

School-Oriented Issues Affecting the Quality of Education: A Qualitative Study for Academic Improvement

Israel Kariyana^{1*} and Reynold A. Sonn²

¹NMD Campus, Mthatha, ²Ibika Campus, Butterworth, Department of Education, Walter Sisulu University, South Africa

Cell: ¹<+27 73 686 3953>, ²<0822021072>, ²Fax: 0866296253

E-mail: ¹<kariyanaisrael@yahoo.com>, ²<rsonn@wsu.ac.za>

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ABSTRACT There are numerous factors that affect the quality of education. Central to these are school-based factors spanning largely from the quality of educators and school management teams (SMTs) whose ultimate actions determine the quality of schools. The study sought to establish learners' views regarding the manner in which current school-based activities are affecting the quality of education. A qualitative research approach with a case study design was followed. The population of the study was 550 learners from two purposively sampled schools out of which 175 were conveniently sampled from Grade 8 to Grade 12 to participate in the study. Open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured face-to-face individual interviews were utilised to gather qualitative data. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the District office and relevant participating school authorities. The qualitative data was analysed using content analysis and presented through direct and verbatim quotations of the respondents. It emerged from the study that learners strongly held educators and SMTs accountable for compromising their potential performance. Effectiveness of institutional policies on educator and learner recruitment and retention, and provision of professional development opportunities were viewed as strong determinants of educator and learner quality and predictors of school management efficacy. Recommendations were made based on the findings.

INTRODUCTION

Even in advanced industrial countries high levels of school quality are not guaranteed. School quality is a function not only of resources applied, but also of the efficiency of their application. Efficiency in turn is a function of incentives facing pupils, teachers and school and system managers (Simkins 2000).

Academic underperformance is a great cause of concern in all educational institutions internationally. The vibrancy of an economy pervades schools. Therefore, it is critical that the school system be of high quality to manage and promote economic prosperity. In an effort to foresee that schools deliver value, South African schools have of late been at the scrutiny of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) country-wide. However, the pace of seriousness of managing the quality of education in the country seems to be infiltrating at the slowest pace in the Eastern Cape Province as evidenced by the province's three-year lowest position on the national league table in terms of percentage pass rate. Brijlall and Maharaj (2013) agree with this assumption when they purport that researchers in the national education evaluation develop-

ment in South Africa assessed the quality of education in the Eastern Cape Province and they reveal a grim picture of the quality of teaching, especially in the important lower grades.

There are several policies governing the quality of education in South Africa and central to these policies is their thrust on promoting issues that uphold school effectiveness (Venkat 2013). Both conceptual-content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge are necessary for effective teaching, together with the teacher's willingness and ability to reflect on practice and learn from the learners' own experience of being taught. These attributes need to be integrated, so that teachers can confidently apply conceptual knowledge-in-practice (Department of Education 2006). The National Education Policy Act 27 (1996) equally upholds that enrolment of learners and their regular and punctual attendance at school are prerequisites of an educated nation. In addition to that, the South African Schools Act 84 (1996) and other similar policies are mandated to improve educational attainment amongst schools in the country.

At school level it becomes the duty of the school managers to promote the kind of education quality the nation yearns for. Most, if not

all stakeholders, look up to schools to dictate the direction of the learners' life. It is at school level that career paths are usually enhanced for learners. There is a general feeling among the populace that failure of the public examinations by learners poses one of the greatest blows to achieving their dreams. Therefore, the type of relationship between the school managers and the educators to the rest of the stakeholders becomes the key determinant factor of school and learner success.

School Managers and School Quality

There is no smooth path to quality, neither is there a straight-jacket single approach. There are internal and external factors that affect the quality of education. The quality of schools is dependent on both internal and external factors. Contrary to internal factors that are particular to an individual school and are controlled within the school campus and zone of influence, external factors are those which no school has direct influence over. However, school-centred factors that affect education quality are the internal factors that vary according to internal efficiency of a particular school. They are unique depending on the school's calibre of its school management team, teachers, and learners (Plant et al. 2008). The present research describes these barriers focusing specifically on ways through which educators and school managers compromise the quality of education.

