

Empowerment of educators in the implementation of school safety measures

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Abstract: The main aim of the study was to find out how educators are empowered to implement safety measures in selected public high schools in the Alfred Nzo East Education District, Eastern Cape, South Africa. The study was motivated by multiple media reports about incidents that threatened the safety of learners especially in rural public schools and how educators are empowered to deal with such incidents. This case study was grounded on qualitative research principles. The study was theoretically guided by the principles of the Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB) and Rational Decision-Making Model. The data was collected from three public high schools in the Alfred Nzo East Education District, Eastern Cape. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to choose the research participants. A total of four educators and one principal were involved in semi-structured interviews. Interviews were supplemented with short observations and document analysis. The findings of the research include the following: the measures are not implemented properly. The piloted school had no school-based safety policies which can serve as a guide for educators in ensuring. It was also established that educators are not empowered to implement safety policies. The researcher recommended that there should be empowerment programmes on school safety management on continuous basis for all the in-service educators twice a year. The researcher further proposed that the training programmes that are provided by institutions of higher learning for pre-service teachers must have multiple law-related modules to provide insight to the novice educators.

Keywords: *School safety, Teacher-empowerment, Monitoring & safety measures.*

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Introduction

Orientation and Legislation Perspective

Safety of learners in schools is a serious issue in South Africa (Kutywayo et al., 2024). They further argue that safety concerns in South African schools include bullying, homophobic bullying, physical harm and sexual harassment; and emerging threats, like cyber bullying, are increasing quickly. Learners are stabbing each other, teachers are being stabbed, learners are being abused, rape cases are being reported and some teachers are negligent (Govender, 2024; Mokonyane et al., 2024 & Mackay, 2020). This is despite the fact that the Department of Basic Education in South Africa is housed and grounded on various constitutional laws and regulations.

Section 7(2) of the Constitution specifies that the state must respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights in the Bill of Rights. Although it is the responsibility of the provincial department of education and districts to create a conducive environment for schools within a district area, at a school level the principal and the educators as appointed by government represent the state, and the SGBs have the power given by government. This means that the principals and educators have the responsibility of ensuring proper implementation of the Bill of Rights at the school level. In the school context, the administrator, which is the principal, may not undermine the laws and policies that are coming from the government that are put in place to ensure protection of learners. The principal, educators and the SGB can promote the provisions

on the Bill of Rights by not acting in an unlawful manner when dealing with issues of safety or enhancing safety in schools.

According to section 12(1) of the Constitution (RSA, 1996), everyone has the right to freedom and security, which includes the right not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhumane or degrading way and the right to be free from all types of violence. In a school context, "everyone" may refer to learners, teaching and non-teaching staff. Learners and educators must be protected and secured from any harm. Learners must be treated in a humane manner. All people at the school should be protected from any form of violence.

Furthermore, section 28(2) of the Constitution states that the best interests of a child are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child (RSA, 1996). This means that districts and schools as legal entities and its legal employees (provincial officials, district officials, principals and teachers) have a constitutional responsibility to act in a way that put the children's interest at the forefront. Moreover, section 24 (a) of the Bill of Rights which states that every citizen has a right to an environment which is not harmful to their health or well-being (RSA, 1996). This means that districts and schools as legal entities and its legal employees (provincial officials, district officials, principals and teachers) have a responsibility to create an environment which is secure and safe enough for effective teaching and learning. Section 29(1) (a) of the Constitution states that everyone has the right to

basic education. The learner's right to receive education implies that the learner has the right to attend school and that this right should be protected. Since formal education can take place in a safe and secure school environment, everything possible should be done by the school, SGB and Department of Basic Education (DBE) to ensure that the learner experiences safety at school.

The Bill of Rights provides that people must be entitled to human dignity, and section 10 stipulates that everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected. All the stakeholders in the education sector are also subject to the right to human dignity. For example, learners as the key stakeholders in the schooling system are not expected to suffer from emotional problems because a certain person in the school has shouted or has addressed a learner in an unappealing manner. Emotional discomfort threatens learner safety at school. When human dignity is ignored or not given to learners, the school environment does not accommodate safety.

