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## COMMUNITY PROTESTS RELATION ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

**Nkokhelo Mthobisi Sibiyi** (Corresponding Author)

Walter Sisulu University/South Africa/ nsibiyi@wsu.ac.za

&

**Bulelwa Makena** (Co-Author)

ORCID identifier is 0000-0001-7340-3001

Walter Sisulu University/South Africa/bmakena@wsu.ac.za

### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relation of community protests on academic performance in one secondary school in one of the Eastern Cape Education Districts. The research approach that was adopted for this study is qualitative research approach as it supports an inductive style especially for small samples. Five senior secondary school teachers were identified as participants to this study. Findings revealed that protest actions had an effect on learner academic performance. The study concludes that community members should embark on protests in a harmonious way that does not disturb the schooling processes because such disturbances act against children rights to education. As recommendation, teachers should devise alternative means to close the gaps of the lost time as this is likely to improve the decline in intended throughput academic rate.

**Keywords:** Community protests, Academic performance, Teaching, Learning, Disturbances.

### INTRODUCTION

The study intended to examine the relation of community protests on learner pass rate. Protests are defined as part of a certain subcategory of public gatherings aimed at state institutions towards influencing or contesting decisions made (Duncan, 2016). Authors developed an interest to embark on this examination through observation that community protests in the Education District under investigation have a tendency of disrupting the smooth running of teaching and learning in schools, thereby leading to a decline in academic attainment of learners (Maeng, Malone & Cornell, 2020).

In addition to that, South Africa has experienced huge amounts of communal protests that have affected children's rights to appreciate basic education (SAHRC, 2018). The context of the investigation centers around several incidents that have been happening in the state, illustrating the magnitude of the problem of how protest-related actions act contrary to the rights to basic education (Cohen & Espelage, 2020). As argued by SAHRC (2018), monitoring over a period of five years indicates that protest-related action manifests in many forms, including the burning of educational infrastructure and the barring of learners from accessing school premises and other sites of learning. Hence, this paper aimed at finding the relation of community protests on academic performance (Atieno, 2014).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Berhanu (2011) argues that protests normally have results that do not encompass the expected outcome. The Department of Education (DoE) supplies schools with all the necessary teaching and learning materials. Teachers who have been in the teaching profession for a huge number of years are noted to have a skill to compile some material for learning. Nevertheless, learner performance is perceived to be declining with reasons such as loss of information occurring during riots (Hassan, 2012). This is an indication that destruction of schools has a long-term effect on learner's academic performance. Schools and learners together with the wider community always have an ultimate aim of attracting efficient and effective teachers, yet, protest-related actions affect learners' attendance because they become scared of the violence that roams within their communities and home backgrounds (Rasila, 2017). As observed by the authors, learners are unable to psychologically and adequately prepare for their examinations in such circumstances and this leaves us with a question of what will become of the youth of the country South Africa if such disturbance persists without interventions by wider community members (Dumont, Istance & Benavides, 2014).

Furthermore, exposure to violence at home and community environments, as well as injury due to violence, contribute to both reduced academic progress and increased disruptive or unfocused classroom behavior for children, adolescents and teenagers. (Word count, 2020) reiterates that violence and fear of violence have serious implications in terms of school performance, attendance, and graduation as an ultimate goal of schooling. The presence of violence changes attitudes on community institutions particularly schools in ways that interfere with learning and success in the field of studying (Cantor, Osher, Berg, Strayer & Rose, 2018).

Henceforth, the problem for authors to engage in this exploration of escalating protests with violence in our societies, leading to disturbance for schools to operate in a normal and cultural form, became a necessity to embark on (Kanyane, Popphiwa, Raseala, Mdlongwa, Viljoen, Moolman, Adonis, Ramphalile & Rule, 2017). It is estimated that South Africa has a big number of protests every year (SAPS, 2017), this being coupled with some experienced high rates of public protest. These actions result in vandalism of school property and disturb normalcy in school processes (Cornell, Maeng, Burnette, Jia, Huang, Konold, Datta, Malone & Meyer, 2017). It is perceived by the authors that if teaching and learning as a process is compromised by strike actions, performance of learners is likely to be hindered, therefore resulting to low pass percentages (Skelton & Nsibirwa, 2017).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This investigation is underpinned by Kolb (2013) Experiential Learning Approach Theory. This theory advocates for profitable teaching and learning which protects and considers that learners as recipients of learning should be catered for positive environments to learning. It is further aggravated by this theory that for acceptable academic throughput rates, development needs to consider the rights to learning. This has an educational implication that teaching and learning need not be disturbed by community protests as it is children's rights to attend schooling in a harmonious learning environment. As authors to this paper we already believe that if learning environment is an appropriate and

undisturbed, it is a welcoming and conducive for effective and efficient learning to occur (Cimermanová, 2018).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research approach that was adopted for this study is qualitative research approach embedded in a case study design, this being a strategy of inquiry that later helped to explore in depth results of processes caused by community protests (Punch, 2014). Denzin and Lincoln, (2005) argue that qualitative approaches should not be viewed as rigid, distinct categories, polar opposites, or dichotomies, instead they represent different ends on a continuum. As authors who engaged in this form of inquiry, we therefore administered an inductive style as a way of looking at the underlying problem under investigation. In addition to that, we decided at using this approach as it assisted a lot to explore and understand the underlying experiences of individual participants in their real-life settings, in this case particularly, the settings being related to their working environment (Creswell, 2015). To obtain data, five secondary schools purposefully nominated from an environment experiencing uncontrolled community protests, were open-endedly interviewed through administration of semi-structured interviews. Thereafter, we collected data by grouping similar categories. Through constant and continued interpretations of participant responses, themes as findings emerged as findings to the underlying exploration.

