

SCHOOL SAFETY AS A MANAGEMENT IMPERATIVE TO LEARNER ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Buyisani Dube¹, Duduzile Nkomo², Sikhangele Mcelelwa³ and Rudo Gumbo⁴

¹Department of Educational Administration, Leadership & Management, BA ISAGO University

²Department of Psychology, Counselling and Special & Inclusive Education, BA ISAGO University

^{3,4}Department of Basic Education and Childhood, BA ISAGO University

<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2024.0639>

ABSTRACT

School management has a crucial role to play to ensure schools become an epicenter of academic excellence and positive behaviour development. School safety stands out as one of the priorities that school managers need to address to enhance teaching and learning in schools. This study aimed to examine school safety as a management imperative to learner academic achievement in secondary schools of Gaborone, Botswana. The study was coached within the qualitative approach of the constructivist paradigm. Population of study consisted of school principals, members of the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with rich information regarding school safety in schools. Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted with 3 school principals and 3 members of the PTA. Focus group interviews were administered with 6 teachers. Data was analysed thematically. The study established that school principals have the capacity to facilitate school safety but existing policy needs to be stream lined with shifting trends in the education system. The study recommends that policy reforms anchored on an inclusive agenda should be made to enable all stakeholders to contribute effectively to the creation of safe school environments.

Keywords: Academic Achievement, School Safety, School Management, Learner Academic Achievement, Functional Schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

School management has a crucial role to play to ensure schools become an epicenter of academic excellence and positive behaviour development. School safety stands out as one of the priorities that school managers need to address to enhance teaching and learning in schools. The safety and security matters in schools create positive perceptions for productive curriculum delivery. Safe schools are conceived as places where structured learning is free from internal, external and environmental threats (Mubita, 2021). School safety implies all measures and practices that are considered to realise the life, health and integrity of school personnel (Devon, 2021). The school environments should promote the safety and well-being of learners, teachers and the entire staff complement that ensure effective operation of schools. There has to be rules and norms that reinforce the safety of both the physical and emotional aspects of school life (Thapa et al. 2013). This means that the structural, psychical and social features of the school environment must sustain and support a secure educational context. The goal is to shield learners and teachers from any possible danger and harm that might impede good educational practices.

Internal threats to school safety include issues of bullying, gang recruiting, physical punishment, verbal harassment and various forms of discrimination (Mubita, 2021). Kibriya et a (2018)

observes that school gender-based violence, and sexual abuse have severe ramifications for students' academic performance. In the same note, the psychosocial and psychological issues associated with school violence tend to impact the girl child more compared to boys (UNESCO, 2017). External threats to school safety cover instances such as attacks on learners on their way to and from school, negative ideological spew on learning environments, violent attacks from insurgent political groups and uncooperative community (USAID, 2016).

Unsafe school environments have an impact on learners' participation, motivation, and attendance in class (Muhlhausen, 2020). Learners that attend unsafe schools may occasionally experience mental health issues like low self-esteem, depression and difficulty focusing (Barrett et al., 2012). According to UNESCO (2017), bullying, verbal abuse and sexual violence are frequently cited as reasons for low motivation, absenteeism and dropout in schools. Similarly (Devon, 2021), contends that unsafe schools have a negative effect on learning outcomes and school enrolment. The associated effects of unsafe schools might be observed in falling enrolment rates, increased levels of learner distraction in class activities and depressed academic achievement. According to a recent meta-analysis study, all types of childhood violence have a significant negative impact on a range of educational outcomes, such as school dropout/graduation, academic achievement, and grade retention (Fry et al., 2018; Gopal & Collings, 2017). Environmental threats to safe schools encompass public health epidemics and disaster that damage school infrastructure and disturb the provision of educational services (USAID, 2016). A lot of instruction time is often lost when schools are vandalized, destroyed or employed as safe centres during times of trouble. After the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, schools and colleges in worse affected areas were forced to close down for more than a month, causing more than two million children to stay out of education (Ireland, 2016). This has the effect of triggering low motivation, anxiety and low academic performance as learners learn in unsafe and uncomfortable environments (Kibriya et al., 2018).

