

# Human Rights Education: Exploring the Safety of Teachers in South African Secondary Public Schools



Ernest Mpindo<sup>1</sup>  & Constance Mphojane<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Central University of Technology, South Africa.

## ABSTRACT

This paper examined the extent and nature of safety for teachers in their different school settings and further underscored the importance of safety for teachers in the school context. The current school environment is violent owing to the increasing lack of teachers' ability to maintain order in schools due to the uncertain alternatives to corporal punishment. This creates a hostile learning environment that weakens the teachers' position of power and prohibits them from using their authority and fulfilling their duty to provide learners with compassionate monitoring. A qualitative interpretivist research paradigm was used in this study employing Critical Emancipatory Research (CER) as a research framework. A CER framework aims to strengthen the liberating, enlightening, emancipating, and empowering democratic values of equality and justice among the researcher and the participants in the research setting. A team of four teachers, a principal, and the School Governing Body (SGB) member from each school were purposively sampled to apply the principles of PAR in Lejweleputswa District in the Free State Province in South Africa. A focused group was employed to answer the following questions: What are the perceptions of secondary school teachers regarding their safety in the school setting? To what extent does learners' violent behaviour threaten teachers' safety at schools? And, how can teachers be assisted to change their minds regarding Human Rights Education as a tool for peaceful education? Data was analysed thematically. The findings of this research showed that teachers do not feel safe at their workplace, they fear both learners and parents who most of the time come to humiliate them physically and emotionally in front of their learners. The study contributes to a debate on the safety of teachers in schools for professional development.

## Correspondence

Ernest Mpindo  
Email:  
vmpindo@gmail.com

## Publication History

Received: 27<sup>th</sup> September, 2023

Accepted: 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2023

Published online:

8<sup>th</sup> March, 2024

*Keywords: Human Rights Education, Teacher-Learner Relationships, Teachers' Safety, Parental Involvement.*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the extent and nature of safety for teachers in Lejweleputswa public schools. Teachers' safety in schools receives less focus and emphasis in research based on school climate than the focus on learners' well-being. Generally, schools must be places of safety and security for all people involved in school. However, the recent violent acts erupting in schools threaten the stability of schools which have impacted negatively on the primary purpose of teaching and learning.<sup>1</sup> Most teachers in public schools are not satisfied with the treatment they get from their learners and learners' parents and feel they are not protected enough by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the government. The educator has the same right to a safe working environment as the

<sup>1</sup> Andrea Juan et al., "Bullies, Victims and Bully-Victims in South African Schools: Examining the Risk Factors," *South African Journal of Education* 38, no. 1 (2018); Sasha-Lee Heekes et al., "A Systematic Review of Corporal Punishment in Schools: Global Prevalence and Correlates," *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 23, no. 1 (2022): 52–72.

learner.<sup>2</sup> Considering that both the learner and the educator interact in a school setting, what is true for the learner in terms of safety is also true for the teacher. It follows from clear reasoning that if a learner is not safe at school, the teacher can also not entirely feel safe and protected.<sup>3</sup>

It is generally agreed that good discipline is the most crucial aspect of an effective school and that a safe school is a precondition for effective teaching and learning.<sup>4</sup> According to Segalo and Rambuda (2018), safe schools are those where everyone feels safe; teachers, learners, and non-teaching staff can work without fear for their lives. This is also supported by Nikitas, Wang and Knamiller when he says, the foundations of security include good order, safety, harmony, discipline, and mutual respect.<sup>5</sup> In agreement with the aforementioned, Cornell and Limber assert that signs of safety include good administration, professional teacher behaviour, and a culture that is conducive to teaching and learning.<sup>6</sup>

Undoubtedly, a hostile learning environment will weaken teachers' position of power and prohibit them from using their authority and fulfilling their duty to provide learners with compassionate monitoring.<sup>7</sup> This is also addressed in Act 85 of 1993's Occupational Health and Safety Act which deals with a person's health and safety at work; this also applies to teachers. The teacher is, therefore, expected to always feel safe and secure at school in accordance with this Act. Everyone, including teachers as employees, has the right to have their dignity upheld, as stated in Section 10 of the Constitution. The teacher's right to have his or her dignity respected and safeguarded at school may be compromised, which could negatively affect the teacher's ability to maintain authority and provide learners with caring supervision.<sup>8</sup>

The aim of the study is, therefore, to find out the extent of safety teachers (conveniently sampled in two secondary schools in Lejweleputswa District in the Free State Province) are afforded in secondary schools, and how school authorities infuse Human Rights Education (HRE) as a tool to create a safe environment in different secondary schools. The paper also seeks to comprehend the difficulties teachers have when trying to instil discipline without putting their safety at risk and also creating an environment where retaining respect for learners' rights is a priority. Using a qualitative interpretivist research paradigm, the study seeks to answer these research questions; how is the safety of teachers guaranteed and ensured in South African schools? What are the perceptions of secondary school teachers regarding their safety in the school setting? To what extent does learners' violent behaviour threaten teachers' safety in schools? and, how can teachers be assisted to change their mindsets regarding Human Rights Education as a tool for peaceful education?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In global educational discourses, HRE has been acknowledged as a viable strategy for fostering active citizenship and preserving human dignity.<sup>9</sup> However, such education hasn't been thoroughly examined in a larger political context. HRE plays a variety of functions, such as strengthening national identity and promoting a country's reputation abroad and preparing people to fight against violations of human rights in society.<sup>10</sup> HRE is practised not just in classrooms but also in the many businesses where students do their mandatory internships in the United States, however, before this implementation, many attempts have been made, according to McPherson and Libal,

