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

Ngogi Emmanuel Mahaye[1], Oluwatoyin Ajani[1]

1 University of Zululand

Abstract

The attainment of objectives within the school system is contingent upon the presence of a favourable environment (Ajani, 2022). The escalation of school violence in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province, which has resulted in the disruption of academic activities, has raised concerns among education stakeholders regarding the crises in schools. Numerous instances of violent incidents resulting in fatalities and damage to both human life and property have been documented (Mahaye, Dlomo & Ajani, 2022). The occurrence of multiple established incidents has resulted in a lack of stability within schools, thereby creating an environment that is not conducive to effective teaching and learning. The present study investigates diverse factors contributing to educational instability in KwaZulu-Natal, drawing upon data derived from published literature and the authors' firsthand involvement as education administrators. The study's findings show that crime and violence are primarily responsible for school instability. Typically, incidents of violence and criminality in educational settings are the result of internal factors involving both learners and school staff members or maybe the result of external forces coming from members of the local community. Multiple strategies have been identified to mitigate instances of violence in the school setting, to foster a secure and favourable atmosphere for educational activities. In addition, several proposed measures have been put forward to ensure the stability of schools in the KwaZulu-Natal province. These include moral guidance, heightened security measures, the cultivation of emotional intelligence, instruction in philosophy, specifically African philosophy (Ubuntu), and the enhancement of teacher welfare packages.

Ngogi Emmanuel Mahaye & **Oluwatoyin Ayodele Ajani**[*]

Languages and Social Sciences Education

University of Zululand

KwaDlangezwa, South Africa

[*]oaajani@gmail.com

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Introduction

The acquisition of knowledge and skills through education is of utmost importance in the cultivation of human values and the advancement of humanity (Ajani, 2022). The prioritisation of development and progress in civilization and humanity is of utmost importance. Education is a means through which individuals are equipped to establish their own unique civilization and achieve success. Ajani (2018) argues 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. The current Eurocentric educational system has resulted in the mental deformation of African individuals, thereby influencing their perception of themselves, others, and the global community (Ajani, 2022). The educational system in question had a detrimental impact on the African psyche, leading to a state of bewilderment, exasperation, and powerlessness. Additionally, it occasionally resulted in the unwitting participation of Africans in initiatives that ultimately aimed to undermine their own interests. The individual experienced a sense of uncertainty and insecurity, particularly in circumstances that necessitated autonomous and immediate decision-making.

Education plays a crucial role in driving economic development and is therefore considered a fundamental pillar of a nation's economy (Ansong et al. (2016). The presence of socio-economic issues within a nation, such as unemployment, poverty, drug abuse, child labour, and violence, can be attributed to a malfunctioning education system. Dysfunctional schools, instead of serving as bastions of education and character development, devolve into environments characterised by persistent violent incidents and the spread of other societal ills that undermine academic pursuits. Various factors have an impact on the process of teaching and learning, which can lead to instability within educational institutions (Charak et al., 2016).

According to Dr. Nelson Mandela, education can serve as a powerful tool for effecting change on a global scale. The prevalence of discrimination and prejudice in our society underscores the critical role of education as a powerful tool for rectifying past injustices and safeguarding the well-being of both current and future generations. The escalating frequency of crises in schools located in KwaZulu-Natal poses a significant hazard to the welfare of the forthcoming generation within the province and the nation. The topic of "Reflections and Experiences on School Instability: Forging a way forward," as presented by the South Africa Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU, 2019) KZN annual principal's seminar for 2019, necessitates a rigorous examination and thoughtful contemplation. There may not be a more important topic to discuss right now given the recent events that have occurred in some of our schools, according to the Mail and Guardian in 2019. This study elucidates the primary factors contributing to school instability in KwaZulu-Natal, as derived from current academic literature. The text culminates by emphasising efficacious models for addressing such incidents within educational institutions.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory elucidates the diverse interactive environmental levels that exert an impact on human development (refer to Appendix 1). This theoretical framework posits that individuals are engaged in ongoing interactions both within and across these various levels. The microsystem is the primary system that encompasses proximal relationships and environments where children and young people (CYP) predominantly engage, such as their household and educational institution. The mesosystem pertains to the interrelationships among microsystems. The term 'exosystem' pertains to the contextual factors that exert an indirect influence on an individual's development, including but not limited to the workplace of their parents or carers, mass media, national services such as the National Health Service, and local authorities (Ajani & Dosunmu, 2018). The term 'macrosystem' pertains to societal elements such as cultural aspects, prevailing norms, values and ideologies, economic and governmental structures, and legal frameworks. Bronfenbrenner (1989) introduced the notion of the 'chronosystem' to his theory, which incorporates the element of time. The ecological systems theory posits that the various levels of influence can interrelate and exert direct and indirect effects on individuals. The utilisation of this theory proved to be advantageous in contextualising the present study within the microsystem of young people, and in the categorization and examination of comprehensive interviews while taking into consideration the diverse systems to which interview data pertained.
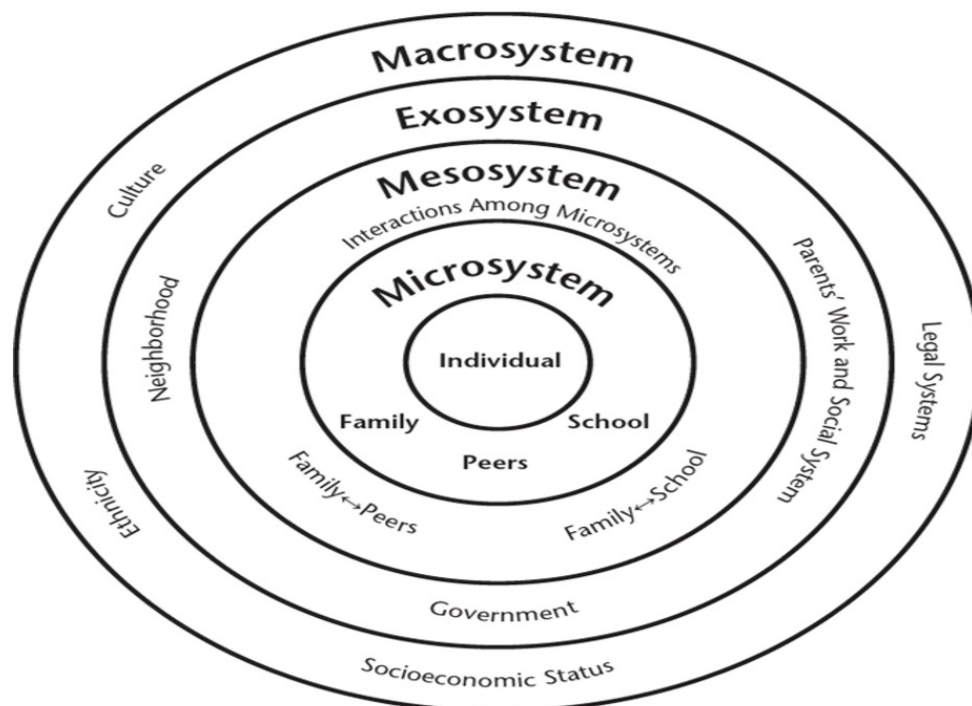

