create an environment where the behavioural expectations of the school and learners differs greatly, causing tension and disciplinary issues. Peer pressure can directly or indirectly create indiscipline in a school environment (Adeleke, 2020). Having to deal with disciplinary issues and the subsequent accumulation of punishments causes great stress for teachers, as mentioned by T2, T3 and T4. The overall well-being and stress levels of teachers is negatively impacted by learners' negative behaviours (Okeke, Thomas & Botha, 2023). Teachers also mentioned a further hindrance created by indiscipline – focusing on these negative instances with specific learners could take attention away from other learners:

T2: "At the same time, you have to try to focus on the others and make sure that they are looked after."

T4: "It is on top of all the other things you need to do now; you need to make sure, oh, okay, this one's not doing well, but now you need to act on that as well, or you're not allowed to do that."

A further challenge for the school is developing strategies and solutions that remediate the issues of peer pressure. The school has policies in place (such as the Anti-Bullying policy) to protect learners from instances of bullying. However, these policies need to be constantly updated or new policies need to be developed to keep up with the changes within the school environment. An added difficulty is trying to ensure that these strategies, solutions and policies are suitable for learners, staff, and the school. School intervention strategies can play a major role in curbing negative situations that can affect the academic performance of learners (Omolekan & Ajayi, 2023). However, participants believe that implementing strategies can be complicated. As identified by T1, a major challenge for schools is trying to develop a culture or a set of behaviours that are

suited to both the school and its learners. This is not an easy task owing to the continuous change in the generational and social interests of learners entering secondary school. T4 and P2 maintain that learners are continuously looking for the next social trend. It becomes difficult for teachers to understand the social trends (for example, TikTok pranks or dances), which could cause tension between the school and the learners. L2 and P2 brought up the issue of vaping from a learner and a school perspective. Vaping is a common trend among teenagers (Kudenga, Vorster & Yang, 2023). L2 has noticed an increase in the number of friends trying to vape to impress their peer group. To curb this issue, P2 asserts that rules must be put in place to curb the issue. When learners are caught breaking the rules, they are punished, and this causes tension between the learner and the school. P2 hopes that learners will be discouraged from participating in instances of negative behaviours if they witness other learners being punished for that behaviour. However, learners lose interest in these negative behaviours (such as vaping) and move on to the next social trend, such as consuming alcohol on school grounds.

4.3.2.4 Theme 4: Peer pressure can cause a decline in academic performance

Negative peer pressure can cause a decrease in learners' academic performance (Alafiatayo et al., 2021). All of the participants agree that peer pressure can cause a decrease in academic performance. However, their level of agreement differs. Eight participants indicated that negative peer pressure is a direct cause of poor academic performance, which coincides with the findings of Sarfika, Saifudin, Malini, Effendi and Wenny's (2024) study. The other three participants concurred that negative peer pressure can cause an academic decline but added that it is case and situation-dependent. Peer pressure cannot be seen in isolation and needs to be considered alongside other factors:

P1: *"It depends on the child and whether they are strong enough to not let the one flow over into the other."*

T1: *"I don't think that is, again, something that can be seen in seclusion. I don't think peer pressure alone will account to academic performance in*

excellence or in the decline in that sense. I think there are other factors involved as well."

P3 states that:

"...the easiest way to see peer pressure is academic decline."

Teachers who witness a decrease in learners' academic performance can attribute it to peer pressure. From the perspective of learner participants, academic performance is affected by peer pressure when peers steer learners in the wrong direction, causing them to lose focus on important aspects, like doing well academically. Learners who focus on their peer group lose interest in their own goals and personal interests (L2). Peers who encourage learners to use alcohol and drugs ultimately affect the learner's academic performance since these substances have an effect on their brain (L3). The results from Ansari, Salam and Suominen's (2020) confirm that alcohol consumption (among other factors) can cause a decline in academic performance.

From a personal, familial experience, L4 avers that peer pressure causes learners to doubt their own academic abilities:

L4: "I think she was studying, and then a group of people came after and said, 'you don't need to study because your marks are already bad.' There's nothing you can do about it" and "I think that affects you because then you feel like, what do I do now? You feel like, what's the point of being at this school? What's the point of learning if I can't improve because of what other people are saying to you?"

Academic performance can be affected by a learner's weak self-esteem and their experiences with negative peer pressure (Mordi & Onoyase, 2023). L2, L3 and L4 mentioned that there is a fear of ridicule from peers in group situations. These include instances such as laughter or judgemental statements made by peers when sharing answers in class, asking for help from the teacher, or attending extra lessons. Seating arrangements, where more disruptive learners are in close proximity to those who focus on their academics, was mentioned by L2, L3 and T4, as well. L3 and T4 both, from experience, attribute academic decline to the peer group's perception of a learner's academic performance:

L4: *"When you hear someone say, for example, I got a two out of fifty, then everyone is just laughing. And then he's thinking, in order to be funny, in order to fit in, I need to keep getting these marks so that I can be the laughingstock of everything."*

T4: *"It depends on your subject. It depends on your group. If they feel it's not a place to do good academically or they feel you need to fail or get bad grades, then it does" [affect academic performance].*

From the perspective of the teachers and principals, academic performance is affected by peer pressure in different ways. T2 witnesses how peer pressure affects learners during mathematics extra lessons where peers are misbehaving and distracting each other.

The peer group's interest in and approval of academics can influence the learner's interest in their academics (Amaewhule et al., 2020). The teachers have observed disruptive, talkative and distracting learners influence those who are perceived to be good learners, with good intentions for their academics. T3 and T4 have witnessed learners display a lack of interest and willingness to work simply because they (or the peer group) deem the subject as unnecessary.

An interesting perspective from the teachers and principals is that society, the school, teachers and parents exert their own kind of pressure which can cause a decline in academic performance:

P2: *"I think society dictates how you behave in class ... dictates how important education is to you."*

P3: *"We have got quite a lot of peer pressure at our school, mainly because we do have a very big focus on academics" and "I think the peer pressure in our school comes from all levels. I think it comes from teachers, I think it comes from other people in their class, their friends, and especially their home life."*

T1: *"I think we in a modern society forget the type of pressures that our learners put themselves under in terms of wanting to achieve" [academically, socially, on the sports field etc.].*

Learners experience academic stress from numerous external entities and may develop a resistance to performing well (Chen & Deng, 2022). A learner's family is a common external factor that may cause a decrease in the learner's academic performance (Jabeen et al., 2021).

4.3.2.5 Theme 5: Other factors cause academic decline

Experiences and knowledge are subjective and unique for every individual (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Each participant attributed one or more factors to the decrease in their own academic performance as well as for learners in general. While there was an overlap in some of these factors, the participants' experiences and interpretations thereof differed.

Three of the learners put the blame on teachers for the decline in their academic performance:

L2: *"I think it's just the teacher's wording may be a bit difficult to understand."*

L3: *"Maybe in the way most of the teachers teach..."*

L4: *"I'm the person that needs a bigger explanation to understand. There's to be at least some form of input from the teacher."*

From the foregoing quotations, it is evident that there are subjects and/or specific content that learners struggle to understand. This is because of the difficulty of the content and the way it is presented by the teachers. L3 added that it is often the teacher's teaching style that does not contribute to the learners' understanding of the content. This is caused by the teachers' hesitancy to change or incorporate different teaching styles in the lesson. In the same vein, L4 concurs that teachers need to take into consideration that learners have different learning styles. L4 maintains that teachers should be more accommodating towards the use of different teaching styles in their classrooms. According to Pasco (2021), teaching styles play a significant role in learners' academic performance. The way a teacher presents content, and the teaching styles employed in the classroom, are determinants of a learners' academic success (Isa et al., 2020). However, teaching styles may not always be suitable for the audience at hand. L2 accentuates that teachers can become frustrated with learners if they struggle to understand content in the way that the teacher presents it. L2 further points

out that teachers can become strict in these situations which sometimes causes learners to be afraid to ask for help. This then, according to L2, results in learners having to teach themselves or each other.

Other determinants of academic decline as identified by the learners include the amount of extra-curricular activities taking place, comparing oneself to others, and an increase in workload. Another interesting factor identified by L4 is how the perceived necessity of or interest in a subject influences one's academic performance:

L4: *"I also don't think EMS is necessarily my subject..."*

L4 continues by mentioning another subject she does not like:

L4: *"Creative Arts is nothing like a necessary subject, so I wasn't taking it seriously" [in term 1 of Grade 8].*

A learner's attitude towards their academics can determine their academic success (Namale et al., 2021). A learner's effort is also an important factor. L1 drew attention to the fact that teachers try to provide additional practice for learners but, they elect not to work:

L1: *"They should do more practice. But then [learners] also won't do their practice when they go home."*

Some of the teachers and principals attributed academic decline to a learner's attitude, sense of entitlement, and lack of self-discipline and work ethic:

P1: *"I think it's a sense of entitlement, actually."*

T2: *"I think it's lack of work ethic and self-discipline" and "some of them decide that they can't do whatever subject it is and they decide that they are not going to study because they can't do it anyway."*

T3: *"I think this generation of learners ... are very entitled and so, they feel that they are untouchable."*

However, the foregoing quotations indicate that learners may not be entirely aware of the detrimental effects that negative attitudes towards their academics may have on their overall academic performance. L2 and T1 both point out that

learners are not necessarily receptive to the advice given by adults. This can then make it very difficult for teachers to try and instil a sense of pride and appreciation for academics in their learners.

Another interesting point brought up by T1 is relatability. If learners feel like they cannot relate to content, then they seem to be “*completely unable to actually respond to it in a satisfactory manner*”. Learners are living in a technological era, a generation completely different to the learners taught in the past (P3). If subject content does not speak to the learners’ interests, then they become unwilling to try in their academics.

The principals and teachers identified numerous other factors that cause a decline in academic performance. T1, T2, P1 and P2 echo that the COVID-19 pandemic is to blame for the current learners’ academic decline. While some learners managed to maintain their academic standards (Kuhfeld et al., 2020), the principals and teachers at the school under investigation feel as though the standard has dropped. Basic skills, such as reading, writing and comprehending, are lacking:

P2: “*We haven’t remedied the issues of COVID and online education. We haven’t plugged all the holes. And that’s why basic skills have seriously lacked with many children.*”

T1: “*I think there was a massive gap that’s created by the online schooling and that we’re only really seeing now.*”

T2: “*Nobody’s gone back to Grade 4 or 5 or whatever it is that they missed on the couch, and fixed what they missed.*”

T3 does not share the same belief as the teachers and principals above. T3 argues that COVID-19 can no longer be used as an excuse for poor academic performance of learners. Rather, T3 attributes poor academic performance to learners’ ‘no-care’ attitude, especially when it comes to academic discipline:

T3: “*Completing a detention because they haven’t done something means nothing to them.*”

Other factors identified by the teachers and principals include: the inappropriate use of social media and technology for academic purposes (supported by Malik, Dhir, Kaur & Johri, 2020), pressure owing to the demand of academics, going from three teachers in primary school to ten in secondary school, home life and parenting where parents' expectations can affect learners' academic performance (Jabeen et al., 2021), teachers' inability to change from a Grade 12 level of teaching to a Grade 8 level, types and difficulty levels of assessments, and learners' exam experiences.

4.3.2.6 Theme 6: Remedial strategies employed to improve academic performance and peer relationships

Participants shared numerous strategies that they believe the school and stakeholders can implement to improve academic performance and peer pressure.

4.3.2.6.1 Strategies for the school to improve academic performance

Participants' responses regarding strategies to improve academic performance that has been affected by peer pressure (or other previously mentioned factors) are varied but do have some overlaps. Before any strategies to improve academic performance can be suggested, T1 believes that there are important considerations that need to be made:

T1: "You first have to almost get to the bottom of it to say, 'what is it that my learners know?' 'What is their background knowledge to this?' 'How can I improve that concept for them in order for them to be able to achieve academically?'" and "we want to say, I want my learners to do well in this subject, but I neglect the knowledge, or I neglect thinking about how many other elements are involved in understanding and performing well in this subject".

Similarly, other participants believe that teachers need to uncover the underlying reasons for academic decline (for example, peer pressure) before any interventions can be determined. The school's Academic policy stipulates that learners and teachers are responsible for the learners' academic performance. Additional help, such as academic support lessons and academic enrichment opportunities, needs to be provided and attended by the teacher and learner,

respectively. Participants suggested that interventions need to be done based on care for their learners, knowing their academic capabilities, and wanting to help them improve, regardless of the cause:

L4: "I feel like it should come from a place of heart and a place of empathy so that they can feel that they have a genuine concern about their marks. And it's not just the thing of you need to do better. It should be, 'we're trying to help you.'"

P3: "Without droning it down on them all the time that you need to get these marks, you need to get these results, let's get them to do the best they can do" and "If we take off the complete pressure of academic performance, our less academic learners would actually perform better."

T1: "We need to, as educators, be more adaptable to the needs of our learners" and "while we want to teach learners that they should be excelling and that they should be achieving the best, we mustn't ever forget that they should be achieving their best."

All four learners suggested that to improve academic performance, teachers should change their teaching styles. All four learners attribute this need for change since not all learners learn in the same way. L1 suggested that the school bring in different teachers who can cater to these different learning styles. L3 suggested that teachers cater to different learning styles in different lessons so that learners could be exposed to different teaching styles. The style in which a teacher teaches is an important determinant of learners' academic success (Isa et al., 2020). T1 further indicated that teachers need to be mindful of the left-brained and right-brained theory, and adapt their teaching accordingly. T1's suggestion is supported by studies conducted by Thaha and Mohammed (2019) and Pratama and Astuti (2021).