<sup>2</sup> M G Masitsa, "Exploring Safety in Township Secondary Schools in the Free State Province," *South African Journal of Education* 31, no. 2 (May 23, 2011): 163–74, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v31n2a477>.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Kutsyuruba, Don A Klinger, and Alicia Hussain, "Relationships among School Climate, School Safety, and Student Achievement and Well-being: A Review of the Literature," *Review of Education* 3, no. 2 (2015): 103–35; Sanna King and Nicole L. Bracy, "School Security in the Post-Columbine Era: Trends, Consequences, and Future Directions," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 35, no. 3 (August 15, 2019): 274–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986219840188>.

<sup>4</sup> F. Tibbitts, "Human Rights Education," in *Encyclopedia of Peace Education*, ed. M. Bajaj (Charlotte, North Carolina: Information Age Publishing, 2011), 99–108; Anja Mihr and Hans Peter Schmitz, "Human Rights Education (HRE) and Transnational Activism," *Human Rights Quarterly*, 2007, 973–93.

<sup>5</sup> Alexandros Nikitas, Judith Y T Wang, and Cathy Knamiller, "Exploring Parental Perceptions about School Travel and Walking School Buses: A Thematic Analysis Approach," *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 124 (2019): 468–87.

<sup>6</sup> Dewey Cornell and Susan P. Limber, "Law and Policy on the Concept of Bullying at School.," *American Psychologist* 70, no. 4 (May 2015): 333–43, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038558>.

<sup>7</sup> Konstantin Kougioumtzis, Göran Patriksson, and Owe Stråhlman, "Physical Education Teachers' Professionalization: A Review of Occupational Power and Professional Control," *European Physical Education Review* 17, no. 1 (February 22, 2011): 111–29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X11402266>.

<sup>8</sup> Letlhoye Segalo and Awelani Melvin Rambuda, "South African Public School Teachers' Views on Right to Discipline Learners," *South African Journal of Education* 38, no. 2 (2018): 1–7; Kougioumtzis, Patriksson, and Stråhlman, "Physical Education Teachers' Professionalization: A Review of Occupational Power and Professional Control."

<sup>9</sup> Felisa Tibbitts and André Keet, "Curriculum Reform in Transitional Justice Environments: The South African Human Rights Commission, Human Rights Education and the Schooling Sector," in *Globalisation, Human Rights Education and Reforms* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2017), 87–109, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-0871-3\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-0871-3_6); Tibbitts, "Human Rights Education."

<sup>10</sup> Tibbitts and Keet, "Curriculum Reform in Transitional Justice Environments: The South African Human Rights Commission, Human Rights Education and the Schooling Sector."

to incorporate HRE into US education; however, little research has been done on whether or not the HRE mandate is implemented in the field of education.<sup>11</sup> Human rights have served as the languages of both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses in the modern era. By utilising critical HRE, participants can understand how both discourses have exploited human rights.<sup>12</sup> However, because Australia is seen as an immigrant nation, Woldeyes and Offord contend that HRE cannot be fully incorporated in Australia unless Australian education is entirely decolonized.<sup>13</sup> The United Nations (UN) contends that children and youth should have access to HRE and that schools are one of the most significant venues for doing so; however, this argument does not address or account for teacher safety. Therefore, according to Robinson et al., there is currently little information available about the kind and availability of HRE in educational settings, and there is no standardised protocol for assessing HRE in educational settings.<sup>14</sup> HRE pedagogy was opposed and shunned by parents and communities to maintain their educational practises because it was believed that HRE threatened the cultures of both Spain and the Netherlands.<sup>15</sup> As far as human rights and their practises are concerned, Africa has been deemed the unluckiest continent. The majority of African nations have flagrantly violated their populations' human rights both directly (by commission) and indirectly (by omission) since gaining their independence from Europe in the 1960s. Mihr feels that human rights cannot be sufficiently maintained without proper education, even though he also thinks that HRE is crucial for changing the status of Africans from subjects to citizens.<sup>16</sup> In sub-Saharan Africa, human rights educators are often foreigners or locals who have learned from them. Their curriculum and instructional structure have been revised, and they have come under fire for placing an undue emphasis on civil rights at the expense of other pressing socioeconomic and political issues. Political rights are therefore unavoidable, and this is probably because of HRE.<sup>17</sup>

This literary work demonstrates that the HRE is necessary and indisputable. Even though Africa is a continent full of challenges and opportunities, there is still an HRE crisis in Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa faces distinct HRE difficulties than Southern Africa. However, the majority of African nations' citizens knowingly permit their politicians and heads of state to curtail their rights due to a lack of understanding of human rights. For instance, corporal punishment is still used lawfully and basic education is still not free in nations like Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Senegal, and Nigeria.<sup>18</sup> Not only is the right to education in Africa under attack but everyone's human rights are called into question as a result. This raised the issue of whose job it is to teach human rights in the neighbourhood schools and how the curriculum needs to be changed to make room for HRE as a pedagogy in Africa. African nations behave as separate governments and take their time incorporating human rights into their constitutions and educational systems, even in spite of the African Union's (AU) attempts to promote HRE in the continent.