Fig. 1. Ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner (1989).

The Ecological Systems Theory pertains to the interplay and mutual reliance of individuals on their surrounding systems. It advocates for social workers to adopt a comprehensive perspective by evaluating the reciprocal influence between individuals and various physical, social, political, and cultural systems. Ecological systems theory has its roots in the distinct frameworks of ecological theory, systems theory, and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory. The

contemporary application of ecological systems theory is grounded on five postulations that scrutinise the interplay and mutual reliance of systems and the inadequacy of evaluating a single system in isolation, necessitating the consideration of the reciprocal influence of systems on one another. The application of ecological systems theory can prove to be advantageous during the evaluation phase of social work practice, as it provides a comprehensive framework for the assessment of clients, particularly through the utilisation of ecomaps. The utilisation of ecological systems theory can be advantageous for social workers in identifying the most suitable system for intervention, as per the evaluation conducted by the social worker.

According to Addison (1992), Bronfenbrenner posits that the adverse impact of a child's development is primarily attributable to the instability and unpredictability of family life that has been engendered by our economy. The insufficiency of consistent and meaningful engagement with significant adults is a hindrance to the developmental progress of children. As per the ecological theory, in the event of a breakdown in relationships within the immediate microsystem, the child's ability to explore other aspects of their environment may be compromised. Children who seek affirmations that are expected in the child/parent or child/other significant adult relationship may resort to seeking attention in unsuitable ways. The aforementioned inadequacies manifest particularly during the adolescent stage in the form of non-conformist conduct, dearth of self-restraint, and incapacity to furnish self-guidance (Addison, 1992). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is widely recognised as a prominent framework for elucidating the impact of social contexts on the process of human development. The present theory posits that an individual's upbringing environment exerts a significant influence on all aspects of their existence. Social factors have an impact on a person's cognitive processes, affective experiences, and preferences.

School Instability

School instability can be described as anything capable of disrupting academic activities in school and consequently denying a child the right to access education (Bowman and Barksdale, 2004). The undeniable right of every child to quality education was first acknowledged in 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that: everyone has the right to education and that it should be free at least at the primary level. Not only does everyone have the right to a free and compulsory primary education, but education should focus on full human development, strengthen respect for human rights, and promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship (UDHR Article 26).

The Republic of South Africa was a signatory to the convention of the declaration of the fundamental rights of a child; therefore, the country needed to make necessary laws and measures to ensure that every child in the country has access to basic education. Consequently, the constitution of the Republic of South Africa provides in section 29(1) that "everyone has access to basic education" (the Republic of South Africa, [RSA], 1996a). The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 also states that stakeholders should ensure that discipline is maintained in schools and classrooms so that teaching and learning will be conducted without disruptions (RSA, 1996b).

Anything that disrupts teaching and learning in schools results in instability and violates the constitution of South Africa (Ajani et al., 2020). Various studies conducted by scholars and stakeholders in education report that several factors disrupt academic activities in schools all over the country (Nzama & Ajani, 2021; Mahaye et al., 2022). It has been revealed that parents, teachers, as well as learners contribute in various ways to the disruption of academic activities in schools (Ajani & Gamede, 2021). Teachers are expected to act *in loco parentis* in schools and therefore take the highest responsibility of ensuring that classrooms and schools are conducive to learning (Theron & Theron, 2014; Khathi et al., 2021).