The creation of safe schools has historically provided challenges to school management. This has especially been experienced in developing countries where resource constraints have bedeviled the education sector (Devon, 2021). Schools are designed to be learning organisations which promote effective and efficient development of knowledge, skills and attitudes of learners. This thrust is however, hindered by the consequences of the destructive human behaviours and natural disasters. In some instances, schools are faced with unforeseen hazards such as violence and outbreaks of fire and floods (Lukumon et al., 2018). These are daunting challenges to management. The tendency is for management teams to rely on the national government and related departments to provide guidance and support when such eventualities transpire. The broader financial implications demand an even wider financial base to mitigate the problems, which further call upon school managers to exercise their negotiation competencies to harness the services of the Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs).

Creating a safe school environment involves a holistic focus on the school (Muhlhausen, 2020). This entails that school management be able to rally all key stakeholders to a commitment to the creation of safe and healthy schools. The process inherently requires a lot of time and effort to deliver the desired spirit and practical compliance. The social, psychosocial and structural factors of organisation building have to be harmonized to achieve the anticipated school climate that is supportive to effective teaching and learning. This refers to a climate that avoids discrimination, enhances self-esteem, breeds co-operation, cultural tolerance and connects school to community. The school should therefore create psychosocial conditions in which developing an awareness of justice and rights can be taught through pointing out injustice and then encouraging children to use

reasoning and decision making (Muhlhausen, 2020). This demands that those in management should be well versed with policies and procedures that guide service and practices in the education system.

Managing school safety can be a traumatic experience. It involves executing such tasks as planning, controlling, leading, organising, in such areas as relating to learners, staff, teaching, curriculum, physical facilities, finance and school community affairs. They have to grapple with issues pertaining to violence prevention and intervention, staff training and crisis management. According to Bipath (2017), most school managers in South Africa draft school safety policies without considering a baseline from the Department of Education. Schools tend to be influenced by conditions or situations unravelling in their local environment and do not take cognisance of the provisions of the Education Act. In Botswana, The National Health Policy is driven by the slogan, “*Towards a Healthier Botswana*” which acknowledges that the provision of health services goes beyond merely curing the sick, to promoting health lifestyles in order to prevent diseases and ill-conditions for all people living in the country (Ministry of Health, 2012). In addition, school health assessments are conducted to establish the health conditions of learners for appropriate subsequent interventions. This also involved environmental health assessment which focuses on the state of infrastructure, school grounds, ablution facilities and catering services for effective teaching and learning (Shaibu & Phaladze, 2010). These stated provisions provide background for school management, through Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and other school management bodies to adopt a code of conduct after consultation with learners, teachers and parents, for the effective governance of schools. However, they are sometimes unable to do this owing to lack of safety workshops, capacity building and safety monitoring system from the government. The development of safe schools is also marred by negative attitudes of school personnel such as teachers, lack of situation specific policies, fear of reprisal from the offenders, delayed response from the police, lack of motivation and requisite skills from some stakeholders (Bipath, 2017). School management should have a strategy to deal with school safety problems, and as such contribute to a large extent to the safety solutions that prevail in schools. However, school safety is everyone's business. Ideally, the best safety effort should involve all aspects of a school, including classroom situations, school services and the school climate, which logically surpasses the natural capacities of the usually few members of the school management committee. The physical environment of a school or learning space, including its surrounding neighborhood, is crucial to learners' safety and security. This means that the school administrators should work hard to enlist the services of stakeholders, including the community, as these are significant in creating safe schools (Ishimaru, 2017). Implied in this case, is that the nature and character of the community around the school are pivotal to school safety. The general level of education, pre-disposition to crime, level of poverty and cultural orientations shape the safety concerns of schools (Wang, Chen, Zhang & Oudekerk, 2020). These coalesce to create a torrid time for school management as they have to survey a plethora of factors in the environment to understand the nature of problems, their causes and possible ways to solve them. As a way to address safety hitches, compelling responses can be adopted such as the use of metal detectors, addition of security personnel and zero-tolerance to possession of dangerous weapons (Wang et al, 2020). Softer options may involve offering counselling services, instituting conflict-resolution programmes, and creating better communication between the school and home.