With a progressive and impartial constitution, South Africa is recognised as a progressive nation. Because of this, DBE has been completely remaking education ever since the democratic regime began in 1994. Although there aren't many international studies that concentrate on school-based HRE, the ones that do exist offer a narrow perspective on the nature and scope of HRE in schools and don't significantly advance our understanding of teachers' HRE responsibilities.<sup>19</sup> Through a variety of reform agendas, the government and numerous significant education authorities have pushed to liberate the South African education system and provide students with instruction that is specifically customised to their needs.<sup>20</sup> Even if HRE is increasingly widely used globally, the obligation and duty

<sup>11</sup> Jane McPherson and Kathryn Libal, "Human Rights Education in US Social Work: Is the Mandate Reaching the Field?," *Journal of Human Rights* 18, no. 3 (2019): 308–24.

<sup>12</sup> Anja Mihr, "Transitional Justice and the Quality of Democracy," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence (IJCIV)* 7, no. 2 (2013): 298–313.

<sup>13</sup> Yirga Gelaw Woldeyes and Baden Offord, "Decolonizing Human Rights Education: Critical Pedagogy Praxis in Higher Education.," *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives* 17, no. 1 (2018): 24–36.

<sup>14</sup> Carol Robinson, Louise Phillips, and Ann Quennerstedt, "Human Rights Education: Developing a Theoretical Understanding of Teachers' Responsibilities," *Educational Review* 72, no. 2 (2020): 220–41.

<sup>15</sup> M. Bajaj and M. Zembylas, "Emotions, Critical Pedagogy, and Human Rights Education," in *In Human Rights Education: Theory, Research, Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 47–68; Tibbitts and Keet, "Curriculum Reform in Transitional Justice Environments: The South African Human Rights Commission, Human Rights Education and the Schooling Sector."

<sup>16</sup> Mihr, "Transitional Justice and the Quality of Democracy."

<sup>17</sup> Mihr, "Transitional Justice and the Quality of Democracy."

<sup>18</sup> M. C. Ralejoe, "The Perceptions of Lesotho Secondary Schools' Teachers about the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities." (University of South Africa, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Robinson, Phillips, and Quennerstedt, "Human Rights Education: Developing a Theoretical Understanding of Teachers' Responsibilities."

<sup>20</sup> Bunmi Omodan, "Democratic Pedagogy in South Africa: A Rethinking Viewpoint for Knowledge Construction.," *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 10, no. 2 (2019): 188–203.

of teachers are not precisely defined.<sup>21</sup> In South Africa, there hasn't been enough research done on HRE, so further clarification is still required to address some connected issues.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Critical Emancipatory Research Framework

CER aims to strengthen the liberating, enlightening, emancipating and empowering democratic values of equality and justice.<sup>22</sup> Because of its principles and ideals of social justice, equity, respect, peace, freedom and the hope that the oppressed will be empowered and emancipated, the CER was chosen to be the most acceptable theoretical framework for assisting teachers to express their true perceptions about their safety in their workplace.

CER's approach to school relations is founded on two observations that are relevant to social change. First, according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni, classroom violence should not be seen as a natural condition of order.<sup>23</sup> In reality, scholars must embark on intellectual excursions to problematize it, as well as to expose and fight problematic school relationships, because such relationships establish a world order based on human rights violations and deception. Second, Akinsola advocated for "open discourse on how to engage minds critically to successfully deal with the issue of human rights violations in South African schools."<sup>24</sup> In short, CER is important for framing this research because it provides a theoretical foundation for a view of planning that emphasises widespread public participation, sharing of information with the public, reaching consensus through public dialogue to improve relations rather than exercising power, avoiding the privileging of experts and bureaucrats, and replacing the technical expert model with one of the reflective planners.<sup>25</sup>

While discourse is not always simple or possible, it is desirable. This paper argues that schools and societies can channel the energy of conflict into productive rather than destructive channels as cited in Dube and Hlalele through developing deliberative interactions that reduce the scourge of human rights violations in schools. In short, the researcher agrees with Mahlomaholo that CER appears to be one of the most effective methods for subverting this warped consciousness and cultivating a positive academic identity.<sup>26</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

This study demanded a practical intervention in the form of Participatory Action Research (PAR) to establish settings that encourage empowerment. PAR is a research approach aimed at promoting social justice via the creation of conditions that encourage participation and empowerment.<sup>27</sup> To ensure that everyone with a stake in the partnership's success has a voice in the decision-making process, PAR fills the gap between power hierarchies and enables researchers to put CER into practice.<sup>28</sup> A team of four teachers, a principal, and the School Governing Body (SGB) member from each school were purposively sampled to apply the principles of PAR. The team's joint objectives were to enhance the application of HRE and lessen the dangers to school environment safety. To address the safety concerns of teachers, team members worked together at a school to contextualise and conceptualise human rights education problems, devise methods and decide how to execute them.