P2 and P3 suggest that the school bring in new subjects. P2 suggests introducing further studies programmes so that learners who want to expand on their knowledge can prepare themselves academically for university. P3 suggests that schools introduce subjects that cater to different academic abilities of learners.

This will ensure that learners who perform better in practical subjects than they do in theoretical subjects are given the opportunity to succeed.

T4 suggests that teachers make use of music, pictures, and fun and interactive groupwork to maintain learners' interest in specific subjects and academics in general. Activities that are fun and social could play a role in encouraging positive peer relationships. L4 highlights that using videos, games, and interactive websites are not only beneficial, but are thoroughly enjoyed by the learners. Games can be beneficial when teaching theoretical subjects such as History and Geography (Oceja, Abián-Cubillo & Torres-Trimallez, 2022) or abstract concepts such as Geometry (Gargrish, Mantri & Kaur, 2020). L2 suggests that teachers foster an atmosphere of friendly competition by having an achiever's board. This could encourage learners to perform better to accomplish the goal of having their name on the board. It can also encourage positive peer relations where learners congratulate each other on their achievements. Encouraging this kind of friendly competition can be beneficial for a learner's social-emotional development (Suryana, Khairma, Sari, Mayar & Satria, 2020).

From the perspective of P1, the way in which the education system approaches teaching and learning, needs to change. P1 would like to see the end of homework. An eleven-year study by Glass and Kang (2020) has shown that there is an increase in the number of learners who do not benefit from homework, which supports P1's idea. Similarly, the participants in Kazim, Idrees, Siddiqua and Naseem's (2024) study believe that homework causes stress for learners on a personal and social level. There is also a link between formal assessments and academic stress. High performing learners experience anxiety when it comes to their school work and their assessments (D'Agostino, Spagnolo & Salvati, 2022). P1 suggests that formal, summative assessments also be abandoned and that junior learners (Grades 8 and 9) only write exams in their three essential subjects. P2 further articulates that implementing continuous assessment (CASS) on a regular basis will alleviate learners' stress and anxiety while simultaneously benefitting their academic success and preparedness for more formal assessments. P1 believes that learners will learn more effectively (and therefore, be better prepared for formal assessments) if they are taught conceptually

(Medwell & Wray, 2020). P1 highlights that learners are more likely to learn a concept (for example, photosynthesis) if they can see it in action (for example, growing their own vegetable garden).

In terms of additional academic assistance, most participants mentioned extra lessons, academic support and academic enrichment. While these are offered at the school under investigation, some participants had additional comments on how it could be made more beneficial. Learner participants suggested there be more opportunities to practice or revise content, more individual discussions and personalised help, differentiation in teaching methods, and more venues to complete homework after school. Principals suggested more interaction with the school website (where exams and resources are located), lengthening the school day for learners to complete teacher-developed modules in problem areas, and offering opportunities for academic enrichment as opposed to support. Extra academic lessons hold great value for learners who attend them, provided both the learners and teachers are willing to work towards improvement (Maluleke, 2024). Teachers suggested helping learners on a one-on-one basis, moving away from textbook teaching, and implementing pacing where strong learners continue with practice activities and weaker learners benefit from additional explanations.

An interesting strategy suggested by T3 is academic testing for concessions and accommodations. The school's Academic policy stipulates that it is the responsibility of the Grade Head to ensure that learners who are struggling academically could be tested and apply for accommodations. From a diagnostic perspective, academic testing has allowed T3 to identify learning impairments or emotional and mental stress that learners may have. These stressors could be attributed to instances of peer pressure or issues in the learner's home life. By identifying these impairments and stressors, T3 can recommend or develop programmes and help these learners to help improve their academic performance. Wei and Zhang's (2024) study serves as testimony to the benefits of accommodations and concessions for learners with learning disabilities. These learners performed better when granted a time concession.

A strategy suggested by some participants and prompted by the researcher, is the potential benefit of using technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and social media, to improve academic performance. Participants believe these tools can be used effectively provided they are used for the right purposes. Learners should be taught how to use these devices and platforms for good, and not for the perpetration of peer pressure or to distract them from their academics. While it is ideal to use technology for learning, learner participants emphasise that technology (particularly AI) is not always accurate and should be utilised alongside additional research. Studies by Baidoo-Anu and Ansah (2023), de la Vall and Araya (2023), and Zaman (2024) buttress that there are benefits and disadvantages of using AI as a teaching and learning tool. Social media platforms can also be used to inform learners (and teachers) about the current types of peer pressure present in today's age. AI has also proven to be an effective therapy tool (Dekker et al., 2020). In some instances, it can be successful, however, its disadvantage lies in its inability to be empathetic. Learners who have fallen victim to peer pressure need to be able to share their feelings and have a reciprocated, human response.

Other strategies suggested by participants include adjusting the extra-mural timetable to be more accommodating to learners' academic needs, facilitating study groups, or pairing learners who can help one another when doing class allocations at the end of the year (an idea supported by Offordile et al. (2021)). Some additional strategies suggested by participants in this study include instilling a sense of internal motivation in learners (supported by Kuhfeld et al. (2020)), encouraging poorer performing learners with positive reinforcement, and instilling a sense of care for academics through disappointment and strictness on the part of the teacher.

4.3.2.6.2 Strategies for the school to improve peer relationships

Learners felt that the school can only do so much to improve peer relationships in the school environment. While the school's Code of Conduct highlights the behaviours and ethos expected of learners to ensure a comfortable and friendly environment for all school stakeholders, L2 stated that learners will not be receptive to instances where the school tries to 'force' their idea of friendship on

learners. L2 used an example from experience where learners were paired with learners from other grades during break time. L2 is adamant that these kinds of strategies do not work, as learners need the freedom to form friendships naturally and by choice.

Learners appreciate the strategies that the school has attempted so far, such as sports days and outreach programmes. However, they do have suggestions on how the school can further foster positive peer relationships. It is hoped that these strategies can play a significant role in reducing and preventing peer pressure. Non-academic school days, such as inter-house sports days and Youth Day charity celebrations, should continue as they do help foster relationships among peers who would not necessarily interact with each other during the academic day. Learner participants agreed that these days allow them the opportunity to interact with each other in a non-academic environment. They can see their peers in a different light which could hopefully foster a sense of family spirit (P1). L1 suggested that having more school camps could also foster stronger relationships. The benefits of attending and experiencing school camps extend well into adulthood (Warner et al., 2021). L4 further suggests that the school host more social events, such as school dances and gatherings.

From a classroom perspective, L1 and L3 suggested more groupwork activities. Groupwork is beneficial as learners can interact with one another socially while helping one another academically (Baskerville, 2021). Learners greatly benefit from peer tutoring in a group situation (Alegre et al., 2020). However, L1 believes groupwork is more beneficial for developing peer relationships when the work is not taken for marks. L4 adds that groups can be beneficial if they share a common goal, such as studying. L2 believes that peer support groups provide the perfect opportunity to improve peer relationships.

However, some learners see group work as an opportunity to socialise with their peers. This takes away from the academic focus of the groupwork activity and can cause disruption in the classroom. In these instances, L2 suggests that disruptive learners be separated in class to decrease the probability of them disrupting others. L2 also believes that moving learners away from one another can decrease the occurrence of peer pressure. This could be a worthwhile

strategy, as noted by Hwang and Domina (2021), who found an increase in learners' academic performance when disruptive peers had been suspended.

Further suggestions from learners include teachers providing guidance on topics of peer pressure and academic performance; teaching learners how to solve conflicts; teaching learners how to problem solve, which is referred to as metacognition (Abdelrahman, 2020); implementing intergrade peer support groups; and continuous encouragement in team sports.

Suggestions made by the principals differed from the strategies suggested by learners. P1 would like to see a more relaxed environment where teachers foster a sense of camaraderie:

P1: *"I would like to see more fun things happening."*

Some of these *"fun things"* include having learners involved in a school production, days like the school's Youth Day charity celebration, and friendly competition between classes when, for example, collecting money or item donations for charity. These activities have the potential of fostering a sense of family spirit (P1) because learners will be working together to achieve a common goal, without having academics at the forefront. Although the study conducted by Parrot and Cohen (2020) focuses on younger children, there is no denial that more 'play' or socialising opportunities are beneficial for learners' social development. In line with family spirit, P1 emphasises the importance of letting learners know that school staff, such as teachers, the school psychologist and Grade Heads (*teachers who oversee all of the learners in a grade*) are there for them when they need help or guidance outside of the academic sphere. Teachers who display positive interpersonal behaviours make learners feel emotionally and socially supported (Zheng, 2022).

P2 believes that the removal of cell phones will help improve peer relationships:

P2: *"I think by removing such early access to cell phones, we'll remove peer pressure, and we'll enable them to develop their own identity."*

Cell phones are unfortunately an ever-present feature in the modern classroom. Educational institutions (such as the school under investigation) are becoming

more reliant on technological devices as teaching and learning tools. While teachers can try to maintain control over the use of cell phones in the classroom, they have no control over what happens outside the classroom. Learners often use social media to engage in cyberbullying or to perpetrate peer pressure (Shin & Kim, 2023). Learners have continuous access to all types of negative media, which is often portrayed as being an acceptable social trend (for example, young celebrities promoting underage drinking or doing drugs). Learners see these negative behaviours as normal behaviour. Learners bring these negative behaviours into the school space, ultimately promoting these negative behaviours to their peers.

With limited access to cell phones and social media, P2 believes that learners would then be given the opportunity to develop their own identities and not base it on *“some sort of influencer” (a well-known person on social media, usually with thousands of followers)*. P3 and T1’s views contradict that of P2. P3 and T1 echo that cell phones and other technological devices cannot be removed from the classroom and school context. This is owing to the increased reliance on them for education and communication purposes, especially in the school under investigation. Learners use their devices to communicate with their peers and their teachers. Learners are also using their devices to access educational resources, such as images from Google or information from AI websites. While P2 does acknowledge that technology cannot be completely removed from the modern classroom, P2 does suggest that learners then be taught to use their devices in a way that is beneficial to their learning. P2 used a recent example to support her suggestion. Learners had to complete an activity on content that is often perceived as uninteresting. The teachers in charge of this activity designed it in such a way that learners had to use iPads and cell phones to scan Quick Response (QR) codes to complete the activity. P2 reported that these learners had much fun using their devices to learn and interact with their content. Khaola, Musiwa and Rambe (2022) agree that technological devices can be effective tools to improve communication and learning in the classroom, provided they are used appropriately.

P3 believes that a change or improvement in peer relationships starts with the learners. Learners must have the urge to improve themselves from within before they can begin engaging in a positive manner with their peers:

P3: *“I do think that we have lost mutual respect. I do think that our learners need more training and input on how to be a decent person.”*

While it is expected that learners learn the value of respect from their home environment, P3 adds that the school can play a role in reinforcing and encouraging learners how to be comfortable in being who they are, to have morals and values, and to tell right from wrong. P3 further advises that, before the school engages in reinforcing and encouraging these traits, there should be training at a staff level where educators are made aware of the kinds of pressures that learners are under. This would help them to better understand their learners and be better equipped to teach them how to foster positive relationships with each other. Schools need to approach their reinforcement and encouragement of positive traits with intent to ensure a balance between what is expected by the school and by learners (Tejada, Li & Hammer, 2023).

T1 agrees with P3 and adds that learners should be taught resilience to prepare them for adulthood. T1 believes that schools should facilitate opportunities for learners to safely explore their identities. Instilling resilience in adolescents is important, especially for their mental well-being (Tang, Diao, Jin, Pu & Wang, 2022). T1 also believes that schools should focus on developing holistic learners, embracing their individuality and doing what is best for them. Schools should be developing solutions that guide learners towards independence where they are confident enough to remove themselves from situations of peer pressure (T1).

T2 shares a thought similar to that of T1:

T2: *“The learners themselves need to be taught that they are enough on their own” and “I think it has to come from self-worth and self-confidence.”*

Amoah, Acheampong, Sefah, Britwum, and Adjei (2021) and Garcia-Martinez et al. (2022) call attention to the importance of a learner's self-concept in their academic success. T2 adds that teachers need to engage with learners personally and explain the disadvantages of being with negative peer groups. In

instances where this may not work, teachers can control negative peer relationships by assigning learners to new classes at the end of each year (T2).

T3 draws on the importance of class time for improving peer relationships. In the subject that T3 teaches, there are countless opportunities to impart important life skills on learners. However, T3 does not see the learners often enough, resulting in the need to filter content. This lack of time also prevents a deep engagement with the syllabus content that needs to be taught. To remedy the impact of peer pressure, learners would need to be seen frequently. T3 also believes that teaching or speaking from experience can help learners deal with peer pressure. If learners know that their teacher has been through something similar to what they are going through, they may be more receptive to their advice. Teachers can play a significant role in developing learners to become agents of social change (Butera et al., 2020).

T4 also believes that improving peer relationships starts in the classroom. Learners should be placed in teacher-facilitated groupwork scenarios where they work together to solve a problem, for example. This gives learners the opportunity to interact and learn from each other, and ultimately improve their social development (Polat, Sezer & Atiş-Akyol, 2022). T4 asserts that learners who experience negative influences, situations and experiences should be taught to steer these instances in a positive direction.

4.3.2.6.3 Strategies for stakeholders to improve academic performance and peer relationships

Stakeholders have an important role to play in the way a school functions, how it fosters a sense of harmony, and how they can help the school and its learners attain their goals (Kaya, 2022). Research participants identified and elaborated on prompted semi-structured questions about the various stakeholders that can be involved with the school to enable a positive functioning of the school, in terms of peer pressure, academic performance and the impact of peer pressure on academic performance. Numerous recommendations and suggestions made by participants on how stakeholders can be involved with the school to improve peer pressure and/or academic performance are suggested.

