Peace Studies, Knowledge, and Learners Achievement

Vuyisile Msila
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8875-0644
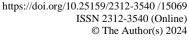University of South Africa
msivuy@gmail.com

Abstract

All conscientious school leaders and parents aspire for peaceful schools where knowledge about peace will thrive, and role-players will be conscious of human rights. Research has demonstrated that when learners have learned about peace, they are able to reshape their thinking as they consciously build optimism about the world. Arguably, all countries would embrace schools that promote peace within the curriculum. Yet, few studies have examined the link between peace and learner achievement apart from promoting reflection and dialogue on peace. As such, this study examined the impact of peace studies on learner achievement. The qualitative study was conducted in four high schools that had been riddled with violence over a period of two years. Teachers in these schools had undergone informal peace training to lessen violence. The findings revealed that learners learned about handling conflicts and understanding the concept of good values as well as respect and knowledge. It was also found that learners whose schools have run critical programmes in peace studies are likely to use a positive school climate, useful knowledge, and maximisation of positive learner behaviour for their success. Peace may therefore be a little recognised factor that may support learner success and minimise the dropout rates. Finally, the study showed that peace and progress go hand in hand when teachers and their learners do not have to focus on addressing violence. The schools become more prosperous when they use stability to enhance a positive climate and promote peace and learners' achievement.

Keywords: learner behaviour; peace**;** school climate; school effectiveness; violence

Introduction

Schools have become violent spaces that are not safe for teachers, learners, or parents, with various forms of school-based violence having negative effects on learner achievement (Ncontsa and Shumba 2013; Matthew et al. 2021). A loss of concentration, poor academic performance and depression are among the effects of being subjected to violence at school (Ncontsa and Shumba 2013; Makaneta 2022). Violent incidents arise as a result of the violent society in which many educational institutions are situated since schools are a microcosm of the larger society. South African communities have long struggled with challenges such as gangsterism, murder, child abuse and various other criminal activities. In many communities, the prevalence of guns among adolescents and young adults is a consequence of them identifying with flawed role models, among other things (Ngidi and Kaye 2022). Unfortunately, all these ill practices become part of the school culture. Endemic school behaviours which make it easy for many of these ills to thrive include teacher apathy and fear, parental non-involvement, a lack of school vision, as well as bullying. McGaha-Garnett (2013), as well as Hochfeld et al. (2021), contend that when children are exposed to violent homes and community environments, they tend to make limited academic progress and are prone to unfocused classroom behaviours. Violence tends to lower learners' academic performance and curb their social and emotional competencies (McGaha-Garnett 2013; Samara et al. 2021). This notion is supported by Bravo-Sanzana, Bangdiwala and Rafael (2022), who affirm that school violence has a negative effect on learners' academic performance, and mainly assumes three forms: direct violence, discrimination, and cyberbullying. Bravo-Sanzana et al. (2022) added that learner efficacy, educational expectations and satisfaction with their teachers are critical in reducing school-going children's negative exposure to violence. In general, schools in South Africa do not teach peace studies or peace education, which are perceived to be antidotes to violence in schools. In this study, the focus is on examining the role of peace education in alleviating violence and upholding positive values that support good citizenry.

School leaders for peace have a vital role to play in transforming institutions affected by various forms of violence which thwart effective teaching, as well as efforts to achieve epistemic freedom and social justice. While most school leaders seek to instil the tenets of democracy, social justice and transformation in their charges to create a more peaceful world, they should also foster school climates that support effective learning and success. It is a noble cause if schools, through various peace initiatives, can deliver global citizens of peace, but it would be even more laudable if the principles of peace education supported learner achievement—after all, that is the fundamental task of any school.

This study sought answers to the following questions:

- How does peace education lead to learner success?
- What are the critical elements in peaceable schools that can lead not only to peace but also to authentic and effective pedagogy?

- What role should teachers play in collaboration with school leaders to instil peace and a just pedagogy for success?

Aims and Objectives of the Study

Aims

- To investigate whether learners in peaceful schools are likely to achieve academically.
- To assess the effects of teacher empowerment on peace, education, and learner achievement.
- To assess why effective peace education leaders should foster new cultures and school climates.

Objectives

- To compare school effectiveness before and after an intentional peace education programme.
- To determine the role of peace education and leadership in attaining learner achievement.
- To summarise the values that are critical in peace education to support learner success.
- To evaluate why peace leadership matters in achieving effective schools.
- To demonstrate why school violence equates to poorly performing schools.

Literature Review

Many modern-day societies are characterised by conflict, violence and various forms of social injustice, and for that reason, organisations require leaders who can lead for justice and peace. School leaders who lead for peace tend to embrace peace education and promote the principles of social justice in their schools. Bhat and Jamatia (2022) differentiate between education for peace and peace education—in peace education, the concept of "peace" is included in the curriculum, while education for peace implies that such education is for life. Education for peace enlightens people about the values, skills, and attitudes they need to live in harmony with others (Bhat and Jamatia 2022). Furthermore, Bhat and Jamatia (2022, 613) add:

> There is a global need for peace education. It can be viewed from a variety of angles …
> To put it in another way, peace education can be taught in schools as a regular subject
> and also as a tool for developing students' abilities, talents, and attitudes. It doesn't
> matter whether you're in a school or non-school setting; education refers to any process
> that helps children or adults acquire information, skills, attitudes and values that will
> help them modify their behavior.