Section 27 of the Bill of Rights indicates that everyone has the right to have access to health care services, including reproductive health care, sufficient food and water, and social security (RSA, 1996). In the context of the school, "everyone" means learners and teachers and any other individuals within the school premises. Schools as legal entities, therefore, have to adhere to this right by ensuring that the school nutrition committee checks the expiry dates in food, damaged tins which can cause food poisoning and the cooking equipment must be clean to maintain the hygiene. Although schools are not legally obligated to provide sanitary services, a caring school may strive to ensure that sanitary services are provided for all learners who might not be able to afford to buy them. Social security may refer to the programmes of government intended to promote the welfare of the population through meeting basic needs like shelter, food and health care services. In a schooling situation, the SGB together with the principal and teachers have to ensure that the basic needs of learners are met by ensuring that they have safe shelter (classrooms) and the sanitation facilities are safe.

The study piloted by Brock and Brundige (2014) about sexual violence by educators in South African schools also found that a right to receive education in a safe environment is being violated for most school learners due to teacher sexual harassment. Another academic research, which was done by Smit (2015), illustrated that learners' right to privacy in schools is infringed because some of their fellow learners or even teachers do cyberbullying. This affects one of the key constitutional rights, the right to privacy which is stated as follows in section 14 of the Constitution: "Everyone has the right to privacy, which includes the right not to have - (a) their person or home searched; (b) their property searched; (c) their possessions seized; or (d) the privacy of their communications infringed". Moreover, this implies that section 28 (2) of RSA (1996) which states that "a child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child" is violated.

Section 10A (1) of the South African Schools Act (hereafter referred to as SASA (84 of 1996) prohibits any form of initiation practice against a learner at a school or in a hostel accommodating learners of a school. High schools, especially those that are situated in townships, have learners who are victims of these unlawful initiation practices (Huysamer & Lemmer, 2013); meaning safety in these schools is a critical issue. Section 8 of the School Infrastructure Safety and Security Guidelines (SISSG)

(2017) states that when a school is installing or doing renovations to a school building, it has to ensure that electric wires and dangerous tools do not interfere with the safety of learners and the supply of electricity has to meet the national safety standards.

Although corporal punishment is prohibited by section 10(1) of the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996), some schools or individual still practice it (Makhasane & Chikoko, 2016). This still reflects that there are some schools that are putting children safety in danger. On the other hand, learners who commit serious misconduct may cause a threat to the safety of other learners and such learners must be removed from schools to protect other learners. This has been advocated in section 9 (7) (a) of SASA (84 of 1996) as it indicates that Head of Department (HOD) "must take reasonable measures to protect the rights of other learners at the public school" when deciding to expel or not to expel a learner who is implicated in a serious conduct. Learners have a right to basic education, but once they commit a serious act that impose a threat to other learners, the SGB may write a recommendation letter of expulsion (section 9 (1c) (b) to the provincial Head of Department (HOD) of Education.

Section 3.11 of the Code of Professional Ethics in SACE Act of 2000 states that an educator "takes reasonable steps to ensure the safety of the learner". It is therefore a professional role of an educator to find strategies to ensure that learners at schools are always safe in all spheres. An educator must be dismissed if he or she is found to be committing a serious misconduct and misconduct as outlined in sections 17 and 18 respectively of the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 as amended in 2011. Therefore, if an educator branches the any of the laws stated in section 17 and 18 of Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 as amended in 2011, then that educator might be removed from the SACE register if "the educator was found guilty of a breach of the code of professional ethics" (section 23 (1) (c)).

Another major practice that might threatens learner safety in schools is bullism (Laas & Boezaart, 2014). "Bullying involves repeatedly picking on someone with the aim of hurting or harming them physically, emotionally or socially" (DBE, 2012). Bullying, as stated in section 11 (M) on the Guidelines for the Consideration of Governing Bodies in Adopting a Code of Conduct for Learners (1998) is an offence for which one might be suspended or expelled. Many of the constitutional rights are infringed when bullying occurs, and the problem is escalating (Laas and Boezaart, 2014).

When teachers are appointed, they are appointed based on the regulations stated in the Employment of Educators Act of 1998. Based on section 18 (1) (d) of the Employment of Educators Act of 1998, an educator may be found guilty if he or she is negligent in the carrying out of the duties attached to the educator's post. According to section 18 (1) (e), an educator may be found as committing a misconduct if he or she "in the course of duty endangers the lives of himself or herself or others by disregarding set safety rules or regulations". This implies that teachers are obliged to act in a way that may not cause any damage or threatening learner safety.

