

The Use of Indigenous Values in Resilience Building of Out-of-School Suspended Learners



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ABSTRACT

This study explored the role of Indigenous values in fostering resilience among out-of-school suspended learners, a population often at risk of academic disengagement and negative life outcomes. Drawing on the moral philosophy of Ubuntu, the research examined how Indigenous principles such as communal responsibility, respect, and holistic well-being can be leveraged to support suspended learners in navigating challenges and re-engaging with their education. Qualitative methods were used, including interviews with 12 parents of out-of-school suspended learners from two selected secondary schools. The findings revealed that when schools and communities incorporate these values into disciplinary processes and support systems, they help mitigate the adverse effects of suspension by fostering a sense of belonging, self-worth, and perseverance. The study concludes that incorporating Indigenous values into community practices and school disciplinary frameworks significantly enhances the resilience and re-engagement of suspended learners. To promote the holistic development of learners, it suggests legislative changes that would institutionalise culturally sensitive disciplinary practices and cooperation between communities, families, and schools. The research contributes to educational resilience literature by highlighting culturally responsive approaches that promote the inclusion and success of marginalised learners, suggesting implications for policy reform and school practices.

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INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, suspension and expulsion of learners were introduced as an alternative means of enforcing discipline in schools.¹ This practice was widely used in Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) to respond to problematic behaviour.² However, it should be noted that discipline practices for out-of-school learners can vary across different European countries, the United Kingdom, and African states due to variations in cultural, legal, and educational systems. The most severe disciplinary measure used in preliminary studies on difficult behaviour in different parts of the world was out-of-school suspension.³ However, the evolution of school disciplinary approaches traced broader cultural sentiments and policies using suspension as a punitive measure, which are punishments

¹ Republic of South Africa, *The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996. The Schools Act* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 1996).

² Daniel Quin, "Levels of Problem Behaviours and Risk and Protective Factors in Suspended and Non-Suspended Students," *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist* 36, no. 1 (2019): 8–15; David Armstrong, "Addressing the Wicked Problem of Behaviour in Schools," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 22, no. 9 (2018): 997–1013.

³ Chris Curran and Maida Finch, "Reforming School Discipline: Responses by School District Leadership to Revised State Guidelines for Student Codes of Conduct," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (2021): 179–220.

that exclude misbehaving learners from class.⁴ Additionally, Henderson and Breonte argue that out-of-school suspension impacts learners' perceptions and relationships with adults in the school building and is correlated with lower perceptions of school climate.⁵ However, it would be acceptable if the child's age, cultural background, family experiences, and values were considered when addressing challenging behaviour. What form this discipline-related involvement would take is not yet obvious because little scholarship exists on how Black learners and their parents perceive school discipline.⁶

Under apartheid, corporal punishment was one of the key methods used to discipline learners in South African schools.⁷ The United Nations (UN) defines physical violence against children as all corporal punishment and all other forms of torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, as well as physical bullying and hazing by adults or other children. In addition, physical punishment was linked to delinquency and other antisocial conduct, increased risk of subsequent victimisation, the perpetuation of the cycle of violence by victimising one's own children or spouse, and increased likelihood of involvement in criminal behaviour.⁸ Traditional behaviour modification practices, such as corporal punishment, have been abolished in post-South Africa.⁹ Instead, it was legislated that school learners must be punished by suspension. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 has reduced to copying the disciplinary measures of the Western social and educational thinkers and neglected the indigenous methodologies and research priorities of child discipline.¹⁰ Thus, learners' suspension and expulsion were introduced as alternative ways of enforcing school discipline.¹¹

Although most studies on parenting have been conducted, there has not been much research on parenting from an African perspective and how they promote the resilience of out-of-school suspended learners.¹² Learners continue to behave unruly because they are misunderstood, endure long-term, unacknowledged hardships, and suffer the consequences of being expelled or suspended from school. Many out-of-school learners are members of indigenous groups with distinctive moral standards, cultural practices, and ways of life. Unfortunately, no one understands them; they are not respected, have no voice in the community, have no meaningful family or community role, and are disconnected from traditional culture and spirituality.¹³ The cultural relevance of treatments and support systems can be improved, increasing the likelihood of success by recognising and using these Indigenous values in educational processes.¹⁴ Researchers and educators who study Indigenous values can develop interventions and practices that typically require a mix of resources that span a range of systems, including biological, psychological, social, and ecological ones, and are culturally sensitive, empowering, and effective in addressing people's unique needs and capacities.¹⁵ For countries with developing economies, like South Africa, Ubuntu is commonly understood as a manifestation of collective agency. Schools and the community must build a strong partnership where various stakeholders, including educators, students,

⁴ Ashley C. Craig and David C Martin, *Discipline Reform, School Culture, and Student Achievement* (JSTOR, 2023).

⁵ Dawn X. Henderson and Breonte Guy, "Social Connectedness and Its Implication on Student-Teacher Relationships and Suspension," *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth* 61, no. 1 (2017): 39-47.

⁶ Charles Bell, "'Maybe If They Let Us Tell the Story I Wouldn't Have Gotten Suspended': Understanding Black Students' and Parents' Perceptions of School Discipline," *Children and Youth Services Review* 110 (2020): 104757.

⁷ Londeka Princess Ngubane, "Perceptions and Experiences of Learners on the Banning of Corporal Punishment in South African Schools: A Case Study of Four Township Schools in the Pinetown District of KwaZulu-Natal" (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College, 2018); Faranaaz Veriava and Kate Paterson, "The Right to Education," in *Research Handbook on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as Human Rights* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020), 113-36.

⁸ Delores E Smith, "Corporal Punishment of Children in the Jamaican Context," *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 7, no. 1 (2016): 27-44.

⁹ Republic of South Africa, *The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996*.