The researcher adhered to all ethical guidelines to ensure that the volunteers were treated with respect and dignity. Since this study's primary focus is on human connections, the researcher in this project was responsible for ensuring the rights and welfare of the participants. The data was analysed thematically. The material acquired

---

<sup>21</sup> Robinson, Phillips, and Quennerstedt, "Human Rights Education: Developing a Theoretical Understanding of Teachers' Responsibilities."

<sup>22</sup> Fatma Aslan Tutak, Elizabeth Bondy, and Thomasenia L. Adams, "Critical Pedagogy for Critical Mathematics Education," *International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology* 42, no. 1 (January 15, 2011): 65–74,

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0020739X.2010.510221>; Bekithemba Dube and Dipane Hlalele, "Engaging Critical Emancipatory Research as an Alternative to Mitigate School Violence in South Africa," *Educational Research for Social Change* 7, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2018/v7i2a5>.

<sup>23</sup> S J Gatsheni-Ndlovu, "Why Decoloniality in the 21st Century," *The Thinker* 48 (2013): 10–15.

<sup>24</sup> H A Akinsola, "Understanding the Determinants and Preventative Strategies for High School Violence in South Africa: The Stakeholders' Targeted Model: Psychological Perspectives," *African Journal for Physical Health Education, Recreation and Dance* 16, no. 4 (2010): 648–65.

<sup>25</sup> Dube and Hlalele, "Engaging Critical Emancipatory Research as an Alternative to Mitigate School Violence in South Africa"; L. M. Malebese, "A Socially Inclusive Teaching Strategy to Respond to Problems of Literacy in a Grade 4 Class" (University of the Free State, 2016); M. S. Motsoeneng, "ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION FOR TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING COLLEGE LECTURERS: A FRAMEWORK FOR CAPACITATION" (University of the Free State, 2020).

<sup>26</sup> M. Abu-Nimer, A. Khoury, and W. Welty, *Unity in Diversity in the Middle East* (New York, USA: United State Institute of Peace Press, 2007); Dube and Hlalele, "Engaging Critical Emancipatory Research as an Alternative to Mitigate School Violence in South Africa"; Sechaba Mahlomaholo, "Critical Emancipatory Research and Academic Identity," *Africa Education Review* 6, no. 2 (October 2009): 224–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146620903274555>.

<sup>27</sup> D. H. Tracey and L. M. Marrow, *Lenses on Reading: An Introduction to Theories and Models*. (London: The Guilford Press, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Tracey and Marrow, *Lenses on Reading: An Introduction to Theories and Models*.

through the interviews was recorded and processed as text, and meaning was drawn from it. To ascertain the impact of each respondent's ideology, the words of the respondent were studied. As a result, the respondent's opinions were more accurately reflected and linked to their behaviour and to ensure the reliability of this qualitative study, the researcher and a senior researcher independently transcribed the interview transcripts to make themes according to the research questions. A member check was also done, in which the researcher contacted the participants again to confirm any unclear results.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In South Africa and other parts of Africa, it is expected that educators would be tasked with imparting moral principles that are in line with the advancement of human rights. Teachers should also learn new approaches to handling complicated challenges in the classroom, such as diversity, culture, and inclusivity, as they are expected to be lifelong learners. This section presents and discusses research on teachers' use of HRE. More importantly, the focus group interviews yielded the following themes once the qualitative data had been gathered and analysed:

### **a. Teaching and learning**

The interviewees noted that one of the main challenges in this area was HRE's exclusion from both exclusive institutional rules and teaching and learning policies. Moreover, participants in the study were generally in agreement that more emphasis must be placed on creating policies that incorporate both HRE and teachers' safety as a tool for order and peace education and procedures within various schools' codes of conduct if significant progress is to be made in ensuring safety in Lejweleputswa secondary schools. It was stressed that to end the marginalisation of HRE, academic personnel has to take responsibility and initiative in creating inclusive policies. They might benefit from this in terms of instruction and learning. When asked what elements, with a particular focus on policies and practice could prevent an efficient framework for HRE, respondents made the following observations:

*E1: Obviously, human rights is something that is very big, but you might find that our learners understand human rights but it's just that they don't understand that it comes with responsibilities.*

*E6: It is difficult for us [teachers] to address grave human rights violations alone, let alone go above and beyond what is included in the textbook. Our teaching strategies are universal, or "one size fits all." Our teaching methods really result in less work being produced. I mean, how will I be able to cover the entire curriculum if I have to give each and every learner personalised attention?*

The information collected from the research at this point tends to complement the literature review by demonstrating how little is known about the teaching and learning processes as well as the student support systems for HRE in our schools. This suggests that some schools may not have policies and codes of conduct in place to offer a framework for supporting teaching and learning. Additionally, it was inferred that some of the respondents had no or very little experience instructing in the field of HRE.