Causes of School Instability

Violence and Crime in Schools

SADTU KZN in its statement on issues affecting education and workers in 2019 stated that "A growing but troubling trend is that of violence and crime in our schools. Our schools have turned out to be like war zones. Both teachers, other workers, and learners are subjected to traumatizing situations where they have to witness these attacks" (SADTU, 2019). This statement indicates how alarming the rate of violence has increased in our schools. "It was like a war movie" was an eyewitness account of brutal fights between learners in a high school in KZN (Mail & Guardian, 2019). It is highly disturbing that incidents happening in our school can be described as a "war movie". Teachers and other learners in such schools where this kind of incident happens would certainly be traumatized.

Violence in schools is a major issue disrupting academic activities in schools in KZN in recent times. Frequently occurring fights in a high school in KZN have drastically reduced the matric pass rate of that school from above 90% to below 40% in less than 15 years. Research shows that a lot of learners miss school because of fear of safety in school. A lot more also do not feel safe in school because they have been bullied before (Figure 1). Besides destroying our educational system, violence in schools results in psychosocial stress for learners and teachers. Violence in schools can be perpetrated in diverse ways, which *in*clude theft, bullying, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, and physical abuse (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Khuzwayo et al., 2016; Nzama & Ajani, 2021). Violence in schools can be perpetrated by the learner on the learner, the learner on the teacher, or the teacher on the learner. The unpredictability of who the next perpetrator will be or whom the next victim will has made violence in school a hydra-headed problem for teachers, the government, other stakeholders, and society at large.

Research shows that when it comes to verbal abuse, learners verbally abuse teachers more than teachers verbally abuse learners (Refer to Figure 2). However, the same research shows that teachers abuse learners physically more than learners due to teachers (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). The high rate of physical abuse of learners by teachers is a consequence of the fact that teachers continue to use proscribed corporal punishment in schools. Figure 3 shows that the use of corporal punishment has increased in KZN from 48.7% in 2008 to 73.7% in 2012. It also shows that KZN has the highest number of reported cases of the use of corporal punishment in the country in 2012.
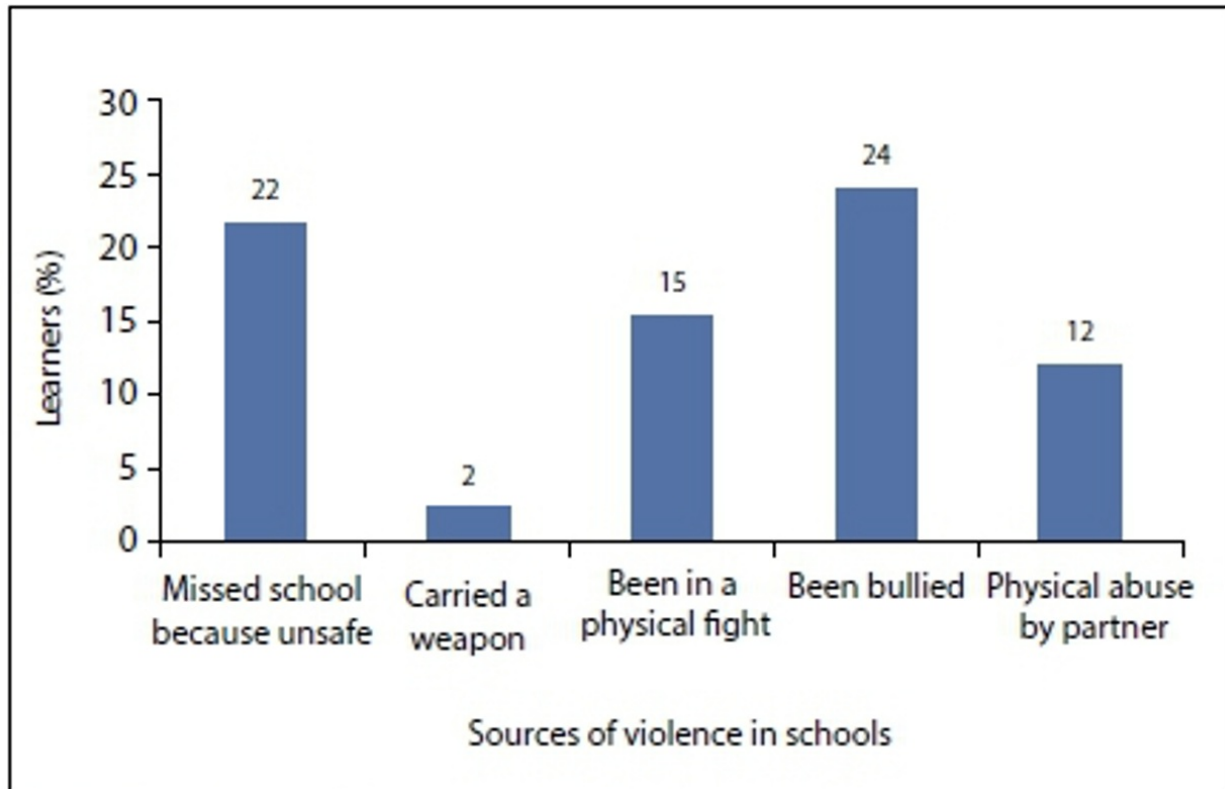
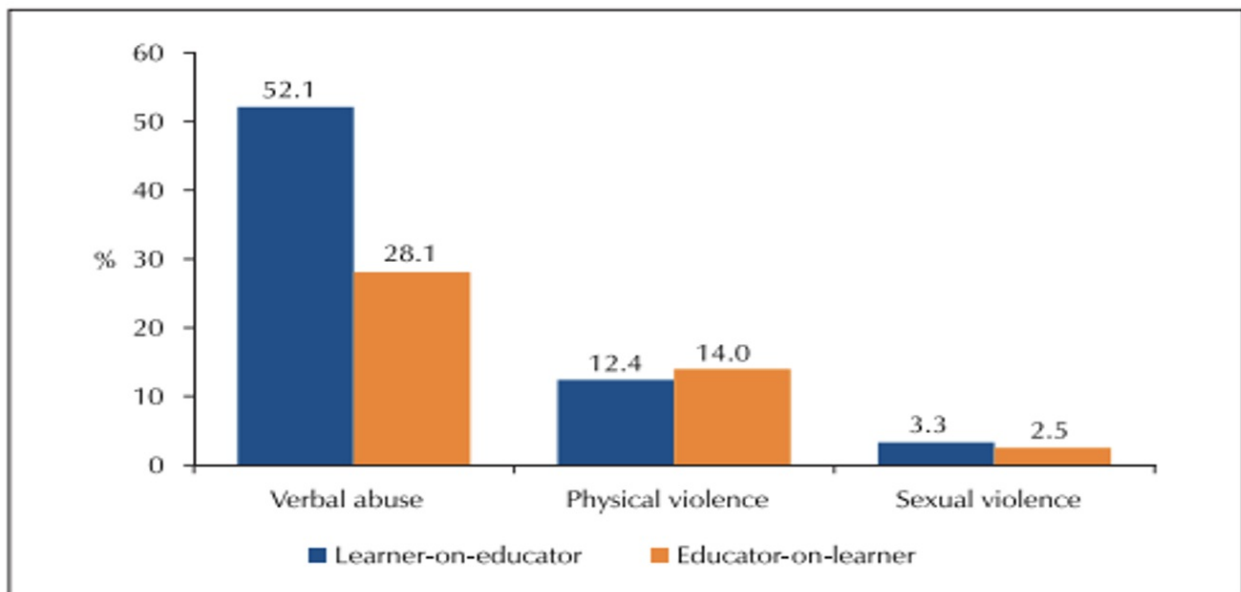**Figure 1.** Violence in a school in KZN (Khuzwayo et al., 2016)