¹⁰ Republic of South Africa, *Constitution of South Africa (108 of 1996)* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 1996).

¹¹ Republic of South Africa, *The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996*.

¹² Wilson Zvomuya, "Utilization of Ubuntu Bowl in Social Work Processes: The Way to Go towards Attainment of Social Development in Africa," *African Journal of Social Work* 10, no. 1 (2020): 63-68; Emilie Phillips Smith et al., "Culturally Relevant Parenting Approaches among African American and Latinx Children and Families: Toward Resilient, Strengths-Based, Trauma-Informed Practices," *Adversity and Resilience Science* 3, no. 3 (2022): 209-24.

¹³ Darien Thira, "Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention: A Post-Colonial Community-Based Approach," *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014): 158-79.

¹⁴ Michael Ungar et al., "How Schools Enhance the Development of Young People's Resilience," *Social Indicators Research* 145 (2019): 615-27.

¹⁵ Ann S Masten et al., "Resilience in Development and Psychopathology: Multisystem Perspectives," *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 17, no. 1 (2021): 521-49; Michael Ungar and Linda Theron, "Resilience and Mental Health: How Multisystemic Processes Contribute to Positive Outcomes," *The Lancet Psychiatry* 7, no. 5 (2020): 441-48.

parents, administrators, and governmental bodies, cooperate in planning and carrying out educational projects.

Bell looked into how Black parents and learners perceived school discipline, and the results revealed that out-of-school suspensions were linked to "Black educational flight," which is the process by which parents withdraw their children from schools that are perceived to be too punitive and enroll them in other schools.¹⁶ This study, therefore, aims to discover how Indigenous principles are applied to enhance the resilience of out-of-school suspended learners in township schools focusing on:

- How does the family structure impact on parenting styles?
- What is the nature of the behaviour of out-of-school-suspended learners?
- What resources are available for parents to handle challenging behaviour?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adolescents need knowledge to help them construct their essential attitudes, beliefs, and skills and develop resilience.¹⁷ However, if these needs are not met, they feel helpless and unable to feel empowered and externalise their feelings by engaging in challenging behaviour. Parents must provide for their families and provide structure for their children according to cultural norms. Children acquire these values by being part of the community through participation in daily activities, observation, and oral transmission.¹⁸ Traditional Northern Sotho culture asserts that a child's surroundings and those around him have an effect on his behaviour.¹⁹ Like other African languages, the Northern Sotho language is very rich in cultural forms of expression because it contains beliefs and accepted values of the community. They form a significant part of oral tradition by revealing the experiences of the entire community. This is only possible if behavioural problems in learners are identified earlier and parents, teachers, and caregivers are prepared to take appropriate action. Therefore, out-of-school suspension and intervention for adolescents remain a challenge that requires an integrated effort and active participation from the relevant indigenous belief system. Akor believes that several early Westerners to the African continent denied the existence of ethics and morality in traditional African societies, probably due to their ignorance of African cultures and traditions.²⁰

This study considered the cooperative efforts of the school, family, and community in regulating student discipline in secondary schools. Although there has been much research on the resilience mechanisms in South African youth, very few of them have looked at the role that Indigenous values play in successful transition.²¹ Notably, Thira proposed the traditional values of care, respect, a meaningful role, and culture/spirituality to enhance the resilience of vulnerable youth.²² It promotes a more welcoming, inclusive, and comprehensive approach to education that values and respects indigenous traditions and expertise. This study also highlighted the importance of comprehending Indigenous values and how they can be mobilised to enhance positive learners' behavioural outcomes.

For this empirical article, the aim is to use core Indigenous values, as identified by Emelianenko, as the cornerstone of social, moral, and ethical behaviour modification tactics in enhancing the resilience of out-of-school suspended learners.²³ These values are ingrained in several cultures. For instance, youth in-care network services in Canada offer a forum or tool through which young people can discuss their experiences of being in foster care, feel supported by peers and professionals, and have their perspectives

¹⁶ Bell, "‘Maybe If They Let Us Tell the Story I Wouldn’t Have Gotten Suspended’: Understanding Black Students’ and Parents’ Perceptions of School Discipline."

¹⁷ Mariëtte Koen, "Sustainable Future for Early Childhood: Applying the African Ubuntu Philosophy to Contribute to the Holistic Development of Young Children," *Sustainable Development in Africa: Fostering Sustainability in One of the World’s Most Promising Continents*, 2021, 131–46.

¹⁸ Mmamoyahabo Constance Makgabo, "The Effect of the Disappearance of Kgoro Cultural Practice on Traditional Values in the Modern Era," 2021.

¹⁹ Lekau Eleazar Mphasha, Shumani Leonard Tshikota, and Avhahudzani Virginia Mantsa, "The Cultural Forms of Expression in Northern Sotho," *Gender and Behaviour* 19, no. 1 (2021): 17549–64.

²⁰ Eusebius Ugochukwu Akor, "Ethics and Morals in Indigenous African Context: Implications for Contemporary African Societies," *JOCAP* 4, no. 2 (2023).

²¹ Linda C. Theron and Nareadi Phasha, "Cultural Pathways to Resilience: Opportunities and Obstacles as Recalled by Black South African Students," in *Youth Resilience and Culture: Commonalities and Complexities* (Springer, 2014), 51–65.

²² Thira, "Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention: A Post-Colonial Community-Based Approach."