The school management team (SMT) is considered the heart of the school. The responsibilities of this organ, especially through the influence of the principals, determine the direction of the institution. Roles of the school principal and the manner in which they are communicated to members of the school system determine the quality of the school. Schools' overall positions in their individual district league tables are usually the responsibility of the school managers, specifically the principal. Poor management styles are usually regarded as the root causes of institutions being dysfunctional. Whereas all SMT members should constructively work to achieve their targets, the skills and experiences of a principal to the conduct of their leadership and managerial expertise carries the greatest weight.

More than ever, in today's climate of heightened expectations, principals are in the hot seat to improve teaching and learning. They are expected to broker the often-conflicting interests of parents, teachers, students, district office officials, unions, and state and federal agencies, and they need to be sensitive to the widening range of student needs (Davis et al. 2005). This emphasis regards school principals as the nerve centres of their schools around which all school life revolves.

Teachers and School Quality

According to the literature, the second most influential agents whose actions have significant effects on school outputs are the educators especially through classroom activities. Yet, definitions of an effective educator or an effective school are neither universal nor conclusive. This is because such definitions are products of the various perspectives from which the concerned 'quality' is viewed. Leigh and Mead (2005) contend that researchers, policymakers, parents, and even teachers themselves agree that teacher quality matters, but defining, measuring, and identifying teacher quality is a far more controversial task. In an education environment focused on improving student achievement, the ultimate measure of teacher quality is the impact the teacher has on student learning (Manik 2014).

Darling-Hammond (2000) argues that quality teaching depends on the teacher's verbal ability, content knowledge, education coursework on teaching methods in their discipline, scores on state licensing exams that measure both basic skills and teaching knowledge, teaching behaviors, ongoing voluntary professional learning, enthusiasm for learning, flexibility, creativity, and adaptability, amount of teaching experience, demonstrated skill in asking students higher order questions and probing their responses.

Teachers should know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students. They should understand how their subject is related to other disciplines; develop students' critical and analytical thinking skills; understand the preconceptions students have about a subject area; use multiple strategies to convey a concept, and teach students how to pose and solve their own problems (Education Policy and Leadership Center (EPLC) 2002).

Quality teachers are one of the most important school-related factors found to facilitate student learning, and likely explain at least some of the difference in effectiveness across schools (Aaronson et al. 2007; Kane et al. 2008). Danielson (1996) as cited by EPLC (2002) outlined measures relating to quality teaching as organized into four domains each with several components. These measures are planning and preparation, for instance, demonstrating knowledge of content and pedagogy; having concern for the classroom environment through the establishment of a culture for learning, instilling the importance of content and student pride in work, and setting expectations for learning and achievement; instruction such as communicating clearly and accurately in oral and written directions and procedures, as well as professional responsibilities such as reflecting on teaching (Manik 2014).

The Blueprint for Welsh Government Schools places teacher quality at the very centre of learning. It is based on research that consistently highlights the quality of teachers as a key determinant of variation in student achievement (Wenglinsky 2000; Darling-Hammond 2000). The research asserts that, to be effective, teachers need a deep understanding of their subject area, knowledge of how students learn specific subject matter and a range of strategies and practices that support student learning. The research also affirms that engaging teachers in high quality professional learning is the most successful way to improve teacher effectiveness (Elmore 2002). Effective teachers have a positive attitude; develop a pleasant social and psychological climate in the classroom; have high expectations of what pupils can achieve; communicate lesson clarity; practice effective time management; employ strong lesson structuring; use a variety of teaching methods; use and incorporate pupil ideas, and use appropriate and varied questioning (Muijs and Reynolds 2005). Besides, practically they possess valid knowledge base about 'what works' at school level to potentiate student outcomes (Teddlie and Reynolds 2000).