To establish and increase school safety, perimeter walls or fences should be built to protect learners and teachers from harmful outside influences, such as drug peddling, sexual abuse, stereotyping, harassment and physical violence. Constant supervision of the school and school yard is usually necessary. Extensive school yards with many unprotected areas and buildings may demand more staff and other forms of security measures. These might involve alarm systems or emergency notification mechanisms. The idea is to alert learners and teachers to an ongoing emergency (Çalık, et al, 2018). According to Mubita (2021), safe schools are aware of learners' problems, adopt effective instructional methods and maintain a culture of adequate supply of physical resources. They exercise loving kindness and respect for all individuals within and outside the school environs. This stance may be derived from Afrocentric epistemologies which have an indelible influence on human relations and learning programmes. Similarly, some factors that have been found to relate with student achievement include a peaceful learning climate, teachers that foster productive behaviours and students' perceptions about the safety of their schools (Gopal & Collings, 2017).

McGuire (2017) posits that school administrators must create a school violence action plan. This action plan is vital to establish a sense of security for learners and staff members. It functions as a blue print or conceptual mind mapping regarding actions to implement in the event of a disruptive incident being experienced. The conviction that in the case of a violent incident there would be adults in charge who know what to do is reassuring for all. Action plans should include a signal to everyone that a crisis is occurring, the selection of a central command post, and instructions on where to seek shelter (Mubita, 2021). Lester, Lawrence & Ward, (2017) believe that all forms of rule violations should be addressed with speed. Teachers and those in positions of responsibility should not ignore even minor rule violations. Offenders usually keep testing situations, and would continue to violate rules when they notice that they easily get away with disrespecting them. Punishing every violation stops the gradual acceptance of unacceptable behavior. A safe school environment develops as soon as learners realise the predictability of teachers in ensuring that bad behaviours are curbed or nipped in the bud (Lester, et al, 2017). Therefore, the school system has to train sufficient personnel to create a supportive school environment (Nickerson, 2019). This can be ensured by noticing violations timely and denouncing such obstructions categorically. The school community should support and be involved in preventing all forms of violence and bad behaviour at school. The youth and adults in the school community must act as really authority figures and role models (Çalık, Tabak, & Tabak, 2018)). They should be incorporated in the running of crime prevention programmes so that the complimentary role of school and community is made manifest in the life of schools. Parents should not condone bad behaviour of their children and ensure that dangerous weapons, such as guns are secured at all times. It is in this regard, therefore, having traced the background to the problem, that the study examined school safety as a management imperative to learner academic achievement in secondary schools of Gaborone, Botswana

Theoretical framework

This study was coached within the systems theory that was proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968) in his General Systems Theory. Systems theory is a multidisciplinary theory that is useful in many systems involving society, nature, economy, politics, psychology and scientific fields. It works also as a framework to understand a phenomenon from a holistic approach (Njoki, 2018).

The system has elements that are rationally and mutually connected towards a shared purpose. The system is conceived as set of related parts or objects that are interlinked in a form of regular interdependence. The components of a system can comprise of people, processes and products. Carmody-Bubb (2020) presents a system as constituting of inputs, process and outputs and outcomes. The inputs relate to things or elements feed into the system for services and activities to run. This is the part that drives the system, and has itself transformed to produce system results. The nature and quality of inputs and processes determine the quality of products. A system has an environment in which it operates (Nickerson, 2019). This environment can be internal and external. Internal environment refers to the conditions within the organisation, such as the kind of relationships of individuals, equipment used, leadership styles adopted, resources used and the dynamics of communication. External environment focuses on the conditions that influence functions of an organisation from the outside spaces. This part of an organisation includes the local community, business suppliers, funders and service partners.