Two aspects are of prime importance in this section—peace pedagogy and school leadership that supports peace initiatives. Peace pedagogy can assist teachers and

learners to be resilient in the face of challenges related to violence in their communities or environments. Njobati (2021) points out that schools are well-suited to provide an enabling space for developing children and their families. In this regard, schools can help to nurture the mental well-being of children in areas where conflict is pervasive (Ngidi and Kaye 2022; Makaneta 2022). Peaceful classrooms engender in learners effective learning as well as resilience or the ability to learn from setbacks in life. Setiadi and Ilfiandra (2019) differentiate between a traditional classroom and a classroom in which a pedagogy of peace is promoted. Setiadi and Ilfiandra (2019; 2020) add that in traditional classrooms, teaching is about learning about something. However, in peace pedagogy, the emphasis is on the mind, because all violence starts within the mind. "The learning process begins with the building of inner peace in the minds and hearts of every person who seeks the truth, knowledge and understanding of each culture and appreciation of shared values to achieve a better future" (Setiadi and Ilfiandra 2019, 164). Peace pedagogy employs a humanist approach that liberates and is participatory and cooperative. Setiadi and Ilfiandra (2019) emphasise that peaceful classrooms are conducive to learning—therefore, classrooms need to be transformed into zones of peace, with such peacefulness being reflected in the behaviour of teachers and learners alike.

School leadership has a significant responsibility to attempt to entrench peace in schools. To establish a haven of peace, school leaders have to instil a culture that supports peace. Some writers speak of the need for leaders to embrace integral peace leadership as a guiding framework (Atwi et al. 2022; Miller and Alomair 2022). Atwi et al. (2022) adds that the need for integral peace leadership comes from the nexus between leadership studies, peace studies and conflict transformation. Miller and Abdou (2018) state that peace leadership is a growing element of leadership, where leaders are supposed to cultivate a professional culture of peace and inclusivity. They confirm the need for integral perspectives of peace leadership initiatives in building positive school cultures and establishing climates that are conducive to learning. One of the basic demands of peace leadership is to enhance positive cultural change to support the organisation. Peace leadership should also affect the development of learners into peace-loving adults, who have been capacitated to achieve success by educators who work diligently to close achievement gaps among their learners (Miller and Abdou 2018). Yet school leadership cannot achieve a peaceful educational context on their own—there is a vital role for communities, parents and various other networks— including neighbouring schools to play (Atwi et al. 2022; Miller and Abdou 2022). For that reason, Schellhammer (2016) suggests that leadership should be informed by the values of a culture of peace. In turn, this "compels leadership education to teach mindsets, values and competencies aligned with a culture of peace" (Schellhammer 2016, 205).

Methodology

Research Design

In an attempt to answer the research questions above, empirical data was collected through the use of qualitative research methods. A well-executed research design guarantees that the methods used match the relevant data analysis. The qualitative approach is invaluable in understanding subjective experiences, gaining in-depth knowledge of a certain context, exploring under-researched problems and generating new ideas (McCombes 2021) The type of design used here was a case study, which is a detailed study of a specific subject. The study was carried out over 22 months. The four Eastern Cape schools under study were average and low performers—in particular, the matric/Grade 12 classes (which did not form part of the study). Three of the schools had an average pass rate between 39 to 48% in the previous three years. All four schools, situated in urban areas, are historically black schools built in historically black areas (colloquially referred to as "townships", hence the reference to "township schools"). None of the schools had white learners, despite it being years since the demise of apartheid.

Participants

Four schools were selected through purposive sampling, sometimes referred to as judgmental or subjective sampling. Some have underscored the drawbacks of this kind of sampling, but researchers chose this method because they believe that the sampled group will be excellent and will provide the best information to answer the research questions (Struwig and Stead 2004; Newby 2014). The schools mainly served indigent families who send their children to under-resourced schools, whose challenges were exposed by the Covid pandemic—many could not continue online lessons, because few of such schools had access to suitable technologies, and even fewer teachers were skilled in computer technology. The four schools, selected from the province of the Eastern Cape in South Africa, are situated in the Nelson Mandela Bay, Sarah Baartman, Buffalo and King Sabata Dalindyebo district municipalities. Each school was selected from a group of 10 schools which participated in a short *peace intervention programme*, offered by a non-governmental organisation. The intervention focused on four themes—peace education, violence, societal transformation, and sustaining peaceable school climates. For 10 months, facilitators offered one-and-a-half hours of training to school management teams (SMTs). In South African schools SMTs are comprised of school principals, deputy principals and heads of departments (HODs). Amongst other duties, they are responsible for quality learning and teaching.

All four schools had reported a range of incidents of violence, as noted in Table 1.

