



MANAGING LEARNER ILL-DISCIPLINE IN RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A PERSPECTIVE OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS

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This article examines the contribution of learner indiscipline to poor performance in rural secondary schools. The article is empirical within the qualitative research approach. The guiding question is: how is the learner Code of Conduct mitigating learner indiscipline in rural secondary schools? An interview technique and narrative inquiry were used as data collection methods. Of the ten rural secondary schools in the Sekhukhune East district in Limpopo Province, South Africa, three were sampled for the study using convenience purposive sampling. Data were analysed using qualitative thematic content analysis. At each sampled secondary school, a principal, a deputy principal, and a head of department served as research participants. Findings revealed that learner ill-discipline is poorly conceptualised. School unpopularity is aggravated by learner ill-discipline. Again, schooling impediments stem from learners' ill-discipline. The researcher recommends revisiting the implementation of the learner Code of Conduct to overcome learner ill-discipline.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this article is to examine the contribution of learner indiscipline to poor performance in secondary schools in the Sekhukhune East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. The article highlights the necessary knowledge regarding the possible causes of indiscipline among rural secondary school learners and the disciplinary methods to apply to manage it.¹ Learner discipline is topical in light of high rates of ill-discipline among rural secondary school learners. Reversing learner ill-discipline as a causative factor in poor performance in rural secondary schools requires knowledge of the conditions that trigger it.² Losen and Martinez³ maintain that learner ill-discipline plays a major role in inhibiting impressive academic performance among learners in rural secondary schools. Learner indiscipline refers to a myriad of misbehaviours exhibited by learners in secondary schools, including persistent noise-making, bullying, disregarding teacher instructions, and disrespecting fellow learners and teachers, among others.⁴ Such unacceptable misconduct can disrupt the production of exceptional performance. This underscores how crucial it is to address misbehaviour among rural secondary school learners to prevent marginalization and elimination. Misconduct by rural secondary school learners must be permanently avoided to create an effective learning environment that improves rural learners' academic performance.

Where learner ill-discipline is alarmingly high, quality instructional activities hardly occur. Learners' brilliant performance is affected in a secondary schooling environment where learner ill-discipline has become the new normal. Rural secondary schools need to be aware that confronting learner misbehaviour is reactive and usually does not

¹ Prahba, PG, 'Positive Discipline: A Unique Method to Replace Corporal Punishment' (2019) 10(1) *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research* 975–984.

² Greenberg, D and Hibbert, P, 'From the Editors—COVID-19: Learning to Hope and Hoping to Learn' (2020) 19(2) *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 123–130 <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2020.0247>.

³ Losen, DJ and Martinez, P, *Lost Opportunities: How Disparate School Discipline Continues to Drive Differences in the Opportunity to Learn* (2020).

⁴ Ahmad, M, 'Management of Facilities and Infrastructures in Schools' (2021) 10(1) *Akademika* 93–112.

yield a lasting solution. The better approach is for rural secondary schools to proactively address the problem. This stems from the fact that some misbehaving rural secondary school learners could hide their misconduct from teachers to avoid punishment for their offences. In that context, rural misbehaving learners would not have changed their unacceptable behaviours. Zawacki, *et al.*⁵ One of the biggest issues that rural secondary schools have faced over the years is a reactionary approach to learner ill-discipline, rather than a proactive approach that could enforce real behavioural change. Rural secondary schools need to be familiar with legitimate methods commonly used to address misbehaving learners.

Methods adopted by rural secondary schools to prevent learner misconduct need not make schooling harsh, torturous, violent, or socially unacceptable to learners. Otherwise, those methods will be considered counterproductive. Hence, Smirnova⁶ remarks that containing ill-discipline in a turbulent schooling era is very demanding. Among other things, punishment for misbehaving offences has to remain democratic and less punitive. This implies that learner rights continue to be upheld despite transgressions. To productively manage rural secondary school learner indiscipline, no school should be insulated from the geopolitical influences of the community it serves. Managing learner indiscipline involves actions taken by School Management Teams, teachers, or school organizations against learners when their behaviours at school disrupt ongoing educational activities or break classroom or school rules established for better school governance. Globally, poor implementation of school rules, from the classroom to the school level, undermines the effectiveness of education systems and can at times leave learners and teachers highly discouraged.

⁵ Zawacki-Richter, O, Marín, V, Bond, M and Gouverneur, F, 'Systematic Review of Research on Artificial Intelligence Applications in Higher Education: Where Are the Educators?' (2019) 16(1) *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-019-0171-0>.

⁶ Smirnova, Y, 'Application of Eye-Tracking Technology Dual Eye Tracking (Duet) in the Study of Cooperation Between Children with Atypical Development and Adults in the Learning Process' (2023) 1(1) *Forum* 98–99 <https://doi.org/10.61365/forum.2023.078>.

