

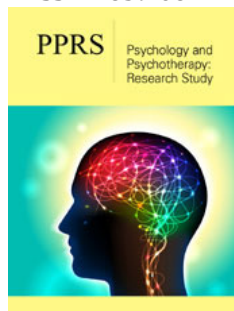
Teachers' Cognition of Learners' Challenging Behaviours in Primary Schools of Tshwane South District in South Africa

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ISSN: 2639-0612



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Submission: 📅 August 08, 2024

Published: 📅 December 03, 2024

Volume 8 - Issue 4

How to cite this article: Shanduka Jetinah and Hlabathi Rebecca Maapola-Thobejane*. Teachers' Cognition of Learners' Challenging Behaviours in Primary Schools of Tshwane South District in South Africa. *Psychol Psychother Res Stud.* 8(4). PPRS. 000691. 2024. DOI: [10.31031/PPRS.2024.08.000691](https://doi.org/10.31031/PPRS.2024.08.000691)

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Abstract

Learners' challenging behaviors in schools remain a global concern in educational settings. The aim of the current qualitative study was to explore teachers' cognition of learners' challenging behaviors in primary schools. Ubuntu and Skinner's Operant conditioning were used as frameworks that guided the study. Employing an exploratory case study methodology, qualitative data was gathered from participants using semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Data was collected from fifteen (15) teachers in three schools of Tshwane South District in South Africa. The following four (4) findings emerged: family hardships, ineffective forms of discipline, children's rights and the abuse of technology. The study concludes that dilemmas and realities of learners' challenging behaviors should be acknowledged and addressed by different educational stakeholders. The need for comprehensive interventions that address not only the individual learner but also systemic challenges within the educational settings are highlighted.

Keywords: Challenging behaviours; Learners; Children rights; Social spheres; Skinner's operant conditioning; UBUNTU

Introduction

Learners' challenging behaviours in primary schools are complex and multi-faceted. They stem from a combination of factors related to the learner, the family and the school environment. These challenging behaviours have been a concern from time immemorial and teachers in schools are concerned that their productivity in the classroom are affected [1]. These challenging behaviours have become all too familiar in the schools globally. In south Africa, the abolishment of corporal punishment after 1994 which brought the new dispensation made teachers without any form of an alternative and they find it difficult to deal with these encounters [2].

Furthermore, learners are becoming increasingly difficult to handle in classrooms and there is therefore a mass exodus of teachers due to these challenging behaviours, among other reasons. Similarly, learners challenging behaviours in the classrooms hinder the educational process, create a negative learning environment, and can have long-term consequences for both the learners displaying the behaviours and the overall school community. Addressing the cause of these challenging behaviour is essential to understand the root underlying factors that give rise to such behaviour. Teachers are compelled to deal with the symptoms and effects of such behaviours on daily basis in schools. Caldarella et al. [3] assert that interventions used by teachers to deal with these learners' behaviours seem ineffective because they do not have the facts of what causes these behaviours. Therefore, for their intervention to be effective, the underlying causes need to be flagged up. Addressing the symptoms rather than the causes have resulted in the perpetual state of confusion. Basically, these challenging behaviours have immense negative bearing not only on the teacher who is attempting to teach, but also the overall productivity of the entire class. Granero et al. [4] posit that learners' challenging behaviours are the main trigger for situations that risk school failure and drop-out.

In addition, Rubbi et al. [5] assert that primary school learners' challenging behaviours are influenced more significantly by school factors as compared to home factors. While the researchers concur with this perspective, the substantial role that home factors play in shaping behaviour should also be recognized. Socio-economic factors and parental involvement exert considerable influence on learners' behaviour Zuze et al. [6] & Epstein [7]. Research conducted by Poulou [8] also suggests that learners' behavioural challenges are rampant in a lot of schools today. The identification of their causes and intervention at an earlier stage remain crucial. Against this backdrop, the purpose of this study was to explore causes of learners' challenging behaviours in Tshwane South primary schools. Highlighting these causes may enable a collaborative effort among schools, parents, teachers, and other education stakeholders to create a nurturing and effective learning environment that yields educational success. As a result, the study was guided by the following research question:

What are the causes of learners' challenging behaviours in the primary schools of Tshwane South District in South Africa?