### **b. Teachers' safety**

Teachers who participated in this study voiced their dissatisfaction with safety measures established in schools. Despite the schools having policies of safety in schools, parents and outsiders are still finding their way to the teachers in classes and offices.

*E1: We are not safe at all... Worse, my school has a passage through which members of the community use at any time of the day as they wish... So having security at the gate does not serve any purpose, they even discontinued their services...*

*E2: I think the issue of safety for us as teachers in schools is very complex because we're being insulted and assaulted by the parents and brothers, uncles and even aunts of these learners.*

These are the extracts from teachers regarding the safety at their workplace. These comments reflect the fear that teachers have regarding their safety at schools. Pressley alludes that the concerns about teachers' safety in schools contribute more to their well-being and burnout and this leads more to the need for substitute teachers which costs the department to hire two people to perform the duties of one person.<sup>29</sup> In support of this, Segalo and Rambuda argue that the lack of safety for teachers in school affects their capability and the right to discipline learners in the school context.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Tim Pressley, "Factors Contributing to Teacher Burnout during COVID-19," *Educational Researcher* 50, no. 5 (2021): 325–27.

<sup>30</sup> Segalo and Rambuda, "South African Public School Teachers' Views on Right to Discipline Learners."

*E3: Even when you send learners outside for disturbing the teaching and learning in a class, or for not doing the homework for example, learners have their way of manipulating the truth to their parents or the principal for that matter.*

*E4: Even policies in place are not being implemented because you can't even call the police on learners when you're assaulted because apparently, it affects the school's reputation....*

*E5: We no longer feel safe as we feel like teachers have been stripped of most of their power to influence and fully enforce discipline around the school.*

Most teachers believe that learners are afforded more rights to shy away from taking responsibility and as a result, more teachers are not only frustrated by the lack of discipline from their learners, but also, by their inability to discipline those learners.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, not much training has been given to the teachers to equip them to discipline their learners in class as an alternative to corporal punishment. Alternatives such as forming healthy teacher-learner relationships, involving parents more often and consistently implementing the school's policy and code of conduct.

### **c. Parental Involvement**

According to Wolhuter & Russo, the primary reasons for inappropriate behaviour in schools are a lack of parental involvement and support in and for the schools.<sup>32</sup> Parents frequently are reluctant to participate in their children's education. The inclination of parents to delegate to teachers the task of teaching moral values to their children creates issues for the teachers, who depend on parental support to handle disciplinary issues.<sup>33</sup> It is obvious that parents who have little or no involvement in their children's study schedules and homework help to explain why their kids perform poorly in class.<sup>34</sup> One of the teachers said:

*E3: Because parents are not visible in schools, some of the learners use drugs, others carry weapons, and others are members of gangs.... So it becomes difficult to reprimand and ensure the safety of teachers and other learners at school under such circumstances...*

Parents must give teachers the opportunity and support to express their concerns, ideas and perspectives in a coequal partnership with schools if they want to be parents' partners in education.<sup>35</sup>

### **d. Teacher-learner relationship**

According to Wolhuter and Russo, connections have a profound effect on people.<sup>36</sup> These sentiments are also shared by Liberante, where he alludes that one of the most significant factors influencing learner engagement, academic motivation and learner behaviour is the relationship between the educator and the student.<sup>37</sup> In light of this, educators must approach disciplinary issues differently, as in the instance of loco parentis, by fostering an educator-learner connection that is supportive of both teaching and learning.<sup>38</sup> This will ensure that students who are suffering as a result of a society that is rapidly losing its morals and values<sup>39</sup> feel respected and safe, which will have positive implications on long-term learning outcomes.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Olufemi Timothy Adigun et al., "I Dread to Enter Some Classrooms': Perspectives Regarding Alternatives to Corporal Punishment in Secondary Schools," *Interchange* 53, no. 3-4 (2022): 391-406; Simangele Mayisela, "'You Detain Yourself If You Detain Children': Educators' Perceptions of Detention as an Alternative to Corporal Punishment," *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. 4 (2021).

<sup>32</sup> Charl C Wolhuter and Charles Russo, "Dealing with Incidents of Serious Disciplinary Problems amongst Learners: A Comparative Study between South Africa and Selected Countries," *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship= Koers: Bulletin Vir Christelike Wetenskap* 78, no. 3 (2013): 1-11.

<sup>33</sup> Patricia Lulama Ndamani, "Factors Contributing to Lack of Discipline in Selected Secondary Schools in the Mangaung Area of Bloemfontein and Possible Solutions," *Interim: Interdisciplinary Journal* 7, no. 2 (2008): 177-97.

<sup>34</sup> P Singh, S M Mbokodi, and Vuyisile T Msila, "Black Parental Involvement in Education," *South African Journal of Education* 24, no. 4 (2004): 301-7.