The school organisation is viewed as a system, and as such has discrete components that work in a coordinated way. There are inputs, processes and outputs that need to be considered for effective running of schools. The nature and quality of school supplies as well as the way in which activities are performed determine the health and academic achievement of learners (Njoki, 2018). The state of the internal and external environment has a broader influence on the condition of schools. Provision of resources such as study materials, school personnel and the status of their training, nature of the built infrastructure, the use of institutional grounds and teaching and learning approaches used shape the way in which schools are considered safe and health for quality teaching and learning. The behaviour of the school community exerts much influence on school safety (Hochfeld, Schmid, Errington & Omar, 2022). A behaved community tends to instill good personalities to children, which subsequently translates to a disciplined learner population (Ishimaru, 2017). Similarly, communities experiencing high rates of crime, poverty, abuse and violence are bound to implant bad behaviours at school. School management, therefore has a greater task to influence the culture of teaching and learning in schools, and this can be achieved through proper management of the internal and external environments, and related services and practices.

Purpose of the study

This study aimed to examine school safety as a management imperative for learner academic achievement, with a view to establish best possible strategies to be adopted to create safe schools in Gaborone, Botswana. Based on the purpose of the study, the following subsidiary objectives were developed:

- To expose threats to school safety that are encountered in secondary schools of Gaborone
- To explore the impact of school safety on the academic performance of secondary school learners in Gaborone
- To examine challenges that school management experiences in creating school safety in secondary schools of Gaborone

2. METHODOLOGY

Research methodology relates to the systematic way of delivering interventions to a problematic situation (Alok, 2017). Research methodology is not limited to research methods but exceeds this scope to include the logic behind the selection of methods and procedures (Usha, Shahabuddin, Rajarathnam, Gokulanachiyar & Chavan, 2022). It encompasses the entire process from a consideration of the participants and decisions regarding the collection of data and the manner in which it is gathered, handled and reported. This study is coached within the interpretivism paradigm. This paradigm suited this study as it regards knowledge as being created and recreated along the continuum of human interaction with themselves and their environment. This worldview presents reality as subjective and residing in the minds of participants in their natural settings (Alok, 2017). It is through this lens that a single instance or occurrence may receive diverse meanings and interpretations. Consequently, this philosophical attitude is critical in examining school safety as a management imperative in secondary schools in Gaborone.

Exploratory case study design was used in this study. This was guided by the objective to provide greater insights and understanding pertaining to the phenomenon under study (Elman, Gerring & Mahoney, 2020). The research process was flexible, with a small sample used to gather data for qualitative analysis. The research thrust was to capture the views and perceptions of participants as they enacted their lived experiences. The exploratory case study design of the qualitative approach boasts of providing a blue print or framework for conducting research that probes into the contextual practices and interpretations.

Population of study consisted of school principals, members of the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with rich information regarding school safety in schools. This technique for selecting participants was considered appropriate because the focus was not to generate a representative sample to generalize findings, but to solicit versatile data that clearly illuminates the circumstances in the study setting. Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted with 3 school principals and 3 members of the PTA, while focus group interviews were administered with 6 teachers.

The researchers sought for permission to conduct the study from the targeted participants. Their consent to partake in the study was secured through, initially contacting them by telephone and then presenting them with consent forms to sign. They were briefed about the purpose of the study and convinced that their contributions would be used only for this study. We also established a mutually agreed verbal consensus that the outcomes of the study were to be availed to them prior to the publication of the report. This was to serve as a measure to validate the results through member-checking as a strategy to verify the authenticity of the results. The interview guides were built using semi-structured interview items. These provided participants the latitude to fully offer detailed or extended information on the practices of those in management, the impact of school safety, challenges experienced by management and possible strategies to develop safe schools. The instruments for data collection were piloted with participants who were not part of this study to test their suitability. Each face-to-face individual interview was carried out in 15 minutes time, and the group interview was allocated an hour to run. Both sessions were conducted outside school regulation time to avoid disturbing the school sessions. The proceedings of data collection interviews were recorded using a smart phone with some non-verbal cues noted in our diaries.