Understanding the causes of learners' challenging behaviour in primary school learners is essential for teachers and policymakers alike to develop effective strategies for intervention and support. While challenging behaviour encompasses a spectrum of manifestations, including disruptive conduct, withdrawal, violence, bullying, and social inappropriateness, it is evident that school-related factors and home factors exert a significant influence. Through this exploration, we endeavoured to deepen the understanding of the complex interplay of factors causing learners' challenging behaviours.

Poulou [9] advocates for the early identification and intervention of these challenges so that they can be dealt with at an earlier stage. In the same vein, Jackson (2013) concurs that intervention and prevention of learners' challenging behaviours is vital to reduce the number of learners who will suffer from mental health problems because of these challenges. A number of factors have been captured in literature as causes of learners' challenging behaviour:

Socio-economic factors

Socio-economic factors such as challenging living conditions such as poverty, malnutrition and homelessness can impact parents' ability to shape their children's behaviour [6]. In the same vein, Smidt [10] posits that the topic of poverty is one that has received little attention in the subject of learner development. When learners emerge from underprivileged settings in particular informal settlements, streets, or harmful family situations characterized by harsh and loud communication and resorting to theft for survival, it becomes imperative to instil proper classroom conduct through education to these learners [11,12]. Therefore, the way how the socio-economic backgrounds of learners contribute to their challenging behaviours in the classrooms warrants exploration.

Parental disengagement

Parental disengagement can serve as a significant catalyst for challenging behaviour among learners, permeating various aspects of their lives and hindering their overall development. When parents are disengaged, they may exhibit a lack of involvement in their child's education, failing to provide the necessary support, guidance, and encouragement [12]. Their disengagement can manifest in a multitude of ways, from neglecting to monitor homework completion to showing insignificance towards the academic struggles and achievements of the learners.

Moreover, the emotional disconnect between parents and their children can create a void where essential values, discipline, and boundaries are not adequately instilled [13]. As a result, learners may struggle to regulate their emotions, manage conflicts, and exhibit appropriate social behaviour both inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, parental disengagement often correlates with decreased academic performance among students. Without the foundational support and encouragement from home, learners may lack the motivation and confidence to excel academically [7]. This can lead to a cycle of underachievement, where learners become disheartened by their perceived inability to meet expectations, further exacerbating their behavioural challenges and disengagement from school.

In addition, participation in extracurricular activities, which plays a vital role in fostering social skills, teamwork, and personal growth, is also significantly impacted by parental disengagement. When parents fail to prioritize their child's involvement in such activities or show little interest in their extracurricular pursuits, learners may miss out on valuable opportunities for holistic development and meaningful engagement outside the academic realm. In essence, parental disengagement casts a long shadow over learners' lives, impeding their behavioural, academic, and social-emotional development. Addressing this issue requires concerted efforts from teachers and to cultivate a supportive and nurturing environment where learners feel valued, understood, and empowered to reach their full potential.

The curriculum

Another cause of learners' challenging behaviour is the curriculum itself. White Paper 6 Department of Education (DoE, 2001) stipulates that a flexible curriculum and an assessment strategy that are accessible to all students, regardless of the nature of their demands, are crucial to the accommodation of various learners in schools, colleges, adult learning centres, early childhood learning centres, and higher education institutions. Ineffective and inappropriately levelled curricula may cause learners to disengage from the learning process and exhibit a variety of challenging behaviours (Prinsloo & Gasa, 2016). In addition, the amount of time available to finish the curriculum, the learning materials, and the pace of instruction and how learning is assessed might serve as hindrances to learning which may lead to challenging behaviours.

Environmental factors

There are some features of environments which may contribute to the occurrence of challenging behaviour. Environment does not only mean the physical space which a person occupies but it also means the people, community, the culture, social factors, and opportunities which surround and influence the learners [14]. To comprehend learners' challenging behaviours, it is crucial for teachers to provide learners with conducive environments that support learners' confidence and self-esteem to alleviate challenging behaviours.

Theoretical Framework

Ubuntu was adopted as a theoretical lens that guided the study. Ubuntu means that a person is a person through interaction with other people [15]. It is the underlying support of African communal life regardless of their different backgrounds. The fundamental beliefs of Ubuntu in education supply the foundation or framework for the engagement of teachers and the learners. Muleya [16] identifies some of the Ubuntu values as communality, respect, dignity, sharing, morality, co-responsibility, compassion, group solidarity, personhood and value acceptance. When values of this African theory are inculcated at school, learners may be able to achieve high levels of moral judgement which is required for the betterment of the school environment and the society at large.