<sup>35</sup> E Lemmer and N Van Wyk, "Home-School Communication in South African Primary Schools," *South African Journal of Education* 24, no. 3 (2004): 183-88.

<sup>36</sup> Wolhuter and Russo, "Dealing with Incidents of Serious Disciplinary Problems amongst Learners: A Comparative Study between South Africa and Selected Countries."

<sup>37</sup> Lauren Liberante, "The Importance of Teacher-Student Relationships, as Explored through the Lens of the NSW Quality Teaching Model," *Journal of Student Engagement: Education Matters* 2, no. 1 (2012): 2-9.

<sup>38</sup> M O B Mohammed, J P Gbenu, and R O Lawal, "Planning the Teacher as in Loco Parentis for an Effective School System," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 16 (2014): 318.

<sup>39</sup> P Chand Basha and G V Ramana, "Value Education: Importance and Its Need," *International Journal of Academic Research and Development* 3, no. 1 (2018): 779-81.

<sup>40</sup> Stephanie Mihalas et al., "Cultivating Caring Relationships between Teachers and Secondary Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: Implications for Research and Practice," *Remedial and Special Education* 30, no. 2 (2009): 108-25; Erin E O'Connor, Eric

*E5: Learners seem to have been given more rights and this somehow limits teachers' efforts to enforce discipline or build any relationship with learners.*

*E6: Teachers end up reluctant to go to class or reprimand learners because they do not know what will upset them on that particular day.*

*E4: We wish for the law to be slightly adjusted here and there in an effort to make teaching and learning a smooth process. Not taking away anyone's rights but understanding that rights come with responsibilities.*

Many teachers are finding it difficult to handle the demands of the classroom owing to their difficult working conditions (Pretorius, 2014), such as their inability to deal with students' lack of discipline in the classroom.<sup>41</sup> Teachers became discouraged as a result of these difficulties because they believed they were losing the war.<sup>42</sup> Effective learning, therefore, does not always occur. Educators must continue to be motivated in their roles as the most significant information resources in the school community and the near surroundings in rural areas, where this research was conducted.<sup>43</sup>

Teachers are held accountable for the moral development of students in addition to their role as educators so that they might grow up to be law-abiding citizens. This implies that teachers are obliged to handle transgressions of the school's institutional rules in a controlling manner within the context of the school community.

### **Discussion Summary**

The current situation is a blatant indicator that the educational system is unable to meet the problems it encounters, particularly in light of external risk factors like poverty, diversity, and absent or functionally illiterate parents. This paper has revealed that the reported violence cases are far less than the actual cases occurring in schools. To stabilise the teaching and learning environment, DBE must develop fresh strategies for addressing these risk factors. Positive educator-learner interactions were found to be an alternative strategy for ensuring a more stable educational environment during this study.

It is imperative to take steps to give teachers the tools they need to handle learner discipline. Numerous studies have been conducted on indiscipline in secondary schools throughout the world, but few of them appear to focus on the particular requirements of teachers when it comes to handling discipline-related issues in the classroom in rural and semi-rural South Africa. In most South African schools, learner discipline is a problem and a continuous process.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Schools must offer an effective education that is delivered in a secure setting. Any behaviour that interferes with a learner's capacity to learn needs to be controlled. Systems of support are necessary for educators and learners to deal with issues relating to discipline. Each teacher and learner must understand the importance of their position within the school community. Each student, staff member and parent should feel valued, secure and able to engage in regular school activities. Communication is essential because teachers need to know what resources are available to them to effectively manage their classrooms. To further their learning, they must also establish positive relationships with every learner.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper has examined the extent and nature of safety for teachers in their different school settings and further underscored the importance of safety for teachers in the school context. Even if it has a variety of associated trajectories that are also surmountable, HRE-based peace education is nevertheless essential for managing behaviour, regulating people's emotions, and promoting amicable conflict resolution. Since there are incidents of the ongoing loss of innocent lives, teaching and learning time, and teachers' interest in teaching as a profession in

---

Dearing, and Brian A Collins, "Teacher-Child Relationship and Behavior Problem Trajectories in Elementary School," *American Educational Research Journal* 48, no. 1 (2011): 120–62.

<sup>41</sup> S N Matoti, "The Unheard Voices of Educators: Perceptions of Educators about the State of Education in South Africa," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 24, no. 4 (2010): 568–84; Mariëtte Reyneke, "Children's Right to Participate: Implications for School Discipline," *De Jure Law Journal* 46, no. 1 (2013): 206–36; Karen Lynn Walton, J Avenant, and I Van Schalkwyk, "Educators' Experiences of Their Relationships with Adolescents Involved in Drug Use," *South African Journal of Education* 36, no. 3 (2016).

<sup>42</sup> Qing Gu and Christopher Day, "Challenges to Teacher Resilience: Conditions Count," *British Educational Research Journal* 39, no. 1 (2013): 22–44.