²³ Ekaterina Emelianenko, "The Role of Ubuntu in South Africa’s Foreign Policy," *Freska* 1, no. 1 (2022).

considered in discussions of policy and the provision of services.²⁴ Parents' parenting styles, the socialisation they provide for children, and their attitudes toward pro-social behaviour have all been connected to children's behaviour.²⁵ Parents can impart to their children the value of honouring and using the wisdom of past generations. Raising and teaching children is a social and biological obligation of parenthood.²⁶ Mothers are their children's first teachers in all countries, and in traditional societies, they teach, model, and pass down their culture's customs.²⁷

In this context, resilience refers to the capacity to value oneself (i.e., to have self-esteem) and live a good life despite adverse circumstances.²⁸ Understanding resilience traits that can assist in uncovering the characteristics of communities that enable individuals to thrive. Education on Indigenous values can make learners more involved and capable of critical thought; in the future, this critical thinking ability might even prompt a further re-evaluation of the inclusive curriculum. Cultural resilience in the face of out-of-school suspended learners should be rooted in the importance of respect, working together, sharing resources, and helping one another. Teaching children how to resolve conflicts amicably, empathise with others, and be nice will help them develop solid social skills and healthy relationships.²⁹ Given the relevant information that was gathered, it is evident that Ubuntu is commonly cited in a reasonably thorough manner to support the idea that people should cooperate in ways that are respectful of one another.³⁰ However, it is important to acknowledge that Indigenous cultures are distinctive and that parenting practices may vary across different Indigenous communities. To develop culturally aware and contextualised treatments, it is critical to have a deeper understanding of the definitions of resilience and resilience building that youth, families, and communities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is enshrined in the moral philosophy of Ubuntu, which refers to "humanness" among community members.³¹ South African Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu, in his essay "Ubuntu: On the Nature of Human Community", explained Ubuntu in this way: "We need other human beings to be human."³² The Nguni proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* was used to define Ubuntu for the first time in writing in 1993.³³ Mugumbate and Chereni stress this by demonstrating how families, communities, and people are all a part of the environment, which is a part of a greater spiritual community.³⁴ The principle of Ubuntu highlights the significance of interpersonal interactions and the notion that "a person is only a person through these linkages with other people."³⁵ The theoretical perspective put out here is meant to guide how the empirical study was conceptualised as a framework for understanding the use of Indigenous values in dealing with difficult behaviour and fostering resilience among out-of-school suspended learners. The term humanness refers to a person's fundamental nature.³⁶

²⁴ Amanda Keller et al., "Factors That Promote or Hinder a Youth in Care Network: A Report from the Field," *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 11, no. 1 (2020): 112–28.

²⁵ Neslihan Durmuşoğlu Saltalı and Hatice Merve İmir, "Parenting Styles as a Predictor of the Preschool Children's Social Behaviours," *Participatory Educational Research* 5, no. 2 (2018): 18–37.

²⁶ Carol Meyers, "Mothers' Wisdom: Technical Training and Lessons for Life," *With the Loyalty You Show Yourself Loyal: Essays on Relationships in the Hebrew Bible in Honor of Saul M. Olyan*, 2021, 13–28.

²⁷ Meyers, "Mothers' Wisdom: Technical Training and Lessons for Life."

²⁸ Linda Theron, "Learning about Systemic Resilience from Studies of Student Resilience," *Multisystemic Resilience: Adaptation and Transformation in Contexts of Change*, 2021, 232–52.

²⁹ Mabel Gonzales, "Understanding Emotional Intelligence," in *Emotional Intelligence for Students, Parents, Teachers and School Leaders: A Handbook for the Whole School Community* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2022), 1–18.

³⁰ Adrian D Van Breda, "A Comparison of Youth Resilience across Seven South African Sites," *Child & Family Social Work* 22, no. 1 (2017): 226–35.

³¹ Johannes Seroto, "Relating to Others through Ubuntu Values," *OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL)*, 2021, 41; Thaddeus Metz, "Ubuntu: The Good Life," in *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research* (Springer, 2021), 1–5; Emelianenko, "The Role of Ubuntu in South Africa's Foreign Policy."

³² Emelianenko, "The Role of Ubuntu in South Africa's Foreign Policy."

³³ Zvomuya, "Utilization of Ubuntu Bowl in Social Work Processes: The Way to Go towards Attainment of Social Development in Africa"; Jacob Mugumbate and Admire Chereni, "Using African Ubuntu Theory in Social Work with Children in Zimbabwe," *African Journal of Social Work* 9, no. 1 (2019).

³⁴ Mugumbate and Chereni, "Using African Ubuntu Theory in Social Work with Children in Zimbabwe."

³⁵ Nisbert T Taringa, "The Potential of Ubuntu Values for a Sustainable Ethic of the Environment and Development," *Religion and Development in Africa* 25 (2020): 387–400; Emelianenko, "The Role of Ubuntu in South Africa's Foreign Policy."

³⁶ Metz, "Ubuntu: The Good Life."

The Ubuntu tenet represents traditional values and ethics in the service of humanity.³⁷ Dolamo contends that post-colonial Africa must regain the principles and values represented in the botho/ubuntu idea for its people to feel the dignity they are entitled to.³⁸ The Ubuntu philosophy was selected because it emphasises protecting life despite human development and change. According to the Ubuntu ideology, Africans can empower one another when they have healthy connections and are free to rely on one another. Cooperative learning, tolerance for diversity, and the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and values are all stressed in education inspired by the Ubuntu philosophy.³⁹

METHODOLOGY

Given that the study's goal is to investigate parents' narratives, the design chosen explored diverse realities and the formation of the parents' varied perspectives. A qualitative research approach was used to study phenomena in their natural settings and to make sense of their perspectives.⁴⁰ The study relied on the participants' views and opinions, acknowledging that they can only fully know the reality of their experiences.⁴¹

Sampling

The study was designed to identify the possible causes of challenging behaviour in suspended out-of-school learners and what can be done to enhance their resilience. The parents of out-of-school-suspended learners were purposefully selected from two secondary schools in independent districts. To address these questions, 12 parents of identified out-of-school suspended learners (six from each school) were interviewed about their family background, social support related to their family values and perceptions of them. School A is one of the privileged schools in a predominantly white community, but almost none of the learners registered at that school reside in the area; School B is situated in a predominantly disadvantaged township in South Africa. The townships in South Africa are normally characterised by high unemployment, poverty, and a high density of people living in deficient environments.⁴²

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through a semi-structured interview that involved asking participants open-ended questions and following them up with probe questions to further explore their responses and the topic of interest.⁴³ Written school documents were also analysed to validate information received during the interviews.