As the most significant and costly resource in schools, teachers are central to school improvement efforts. Improving the efficiency and equity of schooling depends, in large measure, on ensuring that competent people want to work as teachers, that their teaching is of high quality, and that all students have access to high quality teaching (Organisation for Economic Co-

operation and Development (OECD) 2005). Teachers' under-performance can have a negative impact upon the school's reputation and standing in the community, attainment and achievements of pupils, performance of other teachers, performance of support staff and, leadership and management of the schools (Jones et al. 2006). Therefore, the quality of an educator plays a central role in defining the effectiveness of the school as an institution.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Staff recruitment and retention are key drivers in the continued growth prospects of educational institutions such as schools. In this respect, recruiting and retaining effective school managers and educators has a booming effect on the success rates of every school. In schools, the recruitment process for classroom practitioners is the initial phase conducted by school managers to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. The success and effectiveness of this process is dependent on the quality of the interviewing panel which usually comprises influential and/or senior school staff members such as principals and selected school management team (SMT) members. Guarino et al. (2006) contend that because policies that promote recruitment and those that promote retention both focus on mechanisms to adjust the attractiveness of teaching relative to other occupations - that is mechanisms to create rewards that outweigh the opportunity costs of becoming or remaining a teacher - it is often difficult to separate the two issues.

According to Mayer et al. (2000), unfavourable working conditions, lack of motivation both from the administration and students, lack of advance technologies, unsafe future promotions, the salary, incentives and loans are fundamental tools which contribute to make teaching less attractive than other professions. Curriculum and policy changes since 1994 had left teachers confused. This has tragic human consequences – a lot of teachers with a low morale (Chireshe 2014). Quality teachers, as studies have consistently shown, are teachers who are better trained, more experienced and licensed in the subject they teach. Akram and Bilal (2013) argue that good teachers always have great influence on the personality and lives of students. They have a strong grip on the subject matter

which they teach and full command on the answers which they reply to the students' investigation questions. However, some teachers change their profession and leave their jobs or institutes and join another educational workplace for their inner satisfaction or job security, leaving behind their students susceptible of failing to adopt good opportunities for quality education. To understand why teachers leave is the first step in getting them to stay. In this study we likewise view and argue that this, actually, is the beginning of the retention process in the quest to promote school longevity.

Teacher Professional Development

Teacher professional development has become a dominant theme in the quest for improving education quality (Mukeredzi 2013). Professional development has been broadly viewed as the growth of individual teachers in their profession. This understanding suggests "a long-term process that includes regular opportunities and experiences planned systematically to promote growth and development in the profession" (Villegas-Remers 2003: 12). According to Goodland (1983), the teacher is the single most important variable in school effectiveness. Maintaining an effective teaching force requires that qualified teachers regularly enter the ranks and that practicing teachers are kept abreast of changes in the profession. Teachers develop and improve their skills, pedagogically and technically, through high quality professional development programs.

To deliver on the Welsh Assembly's commitment to sustainable development all students need to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge base, values and attitudes to be active global citizens in creating a sustainable society. This is predominately addressed through developments in curricula, pedagogy and experience. To achieve this there will need to be a comprehensive programme of continuing professional development for practitioners (CPD) at all levels (Plant et al. 2008). Teacher professional development activities include pre-service programs which are generally taken prior to entry into teaching or issuance of a teacher certificate and in-service programs which are generally taken after entry into teaching (Anderson 1989).

Statement of the Problem

There are numerous factors that affect the quality of education. Central to these are school-based factors spanning largely from the quality of teachers and school management teams (SMTs) whose ultimate actions determine the quality of schools. The study sought to establish learners' views of the manner in which current school-based activities were affecting the quality of their education.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated school-based issues affecting the quality of education between two contrasting schools in terms of income and ownership. The research questions which informed the study were:

- ♦ What is the difference between what learners in independent schools and what learners in public schools say are the traits of good teachers?, and
- ♦ What is the difference between what learners in independent schools and what learners in public schools say are the current school-based factors affecting the quality of their education?

Research Objectives

The study sought to ascertain learners' views of the traits of good teachers and current school-based factors affecting the quality of their education.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A case study design that employed only qualitative methodology was adopted. Gall et al. (1999) in Castellán (2010) argue that qualitative researchers assume that social reality is constructed by the participants in it and that social reality is continuously constructed in local situations. Joubish (2011) agreed when he stated that qualitative methodology guides the researcher to a deeper understanding of the research object. The present study assessed learners' views of the manner in which current approaches by fellow learners, school managers and educators were influencing their educational attainment.