Table 1: Schools and Forms of Violence

School	Form of Violence
School 1 Apple High School	Bullying, drug dealing by learners
School 2 Banana High School	Abuse of teachers by learners, gangsterism, teacher's car set on fire by learners.
School 3 Cherry High School	Bullying amongst learners, stabbing of a girl by a fellow learner using a pen
School 4 Date High School	Two learners stabbed, group of girls fighting

Many teachers at these schools were committed to teaching, and only Apple High had several underqualified teachers. At Banana High, the previous principal had resigned unexpectedly, due to learners being violent towards teachers. At Cherry High and Date High, many committed teachers reported working hard to combat negative cultures at their respective schools.

Research Instruments

Among several research instruments are questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, tests, observations and documents. In this study, three instruments were utilised, namely, unstructured individual interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis of the learners' school reports. Additionally, the peace course training was observed six times—three times in the first year and three times in the second year.

The researcher used the observation technique to gather data from the schools' peace intervention programme meetings. The researcher ensured that the participants continued their training unaware that someone was observing them. The observer looked for larger patterns of behaviour rather than looking for minute aspects of behaviour (Struwig and Stead 2004). Each time the researcher was in the field, he observed and listened for specific characteristics pertinent to peace. Each training observation spanned four hours, as this was the time spent on the facilitation classes. Apart from observation of the training sessions, the researcher utilised unobtrusive strategies of data collection which included the examination of documents as well as the school culture. Throughout the study, the researcher ensured that there was no harm experienced by the participants. This included anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher was in the field for 22 months and it was during this time that he used all the research instruments highlighted above. At the beginning of the study and before the start of the peace course training, all 24 participants were interviewed individually and in focus groups of six in each school. Two more individual interviews were conducted within 10 months after the first one in the first year (first 11 months). During that first year, documents were analysed at the beginning of January as well as at the end of November of the same year. Furthermore, in both the first year and second year the researcher observed the peace training sessions in April, July and October. During the second year, focus group interviews were held in February and individual unstructured interviews in October. Furthermore, more documentary analysis was conducted in June and November of the second year.

Data Analysis

In analysing the data, the researcher used thematic analysis, which focuses on identifying patterns and themes. This meant that information could be drawn from the raw data. Qualitative data is often subjective, rich and comprised of in-depth information which tends to be presented in words (Wong 2008). As Wong (2008) adds, qualitative data analysis involves studying large amounts of transcripts to look for similarities and/or differences. Organising the data was made easier through the use of coding, which enabled the researcher to compress the vast quantity of information collected (Struwig and Stead 2004; Newby 2014). Qualitative data coding made the raw data sortable, helping with categorisation, the identification of patterns, and post-data collection. As was the case in this study, analysis of qualitative data starts early on in the fieldwork even after the first interview (Basit 2010). Basit (2010) also underscores the analysis of documents which have to be read first, in an engaged rather than a detached manner.

Therefore, the researcher used thematic analysis, which focuses on identifying patterns and themes. This meant that information could be drawn from the raw data.

Findings

In the 22 months during which the study was conducted, the school documents examined, related mainly to learners' academic progress. At the beginning of the study, the researcher examined all the class averages in the four schools, focusing on the selected grade 8–10 classes. In all the schools, the average pass rate (from the previous evaluation) was 30%, with Cherry having the highest pass rate at 38%. As the results were analysed, the school leaders and members of their management teams (who were also participants in this study) concurred that violent conduct and drugs had a negative impact on learner performance at their respective schools. The participants pointed out that fear, uncertainty and a sense of danger made effective teaching and learning a challenge. The negative experiences that arose as a result of violent conduct made the

schools uninviting, marring their climate and culture. The participants from Banana High and Cherry High stated that, during different random searches, drugs (especially marijuana and one dangerous concoction referred to as *nyaope*) as well as weapons were found in some learners' bags. *Nyaope*, also known as *whoonga,* is a form of black tar heroin and its use is largely in impoverished, historically black areas in South Africa. The school principals at Cherry High and Apple High pointed out that this worsened the atmosphere in the schools, making learners jumpy and incapable of concentrating for fear of an attack. The participants admitted that learner achievement tended to worsen in their schools, rather than improve. In Date High and Apple High, there were marked problems in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) learning areas. While there were suitably skilled teachers at Apple High, there were only a few in Banana High, and the challenge was not only in numeracy but literacy as well. The acting principal at Banana High pointed out that teachers tended to be absent from school due to fear and other psychological problems related to the threat of violence. These circumstances impacted badly on learner achievement.

In addition, the study participants highlighted the detrimental outcomes for schools where there was no peace. They all confirmed that, at their schools, learners from indigent families tended to be exposed to different challenges, including a lack of resources, being indigent, a lack of social capital, and most importantly, violence. The participants conceded that bullying and drug abuse were prevalent in many schools, both public and private, but believed such problems to be especially rife in townships. The participants also pointed out that several other elements make schools "violent", including high drop-out rates, parental non-involvement, learner insubordination, fearful teachers and a high failure rate. The participants attributed the low success rate of these four schools to a lack of peace and the prevalence of violence. In fact, all of them linked their low success rate to instability in their schools as a result of the absence of peace.

The findings, as reflected in the document analysis showed some positive changes in learner results, with only Banana High showing no improvement following their participation in the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) programme. Table 2 shows the differences in learners' averages between the first month and the 22nd month of the study.