Data Analysis

Based on a preliminary analysis of the interviews, which revealed similarities and differences as well as unexpected findings, it was possible to identify and analyse patterns carefully through the opinions of the research participants.⁴⁴ This was done using qualitative thematic analysis to help manage the verbatim interview transcripts and emerging themes.⁴⁵ The first goal was to examine how the family's structure and values aid in resolving their children's difficult behaviour. Second, it was explained how difficult behaviour appeared in out-of-school suspended learners. Finally, the available community support systems were examined. As a result of systematically compiling the data, the researcher identified

³⁷ Zvomuya, "Utilization of Ubuntu Bowl in Social Work Processes: The Way to Go towards Attainment of Social Development in Africa."

³⁸ Ramathate Dolamo, "Botho/Ubuntu: The Heart of African Ethics," *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 112, no. 1 (2013): 1–10.

³⁹ Nomlaungelo Ngubane and Manyane Makua, "Ubuntu Pedagogy—Transforming Educational Practices in South Africa through an African Philosophy: From Theory to Practice," *Inkanyiso: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 13, no. 1 (2021): 1–12.

⁴⁰ Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, vol. 5 (sage, 2009).

⁴¹ John Cresswell, "Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches.," 2013.

⁴² Llewellyn Leonard and Ayanda Dladla, "Obstacles to and Suggestions for Successful Township Tourism in Alexandra Township, South Africa," *E-Review of Tourism Research* 17, no. 6 (2020): 900–920.

⁴³ Murat Polat, "Analysis of Multiple-Choice versus Open-Ended Questions in Language Tests According to Different Cognitive Domain Levels.," *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)* 14, no. 2 (2020): 76–96.

⁴⁴ Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, "Teaching Thematic Analysis: Overcoming Challenges and Developing Strategies for Effective Learning," *The Psychologist* 26, no. 2 (2013).

⁴⁵ Lorelli S Nowell et al., "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1 (2017): 1609406917733847.

important negative and positive points of possibility and the need to use indigenous principles to deal with difficult behaviour and foster resilience.⁴⁶

Ethical Considerations

This study was part of a broader research project on building the resilience of suspended learners, which the institution's Research Ethics Committee approved. Ethical issues were considered to guarantee that the research process would not cause any harm to the participants. All participants were age-appropriate to give their consent, and no one was forced to participate against their will. Participants provided written informed consent in writing after being informed of the study's objectives, the privacy and confidentiality of the data, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Interview data were audio-recorded, and transcripts were stored securely with a password.

PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

12 parents of identified out-of-school suspended learners (six from each school) were interviewed about their life stories (family background) and social support related to their family values and perceptions of them. The parents are young with no experience and little parenting and child development education. School A is one of the privileged schools in a predominantly white community, but almost none of the learners registered at that school reside in the area; School B is situated in a predominantly disadvantaged township in South Africa.

Table 1. Demographics of the Participants

| SCHOOL A | Code | | SCHOOL B | Code | |
|---------------|------|------------------------------|---------------|------|------------------------|
| Participant 1 | AP1 | Single Parent, Female | Participant 1 | BP1 | Single parent, Female |
| Participant 2 | AP2 | Married mother | Participant 2 | BP2 | Married parent, Female |
| Participant 3 | AP3 | Divorced parent, Female | Participant 3 | BP3 | Single parent, Female |
| Participant 4 | AP4 | Single parent, widower, Male | Participant 4 | BP4 | Grandmother, married, |
| Participant 5 | AP5 | Single parent, Female | Participant 5 | BP5 | Single parent, Female |
| Participant 6 | AP6 | Single parent, Female | Participant 6 | BP6 | Single parent, Female |

Family Dynamics

Participants' narratives point to their distinct characteristics and ancestry in their life experiences and family dynamics, including single parenting and parenting style. One of the participants mentioned that *“the learners who displayed the most challenging behaviour either stayed with a single parent or none at all, and some parents relied on extended family support (AP2). On the contrary (BP2) said: I am married, but I am not staying with my child because the place we are staying at is still new. We used to rent before, and we are now staying at a place which is being developed with no electricity. So... I left the child at home with his grandmother, great-grandmother, two uncles, grandfather, and his auntie.*

One can conclude that the absence of both parents in a child's life harms his or her education. They also tend not to do well at school. Even though there are various possible reasons for single parenting, not all of them are detrimental. Social interactions significantly impact development, supporting brain growth and influencing how children respond to and interpret their surroundings. From an Indigenous perspective, uncles and aunts mentor, counsel, and support children without the help of case workers and other professionals.⁴⁷ One could infer that having grandparents nearby offers the children a sense of security.

⁴⁶ Gareth Terry et al., “Thematic Analysis,” *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology* 2, no. 17–37 (2017): 25.

⁴⁷ Mugumbate and Chereni, “Using African Ubuntu Theory in Social Work with Children in Zimbabwe.”