Data was analysed thematically based on the Lewis and Harper (2003) framework. This involved the activities of data transcription, reading and re-reading data to ascertain its meaning. The patterns emanating from the data were derived and were used to develop themes. Information related to the developed themes was collated. The themes were cleaned and labelled appropriately

based the contained information. An effort was made to rid the themes of overlapping information and “*all embracing titles*”. The reporting of findings was done using simple and easy-to-understand language. Verbatim excerpts or direct statements from participants were used to support the outcomes of the study. Participants were referred to by the codes that were given to them based on the order which was established from the sequence of the interview process. The 3 school principals were coded from SP1 to SP3; members of the PTA were coded from PTA1 to PTA3 and focus group was tagged as FGI. This coding reflected the position of participants during the interviews.

3. RESULTS

The results of this study are organized into four thematic areas inclusive of threats to school safety, impact of unsafe school environments on learning, school management challenges in creating school safety and best possible strategies for adoption to enhance school safety.

Threats to school safety

The study revealed that there are internal and external factors that contribute to influence school safety. The internal environment of the school has a strong bearing in shaping the psychosocial and physical conditions that mirror the entire teaching and learning life. The interactions among learners, staff members and their environment define the state of school safety. This emerged in this study, where bullying was observed as a major contributor of unsafe environment at school. This comes in various forms such as the “torture” or intimidation that is usually meted on new students enrolled at school. Older and bigger students also frequently harass younger students or those that are perceived to have small body frames and reserved personalities. On bullying, SP3 said that “*at my school, bullying is rife and culprits do a lot of things such as beating up others, confiscating their possessions, mocking and preventing them from accessing some school services*”. FGD noted that bullies “*despite the existence of a schools learners’ feeding programme, we have learners that still snatch away the rations of their colleagues. They may steal serving plates from other learners or even destroy them*”. Bullies used a lot of derogatory names or labels to demean other learners. PTA 3 indicated that “*we handle a lot of cases where learners are guilty of verbal harassment; calling others names, such as ‘you look like a pig or you are fatty boom-boom’*”. The body shaming of learners, especially girls was most common among learners, and tended to be instigated by boys. Learners with some unique or peculiar behaviour were also targeted for mockery. This affected individuals such as girls known not to have boyfriends and boys that have known history to fail to win the hearts of their female counterparts. This situation tended to create an uncomfortable space for regular school attendance and effective academic engagement.

The study exposed physical punishment to be one of the contributors of unsafe school environment. This was noted as a silent element of teaching and learning in schools. Teachers covertly executed corporal punishment despite the ministerial policy which outlawed this practice. The policy stipulated that any infliction of physical punishment should be done with the approval of the school principal and also recorded in the school incident register. In practice, this was not the case, as teachers continued to use the cane and to spank learners during lessons and some school errands. SP 2 said “*the policy categorically forbids teachers to beat learners, and anyone who violates that policy does so at his/her own peril, I will not protect the culprit*”. However, results from FGD 1, showed that teachers do physically punish learners “*yes, there are times where we do a light whack to ensure learners concentrate and participate in class*”. The study further

revealed that physical punishment should not be an option as there are other effective forms of punishment such as deprivation of rights, detention and assignment of duties. PTA 1 suggested that the use of physical punishment creates a culture of violence in learners and the development of group, and sub-cultures. These contribute to unsafe schools. He added that *“it cultivates the practice of gang recruitment, where learners form identity groups based on some defined kinds of behaviour”*. The groups tend to develop a kind of social life which may impact school business in ways like school-based violence and sexual abuse.

