



# The role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools

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Dissertation accepted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Master of Education in Education Management and Leadership* at the North-West University

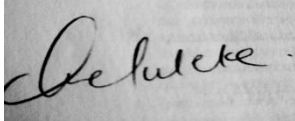
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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Nthabiseng Yvonne Maluleke, declare that this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously submitted it in its entirety or in part for a degree at any university. All sources have been identified and acknowledged by means of complete references.

A rectangular image showing a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'Nthabiseng Maluleke'.

25 March 2021

Signature

Date

## **DEDICATION**

This research is dedicated to the following:

To God Almighty, for the strength, wisdom, knowledge and experience I have gained throughout this research, and for granting me the opportunity to start and finish my dissertation.

To my parents: Mom (Julia Maluleke), this is for you, my number one supporter and pillar of strength. You are one of the strongest women I have ever met in my entire life, and I got that from you – strong as a rock and hard to break. Thank you for believing in me and telling me that I would make it. And, yeah, I have made it!

Dad (Josiah Maluleke), thank you for believing in me and being proud of me. Although you hardly tell me so, your actions have said a lot, have kept me standing and have given me the strength I need to give our surname the respect it deserves (Isaiah 11:1).

To my siblings, Rosa, Armando, Fernando, John, Rebecca and Peter. As an older sister to you guys, I believe I have fought the battle for you and have opened closed gates of success and prosperity for you. I have set a good example for you to follow. Remember that education is key, and no one can take that inheritance from you.

To my relatives and friends, thank you for your support.

To my supervisor, Dr Arrie Van Wyk, thank you so much for believing in me and guiding me from the beginning of this project till the end. The year 2020 was a tough year for me academically, as a lot of changes took place due to Covid-19. Many things had to stop, and that caused much delay, but your patience and words of encouragement made me strong and helped me believe in myself. Yes, many times I wanted to give up, even though I did not admit it, but God used you to say the right words to me at the right time. May the good Lord continue to bless you!

## **ABSTRACT**

This research was about how principals can create safe environments in secondary schools. Safety is an important aspect in schools today as there are many incidents of violence, abuse, rape and unsafe school buildings, amongst others, reported in newspapers, electronic media and on television. A safe environment in schools is one that is free of risk and possible harm. It is also a place where members of the community work, teach and learn without fear of ridicule, intimidation, harassment, embarrassment and aggression. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five (5) secondary school principals and ten (10) teachers individually at their respective schools. The research was qualitative in nature with an interpretative paradigm, using a phenomenological study as a strategy. It was found that the government has a responsibility to provide a safe and respectful learning atmosphere in which all learners and the whole staff are treated with dignity and respect so that they can participate fully in their academics and duties in a safe educational environment.

Furthermore, violence and the dysfunctionality of families also affect teaching and learning as some learners become victims of criminal activities in the neighbourhood. Schools in townships seem to have more problems in terms of safety as some are not getting support from the community; instead, these schools are vandalised, and the learners are abused by the community. Schools in town tend to be more protected because of security measures in place. However, all five schools studied in this research tend to have factors in common that are disrupting teaching and learning and affecting safety at school. These shared factors include burglary, family rage, misbehaving learners and bullying. However, it became clear that although there is lack of support from government, school principals still need to create and maintain safe school environments. In this regard, good leadership from principals is required so that the body can function well. In other words, the principal needs to give the vision and support to the staff, so they can be able to implement it.

**KEYWORDS:**

Principals, safe school environments, school violence, teachers, discipline.

## **ABSTRAK:**

Die navorsing het gehandel oor hoe skoolhoofde veilige omgewings in skole kan skep. Veiligheid is 'n belangrike aspek in hedendaagse skole aangesien voorvalle van onder andere, geweld, verkragting en onveilige skoolgeboue gereeld in koerante, elektroniese media gerapporteer en op televisie gesien word. Veilige skoolomgewings is plekke wat vry is van risiko's en moontlike leed. Verder is dit plekke waar lede van die gemeenskap werk, onderrig en leer sonder vrees vir bespotting, intimidasie, teistering, verleentheid en aggressie. Semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is gebruik om individuele onderhoude te voer met vyf (5) sekondêre skoolhoofde en tien (10) onderwysers. Die kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetode tesame met 'n interpretivistiese paradigma is gebruik. Die strategie wat gebruik is was fenomenologies van aard. Een van die bevindinge was dat die regering die verantwoordelikheid het om 'n veilige en 'n respekvolle leeromgewing tot stand te bring waar alle leerders en die personeel met respek en waardigheid behandel word sodat hulle in 'n veilige omgewing ten volle aan die akademiese aktiwiteite en pligte kan deelneem.

Geweld en disfunksionele families affekteer ook verder onderrig en leer aangesien sommige leerders ook slagoffers is van kriminele aktiwiteite rondom die skool. Dit blyk dat skole in die woonbuurte meer veiligheidsprobleme ervaar aangesien sommige nie ondersteuning van die gemeenskap kry nie. Die skole word eerder geplunder en leerders word deur die gemeenskap uitgebuit. Verder blyk dit dat dorpskole meer beskerm word aangesien die skole dit kan bekostig om veiligheidsmaatreëls in te stel. Nietemin, al vyf skole wat deelgeneem het aan die navorsing, het gemeenskaplike probleme wat onderrig en leer en veiligheid affekteer.. Hierdie gemeenskaplike probleme sluit in inbrake, gesinsgeweld, leerders wat hulle wangedra en boeliegedrag. Dit het ook verder aan die lig gekom dat alhoewel daar gebrekkige ondersteuning van die regering se kant is, is dit steeds skoolhoofde se plig om veilige skoolomgewings te skep en te onderhou. In die verband word daar van skoolhoofde verwag om goeie leierskap aan die dag te lê sodat die skool (liggaam) goed kan funksioneer. Met ander woorde, dit is die plig van skoolhoofde om die visie en ondersteuning aan onderwysers te verskaf sodat dit geïmplementeer kan word.

**SLEUTELWOORDE:**

Skoolhoofde, veilige skoolomgewings, skolegeweld, onderwysers, dissipline.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

HoD	Head of department
RCL	Representative Council of Learners
SACE	South African Council of Educators
SAPS	South African Police Service
SASA	South African Schools Act
SGB	School governing body
SMT	School management team



**PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING**

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**DECLARATION**

To whom it may concern

I hereby confirm that I have proofread and edited the following dissertation, including the references.

**Title of dissertation**

The role of principals in creating safe school environments in secondary schools

**Candidate**

Nthabiseng Yvonne Maluleke



Lariza Hoffman  
Kroonstad  
9 March 2021

## **CHAPTER 1 GENERAL ORIENTATION**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The primary focus of schools is to provide quality education to learners. Schools have been created as places of safety where children can learn. Principals play an important role in creating a safe school environment. This study focuses on the importance of creating a safe environment in schools. Following various events of violence taking place in schools in recent years, many people are in fear of sending their children to school and have many concerns about the future of schools. In pursuit of investigating this theme, key concepts that have to do with the theme will be discussed, after which a discussion of the problem statement will take place. This will be followed by a discussion of the theory that drove the research and the aim and objectives of the research. The research questions and sub-questions will be framed in such a way that they are aligned with the aim, objectives and title of the research. The research methodology and design, describing the type of research, worldview, sampling, data collection methods, data analysis, ethical issues, reliability and validation constructs, will also be discussed. The chapter will be concluded by a division of the chapters of the dissertation.

The concepts making up the title of the research will be discussed in the following section.

### **1.2 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION**

#### **1.2.1 Principal**

According to the Department of Basic Education (2014), principals, as the managers of schools, are the key delivery agents in the education system and the core persons of the school when it comes to safety aspects of the school. The principal has the primary duty to create a safe, nurturing and supportive learning environment that empowers effective teaching and learning (Department of Basic Education, 2014). Therefore, the principal as the cornerstone of the school plays an important role in the development of education programmes. It is necessary to equip principals with the knowledge and skills to cope with multiple changes and the complex task of managing human beings. Schools are a mirror of the life and birthplace of human resource; consequently, the leaders of schools should be acquainted with management skills and leadership styles (Farah, 2013).

The job of a principal embodies eight key interdependence areas that constitute the core purpose of principalship in the South African context. These areas include leading teaching and learning, shaping the direction and improvement of the school, dealing with quality, securing accountability and developing and empowering self and others. Furthermore, it entails managing the school as an organisation, working with and for the community, managing human resources (staff) in the school and managing and advocating extramural activities (DoE, 2019).

According to the South African Teachers Union (2011), the following are some of the core duties of the principal of a school:

- Running the learning at school
- Influencing the direction and improvement of the school support
- Managing excellence and obtaining accountability
- Increasing and empowering self, others and the wellness of staff members
- Managing the school as an organisation
- Working with and for the close school community, as well as the wider community

### **1.2.2 Safe school environment**

The South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 states that learners have the right to a clean and safe milieu that is beneficial to learning and the non-existence of harassment and bullying. Security of property, well-kept school facilities, school furniture and equipment, clean toilet facilities, adequate water supply and an eco-friendly environment can be seen as aspects contributing to a safe school atmosphere.

Regarding a safe school setting, Mncube and Harber (2012) define a safe school as one that is free of risk and possible harm. According to them the following can be regarded as features of a safe school (Mncube & Harber, 2012): Schools should be surrounded by physical features such as secure walls, fencing and gates; Buildings should be in a good state of repair and well-maintained school grounds. Furthermore, these schools should maintain good discipline and a culture conducive to teaching and learning must be at the order of the day (Mncube & Harber, 2012). Lastly, teachers should conduct themselves professionally in an environment where good governance and management practices are maintained in the absence (or a low level) of crime and violence (Mncube & Harber, 2012).

### **1.2.3 School violence**

Mncube and Harber (2012), is of the view that school violence is any conduct of learners, teachers, admin staff or non-school individuals striving to cause injury on another person or to damage school assets. It manifests itself in different forms and involves different sources and actors (Mncube & Harber, 2012). For example, bullying may be learnt outside the school but perpetuated inside the school, resulting in learners bullying one another, teachers bullying learners, learners bullying teachers, parents bullying teachers and principals bullying teachers or being bullied by them (Ncontsa & Shuba, 2013). This indicates that teachers spend most of their time focusing on solving problems linked with school violence instead of focusing on effective teaching and learning (Ncontsa & Shuba, 2013).

The school principal, parents and the rest of the school leadership, including the learner representatives, need to work together to combat the violence taking place in schools (Geldenhuis & Doubell, 2011). Violence in schools includes violence, attacks, threats, theft, vandalism, verbal abuse, gross insubordination, disruptiveness and disrespect for authority, violation of the school code of conduct, truancy, delinquency, gambling, gangsters, rape, substance abuse and even murder in and around the school (Geldenhuis & Doubell, 2011).

### **1.2.4 Secondary school**

The SASA 84 of 1996 is aimed at ensuring that all learners have access to quality education without discrimination. Schooling is compulsory for children aged seven to 15 (SASA 84 of 1996). According to Nuffic (2010), secondary education consists of two phases, namely the Senior Phase (Grade 7 up to and including 9) and the Further Education and Training Phase (Grade 10 up to and including 12). This level of education caters for learners who are mature, know the consequences of right and wrong and are expected to follow rules because of their level of understanding.

## **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

School principals are faced with more demands, complex decisions and additional responsibilities than ever before (Mestry, 2017). Notwithstanding the burden on principals, it is important for school principals to highlight their roles by emphasising best teaching practices and always keeping their schools safe (Mestry, 2017). According to November *et al.* (2010), South African school education is seen as an essential constitutional human right that is a powerful instrument in the fight against oppression, abuse and poverty. However, sexual

harassment, violence, rape and bullying of learners by teachers and of teachers by other teachers within the school system have been identified as serious impediments to the transformation of schools and educational institutions across the country.

Burton and Leoschut (2012) expound that violence arising at schools is not limited to incidents among learners but also includes acts perpetrated against and by teachers. More than a quarter of principals claim to have received reports of verbal violence, and in more than a tenth of such received reports of physical violence, teachers were the aggressors (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). Teachers often become preys of verbal violence, physical violence and sexual violence, which are sometimes perpetrated by learners (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). The South African Council of Educators (SACE, 2011) indicates that school violence is one of the problems that are a major fear to the government, the teaching profession and civil society. As such, school violence has become a demoralising factor in teaching and learning (Ncontsa & Shuba, 2013).

In the context of school violence, approximately a tenth of learner's assert that it is easy for them to get a firearm at school, while one in five learners claim that they have easy access to knives or other weapons at their school (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). The ease of access to firearms and substances is enabled by personal awareness of individuals who are involved in various drug-related or criminal activities at school because most schools do not have tight security (Burton & Leoschut, 2012). Schools and classrooms should be protected spaces; yet they are common sites of violence. Apart from classrooms, vulnerable spaces for school violence include sport areas, toilets and open grounds (Meyer & Chetty, 2017). The situation is aggravated by the attitudes and behaviour of teachers; for example, teachers are often absent, which elevates the risk of classroom violence (Meyer & Chetty, 2017). Furthermore, teachers leave classrooms unsupervised or do not spend the required time in schools, which results in a lack of monitoring (Meyer & Chetty, 2017).

According to Bellibas and Liu (2018), leaders adopt different leadership approaches in the school that have distinguished emphasis, purposes and strategies to shape their control on learners and teachers. The type of leadership that principals adopt has an impact on the school climate and how safe the school is (Bellibas & Liu, 2018). For instance, the collaborative leadership style has a much more positive effect on the school climate than directive leadership does, suggesting that collaborative leadership is more effective than traditional instructional leadership in establishing a positive school climate. Thus, the focus of this research is to investigate the role of the principal in establishing a safe school environment in secondary schools.

## 1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Collingridge (2013) indicates that the roles of the principal and the school governing body (SGB) in managing a school are complex and appear to overlap, which may cause conflict. To reduce conflict among the various stakeholders of a school, provincial education departments need to send out circulars regularly to clarify the laws governing the role of principals.

Mestry (2017) points out that principal's experience great difficulty in coping with numerous changes, partly because they have been inadequately prepared for their leadership position or simply lack the necessary skills, knowledge and attitude to lead and manage a school effectively and efficiently. It is worrying that schools are not better at protecting children from the negative elements of the wider community (Mestry, 2017). A crucial aspect to which schools can combat violence in the community is the degree to which the school is and sees itself as a well-organised and managed community (Mncube, 2014). In this regard, the purpose should be to look after and care for its learners by means of a clear attitude to safety and care (Mncube, 2014).

It seems evident that school leaders and their school management team (SMT) have a problem about applying their mind to the systems of the school, due to a lack of understanding of their role and dealing with matters pertaining to the systems at school. In this regard, the theoretical framework that will be employed in this research is the systems thinking approach. Many authors have written about this theory, and as such, there are as many interpretations of it as there are persons who have written about it. Arnold and Wade (2015) define systems thinking as the art and science of making trustworthy inferences about behaviour by developing an increasingly deep understanding of underlying structure. Some see it as a tool that provides a strong language to convey and explore difficult problems (Arnold & Wade, 2015), while others are confused by the important but unclear set of theories, approaches and tools used (Arnold & Wade). However, the reasons for using theories and, in this instance, systems thinking, is to stimulate scientific practices in organisations (Arnold & Wade, 2015).

Systems-thinking principals should possess the following characteristics:

- An analytical mind  
Systems-thinking leaders should be able to find and describe hindrances, find vital clues from data and create real answers for the problems identified (Behl & Ferreira, 2014). By identifying interconnections from data is analytical in nature, as these interconnections contribute to the broader picture (Behl & Ferreira, 2014). To be

analytical allows leaders to look at all the interconnections of the systems in their schools to have a clear understanding of these to analyse them (Behl & Ferreira, 2014). Principals should regularly assess the climate at the school – how learners and teachers behave and act on it. They should also, on a regular basis, analyse the state of the school buildings and make recommendations to the SGB to rectify what is wrong with the buildings.

- Creativity

Systems-thinking principals are innovative and thus can put different aspects together to form new meanings (Behl & Ferreira, 2014). These principals should be able to think differently from others to establish paradigms. Their ability to understand the interconnectedness of the systems in their schools is an enabling factor to creating new things (Behl & Ferreira, 2014).

- Communication and relational abilities

Principals who are systems-thinking leaders develop good relational skills by depending on their good communication abilities, which also include listening abilities (Behl & Ferreira, 2014).

- Consideration and the use of multiple views

These leaders take the views of others into consideration resulting that the views of their colleagues are part of the solution of the challenges encountered (Arnold & Wade, 2015). The consideration of the views of their colleagues, together with the understanding of all other interconnections, give them the capacity to obtain a broader understanding of the systems within their schools (Arnold & Wade, 2015).

- Curiosity

Showing curiosity allows systems thinkers to lead many different practices and gives them the skill to ask the right questions. To this effect, these principals are in the favourable position to develop the ability to establish, build and employ new paradigms useful to understand the whole structure in their schools (Behl & Ferreira, 2014).

- Broadminded, and wide-ranging capability

Principals who are broadminded and have a wide-ranging of experiences usually have a broad and varied background and are open-minded (Caldwell, 2012). This allows them to apply their wisdom and skills to see many perspectives of a problem in their workplaces (Caldwell, 2012).

School principals and the rest of the school leadership need to adapt to processes of systems thinking to improve the effective running of the school. It is important for the school leadership,

including the principal, to get adequate training and the skills they need to lead, maintain and create a safe environment in schools.

## **1.5 RESEARCH AIM, OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS**

This research was aimed at determining the role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools. Arising from the aim, the objectives of the research are as follows:

- Objective 1: to determine what a safe school environment entailed.
- Objective 2: to understand the challenges and limitations faced by principals in creating safe environments and minimising school violence.
- Objective 3: to analyse the role and responsibilities of the principal in creating a safe school environment.

The main research question of the study is as follows: What is the role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools?

Arising from the main question, the sub-questions of the research are as follows:

- Sub-question 1: What does a safe school environment entail?
- Sub-question 2: What challenges and limitations are faced by principals in creating safe environments and minimising school violence?
- Sub-question 3: What are the role and responsibilities of principals in creating a safe school environment in a secondary school?

## **1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

### **1.6.1 Qualitative research**

A qualitative methodology is used in this research because it uses methods that emphasise collecting data on naturally occurring settings. Most of these data are in the form of discussions rather than numbers (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). According to Azmy (2012), the goal of qualitative research is to provide an in-depth understanding, and therefore it targets a specific group, type of individual, event or process. Since the aim of this research was to determine the role of the school principal in creating and maintaining a safe school environment, especially in secondary schools, a qualitative method was appropriate. Principals and teachers, in their natural school settings, gave in-depth, unrestricted accounts of their experiences in response to questions that dealt with school safety.



Kumar (2014), is of the view that qualitative research, is rooted in empiricism which means that an open, adaptable and unstructured approach to inquiry, is employed. Furthermore, the aim is to investigate diversity instead than to quantify, and it highlights the explanation and narration of feelings, views and experiences rather than quantities (Kumar, 2014). Moreover, it conveys findings in a descriptive and narrative rather than an analytical way, placing no or little emphasis on generalisations (Kumar, 2014).

### **1.6.2 Worldview**

The worldview that is associated with qualitative studies is interpretivism (Vosloo, 2014), and as such, it is used in this study. It focuses on exploring the complexity of social phenomena such as school safety with the view of gaining an understanding of the phenomenon. The aim is thus to understand and interpret everyday happenings (events), experiences and social structures, as well as the values people attach to these aspects, relating to school safety.

Interpretivists believe that social reality is subjective and nuanced, because it is influenced by both the views of the participants and the values and aims of the researcher (Vosloo, 2014). This insight is relevant to the study as it gives guidance to the researcher on how to interpret data that are concrete, understandable and relevant.

### **1.6.3 Strategy of inquiry: phenomenological study**

Phenomenology provides a theoretical guideline to researchers to understand phenomena at the level of subjective reality (Qutoshi, 2018). The researcher can adopt interviews, observations and discussions as data collection strategies within a phenomenological method or strategy of inquiry. Phenomenological approaches are more effective when describing subjective realities, insights, beliefs, motivation, actions and folk wisdom (Qutoshi, 2018). Nieuwenhuis (2016), on the other hand, is of the view that a phenomenological strategy concentrates on the meaning that certain lived experiences hold for the participants.

The phenomenological strategy was the most relevant method to conduct this research, as it sought to explore the role of principals in creating a safe school environment and to unleash the experience of principals and teachers about, among other things, the lack of maintaining a safe school environment, those affected by school violence and the non-maintenance of school infrastructure. Furthermore, the strategy worked well with the design and worldview of this study.

#### **1.6.4 Sampling**

Chawla and Sondhi (2011) state that sampling is a process of selecting an adequate number of elements from the population so that the study of the sample will not only help understand the characteristics of the population but also enable the researcher to generalise the results. There are two sampling types, namely probability and non-probability sampling (Welman *et al.*, 2005). For this study, purposive sampling, which is classified as non-probability sampling, was used. According to Kumar (2014), the primary importance in purposive sampling or judgemental sampling is the researcher's judgement as to who can offer the best information to achieve the objectives of the research. The researcher only goes to individuals who, in his or her opinion, are likely to have the necessary information and will be willing to reveal it. Hence, the target for this study was to interview school principals as the main leader of their schools and a few teachers to get in-depth insight into how they worked together in always creating and maintaining a safe school environment.

This research was done in five secondary schools in the Vanderbijlpark area – two in the town and three in the township. For this study, interviews were conducted with the five principals of the secondary schools individually and five teachers as focus groups from each school. This added up to a total of 30 participants to get their experience, views and opinion on school safety.

#### **1.6.5 Data collection method**

Semi-structured interviews were used to conduct the research. According to Kumar (2011), the strength of semi-structured interviews lies in the freedom they provide to both the researcher and the participants in terms of content and structure. In-depth interviewing is a continual, face-to-face encounter between a researcher and participants directed towards understanding the participants' views of their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words (Kumar, 2011). This definition underlines two essential characteristics of in-depth interviewing: It involves face-to-face, repeated communication between the researcher and his or her participants, and it seeks to understand the latter's perspectives. Because this method involves repeated contact and, consequently, an extended length of time spent with a participant, it is expected that the rapport between researcher and participant will be boosted and that the corresponding understanding and confidence between the two will lead to in-depth, accurate data (Kumar, 2014).