Parents can be one of the most instrumental stakeholders in the school environment:

P1: *“The relationship between parents and teachers and learners should be quite strong.”*

A constant line of communication is needed to keep the school, parents, learners and teachers informed of all happenings within the school. This line of communication is also important when there is a need to communicate any concerns. These concerns could be related to issues of peer pressure and/or academic performance. Participants acknowledge that parents have various roles to play both inside and outside of the school. The level of involvement from parents is contested by some participants. T2 believes that some parents are overly involved in their child’s school life, while T4 believes that parents need to be more involved in specific aspects of their child’s life. Parental involvement is an important determinant of a learner’s belief in their academic capabilities (Metzger et al., 2020). L1 underscores the importance of parental monitoring in all aspects of a learner’s life and remain wary of any changes in their child’s behaviour:

L1: *“They could also monitor what their child is doing, because if you monitor that, you can kind of see where your kid will slip and then fix them up.”*

Parents are responsible for teaching their children the difference between right and wrong. These are the values that learners bring with them into the school environment. While the parents’ intentions for their child’s morality may be good, it is unfortunate that they are not always aware of the different elements involved in their child’s social and academic lives. To remediate this, L1 suggests that parents check their child’s cell phone, while L2 suggests counselling or therapy if they are unable to get to the source of the problem by themselves (supported by Liu et al. (2022)). Schools can help in understanding their child’s social and/or academic struggles by educating parents in this regard:

P3: *“These learners that we teach specifically don’t talk to their parents and their parents don’t talk to them. And it’s no one’s fault that the*

generation of parents now in the high school arena at our school are a completely different generation as well."

T1: *"There has to be the focus on educating parents, guardians and so on with what is currently an issue for a teenager."*

T3: *"I would say opening up the parents' eyes, be it talks with not just us ... talks with outside parties that come in, workshops with parents just to get them on board with us so that we can then make the right decisions for their children."*

Stakeholders can play a significant role in improving learners' academic performance (Biggs & Hacker, 2021). Teachers and parents as stakeholders can be of great value in this regard by offering encouragement (Peng et al., 2022). Parents can aid their children at home by helping them with homework or helping them to prepare for assessments:

L4: *"Sometimes maybe you struggle at school and you need that extra bit of help. So maybe you could get the help from your parents by ... them repeating the work or them taking a sheet you're learning from and asking you questions based on that sheet."*

Other stakeholders include alumni. L2 and L4 are receptive to the idea of alumni coming to school to talk about their experiences with, for example, peer pressure and academic performance. However, L2 and L3 draw on the importance of relatability when it comes to alumni or guest speakers. If the speaker does not talk about something that the learners are interested in or can relate to, then L2 and L3 believe that learners will not be able to take anything away from the experience:

L2: *"You need to be able to open up your mind. And you do that with relatability. You do that with trust. That's how you open up someone's mind. That's from personal experience."*

L3: *"They themselves might have gone through the same exact peer pressure that you're going through. So, it could help that it's coming from a place of relatability."*

Larsson, Marshall and Ritchie (2021) encourage alumni-learner relationships as they are beneficial in terms of developing interpersonal skills and helping learners understand careers in practice. Alumni can also provide valuable advice when sharing their experiences dealing with peer pressure and/or academic decline:

L4: "I feel like the alumni could come to the school maybe and talk about their experiences in school and what they did to get to where they are" and "that could inspire people to do better. And they'd be like, if this person has come from my school and they've achieved all these great things, then I know I can too. And that instils in you that you feel like you can do better and you'll push yourself to be better every day, because if someone from your school has ended up somewhere you want to be, then at least you know you can do it."

L4's preceding statement applies to guest speakers as well. P2 and L4 spoke about a recent guest speaker to the school who spoke about the dangers of inappropriate cell phone use. L4 stated that the presentation was both interesting and relevant since it is applicable to learners' lives. The content, as well as the presenter, was relatable. Guest speakers who speak from experience before engaging with the issue at hand are better received by learners because of their perceived relatability (Casper & Balgopal, 2020). In terms of guest speakers, P1 suggests that the school invite professionals, like educational psychologists, to host workshops dealing with issues such as peer pressure.

P3, T3 and T4 buttress that, for stakeholder intervention (in terms of peer pressure and academic performance) to be successful, there needs to be consensus across all stakeholders regarding the school's current procedures. Stakeholders would need to be actively involved in the development of new procedures, policies or strategies that deal with peer pressure and academic performance:

P3: "It really is just a round table discussion. So, for example, having a focus group with an older generation teacher, younger generation teacher, a board member who is not in the classroom, educational specialist who is not in the classroom, and learners across the grades and have an open conversation."

T3: *“There must be consensus across the board as to how to deal with these situations. Be it the slightest situation of peer pressure, to the most severe case of peer pressure that there is a consensus across all stakeholders that this is how it's going to be dealt with.”*

T4: *“I think for anyone, a parent, teacher, a staff member, anyone, must first know [that] peer pressure is all over and it's not going to change just by you saying something. I think, acknowledge the peer pressure and then just maybe find a way to get everyone involved in that certain situation, maybe try to figure it out together.”*

Oftentimes, external stakeholders are not entirely aware of what happens in the school realm (Layco, 2022). It is important that stakeholders are continually informed about issues and changes in the school environment so that they too can uphold the school's objectives and goals. Stakeholders cannot be effective if they do not possess prior or current knowledge of the school's functioning.

4.3.2.6.4 Current school rules, policies and discipline, and potential policies related to peer pressure and academic performance

Rules play an important role in our everyday lives:

T1: *“As with anything, when we think about it in a larger societal space, is that why do we have rules in a country? So that people know what the boundaries are. And I firmly believe that we as humans need to have boundaries in order to be able to live fully.”*

The current perceptions of the school's existing rules and policies in place are positive, according to the participants. Participants were prompted to share their opinion on the potential benefits or disadvantages should the school and stakeholders implement a policy or policies for peer pressure and academic performance. Some participants agreed with the potential implementation of a policy based on peer pressure and academic performance:

L3: *“I think maybe a policy can be used to help. The school has a lot of rules and it really helps a lot of people to have those set of rules put in place. So, maybe a policy, like no marks being told to people or something*

like that, and instead of laughing at someone when they get a bad mark, encourage them to do better."

P1: "I think having a proper code of conduct is important so that if there is peer pressure and bullying comes out of it, for instance, that there's recourse. I think having a proper disciplinary process in place ... if you do this, you're going to get that. I think having a social media policy in place to govern ... It's rules, having a drug policy in place, having a bullying policy in place, all of these things, to almost deter a child from that kind of peer pressure."

P3: "It has to be rehabilitative. And again, you can have those policies in place, but you can't just have something on a piece of paper. There has to be follow through with the policy."

A common theme from L3, P1, and P3's responses above is the need for specificity. Policies that are clearly written are more readily understood and accepted and leave little opportunity for misinterpretation. Therefore, should a policy for peer pressure and academic performance be implemented, it would need to contain specific examples. This policy could be included alongside the school's Anti-Bullying policy or could be introduced as a stand-alone policy.

Some participants are not entirely convinced that a policy based on peer pressure and academic performance could be effective:

L1: "I think that the rules don't really play that big of a role because kids, especially when you give them rules, all they want to do is break the rules."

L2: "I just don't know if it'll be followed as strictly, especially if it's like a newer rule ... there's some things that you can't really enforce, especially the peer pressure stuff ... So, if the policy is there and no one's enforcing it, no one's going to follow it."

T2: "You have policies for lots of things at school, but sometimes they're hard to enforce. I think ... it kind of has to come from somebody who the learner will listen to, maybe a counsellor or maybe a teacher that they are closer to."

L2, P3 and T2 emphasise the importance of punishment and following through with threats of punishment. There needs to be repercussions for negative actions to stop or prevent negative behaviour from re-occurring. It is important for schools to have procedures in place to implement school policies effectively (Allen, Reupert & Oades, 2021). This will help schools in maintaining a positive school environment that promotes the types of behaviour that the school desires. However, the way in which a school implements policies is important as it can influence learner receptivity. L2 argues that if the repercussions of going against school rules are too harsh, it can create further problems, such as rebellion. L2 maintains that policies should focus more on the positives than they do on the negatives. P1 concurs and reiterates the importance of having “positive” policies (such as the school’s existing merits, academic awards and extra-curricular awards policies) in place. These policies serve as encouragement for learners, in the hope that it will steer them away from negative behaviours.

T3 and L4 highlight the importance of clarity in policies. They need to contain descriptive and specific details to avoid ambiguity and potential comeback from those on the receiving end of punishments. Ambiguous policies can result in resistance, avoidance of responsibilities and confusion among the recipients of said policies (Väyrynen, Lanamäki, Laari-Salmela, Iivari & Kinnula, 2022). P3 and T3 further emphasise the importance of consensus across all school stakeholders to ensure that when the school enforces a punishment, it is understood and accepted by all without retaliation, which is aptly summarised by T4:

T4: *“I think the policy is important. We’ve got your ground rules, so you can go back to it and see it’s there, this is what you were supposed to do. You didn’t do it”* [and therefore suffer the consequences as stipulated in the policy].

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter presented and interpreted the results provided by research participants with regards to peer pressure and academic performance. These results were obtained through the analysis of relevant documents (the SASA No. 84 of 1996, learner reports, school code of conduct and policies, and examples of learners' work) and through individual semi-structured interviews with research participants. Based on the analysis of these results, the researcher was able to identify recurring patterns and then develop appropriate themes. These themes allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how the learners, teachers and principals at the school under investigation experience peer pressure and academic performance. Chapter 5 will present a discussion of the findings as well as the study's limitations, recommendations and conclusion.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 focuses on the discussion of research findings from the study. The limitations of the study are discussed as well. Recommendations are also included, and a conclusion to the study is provided. The themes identified in the study contain pertinent information that assist in answering the main and sub-research questions. These themes uncovered many different perspectives on peer pressure and academic performance. The diversity of the findings supports the interpretivism paradigm as well as the Ecological Systems Theory and the Social Learning Theory. Overall, it can be determined that peer pressure and academic performance has an impact on learners at a Linmeyer school in Johannesburg South.

5.2 Research questions and corresponding themes

The research questions and their corresponding themes have been presented in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Research questions and corresponding themes

Main research question: What is the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of learners in a Linmeyer school in Johannesburg?	
Secondary research questions	Themes
1. How could peer pressure among learners cause a decline in their academic performance?	• Peer pressure can cause a decline in academic performance. • Other factors cause academic decline. • Observed decrease in academic performance.
2. What challenges do schools experience as a result of peer pressure?	• Negative peer pressure creates challenges for the school.
3. What motivates peer pressure?	• Motivations for peer pressure. • Peer pressure can be beneficial or disadvantageous.

Main research question: What is the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of learners in a Linmeyer school in Johannesburg?	
Secondary research questions	Themes
4. How can the challenges of peer pressure be mitigated to improve learners' academic performance?	• Remedial strategies to improve academic performance and peer relationships. • Rules, policies and discipline remediate issues of peer pressure and academic performance.
5. What remedial strategies could be employed by the school and stakeholders to curb the impact of peer pressure and academic performance?	

5.3 Discussion of themes

The discussion that follows uses the themes that emerged from the analysis of data to answer the secondary research questions and ultimately, the main research question.

5.3.1 Peer pressure can cause a decline in academic performance

This section addresses the main research question as well as the first secondary research question. The findings of the study revealed that peer pressure can cause a decline in a learner's academic performance. However, it may be situational and is dependent on the learner. If a learner is strong enough to resist peer pressure, then their academics will not be negatively affected. Peer pressure (especially where it is negative) can cause a decline in a learner's academic performance, as is supported by Alafiatayo et al. (2021). The type of peer group that learners associate themselves with within their microsystem can significantly impact their quality of academic performance. P3 stated that a decrease in academic performance is usually an indication of peer pressure taking place. As an educator, the researcher can attest to this. Learners feel the need to impress or conform to their peers and alter their behaviours to suit them. This change in behaviour is often owing to the learner's perception that models who exhibit the same behaviour receive awards and recognition (Bandura, 1969).

L4 made mention that peer pressure can result in learners missing school, which could ultimately affect their academic performance. The learner participants in this study each have a meticulous attendance record, with minimal absent days.

In their opinion, peer pressure affects academic performance when learners are steered in an unintended direction. Learners lose interest in their hobbies and are no longer working towards achieving their goals. Alcohol and substance use is another peer-influenced factor identified by L3. It has been proven that alcohol abuse among adolescents causes damage to their brain, which can ultimately affect their academic performance. Lees, Meredith, Kirkland, Bryant and Squeglia (2020) warn that alcohol consumption causes negative effects on neural and behavioural aspects of adolescents which can be carried into adulthood.

Peer pressure can create self-doubt, especially in situations where a learner's weaknesses are constantly highlighted. If the peer group feels like a learner cannot or should not be doing or achieving something, the learner might stop trying, as mentioned by L4. In terms of academics, if a learner is told that they are a failure because of their poor results, they will believe it and stop making an effort. This ties into the fact that peer pressure can affect a learner's self-esteem and reciprocally, affect academic performance (Sultana, Ditta & Atta, 2024). Similarly, it has been proven that learners with high self-esteem perform better academically (Yu et al., 2022). It is important for teachers to monitor learners consistently, noting any change to academics or personality, and intervene as soon as possible. These interactions within a learner's mesosystem are beneficial not only for their academic performance, but for their social well-being.