External threats to school safety cover instances that are not vested within the confines of the physical school boundary. These influence the school from the periphery into the centre. The study established that some learners experience obstacles that impede their free movement from home to school and back. Some learners have individuals that pounce on them as they travel to school or while they walk to their places of residence. This particularly affects girls the most, who may have female suitors who way lay them on the way, at times to force them into accepting their sexual advances. Findings from FDG1 revealed that *“some boys wait to pounce on unsuspecting or unsuspecting girls whom they hope to influence to enter into sexual relationships”*. PTA 2 added that *“while this trend of learners getting attacked on the way to and from home is not very rife here in town, it is however real, we have evidence of reported cases to that effect”*. SP 2 noted that *“a majority of cases involve criminal elements that rob learners of their valuables such as satchels, cellphones, watches and calculators”*. The nature of the community with regard to acculturation stance of its members is also vital. The community of the school that has less value for education tends to react negatively to schooling as well as school activities. This attitude was reflected in this study, where unruly behaviour of some boys was recorded. SP1 confirmed this when she said that *“we have received a lot of bad reports of learners that have been robbed, beaten up or have their rented houses broken into for sinister motives”*. The effect of such acts of thuggery create a threatening environment to learners which deeply demotivates them, and ultimately impairs school progress.

Impact of unsafe school environments on learning

Unsafe school environments are a problem to both learners and staff members. Learners that attend unsafe schools may occasionally experience mental health issues like low self-esteem, depression and difficulty focusing. Learners in unproductive school settings spend a lot of time pondering ways to survive rather than expending energies grappling with strategies to master educational content. This was substantiated by sentiments from FGD1 which indicated that *“learners that feel intimidated develop signs of low self-esteem, they may also encounter depression when they become powerless about their situation”*. This state of affairs is contrary to the normative view, wherein learners should feel cared for, loved and supported to perform well in their studies. The withdrawal of this needed support also works to demotivate learners. In addition, bullying and other negative behavioural practices impact badly on learner performance. On this note, Kibriya et al., (2018) observe that bullying, verbal abuse and sexual violence are frequently cited as reasons for low motivation, absenteeism and dropout in schools. PTA 2 revealed that *“we have learners whose parents have transferred them to other schools because they were being harassed by their counterparts. FGD1 cited a case “where a group of girls would camp in the toilet, and sexually abuse other weaker learners when visiting the ablution...”*. Instances of this nature cause discomfort to learners as the school environment is rendered uncondusive to learning. The outcome may be a drop in the rate of learner academic achievement or school dropout.

The study showed that environmental threats to safe schools encompass public health epidemics and disasters that damage school infrastructure. The covid-19 pandemic is one such unfortunate situation which caused massive human casualties and disruptions in school operations. SP 3 and FGD 1 reiterated that *“the covid-19 pandemic disrupted teaching time, many learners failed to catch up even when the pandemic receded”*. In addition, PTA 3 revealed that *“school budgets were put in disarray, it became difficult to account for money that was collected and owed to schools, the situation just became chaotic”*. Unsafe school environment disrupts instructional processes. This may involve total stoppage of teaching and learning activities or interrupting normal schedules such that it becomes difficult to achieve the goals of education. The environment that is affected, for example, by pollution and loud noise may be harmful to human health. Learners tend to be susceptible to diseases and medical conditions which cause them to make frequent visits to health institutions, and subsequently lose out in their studies due to continued absenteeism.

School management challenges in creating school safety

School management is faced with challenges which work to beset school safety. The setbacks may occur within or outside the school environment. Staff members may work as individuals or collude with others in contributing to unsafe schools. Destructive human behaviours and actions may show ugly faces when staff members fail to abide by standing code of conduct such as using insulting, divisive and demeaning words at the work place. SP 2 revealed that *“we have staff members that claim to be untouchable, associate their deployment to schools with higher and influential offices, such people create management headaches”*. This was supported by sentiments from FG1 that *“some union activists have high appetite to challenge the authority and decisions of school management. They are quick to attach issues of policy, regulations and rights to management decisions”*. The effect of this behaviour is the development of open confrontation and violation of instruction, which ultimately develops an unsafe environment for effective school functioning. It is ideal that the school climate should be postured in such a way that avoids unnecessary fights, breeds co-operation, advances tolerance and celebrates diversity among staff members.