Figure 2. Rate of person-to-person violence in South Africa (Burton & Leoschut, 2013)

The prevalence of corporal punishment in South Africa was found to be highest in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in 2012. However, recent research indicates that KwaZulu-Natal has fallen behind the provinces of Free State and Eastern Cape in terms of the frequency of corporal punishment usage. According to South Africa's Education Statistics (2018), Table 1 indicates that KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) has reported a prevalence rate of 10.1% for the use of corporal punishment. In

contrast, Free State and Eastern Cape have recorded higher rates of 12.6% and 12.7%, respectively. The decrease in the implementation of corporal punishment in KwaZulu-Natal is a positive development. 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.
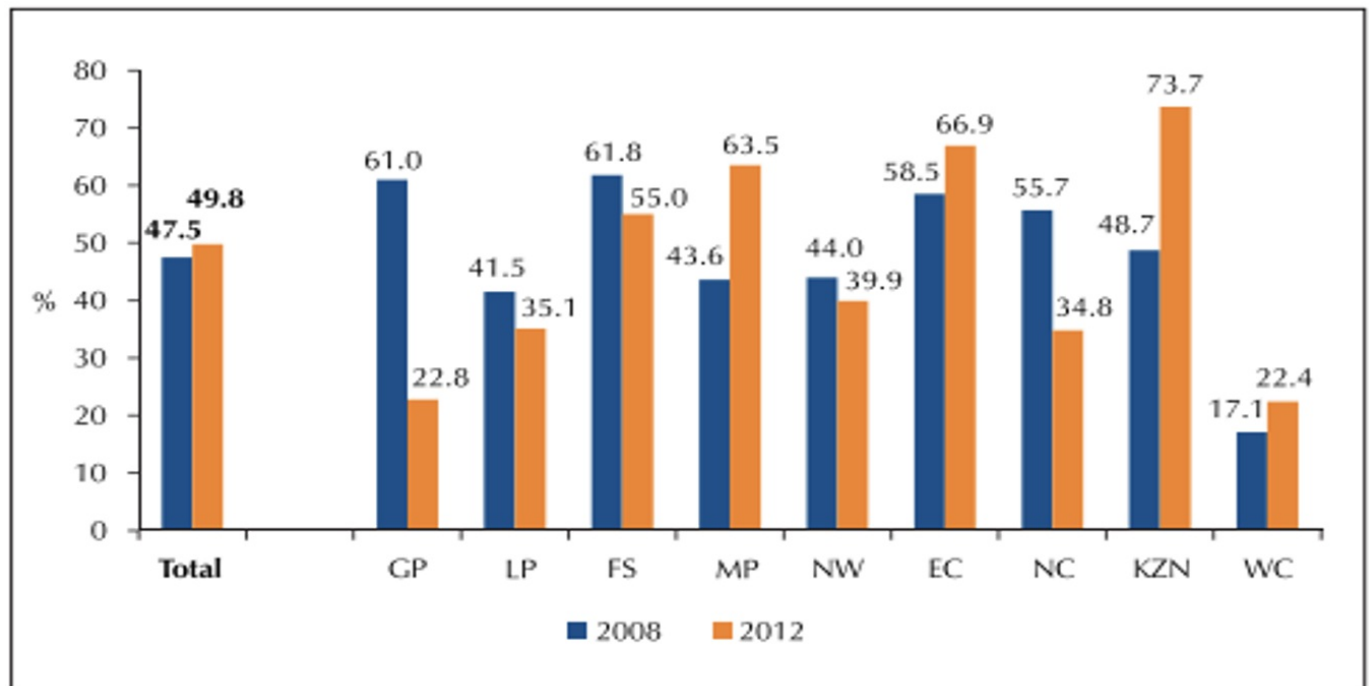