Further to the factors identified above, participants added that ridicule from peers often impedes academic effort. Learners do not want to share their opinions or answers in classroom situations for fear of being ridiculed. It then becomes difficult for teachers to gauge learners' level of understanding if they are not asking or answering questions. The reciprocal effect of not participating in lessons is a lack of understanding of the content. As participants pointed out, learners then fear further ridicule from peers if they attempt to seek help from teachers. Peers play an important role in a learner's self-efficacy and their motivation to achieve. This finding is supported by Li, Peng, Lu, Liao and Li (2020).

Participants further identified that ridicule can cause learners to alter their behaviour. L3, T4 and the researcher have experienced instances where learners

appreciate the laughter of their peers when answering a question incorrectly. This laughter further motivates them to continue providing incorrect or jokeful answers to please their peers. The perception of the learner then becomes one where they believe that, to be accepted, they need to be perceived as lacking care or interest in their academics. These learners have experienced a reward in the form of peer acknowledgement and chose to reproduce this negative behaviour to continue receiving acknowledgement, often to the detriment of their academics.

An important consideration to be made regarding academic performance is the fact that the pressure to perform (or not to perform) does not necessarily only come from peers. Academic achievement is often the main focus of a school, as is acknowledged by P1 and P3 in the context of the school under investigation. Participants acknowledge that pressure to achieve can come from teachers, parents (P3), the school, and society as a whole (T1). All of these sources of pressure within a learner's microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem can contribute to a learner's academic decline. Additionally, they can contribute to further issues, such as decreased mental health (Eriksen, 2020), stress (Kulakow, Raufelder & Hoferichter, 2021), and depression (Fu, Ren & Liang, 2022).

5.3.2 Other factors cause academic decline

This section addresses the main research question and the first secondary research question. The findings of the study justified the use of the interpretivism paradigm. Humans create meaning through experience and their interpretations thereof (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). While the participants agreed that peer pressure can cause a decline in academic performance, they acknowledged or outrightly contended that peer pressure is not the only factor, nor should it be seen in isolation. Different factors were offered based on personal experiences, or were general suggestions made using examples based on instances that they had witnessed. Responses were diverse but are by no means exclusive. The number of factors that could impact academic performance is innumerable.

The learners attribute academic decline to teaching methods that do not suit particular learning styles. Teachers may select a teaching style that best suits their own preferences. However, these styles do not always complement a

learner's learning style. Learners may lose interest or focus, causing frustration on the part of the teacher. These findings are supported by Farooq, Qadir and Sajid (2022) and Inayat and Ali (2020), who add that teacher support can further a learner's interest and enthusiasm. While it is accepted that teachers and their teaching styles play a significant role in learners' academic interest, it is important to note that learners have the most significant part to play, as identified by participants. T1 states that learners struggle with their academics because the content is often something that they cannot relate to. Agustina, Wahyudin and Pratiwi (2021) agree that there is a positive correlation between academic achievements and learner motivation. It can, therefore, be assumed that learners who cannot relate to content, are neither motivated to work, nor are interested in their academics, and may experience a decline in their academic performance. However, for some learners, this lack of motivation and interest is not necessarily their fault. Some of the learner participants attribute the loss of interest to an increased workload. As P1 pointed out, learners have more subjects in secondary school and are taught by a variety of different teachers. This, coupled with the stress of transitioning from primary school to secondary school (Ryan et al., 2021), can negatively impact a learner's academic performance.

From the perspective of teachers and principals, learners experience a decrease in their academics owing to the lack of self-discipline (T2), perceived sense of entitlement (P1 and T3), and a lack of work ethic (T2). This ties into the foregoing discussion regarding a learner's interest. Muksin and Makhsin (2020) noted in their study that, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, learners who lacked self-discipline did not perform well academically. In this situation, self-discipline was a necessity. Learners who lack self-discipline for their academics may not necessarily see or respect the importance of academics. Similarly, a learner's work ethic (or lack thereof) can negatively impact their performance, as pointed out by L1, who stated that learners are not interested in doing additional work to improve their academics. Learners develop the perception that they will get the work done later or not at all. This perception can lead into the sense of entitlement where learners who do not work still expect to achieve. Oftentimes, learners place pressure on the teacher, especially through parent involvement, and the teacher is blamed for their poor performance.

The teachers and principals further believe that COVID-19 is to blame for the current learners' poor academic performance and lack of self-discipline (T2). The Grade 8 class of 2024 were in Grade 4 when the pandemic struck. Grade 4 is the start of the Intermediate Phase of schooling, where numerous new skills are taught. The teachers feel that learners are lacking in skills such as reading, writing and comprehension. Learners frequently misspell common words and lack the ability to put together a comprehensive paragraph. Learners also experienced a decrease in interactions within their microsystem, ultimately affecting their social development.

Another factor contributing to learners' academic decline, as identified by teachers and principals, is the consistent and inappropriate use of cell phones and other technological devices. The school under investigation makes use of digital devices as a learning and teaching tool. However, many learners do not see it that way and are misusing their devices. Learners constantly have earphones in their ears or are playing games and visiting social media sites during lessons, while the teacher is teaching. McCoy's (2020) study showed that learners readily admit to the use of cell phones in the classroom for non-academic purposes. Learners become easily distracted and do not pay attention to the content being taught, which ultimately affects their overall academic performance.

Further factors affecting academic performance included general academic pressure as learners try to cope with the academic demands of their teachers, the school and parents. In addition to academic pressure comes the pressure to excel in their extra-curricular activities, which often take up numerous afternoons. Learners fall behind with homework because there is minimal time in their schedules to complete it. Incomplete homework can lead to demerits and potential conflict with teachers, creating disruptions within the learner's mesosystem. Secondary school also introduces a brand-new set of teachers who may be unfamiliar to the learners. Each of these teachers have different expectations of learners, such as how they should enter into the classroom, what kind of behaviour they deem acceptable, the type or quality of work expected, and the use or unacceptable use of learning tools and stationery, among others.

Pressure is coming at the learners from numerous angles; hence, some of the participants' hesitancy to solely attribute peer pressure to the decline in academic performance. There are numerous aspects affecting a learner's life and it is important to see how the interaction between these aspects affects their academic performance and overall wellbeing.

5.3.3 Observed decrease in academic performance

This section addresses the main research question and the first secondary research question. The findings after the analysis of documents were corroborated by participant responses in the semi-structured interviews. Documents related to the school under investigation (various school policies, code of conduct, examples of learner work in various subjects, and learner reports, which included academic attendance and behavioural reports) were analysed. The researcher noted decreases in the academic performance of the learners from Term 3 of Grade 7 to Term 1 of Grade 8. The learners reported dissatisfaction with their overall or subject-specific results in their individual semi-structured interviews. Learners could pinpoint their own unique reasons for these decreases, as well as potential reasons that may affect other learners' academic performance. Some of the teachers pointed out that learners are struggling to write cohesive and comprehensive sentences. This was corroborated in some of the learners' work, especially where longer pieces of writing were required. There was the occasional misspelling of words, repetition of thought processes, and incorrect use of words. However, the conditions under which this work was completed were unclear (time-pressured, stressful, assessment etc.)

During the individual interviews, learners acknowledged that specific factors impacted their academic performance negatively, especially from Term 3 of Grade 7 to Term 1 of Grade 8. Despite these decreases, it is evident that learners are consistent in making an effort in Term 2 of Grade 8 to produce the best standard of work. In instances where the same work is done and marked on different occasions (class activities and formal assessments), learners exhibited a noticeable increase in results due to consistent effort. In their interviews, the learner participants expressed an awareness that their results can improve. The learners have an internal need to improve. They are willing to work towards their

goals. In general, learners who are persistent, have a good sense of intrinsic motivation and who have high personal value are more likely to achieve in their academics, according to Howard, Bureau, Guay, Chong and Ryan (2021).

Out of the three principals and four teachers, only two were satisfied with the academic performance of the Grade 8s. P1 and T4 have acknowledged good overall and subject-specific performance among the learners. They have also acknowledged that learners are consistent in trying, no matter their level of achievement. However, the other two principals and three teachers do not share the same feeling, stating that learners lack interest and effort towards their academics. The consensus is that learners are unwilling to try, even if teachers deem them capable. They expressed the need for academic improvement through instilling a sense of urgency, interest, and motivation in learners towards their academics. T1 expressed the opinion that learners' academic endeavours should be recognised and praised according to their own abilities. In line with Social Learning Theory, learners should be motivated to repeat their own positive behaviours to achieve the same level of recognition and praise. T1 and P3 believe that there should be no set standard or benchmark to which learners need to conform. Rather, learners should be praised when they have progressed according to their own standards and abilities. Akbar and Al-Gharabally (2020) concur with T1's opinion, that teachers should focus on praising a learner's effort rather than on how well they achieved according to the standard grading. Akbar and Al-Gharabally (2020) also highlight the importance of providing effective feedback and guidance to learners to assist them in improving their own work, irrelevant of the general standard.

There were no significant concerns regarding the learners' absenteeism or behaviour. In the interviews, the learners all expressed a disregard for negative behaviours, such as vaping, which is supported by the fact that none had any demerits related to negative behaviour. The school under investigation has a policy regarding drug use as well as a demerit/discipline system in place to deal with and punish learners who engage in negative activities and behaviours. Should the learners have engaged in any negative behaviours, it would be specified on the behavioural report. In terms of policy, all participants

acknowledged and appreciated the detailed nature of all school policies and the code of conduct. Nevertheless, some mentioned that it would be beneficial to have more detailed explanations of what, for example, constitutes as peer pressure. However, this is a difficult task considering that, in line with the interpretivist paradigm, the experience of peer pressure is unique. As Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) put it, their experiences are subjective. An objective description of situations that constitute as peer pressure may not be possible.

5.3.4 Negative peer pressure creates challenges for the school

This section addresses the main research question and the second secondary research question. Schools can experience numerous challenges because of peer pressure among learners. However, it is dependent on the severity of the situation at hand. The main challenge identified by the participants was the impact that negative peer pressure and its associated actions can have on the reputation of the school. However, as mentioned by P3, people will always remember the negatives. In terms of the school, people tend to remember situations that put the school in a negative light rather than those situations where the school excelled (for example, academically or in extra-curriculars). Martín-Miguel, Prado-Román, Cachón-Rodríguez and Avendaño-Miranda (2020) refer to the school's reputation as an "intangible asset" that provides the school with a "competitive advantage". Schools with 'good' reputations are more desirable for prospective parents and learners. Participants in this study stated that if peer pressure and its associated activities have created a negative reputation for the school, then it runs the risk of losing current and prospective learners. Parents may perceive the school environment and the behaviour of the learners within it as undesirable. Based on perceived (or possibly evident) negative behaviour, current parents may remove their children and potentially discourage prospective parents from enrolling their children. As many of the participants stated, parents talk, and are often more willing to discuss their grievances than they are their good experiences. de Talancé (2020) agrees that a parent's perception of the school can be negative and can differ greatly from the school's own advertised and objective perception of quality.

From the perspective of participants, further challenges for the school include maintaining external stakeholders' perception of academic success, dealing with behavioural issues, and having to develop procedures to deal with issues like absenteeism. A challenge for the school in terms of academic performance is to overcome the negative perception of external stakeholders (such as universities), if and where it may exist. L3 mentioned that universities may be selective in their choice of entrants based on the school from which they come. This ties in with the notion of reputation. Warta, Syam and Rahmatullah (2024) confirm that a learner's academic success is greatly beneficial for the school, its reputation, and external stakeholders' perceptions of the school. P2 mentioned that the school under investigation is experiencing a rise in instances of vaping. Unfortunately, these instances may cause the school to be perceived as having behavioural issues or as having minimal control over behavioural issues. This may cause the school to be seen in a negative light. How the school deals with these behavioural issues can also affect its reputation (T4). The challenge for the school would then be to change these negative perceptions into positive ones by implementing, for example, behavioural intervention programmes and support systems (Gagnon, Sylvester & Marsh, 2021), classroom management strategies (Sunday, Ogbeche & Adie, 2022), and a stricter code of conduct. These strategies will help the school to maintain the positive discipline, values and culture expected of its learners (Hanslo, 2020).

Participants acknowledge that attempting to implement strategies to overcome negative behaviours can create further challenges, especially for the teachers. Disciplinary issues create stress for teachers. There is an emotional component where, for example, teachers have to deal with children who are misbehaving because of issues in their home life. There is also an administrative component, where teachers are expected to maintain meticulous paper trails to ensure disciplinary processes are followed correctly. Teachers also expressed that these instances of having to deal with negative behaviours takes their attention away from their other learners, who could then fall through the cracks. Okeke et al. (2023) agree that teachers' overall well-being is negatively affected by having to deal with instances of the learners' negative behaviours.

Further to the challenges mentioned earlier comes the challenge of creating balance. Learners, teachers, parents, principals, the school and stakeholders will all have differing opinions on the way in which a school should be run. Learners may feel that the school's means of discipline are too strict, while the school may feel that it is too lenient. However, according to participants, it is difficult to create an environment within the school that is suited to everyone involved. There will always be disagreements regarding the development and implementation of rules.

5.3.5 Motivations for peer pressure

This section addresses the main research question, as well as the third secondary research question. In continuation with the interpretivism paradigm, one's perception of peer pressure and the reasons behind its perpetration differ according to an individual's experience. According to most participants, the perpetration of peer pressure is motivated by the want or need for power. Learners may find enjoyment or fulfilment in controlling others.