Focus group interviewing is a strategy by which the attitudes towards and opinions or perceptions of an issue are explored through a free and open discussion between the members of the group and the researcher (Kumar, 2014). The data generated from these can be detailed and rich and can be used to explore a vast variety of issues (Kumar, 2014).

### **1.6.6 Data analysis**

The most crucial part of the study is when the data are analysed and interpreted, which should be done exactly as the participants have presented it (Welman *et al.*, 2005). In this step, all the field notes and tape recordings must be processed. This entails converting the notes and recordings into write-ups, which should be intelligible products that can be read, edited for accuracy, commented on and analysed (Welman *et al.*, 2005). In this study, data were recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

According to Nieuwenhuis (2016), there are two general steps in qualitative data analysis, namely preparation of data and coding of data. The preparation of data is an important step in the study as it requires data to be systematic and organised so that the researcher can easily locate information in the data set. Preparation of data consists of the following elements:

- Explaining sample and participants
- Organising the information
- Transliterating data
- Getting to grasp the data

Coding data is the process of reading carefully through transcribed data, line by line, and dividing the data into meaningful analytical units.

### **1.6.7 Ethical issues**

Application for ethical approval of research includes questions inviting the researcher to indicate potential benefits to the participants, the greater education community and the wider research community. The rules and codes themselves are founded on the principles of respect for persons, beneficence and justice (Kumar, 2011). Kumar (2011) indicates that in every discipline, it is regarded as unethical to collect information without the knowledge of the participants, their expressed willingness to participate and informed consent. Informed consent implies that subjects are made adequately aware of the type of information the researcher wants from them (Kumar, 2011). The following questions need to be answered when ethical approval is sought from people: why the information is being sought, what

purpose it will be put to, how they are expected to participate in the study and how it will directly or indirectly affect them. Moreover, it is important that participants' consent should be voluntary and without pressure of any kind.

For this study, the participants' consent was required following the procedure of the gatekeeper (see Kumar, 2011). Gatekeeper permission refers to access to an institution or organisation and can be either physical or informational. All institutions or organisations have the right to grant or decline permission to a researcher to conduct research in their territory. Permission from the education department to conduct research at departmental schools is compulsory and thus was obtained for this study.

The procedures to be followed and the purpose and importance of this study were explained to the participants. The researcher guaranteed the participants that their information would be kept confidential, that they were not compelled to participate in the study and that they could withdraw at any time. Research should be free of coercion, undue influence or inappropriate incentives, and participants should be given sufficient time to consider participation (Olivier *et al.*, 2019).

The following are some of the aspects to be stated in the consent form and made clear to the participants (Olivier *et al.*, 2019):

- the contact details of the research ethical committee, with a statement that the participants may contact the committee if they have complaints about their rights and welfare as research participants
- the contact details of the researcher, with a statement that the participants may contact the researcher if they have queries about the research project
- the expected duration of participation
- the nature of the participants' responsibilities
- the nature of the researcher's responsibilities
- the anticipated risks of harm or discomfort
- the measures to minimise risk of harm
- the extent to which confidentiality is possible
- a statement that the research has been approved by a registered research ethical committee (including identifying details)

The consent form should be in plain language, appropriate to the participants' level of understanding, and free of jargon and unexplained acronyms. Furthermore, it should be clear

and explain technical terminology and it should be translated into a language or languages appropriate to the context (Olivier *et al.*, 2019).

### **1.6.8 Reliability and validity**

Validity in the broader sense refers to the ability of a research instrument to demonstrate what it was designed for (Kumar, 2011). Reliability relates to consistency in the findings of the research instrument when used repetitively. Trustworthiness in a qualitative study is determined by four guides – credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability – which reflect validity and reliability in qualitative research (Kumar, 2011). Upon collecting the data for this study from the interviews, it was important for the researcher to make sure that only applicable and valid data were used for the study. It was the responsibility of the researcher to make sure that the participants did not deviate from what they were being interviewed for. Before conducting the interview, it was also important for the researcher to explain the importance of the research and outline what was expected from the participants.

## **1.7 CONTRIBUTION OF THE RESEARCH**

### **1.7.1 Faculty and Edu-Lead**

The vision of the faculty of education is to institute a niche for research about the role and position of leadership in education with a focus on organisational increase and to contribute to the understanding and practice of school development. This strategic aim is to provide to the academic enhancement of schools and the development of schools as centres of the communities contributing to positive citizenship in the wider context of South Africa.

A fundamental focus of Edu-Lead is the field of education leadership, management, and governance on all levels of the education fraternity. The objective is to build theories on the effective professional improvement of education leaders and managers in diverse education organisations by optimising the professional and academic aspects of the working life and environment. This study aims to provide insight that will improve the South African education system by suggesting different approaches to providing safe school environments and making sure that school principals and SMTs get proper ongoing training upon being appointed and as the education system improves.

At the end of the research, the study wishes to accomplish and contribute insight into:

- turnaround strategies on how schools maintain a safe environment;

- the promotion safe environment in schools by the school principal, SGB, teachers, learners and the community;
- the influence of the leadership approaches of principals, school management structures, moral leadership and contextual factors on a positive school climate;
- the leadership accountability of principals towards improved quality education and a safe environment in secondary schools; and
- innovations that will help improve the school leadership, which will lead to a positive climate in schools.

### **1.7.2 Education and practice**

Education is one of the most important aspects of South Africa that can be used to transform and improve the country. How, what and where knowledge is imparted to learners is important, as it has the power to affect learners either positively or negatively. The purpose of this study is to determine ways that will have a positive impact on making sure that South African education improves in most of the aspects currently affecting it, such as a safe school environment, the role of the school principal and school violence. The strategies and guidelines that will be acquired from this study could be used to improve education practice in how schools function.

This study also seeks to take schools back to the basics of the purpose of education through promoting a safe school environment through the following:

- quality leadership of the school principal
- promoting awareness of safe environments in schools, which will lead to quality education
- maintaining safe schools by working together with the community
- promote togetherness in schools through teachers, learners, school leadership and the school principal

In the next section, an overview of the study is given in the form of a chapter division.

## **1.8 CHAPTER DIVISION**

The study is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter 1: General orientation

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 3: Research methodology and design

Chapter 4: Data presentation, analysis, interpretation and discussion

Chapter 5: Findings, recommendations and conclusion

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter gives a theoretical literature analysis on the understanding of principals in creating a safe school environment in secondary schools. The lack of a safe environment in schools has resulted in a major issue in many schools, which is escalating as seen through various media sources (Makwarela *et al.*, 2017). South African schools have been labelled as unsafe places due to ridicule, intimidation, harassment, humiliation and violence such as shootings, victimisation, bullying, sexual harassment, stabbings, rapes and robberies on the school premises (Makwarela *et al.*, 2017). However, as “school safety” is a broad term, the study will determine, firstly, what a safe school environment entails and secondly, what the challenges and limitations encountered by school principals are when it comes to maintaining safe environments at schools. Lastly, the study will seek to gain deeper insight into the role and responsibilities of principals in a school and how they can use their understanding of systems and the correct application thereof in schools to lead, manage, maintain and keep schools safe at all times.

### **2.2 SCHOOL SAFETY AND SCHOOL VIOLENCE**

#### **2.2.1 Safe school environment**

Mncube and Harber (2012) describe a safe environment in schools as one that is free of risk and possible harm. They further maintain that a safe school environment is a place where members of the community work, teach and learn without fear of ridicule, intimidation, harassment, embarrassment and aggression. Xaba (2014) concurs with these views and adds that a safe school environment comprises school-related activities where learners are safe from harassment and substance use.

#### **2.2.2 School violence**

According to Mncube and Harber (2012), school violence is any behaviour of learners, teachers, administrators or non-school persons, attempting to inflict injury on another person or to damage school property. School violence has tarnished the value and importance of school and education, leaving many in fear and others vulnerable.



The following section is about the discussion of a safe school environment and is an answer to Objective 1, to determine what a safe school environment entails.

## **2.3 LEGISLATION AND DIFFERENT POLICIES REGARDING SCHOOL SAFETY**

About school safety, specific legislative acts and policies should be taken cognisance of during the daily activities of schools. The various acts and policies are discussed individually below.

### **2.3.1 The Constitution**

The *Constitution of South Africa* (1996) is a set of rules that regulate or govern South Africa. Chapter 2 consists of the Bill of Rights, which protects the rights of all people in the country and acknowledges the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom. The most relevant sections of the Bill of Rights that involve the rights of learners are Sections 24, 28 and 29. Section 24 stipulates that everyone has the right to a milieu that is not harmful to the health or wellbeing of individuals. This section is applicable to all individuals who work or learn at a school. In addition, Section 28 has specific relevance for learners, stating that children have the right to education and should be protected from harm, neglect, exploitation, or degradation. Section 29, which stipulates that everyone has the right to education, is applicable to everyone who works at and attends a school. In order to keep individuals safe at all times, the principal and his or her team should ensure that these sections of the Bill of Rights are enshrined in the school policy and are applied on a daily basis.

### **2.3.2 The South African Schools Act**

The SASA 84 of 1996 spells out rules that regulate all stakeholders who take part in anything that has to do with schools. The rules in the different sections of the act emphasise the right of learners to be educated in a safe environment. It gives the principal and other stakeholders, such as the SGB, the power to create and maintain a safe school environment. Specifically, Section 16 (2a) of the SASA outlines that one of the functions and responsibilities of the principal is the implementation of policy and legislation for the school. On the other hand, Section 18(2a) maintains that the SGB must create an ordered and focussed school environment devoted to the fostering and upholding of a quality governance arrangement. These policies are important for the function of and discipline at schools, as it gives direction on how everyone on the school premises should behave.

### **2.3.3 A code of conduct for learners**

It indicates the rules on how learners should behave at the school and describes the corrective measures that should be applied by the school regarding the transgressions by learners (South Africa, 2008). The intention of these rules is to establish a disciplined and purposeful school environment, dedicated to the improvement and maintenance of the quality of the learning process. These rules are applicable to all learners while they are on the school premises, when they are representing the school or when they are attending functions held by the school. Furthermore, a code of conduct is aimed at promoting the rights and safety of all learners, teachers and parents. It ensures that learners are responsible for their own behaviour and prohibits all forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance. It also serves the purpose of eradicating disorderly and provocative behaviour of learners.

According to the SASSA 84 of 1996, and specifically Section 2(8), a code of conduct should be adopted after thorough discussion with the different interested parties such as, among others, the learners, parents and teachers of the school. SGBs should be assisted by the Ministry by providing guidelines, after consultation with the Council of Education Ministers. It is also clear that nothing pardons any learner from the responsibility of conforming to the code of conduct of the school. This document for learners should contain requirements of a process for protecting the wellness of the learners and any other party involved in disciplinary actions. Mestry and Khumalo (2012) is of the opinion that these rules are based on agreement between different stakeholders at the school resulting that the drafting thereof should be a joint effort by these stakeholders, inter alia, parents, learners, educators and non-educators at the school.

### **2.3.4 Policy on bullying**

School policies on bullying forbid behaviour of learners, such as threatening and harassing other learners (Hall, 2017). The advantage of policy mediations is that such interventions can influence the behaviour of persons, such as learners, teachers and supervisors, while also contributing to good school practices. In this regard, Laas (2013) declares that bullying is a real problem in schools. Bullying, an international phenomenon, has a destructive external factor that sets the stage for permanent damage that will eventually have a permanent negative effect on the lives of learners. It has become visible through conventional media reports and social media video clips, resulting in public concern about the lack of safety in South African schools. These scenes on social media have added to existing concerns about physical violence, homophobic bullying, sexual persecution and, more recently, virtual bullying

(Juan *et al.*, 2018). The Department of Education is of the view that bullying manifests itself in higher levels of school absenteeism by learners who are victims thereof (Coetzee & Venter, 2016).

Policy intervention strategies revolve around suspending and expelling bullies, training teachers on intervening and teaching sympathy and respect to learners through classroom lessons (Hall, 2017). Furthermore, other strategies involve maintaining constant adult supervision throughout school settings, collaborating with parents about learner behaviour and presenting school-wide policies on bullying. However, Borgwald and Theixos (2013) warn that a zero-tolerance policy approach has little to no impact on bullying and school violence, as it often results in expulsion and suspension. According to them, such an approach is not the best response to bullying, as it restricts access to education for the offender.

### **2.3.5 Policy on access control**

One of the things that a principal should have control over is access to the school (SASA 84 of 1996). It is the responsibility of the principal to account for anyone that enters the school gate. In fact, Section 61 of the SASA 84 of 1996 sets out regulations relating to safety measures at public schools. The head of the department (HoD) or principal of any public school may take steps as deemed necessary for the protection of the public-school buildings and the people who work there. Section 61 stipulates that without the authorization of the principal or HoD, no person shall enter any public-school properties without the necessary information provided, which includes, among other things, his or her name, proof of identity, place of residence and any other important documents required by the relevant authorities. It is maintained that the principal or HoD may at any time get rid of any person from the school premises if that person enters the premises without the mentioned documents and information. In addition, Hanover (2013) states that access control of a school also involves technology-based security gadgets such as surveillance cameras, closed-circuit television systems and weapon detection systems. The above measures, if applied correctly, can assist the school principal in accomplishing what the SASA indicates regarding access control in schools.

### **2.3.6 Policy on cell phones**

Most high school learners own cell phones, and though sometimes these are very useful, they can have a negative impact on the teaching and learning process (Maphalala & Nzama, 2014). Schools have different policies when it comes to the use of cell phones by learners – some schools ban cell phones use completely, while others allow learners to use them only during

lunch and break periods (Maphalala & Nzama, 2014). According to Redmanye *et al.* (2011), the French Senate has legislated a ban on cell phone use by under-15-year-olds in schools. It is also noteworthy that the United Kingdom Department of Education discourages the use of mobile devices by young people and suggests that schools should consider banning such devices when school policies are drawn up. Along this line, Maphalala and Nzama (2014) point out that the South African National Association of School Governing Bodies did consider the ban of mobile devices on school grounds, stating that some of these devices such as mobile phones caused disturbances that could result in the collapse of the learning milieu. However, Phippen (2017) is of the view that the digital world presents many opportunities and benefits for learners. An enthusiasm for technology can be transformed into rewarding careers if it is not used to the detriment of the safety of oneself and others in the school. Though technology has advanced and can better education it can still have a negative impact to safe environments in school for example: learners come from different backgrounds and affordability is not the same. This could prompt learners to steal and leading learners to violence and this can be an unending circle. Learners carrying phones to school could also lead them becoming victims of crime in the community.

### **2.3.7 Policy on the seizure of drugs and dangerous weapons**

According to Section 8A of the SASA 84 of 1996, random searches and seizure, as well as drug testing at schools, can only take place when approved by the principal for valid learning reasons. The SASA prohibits any person from bringing a dangerous object or illegal drug onto the school properties or have such an object or drug in his or her possession on the school premises or during any school activity. Seizure and drug testing should be done by the principal or delegate in a way that is judicious and relational to the suspected illegal activity (SASA, 1996). It is further stated that searches and testing should be conducted in the best interest of the learners at the school, considering the safety and health of the learners and current events taking place at schools that affect the image of schools. These measures should take place on a continuous basis and not only be practised when it is realised that the conditions for teaching and learning are in jeopardy and schools are not safe anymore.

### **2.3.8 Policy on learner attendance**

The SASA 84 of 1996 states that it is obligatory for every learner to attend school until the age of 15. Keeping a track record of learner attendance in schools will help monitor the number of learners attending school and maintain a safe school environment so that no learner will enter the school premises without permission (Department of Basic Education, 2011). For example,

if a learner has been suspended from school because of bad behaviour that might endanger other learners, the learner will only be permitted to attend school again with the consent of the HoD of the province.

From the above information, it becomes clear that an accurate recording of attendance is important not only for security reasons but also for the school, as it is responsible for accounting for each person in the building. Furthermore, attending school is a high priority for authorities and parents, as learners will not only achieve better results but also develop better life habits and avoid unsafe activities (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Using a school attendance tracker may be expensive, but the benefits of using such a system will most probably outweigh the cost of the system (Department of Basic Education, 2011). It is contended that a school attendance tracker will not only assist with accurate attendance records but will also help to ensure that schools are safe from unwanted visitors, if access to the school premises is only for learners and staff with the required access (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

From the above discussion (§ 2.3.1- 2.3.8), one can assume that when the policies of schools, as indicated above, are in place and implemented correctly, schools will become safer places for both learners and teachers. The principal, together with the SGB, should make sure that such policies adhere to the *Constitution of South Africa* (1996) and, more specifically, the Bill of Rights.

## **2.4 ASPECTS TO CONSIDER IN ESTABLISHING A SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**

### **2.4.1 Focusing on academic achievement**

Research shows that school climate and school safety have a direct impact on the achievement of learners (Juvonen *et al.*, 2011). A learner who feels unsafe will have trouble in paying attention and concentrating in the classroom, which will lead to underperforming (Juvonen *et al.*, 2011). It is also maintained that learners who are exposed to violent activities, such as alcohol and drug use, fights and using weapons, both on and outside the school premises, may experience emotional or psychological distress (Fan *et al.*, 2011). Learners who fear for their safety will be distracted and unable to fully focus their attention on learning (Cornell & Sayman, 2020). Hence, it is important to establish a safe learning environment so that learners have the best possible chance to succeed academically at school (Fan *et al.*, 2011).

The condition of school facilities, community factors, the physical environment of the school and peer relationships are all associated with learner academic performance. In this regard, it is maintained that schools that are perceived to be unsafe have lower attendance rates and higher rates of chronic absence. For example, it has been found that higher crime rates, poor building conditions and higher levels of pollution are linked to a decrease in school attendance among learners (Milam *et al.*, 2010). A school that is well resourced, with good teachers, disciplined learners and secure classrooms, and that advocates the protection of learners has a better chance of achieving good results (Cornell & Sayman, 2020).

#### **2.4.2 Involvement of families and the community**

Adelman and Taylor (2002) are of the view that too many policymakers, community leaders and parents still regard school and learners' learning as the sole responsibility of teachers. However, teachers have indicated that they cannot do it alone. Support from parents and community members is crucial, as schools are more effective and caring when the stakeholders are involved. In fact, dealing with multiple, interrelated problems, such as poverty, child development, education, violence, crime, safety, housing and employment, requires multiple and interrelated solutions and requires the concerted effort of all stakeholders (Adelman & Taylor, 2002). The most common forms of violence suffered by learners are physical, sexual and emotional exploitation experienced at school, at home and in the community. It is also alleged by Adelman and Taylor (2002) that far too many learners are caught up in phases where they are the recipient or offender (and sometimes both) of harassment ranging from excessive pestering, bullying, intimidation and major illegal acts. The problem is extensive and is linked with other problems that are significant barriers to development, learning, parenting, teaching and socialisation (Adelman & Taylor, 2002).

The Western Cape Government (2020) has started a "Walking Bus" initiative, which aims to establish a safe and supervised road for learners to and from school every day with the dedication and involvement of the community, local law enforcement, the South African Police Service (SAPS), school principals and support staff to help create safer environments. The Walking Bus initiative involves members of the broader community or parents who offer to walk with groups of learners to and from school. They walk with the learners along the most proper and appropriate routes leading to the school. In addition, the Western Cape Government (2020) also helps schools to implement developmental programmes, which include life skills for learners at risk. The aim is to prevent possible problems or assist learners to cope better with remaining situations related to teenage pregnancy, sexual exploitation,

drug abuse, gender-based brutality, bullying, HIV and AIDS, racism and other social challenges.

### **2.4.3 Positive relationships and respect among learners and staff**

According to Khaleduzzaman (2017), the forming of strong and caring relationships with teachers allows learners to feel safer and more secure in schools. It is maintained that learning ensues best in an environment that comprises positive interpersonal relationships and interactions in which learners feel appreciated, accepted, respected and admired (Khaleduzzaman, 2017). Moreover, Sithole (2017), is of the view that teachers should create a positive learning environment, as it serves as a second home for learners to successfully achieve their goals, regardless of their background. It is the view of Hershkovitzh (2018) that conflictual relationships may place learners in a situation where they do not feel connected to the academic and emotional resources of their school, which may lead to failure on their part. Furthermore, the Department of Basic Education (2011) upholds that teachers need to promote respect, tolerance and responsibility in schools. The relationships between teachers and learners must be based on mutual respect and dignity and responsibility. According to Segalo and Rambuda (2018), although teachers have the right to discipline learners, such discipline should be corrective and educative rather than punitive and punishing. However, most teachers are unsure about disciplining learners because some learners have an arrogant attitude towards their teachers, are disrespectful and lack moral values. Parents and teachers need to work together in instilling discipline in learners and make sure they retain good morals, which will lead to having respect for themselves and others. This will make schools safe, as quarrelling and bullying in schools will be reduced.

### **2.4.4 Discussion of safety issues**

The National School Safety Framework (DBE, 2015) indicates that for many children, the biggest threat to their right to education is not discrimination or a lack of access to schools, but violence within or near their schools. This violence undermines their ability to learn, puts their physical and psychological wellbeing at risk and often causes them to drop out of school entirely. According to Mgijima (2014), school violence manifests itself in different forms (e.g. learner-on-learner, teacher-on-learner, learner-on-teacher and teacher-on-teacher violence) and is caused by different factors. According to Chapter 3 of the National School Safety Framework (DBE, 2015), a safe and caring school is a place where pupils can learn and teachers can teach in a warm and friendly environment, free from any form of bullying, violence

or fear. Such schools have sufficient adult supervision and both parent and learner involvement.

To preserve the safety of all learners and teachers within a school, methods such as a code of conduct, early warning processes and disciplinary processes have to be in place, understood and applied properly. A proper system for recording and reporting on criminal activities and violence should also be employed. Events engaged in by staff and learners must be free from abuse, dangerous objects, drugs, alcohol, bullying, discrimination, theft and physical, sexual or gender-based violence. Also essential is a non-violent child-based strategy for dealing with disciplinary problems, without the intimidation or practice of corporal punishment. In addition, it is necessary to discuss safety issues with learners, the SMT, parents and the community from time to time. This will make it easy to address issues affecting the safety of learners in schools and develop solutions on how to curb these and guarantee the safety of learners and staff.