Some learners and their families achieved success despite the challenges in their lives. However, some families find it hard to cope with their circumstances. For example, participant **(AP6)** said: *“I am a single mother, and I am not coping well. I stay with all my four kids and their grandmother, my two brothers, and my uncles, and I have to support their grandfather, who is based in the rural areas but comes and visits sometimes. I have to care for the kids, but they are ill-disciplined.”*

Similarly, **(BP6)** mentioned: *“I am staying with all of my six children. They all have different fathers, and I am a domestic worker. It is very difficult to raise my children alone.”* Subsequently, **(BP4)** also mentioned, *“I am staying with my daughter and my five grandchildren.”* *“We are a family of five. It is me, my husband and my three children. It is the firstborn of a girl and two boys. “After my wife passed on, I thought I was strong...I met another woman...but unfortunately, she fell sick and passed on”* **(AP4)**. The impact of the loss of a significant person was noticed when intervention was needed for behavioural problems. **(AP4)** continued by saying: *“My son told me ...he has anger because of the loss of his mother and his stepmother.”* The other participants mentioned: *“My ex-husband and I are working and are trying hard to discipline our children.”* *We noticed he is very playful and does not take his schoolwork seriously. So, we work together with the teacher, and she reports any problems to us so that we can help him at home* **(AP3)**. *“It is really hard, especially for me. I am unemployed, and I struggle to get maintenance money from my children's father. My parents help here and there, but it is not easy”* **(BP3)**. The parent from school A said, *“...Even though his father is no longer with us, we still co-parent, but it is difficult because he has moved to another province and only contacts us telephonically...”* **(AP3)**.

Not all families who go through hardship are impacted in the same way. From the participants' narratives above, it was found that family structure and parenting style inconsistencies reflect children's challenging behaviour differently. It is the prerogative of parents to support their children and take care of their biological needs; to provide an optimal environment; to protect them; to teach and educate them about their traditional norms and values; to provide guidance, direction, assistance, and help; to motivate them; and to develop their social and emotional skills. Absent fathers also pose a great challenge and emotional distress to the boy child. The African cultural perspective promotes close family networks and good parenting as a buffer against adverse social circumstances and protects adolescents from the negative consequences they may face as individuals.⁴⁸

Parenting Style

Parenting style refers to the emotional climate within which parents bring up their children. Similarly, a family is considered a basic ecology in which children's behaviour is manifested in their childhood through negative or positive reinforcement.⁴⁹ Parents play an important role in shaping the behaviour of adolescents. **(BP2)** said: *“We deprived him of a cell phone, and he does the dishes at home, which is part of his chores at home, and at the same time, it can be posed as a punishment to him.”* Similarly, **(AP6)** uses deprivations as a disciplinary measure: *“When he asks me to buy him something, I just tell him that I don't have money or that he must earn it by doing his chores...”* **(BP6)** said: *“We send him to the rural areas during the school holiday to spend time with his grandparents; maybe they will teach him something about our traditions.”* However, **(BP1)** said: *We beat him up. We sometimes use a belt and punish him by not giving him what he wants. For example, when his birthday is near, and he is expecting presents, I tell him that he will not get anything if he does not improve his schoolwork.”* **(BP5)**, reflecting on her parenting style, said, *“I think it may be because we shout at her. I think that may be the cause. My mother raised us up, shouting at us. So, when she has done something wrong, I try to do things differently and talk to her. So, she thinks that I am being soft. I only shout at her, but I do not know whether she is listening because I always shout at her with the truth, and when I get angry, I get angry for real.”* **(AP5)**

Parenting is the process of promoting and supporting children's physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development from infancy to adulthood. This finding supports previous research results suggesting the importance of the extended family in raising children. Furthermore, the relationship challenges that young, single parents face can affect their parenting and children. Ungar and Theron assert

⁴⁸ Linda C Theron and Linda Liebenberg, “Understanding Cultural Contexts and Their Relationship to Resilience Processes,” in *Youth Resilience and Culture: Commonalities and Complexities* (Springer, 2014), 23–36.

⁴⁹ Samiullah Sarwar, “Influence of Parenting Style on Children's Behaviour,” *Journal of Education and Educational Development* 3, no. 2 (2016).

that good parenting results in children facing fewer behavioural challenges and that it enhances their ability to bounce back from adversity because the parents are involved and informed.⁵⁰

According to research, behavioural problems are on the rise in schools, mostly due to broken relationships, dysfunctional families, repeated significant life transformations, and a lack of basic security.⁵¹ A more in-depth investigation of the use of Indigenous values was required to fully account for non-school protective factors and their interactions, even though the study is notable for its design and thoroughness. Family variables, community factors, and school factors were all identified as confounders in the research. Research has shown that a lack of parental involvement and poor parenting style are among the greatest barriers to children's development.⁵² Sadly, parents are not aware of the problem. Parents' parenting styles, the socialisation they provide for children, and their attitudes toward pro-social behaviour have all been connected to children's behaviour.

Challenging Behaviour

Further inquiry indicated that the alleged violations continue even though they are improper and harmful to other learners and staff. The study found that social variables such as gambling, lack of respect, substance abuse, lateness and vandalism of school property persist in the two schools. Parents alluded to the fact that children are disrespectful, display anger issues and violate school rules.

(AP1) said: "She is being disrespectful and coming back from school late. I then asked her why she returned home late, and she told me she had joined a netball team at school."