Some learners may feel that controlling others is the only way to keep their friends close. Learners who are perpetrators of peer pressure derive their popularity or perceived status from being powerful and controlling. As stated by P3, sometimes these learners are weak in aspects such as academics and extra-curriculars. They use their ability to control others to receive recognition. P2 mentioned that this recognition need not necessarily be positive. As long as these learners are receiving attention (Wadesango, 2022), they are happy. A further derivation of power is the positive reinforcement from other learners, especially when the perpetrator has gotten away with, for example, vaping in the school bathroom. These learners are seen as heroes (P2). They become the person that other learners look up to, even though their actions are negative and perceived as such by the school. Learners have received desired attention from their peers and will elect to repeat those behaviours to continue receiving this attention.

According to participants, a further motivator for peer pressure is the perpetrator's need or want for acceptance. As stated by T1, all learners innately want to belong to something. However, for some learners, becoming the perpetrator of peer pressure may be the only way to create a sense of belonging. Controlling the

narrative of the peer group gives perpetrators the feeling of being a part of something. Having this self-made network of peers helps to curb the fear of being alone, of not being accepted and of being picked on. Solomontos-Kountouri and Strohmeier (2021) concur that the perpetration of bullying is often attributed to the need for affiliation. While their study was based on immigrant learners, it can still apply to learners in general.

Perpetration of peer pressure is often influenced by what a learner experiences at home. P1 believes that the perpetration of peer pressure is often a front put on by the learner to mask the experiences or potential trauma of what is occurring in the home. Learners may feel that they lack control in their home life and instead, perpetrate peer pressure to regain that sense of control. L3 and T4 further elaborate that learners may have experienced childhood traumas, such as substance abuse, which may affect their perception of which behaviours are appropriate and which are not. These perceptions of good and bad behaviour are brought into the school environment and may be used to encourage or influence the peer group. Children who experience issues in the home are more likely to become perpetrators, as is concluded by Nurlia and Suardiman (2020).

Further motivations for peer pressure are the issues that come from within a person. Learners with insecurities can mask them by becoming a bully. As mentioned by T1, it is better to be in control of the situation than become the one who is picked on. Learners want to feel like they are worthy. However, they may only perceive themselves as worthy if they are in control of people and situations around them. Similarly, learners who perpetrate peer pressure have, or develop, narcissistic tendencies, where their expectation is to control and have other learners accept their control. Dietrich and Ferguson (2020) and Nurlia and Suardiman (2020) concur that learners who suffer insecurities or who have narcissistic tendencies will use their ability to intimidate, bully and control others as a way to cover up their own insecurities.

5.3.6 Peer pressure can be beneficial or disadvantageous

This section addresses the main research question and the third secondary research question. The impact of peer pressure can be beneficial or disadvantageous, depending on learners' unique experiences. Participants

expressed that they have experienced or have been witness to instances of positive peer pressure. The most common type of positive peer pressure was the peer's positive impact on learners' academic performance, which the participants had experienced or witnessed in their own capacity. Peer groups that accept academic achievement and encourage it, often have a positive impact on a learner's academic performance. This type of peer group models desirable behaviours that learners may wish to replicate. Khan et al. (2023) noted a similar trend in the university context. In some instances, peer groups can create a sense of friendly competition, where learners compete with each other with their academics at the fore. In other instances, a learner may be a part of a peer group where everyone is achieving and may feel the need to improve their own performance to match that of the group.

The peer group within a learner's microsystem plays a significant role in shaping the learner's overall personality and identity. In instances where the peer group is positive, supportive and morally sound, it is assumed that a learner will then be positively influenced as well. Peer groups can also impact a learner's spirituality by, for example, taking them to a church service or event (L3). Peer groups that hold personal development in high regard could influence a learner to develop in their maturity and work on improving their inner strengths. Positive behaviours exhibited by the peer group may be reproduced by the learner. In instances where the peer group values positive social interactions, extra-curricular activities and good general behaviour, then so will the learner who wishes to fall in with this group. Unfortunately, the same can be said for the negative peer group. Peer groups that centre around negativity can negatively impact a learner's identity and personality. Learners may alter their personalities and behaviours in a negative manner to be accepted by the peer group. Shan and Zölitz's (2022) study highlights the important role that the peer group plays in shaping one's personality. If a learner's peer group is one that centres around positivity, then the learner will likely want to be and do the same (Kreidell & Duell 2023).

In line with the interpretivism paradigm, the negative impact or disadvantages of peer pressure are dependent on a learner's unique experiences. It is also dependent on the learner's perception of the level of intensity to which it

negatively affects them. Participants (especially the learners) did not necessarily experience negative peer pressure in their own capacity. However, they, along with the teachers and principals, have witnessed the negative impact of peer pressure on other learners within the school under investigation. As previously mentioned, the peer group within a learner's microsystem can influence the learner's personality, altering them as a person. Learners begin engaging in activities in which they typically would not engage. An activity frequently mentioned by participants was vaping. Some learners stated that they have witnessed their peers engage in these activities, only to regret it later. Xu, et al. (2023) adumbrate that a learner's peer group is largely responsible for the kind of behaviours which they exhibit. However, learners do not always see the potential consequences that are associated with these negative behaviours.

Another disadvantage mentioned frequently by the participants was the impact of peer pressure on a learner's mental health and overall well-being. Learners can experience emotional stress, nervous breakdowns and physical illness, which all stem from the stress of peer pressure. Learners who are behaving in a way that essentially goes against who they are, may experience inner turmoil trying to be someone they are not. Moreover, the way in which a learner thinks and reacts to situations can also be impacted by the peer group, according to the participants. Peer pressure can also affect a learner's self-esteem, self-worth and self-confidence, especially when they have to alter their identity to suit or fall in with the peer group. Saka, Dike, Akinsanya and Adunjo-Saka (2024) and Cruz et al. (2022) attest that peer pressure can significantly affect a learner's overall mental health and well-being.

5.3.7 Remedial strategies to improve academic performance and peer relationships

This section addresses the main research question as well as the fourth and fifth secondary research questions. Participants shared numerous strategies that they believe the school and stakeholders can implement to improve academic performance and peer relationships.

5.3.7.1 Strategies for the school to improve peer relationships

Participants acknowledged the existing strategies that the school has implemented to improve peer relationships, and proceeded to suggest improvements and additional strategies. Learners feel as though the school has done what it can and that trying to intervene in learner relationships will prove difficult. Learners, teachers and principals drew attention to the importance of non-academic school days, such as sports days and charity initiatives. Learners interact with one another without the pressure of academic competitiveness. Learners are given the opportunity to have fun together. Learners get to know one another in a different context, forming new friendships (and a sense of family spirit) based on these unique interactions. Tarbiyah, Bujuri, Uyun and Nasrudin (2023) support the idea of non-academic school days as they are perfect opportunities for character building activities. These kinds of activities can be of great benefit when trying to improve peer relationships, especially in school situations where negative peer pressure is present.

From an academic perspective, learners believe more groupwork will give them the opportunity to get to know their peers. Groupwork also provides the opportunity for learners to teach one another (Alegre et al., 2020). This may be beneficial in instances where a learner may not necessarily understand their teacher. It was also suggested by participants that teachers provide guidance on topics such as peer pressure and its impact on various aspects of a learner's life, including academic performance. Learners may be more receptive to a life lesson (such as how to deal with peer pressure) if they hear it from someone who has experienced it (as suggested by T3). If a teacher shares their success stories of how they overcame peer pressure, it may prove to learners that it is possible to overcome their struggles. The same can be said for teachers who were once perpetrators of peer pressure. They can share their stories in the hope that it discourages learners from wanting to engage in instances of peer pressure. Ruzgar (2021) agrees that learners feel more comfortable and willing to learn from a teacher if the teacher is friendly and relatable. Similarly, it is important that learners know that they can approach any teacher when they are struggling with, for example, peer pressure and academic decline. Teachers who are present for

their learners both inside and outside of the classroom situation can benefit a learner's personal development (Roefs, Leeman, Oosterheert & Meijer, 2021).

Educating learners about peer pressure is both an important and necessary task. It is equally important for teachers and school staff to be educated in this regard. The teachers and principals in this study expressed that the peer pressure they experienced in their younger years is not the same type of peer pressure experienced today. Teachers reported that their experiences of peer pressure were face-to-face. The presence of cell phones, according to P2, is a major contributor to the perpetration of peer pressure for the current generation of learners. Teachers and principals stated that it is already a difficult task trying to determine what does or does not constitute as peer pressure. Adding the technological element further complicates their understanding.

An important strategy suggested by teachers and principals is to teach learners how to be resilient. Learners stated that they are not necessarily receptive to advice from adults, especially regarding peer relationships. By teaching resilience, learners can then readily determine for themselves if they are comfortable in social situations or not. Ostaszewski (2020) advocates for the instilling of resilience in learners, owing to the taxing nature of peer pressure and its negative impact on learners' mental health. In addition to teaching resilience, participants highlighted the importance of uplifting learners' self-acceptance and self-esteem. Learners need to be taught that they are enough, and there is no need to conform to the peer group for the sake of being liked. However, once again, learners are not always receptive to the advice from adults. As T1 mentioned, learners experience their world (for example, romantic relationships) intensely. It is difficult to try and get them to be accepting of themselves if they (or the peer group) perceive themselves as not worthy. Learners can more readily reject negativity and counter-perceptions of themselves from the peer group if teachers have instilled a good sense of self-acceptance and self-esteem in them. A good sense of self-acceptance can also prevent adolescent depression (Kwok, Gu, Synchaisuksawat & Wong, 2020). Therefore, a good sense of self-esteem can lead to learners developing a better sense of life-satisfaction (Szcześniak, Bajkowska, Czaprowska & Sileńska, 2022).

T3 believes that peer relationships can be improved in the classroom by teaching relevant and relatable content in lessons. Topics such as peer pressure can be addressed in Life Orientation or Guidance lessons. However, as brought up by T3, there is not enough time in the timetable to dedicate to these subjects and therefore, to peer pressure. Other topics need to be covered in this short time as well. T3 finds that she has to filter or rush content and cannot fully address the issues of peer pressure in detail. Kumar (2021) underscores the importance of life skills education, especially for adolescents who live in a world of constant modernisation. Life skills, such as the ability to make decisions, the ability to communicate effectively, and the ability to problem solve, are important for the development of learners' interpersonal and social skills (Kumar, 2021). Teaching these skills in the Life Orientation classroom is beneficial for learners as they can be taught how to identify and deal with instances of peer pressure.

Further to T3's suggestion, T4 encourages the use of scenario-based, problem-solving activities in other academic subjects. T4 believes these types of activities will not only encourage learners to work together, but teach them how to work towards a shared goal, together. Learners can bring their strengths to the fore and help each other improve on their weaknesses. Rai, Chhetri and Rigdel's (2023) provide additional benefits, such as improved communication skills, understanding and completing work on time with the help of peers, understanding and appreciating their peers' abilities, improving their self-assurance, and fostering friendships.

5.3.7.2 Strategies for the school to improve academic performance

It is important for schools to identify the learners who are struggling academically. It is equally important for them to identify the causes that are contributing to this academic decline. These factors, according to the participants, may include peer pressure, mental or emotional changes, and familial issues. Strategies to improve academic performance will need to be rehabilitative. The participants identified numerous strategies that they believe will increase a learner's academic performance where an internal/external factor has negatively affected it. Participants suggested that, for teachers and the school to assist a learner with their academics, the teachers and school first need to show the learner that they

care about them – that there is a positive relationship within the mesosystem. As P3 and T1 mentioned, the school has a deep focus on academics and academic success. It is important for teachers and the school to put these aspirations aside and focus on the learners' reasons for academic decline (such as peer pressure) and work towards remedying those issues first. Once the root cause of these issues has been addressed, only then can strategies to improve academic performance be truly effective.

The most common strategy, as suggested by all four learners, is to change current teaching methods to ones that are more suited to the different learning styles of the learners. If the teaching style does not cater to the learners' preferences, then they may be unable to learn effectively. L3 reported that some learners prefer writing notes while listening to the teacher talk, while others prefer comprehensive notes being provided so that they can summarise content into their own words. Contrarily, L4 prefers more interactive teaching through the use of games and informative websites. These two types of learning styles are very different to one another and require the teacher to make use of different teaching styles to cater for these learners. Inayat and Ali (2020) add that teaching styles play a significant role in determining a learners' level of engagement with schoolwork, their academic curiosity, and their academic exploration. If teachers want learners to succeed, they need to be willing to adapt their teaching styles to suit their learners. However, altering a teaching style is not a quick and easy fix. Oftentimes, teachers are resistant to change, as identified by Lomba-Portela, Domínguez & Pino-Juste (2022). The school under investigation has between twenty-six and twenty-nine learners per Grade 8 class. It may not be possible to cater to each and every learner. L3 then suggests that teachers incorporate different teaching styles in each lesson to accommodate the different learning styles of the learners. Exposing learners to numerous different teaching styles could be beneficial as learners may uncover a style that is more suitable to them than they initially thought.

P1 believes that the way current subjects are taught needs to change. P1 states that teachers should incorporate conceptual teaching in subjects that are more abstract and difficult to understand. Tying into the previous paragraph, these

practical subjects and/or conceptual teaching strategies would accommodate learners' different learning styles. Another suggestion made by participants is to introduce new subjects. P2 asserts that Further Studies subjects give learners the upper hand in university. Learners who take, for example, Further Studies Mathematics, are more likely to cope in their first year of university owing to their exposure to the content in their secondary schooling years. P2 adds that the introduction of Further Studies programmes will be of great benefit to learners, especially if they are intent on a particular career path. However, there is not enough time in the existing curriculum or timetable to accommodate these additional subjects as they are taken external to their school-time subjects. Learners would need to forfeit their after-school activities should they wish to pursue these additional subjects. P3's suggestion could be a potential solution to this problem. P3 believes that the range of subjects at the school under investigation needs to expand to include more practical subjects, for example, home economics and woodwork. However, there is a great debate surrounding the perceived benefits and downfalls of practical subjects. Some scholars believe that practical subjects narrow down a learner's options in career paths, while others believe these subjects expand their skillset which can be beneficial in numerous career paths (Winberg & Hollis-Turner, 2021). The benefits and disadvantages of implementing further studies programmes and practical subjects need to be weighed up against the specific needs of current learners.