#### **2.4.5 Creating ways for learners to share their concerns and offering extended day programmes for learners**

Learners and teachers who are victims of violence can be affected negatively for the rest of their lives if they do not get proper counselling, and this will affect the teaching and learning in schools. According to Gardner (2019), young persons are strong, and given the right environmental circumstances and interventions, the signs associated with trauma may be reduced. Trauma-sensitive school libraries are ones that offer a haven for learners to flourish in this way. School libraries are in a unique position in the school setting to provide this sort of environment for learners. Dennehy *et al.* (2019) state that cyberbullying is an ongoing distress in schools and there is a lack of understanding and suitable action from parents and schools about cyberbullying. However, the involvement of the youth to raise awareness of cyberbullying will help both victims and perpetrators (Dennehy *et al.*, 2019)

. Getting counselling and speaking to someone about what has happened can often be very helpful. If learners need to talk to someone, they can ask a teacher, parent or caregiver to help set up counselling sessions for them (Power, 2017).

#### **2.4.6 Having in place a system for referring learners who are suspected of being abused or neglected**



Schools should establish well-functioning referral systems to refer learners involved in violence at school, both as victims and perpetrators, to the appropriate resources for targeted support and care. Awareness should also be raised among learners and the rest of the school community about the counselling and other support services at their disposal (DBE, 2015). Options to report violence or other safety-related concerns anonymously must be disclosed, as learners need to be assured of their safety when reporting these (DBE, 2015). Power (2017) points out that learners often feel they cannot talk out about bullying, because they are anxious it will lead to further or more bullying. Therefore, it is important for schools to have policies and systems in place that learners will feel safe when they report instances of bullying.

Learners who are bullied or see someone being bullied can do the following: Report the bullying to a teacher. If they do not feel relaxed doing this alone, they can speak to someone they feel safe with and think is trustworthy and ask him or her to approach a teacher with the learner or on the learner's behalf. If learners feel their grievance was not taken seriously, they can approach another teacher or the principal. If learners have been bullied or have witnessed bullying, it can be beneficial to speak to someone about it. They can ask their teacher to help set up counselling meetings. Bullying can be very distressing and have very negative effects on a learner, so it is important that learners who have been bullied or saw bullying have someone who can help them work through their feelings.

#### **2.4.7 Identifying problems and assessing progress towards solutions**

According to the World Health Organization (2019), preventing and responding to violence in schools can improve educational outcomes in learners and help achieve their educational targets. Many of the life skills taught in violence prevention, such as communication, managing emotions, resolving conflicts and solving problems, are the same skills that can help learners succeed in school. Developing a school policy to deal with violence can help the school to agree on a shared vision and overall plan to confront violence in schools. It should also be guided by the values and preferences of the whole school community, including learners, teachers, administrative staff and parents, who should be given the opportunity to contribute (World Health Organization, 2019). Achieving a safe school environment is possible when the school principal works together with the community and learners in mitigating anything that may harm the school or the learners.

#### **2.4.8 Supporting learners in making the transition to adult life and the workplace or tertiary studies**

According to Sitch and Lowry (2019) on educational transition, learners' transition into higher education can be likened to entering an "alien environment". Researchers have identified that the emotional costs associated with a negative experience of educational transition can be high, including excessive stress, loss of confidence, lowered self-esteem and ultimately non-completion. Adult learners require support and services to help them successfully transition into taking on the demands and expectations of college students. Transition programmes have grown in popularity as a means to aid adult learners as they transition to higher education (Karmelita, 2017).

Thalluri and Penman (2019) explain that transitions can be facilitated by means of workshops. Such workshops can be established as a new learning environment accessible to learners of diverse age groups and educational and cultural settings to prepare them to study. The workshop can cover aspects such as confidence, networking and friendships, and reduce anxiety with regard to study. Transition can also be facilitated by way of higher education policies to prepare graduates through universities meaning to connect universities with the world of work through technology transfer, entrepreneurship education, relations between business, research and institutions (Boffo, 2019). This can be done while overreaching the boundaries of teaching knowledge and directing university teaching towards skills and capabilities (Boffo, 2019).

Given both long-term and recessionary changes in the economy, the young adults of today face a transition to adulthood that is very different from that of previous eras. It now takes longer for the youth to learn useful skills, and there is a delayed transition to adulthood for many young people (Aronson *et al.*, 2015). Learners should be prepared at an early stage for the different transitions they are going to encounter in life so that they are not caught off-guard when they reach that level.

## **2.5 INVOLVEMENT OF OTHER STAKEHOLDERS IN SCHOOL SAFETY**

### **2.5.1 School management team**

Since the SMT forms an important management function, this structure should be utilised to administer the creation of a safe school environment (Van Wyk & Marumoloo, 2017). The task of the SMT is to develop a collaborated school safety procedure in accordance with existing policy to make sure the school complies with the safety policies of the Department of Education (Van Wyk & Marumoloo, 2017). In addition, it is their responsibility to develop systems and procedures to decrease the vulnerability of learners when they travel to and from

school (Van Wyk & Marumoloa, 2017). The SMT can also identify infrastructure needs that facilitate safety and identify volunteers that can work with the school on issues of safety, care and support (Van Wyk & Marumoloa, 2017). The monitoring of safety and risk factors in the school in collaboration with the SGB is another function that should be part of the functions of the SMT.

### **2.5.2 School governing body**

The SASA 84 of 1996 states that every public school needs to have an SGB, consisting of teachers, parents, non-teaching staff and learners. These people should work collectively to make sure that schools are safe places that function effectively (RSA, 1996). As the SGB stands in a position of trust towards the school, it is assumed that they will support the interventions of the SMT and the Representative Council of Learners (RCL). It is further assumed that they will establish and ensure ties with the community to assist with the safety of learners to and from schools (RSA, 1996). The ultimate purpose of the SGB is to make sure that school's function in accordance with safety regulations stipulated by the SASA 84 of 1996.

### **2.5.3 School safety committee**

The function of a school safety committee, which could consist of professional organisations, government institutions, non-governmental, faith-based and community-based organisations, businesses, law enforcement agencies and care workers, is to develop a comprehensive school safety and violence prevention plan (Makota & Leoschut, 2016). The committee assists in establishing the safety needs of a school through a school safety audit. Furthermore, the committee makes suitable interventions based on the school needs identified, getting the support of the school, parents and the broader community for the school safety plan. Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the school safety initiatives are further functions of the safety committee (Makota & Leoschut, 2016). The committee should put in place actions and measures to respond to the safety threats within the school. These actions and measures need to be documented in a written school safety plan that outlines the school's response to violence-related concerns of the school. Power (2017) states, for instance, that it is important for schools to have an efficient anti-bullying policy, but it is more important that the principal, the SGB and the teachers make sure that the policy is implemented to ensure that the school environment is free from hostile behaviour and that the learners feel safe.

### **2.5.4 Representative Council of Learners**

The SASA 84 of 1996 specifies that an RCL should be established at every public school. The function of the RCL is to structure how it will liaise and communicate with other learners. It is also the responsibility of the RCL to draft its own constitution, to maintain order, discipline, loyalty, respect, punctuality, academic thoroughness and morality and to promote good relations among the RCL and learners, staff and parents (Mncube & Naidoo, 2014). Other functions of the RCL relate to supporting learner initiatives against crime and violence, understanding, referring and utilising the disciplinary procedures appropriately and providing learners with a fundamental link to the SMT. The involvement and participation of learner leaders in school management structures are essential to the growth of the school and the wellbeing of the rest of the learners (Botha *et al.*, 2015). The involvement of the RCL in decisions on school safety and discipline procedures is crucial, as it will be easier for this body to communicate messages about such matters to other learners (Botha *et al.*, 2015).

### **2.5.5 Community Policing Forum**

The *Constitution of South Africa* (1996) suggests the establishment of a Community Policing Forum at police stations with the major objective to establish an effective collaboration between the police and the community. The functions of the forum are to combat crime, monitor service delivery and establish police-community relations so that problems in the community can be jointly analysed in such a way that appropriate solutions can be designed and implemented accordingly (Malatji, 2016). According to Levine (2017), local participation can enable democracy and empower citizens by incorporating their unique knowledge into public decision making. Hattingh (2015) is of the view that a Community Policing Forum functions as the voice of the community with the police and regarding important safety issues.

The Code of Conduct of the SAPS seeks to oblige partners within a given community to strive towards the creation of a safe and secure environment. Activities of the forum relate to participating in efforts to cope with roots causes of crime in all communities, assisting in preventing any action that may threaten the safety and security of the community and investigating any act that endangers the safety and security of a society. The aim is to bring suspects before the law, arrest offenders and bring them to justice (Malatji, 2016). Gill *et al.* (2014) indicate that community-orientated policing identifies a host of roles for the police beyond crime fighting. These roles include reducing fear, responding to social and physical disorder in the community and building positive relationships with citizens to enhance police legitimacy. The community and the police working together in fighting crime and violence in the community will result in safer communities and, ultimately, safer schools.

### **2.5.6 Sector policing**

The main purpose of sector policing is to ensure that everyone is a dynamic participant in the fight against crime (Hlungwani, 2014). This can be done by establishing a firm partnership between the police, community and other role players. Such a partnership also includes the development of a modern, democratic policing style and thus addresses the safety and security needs of every citizen of South Africa (Hlungwani, 2014). Sector policing is, therefore, seen as a method of dividing the area of a police station into smaller sectors to understand the causes and enabling factors of crime (SAPS, 2015). Forming partnerships with the police, it becomes easier to launch projects to address crime and encourage community involvement, enhanced visibility and patrolling sectors (SAPS, 2015). Having support from the police will ensure that the community complies with the rules of the police and stay within its limits in fighting violence and crime in the community. In so doing, sector policing can be of assistance to school safety.

## **2.6 CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND SCHOOL SAFETY**

### **2.6.1 Classroom management**

According to Coetzee *et al.* (2015), a lack of discipline is a main problem in public schools. The aim of the classroom discipline policy is to create a just and consistent way of promoting good behaviour and dealing with misconduct in the classroom. Rules should be drawn up by both the teacher and the learners, and various aspects of the policy should be finalised through agreement with learners, as this will ensure that they take ownership of it. Nieman and Monyai (2014) are of the view that a classroom policy that consist of a code of conduct that clearly indicates expected behaviour will go a long way in creating a more constructive learning environment and will, therefore, lead to better discipline. The main aim of the teacher should be to create a learning environment in which learners develop strong self-discipline. It should also be the duty of teachers to help learners accept responsibility, to set goals that will encourage them to take pride in their work and achievements and to get the input of learners by allowing them to be part of the formulation of classroom policies on discipline and punishment. Furthermore, teachers should tell learners what is right and wrong and what is appropriate behaviour and ensure they obey the rules. By doing so, learners will be disciplined, and a positive learning atmosphere will be created.

### **2.6.2 Teaching style**

Coetzee *et al.* (2015) point out that teachers should be aware of unique learning styles, as their favoured classroom management style may benefit some learners more than others. A learning style can be defined as a consistent pattern of behaviour that a learner uses to approach and master learning content (Coetzee *et al.*, 2015). Field-dependent learners favour a more global, holistic and rational approach to learning (also known as right-brain learning), while field-independent learners prefer a more analytical, verbal and sequential style of learning (also known as left-brain learning) (Coetzee *et al.*, 2015).

Nieman and Monyai (2014) are of the view that the teacher and the school are responsible to make sure that nothing over which they have control stands in the way of the learners' learning needs. The method of teaching, the resources provided and the systems, timetables and rules should all be intended to the purpose of promoting the success of the learners. According to Stein *et al.* (2014), there are three general categories of interaction that can be built into any learning activity, namely learner-instructor interaction, learner-learner interaction and learner-content interaction. From the above, it becomes clear that the teaching style as well as the type of learning can either be positive or detrimental to the achievement of learners. This can contribute to a positive or negative school culture, which will have an impact (either positive or negative) on school safety.

### **2.6.3 Showing care**

According to Barrett (2018), showing care is to be interculturally competent. Intercultural competence is a set of ethics, attitudes, abilities, knowledge and understanding that are needed for understanding and respecting individuals who are perceived to be culturally unique from oneself (Barrett, 2018). The aim of intercultural competence is to interact and communicate effectively and appropriately with other people and establishing positive and constructive relationships with people. In this regard, Nieman and Monyai (2014) are of the view that a learning environment comprises the psychological and social atmosphere or ethos that exists in every classroom, preferably an atmosphere of support, friendliness and high expectations. Good interpersonal relationships in the classroom depend on several aspects, such as constructive advice, suitable approval, open and lively communication, a sense of humour and a caring approach.

### **2.6.4 Identifying and addressing needs**

Nieman and Monyai (2014) indicate that besides the generally accepted development processes that secondary school learners go through, there is also a group of learners who

must contend with other problems. These are the learners who, because of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, experience barriers to learning and development. Teachers play an important role in promoting the learning and development of the learners in their classrooms. Coetzee *et al.* (2015) state that a teacher must be a responsible person to be able to control all emotions involved in teaching learners. They are of the view that emotional illiteracy can lead to, among other things, a poor classroom atmosphere, either a lack of discipline or too severe discipline, an inappropriately competitive climate, a lack of cooperation and learner alienation from the teacher. On the other hand, Lick *et al.* (2013) point out that teachers need time to dig deeper to identify, analyse and discuss learner data, standards, assessment items and pacing guides to identify the specific concepts and skills learners need to master in order to reach competency.

### **2.6.5 Exercising authority**

The authority of the teacher is a situational factor that has an influence on leadership style and refers to the degree of the teacher's power in the classroom, which is the power to discipline, reward and exert learners (Coetzee *et al.*, 2015). Lac (2017) points out the importance of involving learners when it is about decision making in the classroom, as it builds trust and gives learners the assurance that their insights and experiences are of importance. Patchen and Smithenry (2014) add that when the teacher moves from the traditional leadership position and shifts the classroom authority to the learners to take charge of the instructional process, learners realise that they are responsible as a class to solve problems, which advances teaching and learning.

## **2.7 SCHOOL SAFETY PLANS, AUDITS, MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

The School-based Crime Prevention Guideline was developed by the SAPS in 2009, as part of the *Implementation of the School Safety Programme* document. Its intention is to serve as a resource for members of the SAPS who work with youth crime prevention and school safety (SAPS, 2019). The aim of this document is to render a school-based crime prevention benefit for schools that is preventative, proactive and characterised by the development and implementation of interventions that discourage potential wrongdoers and empower potential fatalities and past victims (SAPS, 2019). Furthermore, it encourages a cohesive and multidisciplinary approach towards crime deterrence and development and mobilises relevant stakeholders to participate in a broad network of services to protect children and transform all schools into safe, caring and child-friendly organisations. This document also assists in building capacity for the school community, especially learners, to prevent and manage school

safety issues by promoting participation in the development, execution, supporting and evaluation of school safety programmes (SAPS, 2019). According to the National School Safety Framework (DBE, 2015), schools are very important stakeholders in achieving communities that are safe for both children and adults. It is vital that schools should be safe places that promote learning at all levels. The prevention of violence at schools is an integral part of the overall safety plan of the community, as the social values and attitudes of the community influence the behaviour of learners.

## **2.8 SCHOOL CULTURE, CLIMATE AND SCHOOL SAFETY**

School culture is a non-physical guiding force and the characteristics and behaviour of a specific school (Dongjiao, 2015). It reveals different forms of educational culture and reflects the direction of a school. Furthermore, it guides the development direction of the principal culture, school educational orientation culture, teacher culture, learner culture, class culture and examination culture (Dongjiao, 2015). The principal is the most important and central figure of the school environment and its climate, as he or she is responsible for promoting a friendly climate by being warm and approachable. According to Botha and Triegaardt (2015), the mood and attitude of the principal give the school its identity in terms of the climate that prevails. Along the same line, Lick *et al.* (2013) are of the view that the most significant challenge of school leadership is to build and maintain a school culture that focuses on the continual advancement of educational programmes, teachers' abilities and skills and the learners' learning. It can thus be said that school culture and climate are crucial elements in maintaining safety at a school. However, the principal is the main driver to ensure that the school culture and climate are safe and favourable to teaching and learning.

## **2.9 OWNERSHIP BY SCHOOL PERSONNEL AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY IN THE SCHOOL SAFETY PROCESS**

According to Power (2017), violence in schools often happens more in impoverished communities in South Africa. Power (2017) maintains that the dire conditions, amongst others, poverty and unemployment have the effect of disempowerment. It resulted in frustrations which lead to violence, rape and other forceful acts. The latter serves as a means of proclaiming power and being in control. However, Barrett (2018) is of the view that if schools and the community develop values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, understanding and respect for people who are perceived to be culturally different from oneself, the scenario will be different. It will enable people to interact and communicate effectively and appropriately with others, which will lead to establishing positive and constructive relationships and harmony in



the community. The National School Safety Framework (DBE, 2015) states that just as safe schools are crucial to safe communities, research shows that a safe community is a prerequisite for a safe school. Schools are microcosms of the broader community in which they are located because exposure to community crime and violence increases receptiveness to school violence, just as exposure to family and community violence results in several detrimental outcomes for children and the youth.

From the above information, it can be postulated that a safe school environment entails the correct application of the different acts and policies that are in place at a school. It further entails that a positive learning culture should be established by focusing on academic achievement, involving stakeholders such as parents at the school, maintaining positive relations with learners and other stakeholders and assisting learners with their challenges. It is also important that teachers adapt their teaching approaches to the needs of learners. Regular audits should be done by the SMT to check the safety of schools. A school culture that is conducive to learning and acceptable to the community should be led by a competent principal, as this will help with school safety and stakeholders taking ownership of the school.

The next section deals with the challenges and limitations that principals are faced with in maintaining safe schools and minimising school violence.

## **2.10 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS FACED BY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS**

The following challenges and limitations are faced by school principals in South Africa.

### **2.10.1 Class size**

Large classes are a huge issue in most South African schools and have a negative influence on teaching and learning (Marais, 2016). It is believed that most teachers struggle to produce productive learning and give attention to each learner, especially those who need attention. Large classes tend to be noisy, and teachers spent most of their time trying to control the learners and less time on the lesson of the day. According to Muthusamy (2015), overcrowded classrooms give rise to a lack of space for movement in the classroom, diminished opportunities for all learners to participate actively during the lesson, a teacher-centred approach, excessive workload for teachers and limited opportunities to meet individual learner needs for self-activity, motivation and discipline. It is thus clear that effective teaching cannot take place in a crowded classroom, as most of the time is spent on classroom management and learner discipline (Loh Epri, 2016). Undoubtedly, the size of the class is an aspect that

needs to be addressed, as it is a challenge for principals to mitigate the effects of overcrowded classrooms on school safety.

### **2.10.2 Lack of discipline**

Ill-discipline is influenced by varied factors, such as drug and alcohol abuse, violence in society, the negative effects of the media, vandalism, the curriculum, inadequate materials, overcrowding, academic failure and children's need for status (Masingi, 2017). Disciplinary problems tend to be common in overcrowded classrooms, causing the teaching and learning to be slow because of the disturbance and disruptions of lesson time. Adequate interaction between teacher and learners sometimes is difficult because of large numbers of learners in classes (Tayeg, 2015). Discipline starts at home, and in this regard, parents have a crucial role in inculcating discipline in their children. In doing so, it becomes easier for learners to display the same disciplined behaviour and morals at school.

A lack of discipline continues to be a general problem in most schools in South Africa. According to Jinot (2018), learners do not accept authority from teachers anymore, and as a result, teachers feel disempowered and without authority in the classroom. Salifu and Agbenyega (2012) are of the view that the misbehaviour children learn at home can be spread to the schoolyard. This means that the role the community plays in children's lives is sometimes more significant than that of the school. For instance, gangsterism, drugs, peer pressure, the negative influence of technology, racial and class conflict are all negative things that happen outside the school property. The problem of ill-discipline is worsening, especially in secondary schools because these learners are at the adolescence stage and have become aware of their rights to privacy and freedom of religion, belief, opinion and expression (Temitayo *et al.*, 2013). Temitayo *et al.* (2013) maintain that among children, there is a lack of understanding about these rights, resulting in their tendency to misuse these rights for their own gain.

### **2.10.3 Bullying**

According to Power (2017), bullying is the repeated threatening treatment of a learner by another learner. The bullied learner is subjected to emotional harassment causing him or her to fear for his or her own safety. Bullying includes verbal threats and the use of offensive language and even being forced to do things such as carrying drugs. Learners who are bullied tend to suffer from behavioural and academic problems and mostly end up missing classes, while others are disengaged in the classroom (Rubens *et al.*, 2018). Bullying has a negative

impact on schooling and may lead to fear of school, regular absenteeism, truancy, impeded academic progress, poor school adjustment, poor relationships with classmates and dropping out of school (Masingi, 2017). Acts of bullying lead to many learners dropping out of school, while others have the choice to join the perpetrators and be drawn into that lifestyle (Magidi *et al.*, 2016). In some schools, bullying takes place in the toilets due to the structural design and location of these spaces, which tend to be separated from the rest of the school and its security systems, including adult spaces such as teachers' staffrooms and the principal's office (Ngidi & Moletsane, 2018). Because of this, the offenders know that the chances of being caught are very slim (Ngidi & Moletsane, 2018).

#### **2.10.4 Violence**

Violence is one of the main challenges in schools that persist regardless of the safety measures that have been put in place by the SAPS and the Department of Education to keep schools safe (Netshitangani, 2014). It is mostly triggered by external factors, such as unemployment, the vulnerability of families, easy access to dangerous weapons and the misuse of drugs and alcohol. This inappropriate behaviour is carried over into schools by learners, thereby affecting the teaching and learning negatively (Netshitangani, 2014). Gangsterism is another challenge faced by principals. Learners are easily manipulated to be part of these groups because of factors such as low self-esteem, poverty and a lack of a sense of belonging. According to Mncube and Madiya (2014), the aim of these formations of learners is to commit acts of violence and crime, to protect themselves and to serve as a defence mechanism.

#### **2.10.5 Attitude and behaviour of learners and teachers**

Most teachers struggle to manage their classrooms at a satisfactory level due to the disruptive behaviour of learners in their classes. It has a negative effect of reduced academic engagement time with learners, leading to teachers suffering from high levels of stress (Ghazi *et al.*, 2013). Major causes of disruptive behaviour in classes can be attributed to poverty, the teacher's negative attitude and unmotivated learners, especially those repeating a grade (Ghazi *et al.*, 2013). Teachers conveying a negative attitude towards learners not only damages learners' self-esteem but also destroys the psychological wellbeing of learners, as many of them will experience anxiety and a drop in their academic achievement and even end up not attending school (Marroquin, 2018). The teacher's attitude has a huge influence on the classroom climate – if the teacher is positive, the learners will be positive as well and excel academically, and vice versa. The causes of a negative attitude from teachers are, among

other things, a lack of job satisfaction and the absence of teaching and learning material (Ekperi *et al.*, 2019). A teacher's behaviour has a direct impact on the relationship he or she has with the learners; for instance, if learners feel that their teacher does not support them, they lose interest in their learning and participating in class, which will affect their schoolwork negatively (Varga, 2017).