Ubuntu from the family, school and community at large deals with challenging behaviours. Mgogi & Mahaye [17] maintain that the roots of education as a social institution lie in its need for stability and security within societal groups. For example, when the parents hold strong values of Ubuntu about education and when they provide the necessary resources and enough support, the child too becomes more likely to value education. The child will, therefore, respect the teachers and other learners at school. Learners who get the necessary support from using the values of Ubuntu both at home and at school will try to avoid exhibiting some challenging behaviours that will affect teachers and other learners.

This may be caused by the support from the teachers, family and community which will create a central helping pivotal system [18]. Andrabi [19] posits that family is the foundation on which values are built, moral values such as respect, truthfulness, tolerance, happiness, honesty, loyalty, peace, justice, responsibility, self-restraint are instilled in the thoughts, feelings and actions of the children and they function well in society. However, the western way of life should not disrupt the African way of life which is more humane. Through Ubuntu which originates from Africa, stories were told that helped to teach children kindness, compassion, humanity, and oneness among other values [17]. Family is, therefore, crucial in ensuring that the children are taught the expected behaviours so that they grow up into responsible adults for the betterment of the family as well as the society at large. It is very critical for teachers to use strategies of managing challenging behaviour whose principles are representative of Africans where people care, respect and take responsibility of others. According to the Western Cape Department of Education (2001), the values which Ubuntu incorporates aspects

of human dignity which flows from practicing respect, kindness, and compassion, are crucial in making schools to become conducive environments for teaching and learning.

The Ubuntu system defines a person as a person through his or her interaction with other people [15,17,20,21]. It is the underlying support of African communal life regardless of where one comes from. Furthermore, a community plays a crucial role in one's development and behaviour. It provides collective existence, social influence, and pressure to the learners [22]. Culture and values are developed and learnt in the communities. Therefore, learners reflect a true image of the level of moral degeneration within their homes and communities. Furthermore, Mgogi & Mahaye [17] argue that in schools, learners are witnessing horrible acts of violence, thieving, destruction of school property, lack of respect for teachers and other forms of challenging behaviours which shows lack of Ubuntu values in teaching and learning situations. The values of Ubuntu may help to curb challenging behaviour in schools if applied properly (Department of Education White Paper 6, 2011). Some teachers may try to apply values of Ubuntu in their classes as discussed in this study.

However, not all learners will embrace these values. Previous studies have shown that Ubuntu produces respectful learners with high moral judgement [16,17,21,23]. On the contrary, the absence of Ubuntu produces ill-disciplined student body which leads to poor school performance. Hence, there is a need to fundamentally re-visioning Africa's education to suit its philosophical, historical, and cultural context by employing the Ubuntu framework to produce a well-educated work force whose skills are relevant and deployed effectively toward the continent's socio-economic progress [24]. Department of Education White Paper 6 [25] asserts that teachers should acknowledge and respect differences in learners, regardless of age, gender, language, class disability, HIV status and ethnicity. These principles which are mentioned in the White Paper 6 of inclusive education contain the values of Ubuntu. These values are incorporated by respecting all learners and embracing differences in the education system in schools. The current study employed the principles of Ubuntu to delve into the underlying causes of challenging behaviours observed in primary schools of Tshwane South, grounded in the context of African Ubuntu theory. The study was also informed by Skinner's operant conditioning theory in addition to the Ubuntu principles.

Skinner's operant conditioning theory

The framework of Skinner's operant conditioning theory was also used to explore causes of behavioural challenges in mainstream primary schools. Skinner [26] asserts that behaviour is the result of the relationship between stimulus and response. This is supported by Basri et al. [27] who connote that the operant conditioning theory is a process of conditions which cause a reaction. This reaction is called operant response, and the stimulants are called reinforcing stimuli because the responses follow certain behaviour which has been done. In learners, the teachers need to identify the things (reinforcers) for good behaviour to be performed by the learners

[28]. Skinner [26] describes the teachers' role as providing a stimulus so that a learner can react to the stimulus by guaranteeing a reaction. This leads to guiding the behaviour towards the goal of behaviour change and good behaviour. In learning, reward or reinforcement is the most important factor in this theory. Learners will become active in learning if there is a reward system for those who have presented good behaviour so that they may become more active in learning [28]. Skinner's theory places more emphasis on three main types of stimuli which are positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement and punishment.