Uncovering a learner's academic needs and/or learning styles can be a difficult task. A solution to this may be through the use of extra academic lessons and/or academic testing (T3). Extra academic lessons offer learners the opportunity to have one-on-one or small-group interactions with their teachers. In the school under investigation, learners are required to inform their teachers about what section of work they are struggling with. In this way, teachers can more readily prepare activities or strategies for those learners. Extra academic lessons also provide teachers with the opportunity to use different teaching styles to help a learner on an individual basis. Maluleke (2024) highlights the importance of extra academic lessons for not only individual learners, but also for the school. Learners who can improve their own academic performance can ultimately contribute to the overall academic success of the school. While these academic

extra lessons offer numerous benefits, they are not necessarily always successful in uncovering the underlying reasons for a learner's poor academic performance. This is where T3 believes academic testing for accommodations and concessions can be a valuable tool. T3 contends that these tests are not necessarily successful in solving all academic issues for each learner who takes them. However, they are successful in that they can differentiate between learners who have genuine learning issues and those who are simply unwilling to work. Once the root cause of a learner's academic struggle is uncovered, teachers can then develop programmes that will assist learners in their academic endeavours. Wei and Zhang (2024) concur with the provision of academic concessions. Learners who were given and made use of the concession of extra time performed to a much better standard (Wei & Zhang, 2024). This practice is utilised in the school under investigation and has proven successful in numerous instances.

A contentious but valuable strategy to improve academic performance is through the use of technology. Cell phone use in the classroom is a problematic issue in schools across the world (Spiratos & Ratanasiripong, 2023). Learners are using their devices for social purposes and are not focusing on their academics. Despite the perceived negativity around technology, there are many benefits for teaching and learning when it is used effectively. L2 mentioned that she makes use of social media to communicate with classmates about school work. Teachers can also make effective use of social media in the classroom through, for example, creating academic support groups on WhatsApp or sharing links to helpful websites on X (*previously Twitter*). Other potential teaching and learning benefits include the use of games. L4 mentioned that one of her teachers makes use of interactive sites while another develops games based on syllabus content. These sites and games are well received by the learners. Studies have proven that the use of games for teaching and learning can be beneficial in numerous subjects, such as English (Ningsih, 2023), History and Geography (Oceja et al., 2022), and Mathematics (Gargish et al., 2020). Learners find enjoyment in using their devices. If teachers can incorporate it into their everyday lessons, learners may show more interest in their academics and possibly improve their results.

Another more recent technological development enjoyed by learners and teachers alike is artificial intelligence (AI). Learners are using AI to assist with homework, explain difficult concepts and solve mathematical problems. However, owing to its instant accessibility, learners are using AI to complete projects and write essays, which is often work that requires creativity on the part of the learner. Three of the learner participants stated that they have used AI for schoolwork, but acknowledged that its use should be appropriate when used for academic purposes. L2 and L4 also point out that AI is not always accurate and should not always be trusted. L3 asserts that AI should be used to encourage creativity and not to complete tasks for learners. L3 also points out that AI is a good tool for learners, especially when they do not understand the teacher's explanation. Teachers could embrace AI and use it to enhance the teaching and learning experience by, for example, finding websites, creating summaries and designing interactive tasks. Harry (2023) adds that AI can be used to design personalised learning opportunities for learners. Combining technology with the accommodation of different learning styles can greatly benefit a learner's academic experience.

5.3.7.3 Strategies for stakeholders to improve academic performance and peer relationships

There are numerous stakeholders within a learner's microsystem and mesosystem who are involved both inside and outside of the school environment. Some of these stakeholders include the learners, their parents, teachers, school board members and alumni. Each of these stakeholders have a role to play in the school's functioning. Stakeholders can have a monumental impact on the learners' academic performance, as well as on their perception and perpetration of peer pressure.

The most influential stakeholder identified by participants are parents. It is important for the school to have a good relationship with parents, especially where the child is concerned. P1 believes that a strong relationship between the roleplayers in the learner's mesosystem (the school, parents and peers) will ensure a prosperous educational experience for all. An important aspect in this regard is communication. The school relies on parents to communicate issues

about their child, and parents expect this to be reciprocated. However, these expectations are not always met. T2 reports that some parents are overly involved, which could result in tension if they perceive the school's actions to be unsatisfactory. T4 believes that parents are not involved enough, which often results in the school not understanding and/or ineffectively handling the behaviours of a particular child (Zakaria et al., 2022). L1 stated that parents should be more active in monitoring their child's life, especially in the digital sphere. Parents who are aware of what is going on in their child's life can help them, or even send them to professionals who can help them even further. The school can also assist in this regard by offering seminars or talks for parents where issues such as peer pressure and academic performance are discussed. This would keep parents up to date with issues that are prevalent in a modern adolescent's life. Parents are significant role players in their child's ability to socialise (Martinez-Escudero, Villarejo, Garcia & Garcia, 2020), their child's self-confidence (Kurniyawan et al., 2021), intellectual development (Ginsburg, 2022), educational development (Lehrl et al., 2020), and overall well-being (Gromada et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important for the school to maintain constant communication with parents regarding their child.

The school plays an important role in shaping a learners morals (Hafizi & Wiyono, 2023), ethics and values (Nirupama & D'Souza, 2021). While the school under investigation does its best to shape learners in a way that falls in line with their own values and ethos, the influence that parents have in this regard often has a greater sway. Learners enter into the school with a set of values, morals and behaviours that were shaped in the home. In many instances, learners assimilate and conform to the expected behaviours of the school, while still maintaining the traits instilled at home. In other instances, learners may go against the values and ethos of the school, resulting in rebellion and the refusal to conform. P2 believes that this kind of attitude is something that is instilled in the home. If parents, for example, place a high value on material objects, then so will their children. L3 further adds that parents who make use of and do not necessarily discourage the use of substances, such as alcohol, often produce children who see no problem using them as well. These are the learners who adopt these behaviours and subsequently subject other learners to peer pressure because

they see nothing wrong with these behaviours. These differences in opinion on what constitutes as right and wrong can often cause great tension between the school and its learners.

Stakeholders, such as alumni and guest speakers, can also play a role in a learner's understanding of peer pressure and academic performance. L2 and L3 believe that, for alumni and guest speakers to be impactful, they need to be relatable. Adolescents are at an impressionable age where the opinions and views of significant others have a great impact on their own opinions and views (Mayeux & Kleiser, 2020). Alumni and guest speakers who are not well received by the peer group ultimately affects the learners' opinion of them. Relatability would ensure that this issue can be overcome. Learners are more receptive to topics that are applicable or are of interest to them. Alumni and guest speakers who speak about an interesting topic and who can share personal experiences will be more readily received by learners (Casper & Balgopal, 2020). L3 further suggests that school leaders (i.e. prefects) as 'guest speakers' can address learners regarding peer pressure and academic performance, as they may be perceived as more relatable because of their age.

The involvement of stakeholders in instances of academic performance and peer pressure can only be effective if everyone is on the same page. P3, T3, and T4 express the great need to ensure that all roleplayers in a learner's microsystem and mesosystem (such as peers, teachers, parents, the school, alumni and the school board) are aware of current procedures in schools. School policies dictate how specific situations (such as cheating in an exam, or vaping in the bathroom) are dealt with. Tension owing to lack of understanding or support from stakeholders can make these procedures null and void. In line with Layco's (2022) study, not all stakeholders are directly involved with or in the school environment on a daily basis. These are referred to as external stakeholders. If these external stakeholders are not privy to the way in which the school functions, it may be difficult to garner their full support. Effective stakeholder involvement requires that stakeholders be made aware of past and present procedures. It is also important for them to be actively involved in the creation of any future procedures and policies.

5.3.8 Rules, policies and discipline remediate the issues of peer pressure and academic performance

5.3.8.1 Policies pertaining to peer pressure and academic performance

School policies form an integral part of a school. Policies form the basis of a school's functioning and determines the standards, mission statements, and daily activities of the school (Allen et al., 2021). The school under investigation has a code of conduct and numerous policies devoted to different aspects of school life. As identified by Allen et al. (2021), these policies outline the kind of environment the school wishes to foster, as well as the type of learner that the school wishes to produce. These policies also outline the types of behaviours that are acceptable and the types of behaviours that are not. Other school policies related to peer pressure and academic performance include an Anti-Bullying policy, a Social Media policy, an Academic Rewards policy, an Appropriate Use of Computers and Internet policy, and an Extra-Curricular policy. All these policies serve to promote desirable behaviours and discourage undesirable behaviours.

The academic policy of the school under investigation clearly outlines the academic procedures, expectations, punishments and rewards applicable to learners and teachers. The policy focuses on the positive aspects of academic performance, perhaps to ensure that learners view academics in a positive light. The policy outlines the punishments for cheating in the hopes that it will discourage learners from such negative behaviours. The merit and demerit policy also serves to encourage good behaviours and discourage bad behaviours. Learners are aware of the types of rewards and punishments that come with certain types of behaviour. It is up to them to decide if they will conform to the rules of these policies or not. However, as pointed out by T3, some learners have no qualms about following the rules. Both P1 and T3 attribute this carelessness to a sense of entitlement. While it is up to learners to decide how they want to conform, it is always important for learners to remember that the school's rules and policies govern them. P2 stated that learners enjoy breaking the rules but do not appreciate having to deal with the consequences. Having rules and policies in place give the school the power to determine the fate of those who go against the rules. However, as previously discussed by P3, T3 and T4, rules and their

associated policies must be made available and well-known to all stakeholders to ensure their support and understanding where needed.

The purpose of the positivity-oriented policies is to show learners that there is more to life than disregarding and breaking rules. These policies serve as evidence that good behaviour, academic effort, extra-curricular involvement and community engagement are rewarding, both externally and internally. Chung and Khandhadia (2024) advocate for the provision of awards (especially for academic excellence) as it encourages learners to work harder and develop a sense of pride and responsibility for their work. If schools can encourage their learners to be engaged in their school and community lives, it will ensure the development of a holistic learner (as stated by T1). In essence, learners are being prepared for their lives after school. It is, therefore, important that schools mould learners to be the best, most resilient person that they can be (T1).

According to participants, the policies currently in place are serving their purpose well. All four learner participants showed disdain towards bad behaviour associated with peer pressure. They agree that the current school policies, rules and punishments are one of the factors that steer them away from these negative behaviours. L2 stated that the current school policies regarding discipline are functioning well. However, as L4 and T3 point out, the policies do not necessarily outline in detail what constitutes as peer pressure. The Anti-Bullying policy lists the types of bullying as well as their associated consequences, but there are no specific examples of scenarios that would constitute as bullying or peer pressure. However, since the human experience is unique, it is not always possible to list every possible scenario that could be considered an instance of bullying or peer pressure. Fortunately, the policies are worded in such a way that it can cover numerous scenarios.

5.3.8.2 Interview responses regarding current school rules, policies and discipline and the implementation of further policies related to peer pressure and academic performance

Participants were prompted to share their opinion on whether a policy pertaining to peer pressure, academic performance and the impact of peer pressure on academic performance would be beneficial in the school environment.

Participants were receptive to the idea. However, they believed that there are various considerations that need to be made before any kind of policy is implemented. L3 spoke to the importance of providing examples in the policy. In many instances, L3 has found it inappropriate when learners share their poor results in the classroom and are laughed at by their peers. Providing an example such as this within the policy will, firstly, discourage learners from this kind of negative behaviour. Secondly, it could encourage learners to take more pride in their academics and endeavour to work harder (Borja, Fabillar & Paglinawan, 2024). L1, L2, L3, L4, P1, P3, T2, T3 and T4 also support the need for specificity and clarity in policies for them to be effective and receive little to no resistance. Väyrynen et al. (2022) state that ambiguous or unclear policies can result in resistance from learners and stakeholders.

However, as previously mentioned, it may be close to impossible to list all possible examples of peer pressure, as the experience is unique to the individual. Harrison, Fox, and Hulme (2020) suggest that learners be involved in the process of developing the policy. In terms of the school environment, stakeholders should be involved as well. In this way, schools could develop policies that are understood by all learners and stakeholders, owing to their equal input. T3 adds that a focus on peer pressure in an anti-bullying policy is important. This is necessary especially since peer pressure is something that is not necessarily identified or understood by all. Defining the term and providing details on what constitutes as peer pressure could be of great benefit to the school if and when instances of peer pressure arise.

P1's suggestion is to have numerous different policies that relate to peer pressure, such as a social media policy and a drug policy. All of these would have the appropriate disciplinary actions listed in case of infringements related to peer pressure. Should a policy or policies focusing solely on peer pressure and academic performance be developed, it would be necessary to educate learners and stakeholders about it before it can be implemented. Vaill, Campbell and Whiteford (2023) state that if learners, teachers, parents and school stakeholders do not understand the policy or are unsure of how to use or interpret it, then the policy may be perceived as meaningless. Learners and stakeholders would need

to be made aware of what constitutes as peer pressure, how to report instances of peer pressure and/or its impact on academic performance, how investigations will be conducted, how the situation will be monitored, and what the consequences are for those who perpetrate peer pressure (Haugen, Sutter, Jones & Campbell, 2019). Waasdorp, Fu, Perepezko and Bradshaw (2021) further emphasise the importance of training teachers in how to effectively understand and enforce the policy.