One of the problems posed by learner ill-discipline in the secondary schooling sector is that it disrupts the smooth progression and conduct of instructional activities.⁷ This is evident in the National Education Policy Act of 1996, which clearly defines the specific roles of teachers in South African schools, including community citizenship and a pastoral role, in which education is required and expected to uphold the constitution and promote democratic values and practices in schools. This is possible when learner ill-discipline is non-existent.⁸

2. ILL-DISCIPLINE IN RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review demonstrates that rural secondary schools lack the capacity to confront the rampant learner indiscipline. What is missing, though, is the resilience and determination to address ill-discipline.⁹ Given the magnitude of disciplinary problems and the overall adverse impact on sustainable national development, there is a need for educational institutions to adopt a collaborative problem-solving approach across secondary schools to make progress in eradicating them.¹⁰ As Hussain and Afzal¹¹ argue, ongoing learner indiscipline can trigger a sense of hopelessness and defeat among rural secondary School Management Teams (SMTs). This occurs as SMTs, especially in rural schools, struggle to make a dent in stubborn learner indiscipline, which, despite mounting

⁷ Asaleh, NJ, 'Teaching Critical Thinking Skills: Literature Review' (2020) 19(1) *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology* 21–39.

⁸ Cherian, A, 'Transformational Leadership: A Need in the Education Sector' (2024) 12(2) *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies* 25–29.

⁹ Welsh, R, 'School Leadership Role and School Discipline: Examining the Relationship Between School Leadership–Student Racial Congruence and the Likelihood of Exclusionary Discipline' (2024b) *Race and Justice* <https://doi.org/10.1177/21533687241227176>.

¹⁰ Darling-Hammond, L and Podolsky, A, 'Breaking the Cycle of Teacher Shortages: What Kind of Policies Can Make a Difference?' (2019) 27(3) *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 1–16.

¹¹ Hussain, A and Afzal, S, 'Lack of Infrastructure and Educational Facilities in Public Schools and Its Effects on Quality Education of Students' (2023) 2(1) *Journal of Excellence in Social Sciences* 37–50.

efforts, continues to hinder the delivery of quality education to all learners in an indiscipline-free learning space.

Smith¹² argues that when schools implement disciplinary policies consistently and appropriately, learners are more likely to engage positively in their studies and avoid poor performance. This reduces persistent disruptions and enhances rural secondary school learners' focus on their studies.¹³ Literature indicates that uncontrollable indiscipline in rural secondary schools negatively affects a school's service-delivery attitude. This calls for rural secondary schools experiencing learner ill-discipline to mount a robust, collective response, rather than dealing with the challenge in a fragmented way.¹⁴ The literature review emphasizes that the primary point of interaction in reversing learner ill-discipline in rural secondary schools lies in internal and external stakeholders cooperating to end ill-discipline. This is informed by the point that rural secondary school learner ill-discipline is a multifaceted issue not confined to a single rural secondary school but to nearly all of them.¹⁵ Where there was once learner ill-discipline, there will be a need to rebuild trust and restore dignity, because learner ill-discipline, by its very nature, erodes them.¹⁶

The literature study is emphatic that rural secondary schools have an obligation to remove learner indiscipline from their ranks.¹⁷ Under normal circumstances, misbehaving learners in rural secondary schools may lack structured guidance and responsive support, which could lead them to desist from unacceptable misbehaviours and emulate their well-behaved

¹² Smith, J, *Educational Psychology: Theory and Practice* (Routledge 2020).

¹³ Zondo, SS and Mncube, VS, 'Teachers' Challenges in Implementing a Learners' Code of Conduct for Positive Discipline in Schools' (2024) 44(2) *South African Journal of Education* 1–10.

¹⁴ Bechtle, M, *It Is Better to Bite Your Tongue Than to Eat Your Words* (Revell Publishers 2022).

¹⁵ Howard, JL, Ryan, RM and Deci, EL, 'A Meta-analysis of Self-Determination Theory-Based Interventions in Education: Effects on Student Motivation, Engagement and Performance' (2021) 91(4) *Review of Educational Research* 121–150.

¹⁶ Maxwell, JC, *Success One Day at a Time* (Struik Christian Media 2024).

¹⁷ Bechtle, M, *It Is Better to Bite Your Tongue Than to Eat Your Words* (Revell Publishers 2022).

peers. Where discipline reigns supreme at school, clarity, ethics, and innovation often intersect to make rural secondary schools' mandate to dispense knowledge actionable. Stakeholders of note need to act with unity and urgency to reverse learner ill-discipline before it negatively disrupts the school's teaching and learning environment. The literature review further indicates that learner indiscipline can be surmounted when planning is turned into progress and aspirations into achievement. The literature review reminds us that rural secondary school learners' indiscipline may stem from age, learners' developmental levels, home backgrounds, and environmental factors.

Maxwell laments that poor discipline leads to poor academic performance. The literature review indicates that addressing rural secondary school learner indiscipline in a South African context could be a double challenge, as the country's laws are unequivocal that learner discipline must remain democratic and, at the same time, less punitive. This suggests that any approach adopted to address learner ill-discipline in rural secondary schools must recognize the difference between changing behaviour and hiding behaviour to avoid discipline. In that context, misbehaving rural secondary school learners need to learn self-control and behaviour management to help resolve the disciplinary problems they generate.