Positive reinforcement

This is when teachers present a stimulus by increasing the probability of a response. Skinner [29] proposes that when positive reinforcement is used to reward a desirable behaviour, the behaviour which is unwanted will eventually extinguish [29]. He additionally contends that therefore, learners will be inclined to engage in activities that contribute to an enhanced sense of well-being. Learners want to feel confident in their classroom actions. Therefore, positive reinforcement will make them behave in a good way. When the environment has a positive atmosphere, a child will have a positive behaviour. According to Mantasiah [30], positive reinforcement is teachers' responses to learners' positive behaviours so that learners can increase their frequency to perform them.

Negative reinforcement

This is an unpleasant stimulus restriction, which if stopped will result in a probability of response. According to Mclead [31] the removal of an unpleasant reinforcer can strengthen learners' behaviours using negative reinforcement. This is so because an adverse stimulus which would be rewarding to the learner would have been removed. The unwanted behaviour would be avoided because the learner is afraid of the discomfort that comes with the behaviour. Wahab et al. [32] indicate that teachers may use negative reinforcement for example warning, shouting, scolding and reprimanding when they are dealing with challenging behaviour. However, the findings of their study indicated that it was dependent on the researcher's number of years of experience. The researchers further emphasised in the study that the teachers will drop these negative reinforcers as soon as they realise that the behaviour is not changing.

Punishment

This is when teachers give an unpleasant stimulus. Syarifuddin [33] defines punishment as the removal of a positive reinforcer for a response. Punishment is a consequence given by the teacher to reduce the negative behaviour of learners. Consequently, this behaviour will not happen again. Punishment yields only fewer results when compared to the use of positive reinforcement. Proponents of punishment propose that if a learner is punished, behaviour is not forgotten but will only be suppressed and this suppressed behaviour will resurface when the punishment is no longer present. However, it is of paramount importance for the teachers to use reinforcement towards desired behaviour since

reinforcement tells a learner what to do and punishment tells them only what not to do [31]. It then weakens the learners' behaviour. This is supported by Lorraine & Pulumbarit [34] who propose that since reinforcement falls on pleasure, pain can be reflected in giving punishment which gives positive and negative result as the behaviour decreases. In the same vein, positive punishment decreases behaviour by adding unpleasant stimulus following the behaviour.

Research Methodology

The interpretive research paradigm operates under the assumption that truth is culturally constructed, rendering it subjective and open to multiple interpretations [35]. This perspective suggests that a single event can be perceived and interpreted in various ways, depending on the cultural context and individual perspectives of the researcher. Within this paradigm, knowledge was viewed as constructed rather than discovered by the researchers. The interpretive paradigm was employed, allowing the researchers to understand events from the perspectives of the participants [36]. The researchers gained insight into the depth and complexity of the participants' experiences of the causes of challenging behaviours in their classrooms.

The research design serves as a framework for addressing the research question and should offer sufficient detail to ensure transparency and replicability, enabling readers to evaluate the study in relation to its stated objectives [37]. The researchers considered the research approach to determine how pertinent data was gathered. An exploratory case study was employed. We explored a real-life experience of participants over time using detailed in-depth data collection from various sources. The study integrated perspectives from teachers to elucidate causes of behavioural challenges exhibited by learners in classroom settings. Additionally, data collection incorporated pertinent documents.

Sample

Luciani et al. [38] describe sampling as the deliberate decisions that aid in determining who will be the individuals or groups involved in the study. Purposeful sampling was adopted in this study to collect information rich data that provide information on the phenomena under exploration. Participants sampled had more than five years of teaching experience. In addition, all sampled teachers had vast experience in teaching learners with challenging behaviours and some were even part of the school management teams. The various characteristics and perspectives of the participants provided a great insight and understanding of the phenomena. Three (3) schools in Tshwane South of Gauteng Province were sampled. In each of the three (3) schools, five (5) teachers were sampled which gave a total of participants to fifteen (15). Codes were used to identify the schools and the teachers. Schools were referred to as School A, School B and School C. Teachers were referred to as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10, T11, T12, T13, T14 and T15.

Permission was sought from obtained from the Department of Education in Tshwane South district, Gauteng province, as well from

the principals of the schools. Informed consent forms were signed by all participants. Participants were assured that participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and they might leave at any time. All three schools are geographically located in urban areas. Appointments to visit the schools were made telephonically first with the principals and thereafter with the individual participants.