The other participant said, *"Anger is his main problem. He is short-tempered and violent towards other kids at home. His aunt always tells me that he has some anger problems. She even told me she has spoken to a social worker who visits our home to check on orphans staying with my sister."* **(BP2)**. **(BP4)** said: *"He is the kind of child with anger. He gets angry so fast, and the way he gets angry so fast, I think that it is because of his mother, he also beat up other learners."*

The other participant said: *"He usually bunks classes... he does not respect teachers... he was involved in stealing, but when I asked him, he denied it."* **(BP6)** **(PB5)**: *"He was also suspended for gambling. He only gambles here at school..., and I notice that by the weed I find on his clothes. His gambling behaviour only happens at school."*

These narratives provide examples of the effects of children raised by single parents. Complaints about learners, especially those living with single parents or non-biological parents, include being involved in drugs, arriving at school late and skipping classes. Although Zondo, Mncube, and Adu argue that most schools have a challenge in dealing with misbehaving learners if appropriate and proper discipline measures are not put in place, suspended learners will continue to display psychological, cognitive, and social misbehaviour that requires the services of a multi-disciplinary system.⁵³

The Need for Support

Families need some support in terms of finances and access to health care and education to provide for their children. When needed, some families may benefit from more focused parenting support, such as parenting programmes. Children from low-income homes and those whose parents have less education are more likely to have behavioural disorders, according to studies currently available.⁵⁴ During the school document analysis, it was found that just one of the seven parents interviewed at School B had a job; in contrast, all five parents at School A were said to have one. *I was never called for any intervention. When I go to school, I am only told what he has done..."* **(BP6)**. *"I need support to keep him busy and*

⁵⁰ Ungar and Theron, "Resilience and Mental Health: How Multisystemic Processes Contribute to Positive Outcomes."

⁵¹ H P Jyothi, "Behavioural Problems of the Single-Parent Adolescents," *International Journal of Latest Technology in Engineering, Management, and Applied Science* 4, no. 12 (2015): 25–27; Catherine Ward, Tawanda Makusha, and Rachel Bray, "Parenting, Poverty and Young People in South Africa: What Are the Connections," *South African Child Gauge* 1, no. 1 (2015): 69–74.

⁵² Keith Smolkowski et al., "Effectiveness Evaluation of the Positive Family Support Intervention: A Three-Tiered Public Health Delivery Model for Middle Schools," *Journal of School Psychology* 62 (2017): 103–25.

⁵³ Sindiswa Zondo, Vusi S. Mncube, and Emmanuel O. Adu, "Strategies Teachers Use to Implement Positive Discipline in Schools," *Prizren Social Science Journal* 7, no. 1 (2023): 79–88.

⁵⁴ Suzanne Hartman, Adam Winsler, and Louis Manfra, "Behavior Concerns among Low-Income, Ethnically and Linguistically Diverse Children in Child Care: Importance for School Readiness and Kindergarten Achievement," *Early Education and Development* 28, no. 3 (2017): 255–73.

concentrate on his studies. It is very difficult for me to give him pocket money because I think that he uses that money to buy cigarettes... ”(AP2).

The findings of the study indicate that there is a difference in the socioeconomic status of the pupils between schools A and B. Poverty is a prevailing problem, especially in the areas known as “townships”, which are located outside city centres. Poverty seems to have less of an impact on School A participants. Children born in poverty are more likely to develop poor nutrition, chronic illness, and mental health problems, to name just a few. The narratives revealed that challenging behaviour and environmental stressors are related to socioeconomic position. Teens who experience such an upbringing face the risk of experiencing psychological, social, and financial problems.

Supportive social connections affect whether children see a specific occurrence as being negative or how they interpret it.⁵⁵ Adolescents need to talk honestly to their parents about their problems, and parents should feel linked to them. Understanding children's vulnerability and resilience Parents were asked if their children received any form of support from the district office or local community service providers to address the barriers facing their children.

I have never been referred to the district. I do not know of any social workers or psychologists in our community.” (AP2). (AP4):” I did not receive any support from the school. I was told that my son is troublesome....” The other participant also indicated that “... the school did not support my child. They once sent me to a social worker in town, which was too far.” **(BP4)**. “A social worker from the district office helped me, but my son attended just one session....” **(AP4)** “...I involved my uncle and asked him to come to talk and reprimand him to stop his behaviour...” **(BP6)**.

Phasha maintains that learners in township schools require substantial support to enhance their resilience due to the sharp increase in family disintegration.⁵⁶ Studies have also shown that single parenting is increasing and that it has an impact on the high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression that children experience.⁵⁷ Positive social connections affect whether youngsters see a certain incident as negative.⁵⁸ This perspective has implications for understanding vulnerability and resilience in children.⁵⁹

Adolescents strive for a positive social identity because they derive part of their self-esteem from group membership. Belonging can materialise in forms that satisfy the motivation to belong but threaten the healthy functioning of the individual and the cohesion of society, unfortunately resulting in anti-social behavioural norms that reinforce delinquent behaviour. **(AP4):** *I think he is associating himself with bad friends. The thing is, he behaves well at home, but when he is at school, he starts to behave funny.” (BP6)* “The most important problem that is bothering me is that he recently started drinking alcohol, and I do not like the group of boys he hangs up with; they are older boys.”

In the narratives, parents firmly feel that learners who act differently at school are negatively impacted by their peers or friends when they act unethically. Adolescents were found to seek a positive social identity since belonging to a group contributes to their sense of self-worth. Parents strongly believe that peer pressure is a factor causing bad behaviour in their children. Parents are responsible for supporting and caring for their children's biological needs, providing a safe and healthy environment for them, keeping them safe, teaching and enlightening them about their cultural norms and values, and providing for their social and emotional skills.

Adolescents generally strive for a positive social identity because they derive a part of their self-esteem from group membership. Belonging can materialise in forms that satisfy the motivation to belong but threaten the healthy functioning of the individual and the cohesion of society, unfortunately resulting in anti-social behavioural norms that reinforce delinquent behaviour. However, a broad spectrum of

⁵⁵ Karen E Smith and Seth D Pollak, “Social Relationships and Children’s Perceptions of Adversity,” *Child Development Perspectives* 15, no. 4 (2021): 228–34.

⁵⁶ Nareadi Phasha and Paseka A Mosia, “Access to Curriculum for Students with Disabilities at Higher Education Institutions: How Does the National University of Lesotho Fare?,” *African Journal of Disability* 6, no. 1 (2017): 1–13.