The Sample

A convenient sample of 175 learners in Grade 8 to Grade 12 from two contrasting schools participated in the study. In the independent high school (IHS) which was mainly attended by learners from more affluent families and recruiting learners from Grade 8 to Grade 12, 25 learners of each cohort: Grade 8 to Grade 12 participated, whereas in the public junior secondary school (JSS) which was mainly attended by Grade 8 to Grade 9 learners from disadvantaged nearby communities, 25 learners of each cohort: Grade 8 and Grade 9 were sampled for the study. The JSS was a no-fee paying school relying on the government's free-meal nutrition programme. This was done to check for disparities in the magnitude of the factors between unlike schools.

Instruments

Qualitative methods are often associated with the collection and analysis of written or spoken text or the direct observation of behavior (Cassel and Symon 1995). The study utilized an open-ended questionnaire administered to 147 learners to gather written responses and conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 28 learners to collect the qualitative data. Wright and Maja (2006) state that semi-structured interviews are usually employed in explorative research to identify important variables in a particular area, to formulate penetrating questions on them and to generate hypotheses for further investigation.

Reliability and Validity

Seale (1999: 266) states that the "trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability". A pilot study was conducted after inquiry audit to ensure data trustworthiness of the open-ended questionnaire and the interview schedule.

Data Analysis

Data collected was coded and analysed using the content analysis method and presented through direct and verbatim quotations of the respondents.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to administer questionnaires and conduct interviews was sought from the District office and the school principals in which schools the study was conducted. Respondents were assured of privacy and confidentiality.

RESULTS

Findings of the study are presented in this section.

Learners' Views of the Qualities of Good Teachers

Most of the learners recalled and classified what they perceived as their good teachers from individual stand points. They indicated that most of their teachers, both past and present, were not as 'good'. However, the few good teachers who have impacted positively on the lives of learners seemed to have successfully done so by embracing parental roles within their teaching jobs. Good teachers were noted to have common characteristics including listening to learners, having good communication skills, being supportive, and having patience and enthusiasm. Junior Secondary School (JSS) Learner 1 reports as follows:

They are open, humble, know how to treat teenagers, gives me and others advice on how to shape our lives; he is the first person I think of when I'm down or having a problem, he is a father figure.

Similar sentiments were echoed by learners with different ethnic, family and economic backgrounds from the high school who felt that good teachers motivate them to persist when they face challenges. In return, the learners worked both for themselves and for such teachers. Independent High School (IHS) Learner 1 acknowledged that:

They used to encourage me to pass. They were like parents to me, they would get very disappointed if I did not make an effort of trying so that was why I worked hard to make me and them feel good about what they were doing and what I was doing.

IHS Learner 2

Teachers need to be like parents, they need to tell us that we can do better. They must show

and tell us the truth considering our results. They need to be helpful. They must introduce extra-lessons for us as we don't understand much in some learning areas. They must be exciting and give us group works that we should present in class. They should be very understanding and always find a solution to the problems we have through our school work.

Classroom relations between teachers and learners were also considered, as well as the manner in which teachers progressed from one aspect to another. Good teachers were viewed as able to create a positive relationship with students. This view was supported by JSS Learner 2:

They [teachers] never continued to another topic without the whole class understood. They could relate to students and never pressured anyone and encouraged students all the way. They made everyone feel good about putting effort to learning.

Learners' Views on the Most Important Issues that Need to be Addressed in Schools

In order to have a better picture of the various issues affecting learners in their school lives, it was important to give them leeway to suggest issues which they felt deserved to be addressed at their schools so as to enhance their education. Issues which were raised by most students were categorised into purely academic issues, socio-academic issues and blended responses. These were further sub-categorised and summed up into several themes as presented below.

Purely Academic Issues

Curricular and co-curricular activities are the main activities at any school. However, schools differ greatly on the amount of time and effort they put in these activities. In the present study, curricular activities are mainly classroom-based, and these with their counterparts are thus presented.