## FINDINGS

As common responses were gathered together with their similarities, some themes emerged as findings to this investigation. The two themes that divulged are learner-teacher attitudes and converted learner behavior.

### Learner-teacher Attitudes

Findings noted that protests have a discouraging effect on the morale, behavior and attitude for all involved. These attitudes result in lost discipline at schools, particularly through influence by ill-intentioned people seeking learners' participation in protest actions. Teachers become faced with such attitudes towards learning. As a way of responding to the question relating to learner and teacher attitudes, one participant said: *Exposure to violence in home and community environment contributes to both poor academic progress, ill-discipline and lack of focus in classroom from learners which might be the result of trauma at some stage.* With the same view, another participant reported that: *Fear of violence has a serious implication in school's performance and attendance and in some cases teaching and learning would be suspended for many days because of community protests. In this case when learners return to school, they become more violent because they have engaged themselves in these protests. They lose all interest and develop a bad attitude toward learning.*

### Converted Learner Behavior

When participants were asked on how they perceived learners during the time of protests, they responded in a manner that made the authors to be shocked and sad. This is noted when the participant responded that: *Learners tend to behave badly in school because of community protests. If there is stealing involved in the protests, learners are likely also to practice the act to steal at*

*school because they think it is okay to do so. Another participant had a similar opinion: This becomes the practice if learners might have observed an assault, they do that in school, this denoting a change of behavior in learners who are known to be good-humored and humble towards other learners and their teachers.*

## DISCUSSIONS

Attitudes caused by protests have an emotional or psychological manner that could lead to behavioral changes for both teachers and learners because these community protests are a traumatic event as they involve burning of tyres, burning of assets like cars and buildings as well as carrying of live ammunition by all people for self-defense (Hassan, 2012). Nonetheless, learners do not have access to resources on how to deal with this trauma which then causes a ripple effect resulting in psychological experiences.

As such, a learner is liable to act out certain behaviors witnessed. These might include displays of anger or the damage to property. Learners might think it is okay to behave in that manner because it is behavior displayed by adults during protests. People are found not realizing that children model adult behavior (Mokati, 2017). Learners would then grow up thinking that engaging in a protest is a correct or effective way to voice out grievances when in actual fact it is not, yet some may join whatever form of protest. In addition to that, the environment of fear can obstruct the smooth running of teaching and learning at school.

On the other hand, protests can get out of hand in a manner that they result into violence acts and fatal death to some. Learners are exposed to these acts to an extent that some learners imitate by bullying other pupils, disrespecting their teachers, swearing at adults and also using vulgar language. Sometimes in these protests they are used as human shields because the older people know that police would not shoot when learners are at the forefront. For police not to shoot at these learners sends a motivation to them that they are superior, of which that is not the case. Community protests affect learner's behavior in a very negative way.

It also emerged from the findings that in relation to attitudes learners during protests mix up with youth that no longer attend school, with influences to disrespect teachers. Therefore, reputation of teachers becomes impaired as learners observe them being badly treated. Besides the dented image of teachers, community protests also have psychological impact on teachers. Loss of time during protests may result to an increased workload (Hassan, 2012). When the protest is over and this in turn results to learners and teachers being overloaded because of time wasted, leading to stress for both parties. It is said that a healthy mind creates a healthy body, vice versa is correct, when stressed learners perform poorly (Skelton & Nsibirwa, 2017).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study aimed to investigate the relation of community protests on learner's performance in a selected primary school. The authors focused on determining how constructive conversations could be held within teachers to show up with strategies that could create healthy ways to deal

with matters of protests that seemed to affect academic performance. Findings identified gaps in terms community protests on the learner pass rate and recommendations are proposed to develop ways to advise community about protests without having to interfere with the pass rate of learners. Learners should not be disadvantaged while communities make demands that are unrelated to basic education. Schools need not be a trade-off for service delivery matters. Leaders of the protests, whether parents, community members or must be cautioned of the negative image they cause for schools.

To ensure that the learning environment of learners is not disrupted, the study recommends that DBE should help all learners who are delayed in their studies due to protests or matters unrelated to education. This could be done through organizing a team of psychologists and social workers who should attend to individual learners to help them maintain stress and calm their emotions, as well as engage with families to help reinforce expectations of learners to discuss possible responses with regard to learner education. Another recommended strategy is to take remote learning into consideration. This type of learning helps in situations where there has been unplanned physical separation between teachers and learners. Teachers therefore need to be trained so that they can be able to support learners. If this recommendation could be put into effective practice, gaps created during protest actions would be closed. This would then help all learners to work towards improved academic achievement. Findings to this investigation have been noted to be in line with the underpinning theory by Kolb (2013) who is of the opinion that for equilibrium in teaching and learning as a process, schooling conditions need to be favourable irrespective of the disagreements within communities where schools are located.

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