#### **2.10.6 Parental involvement**

Parental involvement plays a vital role in learners' academic achievement (Wilder, 2014). Unfortunately, not all parents can be of assistance to learners due to illiteracy, poverty, single parenthood, a lack of a supportive environment and the inability to do what needs to be done (Munje & Mncube, 2018). Also, some parents do not know what duties they need to perform (Munje & Mncube, 2018; Wilder, 2014). However, there are many parents who are literate enough to assist their children, for instance by reading with their children and monitoring their schoolwork every day (Wilder, 2014). Parents need to work hand in hand with schools to achieve good results from learners.

Another problem that hampers parents from assisting their children relates to the language that the school uses during parent meetings. English is mostly used to conduct parent meetings, which appears to be affecting parental involvement negatively (Poole, 2017). Furthermore, many parents who lack knowledge on parental involvement wish to assist and get involved in their children's schooling, but most South African schools fail to establish programmes to educate them sufficiently (Selolo, 2018).

#### **2.10.7 Weapons and drugs**

According to the SASA 84 of 1996, no learner can have in his or her possession dangerous weapons or illegal drugs on the school premises. It is also not permissible to have these in his or her possession during any school activity. However, notwithstanding the latter, the use of drugs such as marijuana and nyaope is a continuous problem in most South African secondary schools (Hlatshwayo, 2018). Learners who use these illegal substances become violent and change their behaviour, which disrupts learning (Hlatshwayo, 2018). According to Ncontsa and Shumba (2013), public schools tend to be easy targets when it comes to learners having access to drugs and dangerous weapons inside the school due to improper security. Due to poverty, drugs are sold to learners in the community, and some communities end up robbing their schools instead of protecting it (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013).

According to Magidi *et al.* (2016), the most common weapons used by learners to threaten and control other learners are scissors, knives, batons and sharpened pencils. Moore (2016) remarks that the factors that influence learners to carry weapons to school include age, race, poor academic achievement, male dominance, a history of delinquency and substance abuse, previous experience of violence, having been a victim of violence, unsafe environments and having easy access to weapons. Incidents of killings in schools are still rising instead of decreasing in South African schools. Some of the most recent incidents reported on in the media include the following: According to a newspaper article published on 10 September 2019, a 14-year-old allegedly stabbed a 17-year-old in the chest over a cell phone, and the victim died on the scene (Mabuza, 2019). A month later, on 10 October 2019, a 15-year-old learner accused of stabbing another to death with a pair of scissors at Thuto-Tiro Comprehensive School in Sebokeng was suspended from school until further notice (Njilo, 2019). Another fatal incident, reported on 8 October 2019, involved a learner being stabbed to death at a Western Cape school (Pijoo, 2019).

#### **2.10.8 School facilities, grounds and surroundings**

The maintenance of buildings, grounds and surroundings is the responsibility of the SGB as prescribed by the SGB Act 84 of 1996. However, this maintenance work is a specialist job, and according to Xaba (2012), there is generally a shortage of such skills in the SGB of most schools. School facilities can be divided into buildings, grounds and service systems and consist of the building foundation and external walls of buildings, which, together with the roof, windows and external doors, separate the interior from the external environment and protect it. School grounds comprise the grass areas and their uses, pathways and paved areas, trees, shrubs and planted areas, parking areas, slopes, walls and fences, corridors and steps, and unimproved grounds and playgrounds (Xaba, 2012). Xaba (2006) alleges that most schools are not safe enough for learners, teachers and the rest of the staff. This is confirmed in a document of Equal Education (2016) that reveals statistics of the infrastructure scenario in South African schools.

The following are statistics from this organisation when it took the Minister of Basic Education to court for the state of schools in South Africa. Equal Education (2016) noted that of the 24793 public ordinary schools:

- 3544 schools did not have electricity, while a further 804 schools had an untrustworthy electricity supply;
- 2402 schools did not have a water source, while a further 2611 schools had an untrustworthy water supply;

- 913 did not have any toilet facilities, while 11450 schools were still using pit latrine toilets;
- 22938 schools did not have stocked libraries, and 19541 did not even have place for a library;
- 21021 schools did not have any research laboratory facilities, while only 1231 schools had stocked laboratories;
- 19037 schools did not have a computer facility, while a further 3267 had an apartment designed as a computer centre but which were not stocked with computers; and
- 2703 schools had no fencing at all.

It is alleged that if the basic amenities are not catered for by the Department of Education, it is impossible for schools to maintain the school facilities, grounds and surroundings (Equal Education, 2016). Recently, the steps at a former Model C school in the Vaal Triangle collapsed, resulting in the injury and death of some learners at that school (Njilo,2019). From the above, it can be said that the challenges and limitations faced by principals are huge due to the lack of expertise on the part of SGBs and the failure of the Department of Education to fulfil its constitutional duties diligently.

The following section deals with achieving Objective 3, namely determining the role and responsibilities of the principal in creating a safe school environment, which forms the core of this research. This section will be underpinned by the systems thinking theoretical framework that will show how principals can think and act in a timeous manner to keep schools safe.

## **2.11 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SYSTEMS THINKING**

This section explains the systems thinking theory. Seeing that different authors have different views about the theory, only some aspects of systems thinking are discussed in this study.

### **2.11.1 Interconnectedness**

Systems thinking requires a change in mindset (Assaraf & Orion, 2021). The fundamental principle of this shift is that everything is interconnected. Basically, everything is dependent upon something else for survival. Everything needs something else, often a complex selection of other things to survive. For instance, people and animals need food, air and water to maintain their bodies, while trees need carbon dioxide and sunlight to thrive (Gross, 2015). Thus, a systems thinker uses his or her mindset to unravel things and work within the complexity of life. As the schools of the 21st century are complex places to manage and lead, principals should

apply their minds to unravel complex issues at school to make schools safe places in which to work and learn.

Communities are the first and last contact of the learner when going to school and going back home from school. Thus, communities play an important role in building learners' character because their behaviour is mostly influenced by what they see outside the school boundaries, which they then implement in schools (DBE, 2015). Community involvement in schools has a huge impact when it comes to learners' achievement at school. Hence, it is important for schools to teach and encourage communities to collaborate with the school to work together in making sure that schools are safe in all aspects (Gross, 2015).

### **2.11.2 Synthesis**

Synthesis refers to the linking of two or more things to create something new (Assaraf & Orion, 2021). When it comes to systems thinking, the goal is to synthesise. All systems are dynamic and complex; thus, one needs a more holistic approach to understanding phenomena such as school safety. It is about understanding the whole and the parts at the same time, along with the relationships and the connections that make up the dynamic forces of the whole school system. Synthesis can thus be described as the ability of a person (in the context of this study, a principal) to see interconnectedness (Assaraf & Orion, 2021).

According to Xaba (2014), security on the school premises are measures that are taken into consideration to create a school environment that is free of crime and violence. Such measures involve the installation of equipment or devices that detect weapons at the school gates and on every class door to keep schools safe. It may include security guards, staff monitors, metal detectors, locking doors during the day, visitor sign-in required and locker checks. Furthermore, the Department of Education have guidelines, such as the SASA 84 of 1996, that schools should practise and abide by to improve security. These rules should be made known to all learners, parents and the community, and anyone who does not abide by these should be charged accordingly. The same applies to school policies on safety and violence. Most importantly, these systems should be interconnected with one another.

### **2.11.3 Emergence**

Emergence in systems thinking is the performance of a system that does not depend on its individual parts but on the relationships of the parts to one another (thwink.org, 2014). Therefore, emergent behaviour cannot be forecast by the examination of the separate

segments of a system; it can only be predicted, managed or controlled by understanding the parts and their relationships (thwink.org, 2014). Emergence thus implies that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Hence, in the context of the school, one could not understand and manage school safety by looking at the learners only; it should be a holistic approach. Consequently, it is important for principals to look at the bigger picture, as it is vital for them to know the community that the school serves and have regular interaction with the community, the teachers, the learners, the SGB, social services, the police and all other organisations that are stakeholders in schools.

#### **2.11.4 Seeing wholes**

According to Shaked and Schechter (2013), one of the definitions of systems thinking is that it is a discipline for seeing wholes and a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things. It also entails seeing patterns of change rather than static “snapshots” (Shaked & Schechter, 2013). In essence, it is all about seeing through chaos, managing interdependency, understanding choice and the ability to see the world as a complex system. This is one of the features of systems thinking that entail understanding the big picture, understanding all aspects of school life as one large system, understanding the interconnections and thinking creatively (Shaked & Schechter, 2016a). Systems thinking can help the leader with school improvement, as it has an impact on the school staff to make better decisions that tend to improve the learners’ achievement. This can be accomplished by the principal’s motivation, appropriate support to the staff and enhanced job satisfaction by encouraging a more cooperative approach between leaders and staff, consulting with subject coordinators for ideas and recommendations that enhance knowledge and interacting with school faculty members to exchange information and explore knowledge (Benoliel *et al.*, 2019). Seeing wholes refers to the ability of the principal to hypothesise all aspects of school life as one large system, for example the need for improvement in school safety that requires the principal not to isolate components but rather consider other interactions, as they manually influence one another to address the matter (Shaked & Schechter, 2013).

According to Sun *et al.* (2017), in a nutshell, whole-school reforms work in identifying best practices and developing a theory of action to guide restructuring schools. These include the importance of capacity building among school and district leaders and teachers, garnering faculty and parent support and commitment by building relationships, implementing strategies from research-based plans, giving greater flexibility to adapt reform and financial resources to specific contexts and making visible improvements early in the turnaround process (Sun *et al.*, 2017).



### 2.11.5 Using a multidimensional view

Using a multidimensional viewpoint means seeing numerous aspects of a given problem simultaneously, noticing a wide range of reasons for its occurrence and existence (Shaked & Schechter, 2013). It implies that principals should consider a variety of the consequences of the issue and predict various options for its future development (Shaked & Schechter, 2016b). The problem with regard to school safety that principals are facing in schools requires a systems thinking principal to take into account the reasons for the existence of school violence, as this will lead to an understanding of a variation of the consequences thereof and the ability to predict various options for its future development (Shaked & Schechter, 2013).

Leigh *et al.* (2017) reckons that another approach principals and the school leadership can use within the multidimensional leadership development conceptual model is the six E's method. The six E's stand for the following (Leigh *et al.*, 2017):

- Examination: self-assess prior and emotional intelligence testing.
- Education: learning through formal methods such as masterclasses, workshop and action learning.
- Experience: chance to try out new things.
- Exposure: mentoring, coaching and effective learning.
- Evaluation: studying and reflecting on the effectiveness of learning.
- Environment: an empowered leadership learning environment can also fast-track the development of leadership.

The six E's blend well with the definition of the multidimensional view, as it deals with issues from different aspects, not just one. It will give the principal an opportunity to influence the environment in which they are working and to keep the school safe through decisions, mentoring, having a creative mind, reflecting and giving room for improvement.

A school principal must be able to adapt to change in a school environment, as this has an impact on the school. Multidimensional complex and adaptive principles should be used because principals, as managers, have the responsibility of planning, organising, leading, controlling and coordinating. Moreover, they should have adaptive leadership skills that enable them to establish communication networks, which are expected to cause schools to develop. Also, they should use adaptive behaviours such as self-reflexivity, change, adaptation and innovation (Leigh *et al.*, 2017).

The wellness of school principals plays an important role under the multidimensional view, as their wellbeing is a critical factor in the effectiveness of leadership and the performance of the school. Principals' responsibilities are becoming even more complex, as they are expected to be visionary leaders who transform schools from mediocrity to greatness. Furthermore, principals are required to be counsellors or mentors to learners and staff in times of crisis and are accountable for learner discipline and safety (Sinclair, 2018).

#### **2.11.6 Assessing significance**

Assessing significance refers to the principal's ability to evaluate elements of school life according to their significance for the entire system, distinguishing between important and unimportant issues to be resolved and identifying patterns (Shaked & Schechter, 2016b). School safety is one of the important issues school principals currently have to confront in schools (Shaked & Schechter, 2016b).

According to Kutsyuruba *et al.* (2015), the principal and the leadership of the school have an essential role in creating a safe school climate and a collaborative school culture by establishing, maintaining and sustaining trust relationships in schools. Trust issues can be a problem between the school and the community if they do not believe in the power and leadership of the school principal. The ability of teachers to perform well and lead learners depends on their level of trust in the school principal because if there is trust in the school, teachers tend to feel secure and put more effort into their educational goals, while organisational policies can easily be implemented and followed as well (Balyer, 2017).

Once trust is implemented, the school principal and other stakeholders need to work together in maintaining safety at school and of the learners. The following are the most fundamental aspects that the school principal and other stakeholders need to investigate to make sure that schools are safe (SACE, 2019):

- There should be sufficient funds to purchase good security systems, including hiring well-trained security guards, purchasing metal detectors, and so forth.
- Teachers should establish a pleasant environment that makes learners want to come to school, and most importantly, teachers should know the background of their learners, as this will enable interaction between them.
- The principal should make sure that there is shared responsibility from parents, teachers and learners, the police, social workers, a psychologist, a school nurse, and so forth, all working collectively and guided by accepted policies to make sure that schools are safe.

- Parents should always speak the same language as teachers to prepare their children by teaching them good values. For this to take place, parents need to be trained and the SGB should always be included.
- The school principal should form a relationship with the local community of the school and urge them to be involved in the wellbeing of the school and assist in protecting the learners, teachers and the school as a whole. Moreover, the community should be empowered to handle gangsterism and other socio-economic challenges, such as poverty.
- The root sources of a problem must be dealt with.
- Schools should report instances of violence to the security team.
- Schools must have strategies and procedures for promoting safety.

The following section discusses measures that were put in place by the Department of Education to assist with the safety of schools.

## **2.12 MEASURES FOR SCHOOL SAFETY**

The Department of Education has put in place measures to assist schools in establishing a safe school environment, namely the National School Safety Framework and the National Development Plan, which are discussed below.

### **2.12.1 The National School Safety Framework**

The National School Safety Framework (DBE, 2015) made available an important tool through which the minimum standards for safety at school can be established, implemented and monitored. The latter can be used to hold schools, districts and provinces accountable (DBE, 2015). Different individuals in the school encounter safety in different ways and has also different safety needs (DBE, 2015). In this regard, the framework was created to cater for these differences resulting that the instrument provides schools with the tools to identify what these experiences are and the steps that need to be taken to address individual needs (DBE, 2015).

A systematic approach has been provided to ensure that members in schools play their part in establishing and maintaining a safe school environment. Safety within schools is not merely focused on the absence of violence but includes many other critical aspects such as health, infrastructure, occupational health, disaster risk management and curriculum design (DBE, 2015). However, the purpose of the National School Safety Framework (DBE, 2015) is to focus

only on the levels of violence that have been plaguing schools countrywide to provide a guide on managing schools to be a safe environment by making sure that appropriate structures, policies and an enabling environment is in place and directing school management and everyone within the school towards appropriate remedial and preventative interventions.

The aim of the framework (DBE, 2015) is to create a safe, violence- and threat-free, supportive learning environment for learners, teachers, principals, SGBs and the administration with the following broad objectives:

- Assist the school in understanding and identifying all security issues and threats.
- Guide schools to effectively respond to identified security issues and threats.
- Create reporting systems and manage reported incidents appropriately.
- Help the school to monitor its progress over time.

The framework does not present a radical new approach to the prevention of school violence but, instead, aims to consolidate existing initiatives and strategies of school safety and violence prevention, and provide the thread that links them all together (DBE, 2015). To maintain safety at schools, the Department of Education (2006) has compiled the following regulations as safety measures in public schools to assist school principals in maintaining a safe school environment:

- No teacher, parent, learner, or any other person may possess alcohol, illegal drugs, any illegal substance or dangerous objects during any school activity.
- Nobody may without the approval of the relevant authorities enter any public-school premises before revealing their personal details, including their identification and the reason for their visit, to the principal.
- The school should implement methods to ensure the safety of learners during school activities. These measures included but is not limited to supervision of learners, guarding against theft, safely transporting learners and having insurance available for accidents or injuries that may happen.
- All public schools must exhibit clear signs at the entrance of the building. These signs should indicate that any person who enters the school may be subjected to a search and that any person who breaks this regulation may be removed from the school premises.
- It is also recommended that schools must collaborate with police stations to make sure that visible policing is present during all events at the school.

The abovementioned measures are compulsory for all public schools, and all need to abide by these regulations. Without such laws and regulations to bring about discipline and order in schools, schools would not function properly. It is the responsibility of the school principal to communicate these regulations to parents so that both schools and parents speak the same language to learners in order to keep schools safe.

### **2.12.2 National Development Plan**

The National Planning Commission (2011) outlined a plan to improve the education sector by the year 2030. Below are some of the elements of the National Development Plan (National Planning Commission, 2011) to improve education in South Africa:

- Competence and capacity of school principals: The common feature of all well-run schools is leadership. Principals should be selected purely on merit, be given greater powers over school management and be held accountable for performance.
- Teacher performance: Teacher accountability and performance need to be improved. This means that professional growth, peer assessment, school infrastructure and the provision of learner support materials and teacher support practises need to be intensified. They should be held accountable for learner performance, with due recognition of the learning environment.
- Improving the quality of education: The quality of education for children in poor communities is mostly poor; hence, an education system with the following attributes is needed:
  - High-quality, universal early childhood education.
  - Quality school education, with globally competitive literacy and numeracy standards.
  - Further and higher education and training that enable people to fulfil their potential.
  - An expanding higher-education sector that can contribute to rising incomes, higher productivity and the shift to a more knowledge-intensive economy.

The above elements of the National Development Plan (National Planning Commission, 2011) regarding education improvement in South Africa may indeed have a positive effect on education in schools. Also, appointing principals and teachers who are well trained can improve the influence of discipline because of powerful leadership and teachers who are well trained to instil discipline in classes and achieve good results. Building more schools will also help in achieving the outcomes of the above plan, as teaching will be more learner-centred because of fewer learners in the classes and giving teachers an opportunity to reach out to all the learners (National Planning Commission, 2011).

## **2.13 OTHER MEASURES TO IMPROVE SCHOOL SAFETY**

In this section, other measures that can be implemented by principals to improve safety at schools are discussed.

### **2.13.1 Counselling**

Most teachers and learners who are victims of school violence tend to be traumatised and spend a lot of time thinking about their safety at school, losing focus on academics (Maring & Koblinsky, 2012). Hence, professional counsellors are needed in schools or should be offered to learners and even teachers, as school staff is also affected by school violence and any unsafe issue in schools that influence their performance in school and in class (Maring & Koblinsky, 2012). Teachers may also refer ill-disciplined learners for counselling if their behaviour continues to disrupt the class. Counselling can be used as a support system to such learners, as counsellors may discover what causes unruly behaviour and suggest ways for learners to be assisted (Bryan *et al.*, 2012). According to McInerney and McKlindon (2014), receiving trauma-specific treatment can lead to better school attendance and academic outcomes. Proper counselling measures should be part of the school planning, especially in the current era in which violence may occur at any time, unlike before, when it only occurred occasionally.

### **2.13.2 Teaching learners about conflict resolution and the prevention of violence**

According to Robinson (2019), violence intervention is a technique recommended to help prevent violence in schools. It is believed that these interventions can increase learners' knowledge about violence and teach them skills, such as conflict resolution and anger management skills, that may help reduce violence. Another method is teaching learners about conflict management. There are different types of conflict, but all of them require suitable solutions to resolve the conflict. A conflict management plan can be defined as the behaviour towards the intensification, lessening and solving of conflict (Bourne *et al.*, 2015). The Department of Education (2012) states that one of the things that can prevent violence is the implementation of positive discipline in the classroom by describing appropriate behaviour. Learners should acknowledge their behaviour and improve on it. Teachers, on the other hand, should avoid negative discipline, such as commanding, forbidding, criticising, belittling, threatening and unnecessary punishment.

### **2.13.3 Decision making**

Hariri *et al.* (2012) states that the decision-making skills of school principals and their ability to adopt collaborative leadership styles to involve others in decision making have a significant impact on the success of schools. The values that school principals have as decision makers play an important role because of the power that can have either a positive or a negative influence on school safety.

According to Truong *et al.* (2017), the values of decision makers and the societal and organisational culture shape decision-making processes used by leaders, as values influence which problems school leaders choose to address, as well as their interpretation of the causes and effects thereof. Principals do not directly affect learning, but their leadership behaviour indirectly affects the school climate through their interactions with others and the decisions they make on behalf of the school (SACE, 2019).

### **2.13.4 Home background**

According to Pitso *et al.* (2014), a dysfunctional family can be described as one that is negatively influenced by marital disruptions, such as divorce, separation and single parenting. Large households, violence in the family, child abuse and alcoholism are further aspects that may result in leading children to become part of a gang and being involved in criminal activities (Pitso *et al.*, 2014). Families in which one or more members have an alcohol problem tend to be unable to nurture and protect children or meet their needs, which negatively affects them as they tend to be distracted by the situation at home and lose focus in class (Masilo, 2012). A report of the SACE (2019) indicates that consequently, dysfunctionality in the family affects schools indirectly, as it first influences the learner, and the school gets to see its effect when learners start to skip classes and join gangs because they want a sense of belonging. Moreover, the background of learners' family and socio-economic problems play a crucial role in learner behaviour while at school (Masilo, 2012). Some learners come to school hungry, which has a negative effect on their behaviour while others come to school filled with resentment and end up taking out their irritations on someone at school (Masilo, 2012).

### **2.13.5 Lack of motivation**

The SACE (2019) report states that most learners showed aggressive behaviour towards their teachers for various reasons. However, the latter can be attributed to underlying factors, amongst others, poverty, drug abuse, dysfunctional families, bullying and violence (SACE,

2019). These learners disrupt teaching and learning, making it difficult for teachers to control their classrooms. Most learners from such backgrounds tend to have no interest in school and end up dropping out, while teachers lose interest in teaching (SACE, 2019).