In line with the enforcement of policies comes P3's recommendation that all policies be rehabilitative. L2, P3 and T4 buttress that it is important to effectively enforce policies and discipline perpetrators when punishment is due. However, these punishments should not make learners feel as though there is no way forward for them. Waasdorp et al. (2021) add that victims and perpetrators should be referred to counsellors and/or school psychologists who can help them to deal with the emotional and mental stress of a situation of bullying or peer pressure. This is a possibility for the school under investigation, as there is an on-site psychologist. In terms of a policy related to peer pressure, academic performance and the impact of peer pressure on academic performance, rehabilitation is also a possibility. Learners who have been the victim of or who have perpetrated peer pressure could be offered emotional and mental support in the form of a trusted teacher or the school psychologist. Those who have suffered a decrease in academic performance, due to peer pressure or any other factors, can be offered additional academic support from teachers to help them improve their results.

5.4 The use of the Ecological Systems Theory and Social Learning Theory

This study made use of two theories, namely, Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory. Both of these theories assisted the researcher in understanding the various facets of learner behaviour, peer pressure, academic performance, rules, discipline and the various perceptions thereof.

5.4.1 Ecological Systems Theory

According to Bronfenbrenner, a child's development is largely shaped by the social environment (Navarro et al., 2022). A child is exposed to numerous social

situations and environments on a daily basis. For the purpose of this study, the social environments taken into consideration were the school environment and the home environment. These two environments include all of the people that interact with the child within these spaces. These people fall within what Bronfenbrenner (1977) calls the microsystem. Parents, friends, peers, teachers and principals are some of the people within the child's microsystem. The researcher asked broad, open-ended questions regarding peer pressure and academic performance. Participants frequently mentioned the role that these people play in influencing their own perceptions of peer pressure and academic performance. Learner participants mentioned their peers and how those who engage in negative behaviours (vaping) or disregard their teachers, have influenced them to be the opposite. These peers have reinforced the type of person that these learner participants want to be. The learners further acknowledged the role that their teachers, their principals and the school play in their own perceptions of negative behaviour (such as peer pressure) and their academic abilities. The learners further mentioned the role of parents and how they play a significant role in their behaviour, values, peer choice and perception of their own academic performance.

The mesosystem follows thereafter, and examines the relationships that exist between the different people and entities in the learner's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). These relationships exist between the child and their friends, the peer group, their parents, their teachers and their school. The learner participants acknowledged these relationships, while the teachers and principals shared from their external perspectives. A memorable quote from P1 encapsulates the importance of these relationships within the mesosystem: "*the relationship between parents and teachers and learners should be quite strong*". The stronger these relationships are, the better the child can cope in their environment. Parents rely on teachers, principals and the school to keep them updated regarding the progress of their child. The teachers, principals and school rely on parents and learners to keep them updated regarding any personal, emotional or academic issues the learner may be facing. The learners further rely on their parents, their teachers, the principals and the school to acknowledge when they are struggling (or achieving) and take actions to remedy (or reward) these issues (or positive

behaviours). A healthy, functioning relationship between these entities will ensure social, emotional and academic success. Similarly, a poorly functioning relationship between these entities can result in poor social experiences, negative emotional feelings and a decrease in academic performance.

The final system utilised by the researcher in this study was the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The macrosystem includes the laws, customs and values specific to particular cultures that may directly and/or indirectly influence a child's development (Soyer, 2019). Participants acknowledged the role that the family plays in determining a child's values, morals, beliefs, choice in peers, acceptable behaviours, perception of success, academic effort and extra-mural involvement, among others. Learners bring these characteristics into the school environment where it can influence their own (and their friends' and peers') functioning within the school environment. In most instances (such as those applicable to the four learner participants), learners can assimilate or appreciate the set of customs and values of not only their friends and peers, but of the school environment itself. These learners are functioning well in the school environment as they have acknowledged what the school wants them to be, but are also strong in fully knowing who they are and how they came to be. However, as mentioned by some of the teachers and principals, some learners are not ready to accept the customs and values set by the school. This is where tension and conflict arise between learners, their parents and the school, which oftentimes produces negative experiences and outcomes for all.

While the macrosystem incorporates the laws that govern people as a whole, it is important to acknowledge that the laws of the school (in the form of policies, such as the code of conduct) govern the school environment. A memorable quote by T1 summarises this concept: *"When we think about it in a larger societal space, is that why do we have rules in a country? So that people know what the boundaries are."* Schools need to set boundaries in place so that learners, teachers, parents and all other stakeholders know what kind of behaviours are deemed acceptable and unacceptable within the school space. These rules and boundaries also serve to shape the learner into becoming someone who is not

only ready to enter into society, but someone who enters into it and thrives in all aspects.

5.4.2 Social Learning Theory

Bandura's belief is that children develop their social skills by modelling the behaviour of a role model in their life (Bandura, 1969). There are four processes that Bandura believes children go through when observing desirable social behaviours and actions. These are attention, retention, reproduction and motivation (Bandura, 1969). The use of Social Learning Theory in this study proved beneficial in understanding why learner participants in particular elected *not* to model certain behaviours.

Bandura (1969) posits that children pay attention to behaviours that receive positive reactions or rewards from others around them. The same can be said for negative behaviours. If children see that a particular behaviour does not receive positive reactions or rewards, then they are unlikely to model that behaviour. The learner participants mentioned instances of bad behaviour (especially vaping and drinking alcohol). However, these utterances were not made in reference to their own behaviour, but rather that of their friends or peer group. The learner participants showed disdain for these behaviours and favoured good, academic-orientated behaviours.

L1 mentioned seeing older learners with different badges for extra-curricular activities and expressed interest in achieving the same accolades. She has, therefore, paid attention to the behaviour of those older learners as they are receiving positive reactions and rewards. In terms of attention, the principals and teachers noted instances of learners participating in negative activities (such as vaping) because learners have received (perceived) positive reactions from the peer group at large. A quote from P2 summarises this perception: *"When you get away with it, then it's almost like you're better than everybody else and people start looking up to you for guidance and advice. What did you do right? And you actually become a hero in people's eyes."*

Retention is the process that follows attention (Bandura, 1969). Children will observe behaviours for a particular length of time to ensure that they memorise the actions of their model to effectively recreate that behaviour. The teachers and

principals have noticed that learners are less likely to replicate negative behaviours if they are witness to other learners (or models) being punished for their behaviours. Learners who are caught vaping are met with a slew of punishments. All learners are aware of what these punishments are. If their peers are suffering these punishments because of their negative behaviours, then learners are less likely to replicate that behaviour. The knowledge of what these punishments constitute serve as a deterrent. Learners will retain this knowledge, ensuring they do not replicate the behaviour, as they do not want to suffer the consequences.

Following the retention stage is the reproduction stage (Bandura, 1969). Learners begin to behave in the same way as their model to receive the same positive reactions or rewards. L1 paid attention to the number of badges on the older learners' blazers. She took note of the behaviours that allowed those older learners to achieve these accolades. L1 retained that behaviour and is now reproducing it. L1 takes part in numerous extra-curricular activities so that she too can achieve badges and accolades for her participation. The reproduction of this positive behaviour has positive outcomes. However, as mentioned by teachers and principals, learners are also replicating poor behaviour. Despite the punishment given to those who break the rules (for example, vaping in the bathroom), there are learners who are still replicating this behaviour, despite knowing the consequences. As P2 mentioned, when learners are believed to have gotten away with bad behaviour, they are held in high regard by their peers. Despite the risk of punishment, some learners may elect to reproduce poor behaviour to impress and get the approval of their peers.

The final stage is the motivation stage (Bandura, 1969). Children who continually receive praise and rewards for their modelled behaviour are more likely to continue repeating it. L2 mentioned peers who had tried vaping due to pressure from peers. There was regret on their part for numerous reasons. Those peers informed L2 that they will not participate in any vaping activities again because of the negative attention and punishment associated with it. The negatives far outweighed the positives, hence L2's peer's choice not to resume with that behaviour. All four learners exhibited motivation in terms of their want to perform

well academically. These learners know and enjoy the feeling of success, and enjoy receiving praise from others when they achieve academically. Their desire to continue performing well comes from internal and external motivators, and will, therefore, result in continued motivation to perform well academically.

5.5 Study limitations

The limitations of this study include the following:

- This study was conducted in only one secondary school in Linmeyer, Johannesburg South.
- The participants who best met the inclusive criteria were all female. There was no input from any male participants as they did not meet the inclusive criteria to the level that the chosen participants did.
- Only four learners and four teachers were interviewed out of a much larger population of learners and teachers.
- Purposive sampling may have led to the exclusion of data-rich participants who, for example, may have a small decrease in academic performance but significant experience with peer pressure.
- The use of open-ended questions in the semi-structured interview may have led to the over- or under-exaggeration of responses.
- Participants may have held back pertinent information owing to the sensitive nature of the topic.
- The results of this study are based on the experiences and opinions of a small group of people and may not necessarily be representative of the general population.

5.6 Study recommendations

The aim of the study was to investigate the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of secondary school learners in Linmeyer Schools in Johannesburg. The results of the study revealed that participants are aware of and have either personal or third-party experience of the issues surrounding peer pressure and academic performance. Participants acknowledged the existing policies and procedures in place to deal with peer pressure and academic performance. However, the participants offered further suggestions on how to rectify the impact

of peer pressure and improve academic performance. Based on these suggestions, the researcher recommends the following:

- Schools should endeavour to facilitate opportunities for learners to interact outside of the classroom, such as sports days or school socials. These non-academic days allow learners (and teachers) to get to know one another without the pressure of academics. The researcher recommends additional options for non-academic, team-building school days, such as visiting nature reserves, going on group hikes, completing an obstacle or tree-top course, and visiting historical/art/illusion museums.
- Teachers should incorporate different teaching styles into their lessons and make use of interactive teaching materials. Modern-day learners enjoy interpersonal learning experiences as well as lessons that engage with different types of technology. The researcher recommends that schools (where possible) incorporate technology and groupwork into their lessons. For example: learners can use geo-location apps to participate in a scavenger hunt, where learners work in groups to answer lesson-oriented questions at particular locations in order to receive a clue for the next part of the hunt. Another example would be using virtual reality (VR) technology to teach, for example, the Second World War or Natural Disasters, using 360° videos available on the internet.
- Teachers, the school and all other stakeholders should be observant and consistent in dealing with instances of peer pressure, academic performance and the impact of peer pressure on academic performance. Participants identified that learners are not necessarily comfortable in discussing these issues with others, particularly adults. The researcher recommends that schools implement a system of reporting that allows learners to report their concerns anonymously and select their preferred avenue for dealing with it. For example, a Google Form with survey-type questions can be made available to all learners. Options for anonymity, parent involvement, academic or social advice, in-person help from a teacher, peer support groups, and professional help from the school psychologist, among others, would allow learners and school staff to approach the situation how they feel most comfortable doing so.

- Based on the study's findings, it has been identified that a detailed, unambiguous policy framework pertaining to peer pressure is needed. Schools should continuously update policies regarding peer pressure and academic performance to be in line with the continuous social changes in the learners' lives. All stakeholders should be involved in the updating and/or development of new policies. The researcher recommends having monthly or bi-monthly gatherings where representatives from each group of stakeholders meet (for example, representatives from the learner and parent bodies, from the staff (academic and non-academic), the school board and alumni. These meetings can be used to discuss past, current and potential issues regarding peer pressure, academic performance and any other issues within the school environment. These meetings and discussions would allow for collaborative ideas and solutions that would benefit all parties involved.

5.7 Conclusion

The aim of the study was to investigate the impact of peer pressure and academic performance of secondary school learners in Linmeyer schools in Johannesburg. The researcher was able to successfully provide an answer to the main research question. The impacts of peer pressure and academic performance can either be positive or negative. Even though the learner participants' own personal experience of peer pressure was minimal and more positively orientated, they, along with the teachers and principals, acknowledge from a third-party perspective that peer pressure can negatively impact learners, especially regarding academic performance, in the school under investigation. However, peer pressure is not the only cause of poor academic performance. Some of the factors that can cause a decrease in academic performance include the poor quality of teaching, academic competition, increased workload, lack of self-discipline and decreased work ethic, negative attitudes, external pressures from the family and society, a difficult home life and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Peer pressure and the negative behaviours associated with it can create challenges for the school, such as indiscipline, the need to adjust school rules and policies, and being perceived as having a bad reputation. However, these challenges can be prevented or eradicated by improving peer relationships. This

can be achieved by facilitating more non-academic or “fun” school days for learners to bond on a non-academic level, facilitating more group work activities, and providing lessons on peer pressure and its repercussions. Additionally, decreased academic performance of learners (owing to peer pressure or any other factor/s) can be rectified through the changing of teaching styles, using alternative media (such as games and videos) and technology (such as AI), providing academic support and enrichment, and encouraging learners through positive reinforcement. Furthermore, unambiguous, situation-based school policies can be developed by school stakeholders to provide guidance in instances of both peer pressure and decreased academic performance.

The results of this study contribute to the existing body of literature pertaining to peer pressure and academic performance as it focuses on an area (Johannesburg South) not widely explored in the literature. While the results echo those of numerous other studies within the field, it is unique in that it addresses the impact of peer pressure and academic performance for one case study in the area of Linmeyer, Johannesburg South. The study had its limitations, such as its focus on one school, its small sample size and its use of purposive sampling, which may limit its generalisability. However, it is hoped that the results of this study prompt further research into peer pressure and academic performance, whether positive or negative, especially in the Johannesburg South region.