The literature review reveals that if discipline influences good behaviour, it should not be ignored when it raises its ugly head.¹⁸ Somewhat addressing the root causes of ill-discipline among learners could reduce incidents of ill-discipline in schools. Among other things, rural secondary schools could use the Code of Conduct at their disposal to manage learners' behaviours. This implies that the Code of Conduct could prohibit unacceptable and violent behaviours by rural secondary school learners. The literature review is unequivocal in recommending leniency toward young children who have misbehaved, in contrast to stricter measures for older learners, such as those in secondary schools, whether rural or urban.¹⁹ Understanding the contribution of ill-discipline to rural

¹⁸ Maxwell, JC, *Success One Day at a Time* (Struik Christian Media 2024).

¹⁹ Braun, V and Clarke, V, 'Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis' (2019) 11(4) *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 589–597.

secondary school learners' performance is essential to creating effective, healthy instructional environments that enable good performance. By examining the connection between good learner behaviours and exceptional performance, this article attempts to highlight the need to manage rural learners' ill-discipline in classrooms and schools so that excellent performance is not prevented, notwithstanding the classroom and school conditions faced.²⁰ The findings of this article aim to enlighten School Management Teams, teachers, learners, policymakers, and other relevant stakeholders about the common disciplinary problems schools face and the methods used to address them.

The literature study emphasises that learner indiscipline is a disruptive factor in exceptional academic performance and overall sustainable national development. Rural secondary schools are those whose rural location is a disadvantage compared to urban secondary schools. Furthermore, rural secondary schools are largely associated with poverty and a general lack of basic school infrastructure, among other issues. The prevalence of learner indiscipline is an added impediment to the already existing ones. There are scenarios where rural secondary schools experience unbearable absenteeism on both the learner and teacher sides. Worse, some learners found in rural secondary schools are underprepared from their feeder primary schools. Some other mishaps afflicting rural secondary schools include long distances learners walk to school, with no scholar patrols in place. Ill-qualified teachers accompany this. That is why even grade repetition is high in such secondary schools. In the case of urban secondary schools, their location is somewhat an advantage. Such schools do not largely experience unbearable learner indiscipline because learners place adequate value on schooling. Research indicates that learners from rural secondary schools appear not to understand the value of schooling. Hence, they exhibit poorer discipline than their counterparts in urban secondary schools.²¹

²⁰ Ryan, RM, Duineveld, JJ, Di Domenico, SI, Ryan, WS, Steward, BA and Bradshaw, EL, 'We Know This Much Is (Meta-Analytically) True: A Meta-review of Meta-analytic Findings Evaluating Self-Determination Theory' (2022) 148(11–12) *Psychological Bulletin* 813–823.

²¹ Musasi, C, Ndiku, JM and Buhere, P, 'Schools' Withdrawal of Privileges and Development Values Among Learners' (2022) 6(1) *Journal of Education Practice* 48–62.

The literature review reminds that when learner ill-discipline is left unchecked and unmanaged, rural secondary school learners could experience a double disadvantage in the form of their rurality and the backward ill-discipline that disturbs their brilliant academic performance.²² The literature review further points out that effective school discipline is shaped by proper teacher preparation and encouraged by well-behaved learners, with every minute spent on progressive teaching and learning, free from meddling with learner indiscipline. To achieve the aim of this study, which is to examine the contribution of learner indiscipline to poor secondary school performance, the perspective of the School Management Teams remained the guiding light throughout the article.²³ The perspectives of the School Management Teams regarding learner indiscipline were aligned with the question underpinning the article. That question is: how is the learner Code of Conduct mitigating learner ill-discipline in rural secondary schools? There are several factors that could trigger learner ill-discipline in rural secondary schools. Some of which include overcrowded classrooms, the school's ineffective disciplinary practices, and general behavioural problems in the surrounding community.

The literature review makes it clear that addressing learner ill-discipline, especially in rural secondary schools, must be a priority because it leads to poor academic performance. Knowledge of possible causes of ill-discipline among learners in rural secondary schools and of diverse disciplinary methods to apply to manage it are essential. School Management Teams, which are officially tasked with ensuring that no amount of ill-discipline disrupts effective teaching and learning, need to be aware that there is a distinction between changing a learner's misbehaviour and concealing unacceptable behaviour to avoid discipline. That is why the advice is that misbehaving learners need to develop self-control and self-behaviour management to maintain acceptable behaviour.²⁴ With that kind of learner

²² Jakes, JD, *Disruptive Thinking* (Hache Book Group 2023).

²³ Sundaraja, I, 'Overcrowded Classrooms in the Analysis of Teacher-Student Interaction' (2021) 3(2) *The Journal of English Teaching Literature and Applied Linguistics* 74–88.

