

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

Myra Taylor

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

It is 10 years since Burton & Leoschut published their study on school violence based on their research in 2012. The problem is not new since Leoschut had raised it in 2008 saying 'Violence within schools is not a new social problem but is emerging as a cause for serious concern given the recent spate of attacks'. That was written 15 years ago.

Thus, this paper by raises pertinent issues but fails to track the lack of progress in addressing these problems, which have continued to escalate.

The question that needs to be asked is what has been done /is being done regarding the recommendations suggested by Burton and Leoschut? Further work by Makota and Leoschut(2016) resulted in their suggesting a 'National School Safety Framework', but there has been little response from the authorities. Khani (2016) in her Master's thesis investigated "Schoolbased violence: Are Strategies of Preventing School-Based Violence Effective in Umlazi High Schools".

Khani reported that "The most prevalent form of learner-on-learner victimisation was bullying. The study found that the most reported causes to the prevalence of learner-on-learner violence in this study were the banning of corporal punishment, the overcrowding in classes, the high levels of unemployment in the community, and the lack of sufficient recreational activities".

The study also provides a qualitative account of teachers' perceptions towards ways to manage learner-on-learner physical violence in Umlazi high schools. By making use of thematic analysis, respondents indicated a multi-factorial approach to deal with violence at schools. The need for capacity and developmental programmes for learners and the importance of enforcing the school code of conduct with consistent disciplinary measures were indicated as the most salient themes to manage violence between learners".

There is thus much that can be done but the Department of Basic Education appears to lack the vision to implement what is necessary. South Africa has many wonderful policies but the failure to implement what needs to be done over the past 30 years is truly an indictment on everyone. The amount spent per capita on education should have improved the situation but the money squandered eg, spent on many 'ghost teachers' is an example of the problem.

The fact that despite court rulings there are still schools without adequate sanitation facilities is another example of the neglect experienced by learners.

A further problem is the change in the educational methods and expecting teachers to cope with minimal training. The lack of success of Curriculum 2005 was an example of this choice. Teachers with inadequate training and no access to resources were expected to implement a sophisticated curriculum. In 2015 there were 2875 unqualified or underqualified mathematics, science teachers and those teaching technical subjects. These subjects are not Eurocentric – they are essential requirements for our modern economy. After a minimum of 12 years schooling, learners in order to pass Matric, are allowed to fail one subject provided that they achieve a minimum of 30% for three (3) other subjects, a minimum of 40% for your Home Language, and a minimum of 40% for two (2) other subjects. Despite the low standards there is controversy as to what percentage of learners in 2022 achieved even this. The system also fails the teachers by not providing adequate training and upgrading, and it is not necessarily due to lack of budget because in 2016/7 it was reported that R5645 million was underspent. Teachers are not allowed by law to use corporal punishment, but they have received only limited training in the use of other methods to ensure discipline. The authors state 'However, to create an optimal environment for effective teaching and learning, it is imperative to completely eradicate the use of such disciplinary measures in schools'. The obvious question is 'how'? ... with which the authors do not engage? Many learners come to school using public transport, which operates only at particular times. Thus, disciplinary options such as keeping learners at school for longer hours as a punishment, are not viable options under the circumstances.

I agree with the authors that 'education should foster awareness among individuals of all ages, promoting a positive mindset toward the recovery and reconstruction of their historical, cultural, and personal identity', but education should not limit one to only one's own culture. In this world, there is much we can learn from one another and a narrow world view in an era that links us ever more closely with people throughout the world, is unnecessarily limiting.

The high level of crime prevalent in South Africa emphasizes the importance of a joint approach in making schools safe places. The authors suggest 'Collaboration among the government, teachers, school administrators, and learners is imperative in addressing the underlying factors contributing to this issue in our educational institutions'. By joint approach, I would suggest that a more wide-ranging solution could include social workers and nurses running programmes such as Health Promoting Schools with teachers, parents and learners, and involving parents in various school activities, as well as working with the local police to improve the safety of the school environment, and the local leaders including the traditional and political leaders in the area.

The authors have provided a useful overview of the problems but I think the paper would have benefitted from a more detailed exploration of possible solutions.