

An Assessment of the Implementation of DoE and UNICEF Guidelines for Creating Safe, Caring and Child-friendly Schools: A South African Case Study

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ABSTRACT This paper investigated available policies in schools to complement and support the creation of safe, caring and child-friendly schools. It also investigated the school policies effectiveness in creating safe, caring and child-friendly schools. The study uses a quantitative approach with the use of self-administered and structure questionnaires to elicit information from school principals, HODs, educators, educator unions, SGBs and learners. A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted. The findings show that UNICEF designated safe, caring and child-friendly schools in South Africa, and has made substantial efforts to realize the SCCFS objectives but most basic facilities in the schools were inadequate with respect to their child-friendly status. The educational implications of the findings of the study were discussed and recommendations were also made.

INTRODUCTION

Right to basic education is a feature inherent in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of 2005. Many African countries, including South Africa in particular, which is signatory to it as a United Nation (UN) member, had earlier made commitments to domesticate such type of rights to children through provision of basic education. The CRC was seen as defensible and complementary to already set up goals. Muyila (2007) therefore opined that the charter was justified on the basis of the fact that the socio-political, economic and cultural situation of South Africa makes her unique on the continent. It becomes imperative to have an instrument for the region or continent so as to discourse the issues related to the rights of the child. Therefore, this paper is concerned by the escalation of violence in South African schools, which raises safety and security concerns.

Typically, educators are mainly to blame for violence among learners in South African schools. Harber (2001) noted that violent crime is widespread in South Africa and schools in disadvantaged areas suffer from serious problems of gang-related crime. It is a cause for concern whether or not educators' control of learners has always hinged on the use of corporal punishment. As such, the escalation of cases of learner indiscipline in schools suggests failure by educators to institute adequate alternative

disciplinary measures after corporal punishment was outlawed in schools. According to Burton and Leoschut (2012), violence in schools has garnered considerable media attention in South Africa in recent years.

The recent reports in the South African media have indicated a surge in shootings, victimization, bullying, sexual harassment, stabbings, rapes and robberies in the school premises. There is a huge outcry from educators that while corporal punishment has been abolished, nothing was left in its place, and as a result, learners have become even more ill disciplined. Prinsloo (2008) opines that the violence in school has become a serious issue that has received wide media coverage. South Africa is not left behind because there are growing concerns at an alarming rate about the issue of violence in schools, especially bullying. The increase in the rate of violence in South African schools makes the environment not safe and conducive for learning (Van Jaarsveld 2008). The convergence of many risk factors and social processes at the family, peer influence, schools and national diversities make violence to be at different levels (Osher et al. 2006; Mayer and Leone 2007).

Despite the fact that school violence is a serious problem for educators, learners and administrators worldwide, it is rarely studied cross-nationally (Denmark et al. 2005). South Africa's government strategy for Child Protection Programs is the pre-requisite that plans to articulate

its work on school learner protection as a distinct area of programmatic intervention. South African schools have been labeled unsafe places because of perennial reports of ridicule, intimidation, harassment, humiliation and violence (Xaba 2006). Some learners are fearful that they may be killed by educators or other learners who come to school armed, while others fear that they may be raped by other learners or educators (Somniso 2001; Baloyi 2002).

It is recognized, however, that learners learn most effectively when they feel safe and secure, when they are free from fear and when they learn in a safe school environment (IPT 1999; Xaba 2006; Department of Education (DoE) 2008). Mandela (1995) as cited by Baduza (2009), learners are the rock on which the future will be built, and they are greatest assets to a nation. They will be the leaders of the country, the creators of the national wealth, those who care for and protect the people.

As a result, the Government of South Africa has a special plan that needs to help make sure that the rights of all school learners are protected and implemented (Baduza 2009). Literature suggests that there are significant differences between countries. For example, based on the United Nations data on highest murder rates, for instance, countries such as Colombia, Jamaica, South Africa and Russia are ranked as more violent whereas Hong Kong, Japan and Saudi Arabia ranked amongst the less violent (Shabangu n. d.: 24). School violence has gradually becoming a global occurrence and it usually occurs among learners, between learners and staff members, than between staff member and learners. South Africa is not left behind in this alarming rate of violence in schools where knives, guns and other weapons are a part of daily school life (Maphalala 2014). Mdhluhi and Zwane (1994) indicate that a study of the history of safety in South African schools shows that the former system of Bantu Education ensured that conditions in black schools were not conducive for effective learning. According to Brunton (2003), violence in schools is often still inclusive of challenges of creating safe, caring and child-friendly schools (SCCFS) and therefore, it needs changes in the community as well as in the person in order to create a school climate that is conducive to learning. In 1999, the National Department of Education (NDoE) proposed the Tirisano, which means Call to Action, detailing South Africa's educational priorities and vi-