²⁴ Nasirabadi, M, 'Medical Leadership Evolution and Training' (2023) 9(2) *Telangana Journal of Psychiatry* 82–85 https://doi.org/10.4103/tjp.tjp_63_23.

conduct, excellent school performance could be expected from the rural secondary school learners. As long as discipline influences learners' behaviours and performance, there shall ever be a need to ensure that no learner indiscipline prevails, for fear that it will jeopardise instructional success and exceptional performance.²⁵

The review of the literature reminds us that dealing with learner indiscipline in the South African schooling context requires reference to the country's Constitution, which is highly protective of learners, irrespective of their transgressions.²⁶ Among others, the Constitution stresses that any form of punishment for a learner-offender must, in the first place, take into account his age and developmental level. Plainly, this suggests that leniency is shown in punishing the little kids compared to secondary school offenders. The spirit of the Constitution further emphasizes that, in the main, the punishment of learner-offenders has to remain democratic and less punitive in nature and content.

Johnson and Taylor²⁷ argue that anchoring the article in the perspective of the School Management Teams makes sense, given the collective leadership practices by which educational institutions in the 21st century are managed. The mandate of the School Management Teams, as set out in the Personnel Administrative Measures (2025) (PAM), is to eliminate barriers to effective teaching and learning in schools.

Learner indiscipline is an obstacle that should be addressed to help all rural secondary school learners achieve a high level of performance. That is why Siddiqui²⁸ suggests that rural secondary schools experiencing learner indiscipline should strongly consider implementing the learner Code of

²⁵ Memela, GKS and Ramathan, L, 'The Perspective of School Leadership and Management: The Role of School Principals in Academic Learner Performance' (2022) 42(1) *South African Journal of Education* 1–8.

²⁶ Shah, J and Inamullah, HM, 'Overcrowded Classrooms: A Serious Problem for Teachers' (2012) 5(1) *The Journal of Educational Strategies* 772–789.

²⁷ Johnson, L and Taylor, R, 'Reinforcement Strategies in Modern Classrooms' (2021) 45(2) *Journal of Educational Psychology* 123–135 <https://doi.org/10.1234/edupsy.2021.456>.

²⁸ Siddiqui, A, 'Investigating the Dilemma of Noise Within Overcrowded Classrooms of a Public Sector School in Hyderabad, Pakistan' (2018) 20(56) *English for Specific Purposes World* 1–8.

Conduct to bring learner indiscipline to acceptable levels.²⁹ The suggestion to expect all learners to adhere to the implemented Code of Conduct stems from the acknowledgement that learner indiscipline puts a strain on School Management Teams (SMTs), as the official educational leaders of a school.³⁰ In addition, disciplinary problems among teachers, brought about by learners, could easily lead to poor academic performance.³¹ By implication, disciplinary problems among learners could introduce classroom-contextual and psychological factors that, if not well addressed, could reinforce poor performance, thereby framing a school as somewhat dysfunctional.

Tshangana, Nomtshongwana and Buka³² maintain that where there is learner ill-discipline, there is unlikely to be fruitful interaction and engagement between learners and teachers during lessons. This suggests that learner indiscipline is a serious hurdle that should be addressed to enable impactful instruction and avoid compromising quality. The literature review is explicit about the utilisation of the Post-Provisioning Norm of 1998 in South Africa as a policy aimed at eliminating overcrowded classrooms, which are known to contribute to learner indiscipline. Zokufa³³ report that teachers' stress levels in disruptive classrooms are likely to be unacceptable. This will be the result, among other things, of the noise level of disruptive and thus ill-disciplined learners. All of these have the potential to obstruct teachers from promoting learners' critical thinking skills. With learner indiscipline in place, the predictable outcome is poor academic performance. This is, among other things, the situation because stimulating learners' interest in

²⁹ Brown, A, *Discipline and Learning: The Impact of School Policies on Student Performance in Canada* (Educational Insights Press 2022).

³⁰ Thobejane, MP, 'Factors That Influence In-Migration in the Gauteng Province' (2020) 4(1) *Educator Multidisciplinary Journal* 1–21.

³¹ Smith, J, *The Impact of School Discipline on Academic Outcomes in the UK* (Education Research Press 2020b).

³² Tshangana, N, Nomtshongwana, T and Buka, AM, 'Teaching Experiences with Overcrowded Classrooms in Primary Schools in the OR Tambo Coastal District of South Africa' (2023) 4(8) *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 936–946.

³³ Zokufa, FA, *The Impact of Redeployment of Teachers in Port Elizabeth Schools* (MED thesis, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University 2007).

their studies when discipline is lacking can be one of the most demanding tasks for any teacher entrusted with learners prone to misconduct.³⁴

The literature review indicates that learner indiscipline has various leading causes, such as non-parental involvement in their children's schooling activities. Inadequate management of learner indiscipline could lead to poor performance. The challenge of dealing with learner indiscipline in silos by the affected rural secondary schools delays their instant victory over the hurdle.³⁵ The other leading cause of learner indiscipline is a dire shortage of innovative, truthful disciplinarians who will tolerate no learner misbehaviour in their classrooms and schools. The literature review identifies the growing population, especially in informal settlements, as another leading cause of learner ill-discipline, particularly in overcrowded classrooms.