Although government has put in place multiple pieces of legislation to ensure that South Africa schools are safe and conducive for teaching and learning, academic studies show that these attempts by government seem to be ineffective. A research study done by Smit (2015) agrees that bullies attack or threaten innocent learners, and other learners who want to address

unresolved break-time issues might make use of the time when educators choose to leave the classroom. Akyina & Heeralal (2024) says that Alternatives to Corporal Punishment (ATCP) should be used instead of corporal punishment because corporal punishment threatens children's right to be protected from harm and degradation.

The South African government in its processes to strengthen democracy has developed many laws which attempt to promote rights of children and to protect them in all spheres. These laws include specific laws that affect education and those that indirectly affect the education sector. The Mental Health Act 18 of 1973 section 4 gives provision for any person over the age of 18 to give consent for medical attention for a child who is emotionally disturbed. At a school level, this might imply that the principal and safety or disciplinary committee must ask for permission from the parent or legal guardian to conduct drug testing because some learners might appear to be on drugs when they are on medication.

The Protection from Harassment Act 71 of 2001, section 2, may grant relief to victims of bullying by providing for protection orders, and therefore adds to the legislative framework available to victims. Teachers, based on this act, have a legal power to use this law in favour and in protection of learners. The Children's Act 38 of 2005, section 18 (2) (a), (b) and (c) states that the parental or guardian responsibilities and rights that a person may have in respect of a child include the responsibility and the right to care for the child; to maintain contact with the child; and to act as guardian of the child. It is therefore clear that teachers are given power by the law, similar parents, to take good care of the learners.

Literature Review

Carl (2012) defines empowerment as a process of supplying people with the learning chances, skills, knowledge and essential resources to make them accept, believe and have a sense that they understand their sphere and have power to change it. Carl's (2012) definition can be broadened by incorporating an earlier definition penned by Robinson (1994) which states that the empowerment process involves individuals gaining control of their lives and fulfilling their needs, in part, as a result of developing competencies, skills and abilities necessary to effectively participate in their social and political worlds.

Carl (2012) provides some of the benefits of developing and empowering educators in the education system. An empowered educator owns any task that is allocated to him or her and always has a willingness to contribute positively to their work environment. Furthermore, people who are empowered are likely to take any challenge or crisis as a learning curve not a problem. Lastly, Carl (2012) emphasises that empowered teachers are needed because they perform their duties with high motivation and enthusiasm. These characteristics of empowered people are almost the same as the qualities that teachers need to possess in order for them to ensure that safety in schools is achieved with high magnitude. In the implementation of a policy these qualities might include positive attitude, willingness to go the extra mile, and knowledge about law or regulations, motivation, support, etc.

In the organisation, people may be empowered at different levels. Some people can be empowered at a technical level, operational level and at a strategic level (Williams, 2011). In a school, there are different role players who are educators, principals, SGBs, learners and other external stakeholders who serve at different levels and on different aspects, hence

empowerment at different levels (technical, operational and strategic) is necessary. Teachers, school principals, and School Governing Bodies (SGBs) need empowerment for them to effectively and efficiently manage and govern safety in schools. Based on the study conducted by Ronoti (2014) in King Williams Town Education District (currently known as Buffalo City District), where interviews were used as the data collection method, the findings were that the education system of South African lacks the empowerment element, especially in rural and semi-urban areas.

The majority of SGBs, particularly the parent component in rural and semi-urban areas, have low levels of education. As a result, it is difficult to empower members because they have little or no basic knowledge, skills and expertise with regard to school governance. The manner in which SGBs function and carry out their duties, roles and responsibilities indicate that SGBs received inadequate training. These were significant findings by Ronoti (2014). School Governing Bodies and educators are some of the important stakeholders in education but there is little or no attention given to them in terms of capacitating and empowering them on managing school safety effectively.