⁵⁷ Jyothi, “Behavioural Problems of the Single-Parent Adolescents”; Ward, Makusha, and Bray, “Parenting, Poverty and Young People in South Africa: What Are the Connections.”

⁵⁸ Smith and Pollak, “Social Relationships and Children’s Perceptions of Adversity.”

⁵⁹ Smith and Pollak, “Social Relationships and Children’s Perceptions of Adversity.”

empirical studies highlights the benefits of belonging for adolescents, which are associated with academic achievement, self-esteem and self-efficacy, assertiveness, and goal orientation.⁶⁰

DISCUSSION

The current study looked at how Indigenous values could enhance parental support for the development of resilience in out-of-school suspended learners. The learners in the two schools under study are African and of low socioeconomic backgrounds. According to data currently available, children from low-income homes and those whose parents have less education are more likely to have behavioural issues.⁶¹ Socioeconomic status (SES) describes a person's or family's economic and social position based on income, education, and occupation.⁶² Research suggests that intergenerational transmission of risk is common, particularly among low-income minority populations.⁶³ Education is one of the finest paths to financial security, and lack of access to it is a significant indicator of poverty passed down from generation to generation. Unfortunately, the study revealed that children are the most affected by family dynamics such as death, divorce, or separation and experience feelings of uncertainty and insecurity. Children, thus, assume responsibility for the divorce, thinking that they are to blame for their parents' separation and present with anger issues.

Nowadays, raising children alone can be challenging. Literature shows that raising children as a single parent can be particularly challenging due to the multiple roles and responsibilities a parent must juggle without the support of a partner.⁶⁴ Single parents often face increased financial stress, limited time for both work and parenting duties, and higher stress levels due to managing household responsibilities independently.

From the perspective of Ubuntu philosophy, which emphasises interconnectedness, community support, and the principle of "I am because we are," the presence of grandparents in a family can serve as a crucial protective buffer in the lives of children. Grandparents provide practical support, such as caregiving and financial assistance, and emotional security through their nurturing role, offering children a sense of belonging and identity rooted in familial and cultural traditions.⁶⁵

The parents described the challenging behaviour displayed by their children and the efforts they put into exercising discipline. Parents have a major influence on children's behaviour, especially in their education, and their presence in their children's lives plays a mediating role in terms of risks. Good parenting styles and affectionate ties encourage trust, autonomy, and initiative, serve as protective factors and enhance adolescents' ability to bounce back in adversity because the parents are involved and informed.⁶⁶ They assert that good parenting results in children facing fewer behavioural challenges and enhances their ability to bounce back from adversity because the parents are involved and informed. Furthermore, Ndlovu, Schlebusch, and Makola posit that parental discipline provides parents and teachers with the knowledge and skills to be kind and firm simultaneously, fostering a sense of connection with the children with whom they interact.⁶⁷

To ensure the implementation of positive discipline is successful, a framework should support a multi-stakeholder consideration of engagement. Ubuntu values should be incorporated in re-packaging

⁶⁰ Diana Paricio et al., "Positive Adolescent Development: Effects of a Psychosocial Intervention Program in a Rural Setting," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 18 (2020): 6784.

⁶¹ Hartman, Winsler, and Manfra, "Behavior Concerns among Low-Income, Ethnically and Linguistically Diverse Children in Child Care: Importance for School Readiness and Kindergarten Achievement."

⁶² Carlos Felipe Rodríguez-Hernández, Eduardo Cascallar, and Eva Kyndt, "Socio-Economic Status and Academic Performance in Higher Education: A Systematic Review," *Educational Research Review* 29 (2020): 100305.

⁶³ Igor Ryabov, "Intergenerational Transmission of Socio-Economic Status: The Role of Neighborhood Effects," *Journal of Adolescence* 80 (2020): 84–97; Robert Crosnoe, "Contextualizing the Social and Educational Journeys of Adolescents within the Life Course," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 31, no. 4 (2021): 1135–51.

⁶⁴ Hüsünür Aslantürk and Aliye Mavili, "The Sense of Family Belonging in University Students from a Single Parent Family Compared with Those from a Two-Biological-Parent Family," *Current Psychology* 39, no. 6 (2020): 2026–39.

⁶⁵ Kai Ding, "The Impact of Grandparents and Intergenerational Living on Children's Social and Emotional Development," *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences* 29 (2024): 403–12.

⁶⁶ Anathi Onceya and Nkosiyazi Dube, "Perceptions of Caregivers Regarding Factors That Perpetuate Differential Parenting in Katlehong, Johannesburg, South Africa," *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, no. 2 (2020): 7–39.

⁶⁷ Mkhumbulo Ndlovu, Gawie Schlebusch, and Solomon Makola, "A Framework for Implementing Positive Learner Discipline in Public Secondary Schools from the Context of the Mpumalanga Province," *Acta Educationis Generalis* 13, no. 3 (November 1, 2023): 115–48, <https://doi.org/10.2478/atd-2023-0025>.

the positive discipline toolkit to suit the local context.⁶⁸ Previous research has suggested that Ubuntu has important consequences for discipline.⁶⁹ It promotes the idea that one's humanity is realised through relationships with others.⁷⁰ Children may lose touch with their cultural heritage if parents and the community do not enforce these principles in their house rules. Therefore, it makes sense that the abilities of a person and the social support provided by their environment serve as a foundation for resilience. This subject represents the numerous contextual risk factors that suspended learners encounter and how those variables affect them differently. Therefore, family and social support serve as protective variables that help adolescents manage the effects of risk in their lives.⁷¹ Uncles and aunts provide mentorship, counselling, and support to children without needing professional case workers and other professionals.⁷² According to the African indigenous worldview, strong family ties and responsible parenting serve as a buffer against unfavourable social conditions and shield adolescents from potential bad individual outcomes.⁷³

The information gathered demonstrated that the core causes of the challenging behaviour of the families of suspended learners were their failure to manage their emotional instability and their relatives' presence. Ebersohn and Bouwer assert that a child's upbringing is adversely affected and is plagued by a range of behavioural problems when both parents are absent from the child's life.⁷⁴ Similarly, the Ubuntu principle has important ramifications for discipline because it prioritises the family as a whole and people's duty to their families.⁷⁵ The results of this study, however, show that parents of troubled children either do not cooperate with the school authorities or, if they do, they blame the teachers for their children's challenging behaviour.