Dysfunctionality in schools can also result in a lack of motivation, causing schools not to perform to their best potential. For instance, when teachers use their phones during teaching time, they are a bad example to learners who end up copying this behaviour because it gives them the impression that using phones in the classroom is acceptable because the teacher is doing it during the course of a lesson (Moloi, 2019). Such acts disrupt other learners who really want to learn and teachers who want to impart knowledge through their teaching.

### **2.13.6 Theft in schools**

Theft in schools is a major problem that affects learning in school and results in learners dropping out because of fear of retaliation leading to violence, limited study material because of theft, and so forth. Many learners become perpetrators of crime in schools because of peer pressure and the surrounding community, especially if the community is unstable and social violence, suicide and crimes such as hijacking, kidnapping, rape, hostage situations, housebreaking, senseless killing, and so forth, often occur. Such an environment tends to place learners in a stressful situation, and they end up being obliged to be aggressive too (Pitso *et al.*, 2014).

The SACE (2019) report also indicates that the different media that learners are exposed to play a role in how learners behave. Videos and programmes that influence their behaviour are some of the media that influence the way they react to situations (SACE, 2019). Unfortunately, schools tend to be the place where they get to practise things they observe on the media and social media.

The above are just some of the contributing factors that affect schools indirectly. The school principal needs to investigate these and try to curb these by finding suitable means of making sure that these factors do not jeopardise the safety of the learners and the teachers and that the needs of learners who are less fortunate are provided for.



## **2.14 CONCLUSION**

Maintaining a safe school environment is a continuous process that requires strong leadership and teamwork from all stakeholders. The use of systems thinking in schools can help principals in maintaining safe schools, as it gives them a different perspective of effectively running a school. Systems thinking requires school principals to be team players and can delegate leadership tasks to other staff members, as it builds trust and encourages empowerment and personal development. Moreover, systems thinking encourages collaboration among the principal, school leadership, learners and the surrounding community at large when it comes to decision making in working towards maintaining a safe school environment.

Leading wholes requires a leadership that is innovative and consistent, as schools need to keep up with the technology and find better ways of promoting teaching and learning in a safe environment. These ideas need to assist in dealing with socio-economic factors affecting learners and improve security in schools so that learners and teachers can feel safe. School principals need to be visible and on the front line when leading, providing support, coaching and facilitating problem solving to teachers, as it results in establishing a positive climate in the school and leads to the success of learning in the classroom.

## **CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This research sought to investigate the role and responsibilities of the school principal in establishing a safe school environment and the effectiveness of school performance at large. Previous research has indicated that a safe environment has a positive impact on schools in terms of learner and teacher performance and school safety. Hence, the study aims to determine how the role of the principal can influence and create a safe school environment in secondary schools. The previous chapter was about the literature review and theoretical framework that underpinned the study. This chapter describes the research process, such as the research methodology, the selection of participants, data collection, data analysis, reliability and validity and the role of the researcher in qualitative research.

### **3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

Van Wyk (2012) is of the view that a research design is a way of collecting data and connecting the data to the problem. It articulates what data are required, what methods are going to be used to collect and analyse the data and how all of this is going to answer the research question. The research design can be regarded as the frame of research – it is the “glue” that holds all of the elements in a research project together. In short, it is a plan of the research work (Akhtar, 2016).

#### **3.2.1 Qualitative research**

Kumar (2014) explains that qualitative methodology is embedded in the philosophy of observation and follows an open, flexible and unstructured approach to inquiry with the aims to explore diversity rather than to quantify. It emphasises the description and recitation of feelings, perceptions and experiences rather than measurements (Kumar, 2014). The study has employed this method for the gathering of data. The study is about the role of the school principal in creating and maintaining a safe school environment, especially in secondary schools. In this regard, a qualitative method was an appropriate method to gain understanding into the practices of school principals and teachers. As the principals and teachers were in their natural school settings, they were able to give in-depth, unrestricted accounts of their experiences regarding the questions on school safety and maintaining safe environments.

### **3.2.2 Research paradigm**

A research paradigm can be seen as a way of thinking and gives one an understanding of something (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This system helps researchers to describe their worldview according to their beliefs and values and how they perceive life (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Thanh N and Thanh T (2015) elaborates further that a researcher who follows interpretive paradigm uses those experiences to construct and interpret his/her understanding from gathered data. Specifically, interpretivism supported researchers in terms of exploring their world by interpreting the understanding of individuals. The worldview used for this study was interpretative in nature, which contemplates that social reality is subjective. It is shaped by the perceptions of the participants as well as the values and aims of the researcher (Vosloo, 2014). Interpretivist consider human beings as the primary research instrument because they are adequate to comprehend social phenomena (Shah & Al-bargi, 2013). The purpose of interpretivism is to analyse what has been said by the participants as they express their views about a particular phenomenon. This method was used for the study, and specific participants were selected to answer the research question at hand by sharing their experiences and knowledge so that the researcher could have a broader understanding thereof.

### **3.2.3 Phenomenological study**

A phenomenological study focuses on an individual's meaning and understanding of human experiences (Worthington, 2013). The findings resulting from a phenomenological study are an understanding of a phenomenon that is experienced by the participants. In addition, the main aim of a phenomenological study is to uncover and interpret what has been said by the participants regarding some common experience of a phenomenon (Worthington, 2013). A phenomenological approach was used in this research to ponder the detailed description of the experiences faced by school principals and teachers. The phenomenon investigated was safe school environments, and the aim of the study was to determine how school environments could be kept safe at all times, looking at the responsibilities of the principal and the challenges to these.

The research was done in five secondary schools – two in the town and three in the township. The researcher was able to discover the participants' understanding and perceptions of creating and maintaining safe school environments in secondary schools. By studying the viewpoints of the principals and teachers, the researcher would be able to reach conclusions about what it is like to experience the phenomenon from the perception of the participants and how the situation in some of these schools can be turned around.

### **3.2.4 Trustworthiness of the study**

#### **3.2.4.1 Credibility**

Credibility is the ability of a researcher to describe and present data with accuracy as the data were provided by the participants (Cope, 2014). Furthermore, credibility refers to the researcher's capability to validate the research outcomes with the participants (Cope, 2014). For this study, the methods used to reach credibility while measuring and answering the research question at hand were a literature review and interviews, which gave the researcher the opportunity to produce outcomes that are sound and credible.

#### **3.2.4.2 Transferability**

Transferability refers to the ability of the researcher to present research outcomes that will be usable and can benefit other readers and researchers, who will also be able to link the outcomes with their experiences (Cope, 2014). Therefore, the content outcome of this study is presented in such a way that it benefits and have an impact on other readers and researchers.

#### **3.2.4.3 Dependability**

Dependability entails the degree to which the reader can see consistency in the presentation of the research findings and that what is being presented has occurred exactly how the researcher presented it (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In this study, the researcher aimed to achieve this by making sure that the identified themes for this study were discussed with her supervisor to ensure that they were accurate and dependable. The researcher also made sure that the data were presented purely, with no bias.

#### **3.2.4.4 Confirmability**

It refers to a researcher's obligation to ensure that the interpretation of the data is not based on the researcher's preferences but according to the data at hand (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure conformability in this study, the researcher kept all of the interview scripts, field notes, transcripts and recordings for reference purposes and to make sure that the data were presented and interpreted accurately.

Therefore, the following points indicate the trustworthiness of this research:

- Before conducting interviews at the different schools, the researcher and the supervisor had a discussion on how to approach the participants and the appropriate manner of asking questions.
- During the interviews, some of the participants were asked probing questions for clarity and to make sure that the researcher understood what was being said.
- The researcher had constant communication with the supervisor, as there were a lot of delays and changes in the schools because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **3.2.5 Access**

To conduct this research, the researcher gained permission from the Department of Education in the Sedibeng district and from the school principals of the five schools where the research was conducted. Also, permission to conduct the research was requested and received from the North-West University.

### **3.2.6 Sampling and sampling strategy**

Sampling is a process of selecting enough aspects from the population so that the study of the sample will not only help understand the features of the population but also allow the researcher to generalise the results of the research (Chawla & Sondhi, 2011). For this study, purposive sampling, which is classified as non-probability sampling, was used. Kumar (2014) explains that the primary consideration in purposive sampling is the researcher's judgement to select participants who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study.

This research was conducted in five secondary schools in the Vanderbijlpark area in Gauteng, South Africa – two in the town and three in the township. The reason for this selection was for the researcher to see if schools in the township experience the same issues compared to the schools in town by answering the same research question. These schools were selected based on the distance needed to travel and it was convenient because the researcher resides in the area as well. Vandebijlpark area falls under Sedibeng west district, which has plus minus sixteen schools including both private and public secondary schools. For confidentiality, the names of the schools will not be mentioned, and the schools will be referred to as School A to School E.

The researcher planned to interview five principals individually at their schools and five teachers at each of the five schools as focus groups. However, due to Covid-19, it was not

possible due to social distancing and maintaining the safety of the teachers and the researcher. As a result, only the five principals and ten teachers could be interviewed individually at their respective schools.

Below is a table that indicates the sample of the research.

**Table 3.1: Research sample**

Schools	Number of participants planned to be interviewed		Actual number of participants interviewed	
	Principals to be interviewed individually	Teachers to be interviewed as focus groups	Principals interviewed individually	Teachers interviewed individually
School A	1	5	1	2
School B	1	5	1	2
School C	1	5	1	2
School D	1	5	1	2
School E	1	5	1	2
Total	5	25	5	10

Permission to do the research with the principals and teachers was granted by all relevant parties, such as the Department of Education and the school principals. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the initial plan could not be carried out. Therefore, adjustments were made, and the number of teachers reduced because only a limited number of teachers came to school on different days. Even though the Department of Education had instructed that interviews should be done via media instead of personal contact with the participants, the principals and teachers insisted that the researcher come to school for the interviews. This was because of the new system in schools and because some of the participants preferred to use a free school period for the interview instead of doing the interview after school hours. More information on this issue is provided in Chapter 5 under the limitations of the study.

### **3.2.7 Data collection**

Jamshed (2014) explains that qualitative interviewing is a type of framework in which the practices and standards are not only recorded but also achieved. Most qualitative research interviews are either semi-structured, lightly structured, or in-depth. Semi-structured interviews are in-depth interviews where the participants must answer pre-set, open-ended questions, in the form of a schematic presentation of questions or topics that need to be explored by the interviewee. This type of interview is conducted only once with an individual or with a group and usually covers a period of 30 minutes to more than an hour (Jamshed, 2014).

Semi-structured interviews which contain open-ended questions, were employed to collect data for the research. The strength of semi-structured interviews lies in the freedom they provide to both the researcher and participants in terms of content and structure (Kumar, 2011). All the principals and acting principals were interviewed in their offices, while the staff room was used for the teachers. This was somewhat challenging, as there was a lot of disturbance in the background. According to Kumar (2011), in-depth interviewing is a repeated face-to-face encounter between the researcher and participants focused towards understanding the participants' views on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words. Focus group interviewing is a form of strategy by which attitudes to and opinions or perceptions of an issue are explored through a free and open discussion among members of the group and the researcher (Kumar, 2014). The data generated from these can be detailed and rich and can be used to explore a vast variety of issues (Kumar, 2014). This method was the preferred method to be used to interview the teachers, but it was not used because during the Covid-19 pandemic, it was impossible to interview groups of teachers. The teachers were interviewed individually like the principals.

The questions were phrased in a manner that allowed for individuals to respond accordingly. The researcher also used open-ended questions because they are specific in their intent to get the feelings, opinions and knowledge of the interviewees about the topic discussed. According to Newcomer *et al.* (2015), this method permits the researcher to ask probing questions to individuals or group members who are being interviewed to get clarity and a better understanding of what has been said, which is exactly what the researcher did while interviewing the participants to gain more clarity and understanding. Researcher used a phone recorder as an instrument for data collection and for accurate transcribing. Data was given to the supervisor to store in a safe and lockable place for a period of five years.

### **3.2.8 Ethical consideration**

Ethical consideration is an important part of research whereby researchers must outline ethical issues to be considered and followed in their research. The researcher adhered to specific ethical practices before conducting the interviews. Adhering to the standards set by the North-West University for ethics, the required permission protocols were followed with the applicable authorities. These protocols included an application to the Research Ethics Committee of the North-West University, the Gauteng Department of Education, the SGBs of the five schools as school gatekeepers and the principals of the schools to conduct the research.

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher obtained ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of North-West University. Letters of permission to undertake the research at the five selected schools were sent to the schools. Upon receiving all the consent forms and permission to conduct the research, the researcher made it clear to the participants that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time. No remuneration for participation was offered to the participants. The researcher explained the aims and objectives of the study and the issues of confidentiality and anonymity to all the participants.

Another essential ethical aspect is the issue of confidentiality in the findings and results of the study, the protection of the participants' identities and undertaking to destroy the audio recordings. For this study, questions answered during the interview were made confidential and used pseudonyms to refer to the participants as a measure in making sure that participants are protected from possible victimisation. As a result, no name of school or any participant was written down or was required during the process of the interview to safeguard and protect their identity and their rights. The researcher gave the audio recordings to her supervisor to store them for a period of five years.

### **3.3 DATA ANALYSIS**

This is the most crucial part of the study as the data are analysed and interpreted exactly as the participants have presented the data (Welman *et al.*, 2005). In this step, all the field notes, such as notes made by hand and tape recordings, must be processed. This entails converting the notes into write-ups, which should be intelligible products that can be read, edited for accuracy, commented on, and analysed (Welman *et al.*, 2005). The first step was to gather data by conducting interviews. The second step was to transcribe the data by typing what had been said exactly as it was from the phone recorder. The third step was to sort and sift the data according to codes to answer the research question. Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019), indicate that coding is similar to how the craftsmanship of the stroke, the mixing of colours and the preparation of a canvas are conducive to the artfulness of both abstract and figurative painting. The same strategy was used to structure data according to different categories of themes, considering the relevance, meaning and making the data easily accessible for data analysis. Lastly, the data were analysed, interpreted and discussed to have meaning and sense.

### **3.4 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER**



The responsibility of the researcher was, firstly, to choose participants from the selected five schools – the school principal and five teachers from each school. Secondly, the researcher had to explain the purpose of the study, what it intended to accomplish at the end and how it would improve the school environment and school safety. Thirdly, a letter of permission from the gatekeepers was provided to all of the participants as proof that the research had been approved and could be conducted at the schools. Lastly, a consent document was provided to and signed by the participants to declare that participation was voluntary, they could withdraw at any time and that there would be no compensation of any sort for the research.

### **3.5 CONCLUSION**

The qualitative method has been employed for the study, as its purpose is to describe reality as experienced by the participants. The researcher used semi-structured questions to collect data from interviews. The questions were phrased in a manner that allowed for individual responses. Aspects regarding the reliability of the study, the confidentiality of the participants and the trustworthiness of the data, as well as the ethical matters applicable to the study, were emphasised. In Chapter 4, the data analysis and interpretation and a discussion of these will follow.

## **CHAPTER 4 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter, the research methodology and design were discussed. This chapter is about the presentation, analysis, interpretation and discussion of the data that were gathered through interviews with the principals and teachers. The aim of this is to answer the research question “What are the role and responsibilities of principals in creating a safe school environment in a secondary school?” Individual interviews were done at five secondary schools with the school principal of each school and two teachers per school. The interview questions were divided into two parts, with the first part for the principals and the second part for the teachers. After the interviews, the first step was to transcribe the data, as the interviews were recorded, after which the data were analysed and interpreted. This chapter will first present the data, followed by the analysis, interpretation and discussion of the data.

### **4.2 PRESENTATION OF THE DATA**

The following data have been obtained from interviews done with school principals and teachers at their schools. In each sub-section, according to the three sub-questions, the data of the principals about safe school environments are presented first, followed by the data of the teachers.

#### **4.2.1 Safe school environment**

The following are responses by the principals and teachers regarding a safe school environment.

##### **4.2.1.1 Principals**

The following are responses of the principals from the interviews held at their schools. According to Principal 1, a safe school environment is a place where all in school should feel safe and where safety systems are in place.

*Mmm, a safe school environment is whereby learners, they feel safe, the educators and the entire staff, and then there are systems in place in terms of safety. Your control access, nè, your fire extinguishers, your policies in terms of the guidelines of visitors, uhm, register. So, a safe environment is whereby*

*[sic] everybody, even if they have a challenge, they know whom to report to.*  
(Principal 1)

Participant 2 regards a safe school environment as a place where learning can take place easily, as the environment is safe and there is no bullying or any other threat disturbing teaching and learning.

*A safe school environment is an environment where a learner can ... learn easily without any threats, whereby [sic] there won't be any hazardous environment in terms of the building. Learners must not bully each other, eh, or rather intimidate each other.* (Principal 2)

Participant 3 said that the school was guided by the nine component focus areas of the Department of Education – the first one focuses on school safety, security and discipline and the second on school infrastructure.

*The GED focus area, so we call the nine focus areas, nè, and then it has been divided or it is divided into two components. One, it's school safety security and discipline and two is school infrastructure. Now let me start with school infrastructure, nè. With school infrastructure, you need to secure as a principal that the school fence is intact, nè, like in Doctor Molefi Oliphant, we've got a physical[ly] secured school with a mesh wire fence right around the school. Secondly, you need to ensure that there are patrollers 24 hours. Some are allocated for, what can I say, they are allocated day duties and others are allocated night duties, nè. In our case, we've got four patrollers, nè, two of them work during the day.* (Principal 3)

Participant 4 believes that a safe environment prompts teaching and learning safely as everyone feels safe in school.

*... is an environment that actually promotes learning and that the learners feel safe in the space that they are in, as well as the educators, actually everybody in the school should feel safe; then that is the [sic] safe environment.* (Principal 4)

According to Participant 5, a safe school environment is a place that is free from any danger, where teachers and learners are supported in any way and teaching and learning happen in peace.

*It's where learners and staff are safe, where they are able to learn without having to worry about things that will endanger them. It's a school where*

*learners' health is taken serious[ly], it's a school where emotional or emotions of both learners and staff are taken care of. It's a school where learners, or [an] organisation where everybody who's part of it are [sic] being supported in whatever that is disturbing their peace of mind. (Principal 5)*

#### **4.2.1.2 Teachers**

The following are responses of teachers obtained from interviews held with them individually at their schools. Participant 1 said that a safe school environment was a place where everybody in school felt safe everywhere at the school and where the safety rules were complied with.

*... teachers, working staff as well as the learners and people from the public can feel safe and where they are actually safe whether they are using the admin offices in [the] school building, the sports area, the bathroom areas or the entrances and exits of the school, as well as the school's vehicles. They must feel safe and ... must comply to safety. (Teacher 1)*

Participant 2 said a safe school was an environment where teachers and learners were safe.

*It's an environment where both learners and teachers would be safe when they are at school. (Teacher 2)*

According to Participant 3, a safe school environment is a place that does not endanger the learners in any way.

*A safe school environment is one that does not put learners in any harm of some sort. (Teacher 3)*

Participant 4 said that learners should feel safe when they were in class and teachers should feel safe on the school premises.

*... place whereby [sic] learners, when they come to school, they must feel safe in the classroom, and also teachers, they must feel safe when they are here. (Teacher 4)*

According to Participant 5, a safe school environment is a place where teaching and learning take place without any disturbances inside or outside the school.

*A safe school environment is an environment where teaching and learning can take place without any disturbance or destruction. (Teacher 5)*

Participant 6 stated that a safe school environment was a place where learners were free and protected from any kind of abuse at school.

*A safe school environment would be the kind of environment where learners are free from being bullied of, uhm, any kind of abuse; could be physical abuse, emotional abuse or even sexual abuse. (Teacher 6)*

A safe school environment, according to Participant 7, is a place that cares about the learner and is conducive to learning.

*A safe school environment, it's a place that is conducive for teaching and learning and also that take[s] care of the learners and the educators. (Teacher 7)*

Participant 8 said that a safe school environment was a place where learners were free from any danger and harmful objects at school, where there was no littering and the learners could enjoy their lunch in a clean space.

*... is an environment where learners will be free from any danger, where learners would be expected to enjoy themselves without any harmful substances around. (Teacher 8)*

According to participant 9, a safe school is a place where everybody at school is safe, where the school is clean for the health of everyone and there are no hazardous objects around the field where the learners play.

*According to my understanding, everyone is safe at the school in terms of maybe the cleanliness for health ... in terms of hazardous objects whereby [sic] learners they go to the field and they play. (Teacher 9)*

Participant 10 pointed out that for a school to be safe, it needed to be fenced and the gates locked at all times so that there would be no intruders in the school. The school should protect learners from any hazardous objects within the school grounds, which must be barricaded and have safety boards around the school.

*There must be those boarders [sic] whereby they encompass safety for learners, whereby there will be no intruders who will be able to come in and out from the schoolyard. The gate, there must be a fence, uhm, there must be a gate that is locked at all times during school hours, and also for the school environment, we must have posters within the school that indicate hazards whereby [sic] now learners are not, uhm, supposed to be there during, uhm, wherever [sic]. (Teacher 10)*

## 4.2.2 Challenges and limitations faced by principals in creating safe environments and minimising violence

The following are responses of principals and teachers regarding the challenges and limitations faced by principals in creating safe environments and minimising violence.

### 4.2.2.1 Principals

The following are responses of the principals from the interviews held at their schools. Principal 1 mentioned that overcrowded classrooms were not a problem as such because violence in classes occurred regardless of the classrooms being overcrowded. The same participant pointed out that the school and learners faced situations that were beyond its control, such as learners being robbed at the mall or outside the school premises. Another challenge mentioned was learners selling drugs at school and bringing dangerous weapons to school.

*I did have one of the activities where a learner would come with a knife [and] want to stab another one. Other kids will come with drugs (matekwane), marijuana, and sell [these] to other kids, nè, so they will fight among themselves. Then obviously now we have to come in. (Principal 1)*

Principal 2 stated that the school was encountering a lot of challenges because of the area where the school was situated, as violence, drugs and dangerous weapons were common in the area. The school has policies on these factors, but they are not being implemented and the safety team is not doing its job. Searches are not conducted at school and the last one was done two or three years previously. Learner discipline is a problem at the school, and there is no support to assist with burglaries committed at school.

*We have a committee, but I don't think it's that functional. We have a very serious case of overcrowding. Very big problem of disciplinary problems. Just today, in the morning, I was dealing with cases of learners who are disrespecting educators. (Principal 2)*

Principal 3 mentioned that the school was still new in the area and was regarded as one of the safest schools; however, this status was affected by socioeconomic factors in the area, violence, dysfunctional families and learners being victims of crime and abuse because of the tablet they were provided with as it was an information and communication technology school.