The magnitude of educators' negligence and care can be caused by lack of empowerment as each job needs specialised training for it to be performed effectively and efficiently (Newnham, 2000). The training can be in a formal manner (meaning that a person would need to acquire a certain professional qualification from a recognised institution of learning or the training can be informal (meaning it can be acquired through observation, etc.) (Verma, Mohapatra & Löwstedt, 2016). Some of the educators in schools are not proficient in taking good care of learners or they lack expertise to control or to implement safety measures in schools. Personal experiences of teachers also determine the magnitude of giving care to their learners. Someone who has been a victim of unsafe circumstances and negligence is likely to offer less or no support to others because of trauma and bad flashbacks (Mohapi, 2007).

Singh & Surujlal (2009) argue that educationalists have a moral and legitimate commitment to design and present rational safety plans of physical activities at a learning centre. Prevention becomes significant, as many injuries are litigated, and such lawsuits often result in schools, hence the school districts having to pay costly damages to injured individuals. A teacher's job scope does not end in the classroom nowadays, but it goes far beyond it (Adendorff, Mason, Modiba, Faragher & Kunene, 2010).

Caring forms part of undocumented responsibilities of a teacher. Oosthuizen & Botha (1998) outlined that educators in a school have a legal duty in terms of the common law principle, *in loco parentis*, to ensure the safety of learners in their care. Educators as legal persons *in loco parentis* are vested with special status that empowers them to act accordingly in terms of the law. Teachers as adults and professionals are vested with powers to ensure that operations of the school are running smoothly, especially in safeguarding learners all the time. Teachers are also granted authority over the learners during extramural activities on or away from the school grounds. Singh and Surujlal (2009) suggested that minimising physical activity related injuries and illnesses among learners is a joint responsibility of educators, supervisors, coaches, instructors or trainers, as well as learners themselves and their families during breaks and physical activities.

Bhana (2013) indicates that corporal punishment, learners' violence against teachers, sexual harassment of girls in schools by male teachers and peers as well as girl-on-girl violence are some of the reported forms of violence. Parents and school principals have the right to take legal action against any educator, learner or person who unlawfully violates the constitutional rights of their children by, for example, corporal punishment or injury to a child. Learners are not only exposed to unsafe physical conditions, physical maltreatment and emotional instability but are also faced with unhealthy and unsafe conditions in their teaching and learning centres. A less empowered educator might administer corporal punishment not knowing that it can implicate him or her and it even threatens learner safety. This seeks to say that schools in general are faced with problems of discipline. Even in the 21st century there are still educators who believe that corporal punishment plays a pivotal role in maintaining discipline. However, corporal punishment is one of the practices that make issues of safety in schools to be extremely bad. Corporal punishment in schools causes the school to be unsafe and violent.

Nunan (2018) studied victims' experiences of challenging learner behaviour in primary schools in Phoenix, Kwa-Zulu Natal, and in South Africa generally. This study was guided by the principles of the qualitative approach under the interpretivism paradigm. The data was collected via interviews. The research found that some learners in schools who were facing challenges (adolescent stage changes) of change in behaviour were not tolerated in schools and got punished by their educators through the use of corporal punishment. Some learners who experienced challenging change in behaviour were not even safeguarded by educators. To the researcher, it is likely that a less empowered educator who might have not been through workshops on alternative methods of discipline may think that learners who experience challenging change in behaviour will classify those learners as silly and misbehaving. Although misbehaving and silly actions cannot be applauded, it must be understood that children grow through change in behaviour and teachers have a role in protecting them. Although Nunan's (2018) study attempted to expose how learners who are experience change in behaviour are treated, it did not expose the safety implications of enforcing discipline through corporal punishment.

In summary, the already established researchers noted that the school managers and teachers have a huge scope in terms of their duties. Safeguarding learners at schools add more pressure on their roles. Moreover, studies reveal that SGBs are not fully empowered to manage areas of safety in schools. Teachers who administer corporal punishment do not only subject learners to suffer physically, but they also tend to be disturbed mentally, socially and emotionally (Nijhara, Bhatia & Unnikrishnan, 2017). Although some areas of management or operation for educators and school leaders seems to have been addressed in terms of empowerment, the literature still lacks in terms of addressing issues of empowerment on safety in schools.

Research Objectives

- To understand how the educators are empowered to be able to implement the regulations for safety measures at public schools.
- Establish challenges faced by teachers in implementing regulations for safety measures at public schools.