Natural hazards and disasters are clear causes of unsafe schools. These usually operate beyond human understanding and ability. However, as human beings, we are invited to be adept in employing strategies to mitigate the negative consequences of those mishaps. The Covid-19 pandemic and flooding from cyclone induced rainfall are examples in the minds of many people. PTA 1 said that *“covid-19 pandemic rendered school settings very unsafe, and this resulted in massive school closures and shift systems, where school attendance was staggered to reduce the numbers of learners at school”*. This was precipitated by a need to contain the rapid transmission of the dreaded flu-like disease that was spread through contact and keeping very close distances to each other. SP 2 indicated that *“we have experienced regular cyclones, but these have not posed a great threat, serve for minor damages to roof tops of buildings, electricity lines and road ways”*. The study noted that the schools under study had not been affected by such hazards as political violence and outbreaks of fire.

School safety is everyone’s business. It requires a holistic approach to implement successfully. The efforts of all stakeholders have to be infused in the adopted strategy to ensure a collective stance is deployed in the process. This is what eludes most school administrators. It appears difficult to strike a productive relationship between schools and the community. On this point, PTA 3 said *“as we double as both community members and part of school management, we struggle to ensure a smart working relationship is established between schools and communities”*.

The two institutions should have a symbiotic operational plan. This should result in a co-produced code of conduct, emanating from consultation with key stakeholders such as learners, teachers, parents and local governing bodies. To achieve this desired end, school management has to commit ample time and elusive financial resources. There has to be awareness activities to conscientise and orient people on the need for unity of purpose in creating safe schools. This is admittedly, not an easy task for school management. Findings from FGD1 indicated that “*some communities have deep seated culture of violence, anti-school rhetoric and behaviours that do not support collective good*”.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that there are internal and external environmental conditions that influence school safety. Threats to school safety include behaviours such as bullying, intimidation, body shaming, individuals that harass learners on their way to and from school. Unsafe schools negatively impact learner education as such learners are striped of motivation, self-esteem, commitment and dedication to school activities. The initial self-efficacy expectation of learners is altered. Learners need to be in loving and supportive spaces that help to bring the best out of them. Natural hazards and pandemics, in the mold of the Covid-19 pandemic can impact education profusely when school practices are either halted or disrupted. School management is faced with challenges which hinge on disruptive behaviours of internal staff members and those residing within the school community. It is at times difficult for those managing schools to establish productive working relationships between schools and the local community. To succeed on this, a lot of time and financial resources may have to be expended. Unforeseen circumstances and natural disasters also come into play to exacerbate the management quagmire of school managers.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that policy makers should spearhead a vibrant crusade to influence the designing of school-sensitive programming and create a new pathway towards the construction and maintenance of safe and healthy schools. A synergistic relationship between and among stakeholders should be established to reduce areas of conflict, but foster collective ethical practice. School management should ensure the school environment is secured through the provision of security measures such as protective perimeter fence, employ trained security personnel, install Closed Circuit television (CCTV) cameras and record all visitors in the visitor record register. Metal detectors may be used, where possible, to capture the presence of dangerous weapons such as knives, screw drivers, and guns. School managers should actively address issues of access control both within the school and the immediate vicinity of the local community. Direct instructions to the administration offices need to be given to allow for the screening of visitors and preventing uncontrolled loitering in the school premises. In fact, management has to ensure territoriality is built around school grounds as this establishes a sense of ownership and belonging among both staff members and learners. The school should initiate awareness programmes to instill justice and rights knowledge. Injustice has to be pin-pointed when it occurs and learners encouraged to use reasoning and decision making to help create safe school environments. It may also be helpful for a school violence action plan to be developed, indicating where all school violence reports should be recorded, where needed help should be sought and people gather in an emergency. Various community organisations should be incorporated into school safety plans including the police, church, counselors, civic leaders and youth groups.