sion for the next five years. Tirisano is a safety strategy toward achieving a crime-free environment in South African schools, and thus a safe school environment for learners (Asmal 1999). Schools are declared to be safe environments where all learners have equal access to equal educational opportunities and are treated equally. In terms of Section 24 of the 1994 Constitution, everyone has the right to an environment that is not harmful to his or her health and wellbeing.

Pillay (2000) proposes that if learner crime is not brought under control in South Africa, this will have far-reaching consequences on the young people of South Africa who will end up as drug addicts, violent criminals and anti-social individuals, rather than being an asset to the nation and the country's economy. Christie et al. (2007) support that schooling like teaching and learning can be successfully conducted in a peaceful atmosphere and conducive environment.

Research Objectives

This paper has two objectives namely:

1. To investigate school policies that are effectively made use of for creation of safe, caring and child-friendly schools (SCCFS).
2. To find policies that are available at schools to complement and support the creation of SCCFS.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the investigation of the safe, caring and child-friendly in schools.

1. To what extent have the school policies effectively made use of creation safe, caring and child-friendly schools?
2. Which policies are available at schools to complement and support the creation of safe, caring and child-friendly schools?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study uses a quantitative approach. Hackley (2003: 9) claims that most studies are a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative research, as they are not mutually exclusive in research. Easterby-Smith et al. (2002: 42) consider quantitative research to be fast, economical and

of significant relevance when policy decisions need to be made, but warn that it might be rigid and artificial due to the structured nature of questionnaires.

Research Design

From a methodological point of view (Babbie and Mouton 2002), descriptive research design is used as a plan on how the researcher intends to conduct the study. This study employs a descriptive survey design, which captured quantitative approaches.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

This study has used both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through questionnaires from school principals, HODs, educators, educator unions, SGBs and learners. This multi-paradigmatic focus is ideally suited to the multi-paradigmatic nature of coaching. Secondary data was collected from the literature such as government policies, journal articles, books, newspapers and school circulars.

Questionnaires

The questionnaire was developed for the purpose of assessing the implementation of the SCCFS policy and practices. A questionnaire was used to collect data from participants regarding how they viewed the perceptions of school principals, School Governing Bodies (SGBs), educators' unions, Learner Representative Councils (LRCs), Head of Departments (HODs) and educators to manage violence in schools.

Sample

The sample for this study comprises 24 secondary schools in the education district of Limpopo using the convenience sampling method to randomly select secondary schools in Vhembe. The sampling in this paper included school principals, Head of Departments (school based), educators, School Governing Bodies members, educators' union and learners within Vhembe District, so that they could provide information on how safe, caring and child-friendly schools could be produced. The idea of choosing convenience sampling was based on the following:

- (a) Accessibility to the researcher
- (b) Because the researcher worked with some school principals within the same circuit
- (c) Some schools were nearer to where the researcher was conducting the research
- (d) The members of the target population were homogeneous
- (e) Their schools were identified by the DoE as needing urgent attention for violence in schools in 2007
- (f) Another point was that they would not refuse the interview (Whitley 2001)
- (g) It also saved time, money and effort

Data Analysis

As indicated above that quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed in this paper, therefore the analysis also adhered to these aspects. The descriptive statistics of percentages were used to analyze the quantitative data.

Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was validated by given it to the experts in the field of education leadership and management. Their comments were used to amend the questionnaire. The reliability was measured using Cronbach alpha.

RESULTS

Demographics

In this paper, the presentation of data analysis reveals that there were more male than female participants who took part in the study, as 52 (71%) of the participants were males and 21 (29%) of them were females. Majority (42%) of the participants were in the age group of 40-49 years, 19 (26%) of them were aged 50-55 years, 9 (12%) of the participants who took part in the study were 20-29 years old, 6 (8%) of the participants were in the age group of 30-39 years and the rest (12%) were those in the age group of above 56 years (Table 1). The findings of the analysis show that there were many middle aged participants compared to the experienced educators in the study. Nearly half (49%) of the participants were holding university degrees, 13 (18%) of the participants were holding of Diploma certificates, 12 (16%) were grade 12 certifi-

cates holders, 11 (15%) were holding Master's Degrees and the rest (3%) had ordinary certificates of education. None of the participants who participated in the study had other academic qualifications.