Research Methodology

Data were collected from a school located in the Alfred Nzo East Education District using a qualitative research approach. A purposive sampling technique was utilised to select participants who were directly involved in school safety and management processes. The sample consisted of four educators and one principal who participated in semi-structured interviews. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants to ensure accuracy of the data. In addition to interviews, short observations were conducted to capture contextual practices related to school safety. Document analysis was also employed to support and triangulate the data obtained from interviews and observations. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Eastern Cape Department of Education. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and emerging themes. All ethical considerations, including confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation, were strictly observed. The data were stored safely and securely to protect participant information and ensure data integrity

Data Presentation

Initially, the researcher wanted to understand how the educators are empowered to be able to implement the regulations for safety measures at public schools and challenges in the implementation phase. The development of the staff through empowerment engagement plays a pivotal role in effective management of all activities in an organisation. Educators are supposed to be developed because they form part and parcel of the implementation process. Hence, these teachers must be empowered in managing safety in schools. This section seeks to answer the objectives empowerment of educator in the implementation of the regulations for safety measures at school A. For the purposes of presentation and upholding ethical standards, the names of the educators and Principal will be coded as E1-E4 for educator 1 to educator 4, for principal, the cod PR1 was used, lastly the school will be denoted by letter "A".

It is evident that there has been a training that has been provided to educators in terms of managing school safety in areas like managing safety in schoolyards/grounds, testing for drugs, interaction with stakeholders, behaviour of learners, learner abuse and scholar transport. The participants articulated the following about training:

...safety in school yard ... it was on our first workshop which only specifically was based on school grounds and how must interact with the other stakeholders that is police forum we were only told about that ... trained on the behaviour of the learners and performance of the learners and testing the drugs (E1).

In terms of safety, I was specifically trained on, if, for instance learners should be safe about abuse, they should not be abused by other learners, they should not be abused by teachers and yes that's it (E2).

Managing scholar transport mhh, what is happening is only the coordinator of the scholar transport is trained on managing scholar transport, not all the educators. It is the principal and coordinator [who] is running the scholar transport (PR1).

Although PR1A suggested that there was training on managing scholar transport, E1A suggested otherwise because he was not trained on scholar transport.

No, no we are not trained [on scholar transport] (E1).

This contradiction might be caused by the fact that the PR1 is a principal, and the training was provided to the principals not to the educators.

It is evident from the data that the empowerment was in the form of workshops and trainings. This is evident because E1 and E2 had this to say:

...on our first workshop... (E1)

...specifically trained on... (E2)

Although a safety support programme was conducted, it was revealed that the training was not enough and inadequate. For example, when EDUCATOR 1 was asked if they received any form of training or empowerment in ensuring that learners are safe, EDUCATOR 1 had this to say:

Mmh! Well I am not going to lie it was only last week, it was our first training which only took one day on Thursday last we were taken for training ... No no we are not trained, since it was on our first workshop ... Mmh I was trained years ago I think it was 2011 when I was trained ... No it is not enough (E1).

As it comes from the data, no training was done for ensuring that drugs do not cause lack of safety in the school:

No there is no [training], as far as I know there is no one who has been trained on safety ... That's another problem, teachers are not trained on drugs. They are not supposed to beat the children, they are not supposed to do anything to children if they are found with drugs ... It's a big problem because our learners are violent, they come to school being drugged sometimes they are unruly but teachers do not have an accurate way of dealing with those violent learners (PR1).

No the manuals just come to us (E4).

E1 sentiment might reflect that some teacher training programmes for empowerment were autocratic in nature and educators were trained in a passive manner.

No we are not trained on dealing with violence but we use our capabilities like being a teacher you know you have the way of dealing with things in a professional way (E1).

No warning board at its school gate about a school as a drug, violence and accident-free zone ... overloads the vehicles had in the morning and in the afternoon (Observation).

The principal acknowledged that the issue of safety is a complicated and wide issue.

Yes, the issue of safety is too wide PR1.

The support from the community and the SGB included a whole range of issues like the safekeeping of stationery, locking classes and discipline - language, fights, liaison with police and the Department of Social Development:

Yes, safety is wide but our role is to sit down with the principal and ensure that the stationery that is given to learners is safe. As there are keys in these classes, the teacher concerned in each class must have a key and ensures that he/she locks all the time after classes. We also assist educators in ensuring that there is no vulgar language used at school because it might make other people to be angry and the school will lose control and fights thereof. We are in a campaign to include police to work with us because sometimes we can't search female learners everywhere (E4).