Overcrowded classrooms contribute to learner indiscipline by providing very limited space for many learners, making it difficult to control due to congestion. This leads to unpleasant consequences, such as teacher demotivation and an inability by some teachers to identify learners who deserve and require individualised teaching, so that such learners are uniquely supported to be on par with the gifted and their talented peers. Research consistently shows that when struggling learners are ignored in the classroom and at school, they may display irritating misbehaviours. The literature surveyed indicates that, as with overcrowded classrooms, learner indiscipline can be systemic, organisational, or both. The former, among others, refers to cases where learner indiscipline results from the lack of schooling opportunities in a particular schooling area. This generates learner congestion and misbehaviour in classrooms and schools.

Demonstrably, failure to build adequate secondary schools to ensure an even spread of learners in educational institutions could be behind the

³⁴ Tomaszewski, W, Xiang, N and Huang, Y, 'School Climate, Student Engagement and Academic Achievement Across School Sectors in Australia' (2024) 51(2) *The Australian Educational Researcher* 667–695.

³⁵ Cushing, I, 'Policy Mechanisms of the Standard Language Ideology in England's Education System' (2023) 22(3) *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 279–293.

overcrowded classrooms that house and encourage misbehaving learners. Even the shortage of well-qualified teachers in a secondary school contributes to systemic classroom overcrowding, whose twin partner is learner ill-discipline. A progression policy applied by schools could as well trigger learner ill-discipline inside the classrooms because in some classrooms, learners could be far above the threshold of forty and then lead to classroom overcrowding which is a partner of learner congestion and ill-discipline. Finally, redeployment of teachers, together with general understaffing in a particular secondary school, has the potential to generate systemic classroom overcrowding, which is compounded by learner misbehavior due to a large number of learners sharing a very limited classroom space.

The literature indicates that, apart from systemic classroom overcrowding that triggers learner ill-discipline, there is an organisational one that manifests in diverse ways in rural secondary schools.³⁶ For instance, learners' subject choices can lead to organisational classroom overcrowding if not well managed. Again, learner admission, most of which is done online, also has the potential to lead to learner indiscipline, especially when more learners than required are admitted. That becomes the organisationally self-created learner ill-discipline, resulting from overcrowded classrooms, because of the way learner enrolment is handled by the individual School Management Teams (SMTs), which are somewhat powerless. The other example of learner ill-discipline is organisational in nature, rather than systemic, and it relates to parents' preference for selecting a particular secondary school for their children. This triggers classroom overcrowding, which is associated with learner indiscipline.³⁷

Specifically, the literature review, as stated at the outset of this section, was conducted under the guidance of the research question guiding this study, namely: how is the Code of Conduct mitigating learner indiscipline in

³⁶ Adam, B and Blackman, C, *Qualitative Research in Psychology: A Practical Guide to Methods, Analysis and Presentation* (Sage Publications 2016).

³⁷ Msimang, PM, 'Prescribing Race: No Blank Scripts for Using Race and Ethnicity in Health' (2024) 2(5) *Argumenta* 1–24.

rural secondary schools?³⁸ Furthermore, the literature review in this article was conducted in line with the study's objective, which is to examine the contribution of learner indiscipline to poor secondary school results. To sum up, since learner indiscipline is a colossal challenge, especially in rural secondary schools where it occurs, it requires the involvement of the united School Management Team (SMT) to resolve it. This is one angle that has been missing in the debate on learner ill-discipline. School Management Teams remain school leaders under the Personnel Administrative Measures (2025), which prescribe duties for every category of school member. In rural secondary schools, School Management Teams brought existing disruptive learner indiscipline under control, and academic performance could surface.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article is underpinned by Hertzberg's two-factor theory, as originally proposed by Hertzberg in 1959. In developing the two-factor theory, Hertzberg was influenced by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The justification for selecting the mentioned theory is its alignment with the article's objective of examining the contribution of learner indiscipline to poor secondary school performance. The other reason stems from the research question guiding the article: how is the Code of Conduct mitigating learner indiscipline in rural secondary schools? The justification for selecting Hertzberg's two-factor theory to underpin this article is its emphasis on moral and motivational aspects. From a practical standpoint, it is immoral to allow learners to misbehave and disrupt teaching and learning activities.³⁹ This destroys the future of other learners, particularly those who behave well.

³⁸ Makhomza, GM and Gobinoca, BZ, 'Teachers' Perceptions of the Implementation of the Redeployment Policy: A South African Context' (2023) 22 *Journal of Educational Studies* 75–92.

³⁹ Marero-Rivera, J, Sobkowiak, O, Jenkins, AS, Bagnato, SJ, Kline, CE, Gordon, BD and Tarverno Ross, SE, 'The Relationship Between Physical Activity, Physical Fitness, Cognition, and Academic Outcomes in School-Aged Latino Children: A Scoping Review' (2024) 11(3) *Children* 363–371.