Data Collection Instruments

Qualitative data analysis was used. The purpose was to capture the participants' in-depth understanding of the causes of challenging behaviours to see the world through their eyes. The following data collection instruments were used

Interviews

The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with all participants at their respective schools. An interview schedule was prepared by the researchers and taken to two experienced professors for comments. The comments provided were addressed by the researchers in consultation with the said professors to verify if all comments were attended to. In accordance with the research study's obligations set by the school district, the researchers arranged interviews to occur outside the teachers' contact time to avoid disrupting the teaching and learning processes at all sampled schools. The scheduled interview sessions were initially planned to last for one (1) hour. However, the researchers were flexible to accommodate longer durations that lasted up to two (2) hours with some participants depending on the depth of answers provided by participants.

Document analysis

The researchers also analysed the school documents that are used for learners with challenging behaviours at the schools. These documents included schools' codes of conduct, merit and demerit files, observation books, as well as class registers. This analysis aimed to examine the methods through which teachers identify and manage learners with challenging behaviours in classrooms. The document analysis encompassed an examination of the School Codes of Conduct to ascertain the prescribed guidelines and regulations governing learner behaviour within the institutional context. This regulatory document served as a framework that afford teachers the means to establish a methodical and uniform approach to behaviour management throughout the school.

Merit and demerit files were scrutinized for records documenting learners' positive and negative behaviour, thereby providing insight into the efficacy of associated rewards and consequences as documented by Basri et al. [20]. Observation Books enabled the researchers to elucidate the methodologies employed for the ongoing monitoring and assessment of classroom behaviour, encompassing an exploration of the frequency and nature of behavioural incidents. The analysis of the Screening Identification Assessment Support (SIAS, 2014) policy was also conducted. The policy was analysed to establish how schools utilize it to support learners with challenging behaviours. Additionally,

registers were employed as instrumental tools for identifying discernible patterns and trends germane to behaviour management, including the prevalence of specific challenges, the implementation of interventions, and resultant outcomes. The documents provided by participants were given to the researchers when they were at the schools.

Data analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data coding method proposed by Creswell [36] was used. This made it possible to divide the raw data into different themes and categories, which were then checked against codes. Transcribing the verbatim audio-recorded semi-structured interviews-built credibility. Confirmability was achieved by providing detailed explanations of the data collection and interpretation processes, as well as by presenting the findings in a systematic, coherent, and logical manner.

Taking notes during interviews and the uniformity of the data generating process improved dependability. When the semi-structured interviews and documents were analysed, the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were ensured by using pseudonyms and removing any personal information that could identify the participants or their schools.

Findings

Several themes arose during data collection. These included a lack of parental participation, disruptions in learners' social worlds, inefficient sorts of punishments, learners' backgrounds, and too much independence.

Family hardships

Children perform better when their parents keep up with their academics [36]. Parental involvement in all aspect of their children's lives is essential. Durisic & Bunijevac [39] assert that parental participation in a child's education starts at home, where parents provide a safe and healthy atmosphere, appropriate learning experiences, support, and a favourable attitude toward school. The South African Schools (SASA, 1996) [40] emphasises that parents must keep track of the academic assessment of their children. The implication is that parents and teachers should work together for the well-being of the learner. However, one of the participants had the following to say about unsupportive parents:

"Parents are too busy to help inculcate values to their children and hence they leave everything to be done by the teachers who already have their hands full with more than 40 learners who need attention" (Participant T8).

These parents hold the belief that, having paid their children's school fees, the responsibility for the rest of their education should be shouldered by the teachers. Parental involvement, effective communication, helping children at home and collaboration with the community are all ingredients for successful teaching and learning resulting in minimal challenging behaviours [7].

Another participant had this to say:

"We have parents who are absent in the children's lives because they are busy chasing after the money. Some of these parents have no time for their children even if they are called to school, they do not give themselves time to come and hear about their children" (Participant T4).

Parents who physically coexist with their children but emotionally detach may fulfil their children's basic needs but fail to provide the necessary emotional support. Their absence during family time leaves the child feeling neglected, yearning for attention, validation, and affection, often seeking these elsewhere. Contemporary parents often find themselves preoccupied with the demands of modern life, such as financial constraints, demanding work schedules, and language barriers, which hinder their ability to participate actively in their children's school events and educational journey [39]. This was noted by participant (T8) who said:

"Parents are too busy to help inculcate values to their children and hence they leave everything to be done by the teacher. So instead of teachers being just teachers, they have to be parents, social workers, psychologists and so forth but we already have our hands full as it is, we are not managing".