Numerous empirical studies have shown links between the advantages of belonging and teenagers' academic success, self-worth, self-efficacy, assertiveness, and resilience.⁷⁶ This holistic viewpoint is especially pertinent for out-of-school suspended learners who may have had socioemotional or sociodemographic disruptions or who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Indigenous principles can be incorporated into educational programmes to create a holistic framework that meets the different requirements of out-of-school suspended learners and promotes their general well-being. Additionally, indigenous values place a high significance on the cooperation of the family and the community. This translates to building support networks, involving families and the community, and cultivating alliances with Indigenous leaders and organisations for out-of-school suspended learners. Indigenous values create resilient learning environments that promote growth by building strong connections and support networks.⁷⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings suggest institutional change by incorporating Indigenous values in educational programmes that strengthen the resilience of out-of-school suspended learners, and that should not be approached as a static resource. It should thus be noted that Indigenous systems are highly context-specific and depend

⁶⁸ Ndlovu, Schlebusch, and Makola, "A Framework for Implementing Positive Learner Discipline in Public Secondary Schools from the Context of the Mpumalanga Province"; Emelianenko, "The Role of Ubuntu in South Africa's Foreign Policy."

⁶⁹ Ndumiso Dube, "The Philosophy of Ubuntu in Secondary Schools in the Gweru District of Zimbabwe: A Critical Reflection" (University of South Africa, 2021); Jacob Mokhutso, "Ubuntu: A Countermeasure for Challenges of Child-Rearing," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 103, no. 1 (2022); Joel Mukwedeya, "Peace and Harmony through Ubuntu in a Globalized World," *Comparative Education for Global Citizenship, Peace and Shared Living through Ubuntu*, 2022, 221–41; Ndlovu, Schlebusch, and Makola, "A Framework for Implementing Positive Learner Discipline in Public Secondary Schools from the Context of the Mpumalanga Province."

⁷⁰ Ignatius Nnaemeka Onwuatuegwu and V. S. Paul-Mgbeafulike, "African Traditional Educational Framework: Unveiling the Wisdom beyond Western Education," *Nnadiesube Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (2023).

⁷¹ Ann S Masten and Andrew J Barnes, "Resilience in Children: Developmental Perspectives," *Children* 5, no. 7 (2018): 98.

⁷² Mugumbate and Chereni, "Using African Ubuntu Theory in Social Work with Children in Zimbabwe."

⁷³ Theron and Liebenberg, "Understanding Cultural Contexts and Their Relationship to Resilience Processes."

⁷⁴ Suzette Ebersohn and A C Bouwer, "A Bio-Ecological Interpretation of the Relationship Challenges in the Context of the Reconstituted Family," *South African Journal of Education* 35, no. 2 (2015): 1039.

⁷⁵ Macalane Junel Malindi, "Exploring the Roots of Resilience among Female Street-Involved Children in South Africa," *Journal of Psychology* 5, no. 1 (2014): 35–45; Linda C Theron, "Toward a Culturally and Contextually Sensitive Understanding of Resilience: Privileging the Voices of Black, South African Young People," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 31, no. 6 (2016): 635–70; Theron and Phasha, "Cultural Pathways to Resilience: Opportunities and Obstacles as Recalled by Black South African Students."

⁷⁶ Paricio et al., "Positive Adolescent Development: Effects of a Psychosocial Intervention Program in a Rural Setting."

⁷⁷ Zvomuya, "Utilization of Ubuntu Bowl in Social Work Processes: The Way to Go towards Attainment of Social Development in Africa"; Mugumbate and Chereni, "Using African Ubuntu Theory in Social Work with Children in Zimbabwe."

on several variables, including the diversity of Indigenous communities and the effectiveness of implementation. To ensure that the application of Indigenous values is made in an appropriate and meaningful manner, researchers examining social contexts, such as family, school, or community, and their relation to various outcomes for out-of-school suspended learners, including academic achievement or involvement in crime, should prioritise the contextual family dynamics. Furthermore, research exploring inclusive learning environments that support holistic well-being and academic success of all learners should redirect the focus by honouring and utilising the knowledge and practices of Indigenous communities. Finally, though a large body of literature examines the challenging behaviour of out-of-school suspended learners, few studies or none examine the use of Indigenous values as a mechanism that can be mobilised to address challenging behaviour. Understanding the principle of Ubuntu, how relationships are developed and strengthened, and key elements of Indigenous values will be critical to developing policies to improve the lives of out-of-school suspended learners and the youth in general.

CONCLUSION

The study has examined the importance of Indigenous values in building the resilience of out-of-school suspended learners. Suspension as a disciplinary mechanism is unevenly used by learners in rich and underprivileged schools, and this exposure is linked to an increase in challenging behaviour. The concepts and values of the Black culture that are meant to strengthen morality and discipline within families are ignored. According to the Ubuntu School of Thought, parents should put their Indigenous value systems into practice and instil them in their children to help them be more resilient and prevent out-of-school suspensions. Charity begins at home. Parents must create the best environment for their children, protect them, teach them about their cultural norms and values, and encourage the development of their social and emotional abilities.

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