Table 2: Schools' Pass Percentages Over a 22 Month Period

School	Grade and Pass Rate Improvement
Apple High	Grade 8: from 34–39%
	Grade 9: from 37–41%
	Grade 10: from 35–38%
Banana High	Grade 8: from 34–31%*
	Grade 9: from 32–30%*
	Grade 10: from 35–31%*
Cherry High	Grade 8: from 37–42%
	Grade 9: from 39–44%
	Grade 10: from 36–43%
Date High	Grade 8: from 39–45%
	Grade 9: from 41–48%
	Grade 10: from 38–46%

* No improvement

All the study participants had stories to tell about the negative impact which conflict, violence and underperformance had in their respective schools. At Date High, gang fights were prevalent, while in Banana High drugs were a problem, with more than 100 learners reportedly coming to school either drunk or high on substances during the period under study.

The remaining findings are discussed under four headings, as per the topics which were given prominence during the interviews.

Peace Education and Learner Success

The participants were unanimous in articulating that decreasing violence in schools is likely to boost learner success. Acts of bullying, drug abuse and insubordination were identified as being among the root causes of school failures. The principal of Apple High pointed out:

> When there is no peace in any school, it is difficult to have strong leadership that would lead to good results for both teachers and learners. Our schools need to reduce conflicts because what conflicts do is they attract much attention, and this makes schools forget about the fundamental functions. Only resilient learners would succeed betwixt conflict and only teachers who show courage and teach to overcome the effects of violence.

The above was supported by a Head of Department at Banana High, who stated:

> Our schools in townships strive for success, but there is no peace. Parents have given up, teachers are despondent, children are afraid. In fact, many people from communities have become suspicious of schools. How do you trust schools where young children perish in pit latrines? Our schools cannot be places of peace when children are perpetually scared. Learners cannot succeed. Our school currently have an acting

principal, because the previous principal could not lead in an environment that lacked peace.

The principal of Cherry High emphasised the impact which various forms of violence, conflict and misdemeanour have on teachers, and on quality teaching:

> It is simple: our teachers can hardly teach in our schools. I see the major problem is that our communities and parents do not understand that schools need them, for learners' success. They expect us as teachers to see what we can do to maintain peace and many teachers – especially young teachers – are overwhelmed by the prevailing scenarios. I have highlighted these issues in my own teacher union meetings. Without peace, good initiatives will fail, and we will forever be criticised for not attaining excellent results for our learners. Last year, only 23 per cent of our learners passed matric. This is outrageous. One teacher was nearly stabbed in class by a learner. Another teacher highlighted the way other teachers bully him in the staffroom. I referred another teacher to a professional psychologist because she is not coping to contain learner misbehaviour. Her leave days are more than 65 days, and many of these are not accounted for.

Several participants voiced similar views. Three common aspects became prominent— the first is a success, which many maintained was dependent on the involvement of all educational stakeholders. In the sampled schools, the participants pointed out that there was a need for all role-players to work together. Several affirmed that, without the involvement of role-players and pervasive peace, there could be no learner or teacher success. Another challenge which had an impact on the sampled schools was school leadership being rendered impotent, as leaders could not guide teachers on a path to ensuring learner success and achieving socially just schools. The participants also shared that, in many instances, the curriculum did not speak to the immediate experiences of the learners, making it difficult to apply the curriculum to efforts aimed at changing learners' fraught experiences.

At Date High, the appointment of teachers by the school governing body (SGB) and union site committees appeared to create challenges which, in the end, proved detrimental to learners' achievement. The SGB always supported the appointment of local candidates (those domiciled near the schools), irrespective of a teacher's qualifications. For instance, in two positions that required Mathematics and Science teachers, the SGB reportedly hired teachers who were language specialists and hailed from the "local community." The Date High principal, supported by her deputy and Head of Department, averred:

> In our school, what leads to conflicts and [the] absence of peace is the appointment or rather "misappointment" of teachers. Appointments are stressful to [the] school management team because the SGB usually supports [the] employment of undeserving teachers for certain positions. This leads to conflicts because some teachers end up being overloaded because they have many classes to take care of in Maths or Technology. Learners fail as a result. Look, last year, the pass rate in Mathematics was a mere 14 per cent. On the other extreme are union site committees which tend to support [the]

appointment of their members, [without] even looking at qualifications. When teachers are not qualified for their positions, there can hardly be any peace. This is a nightmare for school management teams.

Critical Elements in Peaceable School: Searching for Authentic Values and Effective Pedagogy

Values were significant when the focus was mainly on examining factors that affected effective pedagogy. The participants reiterated that learners tended to mimic what was happening in society, which included gangsterism, drug abuse and bullying behaviour. The Cherry High principal captured the idea of values being absent from schools, and the harsh effect thereof on learner achievement and school success:

> The society impacts badly on our schools. As they usually say, the schools are the microcosm of society, and the bad we witness in these schools is a true reflection of what happens outside. The violence, the drugs are all values that are replicated from the communities. School management teams and school governing bodies should always be conscious of what good values are, and how these can be entrenched in schools. Our learners come from […] communities with many values, and some of these do not build. That is why parents, schools, communities should all be pivotal in instilling good values [in] learners. This is difficult if schools are situated in violent communities. There can never be peaceable schools [where] the[y] are situated in violent environments.