<sup>43</sup> Magdalene Ndeto David and Henry M Bwisa, "Factors Influencing Teachers' Active Involvement in Continuous Professional Development: A Survey in Trans Nzoia West District, Kenya," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 3, no. 5 (2013): 224.

schools, this issue must be addressed. In the CER sense, HRE can be used to lessen the challenge of violent schooling environments in South African public schools, as it has done in many nations where human rights are still taught in the curriculum.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abu-Nimer, M., A. Khoury, and W. Welty. *Unity in Diversity in the Middle East*. New York, USA: United State Institute of Peace Press, 2007.
- Adigun, Olufemi Timothy, D S Chonco, A P Kutame, and I S Kapueja. "‘I Dread to Enter Some Classrooms’: Perspectives Regarding Alternatives to Corporal Punishment in Secondary Schools." *Interchange* 53, no. 3–4 (2022): 391–406.
- Akinsola, H A. "Understanding the Determinants and Preventative Strategies for High School Violence in South Africa: The Stakeholders’ Targeted Model: Psychological Perspectives." *African Journal for Physical Health Education, Recreation and Dance* 16, no. 4 (2010): 648–65.
- Aslan Tutak, Fatma, Elizabeth Bondy, and Thomasenia L. Adams. "Critical Pedagogy for Critical Mathematics Education." *International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology* 42, no. 1 (January 15, 2011): 65–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020739X.2010.510221>.
- Bajaj, M., and M. Zembylas. "Emotions, Critical Pedagogy, and Human Rights Education." In *In Human Rights Education: Theory, Research, Praxis*, 47–68. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.
- Basha, P Chand, and G V Ramana. "Value Education: Importance and Its Need." *International Journal of Academic Research and Development* 3, no. 1 (2018): 779–81.
- Cornell, Dewey, and Susan P. Limber. "Law and Policy on the Concept of Bullying at School." *American Psychologist* 70, no. 4 (May 2015): 333–43. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038558>.
- David, Magdalene Ndeto, and Henry M Bwisa. "Factors Influencing Teachers’ Active Involvement in Continuous Professional Development: A Survey in Trans Nzoia West District, Kenya." *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 3, no. 5 (2013): 224.
- Dube, Bekithemba, and Dipane Hlalele. "Engaging Critical Emancipatory Research as an Alternative to Mitigate School Violence in South Africa." *Educational Research for Social Change* 7, no. 2 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2018/v7i2a5>.
- Gatsheni-Ndlovu, S J. "Why Decoloniality in the 21st Century." *The Thinker* 48 (2013): 10–15.
- Gu, Qing, and Christopher Day. "Challenges to Teacher Resilience: Conditions Count." *British Educational Research Journal* 39, no. 1 (2013): 22–44.
- Heekes, Sasha-Lee, Chloe B Kruger, Soraya N Lester, and Catherine L Ward. "A Systematic Review of Corporal Punishment in Schools: Global Prevalence and Correlates." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 23, no. 1 (2022): 52–72.
- Juan, Andrea, Linda Zuze, Sylvia Hannan, Ashika Govender, and Vijay Reddy. "Bullies, Victims and Bully-Victims in South African Schools: Examining the Risk Factors." *South African Journal of Education* 38, no. 1 (2018).
- King, Sanna, and Nicole L. Bracy. "School Security in the Post-Columbine Era: Trends, Consequences, and Future Directions." *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 35, no. 3 (August 15, 2019): 274–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986219840188>.
- Kougioumtzis, Konstantin, Göran Patriksson, and Owe Stråhlman. "Physical Education Teachers’ Professionalization: A Review of Occupational Power and Professional Control." *European Physical Education Review* 17, no. 1 (February 22, 2011): 111–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X11402266>.
- Kutsyuruba, Benjamin, Don A Klinger, and Alicia Hussain. "Relationships among School Climate, School Safety, and Student Achievement and Well-being: A Review of the Literature." *Review of Education* 3, no. 2 (2015): 103–35.
- Lemmer, E, and N Van Wyk. "Home-School Communication in South African Primary Schools." *South African Journal of Education* 24, no. 3 (2004): 183–88.
- Liberante, Lauren. "The Importance of Teacher–Student Relationships, as Explored through the Lens of the NSW Quality Teaching Model." *Journal of Student Engagement: Education Matters* 2, no. 1 (2012): 2–9.
- Mahlomaholo, Sechaba. "Critical Emancipatory Research and Academic Identity." *Africa Education Review* 6, no. 2 (October 2009): 224–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146620903274555>.
- Malebese, L. M. "A Socially Inclusive Teaching Strategy to Respond to Problems of Literacy in a Grade 4 Class." University of the Free State, 2016.
- Masitsa, M G. "Exploring Safety in Township Secondary Schools in the Free State Province." *South African Journal of Education* 31, no. 2 (May 23, 2011): 163–74. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v31n2a477>.
- Matoti, S N. "The Unheard Voices of Educators: Perceptions of Educators about the State of Education in South