What we do the most is to ensure discipline to learners and let them know their main aim of coming to school, that learners are supposed to behave well on teachers because teachers are almost the same as parents they left at their homes. (E3)

Yes, communities around school become loose because there can never be an outsider who smuggles the drugs, these drugs come with our kids and us (PR1).

Yes, they support in safeguarding the school especially now that there is a fencing project, if something goes wrong they call the SGB and neighbors to attend to the problem or call SGB members who are nearer to the school (PR1)

The police are there, we call them, they come if there is anything violent in nature (PR1).

There is an awareness by Social Development about the danger of drugs when someone is glued to them (PR1)

Although E2 said that she was trained, the training was received a long time ago and it might be in need of improvement or adjustment so that it can meet today's needs in terms of safety expectations in schools. E1 was last trained in 2011 yet safety concerns in schools increase in their complexity every day. Literally this might show that there is a gap in terms of empowerment as far as safety is concerned in schools.

Furthermore, E1 and E2 who were participants complained that the training that they received was not enough because most workshops or trainings were about the core business of the school, which is teaching and learning. E1A confirmed the above statement because he said:

No it is not enough E1.

The above statement was referring to the sufficiency of the training on safety in schools. The two educators interviewed in this school were of the opinion that the Department of Education does not capacitate them in all areas of the school but the focus is mostly placed on teaching and learning but not on safety of learners.

PR1 who participated on the study agreed that ever since he had been appointed as a principal there have been no trainings that empower educators to deal with safety issues. The absence of these capacitation trainings will automatically affect the manner in which implementation of the safety regulations unfolds in schools. This is evident from the principals' responses when they were asked if the educators were trained on safety of learners.

No there is no [training], as far as I know there is no one who has been trained on safety PR1.

It is not good that even the leader of the school agrees that there is no capacitation programme for educators. Lack of capacitation usually leads to policy failure (Kelley & Simmons, 2020).

No training is provided on dealing with violence and they are disarmed in terms of dealing with violent and unruly learners who are also intoxicated. The following two statements came from the principal of School A in relation to empowerment on violence and drugs:

That's another problem; teachers are not trained on drugs. They are not supposed to beat the children; they are not supposed to do anything to children if they are found with drugs...PR1.

It's a big problem because our learners are violent, they come to school being drugged sometimes they are unruly but teachers do not have an accurate way of dealing with those violent learners PR1.

Educators in this school complained that there is no capacitation in terms of managing scholar transport. When E1A was asked if he was trained on managing safety in scholar transport, he said:

no no are not trained E1.

On the other hand, the principal of this school who happens to be a scholar transport coordinator for transport in that area was trained but it shows that there was no dissemination of information to the educators:

Managing scholar transport mhh, what is happening is only the coordinator of the scholar transport is trained on managing scholar transport, not all the educators. It is the principal and coordinator is running the scholar transport PR1.

The lack of empowerment leads educators to use their own discretion that might have negative consequences:

No, we are not trained on dealing with violence but we use our capabilities like being a teacher you know you have the way of dealing with things in a professional way E1.

Moreover, during the observation, the school had no warning board at its school gate about the school as a drug, violence and accident free.

Educators are supported by social organizations like SAPS and the Department of Social Development and the SGB supports educators by providing a counselling committee for all the learners who have suffered from emotional or physical instabilities caused by lack of safety. According to PR1:

Yes, they support in safeguarding the school especially now that there is a fencing project, if something goes wrong they call the SGB and neighbors to attend to the problem or call SGB members who are nearer to the school P1A.

PR1A alluded to the fact that the school is also assisted by the SAPS:

The police are there, we call them, they come if there is anything violent in nature. PR1

Moreover, PR1 said that teachers are assisted by sister departments like Social Development:

There is an awareness by social development about the danger of drugs when someone is glued to them .