*Yes, there are violent activities, Mamzo ... they are disturbing, nè. ... We had a number of murder cases or murder incidents that took place this side during*

*the night and unfortunately, because these incidents are happening within the community of the school, you would have learners from the same families attending school here and you can just imagine that the psychological, what can I call it, the level of these kids, it's really disturbing. We had learners who also witnessed their parents committing suicide.*

*We had learners who also witnessed their own brothers killing their own parents. So, so it's sad for Bophelong. Like I'm saying, just google it. There are so many things, Mamzo, so many psychosocial problems within the area, within the area, and because we are a school within the Bophelong, we somehow inherit them. And most of our learners, we have parents, violent parents, who are also abusing learners from home ... which is [sic] some of the things we are dealing with. Others go to an extent of fighting at home and destroying ... have you ever seen, destroying the very tablets, I mean the school tablet, I think, is worth R5 000, plus or minus R5 000, and then they would literally break the tablet, Mamzo, literally destroy it during that fight between parents. (Principal 3)*

Principal 4 stated that the school was mostly affected by burglary and the fact that the school did not have adequate security measures in place because it was a no-fee school that had to rely mostly on the district to pay patrollers.

*Unfortunately, burglary is our biggest problem in this area. Almost every year. Fortunately, this year, we haven't had a burglary, except for taking ... the cable in our home economics centre. But unfortunately, when it comes to burglary, we don't have much power because we don't have our own patrollers that we are paying because we cannot even afford to pay them.*

*Unfortunately, we are a non-paying-fee school, so we depend on the government. But what we do is that fortunately our SGB members, our chairperson stays in the same street, so he always makes a turn even in the evenings. But we have an alarm system that is in place, but we depend mostly on the, uhm, SGB members that will make a turn here. (Principal 4)*

Principal 5 stated that the school experienced challenges such as family problems affecting learner behaviour and learner academics. Learners using cell phones at school was another problem.

*We had a case in Grade 8 where one of the learners decided to send an info [sic] to a classmate and unfortunately, immediately when the parent of the classmate saw the phone, they became worried because there were or there was a message relating to drugs. We had to dig deep, only to find that the learner that received the message was innocent. The learner that sent the message is a fan of these hip-hop or rapping artists, so the rapper was singing about, you know, drugs, dagger, and as a result, this other learner who sent the message, for some reason, became attracted or interested in experimenting in Grade 8. Now it goes beyond that. When we sat with the learner and the parent, we discovered that the father is in Bloemfontein and the mother stays here; so, the two parents are not together and unfortunately, there is now a new man in the mother's life, which made this child to [sic] feel neglected, and because the child is now spending more time without parent supervision. Remember that [the] father is there and the mother is working. When the child leaves Suncrest, in between, there is space. (Principal 5)*

#### **4.2.2.2 Teachers**

The following are responses of teachers obtained from interviews held with them individually at their schools. Teacher 1 pointed out that learners not respecting the teachers and learners who had attitude problems were a problem.

*You know, with teenagers, we also have a problem from time to time, that little bit of disrespect here and there, but I think that is quite normal. But, uhm, we try to, uhm, learn [sic] that learners must have respect. And yes, if there's respect, people will respect the school, people will respect each other, people will respect each other's, uhm, equipment and so on. And therefore, we try to make it as safe as possible through respect. (Teacher 1)*

Teacher 2 revealed that boys would mistreat and disrespect the female teachers.

*Eh, some questions one does not want to answer. Uhm, in terms of discipline, let me say this, nè, there's a positive relationship amongst, uhm, the main staff, nè. However, you'll find that, uhm, especially boys, they tend to misbehave towards, uhm, female teachers, but then we, as the staff, basically the male staff, we tend to somehow deal with these issues. And it also helps to somehow curb the behaviour because we don't, not only talk to the learner or maybe give them punishment, we also involve the parents to ensure that at least they are aware of their child's misbehaviour at school. (Teacher 2)*



Teacher 3 said that the school was surrounded by a lot of violence and other negative things that affected the school and learner behaviour.

*I think a lot of our bullying starts from the location where we are, ya, because like there's, it's very dangerous, like some sort of gangsterism and a lot of initiation things, you know. So, that is what we have a challenge with, but we are really working on it; the safety committee is really doing [its work]. (Teacher 3)*

Teacher 4 mentioned that theft at school was a serious challenge, as it affected teaching and learning.

*Yoh, this one of burglary, it affects us; it really affects us. We experienced burglary last year. They took the laptops; they took the money and it tempers [sic] with the work that must be done. We are unable to do [sic] printouts, to do photocopies, and so forth. (Teacher 4)*

According to Teacher 5, learner attitude is a problem at the school.

*Attitude, we do get an attitude from learners, but we try to speak with those learners regarding their attitude and behaviour, because we also have to understand that maybe that attitude might be triggered by something. Hence, we refer the learner to our school support team, and they don't really, there are certain things that also affect teaching and learning, especially the attitude of learners because now that learner will distract you in class; then you have to deal with that learner, and that learner will waste your time, will take most of your teaching time because you have to discipline such a learner. (Teacher 5)*

Teacher 6 mentioned that safety at the school itself was not a problem, but the major challenge was safety outside the school premises when learners went home or came to school.

*Our school environment, we feel safe within the premises, right, but outside the school, we don't feel so safe, especially the learners, like I said earlier on. Our learners are a target because of their tablets, but within the school, yes, we do safe feel safe because we know that we are protected and we have security guards at the main gate. The problem, uhm, the problems occur when we step outside the school premises. (Teacher 6)*

Teacher 7 said bullying was a problem at the school, especially with new learners from primary school, and the school did not have proper security, so anyone could enter the school premises at any time.

*Bullying, it does happen sometimes, especially for these Grade 8 learners because, remember, they come from grade primary school, and then they just enter the secondary, so these ones who are have been here for a longer time, they try sometimes to bully them. But we are able to deal [with it]. (Teacher 7)*

Teacher 8 mentioned many challenges that affected teaching and learning and might lead to learner safety being jeopardised.

*We have disciplinary problems. Learners are bullying each other. And learner-to-teacher attitude – we do have cases where there is an attitude, especially from learners who are [sic] giving a certain attitude, especially to a teacher. Obviously, all those things, especially if learners are not disciplined. There's overcrowding – teaching will not be effective. (Teacher 8)*

According to Teacher 9, their school is the safest and has fewer challenges that hinder safety at school; however, there are a few learners who pose problems in the school.

*Definitely, we are so lucky here; we have very few learners out of the whole school. It could be two learners who are problematic because of the policy that we implemented here at the school; so, it does affect in a positive manner. (Teacher 9)*

Teacher 10 said that the school was safe considering all the measures and policies in place to ensure safety.

*In essence, our school is safe in this matter. We have boundaries that will be able to make sure that learners don't go out of the schoolyard without us not to see [sic]. There'll always be people who are in charge and looking at the movement around the school, and we do have cameras in order to check other movement of those people that are unknown to us. ... we do have a logbook; as parents are coming in, they need to sign in. (Teacher 10)*

### **4.2.3 Role and responsibilities of the principal in creating a safe school environment**

The following are responses of principals and teachers concerning the role and responsibilities of the principal in creating a safe school environment.

#### **4.2.3.1 Principals**

The following are responses of the principals from the interviews held at their schools. According to Principal 1, one of the responsibilities is to make sure that there is collaboration among all the departments to ensure that the school runs smoothly and is safe.

When I do decisions [sic], I don't do them alone even though I am the accounting officer; we've got the SMT, SGB, safety subcommittee; so as we have a shared vision. ...

To implement all the plans and also to communicate.

*We have your, uhm, general meetings with parents. We allude to these particular issues which are happening in terms of safety. (Principal 1)*

Principal 2 said that one responsibility was to make sure everyone in the school did what they were supposed to do when they are at school.

*We try by making sure that the gate is always locked. Avoid having, you know, those hazardous, anything that can happen in the school. Learners must always be kept in the school being closed [sic]. When they are in class, teachers must be there. The principal must also walk around the school to check that the environment is in order. (Principal 2)*

Principal 3 pointed out that policy implementation was one of the most important factors in making sure that safety was maintained at school. One of the strategies the school uses is to transfer misbehaving learners to other schools according to the school policy

*Just implementation of policy, Mamzo, mmm, [the] issue of school safety, it's right at the centre of teaching and learning; so we always make sure that our gates are locked with the assistance of our patrollers. We always make sure our fence is secured; we always make sure that, you know, issues, guns and dangerous weapons, like I said, we have those random searches, there's random searches. If there's a complaint or concern by a learner, we immediately act on it and if, depending on the nature, if it warrants an immediate transfer, if we feel that it poses a threat to others, so we definitely, we act on instance, Mamzo, we act on instance [sic]. Then we have those safety policies, school safety policies, and try by all means to implement them.*

*We've got what we call an incident book, nè, we've got [an] incident report for educators and [an] incident report for learners, and then we keep records of those transgressions.*

*I transferred learners to a point where [the] district office wanted to charge me and I said, "If you want to charge me, so be it. This is a document, am I not expected to implement this? This is a policy and I'm just a policy implementer."*

(Principal 3)

Principal 4 noted that the most thing was to make sure that the curriculum is taught and in a safe place. An open-door policy was followed to give anyone a platform to raise any concerns, which could immediately be attended to.

*The first thing in a school is that when all the learners are in class and are being taught and the teachers are in class, there is no anybody that is going up and down; there is no mischief that will be taking place. So, our main aim, first of all, is to ensure that curriculum delivery takes place so that the learners are kept busy in classes; therefore, they would not fall easy into mischief [sic]. First of all, we ensure that our periods are attended timeously. If a learner is not in school, the parents report, so basically, because of that, there is minimal mischief that is taking place; therefore, safety is optimal. I normally use an open-door policy that you can come to my office for anything and you can sit and talk about things. I think that makes it easier that when there's a problem, we can immediately attend to [it] because people would come with that problem and we can sort it out then. If we don't have [the] capacity to sort it out, we can go out and outsource. So, I think that helps a lot. (Principal 4)*

Principal 5 mentioned that being a principal and keeping the school safe, required the principal to be hands-on and know what is happening in and around the school and not just sit in the office.

*We took a trip, uhm, around the school. We do that from time to time. I'm a principal who does not belong to the office; so, people who know me very well, I spend most of my time everywhere except the office because sometimes I do go to classes. Sometimes I just stand outside; hence you saw me this morning. ... because I want to know what is happening on a daily basis. (Principal 5)*

#### **4.2.3.2 Teachers**

The following are responses of teachers obtained from interviews held with them individually at their schools. Teacher 1 said that the principal needed to lead by example as everyone followed their lead.

*The principal is the mirror of the school; so, the teachers and the learners are doing exactly what the mirror of the school mirrors them to do. So do, do, do; so, there's a lot to be read in that [sic] words, yes. (Teacher 1)*

According to Teacher 2, the principal is responsible for making sure that everyone at school does exactly what he or she came for and that all safety measures are in place at school.

Teacher 3 did not give any response about the specific responsibilities of a school principal.

Teacher 4 said the school principal had to be democratic and use different approaches in different situations.

*Because as he is the principal, he cannot stick to one approach to say, "As the principal, I am going to use this approach." (Teacher 4)*

Teacher 5 mentioned that it was the responsibility of the principal to check around the school that teaching and learning were taking place and the environment was safe for all.

*So, each and every time the principal checks around to see that teachers are attending classes ... the gate is forever [sic] closed; then we know who visits and also when they visit. She's democratic; she's open to all ideas. (Teacher 5)*

Teacher 6 revealed that their principal was very hands-on and protected everyone at school against misbehaving learners.

*Our principal is a very hands-on principal; she wants to oversee everything at the school. If there is, there are learners who are misbehaving, she wants to be the first person to know about, about those learners; so, she can be the one who personally refers them to other schools. So, uhm, I think she also influences us in a positive way because we then feel safe because we know if ever there are learners who are, uhm, who we don't, uhm, feel safe around, maybe because of their misbehaviour, then the learner, the principal is not going to protect the learner but rather implement, uhm, what you call, but rather refer the learners so that everyone within the school feels safe. (Teacher 6)*

Teacher 7 mentioned that the school principal invited people to come to school and teach them about safety. Also, the principal always encourages everyone at school to take care of the school property.

*Once a year or twice a year, the principal will also hire someone to just come motivate and share ideas with the educators. The principal will not leave the assembly without saying two words about safety in our school and encourage learners to take care of their property. This is their future. (Teacher 7)*

According to Teacher 8, one of the responsibilities of a principal is to ensure that everyone at school is updated about anything that concerns the school and to make sure that everyone at school is safe.

*... regular meetings to inform us about the importance of, the importance of a safe environment so that we keep up with the changes, to ensure that the environment is kept up to standard. (Teacher 8)*

Teacher 9 stated that the principal was responsible for making sure that training on safety was available to the learners and staff. Also, the principal should value others' suggestions about safety.

*[The] principal will just invite people to come here at the school, people who are qualified for safety like the, what is this, there's this organisation that deals with, uhm, alcohol and drug abuse.*

*We [are] supporting one another through his leadership and we [are] backing one another, uhm, in terms of the safety of the, if, remember I said to you, if a learner is misbehaving, and it's then, it's that misbehavior that is too huge for your shoulder. You can we have [an] intercom system. That is assisting us a lot. Then you just press the button; you call to the principal or the deputy principal to come and assist. (Teacher 9)*

Teacher 10 emphasised that the principal should empower teachers by delegating some of the duties at school to them for the benefit of safety.

*The principal must, under safety and security, the principal must appoint someone who will be able to search the learners, who will be able to test the learners in order to determine whether the learners have not utilised [sic], uhm, this substance abuse and for searching their bags is [sic] also to check whether they don't have dangerous weapons within them.*

*... delegates people in order to do some of the things within the school concerning safety, as he is the one who is in charge, but he is not always the one doing things; he delegates, and in that essence, it really helps to also, to*

*develop the educators and even the learners in order to make sure that we are living in a secure area. (Teacher 10)*

### **4.3 ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis and discussion below are aimed at answering the main research question: What is the role of principals in creating safe school environments in secondary schools? Arising from the main question, three sub-questions were formed, which are used as themes to answer the research question at hand.

#### **4.3.1 Sub-question 1: What does a safe school environment entail?**

To follow are the analysis, interpretation and discussion of the responses of the principals and teachers for Theme 1.

##### **4.3.1.1 Theme 1: Adequate security (principals)**

All of the principals agreed that a safe school environment was one where learners and the rest of the school staff felt safe and teaching and learning took place. In other words, it is easy for teaching and learning to occur when there are proper security measures in place that make the learners and staff feel safe. Principal 1 said that there should be proper access at the gate, which is important to monitor who enters when and for what – *“Your control access, nè”*.

Principal 2 emphasised the importance of maintaining the school buildings and keeping the school gates locked at all times – *“We talk about the infrastructure, we have gates that must always be closed, for the safety of the learners. We have buildings that must be maintained.”*

Principal 3 pointed out the importance of having *“a physical[ly] secured school with a mesh wire fence right around the school”* and patrollers at the school at all times, night and day.

Such measures contribute a lot to the safety of everyone at school and provide some peace of mind, like Principal 4 said, *“It’s a school where learners or organisation where everybody who is part of it are [sic] being supported in whatever that is disturbing their peace of mind.”*

From the above, it can be deduced that the principals know that schools need to have proper security at all times, be it patrollers, cameras, a secured fence or an alarm system, to make sure that everyone is safe and protected from harm or danger. It is like being at home and having security systems available to make sure that one has a good rest at night with no fear

because one feels and is protected. This is the same with the schooling system as well – when everyone in the school feels safe, then the rest of the puzzle will fall into place. It is imperative not only to take care of security but also to make sure that the school buildings are maintained and inspected regularly and do renovation when necessary.

Below are the analysis, interpretation and discussion of the responses of the teacher participants for Theme 1.

#### **4.3.1.2 Theme 1: Adequate security (teachers)**

Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9 shared the same sentiment that a safe school environment was a place where the learners and everyone at school should feel safe, that held no danger and was conducive to teaching and learning and where safety regulations in place. Teacher 5 said that there should be security measures in place at school to make sure that everyone was safe, *“for instance, a safe school has to have security, safety measures in place”*. Teacher 6 pointed out that it was necessary to focus not only on the physical aspects of safety but on the emotional protection of the learners as well, so that they would be *“free from being bullied, of, uhm, any kind of abuse, could be physical abuse, emotional abuse or even sexual abuse”*. Teacher 10 emphasised that there should be a fence and the school gates needed to *“be locked at all times during school hours”* so that *“no intruders ... will be able to come in and out from the schoolyard”*.

From the above responses, it can be said that proper teaching and learning are achievable in a safe, secured and protected environment where everyone feels safe. In as much as teaching and learning are the number one goal at school, so is safety, and both need to run concurrently. For instance, if a school is not safe, the learners and the staff will not feel safe, and this can trigger emotions such as anxiety and fear, causing learners not to come to school and even teachers not to attend classes. Safety, as a broad phenomenon, needs to be catered for at school to have a safe school environment free from violence, bullying, harassment and substance use.

#### **4.3.2 Sub-question 2: What challenges and limitations are faced by principals in creating safe environments and minimising school violence?**

The following are analysed, interpreted and discussed responses of the principals and teachers regarding challenges and limitations they come across in creating safe environments and minimising school violence.



#### **4.3.2.1 Theme 2: Learner etiquette (principals)**

Principal 1 indicated that violence and disruption were experienced “*regardless of the number*” of learners in the class. Principal 2 also emphasised that there was a huge problem in terms of discipline at the school – “*Just today in the morning, I was dealing with cases of learners who are disrespecting educators*”. The principal also said that this problem about learner attitude was caused or rather influenced by the surrounding school environment (the community).

Principal 3 said that although discipline was a problem, it was minimal because of the policies that the school followed in making sure that culprits were dealt with by transferring them for “*serious misconduct*” such as stealing, while “*if it’s a case of gangsterism, like in our case, we also transfer but recommend an intervention*”. Thus, the school has implemented a system of transferring learners to nearby schools if they have been found guilty of any misconduct or have violated the school code of conduct.

Principal 4 indicated that the school did not have any problems in terms of violence and discipline because of the school policy they used – “*fortunately, we don’t have such because the policies that we have in place*”. However, he was not specific as to what the policy said. Principal 5 gave many examples of incidents where learners had misbehaved and how the school dealt with them according to policy.

Given the above information, it is evident that schools are still facing many problems arising from learner attitude and bad behaviour in schools, which lead to quarrelling and fights among teachers and learners and disrupt the main purpose of school, which is teaching and learning. It is vital for learners to be taught discipline and for schools to take strict measures against learners who misbehave to curb ill-discipline and violence. If schools maintain discipline, learners will behave themselves when they are on the premises of the school regardless of the influence they get from home or the community.

The following are analysed, interpreted and discussed responses of teachers regarding Theme 2.

#### **4.3.2.2 Theme 2: Learner etiquette (teachers)**

Teachers 1 and 2 both affirmed that disciplinary issues were experienced at their school. According to Teachers 3 said that to eliminate disciplinary problems you have to discipline

learners. *“I don’t think there is something like disciplinary problems, either you discipline, or you don’t you know”* (Teacher 3). While teacher 4 said that learners misbehave because they want to show off *“some learners who disrespect teachers because they want to show off. But those learners are being dealt with”* (Teacher 4). Teacher 5 said that learners who misbehaved, especially in class, disrupted teaching and learning as much time would be spent dealing with them instead of teaching. *“There are certain things that also affect teaching and learning, especially the attitude of [a] learner because now that learner will distract you in class; then you have to deal with that learner”* (Teacher 5). According to Teacher 6, problems with regard to discipline were still an issue at the school because some learners disrupted the classes by making a noise, distracting the other learners in class so that *they are unable to concentrate*. Teacher 7 also mentioned that the school experienced challenges with discipline *“uhm we do have challenges with discipline”* (Teacher 7). Teacher 8 said that some learners displayed a bad attitude, *“giving a certain attitude especially to a teacher”* (Teacher 8), which negatively influenced teaching and learning. On the other hand, Teachers 9 and 10 said that the learners in their school were well behaved and followed the code of conduct of the school so that they knew what to do all the time – *“luckily, we have learners who are listening”* (Teacher 9).

Based on the teachers’ responses above, it is evident that regardless of the school rules and code of conduct, teachers are still having a tough time when it comes to disciplining learners so that they would behave in a manner that is required by the school, as unruly behaviour disrupts teaching and learning. This means that teachers need to think and come up with ways of enforcing discipline in class and make sure that each day, teaching and learning take place in a disciplined and well-mannered class. Learners need to be reminded of the rules from time to time so that they will remember that when they are in class, they need to behave themselves and follow the class rules or they will face consequences.

The following are analysed, interpreted and discussed responses of principals regarding Theme 3.

#### **4.3.2.3 Theme 3: Burglary in schools (principals)**

Burglary is a major issue that affects teaching and learning in most schools. However, Principal 1 said that their school does not *“have issues of burglary”* because of the security measures they had in place at school, such as security cameras – *“We had cameras; they were not working; for this year we said, now let’s focus on cameras”*.

According to Principal 2, the school experienced burglary on a regular basis, “almost every two, three months”. Talking about the disruption and disturbance caused by burglary, he said that it “destabilises the school completely” – “If we experience burglary, you’ll find that they have stolen the [sic] laptop with the software. So, it’s not easy to recover data that was there for learners”. A variety of items are stolen at the school – “the school fence was stolen and nobody is responding to that or assisting. The taps are always stolen. So ... safety is a problem around the school”. He further mentioned that because the school was a no-fee school, it was “a challenge for the school to have security at the gate” and because of the lack of funds, the school could not pay the service provider fees. While the school sometimes called in the help of patrollers, the principal indicated that “they are not even taking their job serious[ly]”.

Principal 3 mentioned that they had a recent burglary at the school, which was dealt with immediately so it would not affect the learners, staff and the teaching and learning of the day – “If we have a problem now, we deal with it now like the recent burglary case we had, it was on Thursday”. The principal further explained the importance of dealing with the situation immediately and not postponing: “we don’t postpone if you’ve [sic] got a burglary because the more you delay it, it’s the more, it’s going to spill [over] to other areas, and remember, what is fragile about teaching and learning is learner performance”.