- Africa.” *South African Journal of Higher Education* 24, no. 4 (2010): 568–84.
- Mayisela, Simangele. “‘You Detain Yourself If You Detain Children’: Educators’ Perceptions of Detention as an Alternative to Corporal Punishment.” *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. 4 (2021).
- McPherson, Jane, and Kathryn Libal. “Human Rights Education in US Social Work: Is the Mandate Reaching the Field?” *Journal of Human Rights* 18, no. 3 (2019): 308–24.
- Mihalas, Stephanie, William C Morse, David H Allsopp, and Patricia Alvarez McHatton. “Cultivating Caring Relationships between Teachers and Secondary Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: Implications for Research and Practice.” *Remedial and Special Education* 30, no. 2 (2009): 108–25.
- Mihr, Anja. “Transitional Justice and the Quality of Democracy.” *International Journal of Conflict and Violence (IJCV)* 7, no. 2 (2013): 298–313.
- Mihr, Anja, and Hans Peter Schmitz. “Human Rights Education (HRE) and Transnational Activism.” *Human Rights Quarterly*, 2007, 973–93.
- Mohammed, M O B, J P Gbenu, and R O Lawal. “Planning the Teacher as in Loco Parentis for an Effective School System.” *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 16 (2014): 318.
- Motsoeneng, M. S. “Entrepreneurship Education For Technical Vocational Education And Training College Lecturers: A Framework For Capacitation.” University of the Free State, 2020.
- Ndamani, Patricia Lulama. “Factors Contributing to Lack of Discipline in Selected Secondary Schools in the Mangaung Area of Bloemfontein and Possible Solutions.” *Interim: Interdisciplinary Journal* 7, no. 2 (2008): 177–97.
- Nikitas, Alexandros, Judith Y T Wang, and Cathy Knamiller. “Exploring Parental Perceptions about School Travel and Walking School Buses: A Thematic Analysis Approach.” *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 124 (2019): 468–87.
- O’Connor, Erin E, Eric Dearing, and Brian A Collins. “Teacher-Child Relationship and Behavior Problem Trajectories in Elementary School.” *American Educational Research Journal* 48, no. 1 (2011): 120–62.
- Omodan, Bunmi. “Democratic Pedagogy in South Africa: A Rethinking Viewpoint for Knowledge Construction.” *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 10, no. 2 (2019): 188–203.
- Pressley, Tim. “Factors Contributing to Teacher Burnout during COVID-19.” *Educational Researcher* 50, no. 5 (2021): 325–27.
- Ralejoe, M. C. “The Perceptions of Lesotho Secondary Schools’ Teachers about the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities. .” University of South Africa , 2016.
- Reyneke, Mariëtte. “Children’s Right to Participate: Implications for School Discipline.” *De Jure Law Journal* 46, no. 1 (2013): 206–36.
- Robinson, Carol, Louise Phillips, and Ann Quennerstedt. “Human Rights Education: Developing a Theoretical Understanding of Teachers’ Responsibilities.” *Educational Review* 72, no. 2 (2020): 220–41.
- Segalo, Letlhoyo, and Awelani Melvin Rambuda. “South African Public School Teachers’ Views on Right to Discipline Learners.” *South African Journal of Education* 38, no. 2 (2018): 1–7.
- Singh, P, S M Mbokodi, and Vuyisile T Msila. “Black Parental Involvement in Education.” *South African Journal of Education* 24, no. 4 (2004): 301–7.
- Tibbitts, F. “Human Rights Education.” In *Encyclopedia of Peace Education*, edited by M. Bajaj, 99–108. Charlotte, North Carolina: Information Age Publishing, 2011.
- Tibbitts, Felisa, and André Keet. “Curriculum Reform in Transitional Justice Environments: The South African Human Rights Commission, Human Rights Education and the Schooling Sector.” In *Globalisation, Human Rights Education and Reforms*, 87–109. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2017. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-0871-3\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-0871-3_6).
- Tracey, D. H., and L. M. Marrow. *Lenses on Reading: An Introduction to Theories and Models*. London: The Guilford Press, 2012.
- Walton, Karen Lynn, J Avenant, and I Van Schalkwyk. “Educators’ Experiences of Their Relationships with Adolescents Involved in Drug Use.” *South African Journal of Education* 36, no. 3 (2016).
- Woldeyes, Yirga Gelaw, and Baden Offord. “Decolonizing Human Rights Education: Critical Pedagogy Praxis in Higher Education.” *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives* 17, no. 1 (2018): 24–36.
- Wolhuter, Charl C, and Charles Russo. “Dealing with Incidents of Serious Disciplinary Problems amongst Learners: A Comparative Study between South Africa and Selected Countries.” *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship= Koers: Bulletin Vir Christelike Wetenskap* 78, no. 3 (2013): 1–11.

## **ABOUT AUTHORS**

Ernest Mpindo is a Doctoral student and a Part-Time lecturer at the Central University of Technology, Free State (Welkom Campus), South Africa in the Department of Educational and Professional Studies. His research is focused more on school safety, school violence, human rights education and education law.

Dr Constance Mphojane (D. Ed) is the Departmental Manager in the Department of Educational and Professional Studies at the Central University of Technology, Free State (Welkom Campus), South Africa. Her research is focused more on educational mentorship, micro-teaching and public management.