Figure 3. Use of corporal punishment in the provinces (Burton and Leoschut, 2013)

Indicators	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	RSA
% of learners in schools who walk for more than 30 minutes to the nearest school of its kind	1,2	12,2	5,5	6,3	22,2	10,4	4,1	10,4	9,7	11,4
% of learners in public schools benefiting from free scholar transport	5,2	4,5	4,4	1,3	1,3	1,8	3,0	3,8	1,6	2,8
% of learners in public schools benefiting from the nutrition programme	55,9	90,2	86,0	80,3	80,5	80,5	54,8	87,7	92,2	77,3
% of learners attending school who reported incidents of corporal punishment	1,1	12,7	8,6	12,6	10,1	7,4	1,3	6,7	4,5	6,8
Adult literacy rates (persons 20 years and older with less than Grade 7 as highest level of education)	8,4	20,5	19,1	15,3	16,4	17,5	7,4	17,2	19,7	13,8

Table 1. Education Indicators (South Africa's Education Statistics, May 2019)

Violence and crimes from outside the school

The Role of learners leadership

The paramount obligation of all parties involved in education is to guarantee the efficient operation of schools. The involvement of learners leadership is crucial as a central and integral stakeholder. Their full participation in the decision-making process for the development and implementation of policies that directly affect them is vital. Active involvement in policy development is imperative, encompassing areas such as the formulation of a code of conduct, extracurricular activities, subject selection, social responsibility, and the disbursement of grants for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), among others. According to the South African Schools Act (SASA) 76 of 1996, the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) is the authorised entity responsible for carrying out its designated functions. The primary purpose of the education system is to cater to the academic requirements of the learners in the nation, and the participation of the adult members in the School Governing Body (SGB) is not discretionary. Certain individuals undermine this goal to advance their own self-serving agendas, whether they be financial or otherwise.

The prevailing belief that learners are inherently minor and immature, which has played a significant role in shaping the current education system, as evidenced by the Soweto 1976 uprising, warrants critical examination. The populace engages in the exercise of democratic principles through various means such as conducting elections and convening parliamentary sessions to deliberate on pertinent issues such as substance abuse, and adolescent pregnancy, among others.

Reported instances of community protests and robberies

In instances where communities express dissatisfaction with the government's delivery of services, it is common for them to engage in the destruction of government property. These communities engage in the destruction of public property, including educational institutions, that they perceive to be under government ownership. A primary school located in the KwaZulu-Natal province was recently set ablaze by members of the local community. Recently, Ukusa High School in Hammersdale witnessed a violent attack on three security officials. The process of overcoming the trauma of the incident may be prolonged for both teachers and learners, resulting in a delay in the resumption of regular academic activities. During a Saturday session of extra tuition, a teacher at Laduma High School was tragically killed, purportedly as an act of patriotism.

Inter-factional conflicts

Inter-factional conflicts among community leaders occasionally extend to educational institutions. In educational settings, it is common for children belonging to conflicting factions to persist in engaging in hostilities. The involvement of other peers can lead to a disruption of academic activities, resulting in an unfavourable learning environment within the school (Charak et al., 2016). A recent incident occurred at Sahlambe High School. The restoration of academic normalcy in Sahlambe High School incurred significant expenses for the Department of Education. Funds earmarked for educational development in the province were diverted towards addressing issues arising from the community and learners themselves, thereby impeding progress in the intended area of focus.