Principal 4 mentioned that “unfortunately, burglary is our biggest problem in this area” in which the school was situated. Despite having an alarm system, the school still experiences burglary “almost every year”, and this has affected the teaching and learning as learners have to go to other schools to perform other activities for some subjects. The principal added, “Fortunately, this year, we haven’t had a burglary except for taking out of [sic] the cable in our home economics centre”. According to the principal, it was impossible for the school to get more security measures in place because the school did not have the funds to do so – “Because we don’t have our own patrollers that we are paying, because we cannot even afford to pay them”.

Principal 5 also mentioned that despite the security measures in place at the school, they did experience burglary although not on a regular basis. The principal described how at a recent break-in, the criminals climbed over the school wall and “took one of our dustbins, allowed the dustbin to lean against the wall” to use it to get back over the wall again.

The following are analysed, interpreted and discussed responses of the teacher participants regarding Theme 3.

#### 4.3.2.4 Theme 3: Burglary in schools (teachers)

Teacher 1 said that the school experienced burglary, and that it affected the teaching and learning at the school as the learners did not have studying materials – *“there was a robbery into [sic] the computer labs; the, uhm, the learners can’t follow the work schedule”*. Teacher 2 did not mention anything about burglary specifically but said that the school needed to follow policy and do maintenance so *“that everything is kept up to date”* to curb burglary. Teacher 3 stated that patrollers should at least have something they could use to protect themselves against burglars because they *“don’t have any weapons ... they actually don’t have anything that they would use if someone could come and say, ‘I’m taking all these cars,’ there is nothing that they have with them”*.

Teachers 4, 6 and 8 mentioned that should the school experience a burglary and if some of the school equipment were to be stolen, it would affect teaching and learning because teaching and learning could not take place or would have to be delayed – *“We experienced burglary last year and they took the laptops, they took the money”* (Teacher 4). Teacher 5 pointed out that burglary did not only affect teaching and learning but also the budget of the school, as *“there has to be a cost incurred in repairing the school”*. Teacher 7 said that burglary was a *“serious issue”* at their school. Teachers 9 and 10 declared that their school was not affected that much by burglary because of security measures in place – *“fortunate[ly] enough, we don’t have that, uhm, too much burglary in our school because of the security”* (Teacher 9). Teacher 10 mentioned some of these measures the school had implemented to ensure safety: *“we have a security company that is guarding the school; we have an alarm system; we have made sure that we fence[d] our school”*.

Given the above data from both the teachers and the school principals, it is evident that the schools have a problem about burglary, despite security measures in place that are meant to protect the learners and the school assets. Moreover, it does not matter whether the school is in the town or in the township. Some schools tend to have minimal incidents of burglary because they can afford to install proper and adequate security facilities because of extra funds they get from school fees, the surrounding area and its community, unlike other schools that have to depend on the Department of Education for funds, where burglary occurs monthly or every quarter. The factor that contributes the most to these burglaries is the socio-economic aspects of the community. Burglary not only affects the school budget and teaching and learning but also instils fear and panic among the staff and learners.

The following are analysed, interpreted and discussed responses of the principals regarding Theme 4.

#### **4.3.2.5 Theme 4: Parents and the community (principals)**

Principal 1 did not raise any issues regarding parents and the community. Principal 2, however, seemed to have major issues in terms of getting support from the community and parents – *“Most parents, or rather community members are not showing any interest of [sic] supporting the school in terms of safety”*. Principal 3 said that family rage and violence and *“so many psychosocial problems ... [such as] violent parents who are also abusing learners from home”* were very common in the area where the school was situated, and as a result, the school tended to inherit and be affected by these. He gave an example of fighting parents who would destroy their child’s *“school tablet ... worth R5 000, plus or minus R5 000”*. Even worse, the principal mentioned that there had been some *“murder cases or murder incidents that took place”* and *“because these incidents are happening within the community of the school, you would have learners from the same families attending school here”*.

Principal 4 has a positive relationship with the parents and surrounding community members around the school and declared that the school depended a lot on the *“SGB members that will make a turn here [at school]”* and on a forum in the community that *“goes around and checks around on schools because our schools have been vandalised a lot”*.

According to Principal 5, some learners have a hard time at home, which affects and influences the behaviour of learners at school. However, the school does provide support to both learners and teachers and, consequently, is able to support children who are *“witnessing fights amongst the[ir] parents”*.

The above responses of the principals clearly indicate that community and parental involvement plays a huge role when it comes to learner education. However, most schools are not receiving the support it needs from the community and parents. At a few schools, the positive impact that parents and the community can make on the school is experienced though. The community and the parents need to know and understand the impact of their involvement when it comes to teaching and learning and the school. It is vital they understand their role because a school cannot function properly without the support of parents and the community.

The following are analysed, interpreted and discussed responses of the teacher participants regarding Theme 4.

#### **4.3.2.6 Theme 4: Parents and the community (teachers)**

The following are the responses of the teachers regarding challenges regarding the involvement of parents and the community at the school.

Teachers 1 and 2 mentioned that the school had close ties with the parents, as there was effective communication between parents and the school. Mention was made of learners who were mugged in the community while coming to school or going home after school – *“Often learners would complain that at times there are people who rob them of their belongings, their cell phones, maybe take their money”* (Teacher 2). This type of crime was a major challenge that instilled fear in learners and affected their academics because *“as a result, the child will then be either absent or be scared to come to school because of such or maybe arrive late at school because of such”* (Teacher 2).

Teachers 3 and 4 emphasised that the parents and the community were involved in supporting learner education and, for instance, came to school during camps to make sure that the learners were protected as the surroundings are not safe – *“... outside of the school, a lot of things happen here in Tsherela, it’s not one of the safest places around”* (Teacher 3). Teacher 5 indicated that the school did not have any issues about parental and community involvement, as they were *“looking out for the school”*. Teacher 6 also said that the parents were very much involved in the school and always supported the school. However, because everyone in the community knows the school is an information and communication technology school, learners tend to be victims of crime in the community because they are targeted for their school tablets – *“We had a learner who was attacked, I think it was, uhm, last year, by three men because of her school tablet. They wanted to take her school tablet, right? So, she was attacked. They removed three of her front teeth.”* (Teacher 6). The teacher explained that these crimes had a profound psychological effect on the learners and especially the victims of such crimes – *“then we, uhm, recommend[ed], uhm, a psychologist for the learner, but we could still see that the learner was struggling in class, and as a result, that learner had to move and stay somewhere else”* (Teacher 6).

Teachers 7 and 8 also maintained that the school had a positive relationship with the parents and the community because of the school policy that requires the school to have regular *“meetings with parents”* (Teacher 7). According to Teachers 9 and 10, their school too

collaborated with the community and parents. They added that the community looked after the school after hours – *“the community members surrounding the school ... they are people who are also guarding the schoolyard, nè, for instance, during weekends, there might, there are sometimes activities”* (Teacher 10).

Most of the teachers seem to have a good relationship with parents. However, there seems to be a challenge in terms of the community not protecting the learners because some learners get attacked by the very same community members while going to school or going home after school. Building positive relations between parents and teachers plays a role when it comes to learner performance and helps both parents and teachers to communicate about the learners' challenges at home and at school. On the other hand, the community needs to know that schools are there for social development in the area, and they need to take care of it in the same way they would take care of the clinics, hospitals, shops and police stations in their community. For example, community members would not attack health workers or policemen because they respect them, and this is the same attitude they should have towards learners and teachers.

The following are analysed, interpreted and discussed responses of the principals regarding Theme 5.

#### **4.3.2.7 Theme 5: Bullying and the use of dangerous weapons and drugs in school (principals)**

Principal 1 stated that bullying was an ongoing problem at the school and that *“some of the things were new, such as cyberbullying”*. According to the principal, some situations were beyond the control of the school, as learners would fight outside the school – *“there won't be any problem with kids while they are at school, but they will go to Vaal Mall and start a fight ... which started at school”*. The principal added in Sesotho that the learners would get involved in situations like these far away from the school but that it still damaged the image of the school.

Principal 2 revealed that the challenges experienced at the school did not necessarily involve bullying but *“learners with weapons around the school”*. The principal added, *“And the drugs, it's a challenge in our area.”* According to the principal, the use of weapons and drugs at school by learners was mostly influenced by the surrounding community but would *“be dealt accordingly as stipulated in the policy”*.

Principal 3 also mentioned a few activities of bullying that had recently taken place at school, such as an incident when an older learner bullied Grade 8 learners – *“He saw an advantage and then he bullied them with an intention of taking their money”*. However, one of the Grade 8 learners spoke up and said, *“No, this is not your money, and we don’t know you”* (Principal 3). The principal added that bullies did not only bully other learners but also teachers and sometimes even the principal. According to the principal, bullying has serious consequences for teaching and learning, as for *“some classes, educators could not go in to teach ... because of those culprits”*. Also, *“there were experiences where teachers were humiliated in the presence of others by the learners. They would take a pack of snacks and pour it on top of the teacher”* (Principal 3). However, according to the principal, instances of bullying are currently minimal because of the system that the school has implemented of transferring misbehaving learners to other schools, especially if the learner is a repeat offender at school.

Principal 4 explained that the school used to have a problem with initiation schoolboys at the school, but the issue had been resolved. The principal said nothing much about experiencing problems with bullying but mentioned that the school had *“a programme on bullying”* and *“some workshops with the learners for bullying”*.

Principal 5 also articulated that bullying used to be a problem at school and that the school had tried to curb it by inviting the police to talk to the learners about bullying and the use of drugs. Also, *“I know at some stage, 2018, 2017, 2018, we had cyberbullying technology, for example it will go from where girls at a certain stage, they get excited, they take those pictures that [are], uhm, confidential and when things turn sour, they circulate them”*. The principal added that such behaviour was not condoned at school, *“whether bullying, uhm, drugs, all those things are not allowed”*.

Based on the above information, it seems that most schools are still struggling with bullying, although it does not happen regularly because of policies implemented at school. The results of bullying are very disturbing because it leaves learners and teachers with feelings of anxiety and stress and teaching and learning are affected. Principals need to put more emphasis on zero tolerance for bullying at schools.

The following are analysed, interpreted and discussed responses of the teacher participants regarding Theme 5.



#### **4.3.2.8 Theme 5: Bullying and the use of dangerous weapons and drugs in school (teachers)**

Teachers 1 and 2 mentioned that the school had not experienced any instances of bullying for the previous two years because of the school policy on bullying – *“bullying is one of the aspects where learners are being reprimanded if they did something like that”* (Teacher 1). Teacher 2 explained that the school had a problem with bullying – *“it normally happens at the beginning of the year when we have new learners in Grade 8, that’s where the problem of bullying happens”*. However, *“it has been addressed [and] we don’t have that [anymore]”* (Teacher 2).

Teachers 3, 4, 5 and 6 indicated that the learners were aware of the bullying policy at school and knew whom to report to when someone was bullied. Teacher 3 further said that a lot of bullying happened or started from the surrounding community and then escalated to the school – *“yes, we do have bullying, especially among the boys, and we try to deal with it, a lot of our bullying starts from the location where we are”*. According to Teacher 3, the situation in the community is *“very dangerous”*

Teachers 7 and 8 said that bullying was a problem at their school, especially with new learners at school from primary school – *“bullying, it does happen sometimes, especially for these Grade 8 learners”* (Teacher 7). According to Teacher 8, *“Learners are bullying each other.”* Teacher 9 and 10 mentioned that there was only minimal bullying at their school because the teachers were hands-on in making sure that the learners did not bully one another. Furthermore, if there was any bullying at school, the learners know the repercussions of that and the culprits were dealt with immediately – *“If the learners [were] found bullying one another, we reprimand the learner there and there”* (Teacher 9).

Many of the teachers stated that they made use of the school policy to ensure that there was no bullying at school and among the learners. A serious challenge about bullying pointed out was the surrounding community. Therefore, learners need to carry the message and attitude against bullying home and into the community to achieve zero tolerance of bullying at school and in the community.

#### **4.3.3 Sub-question 3: What are the role and responsibilities of principals in creating a safe school environment in a secondary school?**

This section covers the analysis, interpretation and discussion of the responses of the principals and teachers regarding the role and responsibilities of principals in creating a safe

school environment. The following are the analysed, interpreted and discussed responses of the principals regarding Theme 6.

#### **4.3.3.1 Theme 6: General responsibilities of a school principal (principals)**

Principal 1 indicated a few responsibilities of a principal to create a safe school environment, such as *“a school improvement plan ... [and] a development plan ... [which is] a three-year plan”* and stated that they met every year to develop new plans. Also, *“we have commissions, the people in the school who look into safety and check what are our mistakes or what are our gaps, we have SWOT analysis ... [to] come [up] with suggestions, regular inspections, to implement all the plans and also to communicate”*. One of the things mentioned by Principal 1 was the planning and installing of cameras at school to promote safety. The principal pointed out that it was necessary to get other stakeholders, such as parents, learners and even the police, within and outside the school, involved to make sure the school was conducive to learning. During *“general meetings with parents ... these particular issues which are happening in terms of safety”* are communicated. According to the principal, the school has *“a code of conduct for learners, which is being done by the SGB and ... learners”* and also has implemented an *“Adopt a Cop”* programme.

Principal 2 declared that one of the responsibilities of a principal was to do a daily check by walking *“around the school”*, and even the classes, *“to check that the environment is in order”* and safe. The principal also pointed out that a school was not a one-man responsibility, and so it was important to make joint decisions about the running of the school. *“Decisions in our school are made through consultation; we consult all those stakeholders and at the end of the day, the decision must be taken [sic]”* (Principal 2). The principal added that it was necessary to involve parents and police when it came to school safety and to encourage everyone to care for the environment and *“treat the school as their own”*. Another point the principal mentioned was that because the school did not have enough funds to have and maintain proper security, the school had to rely on the teachers to *“monitor [security] physically”*.

Principal 3 indicated that taking walks around the school and doing unexpected class visits helped reveal gaps in terms of safety. The principal mentioned that *“during my rounds”* there was one learner who backchatted the principal when the principal politely told learners to cut their hair according to the school code of conduct. So, if not for class visits, the principal would be ignorant of such problems regarding discipline. The principal further indicated the importance of dealing with problems immediately as they occurred – *“we don't bank problems”*. According to the principal, it is necessary to involve parents and report to seniors for joint

decisions and to inform them about anything that is happening at the school. Principal 3 pointed out the importance of being a policy implementer as another responsibility – *“This is a policy and I’m just a policy implementer. I’m your police officer, I’m your watchdog that this policy is implemented.”* Another responsibility is to take care of the school and everything and anything in it; *“our case the safety is specifically focusing on securing assets like learner tablets, a gadget like your smart boards because we are a smart school”*. The principal also said that it was the principal’s duty to record all incidents that threatened learner safety at school and open cases against culprits involved. Also, a police officer had been allocated to the school. The last important thing the principal mentioned was that learners and teachers needed to know the code of conduct, but it was a challenge because some teachers were *“not even aware of their code of conduct”*.

Principal 4 declared that it was the responsibility of the principal to make sure that the curriculum was delivered to the learners in class – *“our main aim, first of all, is to ensure that curriculum delivery takes place so that the learners are kept busy in classes”*. Other responsibilities of the principal are working with the police allocated to the school, the parents and with the community, as the community looked after the school at night. Whenever the school encounters problems, the principal should make sure that *“the incident is dealt with timeously”* so that it does not disrupt the teaching and learning at school. In addition, the principal should ensure that policies are in place and are implemented – *“by all means, we try to ensure that the policies that are in place concerning safety are actually adhered to”*.

Principal 5 pointed out that being a principal did not mean that one needed to sit in an office. Principals must be hands-on and know what is happening at school and what is needed to keep learners safe, for example *“when our learners are dropped by parents or taxis and they are welcomed by the staff from the parking lot into the schoolyard”*. According to the principal, it is important to work with parents, the police and other stakeholders to come to school and motivate learners about safety. The principal should make sure that learners and parents know the school code of conduct and adhere to it, as *“the school code of conduct, every day, it indicates what time our learners are expected to be in the schoolyard; it is expected [that] learners and parents go through that”*. Another responsibility of the principal was to make sure that teaching and learning were taking place, even if it meant that the principal needed to teach when, for example, a teacher was absent from work. Principal 5 mentioned, *“I had to take some classes and teach Grade 12.”* The principal also said that it was the principal’s duty to make sure that the school was clean and that there was no long grass on the school premises. According to the principal, the duties of a principal extended even into the school holidays, as *“from time to time, almost every day during school holidays, I do come to check the school”*.

The following are analysed, interpreted and discussed responses of the teacher participants regarding Theme 6.

#### **4.3.3.2 Theme 6: General responsibilities of a school principal (teachers)**

Teachers 1 and 2 mentioned that it was the responsibility of the principal to make sure that safety was maintained at school and to help resolve cases – *“sit with the deputy principal, maybe the principal as well, to discuss the problems, and in most cases, we call in the parents as well so that we resolve the problem”* (Teacher 1). Teacher 2 said that the principal was *“forever pushing that committees should be punctual here at school – I think it’s part of safety”* and mentioned that the principal had made sure that cameras were installed at school to enhance security.

Teacher 3 listed another responsibility of the principal as ensuring that there is a school policy in place – *“we have a committee that has been sitting with [the] principal trying to fix like sections”*. According to Teacher 4, principals need to be versatile and open to other ideas and empower teachers and learners. *“The principal requires that a person who was taken for training to give training back to the staff”* (Teacher 4).

Teacher 5 said that it was the responsibility of the principal to make sure that teaching and learning really did take place – *“So, each and every time, the principal checks around to see that teachers are attending classes”* and always follow school policies. Also, *“learners [should] be penalised in terms of suspensions but through the principal working with the cluster leader guide from the district”*. Teacher 6 indicated that their *“principal is a very hands-on principal”* and always wanted to know what was happening, which was good because it was one of their responsibilities to oversee everything.

Teachers 7 and 8 mentioned that the school principal kept the schoolteachers informed and updated *“to ensure that the environment is kept up to standard”* (Teacher 8). *“Once a year or twice a year, the principal will also hire someone just come motivate and share ideas with the educators”* (Teacher 7).

According to Teacher 9, the principal should always be ready to assist when teachers encounter problems in classes. For instance, *“If a learner is misbehaving and it’s ... too huge for your shoulder, you can, we have [an] intercom system that is assisting us a lot; then you just press the button, you call to the principal or the deputy principal to come and assist”*. Teacher 10 added that principals needed to delegate as they could not lead the school on

their own – *“under safety and security, the principal must appoint someone who will be able to search the learners, who will be able to test the learners”*.

Based on the above responses of the teachers and principals, it is evident that these school principals know exactly what to do to create safe environments at their schools. Also, the teachers know what to do to support the school principal in carrying out the school mandate. However, consistency is required from all parties to reach this goal. Schools can be safe when everyone at school plays his or her part. With proper leadership, the involvement of relevant people and delegation, it will be easy for school principals to create and maintain a safe school environment.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the data were presented first, followed by an analysis, interpretation and discussion of the data. For school principals to create and maintain safe school environments, good leadership is required from the head so that the body can function well. In other words, the principal needs to give the vision to the staff, and the staff should implement it. Schools in townships seem to have more problems in terms of safety. Some are not getting support from the community; instead, these schools are vandalised and the learners are abused by the community. Some schools are not getting enough support from the government, which makes it difficult to maintain safe schools. Schools in town tend to be more protected because of security measures in place. However, all five schools studied in this research tend to have factors in common that are disrupting teaching and learning and affecting safety at school. These shared factors include burglary, family rage, misbehaving learners and bullying. As indicated by the participating teachers and principals, teaching and learning only become effective when the school environment is safe.

## **CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter provided the presentation, analysis, interpretation and discussion of the data obtained from the principals and teachers. This chapter will present a summary of the different chapters as well as the findings, limitations and recommendations of the study and the contribution it will make to the education fraternity and schools. The aim of this study was to determine the role of principals in creating safe school environments in secondary schools. The objectives of the research were to determine what a safe school environment entails, what challenges and limitations are faced by principals in creating safe environments and minimising school violence and what the role and responsibilities of the principal are in creating a safe school environment. The findings are based on the results obtained from the research objectives as discussed in the previous chapter.

### **5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

In Chapter 1, the purpose, problem statement, aims and objectives of the research, the research methodology and ethical considerations were discussed. The main research question investigated was: What is the role of principals in creating safe school environments in secondary schools?

Chapter 2 offered a theoretical literature review of the research and a section on concept clarification. These were followed by discussions of the characteristics of a safe school environment, the challenges faced by school principals in schools and the systems thinking theory, which is a tool school principal can use to run the school and deal with challenges encountered.

In Chapter 3, the research methodology and design used to collect data were discussed in detail. The paradigm or worldview for the research, qualitative research, the sampling methods used for data collection, ethical issues and the way the data were analysed were discussed. A qualitative method was used for this study because of its unique way of accentuating data gathering on naturally occurring phenomena and the understanding thereof it provides. For this study, purposive sampling was used, as the participants were selected according to the relevancy of the research question criteria. The school principal and two teachers per school of five schools participated in the research.

In Chapter 4, the empirical research was presented. This presentation included the participants' responses to the research questions, a discussion of the responses of the participants and an analysis and interpretation thereof.

The findings that emanated from the research are discussed next.

## **5.3 FINDINGS**

### **5.3.1 Findings with regard to Objective 1: To determine what a safe school environment entails**

According to the literature, the government has a responsibility to provide a safe and respectful learning atmosphere in which all learners and the whole staff are treated with dignity and respect so that they can participate fully in their academics and duties in a safe educational environment that is free from fear, harassment, harm, or threat of harm (§ 2.1). A school that is safe is one that is unrestricted from danger and possible harm (§ 2.2.2). For a school to be safe and function accordingly, a set of rules and policies is required. The SASA 84 of 1996 spells out the rules that regulate all stakeholders who take part in anything that has to do with schools (§ 2.3.2). Part of the school rules is the code of conduct, which specifies the rules and regulations to be followed by learners in regulating behaviour at school. The code of conduct also explains the procedures that need to be applied by the school when learners transgress the rules as stipulated. From this study, it is evident that the code of conduct applies to all learners, not only when they are on the school premises but also when they are away from the school, representing it or attending a school function (§ 2.3.3).

The following points highlight various aspects of standard policies in schools to keep the school and its staff safe.