Some participants insinuated that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa may be responsible for the prevailing lack of morals since it supports a secular state that accommodates various religions. An under-emphasis on Christianity in township schools was identified as being responsible for waning values in schools. A Head of Department from Date High contended:

> I think we lost values when we underplayed religion … I mean Christianity … in our schools. When we were at school as children, we all prayed, we were taught religious studies and the Bible was always part of our growing [up], whether we agreed with it or not. But now we lack the good values we grew up with. Today our learners are not guided by biblical principles. As learners at school, we learnt about great men and women and how they lived with God and within God. Today our children do not know [the] principles of obeying and being loyal to authority. We are failing as [a] society to nurture the good in our children.

Although several participants did not concur with the role religion was deemed to play, they agreed that the current curriculum barely addresses principles such as humility, obedience, justice, and doing good for others—values which are embraced by texts such as the Bible. Yet other participants—the acting principal at Banana High, her deputy as well as the participants at Date High—all pointed out that the loss of values among learners was indicative that those children had never been exposed to "African cultural norms and values". The Banana High acting principal affirmed:

The learners, teachers and the communities lack what I call our own indigenous cultures. We had everything to guide our children, long before formal education: fathers taught their sons how they could become responsible men, and mothers did the same to their daughters. But now we are all lost between Western and indigenous values. As communities, we need to go back to the basics and teach our children what it means to be human. This is the only way we can have humanising education. When there is no peace, there is no respect.

All the participants concurred that any transformed curriculum would be inadequate unless it emphasised values. They believed that with the advent of various innovations, schools have begun focusing on technologies to the detriment of inculcating values in youngsters. Furthermore, the participants reiterated that many teachers are not sufficiently prepared to entrench peace in schools, with novice teachers in particular feeling they have been thrown in at the deep end.

Collaboration Between Teachers and School Leaders: Implications for Pedagogy of Success and the Peace Curriculum

Another common point raised by the participants was the lack of teacher empowerment to uphold peace in schools. During the focus group interviews, in particular, it became clear that teachers, in general, but novice teachers in particular, were found wanting in the face of violence, conflict and other misdemeanours on the part of their colleagues and their learners. The deputy principal of Cherry High affirmed:

What really kills our schools is very basic—the lack of a teaching corps that is adequately prepared for the quagmires we are exposed to. Teaching and learning [are] about life as well. Teaching is not merely about Science, History and Mathematics, but it is nurturing learners about their present and the future. But teachers come to school with no idea of what they should expect. Unempowered teachers cannot initiate and sustain peace. This is where we need to start, and even effective leaders may not be successful in uplifting peace if teachers do not know how to do this. We should now begin to see every teacher [as] a leader. Not only a classroom leader but like the principal, practically participat[ing] in leadership duties.

Again, there was consensus that schools where teachers are not empowered may not be able to achieve whole-school development. The participants underscored the collective responsibility that teachers have to uphold peace in their schools. It was also clear that the participants emphasised the role of SMTs and SGBs in empowering not only teachers but also the schools' governors. A Head of Department at Apple High pointed out:

It can be disheartening for teachers to face violence and conflict in schools whose teachers are not confident in defending justice and peace. But as managers, we cannot assume that teachers have these skills, hence it is necessary to prepare teachers to be proactive in introducing some form of peace studies in their classrooms. How will our learners understand peace if they see violence in their society and their schools keep quiet? I think we need education department officials to develop simple manuals to

support school management teams in empowering teachers. Yet, principals should lead this.

The participants employed the notion of leadership for peace, which should permeate the school as a whole. Interestingly, there was consensus that teacher unions should play a role in empowering members so that the work of the SMTs would not happen in isolation. The involvement of teacher unions was summarised thus by the Banana High principal:

> The collaboration between school management teams and teacher unions is critical in building schools with empowered teachers. In fact, I still feel that unions have done nothing to protect their members [who are] faced with various forms of violence. Here is an opportunity where they can have practical solutions. Our principals, their management teams, as well as union leaders should lead the process of teacher empowerment, especially in vulnerable schools like ours.

It was clear from these statements that there can be no empowered schools without empowered teachers. In turn, empowered teachers and empowered schools need the guidance and leadership of strong management teams and other important stakeholders.

One aspect which was emphasised during the focus group interviews was the idea of teaching peace across the curriculum. The participants pointed out that the scourge of violence has spread across the country, leaving schools under the spotlight for all the wrong reasons. They acknowledged that many children do not know much about building peace in the home or even their schools. Incidents of bullying, and fighting on the school premises (even stabbings and shootings) have become commonplace. The acting principal of Banana High averred:

> We need solutions, and we need them as of yesterday. All managers in our schools are complaining, but no one comes with solutions. As we talk and talk endlessly our schools are perishing and teaching has dissipated because of the lack of peace. We need a policy in all our schools where we will teach peace in every subject. It may sound bizarre, but one can teach peace during a period of Science and Mathematics. This may be easier with Social Sciences, but I refuse to think that only Social Sciences can achieve this. Physics, Economics and Technology are all based in our societies; hence we can teach peace across the curriculum. Peace should be magnified, otherwise, the normality in our schools will leave us forever and violence will consume good programmes.