Classroom Teaching-Learning Experiences

It was reported by the majority of learners that a lot was going on behind the scenes in the classrooms without the school managers' awareness. Most learners expressed concern over some incompetent teachers some of whom had

very poor classroom control capabilities. Interestingly, learners even went further to state some of the effects of their grievances if the responsible school authorities would ignore them. This was well captured by IHS Learner 3:

Our biggest issue is the Grade 10 Life Science teacher who teaches a few students who are in front of her. If we can't understand her methods of teaching, it's not only affecting us as students but the school and students because Grade 10s are more than willing to leave the school next year because of failing subjects they love.

As noted earlier, some learners likened the roles of teaching to that of parenting. They expected teachers to do whatever it would take to see that learners succeed, including varying teaching methods. In light of this, IHS Learner 4 indicated:

The issues that need to be addressed at the school are that not all the teachers fully put an effort to teach the students and make them understand. Most learners at school don't care about doing their projects or assignments so encouraging them to work hard might put a positive attitude in them and not just ignore and say negative things that destroy the student because he/she will have a negative attitude.

Learning Facilities

Learners from both schools were concerned that toilets that did not function well, poorly equipped laboratories and some of the broken tables negatively affected their chances of passing well. In that regard JSS Learner 3 observed:

Our biggest concern is teachers bunking classes. Teachers do not attend classes because they went to town or have exams or personal purposes. Every day after a lesson we must get homework so that we can know whether we understood or not, also the teacher will know. The teacher must not move to another topic while there are many people who don't understand the previous topic. Desks are vandalised and old. Facilities are also not up to standard. These issues really affect us.

Co-curricular Activities

Besides the time allocated for classroom-based activities, schools are also required by

policy documents to afford learners access to co-curricular activities which include sports and clubs. However, the majority of learners reported reluctance on the part of schools in implementing serious co-curricular activities. These two learners noted:

IHS Learner 5:

Well if the school operates in a way that they cater for other students' hobbies because some also want to play sports but the choice they have can't be reality because the school does not have certain sports.

JSS Learner 4:

In terms of sport if we can take sport high we can do it not just certain sports but all kinds of sport so that those who have interest can participate as well as they can because some students may not do well in books but well in that certain sport that can lead to success.

Some learners even suggested solutions to their problems. They urged their schools to recruit new teachers for challenged subjects emanating from the unprofessional conduct of some teachers or the incompetent delivery of others. Teachers and school managers were also strongly featured as brushing aside or being unresponsive to learners' grievances. IHS Learner 6 reckoned:

The important issues that need to be addressed in the school are getting new teachers for the English subject because we don't understand the people who are teaching us now. I also think teachers must hear the learners' opinions more and consider them more. Whenever the students have a query about something involving the school, no-one listens to them.

On the contrary, IHS Learner 7 complained:

Changing teachers in each and every year make us fail and we can't work with the new teachers every year or term, it affects our performance.

Social Issues

Partial Treatment

The issue of favouritism featured relatively high as a concern for learners from both schools, though high school learners appeared to have

been more concerned. Having pointed out that a calm teacher who treated all the students in the same way was a good and desirable teacher, IHS Learner 8 echoed:

The students' opinion matters. Everything should be fair to everyone. People should not get favours because they have parents that are known in the school or because of the colour of their skin.

Blended Responses

These were responses based on multiple issues. For instance, learners were concerned about disciplinary problems at their schools, the application of the code of conduct in the management of learner indiscipline as well as the attention levels given to their social problems at school. IHS Learner 9 responded:

I'll start with discipline. Our code of conduct says that there is no corporal punishment but some teachers beat us. Our tables are horrible and in each and every class there's a heater which doesn't warm the whole class because it is too small. When it is hot, water always disappear in this school and we don't go home early yet some of us get dehydrated.

The issue of discipline and drugs was especially dominant in the high school responses where most learners picked out the use of drugs by some learners around the school premises as a very problematic issue. Some learners were concerned about both the immediate and long-term effects of the use of drugs by their peers. IHS Learner 10 confirmed:

Drugs are the most important issue that needs to be addressed at my school. Children and adults at this school take drugs and some of them come into class with the smell of alcohol and drugs. Some of the teachers at this school make us not feel comfortable when they are around us.