The implications for education practice uncovered in this study identified the need to implement changes in the school environment to improve peer relationships as well as to develop alternative strategies to improve academic performance. Furthermore, the study identified the implications for schools to implement school policies regarding peer pressure and its subsequent impacts, as well as policies pertaining to decreased academic performance. Further research would be encouraged to determine the successes and limitations of implementing such policies, especially in schools where peer pressure and academic performance are impacting a learner’s life.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Interview Questions and Sub-Questions



Main Research Question

How does peer pressure affect the academic performance of learners in Linmeyer Schools in Johannesburg?

Secondary Research Questions

1. How could peer pressure among learners cause a decline in their academic performance?
2. What challenges do schools experience as a result of peer pressure?
3. What motivates peer pressure?
4. How can the challenges of peer pressure be mitigated to improve learners' academic performance?
5. What strategies can be put into place to improve the academic performance of learners?
6. What remedial strategies could be employed by the school and stakeholders to curb the effects of peer pressure on academic performance?

Additional Research Questions

1. What are your experiences with peer pressure?
2. What are the benefits of peer pressure, if any?
3. What are the disadvantages of peer pressure, if any?
4. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the/your academic results in comparison with the/your grade 7 year?
5. Can you pinpoint any reasons for or factors that may have contributed to the decrease in the/your academic performance?
6. Does the/your cultural heritage, religious devotion, spiritual beliefs etcetera play a role in the/your choice of peers?
7. What remedies or 'changes' would you like to see in the school environment to improve peer relationships?
8. What remedies or 'changes' would you like to see in the school environment to improve academic performance?



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Appendix B: Participant Information Letter



Information Letter

6th May 2024

An investigation of peer pressure and academic performance of learners in Linmeyer Schools in Johannesburg

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

My name is Tiana de Oliveira and I am doing research under the supervision of Dr S. M. Danke, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Educational Foundations towards a Master of Education (Socio-Education) degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: An investigation on peer pressure and academic performance of learners in Linmeyer Schools in Johannesburg

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could provide insight into the factors that cause a decrease in academic performance of grade 8 learners upon entry into high school. Based on this knowledge, specialized programs can be developed to assist these individual learners. The hope is that, through the development of these programs, the school will be able to further assist all future learners entering into grade 8.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited because, as a teacher, you are likely to be aware of the decrease in academic performance of High School grade 8 learners, who have come from the Primary School.

I obtained your contact details through the Marist Brothers Linmeyer database, of which I am a staff member too. Six staff members will be asked to participate in this study – the high school Principal, the Deputy Principal and four Class Teachers (grade 8 class teachers).

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves the analysis of documents pertaining to learners and teacher's observations of learners (such as examples of work, reports, comment sheets etcetera). It will also involve individual interviews with each participant. The interviews will be semi-structured, with a set amount of questions requiring responses, however, research participants will also be given the opportunity to share their thoughts and pose questions relevant to the topic. It is estimated that each individual interview will be at least two (2) hours in length.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Anonymity and confidentiality regarding participant identity and data given is guaranteed, however, due to the nature of the study, you can withdraw your data as well.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

Potential risks include the possible discomfort of sharing poor academic results and/or opinions about these results, as well as the potential hesitancy in discussing sensitive topics (friendships, family life etc.) – for learners. Staff members may also experience discomfort when discussing learners and perhaps the personal belief/opinion as to why learners are not performing. As a researcher, I will endeavour to make sure all research participants feel as comfortable as possible. You will in no way be forced to provide information that you do not feel comfortable in sharing. I will encourage all research participants to keep discussions confidential but there is a strong possibility that other staff members will be aware of your participation. Should any staff members feel uncomfortable or are in need of a chat with outside entities, I will be happy to arrange meetings with said entities for them.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

I will request that interviews be recorded. However, you have the right to insist that your name will not be mentioned or recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from myself (the researcher), will know about your involvement in this research. Any reference to you and/or your answers will be given a code number (for example: HS1 or PS2 for High School Staff 1 and Primary School Staff 2) and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

Only I, the researcher, will be able to identify which participant is being referred to. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including my supervisor, Dr S. M. Danke, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. However, you will only be identifiable by your assigned code, unless you give permission for other people to see the records. Should this study be published, your identity and answers will still remain private.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at my home for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Hard copies will be shredded and discarded, and electronic copies will be deleted using appropriate software.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There will not be any payment or incentives for participating in this study. Research participants will not incur any costs when participating in this study.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Education, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from myself, if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Tiana de Oliveira on 082 767 0491 or email 59167025@mylife.ac.za. The findings are accessible for five (5) years.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact myself.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr S. M. Danke at 012 429 8808 or danksm@unisa.ac.za.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.



Tiana de Oliveira



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Appendix C: Consent Return Slip for Participation (Principals and Teachers)



Principal, Deputy and Teachers Consent Reply Slip

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of relevant documents and interview audio recordings and transcriptions.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname (please print) _____

Participant Signature

Date

Researcher's Name & Surname (please print) Tiana de Oliveira

06/05/2024

Researcher's signature

Date



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Appendix D: Letter and Consent Slip for Participation (Parents)



Parental Consent Letter and Reply Slip for Learner Participation

Dear Parent

Your child is invited to participate in a study entitled: An investigation of peer pressure and academic performance of learners in Linmeyer Schools in Johannesburg.

I am undertaking this study as part of my Master's research at the University of South Africa. The purpose and possible benefits of the study is to collect important information that could provide insight into the factors that cause a decrease in academic performance of grade 8 learners upon entry into high school. Based on this knowledge, specialized programs can be developed to assist these individual learners. The hope is that, through the development of these programs, the school will be able to further assist all future learners entering into grade 8. I am asking permission to include your child in this study because they meet various criteria as required for this study. I expect to have three (3) other children participating in the study.

If you allow your child to participate, I shall request him/her to:

- *Take part in an interview* – this will be a one-on-one interview where we will discuss issues pertaining to the topic. It will take place in a comfortable school classroom and should not take more than two (2) hours.
- *Permit the use of academic documents*, such as class work, assessments and school reports. Confidentiality of these results is of utmost importance.
- **Please note:** individual interviews will be audio recorded.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and can be identified with your child will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission. His/her responses will not be linked to his/her name or your name or the school's name in any written or verbal report based on this study. Such a report will be used for research purposes only.

There are no foreseeable risks to your child by participating in the study, however, learners may feel discomfort when sharing poor academic results and/or opinions about these results, as well as the potential hesitancy in discussing sensitive topics (friendships, family life etc.). Your child will receive no direct benefit from participating in the study; however, the possible benefits for their education include the identification of factors resulting in poor academic performance in grade 8 and the development of strategies to combat this phenomenon. Neither your child nor you will receive any type of payment for participating in this study.

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusal to participate will not affect him/her in any way. Similarly, you can agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

The study will take place after school, at a time that suits both your child and myself, with the prior approval of the school and yourself.

In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study and you and your child will also be asked to sign the assent form which accompanies this letter. If your child does not wish to participate in the study, he or she will not be included and there will be no penalty. The information gathered from the study and your child's

participation in the study will be stored securely on a password locked computer in my locked office for five years after the study. Thereafter, records will be erased.

If you have questions about this study, please ask me or my study supervisor, Dr S. M. Danke, Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education, University of South Africa. My contact number is 082 767 0491 and my e-mail is 59167025@mylife.ac.za. The telephone contact of my supervisor is 012 429 8808. Permission for the study has already been given by the Principal of the high school and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA.

✂-----

Reply Slip – to be returned to the staff representative

You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow him or her to participate in the study. You may keep a copy of this letter.

Name of child: _____

Sincerely

Parent/guardian's name (print)

Parent/guardian's signature:

Date:

Tiana de Oliveira



06/05/2024



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Appendix E: Letter and Assent Slip for Participation (Learners)



Learner Assent Letter and Reply Slip

An investigation of peer pressure and academic performance of learners in Linmeyer Schools in Johannesburg

Dear _____

Date _____

I am doing a study on the effect of peer pressure on academic performance as part of my studies at the University of South Africa. Your principal has given me permission to do this study in your school. I would like to invite you to be a very special part of my study. I am doing this study so that I can find methods that your teachers can use to help improve your academic performance. This may help you and many other learners of your age in different schools.

This letter is to explain to you what I would like you to do. There may be some words you do not know in this letter. You may ask me or any other adult to explain any of these words that you do not know or understand. You may take a copy of this letter home to think about my invitation and talk to your parents about this before you decide if you want to be in this study.

I would like you to participate in a one-on-one interview with me to discuss peer pressure and academic performance. I would also like to access important documents, such as your report and examples of your work (your name will never be revealed – the entirety of your participation will be confidential).

I will write a report on the study but I will not use your name in the report or say anything that will let other people know who you are. You will be assigned a 'code' for a name, and this is the only way you will be identified (for example: HS1 for High School Learner 1). Participation is voluntary and you do not have to be part of this study if you do not want to take part. If you choose to be in the study, you may stop taking part at any time without a penalty. You may tell me if you do not wish to answer any of my questions. No one will blame or criticise you. When I am finished with my study, I shall return to your school to give a short talk about some of the helpful and interesting things I found out in my study. I shall invite you to come and listen to my talk.

The benefits of this study include gaining insight into the factors that cause a decrease in academic performance of grade 8 learners upon entry into high school. Based on this knowledge, specialized programs can be developed to assist individual learners. The hope is that, through the development of these programs, the school will be able to further assist all future learners entering into grade 8.

Potential risks are that you may feel discomfort when sharing poor academic results and/or opinions about these results, as well as the potential hesitancy in discussing sensitive topics (friendships, family life etc.).

You will not be reimbursed or receive any incentives for your participation in the research.

If you decide to be part of my study, you will be asked to sign the form on the next page. If you have any other questions about this study, you can talk to me or you can have your parent or another adult call me at 082 767 0491. Do not sign the form until you have all your questions answered and understand what I would like you to do.

Do not sign the written assent form if you have any questions. Ask your questions first and ensure that someone answers those questions.

Researcher: Tiana de Oliveira

Phone number: 082 767 0491

✂-----

Reply Slip – to be returned to the staff representative

WRITTEN ASSENT

I have read this letter which asks me to be part of a study at my school. I have understood the information about my study and I know what I will be asked to do. I am willing to be in the study.

Learner's name (print):

Learner's signature:

Date:

Parent/guardian's name (print)

Parent/guardian's signature:

Date:

Tiana de Oliveira



06/05/2024



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Appendix F: Approval Letter from the Department of Basic Education



8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	20 May 2024
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2024– 30 September 2024 2024/80
Name of Researcher:	De Oliveira T
Address of Researcher:	6 Farmham Drive Mulbarton/ Johannesburg
Telephone Number:	082 767 0491
Email address:	59167025@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Research Topic:	An investigation of peer pressure and academic performance of learners in Linmeyer Schools in Johannesburg
Name of University:	UNISA
Type of qualification	Masters
Number and type of schools:	1 Secondary schools
District/s/HO	Johannesburg South

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

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

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Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

1. Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
2. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.
3. **Because of the relaxation of COVID 19 regulations researchers can collect data online, telephonically, physically access schools or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate.**
4. **The Researchers are advised to wear a mask at all times, Social distance at all times, Provide a vaccination certificate or negative COVID-19 test, not older than 72 hours, and Sanitise frequently.**
5. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
6. A letter / document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.
7. The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.
8. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.
9. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.
10. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.
11. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.
12. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
13. The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.
14. On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.
15. The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.
16. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.

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

Kind regards



Dr. Gumnani Mukatuni

DCES, Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 20/05/2024

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Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

Appendix G: Ethical Clearance Certificate

 UNISA university of south africa	
UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE	
Date: 12 June 2024	Ref: 2024/06/12/00000012/01/RB Name: Ms Tiana de Oliveira Student No.: 59167025
Decision: Ethics Approval form	
Dear Ms Tiana de Oliveira	
Researcher(s): Name: Tiana de Oliveira E-mail address: 59167025@mylife.ac.za Telephone: 0823503540	
Supervisor(s): Name: Dr S. Danke and Dr R. Shoko E-mail address: danksm@unisa.ac.za Telephone: 012 429 8808	
Title of research: An investigation of peer pressure and academic performance of learners in Linmeyer Schools in Johannesburg	
Qualification: MEd	
Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above-mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2024/06/12 to 2029/06/12.	
<i>The write risk level application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 12 June 2024 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.</i> The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that: 1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached. 2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.	
 University of South Africa Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150 www.unisa.ac.za	

3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2012; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2029/06/12**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2024/06/12/00000012/01/RB** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Kind regards,



Prof RB Monyai
Acting Head: CEDU Research
monyarb@unisa.ac.za



Prof Mpine Makoe
Executive Dean: CEDU
gakisme@unisa.ac.za



Approved - decision template – updated 16 Feb 2017

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Appendix H: Editor's Certificate

EDITING AND PROOFREADING CERTIFICATE

22 Osche Street

The Reeds

Centurion

0157

02 February 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This certificate serves to confirm that I have edited Tiana De Oliveira's dissertation titled, **"AN INVESTIGATION OF PEER PRESSURE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN A LINMEYER SCHOOL IN JOHANNESBURG."**

I found the work easy and intriguing to read. Much of my editing basically dealt with obstructionist technical aspects of language, grammar and syntax, which could have otherwise compromised smooth reading as well as the sense of the information being conveyed. I hope that the work will be found to be of an acceptable standard. I am a member of Professional Editors' Guild.

Hereunder are my contact details:



Jack Chokwe (PhD – University of Leicester (United Kingdom)

Contact numbers: 072 214 5489

jackchokwe@gmail.com

Professional
EDITORS
Guild



Appendix I: Turnitin Report

Similarity Report

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