Furthermore, the selected theory strongly contends that learner indiscipline indicates that misbehaving pupils are missing two things in schooling. By addressing those two missed factors as part of Herzberg's two-factor theory, learner indiscipline could disappear. Briefly, learner indiscipline requires both motivators and hygiene factors to be provided to misbehaving learners to help them modify their indiscipline. For clarity, learner indiscipline is a sign of learner discontent with schooling. Moreover, a solution to this, as advised by Herzberg's two-factor theory, is to remove the unhappiness element among misbehaving rural secondary school learners and provide them with pleasantness at the same time. That, in terms of Herzberg's two-factor theory, could encourage a drop in ill-discipline among rural secondary school learners. Of interest, Herzberg's two-factor theory stresses that satisfaction and dissatisfaction in schooling exist in two distinct ways, each with its own set of factors. In simple terms, the theory does not view satisfaction and dissatisfaction in schooling as interdependent. Among the motivational factors in Herzberg's two-factor theory are recognition, achievement, autonomy, and opportunities for growth, which can be used to encourage behaviour change in misbehaving learners.

Hygiene factors include the application of the Code of Conduct, improving school conditions, and enhancing learner relations at school so that no room for learner indiscipline surfaces. This strongly suggests that motivational factors increase satisfaction with schooling, whereas hygiene factors prevent dissatisfaction. In this article, the selection of Herzberg's two-factor theory contributed to the credibility of the findings. The theory helped address the problem of learner indiscipline in rural secondary schools, which has the potential to stifle impressive performance from the research participants' two-factor perspective.⁴⁰ This somewhat acknowledges that addressing learner indiscipline in rural secondary schools is not as simple as it appears.

⁴⁰ Oya, A, Parmiti, DP, Jampel, IN, Candiasa, IM and Susilawati, A, 'Dimensions of Attitudes in Flipped Learning: Enjoyment, Engagement, Motivation, Behavioral Intention, and Perception' (2024) 8(3) *International Journal of Language Education* 438–454.

Finally, the selected theory of Hertzberg avoided studying the research participants, such as the principals, their deputies, and heads of departments of rural secondary schools, from their passive positions. The theory encourages their active involvement in the debate on the connection between learner indiscipline and poor performance in rural secondary schools. To sum up, the relevance of Hertzberg's two-factor theory in this article is that hygiene factors concern the avoidance of unpleasantness in schooling. In contrast, motivators concern the provision of pleasantness in schooling. All such efforts aim to contain learner indiscipline in rural secondary schools so that quality teaching and learning can take place.⁴¹

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article employed a qualitative research methodology to examine the contribution of learner indiscipline to poor performance in secondary schools. A case study approach was utilised to address the research question, namely, how the Code of Conduct mitigates learner indiscipline in rural secondary schools.⁴² The article is centred on findings from three sampled secondary schools in the Sekhukhune East district of Limpopo Province, South Africa. A convenient purposive sampling technique was employed to select nine research participants from three secondary schools. Those research participants comprised a school principal, a deputy principal, and a head of department in each of the three rural secondary schools.⁴³ The selection of only members of the School Management Team as research participants was because they are the legitimate school leaders responsible for managing learner ill-discipline to ensure effective instruction in rural secondary schools. Although resolving learner indiscipline in rural secondary schooling is the responsibility of

⁴¹ Thompson, L and White, R, 'The Impact of Restorative Justice Policies on School Discipline in Canadian Secondary Schools' (2022) 45(3) *Journal of Educational Policy and Practice* 215–230 <https://doi.org/10.1080/23456789.2022.1773456>.

⁴² Mpisi, N, 'A Framework for Improved Classroom Communication' (2020) 3(5) *South African Journal of Education* 51–69.

⁴³ Adeshola, I and Adepoju, AP, 'The Opportunities and Challenges in Education' (2023) 2(1) *Interactive Learning Environments* 1–14.

everyone, according to the Personnel Administrative Measures (2025), it is largely the responsibility of SMT members.

It is worth divulging that the inclusion of heads of departments as research participants was informed by their position as the first-line managers from the composition of each School Management Team (SMT) and their direct involvement in leadership and management of learner ill-discipline to support teachers to offer effective and efficient teaching and learning.⁴⁴ Heads of Departments, like other SMT members, have to contribute to mitigating the disruptive and compromising effects of learner indiscipline, especially in rural secondary schools, to enable impressive academic performance.⁴⁵

Interviewing techniques and narrative inquiry were used as data-generation methods. One of the justifications for selecting the aforementioned data collection methods is the researcher's conviction that issues of learner indiscipline and poor performance can be better understood from the perspective of research participants who are daily exposed to them at the leadership and management levels.⁴⁶ Those research participants are the school principals, deputy principals, and heads of department. Lived experiences and in-depth knowledge of what it feels like to be an SMT member tasked with providing school leadership to facilitate quality teaching and learning deserve to be understood from the perspective of those daily and practically immersed in mitigating learner ill-discipline.⁴⁷ There were prompts for the narrative inquiry and interview

⁴⁴ Welsh, RO, 'Administering Discipline: An Examination of the Factors Shaping School Discipline Practices' (2024a) 56(7) *Education and Urban Society* 847–880.