According to the participants, peace education is vital in schools, if learners are to understand the logic of peace and spread that to their communities. As the participants pointed out, schools should prepare learners to resolve and eliminate conflict. Furthermore, peace education across the curriculum should magnify social justice principles, as it supports equality and harmony. The participants also discussed how several television programmes were ostensibly opposed to peace. They pointed out that schools are "competing" with the message those programmes send out into the world. This made it difficult for educators, as the learners' social media chats and posts

glorified the violence shown on television and online. For these reasons, the participants maintained that schools should highlight the theme of peace across all learning areas.

Discussion

Learner Success and Peace in Schools

Bashir and Akbar (2021) point out that peace education helps to promote peace by changing people's thinking. These researchers maintain that teachers can solve societal challenges by developing young people's minds through peace education (Bashir and Akbar 2021). Apart from drafting a curriculum in which learners learn about, and/or practice concepts such as human rights, social responsibility and democratic attitudes, peace education in classrooms should open learners' minds (Bashir and Akbar 2021). In their Framework for Teacher Education, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO 2005) spells out the need for positive peace, which stands in opposition to competition (which is more violent in nature) among learners in classrooms. Cooperation, mutual goals, and a love of others can make learners move from competition to cooperation, which is necessary for effective learning. Furthermore, UNESCO (2005) envisages that peace education will develop critical thinking in learners, who need problem-solving skills as well as the ability to analyse and synthesise. Peace education sharpens learners' appreciation for, and knowledge of, peace, and how societies can live in harmony. The creativity they learn will enable them to be effective in not only mediation and negotiation skills but will also boost their academic achievement. Adada (2016, 32) argues:

> Peacemaker training tends to increase academic achievement and long-term retention of the academic material. Academic units, especially in subject areas such as literature and history, provide a setting to understand conflicts, practice how to resolve them, and use them to gain insight into the material being studied. It is difficult to resolve conflicts constructively when they occur in competitive and individualistic contexts. In a competitive context, individuals strive to win rather than solve the problem. In an individualistic context, individuals tend to care only about their own self-interests and ignore the interests of others.

For Nurenberg (2010), critical thinking, when used in peace education and other peaceable school programmes, improves learners' achievement. In addition, Nurenberg (2010) found a correlation between environment and achievement: in the Vygotskian tradition, peaceable learners have the luxury of constructing knowledge themselves, rather than passively receiving information from their teachers. Nurenberg (2010) also adds that, through peace-based teaching, schools may be able to raise learner achievement and reduce violence and the anxiety it creates among learners. Yet Nurenberg (2010) concedes that few studies have linked peace teaching and learning to learner achievement. When a peace education programme focuses on active links between classroom instruction and the world beyond the classroom, learner achievement may be enhanced (Nurenberg 2010). Furthermore, the environment created

by peace-based education is believed to boost learner achievement, because the school climate allows this to unfold. Chubinidze (2004) points out that a peaceful atmosphere has advantages in education, and where it exists among teachers, learners, and parents, it boosts learners' academic success. As Chubinidze (2004) adds, the interrelationship between curriculum content, instructional practices and in-school peace programmes reinforces learners' achievement with respect to peace-related skills.

Peacemaker training tends to increase academic achievement and learners' long-term retention of the academic material. Academic units—especially in subject areas such as literature and History—provide a setting which can help learners understand conflict, practice how to resolve it, and grant deeper insight into the material being studied. It is difficult to resolve conflicts constructively when they occur in competitive and individualistic contexts. In a competitive context, individuals strive to win rather than solve the problem. In an individualistic context, individuals tend to care only about their own self-interests and ignore the interests of others. It is only in a cooperative context that conflicts tend to be resolved constructively.

Leadership, Teachers and a Peace Curriculum

As the findings indicated, three elements are critical in peace education—designing peace education across the curriculum; supporting leadership for peace; and entrenching teacher leadership for peaceable schools (UNESCO 2005). UNESCO (2005) points out that peace education need not be taught as a stand-alone learning area, but should be integrated into existing learning areas, as what makes it unique is its multidisciplinary nature. UNESCO (2005, 13) declares:

> Curriculum development in peace education has to follow an unconventional path. Unlike other school subjects like Mathematics or Science, peace education does not derive from any known structure of knowledge. It is an interdisciplinary subject. For its meaningful implementation, what is required is commitment from all the perceivers of education; for, peace education does not have a client. It is everybody's business. Lest we fall in the age-old trap of 'everybody's business is nobody's business', the curriculum development must involve everyone—teachers, parents and students, in one way or the other.

Members of staff have to be involved in developing the curriculum, but other schools, communities and parents are all just as vital in the drafting of a credible, inclusive curriculum. Bradley-Levine and Lasi (2020) argue that peacebuilding can be enhanced by teacher leadership—something which was highlighted by several participants in the study. Teacher leaders can creatively include learners, to transform their school. The peace intervention programme was vital in equipping teachers to lead peace and the SMTs supported the idea of the train-the-trainer model (Adaobiagu, Mezieobi, Aroh, and Akubue 2020). The 12 teachers who attended the peace intervention programme from each school were responsible for training fellow teachers as well as learner

representatives. Most importantly, the learner representatives trained their peers. This strategy was crucial in spreading the idea of peace across the schools.