REFERENCES

- Alok, S. (2017). Handbook of research methodology: A compendium for scholars & researchers. New Delhi: Educreation Publishing.
- Bipath, K. (2017). Challenges faced by the school management team (SMS) regarding school safety in South Africa. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 73 (3), 65-83
- Çalık, T., Tabak, H., & Tabak, B. Y. (2018). School Violence: School Administrators' Perspectives and Ways of Solution in Turkey. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 10(5), 611–620
- Carmody-Bubb (2020). A systematic approach to improve school safety. *Journal of behavioural Studies in Business*, 13(1), 1-14
- Devon, K. (2021). Safety Perceptions of School Safety Teams: How Safe Do We Perceive Our Schools to Be? School of education, Northcentral University.
- Elman, C., Gerring, J. & Mahoney, J. (2020). The production of knowledge: Enhancing progress in Social Science. London, Cambridge.
- Gopal, N. & Collings S. J. (2017), Conceptualising school violence: A human rights perspective. *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology*, 30(2):1–13.
- Hochfeld, T., Schmid, J., Errington, S. & Omar, S. (2022). Learners' perspectives on school safety in Johannesburg. *South African Journal of Education*, 42(1), 1-9
- Kibriya, S., Tkach, A., Gonzalez, Z. A. (2016). "The effects of school-related sex-based violence on academic performance: Evidence from Botswana, Ghana, and South Africa." Washington DC: USAID and the Center on Conflict and Development (2016).
- Ishimaru, (2017). Just Schools: Building Equitable Collaborations with Families and Communities. Columbia: College Teachers Education.
- Ireland, S. (2016). Education disrupted: Disaster impacts on education in the Asia Pacific in 2015, Save the Children.
- Lester, S., Lawrence, C., & Ward, C. L. (2017). What do we know about preventing school violence? A systematic review of systematic reviews. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 22, 187–223.
- Lukumon, A. S., Abraham, O. A & Haftamu, M. G. (2018). Effect of School Safety on Students' Academic Performance Case Study: Public Secondary School Students in Lagos State, Nigeria. *Iconic Research and Engineering Journals*, 2 (5), 146-156
- McGuire, D. (2017). *Secure, Safe & Orderly Schools: Definition & Characteristics*. Retrieved from <https://study.com/academy/lesson/secure-safe-orderly-schools-definition-characteristics.html>.
- Ministry of Health (2012). National Health Policy: Towards a Healthier Botswana. Bay Publishing (Pty) Ltd, Gaborone.
- Mubita, K. (2021). Understanding School Safety and Security: Conceptualization and Definitions. *Journal of Lexicography and Terminology*, 5(1), 76-86
- Muhlhausen, D. B. (2020). Comprehensive school safety framework: Report to the committees on appropriations. Washington: National Institute of Justice
- Nickerson, A. B. (2019). Preventing and Intervening with Bullying in Schools: A Framework for Evidence-Based Practice. *School Mental Health: A Multidisciplinary Research and Practice Journal*, 11(1), 15.
- Njoki, W. A. (2018). School safety and its influence on teaching and learning processes in public secondary schools in Nairobi and Nyeri counties, Kenya. Ken[jvb/y zta University, Nairobi.

- Shaibu, S. & Phaladze, N. A. (2010). School health: the challenges to service delivery in Botswana. *Primary Health Care Research & Development*, 11(2), 197-202.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2017). School violence and bullying: Global Status Report, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002469/246970e.pdf>
- USAID (2016) "Safer Learning Environments Working Group: Terms of Reference" <https://eccnetwork.net/wp-content/uploads/SLE-Workign-Group-TOR-June-2016.pdf>
- Usha, S., Shahabuddin, S. K., Rajarathnam, S., Gokulanachiyar, V. & Chavan, A. V. (2022). Methodology of educational Research. Navamuvada: Redshine Publishers
- Wang, K., Chen, Y., Zhang, J., and Oudekerk, B.A. (2020). Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2019. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.