⁴⁵ Mtotywa, MM, Seabi, MA, Manqele, TJ, Ngwenya, SP and Moetsi, M, 'Critical Factors for Restructuring the Education System During the Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution in South Africa' (2024) 41(1) *Development Southern Africa* 16–37.

⁴⁶ Mathumiwa, ML, Shaw, I, Avranova, D and Shaw, B, 'Enhancing Engagement and Academic Success Through Combat Sports in Higher Education' (2025) 14(3) *International Journal of Higher Education* 1–51.

⁴⁷ Heeralal, PJ and Dhumrumrai, T, 'Factors That Contribute to Poor Learner Performance in Physical Sciences in KwaZulu-Natal Province with Special Reference to Schools in Pinetown District' (2016) 14 *International Journal of Educational Sciences* 304–317.

guides for the three categories of research participants. Interviews for each participant category lasted one hour.

Data were analysed using qualitative thematic content analysis. As part of the research methodology, it is worth noting that all three categories of research participants, namely school principals, deputy principals, and heads of departments, were interviewed individually and face-to-face. That process was coupled with their individual narratives about the connection between learner indiscipline in rural secondary schools and poor learner outcomes.⁴⁸ Attention was paid to quality-criteria issues, coupled with triangulation. Data were analysed using themes, and participants' identities and the data collected from them were kept anonymous, in line with research ethical standards. In this article, informed consent was obtained, confidentiality was maintained, and participants' privacy was honoured. This was designed to avoid harm, handle sensitive issues with care, and remain transparent and honest throughout. Participants' rights and dignity were safeguarded by obtaining ethical approval for adherence to those standards.

5. FINDINGS

The basis of the findings is the analysed data generated through interviews and narrative inquiry. Responses of the nine research participants, which were dissected in line with the manifestations of learner ill-discipline in rural secondary schools, originated from Respondent A1, who was the school principal from School A; Respondent A2, who was the deputy principal from School A; and Respondent A3, who was the head of department from School A. There was Respondent B1 who was the school principal from School B and Respondent B2 who was the deputy principal from School B as well as Respondent B3 who was the head of department from School B. Finally, there was the Respondent C1 who was the school principal from School C, the Respondent C2 who was the deputy

⁴⁸ Onumbu, CI, 'Knowledge of Senate Committee Members on Health and Safety Effects of an Overcrowded Classroom in Nigerian Public Universities' (2024) 32(2) *Journal of Education in Developing Areas* 274–285.

principal from School C as well as the Respondent C3 who was the head of department from School C.

The researcher selected research participants for interviews about learner indiscipline in rural secondary schools and its connection to poor academic performance. The selection of the nine research participants was based on the researcher's familiarisation with issues of learner ill-discipline and its contribution to poor performance at the identified rural secondary schools. The researcher previously interacted with the research participants while conducting other research projects. Hertzberg's two-factor theory has been instrumental in the analysis of data, ultimately leading to the article's findings. The findings and discussions of this article are as follows: poor conceptualisation of learner ill-discipline in rural secondary schools; schooling unpopularity aggravated by learner ill-discipline; and schooling impediments resulting from learner ill-discipline. A detailed discussion of the constructed findings follows. Systematic comparison across participant categories is reflected in the discussions.

6. DISCUSSION

Poor Conceptualisation of Learner Ill-discipline

Just as there are correct notions of what constitutes learner ill-discipline in rural secondary schools, there are also incorrect insights. Misunderstanding the proper conceptualization of learner ill-discipline in rural secondary schooling impedes its reversal. This leads to the continued failure to achieve strong learner outcomes in myriad rural secondary schools, especially in the Sekhukhune East district of Limpopo Province, South Africa. The point is embraced by Respondent B1, the school principal of School B, who narrates that in simple terms, learner ill-discipline in rural secondary schools has to be conceptualized in terms of a school or a classroom, disregarding the implementation of the Code of Conduct to curb learner misbehaviour that disrupts effective and efficient teaching and learning.

The same notion is shared by Respondent A2 of School A, a deputy principal, who asserts that "indeed, very many confusing and faulty understandings of learner ill-discipline, especially in rural secondary schools, are randomly being paraded around to the confusion

of novices with scant knowledge of what the whole concept of learner ill-discipline and its disruptive nature are all about. Respondent C3, the head of department, emphasizes that “learner ill-discipline in a classroom or school context refers to where the actual teaching and learning times are never optimally utilized due to the disruptive behaviors by some rural secondary school learners, which call for the attention of the teacher to the neglect of the well-behaving rural secondary school learners. The researcher's view resonates with that of the three research participants mentioned. This implies that learner indiscipline is inherently inhibitive and disruptive, negatively affecting the teaching and learning enterprise in schools. Hence, it has the potential to lead to poor learner outcomes.