The gap between academic help at school and at home is especially troubling when one considers how vital it is for parents to play an active role in their child's development [41]. This was highlighted by T2 who said;

"There is no communication between parents and teachers. We should have a three-legged pot theory for the success of the learner (Parents-Learner-teacher) working together. If the relationship between the teacher and the parent is not right, chances are the learner will pick it up and try to manipulate the situation".

It is critical for parents and teachers to have a mutual relationship for the child's benefit. In recognition of the importance of parental involvement (for both learners and schools, given the rising need to transform the face of South African education), the South African Schools Act (SASA), 84 of 1996 and the Department of education (2001) [25] established structures geared at enabling meaningful school-parent connections. This demonstrates that parents and teachers should coexist together and without confrontation. Furthermore, COVID-19 having ravaged through the countries and countries going through economic hardships, families are not spared. Some families' sources of income have been affected and some jobs have been lost. Learners have lost their loved ones, and they still must adjust to the new normal of surviving with the pandemic. As they adjust to all these social changes, this might affect their emotional well-being. We encounter child-headed families, single-parent households, and parents undergoing divorce. All these challenges affecting the adults are leaving their scars on learners as well.

"We are having so many behavioural challenges in the classroom because we have so many disturbances in the social spheres in our country. There is social disconnect from one another especially

single parent households where daddies and mummies need to work, and they cannot give the attention needed to the child" (Participant T9).

The same sentiments were echoed by other participants who said:

"Some children do not stay with their parents but with siblings and hence they do not have anyone who will put them in their rightful place. When they come to school, they act out because they are seeking for the attention that they do not get at home" (Participant T7).

"The background of parents has a lot to play on how learners behave. We are having orphans who do not have parents, parents who are not working leading to financial difficulties. learners who are deprived of the basic needs of life often are difficult to handle in class" (Participant T6).

When learners experience deprivation of basic human rights, they may exhibit disruptive behaviour as a means of seeking attention from the teacher. The family as the first institution in which a child is born is responsible for shaping the behaviour of a child. If a learner is misbehaving, the family background should be checked first to see how it is inculcating the good values in a learner. Parenting styles, working parents, ineffective parental discipline and dysfunctional families are some of the causes of the challenging behaviours that we are experiencing (Jinot, 2018). In addition, the background of learners can significantly affect their behaviour at school. A learner's background encompasses a wide range of factors, including their family, socioeconomic status, cultural and ethnic background, previous educational experiences, and many more. According to participant T2:

"The background of children is one contributing factor because these children come from different backgrounds. Some come from families where parents are both working and when they come back from work, they are both tired and do not have time to support their children with schoolwork and to instill discipline in the learners".

In the same vein, Participant T5 claimed:

"What can we expect from learners whose parents have the guts to point a gun at someone else, they go out to loot the shops in broad daylight and they even go with their children as we have witnessed the previous week. What do these learners learn from the adults? Do you think they will grow up respecting other people's property? Will they be able to respect human life? This is the reason why we have all these challenges because society is failing us. The parents are failing us".

It becomes crucial for teachers and school administrators to recognize the diverse backgrounds of their learners and consider how these factors impact behavior. Culturally responsive teaching, differentiated instruction, and support services can help address these differences and create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. Additionally, providing resources and interventions for learners who may face additional challenges due to their background can help improve their behaviors and overall

educational experience.

Ineffective forms of discipline

Ineffective forms of discipline in the classroom can sometimes contribute to challenging behaviours. Punishments that are overly harsh, inconsistent, or do not address the root causes of misbehaviour may not effectively deter learners from engaging in challenging behaviours. This was highlighted by participant (T7) who said:

“Merits, demerits, sending learners to the principal, become exhausted and the learners become used to them. So, they don't care anymore. If I go to the principal's office, I will just be suspended and stay at home a few days and come back”.

This ineffective discipline often leads to resentment, defiance, or even a cycle of continued misbehaviour because they do not address the root causes of the problem.

Children's rights

When asked about the causes of challenging behaviours among learners, some participants identified children's rights as one of the problems.

