

# 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.

## Review

For a systematic review, one must follow guidelines such as those set out by Cochrane (Garritty et al., 2020) or PRISMA-RR (Stevens et al., 2018). None such guidelines are mentioned in the article.

Usually with a systematic review there is a "review" team of an "information" team. For example, once literature has been identified to be included in the systematic review, each team member would independently review the abstracts and make a decision on whether or not the literature should be included in the review. Where team members disagree, they need to keep up the discussions until a consensus is reached. But it can go even further than this to where you not only want two or more specialists in the field, but you also want, for example, an information specialist to be on board to assist with searching for documents. I don't see any mention of an information specialist being on board and any steps to how articles were selected.

At best, this article appears as a "traditional" review and not a "systematic" review, as there is no mention of the keywords-string-search that was used, the databases considered etc. Traditional literature reviews, though useful, have major drawbacks in informing decision making. Predominantly subjective, they rely heavily on the author's knowledge and experience and provide a limited, rather than exhaustive, presentation of a topic. Such reviews are often based on references chosen selectively from the evidence available, resulting in a review inherently at risk for bias or systematic error. Traditional literature reviews are useful for describing an issue and its underlying concepts and theories, but if conducted according to no stated methodology, they are difficult to reproduce - leaving the findings and conclusions resting heavily on the insight of the authors.

The "systematic review," on the other hand, aims to provide a comprehensive, unbiased synthesis of many relevant studies in a single document. While it has many of the characteristics of a literature review, adhering to the general principle of summarizing the knowledge from a body of literature, a systematic review differs in that it attempts to uncover "all" of the evidence relevant to a question and to focus on research that reports data rather than concepts or theory. For example, having multiple steps in the systematic review process, including study selection, critical appraisal, and data extraction conducted in duplicate and by independent reviewers, reduces the risk of subjective interpretation and also of inaccuracies due to chance error affecting the results of the review. Such rigorous methods distinguish systematic reviews from traditional reviews of the literature.

Thus, at best, this article appears as a “traditional” review and not a “systematic” review and can not be published under the title of “systematic” review.

Other minor concerns include, for example:

The authors write “According to Dr. Nelson Mandela, education can serve as a powerful tool for effecting change on a global scale”, however, there is no citation provided to substantiate this claim.

The authors cite some news outlets, e.g., the Mail and Guardian, however, outlets may provide sensationalist coverage and the authors should prioritise citing peer-reviewed work such as journal articles and books to ensure the credibility and rigour of their study.

The authors write about “school instability in South Africa”, however, they have neglected the recent works on this topic by Graham and colleagues.

#### References:

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