The peace intervention programme sessions were interactive and their focus on the four broad themes—peace education, violence, societal transformation, and sustaining peaceable school climates—assisted school leaders in spreading peace and lessening violence, fear and bullying cultures among learners. Additionally, in the peace intervention programme sessions, teachers brought the most creative ideas, and this demonstrated the need for collaboration in the building of peace in schools (Schellhammer 2016). The intervention programme revealed the importance of collaborative initiatives in building schools and preparing teachers, learners and parents to fight the ills in schools (Bashir and Akbar 2021; Njobeti 2021; Atwi et al. 2022).

Peace Education—A Silver Bullet?

According to the participants in this study, teachers have not been adequately exposed to peace education, and would therefore struggle to use it to build effective, humanising schools. Notably, education for peace can help learners deal with trauma, and serve to address conflicts through an improved understanding of the plight of the "other" (GPPAC). As the GPPAC (n.d.) points out, education for peace can work to combat behaviours that are detrimental to the social fabric of society. As voiced by the participants, effective leaders will use peace education to nurture children as they shape their cultural values. Schools that practice peace are likely to have learners with improved attitudes, who are cooperative, and that will lead to decreased violence and lower drop-out rates (Brooks and Hajir 2020). A healthy school sustained by peace may improve the school climate, culture and classroom management. The violent incidents occurring in South African schools require more proactive and formal approaches that will foster harmony and cooperation. The teachers in the study indicated that peace pedagogy can help to instil social justice principles, respect and dignity, teach conflict-resolution and cooperative skills, and impart the importance of such learning to communities. Admittedly, the post-apartheid curriculum developers have not yet adequately formulated curricula which adhere to a peace pedagogy—something which would have helped schools deal with this country's turbulent past. Peace education is needed by not only learners but also teachers, whose experience of education is coloured by a violent society. Despite the violent acts and conflict in South African schools, there has been no emphasis on a peace pedagogy (John 2018).

Bashir and Akbar (2021) underscore the role of teachers in entrenching meaningful peace in classrooms, pointing out that without committed teachers it would be impossible to facilitate peace in educational institutions. Bashir and Akbar (2021, 49) note:

> Peace education influences the students' attitudes and thoughts about peace that will help to move towards [a] peaceful future (Harris and Morrison 2003). Peace education cultivated the attitude of respect for self and others, and also understanding for [the]

sufferings of people living in poor conditions of social justice. Peace education worked to mould the attitudes of individuals and develop [a] respect and [an] openness for cultural diversity and forms of expression. Peace education develops the confidence to contribute to the development of [a] society characterised by justice, peacefulness and people's wellbeing (Navarro-Castro and Nario-Galace, 2010). Teachers cannot only teach peace but [must] also change […] students' attitude[s] [towards the] sufferings of people (Harris and Morrison, 2003). Teachers are role models for their students. They set the standards for their students [on] how to behave, by practising peaceful behaviors in the classrooms (Thapa et al. 2010).

Conscientious school leaders who seek to enhance their schools' vision and support learner success, will always empower the schools' role players for the attainment of school improvement. Schools that have no peace are unlikely to produce successful learners and motivated teachers.

Conclusion

Although few studies have examined the link between learner success and peace education, this study demonstrates that supportive school climates and favourable school cultures are vital in fostering learner success. In three of the four schools sampled, teachers reported some level of achievement after a peace intervention programme, albeit not to a significant extent. It was clear that violence and related ills undermined and even destroyed the project of teaching and learning by creating unfavourable conditions. Conscientious school leaders should consciously initiate and uphold the principles of building conducive and inviting classrooms. These cannot be established unless violence is defeated by values that magnify those values that make schools engaged in institutions seeking to enhance collaboration between communities and school stakeholders. Teacher empowerment in respect of a peace-based curriculum, and related strategies are necessary for building effective schools. The participants confirmed that, without peace, schools would remain poor performers with no prospects of ever improving. School leaders who work for peace will see the difference in their schools, for as they instil the values of peace, they will be transforming their schools, thereby ensuring that they also minimise the achievement gap.

References

Adada, M. 2016. "Effectiveness of Peace Education Programmes in Secondary Schools: A Case Study of Kisumu Municipality, Kenya." *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science* 4(2): 28–41.

Adaobiagu N. O., D. I. Mezieobi, P. N. Aroh, and F. N. Akubue. 2020. "The Effect of Cooperative Concept Mapping on Misconceptions, Knowledge Achievement, and Transfer of Learning in Peace Education." *Social Studies* 111(1): 18–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2019.1652139

Atwi, R., M. W. McIntyre, A. S. Abdou, M. O. Alomair, N. J. Irwin, L. Hilt, N. Lotfi, S. Murray, and G. Richmond. 2022. "Peace Leadership Education: Stories of Growth, Training, and Development." In *Evolution of Peace Leadership and Practical Implications*, edited by E. Schellhammer, 101–123. Hershey: IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-9736-1.ch006

Bashir, S., and R. A. Akbar. 2021. "Determining the Effect of Peace Education on Knowledge and Attitude of Prospective Teachers: An Experimental Study." *Bulletin of Education and Research* 43(3): 47–66.