“It is because our learners have a lot of freedom because of the children's rights. I am not condoning oppression, but they have so much freedom to a point where they feel like they can do and say whatever they want. Teachers are not allowed to say any negative connotation whether it is just something minor because they say it is breaking their self-esteem. The learners are aware of all these rights and that's why they can even stand and attack teachers because they know they are well protected by the law” (Participant T4).

Echoing this sentiment, participant T1 stated:

“Our children have a lot of rights, and they think they can get away with anything. They forget that their rights go hand and glove with responsibilities” (Participant T1).

This shows that the children only care about their rights, but the same Constitution advises them of their responsibility to learn and respect their teachers and peers.

“The rights of these children are just too much and it's not working. Our hands are tied because you can go to jail for corporal punishment but on the other hand, it is the one that yields results. The children have got so much rights, but they forget about their responsibilities as well. It is so unfortunate that we must abide by the law even though it is failing to yield results” (Participant T5).

The code of conduct for School B explicitly states in uppercase letters that:

“Teachers are prohibited from administering corporal punishment to learners”.

Participant T5 asserted: *“our hands are tied”.*

This shows that the law protects children, but it does not give the teachers options when learners only exercise their rights but not their responsibility.

The abuse of technology

The abuse of technology on the behaviour of learners in school can vary depending on various factors, including the type of technology used, the context in which it is used, and how it is integrated into the educational environment. While technology can offer numerous benefits for education, including improved access to information and interactive learning experiences, excessive and inappropriate use of technology can have negative effects on learner behaviour [42].

This assertion was supported by participant T8 who said:

“Cell phones are making learners to access the things that they are not supposed to access, and they learn content that is not of their age and hence they will want to practise what they have learnt”.

Reflecting a similar sentiment, T6 mentioned that:

“Our children are being raised by their phones. Netflix and the internet are babysitting our learners. The reason being face-to-face monitoring of the learners has been taken away from the community as it used to be. Instead of learning the right things from the family, they now learn from the internet”.

This shows that the phones are the ones raising our learners and whatever they learn from their phone is what they will practice.

Discussion

The study found that for every challenging behaviour, there is always an underlying cause. The social changes that are happening in society are one of the reasons why our learners are exhibiting challenging behaviours [43]. Parents going through a divorce, single parents' households, child headed families and the impact of COVID-19 affect learners. These things might be happening to the adults but their effects to the children are critical. Whatever bad things happening in the social spheres of the child has a bearing on their behaviour and performance at school.

Landsberg et al. [11] assert that in many nations, socio-economic position is the most important determinant of learner performance. They further indicate that children from low-income families frequently have unfavourable academic self-concepts, their motivation levels are low, and they have school backlogs. Growing up in impoverished households presents a significant challenge for many learners, often leading to difficulties in adapting to the school environment. Dudaité [44] also notes, these individuals frequently face hurdles such as struggling to keep up with their peers [45], repeating grades at a higher rate, and unfortunately, a notable proportion eventually dropping out of school. The findings of Donohue & Bornman [46] further reveal that approximately one-fourth of children from low-income families end up prematurely exiting the education system. Additionally, Landsberg et al. [11] shed light on the stark reality that economically disadvantaged learners are twice as likely to experience grade retention compared to their more affluent counterparts. These statistics underscore the pressing need for targeted support and interventions to address the educational disparities faced by impoverished learners, ensuring that all learners have an equal opportunity to thrive academically.

and pursue their aspirations. If these learners remain in poverty, the effect will be negative on their behaviour at school as found and presented in this study [47-50].

Parental participation enhances not only a learner's behaviour but his or her morale, attitude, academic performance, and social adjustment [12]. Parental involvement in a child's education aids in their development into responsible, productive adults. Parental involvement strengthens a true relationship between the school and the family, which leads to the development of mutual interests, which improves learner performance and behaviour [7]. Hence, the significant advantages of parental involvement in learners' lives, as highlighted in the study's findings contribute to the cultivation of learner positive behaviour in schools.

Moreover, the prohibition of corporal punishment represents a commendable decision by the government, contributing to the restoration of the dignity of our students. An increased consciousness about human rights arose in learners when corporal punishment was banned, and learners know that teachers can be legally sanctioned if they use corporal punishment to instil discipline. In addition, Maiti (2021) suggests that, rather than fostering increased attentiveness or motivation among students, corporal punishment tends to result in heightened delinquent behaviour. Nevertheless, the alternative strategies implemented do not appear to be effective. Learners are aware of their rights and fully exercise them, leading to the ineffectiveness of the current measures. On the other hand, they forget that the rights come with responsibilities. They only care about their rights and will even threaten the teacher that they will report them to the authorities.