Table 1: Analysis of participants from demographic data

Biographical variables	Description of variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	21	29
	Male	52	71
Age	20–29 years	9	12
	30–39 years	6	8
	40–49 years	31	42
	50–55 years	19	26
Academic Qualifications	56 years and over	9	12
	Grade 12	12	16
	Education Certificate/ Diploma	13	18
	Undergraduate Degree	36	49
	Master's	11	15
	Other	2	3

Source: Field work (2016)

Research Question 1: To what extent have the school policies effectively made use of creation of safe, caring and child-friendly schools?

The findings reveal that 67 (85%) participants indicated that their schools have a policy that helps them deal fairly with violence. Hence, 12 (15%) of participants disagreed with the statement. From the second statement, the question arises concerning the school policy on how to deal with the sexual harassment (Table 2). The results indicated that 54 (68.3%) participants supported an idea that the school has a policy on how to deal with the sexual harassment. Hence, 25 (31.6%) participants indicated that there is no such policy in schools. It is most important for this paper that 72 (92%) participants indicated that the code of conduct of learners in their schools was being practised, whereas only 7.6 percent disagreed. When considering policy on dealing with bullying in schools, the overall perception was high at 56 (71.7%), indicating that the majority of secondary schools have policies that deal with bullying of learners in their schools. Here, few participants (28.1%) disagreed that there was no bullying policy in their schools. As for the statement about parent involvement in maintaining safety in schools,

52 (66.6%) participants emphasized that parents should be engaged in this, and only 33.2 percent of participants disagreed with the statement.

Table 2: Participants' responses regarding effective policy in schools

Assessment criteria	Agree		Disagree	
	n	%	n	%
The school has a policy to help educators to deal fairly with violence in the school.	67	85.0	12	15.2
The school has a policy on how to deal with the sexual harassment.	54	68.3	25	31.6
There is a code of conduct about how the school expects learners to behave.	72	92.3	6	7.6
The school has a policy on how to deal with bullying.	56	71.7	22	28.1
The school has a policy that encourages parents to be involved in school safety and security.	52	66.6	26	33.2

Research Question 2: Which policies are available at schools to complement and support the creation of safe, caring and child-friendly schools?

In order to get perceptions with regards to support the creation of safe, caring and child-friendly schools the results of this study presented using themes and frequency tables below. What becomes clear from Table 3 is that 71 (49.3%) participants claim that educators support learners who are in distress, whereas 7 (4.9%) disagree with the statement. The results further indicated that 59 (40.9%) of the participants agreed that the parents are interested in supporting the school as well as its governance for the purpose of conducive for teaching and learning.

Table 3: Participants' responses regarding to provide support to the creation of safe, caring and child-friendly schools

Assessment criteria	Agree		Disagree	
	n	%	n	%
Educators support learners who are in distress.	71	49.3	7	4.9
Parents are interested in supporting the school and its governance.	59	40.9	20	13.9

ing, while 13.7 percent of the participants disagreed with the statement.

DISCUSSION

The general aim of this paper is to better understand how schools function as sites for learner's services, applying the SCCFS program. From demographic data the presentation of data analysis revealed that there were more male than female participants who took part in the study. The paper also sought to establish the way in which educators and learners socially contributed in the implementation of the SCCFS program in schools. The results of this paper have shown that secondary school learners in South Africa experienced high levels of violence in schools. The participants in this study ranged from 20 to above 56 years. Nearly half (42%) of the participants took part to this study. The findings of the analysis also show that there were many middle age participants compared to the experienced educators in the study. The discussion part of this paper is presented as two themes as discussed below.

The School Policies that Make Effective Use of Creation of Safe, Caring and Child-friendly Schools

When the responses were analyzed, it was determined that a high percentage of participants (85%) agreed that the school has a policy to help educators deal fairly with violence in schools, which is consistent with past research (Bauman 2010). Table 3 indicates that ninety-two of participants in this paper had a code of conduct about how the school expects learners to behave. This finding is consistent with the Code of Conduct released by South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996). A code of conduct of learners' informs learners the way in which they should conduct themselves at school in preparation for their conduct and safety in schools and society. In general, the participants in this paper indicated that they had knowledge on how safety and security should be implemented in schools, but some indicated to be uncertain. Bailey (2002) argues that school safety requires a broad knowledge by the entire community, educators, learners, parents, law enforcement and businesses people to maintain good discipline in schools.