The availability of substances and instruments

The ready availability of substances such as drugs and alcohol to learners has also been a contributing factor to the elevated incidence of violence within educational institutions. On numerous occasions, it has been observed that learners have said substances within the confines of the educational institution (Nzama & Ajani, 2021). Learners have been found in possession of hazardous weapons, including firearms and blades, within the school premises. Figure 4 depicts the accessibility of said substances and weapons to learners. According to the findings of the study, a significant proportion of the sampled learners, specifically 23.1%, expressed their agreement with the notion that obtaining knives was a relatively effortless task for them. According to the survey results, 15.5% of respondents reported that obtaining alcohol was a facile task, whereas 11.9% claimed that they could easily acquire drugs. Additionally, 9.0% of participants stated that they had easy access to firearms.
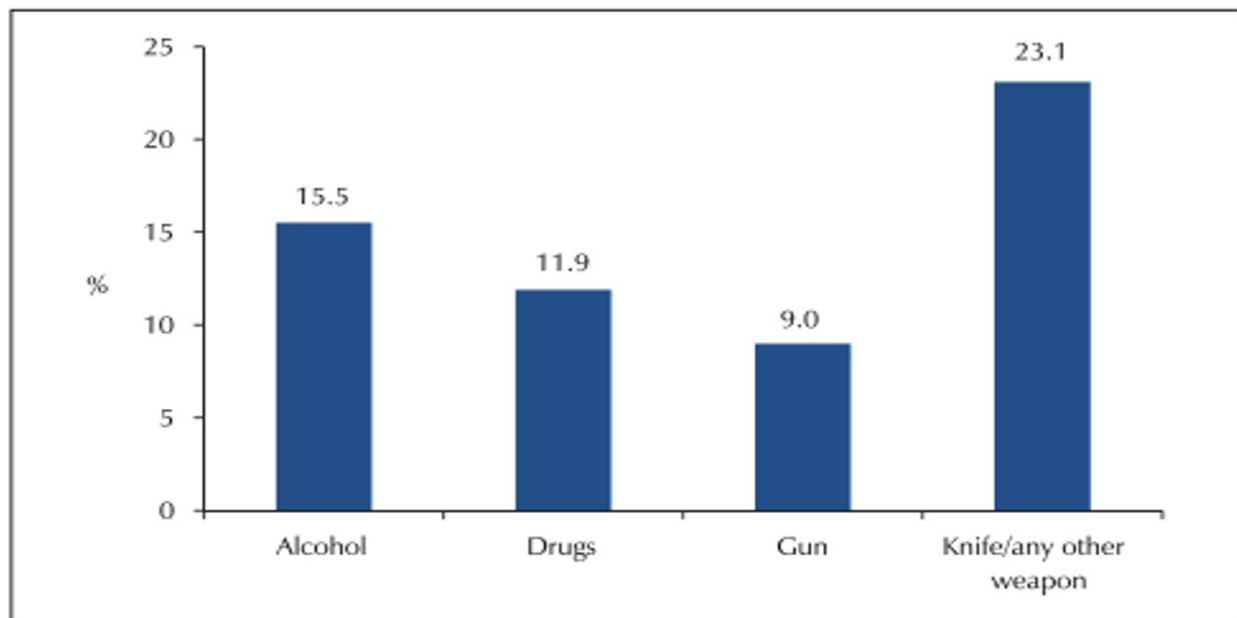

Figure 4. Easy access to substances and weapons (Burton and Leoschut, 2013)

Impact of Socio-economic Disadvantage on Learners' Exposure to Violence in school instability in South Africa

According to The World Bank (2017), South Africa exhibits a significant degree of inequality. According to The South African Child Gauge (2016), the poverty line is exceeded by only 40% of South African children in general. Consequently, a significant number of children and adolescents who experience poverty are often subjected to educational deprivation and delayed schooling. The incidence of learning deprivation is notably elevated in numerous provinces. The present study examines the relationship between teacher support and school delay in the context of South Africa. 3 According to Statistics South Africa (2013), a significant proportion of adolescents in the intermediate phase (29.3%) and senior phase (35.8%) in the Eastern Cape are classified as "deprived learners" based on the Learning Environment Deprivation Index.

The index presented in this study comprises school measures that were found to be correlated with the educational outcomes of adolescents. These measures include access to basic amenities such as water and electricity, as reported by Statistics South Africa in 2013. The phenomenon of a school delay, which refers to the enrollment of learners in a grade level that is lower than what is deemed appropriate for their age, is prevalent among adolescents in South Africa, particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged communities (Spaull, 2015).

According to Statistics South Africa's report in 2013, a significant proportion of learners in the Eastern Cape Province were above the anticipated age for their respective grades, with 69% falling into this category. Additionally, only 77.3% of 15-year-old adolescents had completed primary education in the same province. The phenomenon of school delay in South Africa has been linked to a range of negative outcomes, including school dropout, limited social mobility, unemployment, and poverty (Mahaye, Dlomo & Ajani, 2022). This association is thought to be driven by factors such as low-quality education, cumulative learning deficits, and grade repetition, as highlighted by Spaull (2015). In South Africa, there exists a correlation between socio-economic disadvantage and educational exclusion with elevated levels of violence against children and adolescents in various settings such as their homes, schools, and communities. This has been documented in studies conducted by Burton and Leoschut (2013) as well as Ward, Artz, Burton, and Leoschut (2015). According to Leoschut and Kafaar's (2017) research, a significant proportion of adolescents aged 15 to 18 in South Africa encounter multiple forms of violence during their lifetime. Specifically, 64% of this population experience two or more forms of violence, while 35.4% experience five or more forms of violence.

The risk of impeding educational progress is posed by socio-economic disadvantage, educational exclusion, and exposure to violence, as supported by Herrero Romero, Hall, Cluver, Meinck, and Hinde's unpublished data, Pieterse's 2015 study, and Sherr et al.'s (2016) research. Pieterse (2015) conducted a cross-sectional analysis of 4,747 individuals between the ages of 14 and 22, which revealed that repeated exposure to physical abuse in the home was linked to lower academic achievement in mathematics and an increased likelihood of dropping out of school. Thus far, only a solitary investigation has explored the correlation between exposure to various forms of violence and academic achievements (Ajani, 2018). The study conducted in the Eastern Cape analysed an at-risk sample of adolescents aged 10-18 using a cross-sectional approach. The findings revealed that increased exposure to 'poly-violence' was linked to a higher rate of school delay, but it did not have a significant impact on academic motivation. These results are based on unpublished data by Herrero Romero et al.