The concept of children's rights is an important one that promotes the well-being, dignity, and autonomy of young individuals. It recognizes that children have a right to be heard, to have their best interests considered, and to be protected from harm. However, the implementation of children's rights, including the right to express their views and participate in decisions affecting them, should be balanced with the need for structure and discipline in educational settings. Too much freedom without appropriate boundaries can potentially affect a child's behaviour in class.

Learners sometimes forget that the rights that they have go hand and glove with responsibilities. Children's rights are entrenched in Section 28 in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of South Africa. These rights are in the best interests of all children under the age of 18. The authors of the Constitution made the children's rights a priority when it comes to matters affecting the well-being of children and their best interests are of paramount importance.

Jinot (2018) posits that the use of mobile phones is a major cause of ill-discipline among learners. This was discussed at the 119th annual convention of the American Psychological Association, (2011). One of the presenters advised parents to talk to their children about appropriate technology use early so that if they have a problem on social media, they can talk to their parents [51-56]. Parents were encouraged to pay attention to the online trends and the latest technologies, websites, and applications that

their children are using. The media and the technology that we are having might be good as a way of socialising, but it might be doing more harm than good to our learners [45]. Parents are leaving their children to do as they please on their phones without any monitoring. Some of the sites are very dangerous for the learners as they become exposed to things that even adults would not want to see. Learners can now google almost anything without the guidance of what is good or bad. Knowledgeable parents can assist schools to overcome the negative consequences of social media and reap the rewards of integrating social media with the process of learning (Morales, Cassandra, Sosa-Fey & Josephine, 2017). Therefore, parents and teachers should be guided on how to monitor learners' use of cell phones.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are some of the critical elements of research study. The research participants had to be safeguarded from any adverse consequences arising from their involvement in the study. The researchers followed stringent measures to mitigate potential risks of physical, psychological, emotional, or social nature that participants may encounter during their participation. The researchers prepared some informed consent forms. Prior to the study, the researchers acquired consent from the participants. Priority was given to upholding the participants' dignity. For this research study, ethical approval was requested from the University of South Africa (Unisa). Ethical clearance was secured from the ethics committee within the College of Education reference number 2021/03/10/49968211/25/AM. Permission was also granted by the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) and from the principals of the participating schools. The participants were provided with the details of the research study. The privacy of the participants was acknowledged by assigning pseudonyms to each participant. The participants were addressed with sensitivity [57-61]. The right to anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary participation were respected and valued. Interviews were characterized by principles of transparency and trust, following the execution of informed consent procedures with each participant. Participants were explicitly apprised of their prerogative to withdraw from the research study at any juncture should they choose not to continue.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our exploration of teachers cognition of learners' challenging behaviours in primary schools within Tshwane South sheds light on multifaceted influences contributing to such behaviours. Various factors that range from socio-economic disparities of familial dynamics and educational environments were found. These factors present dilemmas and realities that cause learners' challenging behaviors in schools. These factors should be acknowledged and addressed by different educational stakeholders.

These findings underscore the need for comprehensive interventions that address not only the individual learner needs but also systemic issues within the educational system. By fostering a collaborative approach involving teachers, families, and

community stakeholders - supportive environments that nurture positive behaviour and academic success for all learners could be created. Additionally, this study highlights the importance of culturally relevant frameworks, such as Ubuntu, in understanding and addressing learners' behavioural challenges. It is therefore imperative that further research and action be undertaken to implement evidence-based strategies aimed at promoting positive behaviour that foster the holistic development of learners.

Further Research

Further research on challenging behaviours in primary schools holds immense potential for advancing teachers' understanding and developing effective interventions to support learners, teachers, and families. By delving deeper into this issue, researchers can explore multifaceted factors such as parental involvement, social dynamics, disciplinary practices, rights-based approaches, and technology usage. Studies can track the developmental patterns of challenging behaviours over time, while qualitative investigations can capture the nuanced perspectives of key stakeholders. Comparative analyses across different districts or regions can uncover contextual differences, and intervention evaluations can assess the effectiveness of targeted strategies. Additionally, examining the impact of teacher training programs, community partnerships, and cultural influences can provide valuable insights.

Acknowledgement

This study was funded by the University of South Africa. University of South Africa REF: 2021/03/10/49968211/25/AM

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