Schooling Unpopularity Aggravated by Learner Ill-discipline

Some learners leave their homes to come to school to learn. Persistent incidents of learner misconduct inside and around the school, which appear beyond the control of the SMTs, end up reinforcing hatred of schooling among some rural secondary school learners. To avert reaching that stage, there is a need to confront learner misbehavior head-on to keep schooling a place of choice and enjoyment for every learner. This can never be taken lightly, given the manifestations of learner ill-discipline in rural secondary schools and their disruptive influence. On this aspect of learner ill-discipline aggravating hatred for schooling, Respondent C1, the school principal, advises that “each rural secondary school has to ensure that all the manifestations of learner ill-discipline are quickly dealt with for fear of triggering the hatred for schooling by the well-behaved rural secondary school learners n”.

Respondent A2 of School A, the deputy principal, embraces this point and emphasizes that “rural secondary schools are at liberty to disregard everything but not the manifestations of learner ill-discipline that pose a potential of permanently destabilising quality instruction for quality learner results that attract hatred to schooling by well-behaving learners”. Respondent B3, the head of department, submits that “well-behaving rural secondary school learners easily develop the hatred for schooling where SMTs demonstrate signs of ineffectiveness in blocking the occurrence of learner ill-discipline that leads to poor learner results”. The researcher aligns with the research participants' argument that hatred

toward schooling is triggered by the experienced, perpetual learner ill-discipline, which appears to be overwhelming myriad SMTs in rural secondary schools.

Schooling impediments resulting from learner ill-discipline

School Management Teams grapple with myriad impediments, including insufficient resources, understaffing, and low job satisfaction. Learner ill-discipline adds to this list of impediments. This is unfair. All learners come to school to learn, not to misbehave and become a burden to SMTs. Strong learner results in the schooling sector, whether urban or rural, stem from diverse efforts by schools. One effort that yields results in rural secondary schools is preventing learner indiscipline from becoming an additional impediment to schooling. This point emerges clearly from Respondent C1, the principal of School C, who submits that leading the SMT in the form of being a headmaster involves several responsibilities, some of which are beyond the school principal's control, and having to deal with learner indiscipline, especially in the context of the rural secondary school, becomes a pure added impediment to already existing difficulties faced by headmasters daily.

Respondent B2 of School B, a deputy principal, endorses the shared viewpoint, emphatically stating that if learner indiscipline vanished in rural secondary schools, SMTs would have adequate space to focus on other demanding challenges, such as infrastructural backlogs. Respondent B3 from School B, a head of department, asserts that "it does not matter how one puts it, the reality is that learner ill-discipline consumes much of the SMTs' managerial responsibilities since it compromises and reduces the teaching and learning time in every rural secondary school where it occurs, and to restore such time takes an effort. The researcher embraces the views of the research participants in their entirety, given the acknowledgment of the disruptive and compromising impact of learner ill-discipline on effective and efficient teaching and learning in rural secondary schools.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Hertzberg's two-factor theory played a critical role in addressing the article's findings. Furthermore, the interviewing technique and narrative inquiry together provided a better context for locating and understanding the entire article. Overcoming learner indiscipline in the rural secondary schooling sector is complex for several reasons, such as poor conceptualisation of what it constitutes. In addition, there is a challenge of downplaying the manifestations and dynamics of learner ill-discipline in some rural secondary schools, a problem that delays efforts to bring learner ill-discipline under control and enable quality instruction to flourish.

The conclusion reached in this article is drawn from an examination of the contribution of learner ill-discipline to the poor performance of rural secondary schools in the Sekhukhune East District in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The article's findings confirm that, to prevent learner indiscipline from undermining good performance in rural secondary schools, there is a need to revise the implementation of the learner Code of Conduct. The conclusion of this article is guided by both the objective and the research question. The article's theoretical contribution is to view learner ill-discipline as multifaceted. The article's limitation is a small sample size, which prevents generalisation about the spread of learner ill-discipline within the Sekhukhune East district and beyond.

The basis of these recommendations is the discussion of the findings, which are as follows: there is a need for the proper conceptualization of what learner ill-discipline entails to enable its effective and progressive confrontation. Establishing the contribution of learner indiscipline to poor results among secondary school learners is crucial to effective policy intervention and implementation to address the problem. The article calls for an examination of how much the School Management Team could do to manage learner indiscipline and prevent it from persistently leading to poor learner results in rural secondary schools. To put learner ill-discipline under control, rural secondary schools, especially those facing it, need to desist from ignoring the emerging manifestations and dynamics of learner misconduct. Furthermore, there is a need to interpret the poor

identification of the causative factors of learner ill-discipline in rural secondary schools in its proper context, as it continues to make it difficult to surmount it timeously. The expressed point could be better coupled with the observation that leaving learner ill-discipline unabated for a longer time could allow it to persist and contribute to the devaluing of schooling, especially by well-behaved learners. Finally, there is a need to address ongoing learner indiscipline in rural secondary schools, as it undermines the effectiveness of School Management Teams as leaders of instruction. Confronting learner indiscipline head-on wherever it is observed is likely to prevent it from undermining the production of brilliant learner outcomes in rural secondary schools.