Complement and Support School Policies for Creation of Safe, Caring and Child-friendly Schools

In this study, the participants were asked whether educators support learners who are in distress. Therefore, the relevant data about the response frequencies of participants was reported. The objective of Table 3 was to get participants' perceptions with regard to support for the creation of safe, caring and child-friendly schools. The results presented using themes and frequency tables. What becomes clear from the Table 3 is that 71 (49.3%) participants claim that educators support learners who are in distress. Again, the participants were asked whether parents are interested in supporting the school and its governance. The findings of the present study found that parent participation varied in different ways.

According to Table 3, the findings reveal that 59 (40.9%) participants agreed that the parents are interested in supporting the school as well as its governance for the purpose of conducive teaching and learning. This is consistent to Desforges (2003), who claims that it is widely recognized that if pupils were to maximize their potential from schooling, they would need the full support from their parents. He also goes further showing that parental involvement is a catch-all term for many different activities including at home good parenting, helping with homework, talking to educators, attending school functions, to taking part in school governance.

Implications of the Study

Despite the limitations of research, the researcher believes that the findings have several implications for this study. It is clear from the five distinct themes in the findings that policy is inherent in SCCFS in schools. The findings have at least three implications. Firstly, effective school policies create safe, caring and child-friendly in schools. Secondly, policies complement and support creating safe, caring and child-friendly in schools. Thirdly, policies and practices mediate the social construction and reconstruction in schools. An effective school policy creates an optimal setting for teaching and learning. An effective school policy also is a product of collective effort.

The policy looks at strategies to improve effective teaching and learning examines four of its major components of caring relationships, academic environment, structure and safety, and participatory learning. An effective policy is built upon caring relationships among all learners, educators, parents and community members. It is important that there is a need to push for understanding policies that addresses the widespread and prevailing incidence of violence against learners and educators. Securing and promoting a learner's fundamental rights to have respect for human dignity, physical and psychological integrity through the prevention of all forms of violence, it is essential for promoting the full set of learner rights. Strategies to prevent and respond to violence must therefore adopt a learner rather than a welfare approach. School fulfills an important role, but cannot provide the complexity of interaction that can be provided by communities. Schools and communities should work together to support the SCCFS and to create an environment that welcomes and nurtures families.

It is in the best interest of all South African schools to support the SCCFS, policy as the importance of parent's roles in their children's education. The most particularly interesting in mediated constructions to normalize within the context of the everyday practices of incidents in South African schools is the social reconstructions. In other words, the incidents that happen everyday life in school environment focuses on creating, experiential and engaging activities for learners.

CONCLUSION

The DoE and UNICEF designated safe, caring and child-friendly schools in South Africa have made substantial effort to realize the SCCFS objectives, but there is need for improvement since a SCCFS model is an ideal. There is, however, no indication of schools involvement in these efforts to make the school safe, caring and child-friendly. Therefore, this paper assessed the DoE and UNICEF Child Friendly School initiative program in South Africa. The following conclusions were made on the basis of the empirical findings of this paper. These results make a number of contributions to future evaluation and monitoring efforts of the SCCFS initiative and the field of comparative policy and

practice more generally. First, they provide initial empirical support that a subset of items can be used to create valid and reliable cross-national indicators of a learner's perceptions of school quality. This study adds to the field of school violence by providing data on the frequency and impact in a sample of South Africa learners in schools. Results also indicate that school violence was associated with psychological distress amongst the learners in sample. Evidence based school violence prevention programs offer some promise in reducing incidences of school violence in the future.

Based on the study findings from this paper, the study concluded that educators' attitude on provision of a safe, caring and child-friendly school environment was low, and that educators liked the idea of a safe, caring and child-friendly school approach. It was also concluded that educators were not motivated enough to implement a safe, caring and child-friendly school approach in their schools. The study further concluded that the child-friendly school approach was not easy in this district, as it was demanding to implement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- The Provincial Department of Education (PDoE) in each province should develop safe and supportive programs in all schools.
- The PDoE and all districts should screen assessment procedures to identify the causes of violence in schools.
- The PDoE and all districts should establish trained school safety teams in all schools.
- The National Department of Education should improve policies that limit exposure to media violence among learners and educators.
- In all South African schools there should be a security officer (SSO), who is appointed by the PDoE.

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