The path towards progress: Mitigating the impact

Addressing the issue of violence and instability in schools necessitates a collaborative endeavour among all relevant parties (Nzama & Ajani, 2021). 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 doing so, a sustainable resolution can be implemented to create a more favourable environment for academic instruction and the attainment of educational objectives. The utilisation of the subsequent models may aid in mitigating instability within our educational institution.

The provision of ethical guidance

It is imperative to raise awareness among learners and foster their comprehension that their prospects are contingent upon their own actions and decisions (John, 2015; Ansong et al., 2017). The primary objective of education is to equip individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge that will enable them to contribute meaningfully to their personal growth and development, as well as to the progress and advancement of their country. The perils associated with violence encompass the thwarting of aspirations, squandered existence, and legal retribution. In light of the escalating incidence of antisocial behaviours within educational institutions, it is crucial to incorporate moral education into the school curriculum.

Emotional competence refers to an individual's ability to effectively manage and regulate their emotions in various situations. Teachers must receive training in the development of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence refers to an individual's innate capacity to perceive and comprehend their own emotions and those of others, to self-motivate, and to competently regulate their emotions and interpersonal interactions. Equipping teachers with emotional competence will facilitate their ability to fulfill their roles as teachers and carers, as well as effectively oversee learners within the educational setting.

Incorporating Ubuntu into the educational framework

To initiate the development of the necessary framework for African Ubuntu philosophy, it is imperative to acknowledge the school as a collective community rather than a mere assemblage of individuals. The Ubuntu operating system offers a robust philosophical foundation for its user community, and we must regard educational institutions as communities.

The integration of Ubuntu into the educational system is facilitated by conceptualising the school as a community. Advocating for the welfare of a school entails advocating for the welfare of all its constituents, including the administrative body, teachers, and pupils. The concept of collectivism, which is characterised by the values of harmony and cooperation, entails prioritising the welfare of the collective entity over that of transient individuals. This approach is founded on a far-sighted perspective, as opposed to one that is focused on immediate gains. By implementing the fundamental principles of Ubuntu, including but not limited to humanness, caring, sharing, respect, and compassion, learners can cultivate their humane qualities and consequently enhance their potential as future leaders in our rapidly globalising society. Ubuntu places great emphasis on the importance of harnessing the innate human tendency towards solidarity, as it recognises individuals not by their colour or race, but rather as beings created by a divine entity.

The positive consequences of Ubuntu

The implementation of Ubuntu in educational settings typically originates from school leaders, such as principals and teachers. This is because many successful and academically accomplished schools have adopted Ubuntu leadership principles, such as treating all learners equitably and practising the values of Ubuntu. The implementation of Ubuntu in South African education is demonstrated through the maintenance of school discipline to ensure the safety of both staff

and learners, as well as the creation of a conducive environment for effective teaching and learning. The achievement of sustainable development is contingent upon the effective utilisation of the collective energy of the majority, which encompasses the collaborative efforts of the school community, faculty, and learners in practising the principles of Ubuntu. The pedagogical and professional development emphasis, regardless of the discipline, should be rooted in the principles of Ubuntu.

The concept of leadership through Ubuntu is commonly understood as a manifestation of collective agency. This entails the establishment of a robust collaboration between the school and the community, wherein various stakeholders including teachers, learners, administrators, parents, residents, and governmental bodies work together to design and execute educational initiatives. The teacher and school staff ought to exhibit respect and self-care, followed by extending the same to all learners in the school, regardless of their background or circumstances. This study aims to explore the potential impact of implementing Ubuntu philosophy within the school context, with a particular focus on its implications for school discipline. The presence of Ubuntu practice is a likely characteristic of a high-performing school. In general, the degree of discipline observed within a school setting is indicative of the prevailing presence or absence of the African philosophy of Ubuntu within both the school and the wider community. The adoption of Ubuntu by educational institutions results in the cultivation of a well-behaved learners population. The correlation between the presence or absence of Ubuntu and the type of leadership exhibited has been found to have a significant impact on school performance. In contrast, the undisciplined learners population exhibits a lack of commitment and neglects to adopt proper conduct.

The utilisation of technological advancements

Progressivism is an educational ideology that is motivated by the pursuit of progress through scientific and technological advancements, as well as socio-economic development. Consequently, the Department of Education is facilitating the provision of internet connectivity to educational institutions located in KwaZulu-Natal province. A potential solution to address violent attacks in schools is the development of a mobile application that enables instantaneous transmission of signals or alerts to the nearest police station in the event of an attack on learners, teachers, or other administrators. The fundamental principles of progressivism centre around the concepts of social justice and democracy.

The detrimental effects of the social environment and socialist ideology posited as the solution

Throughout the course of human history, various individuals ranging from mystics to social scientists have envisioned the creation of an ideal society or utopia on Earth. Religion has, at times, endeavoured to create an ideal society. The endeavour to attain perfection has been intricate and intertwined with socio-political, economic, and educational factors. Utopianism places significant emphasis on revolutionary education among the various philosophical schools of thought. Our perspective is that the human race must receive education and preparation that is decolonized in nature, in anticipation of the forthcoming era. The establishment of a non-violent society through human development is not a product of chance evolution, but rather a deliberate outcome of human intellect guided by social engineering frameworks such as The Developmental State and Social Compacts. This encompasses the establishment of a cohesive national

identity, the implementation of a forward-thinking economic plan, the promotion of business growth and expansion, the enhancement of governmental capabilities, and effective communication strategies. The genesis of the utopian socialist ideology can be traced back to its emergence as a reaction to the harsh and oppressive working conditions of the time, to create a society that was harmonious, stress-free, and efficiently structured. When translated into social policies, this ideology transforms into a form of communitarian social democracy.