IHS Learner 11 reiterated:

Smoking in the school yard is an important issue that needs to be addressed at school. The fact that the Grade 10s and 11s are performing poorly in English is due to the teacher's poor teaching methods. I feel that our English teacher is not enthusiastic about teaching us because he never comments about our poor performance and he never asks why it is so poor and actually trying to find a solution. I really feel that this needs to be addressed.

JSS Learner 5

Discipline! Corporal punishment is out but suspension should not be scarce. When a child is wrong he/she needs to be not only told but shown that he/she was wrong. If we can start with discipline then everything else would automatically adjust for itself.

Learners also reported cases of ill-treatment of each other and poor teaching. As JSS Learner 6 raised:

Students must treat each other well. A good relationship among the school learners because there is a lot of tension among them and they tend to judge one another instead of loving and appreciating each other for who they are. Overdose of work, we cannot concentrate on different subjects at the same time, that's why marks are low. Methods on some cases are too hard and we would prefer simpler methods.

IHS Learner 12 equally confirmed:

Some teachers don't explain when writing notes. Students must stop littering; the bins are there for a reason. Matriculants (Grade 12s) must stop trying to own other students. The English and the Life Sciences teachers must please explain their notes. I suggest we have hockey.

JSS Learner 7

Students must always respect each other, they must also respect their teachers. Teachers must have a good way of addressing themselves to the students. Teachers must always attend their lessons. Teachers must be fair. They must not have favourite students.

Respondents were also worried about the disruptive behaviour within and outside classrooms posed by some of their school or class mates, as well as poor teachers. As IHS Learner 13 responded:

Our issues include bad behaviour of some students. The students who usually don't attend lessons, students who use drugs in the school yard, love affairs going around the school, lazy students and some teachers, seniors not leading by example.

IHS Learner 14:

Most of the learners should try and change their attitude towards others so that everyone

could feel free and treat each other with respect. The prefects should also change their attitude. Also, there are a lot of learners who verbally abuse others. That should stop because words stay and even lower your confidence. Nobody wants to be called by names or be told to be dumb.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that there were several school-based issues that affected school effectiveness. Learners pointed out that educators, school managers and learners themselves all had important duties to play so as to enhance education outcomes. This finding is consistent with the argument by Lamb and Fullarton (2001) that variations in the quality of teachers and teacher effectiveness imply that there are major policy implications for schools and school systems in terms of changing the provision and quality of teacher training, taking more care in teacher selection practices, re-shaping and investing more heavily in teacher professional development, and reforming the way in which schools deploy teachers and monitor their effectiveness.

The study also found that good teachers were those who would explain the work to learners until everybody understood it. They also knew what they were employed to do which is teaching. If learners had problems they listened to them and try to help them solve their problems. Unlike others, these teachers also gave several examples relating what they taught to practice so that the majority of learners understand. This finding is consistent with Palmer (2007) who reports that making the content relevant to real life can increase a student's motivation. As such, teachers should emphasize the links between real life and school subjects, design assignments and experiments that use everyday materials and situations, and use personal anecdotes (Manik 2014). Supporting the same view, Frey and Fischer (2010) argue that tasks that are meaningful to the students' real life motivate them.

It was found that quality teachers had good listening, anger management and quality teaching skills. More so, such teachers applied proper pressure; were knowledgeable about their subjects and prepared for the lesson; they had unconditional faith in students, were very understanding and gave weak students more at-

tention and extra learning time. This is consistent with Bush's (2009) finding that despite the fact that outcomes were mostly poor in the sample where the study was conducted, most schools referred to dedicated or experienced educators as factors underpinning learner achievement. The same study also revealed that although it was not clear how effective this has been in raising learner achievement, extra lessons had been viewed as helping learners to progress and/or to 'catch-up' with their peers.

The study also established that learners viewed and expected educators to play true parental roles in schools and should be considerate of learners' performance and think of what could be done to help the learners of all levels perform at their best. Appropriate variation of teaching methodologies is just one way. This finding corroborates that by Williams and Williams (2011) who found that the role of teachers seems to be shifting from preprogrammed knowledge dispensers to instead managers of student learning and learning environment. Therefore, teachers must be empowered to exercise professional judgment in the classroom to attain clearly expressed goals. In this regard Chireshe (2014) states that teachers should be provided with training to support them in this expanded role including more time for peer interaction to share views of what is effective.