Summative findings: It can be concluded that educators are empowered through workshops, training and community support so that they can implement regulations for safety measures at public school. Although educators were empowered, it can be noted that lack of continuous capacitation programmes is a problem. This means that there is too long a gap between the training gatherings or workshops. Moreover, there has been insufficient capacitation in managing violence and drugs yet it is one of the key contributors to lack of safety in schools.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that educator empowerment at the school occurs mainly through workshops, training sessions, and support structures involving the School Governing Body (SGB) as well as external stakeholders such as the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the Department of Social Development. These initiatives focus largely on issues related to substance abuse, school access control, and the management of schoolyards for safety purposes. While these efforts indicate institutional recognition of school safety concerns, the findings suggest that such empowerment initiatives are limited in scope and insufficient to ensure a consistently safe learning environment.

Educators at the school reported that training programmes and workshops are inadequate, particularly in addressing critical safety areas such as scholar transport, access to school premises, and the management of illegal drugs and dangerous weapons. The study further revealed that the "mini workshops" provided lack continuity and depth, thereby undermining effective implementation. Sporadic training opportunities fail to equip educators with the necessary skills to respond effectively to safety challenges, resulting in fragmented and inconsistent safety practices within the school. In addition, educators expressed concern about the lack of motivation and support from parents and the surrounding community. This absence of collective involvement places a disproportionate responsibility on educators to ensure learner's safety, often without adequate backing. The findings suggest that school safety cannot be achieved in isolation and requires active collaboration between the school, parents, community members, and relevant government departments.

From the perspective of the Rational Decision-Making Model, effective implementation of decisions taken by top management depends on the adequate capacitation of those responsible for execution. Contrary to this principle, the findings of this study indicate that educator empowerment at school remains minimal. Teachers, as frontline implementers of education and safety policies, reported frustration with the limited training provided by the Department of Basic Education. This lack of continuous professional development negatively affects their ability to perform their duties effectively.

Carl (2012) highlights that empowered educators develop a sense of ownership over their responsibilities and are more inclined to contribute positively to their work environment. However, the findings of this study suggest that insufficient training and development undermine such ownership. The observed conditions at the school reflect a broader challenge within the education system, where human capital is not developed on an ongoing basis, increasing the risk of institutional failure. The study further revealed that inadequate training has direct implications for

educator performance and confidence. Educators who lack proper training are less confident in responding to safety-related incidents, which increases risks within the school environment. From the perspective of Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB), such conditions are likely to result in implementation failure, as the theory emphasizes the importance of proper training, clear communication, and information dissemination when new policies are introduced (Lipsky, 1980). Without these elements, policy acceptance, ownership, and effective execution are compromised.

Educators at the school are responsible for both curricular and extra-curricular activities, with safety being an underlying concern across all duties. This reality requires educators to possess a wide range of skills beyond classroom instruction. However, the findings indicate that educators are not adequately capacitated on an ongoing basis to meet these demands. This lack of continuous empowerment is particularly evident in areas related to school safety and legal compliance. Some educators indicated that, in the absence of formal training, they rely heavily on experience to manage safety issues. While experience is valuable, over-reliance on experiential knowledge poses significant risks. Novice educators, who lack experience, are still expected to manage safety concerns effectively. Furthermore, the school operates as a legal entity governed by policies and legislation. Managing safety based on personal experience rather than established legal frameworks may expose educators and school leadership to legal consequences arising from non-compliance.

Street-Level Bureaucracy theory further warns that excluding implementers from the policy planning process contributes to poor implementation outcomes (Lipsky, 1980; Erasmus, 2014). The findings of this study suggest that educators at the school feel marginalized during policy formulation processes. Safety policies and manuals are often communicated through a top-down approach, with minimal consultation. As one educator noted, “*The manuals just come to us,*” indicating limited involvement in planning and decision-making. This sense of exclusion negatively affects educator commitment to implementing safety policies. The findings support the view that involving educators in planning processes enhances policy ownership and motivates implementers to go beyond minimum compliance. When educators are excluded, policy implementation becomes a compliance-driven exercise rather than a shared responsibility.

Conclusion

In summary, the findings highlight a significant gap between policy intentions and practical implementation at the school. The lack of continuous training, limited educator involvement in policy formulation, and insufficient community support undermine efforts to create a safe school environment. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that prioritizes sustained educator empowerment, meaningful participation in decision-making, and strengthened collaboration between the school, parents, community stakeholders, and education authorities.

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