Utopian ideologists envisioned the development of a novel progressive social science that would offer ideological frameworks for the restoration of a non-violent and non-opportunistic sense of community, devoid of kleptomaniac tendencies. School principals must possess a comprehensive understanding of key sociological principles, including but not limited to Diversity in Education, Inequality and Marginalisation, Access and Equal Opportunity for Education, and Transformation and Education. Failure to do so would be unacceptable. The significance of experience concerning the aforementioned fundamental principles of perceptive doctrines is of utmost importance, surpassing any measure of conflict resolution strategies. Therefore, contemporary schools are social establishments specifically created to provide a learners or scholar with a well-rounded and authentic understanding of society through a refined public education system that incorporates innovative approaches to address the prevalence and pace of criminal behaviour.

The present study reveals various factors that are situated within the systemic levels postulated in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. This research has implications across multiple levels. In the context of a macrosystem, it is imperative to critically examine the prevailing ideologies of gender and other societal norms. It is imperative to hold the government and media responsible for their contribution to disseminating particular messages regarding gender and sexuality. The impact of these institutions' priorities and beliefs extends to other exosystems, including youth services. This study centred on the microsystem and, accordingly, the majority of the implications derived from the results pertain to the individual, group, and school levels. One of the most significant implications pertains to addressing fear-based behaviours or lack thereof, which could be linked to heightened stress levels and limited chances for introspection within educational institutions and EP programmes. A deficiency in reflective capacity may impede the process of change and perpetuate inflexibility and harm to children and young people. Initiating this process requires a foundation of empathy and a willingness to embrace diversity. The aforementioned objective is achieved through supervisory measures, training programmes, SRE (Special Religious Education), inclusive curricula, adequate policies, and a comprehensive institutional pledge to mitigate discriminatory practices and promote inclusivity in educational institutions.

Conclusion

The issues that impede academic pursuits within educational institutions are complex and varied. Acts of violence, specifically physical altercations and verbal aggression are the primary contributors to an unsafe learning environment within schools. The incidence of hazardous armaments, including knives and firearms, in educational institutions is increasing. The association of children with older individuals who exhibit antisocial behaviour is positively correlated with the likelihood of the former engaging in substance use, including drugs and alcohol. The utilisation of these substances within an educational setting has the potential to exert a negative influence on learners, potentially leading them to engage

in egregious behaviours.

Certain teachers have not fulfilled their parental responsibilities within the educational institution. Instances of physical and sexual abuse of learners by teachers are not indicative of positive parenting practices. Teachers who engage in such behaviours are deemed unworthy of their profession. The teaching profession is widely regarded as the most esteemed occupation globally because every individual who has acquired knowledge and expertise in various fields such as medicine, engineering, accounting, and other disciplines has been under the tutelage of a teacher.

Recommendations

Drawing upon a range of scholarly sources, personal experiences of authors, and recommendations provided by teachers in select KwaZulu-Natal schools. The research provides suggestions to alleviate volatility within educational institutions. The implementation of regulations and guidelines is imperative for all members of the educational community, including learners, teachers, and other involved parties, to foster an understanding of the importance of establishing a secure and favourable learning environment. Teachers and other relevant parties within the educational setting must take measures to prevent learners from bringing hazardous weapons and substances onto school grounds. A comprehensive screening or investigation of all learners in those unstable educational institutions is imperative. It is advisable for teachers and guardians to promptly notify the relevant authorities of any instances of disruptive behaviour exhibited by learners. Teachers are advised against utilising physical punishment as a means of discipline, and instead, they are encouraged to employ the prescribed disciplinary protocols to address non-compliant learners. The government must guarantee the sufficient fortification of school premises through the installation of fences, as well as the provision of security personnel.

It is of utmost importance that the welfare of teachers is sufficiently provided for. To effectively promote and advance public quality education with innovation and creativity to keep pace with the Fourth Industrial Revolution, teachers must be content and provided with adequate welfare packages.

The correlation between poverty and criminal activity and other societal issues is well-established. As such, it is imperative to promote entrepreneurship among learners as a means of mitigating the negative impacts of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. The Department of Basic Education ought to strive towards offering a balanced level of professionalism that promotes equilibrium in society, while also employing innovative methods in pursuit of non-violent means to effect political or social transformation. It is imperative to develop a comprehensive School Safety and Security Strategy and Plan that encompasses the establishment of efficient structures within educational institutions, with an unambiguous delineation of responsibilities. The Social Compacts initiative has presented a challenge to principals and teachers to embrace Societal Leadership, which involves assuming social responsibility and leading with confidence, rather than adopting a defensive mindset. This approach is considered a key driver of the National Development Plan (NDP) and involves reviving the Quality Teaching and Learning Campaign (QLTC) and promoting Professional Learning Communities (PLC). The aim is to establish a moral high ground, as this is where the root causes of instability in schools are often found.

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