

# Review of: "School instability in South Africa: a Systematic Review of Reflections and Experiences for a way forward"

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**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

While dealing with a very interesting and relevant topic, the article disappoints in several regards:

1. Despite claiming to be it is not a study, but rather a loose reflection on the issue. No original new data or empirical evidence is presented; it is not clear whether and in which way the authors have done research themselves.
2. Much of the data presented is too old to be relevant for a paper on education - unless it is made convincingly clear that evidence from ten years ago would still be valid and no newer data available. The ecological model of Bronfenbrenner could be an interesting starting point, but since the influence of the different environments on the occurrence and prevalence of violence is not discussed, it has no further relevance for the argument.
3. The article does not discuss the role and relevance of forms of structural violence, as represented by poverty and unequal schooling, the availability of weapons, the omnipresence of criminality, the corruptness of politics, the lack of resources (only the low salaries of teachers are mentioned, but not incorporated in the analysis of factors), violence in the families and the communities etc. pp.
4. It talks about violence in schools, but only gives anecdotal evidence as regards patterns and forms of violence. Also addressing violence of students against teachers and teachers against students (and students among each other) as being somewhat at the same levels neglects the fundamental difference in power between students and teachers and fails to recognise violence practices by teachers as a fundamental violation of professional principles and doing the job they are paid for, while students generally do not have much choice: they are at school, because it is compulsory to be there. This is by no means a justification of violence against teachers or among each other, but a plea to deal with these different forms of violence at different levels.
5. Similarly, naming alcohol and "drugs" at the same level as guns and knives shows a clear lack of differentiation. The only thing they all have in common is that they are not allowed in schools for good reasons, but as regards their level of dangerousness and being part of/inserted in the daily lives of communities differs fundamentally (which also applies for different kinds of "drugs" - to put them all in the same bag is not inductive to any kind of deeper insights).
6. One could attribute this conflation to a specific kind of conservative ideology - typical especially for the US- and other Western (often evangelical) contexts, which the authors did most probably not intend. However, the article is tainted throughout with different kinds of ideological statements - from religious to nationalist to communitarian to socialist, again presented in rather anecdotal and unconnected, i.e. unreflected ways.

This is actually quite a pity, because especially the reference to Ubuntu as a principle that would allow for

comprehensively tackle the major issues of violence and respect in schools, even when the general circumstances and conditions in a respective community/neighbourhood/area/village are not favourable, is very relevant. It would have made up a highly interesting study to compare schools with Ubuntu-principles (and the quality at which they are implemented) to schools without such a framework and look for evidence for differences in dysfunctional behaviours, violence vs. productive happiness and content among the different groups at school. But, obviously, this would require data collection efforts, a suitable methodology and the thorough analysis of whatever kind of data has been made available.