Basit, T. 2010. *Conducting Research in Educational Contexts*. New York: Continuum.

Bhat, R. M., and P. L. Jamatia. 2022. Importance and Necessity of Peace Education in the School Curriculum for Fostering International Perspective." *Internal Journal of Educational Review Law, And Social Sciences* 2(5): 613–620. https://doi.org/10.54443/ijerlas.v2i5.341

Bradley-Levine, J., and S. Lasi. 2020. "Peace Building Through Teacher Leadership." *Journal of Peace Education* 17(3): 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2020.1775562

Bravo-Sanzana, M., S. I. Bangdiwala, and M. Rafael. 2022. "School Violence's Negative Effect on Student Academic Performance: A Multilevel Analysis." *International Journal of Injury Control and Safety Promotion* 29(1): 29–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457300.2021.1994615

Brooks, C., and B. Hajir. 2020. "Peace Education in Formal Schools: Why is it Important and How Can it be Done?" Accessed May 15, 2023. https://www.international-alert.org/publications/peace-education-formal-schools-why-is-it-important-and-how-can-it-be-done/.

Chubinidze, N. 2004. "Peace Through Social Studies Curriculum in U.S. and Georgian School Settings." Accessed March 21, 2023. https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cie_capstones/121.

GPPAC. "Peace Education." Accessed February 24, 2023. https://www.gppac.net/what-we-do/peace-education.

Hochfeld, T., J. Schmid, S. Errington, and S. Omar. 2022. "Learners' Perspectives on School Safety in Johannesburg." South African Journal of Education 42(1): 1–9. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v42n1a1936

John, V. M. 2018. "Peace Education in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Needs, Responses, and Constraints." *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 6(1): 55–74. https://doi.org/10.18588/201805.00a048

Makaneta, H. 2022. "School Violence: Communities in South Africa Must Play Their Part." Accessed February 30, 2023. https://theafrican.co.za/education/school-violence-communities-in-south-africa-must-play-their-part-cf6bb69a-8406-408a-b11e-3bf265d6244d/.

Matthew, J. M., A. B. Nickerson, and S. R. Jimerson. 2021. "Preventing School Violence and Promoting School Safety." *Contemporary Scholarship Advancing Science, Practice, and Policy, School Psychology Review* 50 2–3; 131–142. https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2021.1949933

McCombes, S. 2021. "What is a Research Design - Types, Guide & Examples." Accessed April 24, 2023. https://www.scribbr.com/research-process/research-design/.

McGaha-Garnett, V. 2013. "The Effects of Violence on Academic Progress and Classroom Behavior: From a Parent's Perspective." Accessed May 30, 2023. https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/vistas/the-effects-of-violence-on-academic-progress-and-classroom-behavior.pdf?sfvrsn=1828de3f_12.

Miller, W. M., and A. S. Abdou. 2018. "Cultivating a Professional Culture of Peace and Inclusion: Conceptualising Practical Applications of Peace Leadership in Schools." Frontiers in Education 3. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2018.00056

Miller, W. M., and M. O. Alomair. 2022. "Understanding Integral Peace Leadership in Practice: Lessons and Learnings from Women Peacemaker Narratives." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 28(4): 437–448. https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000618

Ncontsa, V. N., and A. Shumba. 2013. "The Nature Causes and Effects of School Violence in South African High Schools." *South African Journal of Education* 33(3): 1–15. https://doi.org/10.15700/201503070802

Newby, P. 2014. *Research Methods for Education*. New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315758763

Ngidi, L. Z., and S. B. Kaye. 2022. "Reducing School Violence: A Peace Education Project in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa." *South African Journal of Education* 42(2): 1–14. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v42n2a1989

Njobati, F. F. 2021. "Shaping Resilience Through Peace Education in Schools: Results from A Case Study in Nigeria." *Zeitschrift für internationale Bildungsforschung und Entwicklungspädagogik* 44(4): 25–31. https://doi.org/10.31244/zep.2021.04.05

Nurenberg, D. 2010. "A Study of The Effects of Peaceable Schools' Curricula on Student Achievement in an Urban Middle School." PhD diss., Lesley University.

Samara M., N. B. Da Silva, A. El-Asam, S. Hammuda, and N. Khattab. 2021. "How Can Bullying, Victimisation Lead to Lower Academic Achievement? A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of the Mediating Role of Cognitive-motivational Factors." *International Journal of Environmental Research in Public Health* 18(5): 2209. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18052209

Schellhammer, E. P. 2016. "A Culture of Peace and Leadership Education." *International Journal of Public Leadership* 12(3): 205–215. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPL-04-2016-0014

Setiadi, R. S., and R. S. Ilfiandra. 2020. "Peace Education Pedagogy: A Strategy to Build Peaceful Schooling." *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 399(2019): 161–167. https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200130.105

Struwig, F. W., and G. B. Stead. 2004. *Planning, Designing and Reporting Research*. Cape Town: Juta.

UNESCO. 2005. *Peace Education: Framework for Teacher Education*. New York: UNESCO.

Wong, L. P. 2008. "Data Analysis in Qualitative Research: A Brief Guide to Using Nvivo." *Malaysian Family Physician* 3(1): 14–20.