The study further found as overwhelmingly problematic in schools the issues of discipline, late lesson attendance or unjustified absence from school by educators and learners, as well as poor learning facilities. It was noted as the duty of school managers and educators to uphold discipline in schools so as to curb school underperformance. Maphosa's (2011) study concludes that a lot could be done to deal with learner indiscipline in schools by adopting preventive and proactive approaches. Such preventive approaches assist in detecting forms of indiscipline long before the manifestation of indiscipline. Ministerial Review (2004) confirms that South Africa's underperforming schools require a greater emphasis on basic management, making the organisation functional, rather than a visionary approach. Manik (2014) pointed out that this may involve ensuring regular and timely attendance by learners and educators, maintaining order and discipline in classrooms, and providing adequate resources to enable learning to take place.

The study also established that learners were not only affected by purely academic issues but also social interaction issues. There is a direct relationship between social life and academic life, and separating the two is virtually impossible. Thus, learners considered positive learner-teacher and learner-learner relationships as necessary ingredients to spice up the teaching-learning process. Similar views are confirmed by Palmer (2007) who argued that when students have positive social interactions with their peers or teachers, they will become more engaged in learning. Social interaction can occur when learners work in groups, have group discussions, group projects, and group presentations. However, the students need to be properly prepared in the skills needed to make the group operate effectively.

Learners also indicated that co-curricular activities were viewed as a very secondary, less important part of the curriculum hence were not prioritised in most schools. While learners had a wide selection of sporting codes which they desired to partake, schools only offered limited choices for such codes. However, co-curricular activities greatly influence the main curricular activities. This finding is in sync with Kariyana et al.'s (2013) study which affirms that both past and recent researches have established that while sports is viewed as an essential component of the school curriculum for the development of the holistic child, most schools currently sacrifice such time for academic activities. The authors concluded that students' involvement in co-curricular activities was viewed as beneficial as it had ripple effects on academic achievement through its impartation of skills and values necessary in learners' academic pursuits. The authors also established that participation in structured co-curricular activities enhance mental discipline in a learner.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that learners were well informed of what they desired out of schools and were also aware of how to achieve that. They were knowledgeable of the roles expected of the school management teams, educators and themselves. Therefore, the only most noble and convenient thing to do was to see all stakeholders playing their roles as required if the best could be expected as school outcomes.

The study also concluded that most educators did not use effective and varied learner-centred teaching approaches, and were biased towards certain learners. Both teachers and learners were not punctual on attending their lessons, while both sometimes unnecessarily absented themselves from school. Teachers were noted to be using limited practical examples that did not promote deep understanding. Learner indiscipline also featured strongly as a problematic issue.

The study further concluded that there were no effective school-based committees to deal with such issues as learner indiscipline and school managers were not highly effective to promote efficient school improvement efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the findings and are buttressed on the implications for school management practices.

Promoting the quality of educators should be one of the priorities of schools. This is based on the fact that high quality teachers employ measures that promote deep understanding of concepts and focus on the development of all learners. This could be achieved through recruiting and retaining effective educators, as well as their attendance to in-service professional development programmes. Educators should also find more time to interact as colleagues to share professional views of what really is 'effectual'.

Schools should develop task teams that focus strictly on the recruitment and retention of learners. If without, schools should seriously develop, implement and adhere to effective learner and employee recruitment and retention policies with articulate strategies to minimize chances of being 'manufacturing factories' for other schools as learners will be transferring to such schools probably attracted by amongst other factors, the affordable fees or despising repeating a grade at the same school, likewise poor salaries and work morale drive away teachers and non-teachers.

To assist school leaders to cope with their demanding daily responsibilities, school managers should attend professional development workshops where they share their experiences out of which the positive ought to be utilised at individual school level.

Given that learners had knowledge of the code of conduct and its implementation challenges, schools need to revise their policy documents and establish efficient School Committees to deal with learners' queries.

School committees on discipline, academic enterprise, and sports need to be religiously supervised by the SMTs or the principals because ultimately these are the determinants of the quality of the school.

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