As most of the people in schools use cell phones, it is important that all schools have a policy on cell phones (§ 2.3.6). The reason for this is that schools are developing, and some use cell phones as part of teaching and learning, while others do not permit cell phones at school, as they disrupt teaching and learning (§ 4.2.2.1). There should also be a policy on search and seizure, which should be authorised by the school principal (§ 2.3.7). Another crucial policy is one on learner attendance, which stipulates that it is compulsory for learners to attend school (§ 2.3.8). The involvement of different stakeholders in schools is also crucial to make sure that safety is maintained in schools (§ 2.5). Even though not all parents are educated, their support is never nullified, but all that they can offer the school is appreciated (§ 2.4.2). Parents and

the community can help guard the school at night and see to it that they report any suspicious activity they see happening in or around the school. General meetings should be held to discuss issues of safety with parents (§ 4.3.2.5). Strong and supportive relationships with teachers allow learners to feel safe and secure in the school (§ 2.4.4)

### **5.3.2 Findings with regard to Objective 2: To understand challenges and limitations faced by principals in creating safe environments and minimising school violence**

A safe school environment is characterised by several factors that work together in creating a safe atmosphere in school, and this is like a chain – if one connector is broken, it will affect the rest of the chain. Bullying is a serious problem in most schools. It is a harmful external factor that sets the stage for permanent damage, which will ultimately have a lasting, negative effect on the learner's life (§ 2.3.4). Bullying is a problem especially with new learners from primary schools (§ 4.2.2.2.). Bullying continues in schools, while in some cases, the situation is beyond the control of the school, as learners would fight outside the school (§ 4.3.2.7). The level of parental and community participation in education is low and is affected by various factors, such as poverty, single parenthood, low literacy levels, language barriers, job and time pressure, poor parenting skills, insecurity of parents about their value and a lack of knowledge about the importance of their role (§ 2.4.2) This is a continuous problem for most schools. Family rage and violence are very common in the area in which the research was conducted (§ 4.3.2.5).

Overcrowded classrooms are an issue in most schools. Large classes have a negative impact on teaching and learning, as most teachers struggle to maintain productive teaching and learning and give attention to each learner, especially those who need attention (§ 2.2.1.1) Overcrowded classrooms tend to be noisy, and teachers spent most of their time trying to control the learners and less time on the lesson of the day (§ 2.2.1.1). Overcrowding in schools is a huge problem and opens a loophole for other negative and uncontrollable things to happen in schools and classrooms (§ 4.2.2.1). Problems about discipline tend to be common in overcrowded classrooms, hampering the teaching and learning because of the disturbance (§ 2.2.1.1). Problems in terms of discipline in schools are often influenced by the area in which the schools are situated (§ 4.2.2.2).

Violence and the dysfunctionality of families also affect teaching and learning. Some learners become victims of criminal activities in the neighbourhood, as they may be robbed of their school tablets (§ 4.2.2.2). Learners who misbehave in class disrupt teaching and learning, and



this costs teachers much time as they will spend a lot of time dealing with disruptive learners instead of teaching. This may, in turn, affect the quality of teaching in the school (§ 4.3.2.2). Major causes of learners' disruptive behaviour in classes are poverty, teachers' negative attitude and lack of motivation and learners repeating a grade (§ 2.2.1.5). Most public schools tend to be easy targets when it comes to learners accessing drugs and dangerous weapons inside the school because there is no proper security (§ 2.2.1.7). Maintaining proper security in schools is a huge problem, especially schools in the townships because they are no-fee schools. As a result, these schools depend mostly on the government for security, the maintenance of buildings and hiring patrollers, while schools in town tend to have proper security because of the surrounding area of the school and the fact that they have adequate security systems in place (§ 4.2.2.1 and § 4.3.1.1.1). Most schools are affected by burglary, as they do not have adequate security measures in place (§ 4.2.2.1). Irrespective of how tight security may be at a school, whether in the town or the township, burglary does happen (§ 4.3.2.3).

### **5.3.3 Findings with regard to Objective 3: To analyse the role and responsibilities of the principal in creating a safe school environment**

The principal is primarily responsible for the creation of a safe, nurturing and supportive learning environment that enables effective teaching and learning (§ 2.2.1). The principal and the school leadership need to work together to always maintain a safe school environment (§ 2.2.2). Sections 16(a) and 16(2a) of the SASA 84 of 1996 outlines that one of the functions and responsibilities of the principal of a public school is the implementation of policy and legislation for the school he or she is the head of (§ 2.3.2). Another responsibility of the school principal is to make sure that the curriculum is delivered to the learners in class and that the teachers are teaching (§ 4.3.3.1). For a school to improve the academic achievement of its learners, it requires strong leadership by the principal (§ 2.4.1). The principal should have control over access to the school (§ 2.3.5).

School principals need to see to it that random searches take place in school on a regular basis to ensure that learners are not under the influence of drugs or alcohol and are not carrying dangerous weapons (§ 2.3.7). However, random searches are still a challenge in some schools (§ 4.2.2.1). Violence intervention is a technique recommended to help prevent violence in schools (§ 2.7). In some schools, workshops regarding bullying are offered to all learners to help minimise bullying and violence in schools (§ 4.3.2.7). The systems thinking theory is a system that can help school principals change their approach to dealing with and handling situations in school. It will assist principals to think of schools as systems, where one

part of the school is affected, the rest of the school will suffer as well. This model can be used to improve the school environment because it deals with issues from different aspects, not just one (§ 2.11.5). School principals must be able to resolve issues (§ 4.3.3.2). This approach also helps the principal and the teachers make better decisions, which improve the safety and academic results of the school (§2.11.4).

School principals must be able to deal with issues according to their importance. It is necessary to distinguish between important and unimportant matters to be resolved and to identify patterns (§ 2.11.6). They should be able to involve other stakeholders when it comes to decision making at the school (§ 2.11.6). In so doing, they make sure that there is collaboration among all the departments to ensure that the school runs properly (§ 4.3.3.1). Principals should make joint decisions about the running of the school (§ 4.3.3.1), involving parents and the SGB and reporting to seniors for joint decisions (§ 4.3.3.1). Also, principals need to be updated about anything and everything that is happening at school, and they must lead by example (§ 4.2.2.3). Lastly, principals need to make sure that there is adequate security at school, including proper fencing, patrollers, an alarm system and cameras (§ 4.2.1.1).

## **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations have emanated from the research.

### **5.4.1 Recommendation 1**

Creating a safe school environment is not a one-man's job to be done by the principal alone but requires everybody at the school to do what is required of them. It can be argued that teaching and learning cannot take place in an environment that is not safe; therefore, the principal needs to make sure that everyone involved in the school, including parents, is familiar with the school rules or school policies and understands and adheres to the rules. Schools need to have proper security measures in place, and it should be mandatory for all schools. The government needs to investigate these security measures, especially at public schools, as they are easy targets because of poor security.

Schools need to have security guards on duty day and night, just like any other company because school assets need to be always protected. All schools need to have cameras, an alarm system and proper fencing, which should be always monitored. The school gates need to be always locked, and a visitors' register should be kept and monitored. No one should

enter the school premises without an appointment and proper identification. Recent developments that have taken place because of the Covid-19 pandemic have proven that it is possible and can be done. Schoolyards should preferably have more open space inside so that it can be monitored easily. There should be only one point of entry so that anyone entering or leaving the school premises can be monitored. Schools also need to have drug testing procedures and weapon detectors in place. Teachers should monitor learner movement all the time from when they enter the school gate, even when changing classes, which would eliminate many undesirable activities.

#### **5.4.1.1 Motivation**

Schools need to be always safe, as they are the second home of learners and staff because this is where they spend most of their time on school days. Therefore, it should be mandatory for schools to have proper security measures in place, such as a secured fence around the school and patrollers on duty at school day and night (§ 4.3.1.1 and § 4.3.1.2).

#### **5.4.2 Recommendation 2**

For learners to behave at school, the school and parents should work together and speak the same language to learners. Learner discipline is a continuous problem in schools, regardless of measures in place, such as the code of conduct and other school policies they need to adhere to. Learners need to be taught respect and how to reject negativity, as this will build their character and mould their personality. Respecting oneself as a person makes it easy for one to respect others as well and treat them properly. Schools need to continue working with learner representatives when it comes to the creation of rules. Teachers should make use of a suggestion box per grade so that learners can participate in developing rules by selecting the most appropriate and relevant suggestions. Learners should be taught to be accountable for their actions and behaviour if they have transgressed against the school rules. If a learner shows a continuous pattern of ill-discipline, he or she should be deregistered and apply at another school. If the bad behaviour continues, the learner should be referred to an adult school or a college. Rewarding learners for good behaviour is recommended, as it motivates them and challenges others to improve their behaviour and do more.

#### **5.4.2.1 Motivation**

Some schools transfer misbehaving learners to other schools, as dealing with them and reprimanding them take too much time away from teaching and learning (§ 4.3.2). This method can be adopted by other schools.

### **5.4.3 Recommendation 3**

Burglary is a problem in most public schools because of poor security measures in place. It is a serious issue that hampers and delays teaching and learning. Enhancing security measures at schools would assist in curbing burglary. Most schools in town have the capacity to put in extra security measures because of funds generated from school fees, and because of the tight security measures in place, these schools have fewer incidents of burglary. Therefore, the government should assist public schools and especially no-fee schools have better security measures. School principals, together with the school leadership, should be innovative and develop strategies that can be used to improve, create and maintain proper security, instead of just depending on the government for assistance. This can be done through fundraising and asking for donations from private companies and support from parents. As schools are working with the police in terms of doing searches and encouraging learners about safety, schools can also request the police to patrol the school, especially at night.

#### **5.4.3.1 Motivation**

Burglary occurs at any school at any time, and the effect, damage and success of it depend on the security measures in place at the school (§ 4.3.2.3 & §4.3.2.4).

### **5.4.4 Recommendation 4**

Some schools experience problems with parents who do not support their children and the community that does not support the school in their area. It is high time that schools reach out to the community and do some community work, such as helping the less fortunate by providing food and school uniforms to poor learners. Schools can have vegetable gardens and give the vegetables grown to the community when ready. This is a system of giving back to the community, and, in return, the community will do the same by taking care of learners and the school. Schools can use the money raised by fundraising to employ members from the same community to be patrollers, cleaners, garden workers and general workers for the school to help reduce the unemployment rate in the area. Parents should be given a platform to disclose when they experience family problems or other trouble, as this can affect how a

learner behaves at school. If need be, families in need should be referred to counselling. Parental and community involvement play an important role when it comes to school safety, learner performance and learner wellbeing.

#### 5.4.4.1 Motivation

Involvement of the community and parents in school has an important role for the functioning of the school. This can be achieved through having regular meetings with parents and the community so that they will feel they are part of the school and that their voice and views matter (§ 4.3.3.1).

### 5.4.5 Recommendation 5

Learners need to be taught about bullying from the primary school level so that they know and understand it. Many learners become victims of bullying and end up bringing weapons to school because they want to protect themselves. Others may be forced to sell drugs at schools because they are powerless and afraid of bullies. It is recommended that schools have metal detector machines at their gates to help learners who are forced by bullies to carry weapons to school (§ 5.4.1). Learners should be given a platform where they will feel free to say they are being bullied at school; this could be done once a month when class teachers interview learners individually. Such regular interviews will also help teachers find out if there are any other issues affecting the learners' performance. A zero-tolerance policy should be implemented, where first offenders of bullying are deregistered from the school. Teachers need to be in their classrooms all the time during lesson time and make sure that teaching and learning take place. Doing so would curb bullying because learners will not have free time to play around but will be focusing on their schoolwork.

#### 5.4.5.1 Motivation

Some schools have already started with the initiative of giving learners workshops and teaching them about bullying (§ 4.3.2.7 and § 4.3.2.8).

### 5.4.6 Recommendation 6

Principals are the accountable officers of a school who must ensure that everything in the school runs smoothly and according to the school plan and the policies of the Department of Education. They should also make sure that the school is fenced and has proper security and

that the school buildings are maintained and anything that is broken is fixed. School principals need to make sure that everyone at the school knows the rules and the code of conduct by heart. If they know the rules, it will not be so easy to break them. Principals should make sure that they collaborate with the school leadership and involve them in decision making. Principals need to make sure there is collaboration in schools, where parents and teachers work together for the benefit of the learners. It is recommended that other stakeholders fund the school to improve safety measures. People should be invited regularly to motivate and train learners about school safety and train and empower teachers as well.

Learner recognition should be part of the curriculum as it will motivate learners to behave and perform well, for example: having a prize giving ceremony where learners are given certificates and trophies for good behaviour, improvement academically and for top achievers. Seniors should regularly report to the principal, as it will give them a platform to escalate issues and attend to problems immediately. Regular leadership training and meetings for reviews, updates and improvements should be conducted. Daily checks around the school and even class visits should be done by the principal to ensure that teachers and learners are in class, participating in teaching and learning, and that the learners are safe. Regular follow-ups should be done with the Department of Education to make sure it delivers school resources and material needed by the schools in time. Principals need to be hands-on and up to date with what is happening in and around the school. They should have monthly meetings with parents and weekly meetings with teachers and learners to keep everyone informed.

#### **5.4.6.1 Motivation**

School principals are overseers of the whole school, and it is their responsibility to make sure the school environment is safe and conducive to teaching and learning (§ 4.3.3.1 and § 4.3.3.2).

### **5.5 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

According to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018) a limitation is the potential weaknesses that are usually out of the researcher's control, and are closely associated with the chosen research design, funding constraints, or other factors. While delimitation are boundaries or limits that are set by the researcher for their study so that the study's aims and objectives do not become impossible to achieve.

A limitation of this research was that the study was conducted in only one area due to transport costs and the convenience of the researcher. Another limitation was that due to Covid-19 restrictions, the research sample had to change because teachers were attending school on

different days. It was, therefore, difficult to get a group of teachers together at the same time to do a focus group interview with five participants. As a result, the teacher sample size changed to interviewing two teachers per school. Although the Department of Education stipulated that interviews should be done telephonically or via social media, the teachers and principals did not want to give out their telephone numbers and insisted that the interviews be done at school.

This study is delimited to the role and functions of parents, learners, SMT, SGB and other stakeholders. The reason is that the participants selected using the purposive sampling method to answer the research question at hand meet the criteria and are at the most accurate position to answer the research at hand.

The participants did not want to conduct interviews after school but preferred doing it during school hours in their free period. Most of the interviews were conducted in the staff room, and even though the staff was informed about the interview, there was a lot of background noise, disturbance and interruptions. One of the teachers the researcher interviewed was very uncomfortable with answering some questions because of the surroundings. At two schools, the researcher was made to wait for the teachers because they had a meeting. Only after the meeting, the researcher was instructed that she had to leave, as the teachers would not be doing the interview that day and another appointment had to be scheduled. The last limitation was that at two schools, the researcher had to interview an acting principal because the school principal had other commitments at the time, irrespective of the fact that the researcher showed up for the appointment at the date provided by the principal.

## **5.6 CONTRIBUTION OF THE RESEARCH TOWARDS THE SUBJECT FIELD EDUCATION MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

The information gathered here can help school management to improve the school by applying various strategies of leadership and dealing with situations at school. This information can also benefit the Department of Education to help improve security measures at public schools by adopting methods that multiracial schools are implementing to improve safety and enforce tight security in schools to ensure safety. This information can also help other researchers in their literature review and background study.

## **5.7 CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to determine the role of principals in creating safe school environments in secondary schools. The study proved that this objective was achievable if principals received proper leadership training and acquired all the necessary skills, which in turn, would be imparted to the rest of the team. The study also proved that for schools to be safe in all aspects, principals should work together with the staff, learners and all relevant stakeholders and get support from the Department of Education and the community. All the above play an important role in making sure that schools are safe for all, so that the goal of the school is reached, that is, for teaching and learning to take place in a safe environment.

School principals need to make sure that their schools get full support from the Department of Education. This applies mostly to public schools, as these are schools that depend on the Department of Education for everything the school may need. Principals also need to make sure that they enforce and enhance collaboration with parents, the community and all relevant stakeholders, because without their involvement and full support, schools cannot function properly. The study also showed that when safety was prioritised at schools, effective teaching and learning could take place, teachers would attend classes and learners would be well behaved. Schools also need to support the community, in return, and work together with the police. Just as the right hand needs the left hand to wash it, the same applies to the chain of a schooling system.

Lastly, the study showed that principals needed to support teachers as it boosts their confidence, and in return, teachers would practise the same principles with learners. This would facilitate teaching and learning and build trust between teachers and learners. Schools need to have the same voice when it comes to issues of bullying, violence, and school safety, in general, because for example, if a learner is transferred to another school for bad behaviour, it does not mean the learner gets to behave in the same manner just because he or she now attends another school.

Therefore, this study achieved its aim in terms of the role of principals in creating safe school environments in secondary schools. It has shown that school principals are crucial role players in this regard but need the support and collaboration of learners, teachers, parents, the community, and the Department of Education to create safe school environments in secondary schools.



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## ANNEXURE A: Ethics approval letter of study



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom  
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222  
Fax: 018 299-4910  
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Senate

Tel: 018 299-4849  
Email: [nkosinathi.machine@nwu.ac.za](mailto:nkosinathi.machine@nwu.ac.za)

### ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the **Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee (EduREC)** on 19/07/2020, this committee hereby **approves** your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SCRE) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

**Study title: The role of principals in creating safe school environments in secondary schools**

**Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Dr A van Wyk**

**Student / Team: NY Maluleke (MEd student – 21247390) Ethics number:**

N	W	U	-	0	1	2	4	4	-	2	0	-	A	2
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Status: S =

Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

**Application Type: Project**

**Commencement date: 17/09/2020**

**Risk:**

**Low**

**Expiry date: 17/09/2021**

**Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.**

**Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):**

**General conditions:**

*While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:*

- *The study leader/supervisor/principal investigator/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the EduREC:*
  - *annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and*
  - *without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.*
- *The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the EduREC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.*
- *Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.*
- *The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.*
- *In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRC and EduREC reserves the right to:*
  - *request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;*
  - *to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process; – withdraw or postpone approval if:*

1

- *any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;*
- *it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the EduREC or that information has been false or misrepresented;*
- *submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or*
- *new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.*

The EduREC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the EduREC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely



Prof JAK Olivier  
Chairperson NWU Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee

Original details: (22351930) C:\Users\22351930\Desktop\ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY.docm  
8 November 2018

Current details: (22351930) M:\DSS1\8533\Monitoring and Reporting Cluster\Ethics\Certificates\Templates\Research Ethics Approval Letters\9.1.5.4.1 ES-REC Ethical Approval Letter.docm  
5 December 2018

File reference: 9.1.5.4.2

**Annexure B: Proof of language editor**

*PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING*

Dr. L. Hoffman, APed (SATI), APRed (SAVI)

Kroonstad

BA, BA(Hons), MA, DLitt et Phil

Accredited Professional Text Editor – English and Afrikaans (South African Translators' Institute)

Member of the South African Translators' Institute

Cell no: 079 193 5256

Email: larizahoffman@gmail.com

---

**DECLARATION**

To whom it may concern

I hereby confirm that I have proofread and edited the following dissertation, including the references.

**Title of dissertation**

The role of principals in creating safe school environments in secondary schools

**Candidate**

Nthabiseng Yvonne Maluleke



Lariza Hoffman  
Kroonstad  
9 March 2021



**Annexure C: GDE permission letter**

**GAUTENG PROVINCE**

Department: Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

814/41112

**GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER**

Date:	24 August 2020
Validity of Research Approval:	04 February 2020 — 30 September 2020 2019/582
Name of Researcher:	Maluleke NY
Address of Researcher:	House 48 Ibali Estate
	Maclare Street
	Vanderbijlpark
Telephone Number:	0833168009
Email address:	<a href="mailto:mymaluleke@gmail.com">mymaluleke@gmail.com</a>
Research Topic:	The role of principals in creating safe environments in Secondary Schools
Type of qualification	Master's in Education Management and Leadership Skills
Number and type of schools:	5 Secondary School
District]s/HO	Sedibeng West

**CHAPTER 6 RE: APPROVAL IN RESPECT OF REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager to indicate that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

The following application to DE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1. Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study,



## Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7<sup>th</sup> Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

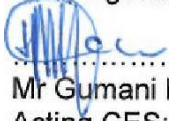
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.educationmgpg.gov.za

2. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.
3. Because of COWD 19 pandemic researchers can ONLY collect data online, telephonically or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate. The approval letter will then indicate the type of arrangements that have been made with the school.
4. The Researchers are advised to make arrangements with the schools via Fax, email or telephonically with the Principal.
5. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study
6. A fetter/ document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned respectively.
7. The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.
8. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.
9. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval fetter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.
10. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.
11. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study:
12. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport fares and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
13. The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.
14. On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.
15. The researcher may be expected to provide and show presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.
16. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards



.....  
Mr Gumani Mukatuni

Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 24/08/2020 .....

2

*Making education a societal priority*

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7<sup>th</sup> Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tell (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gautengxgovza

Website: wvm.education.gpg.gov.za



## Annexure D: GDE district permission letter

GAUTENG PROVINCE  
EDUCATG3N  
REPUBLIC OF South AFRC

Enquiries: Mrs. M.A Mosia  
Sub-Directorate: ISSP- Policy and  
Planning

Tel: (016) 594 9281

Cell: 066 487 2663

Ref: ISSP

TO: NTHABISENG MALULEKE

CC :PRINCIPALS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS

DATE: 26 AUGUST 2020

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN

### SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SW DISTRICT

Dear Sir I Madam

The office of the District Director acknowledges receipt of your request to conduct research in five Secondary schools in SW District-

Therefore, the permission is hereby granted for you to go to 5 Secondary Schools of your choice in Sedibeng West to conduct your research on the role of Principals in creating safe environments in Secondary Schools.

However, note that schools must be consulted prior for proper arrangement to avoid disruptions in schools and all appointments to be done through the office of the Principal.

Regards.



Mr B.V Thetha  
District Director  
Date: 26/08/2020

Office of the District Director: Sedibeng West  
6 Samuel Street, Zone 18, Sebokeng I Private Bag X067, Vanderbijlpark, 1900  
Tel: 016 594 9120 1 Fax: 016 594 9399  
Website: mww.education-gpg.gov.za

## Annexure E: Research interview questions

### Research Interview questions for both principals and teachers.

Good day Sir/Madam.

My name is Nthabiseng Maluleke a master's student from North West University Vaal campus. Thank you for the opportunity you given me so that I can conduct my research at your school and please note that I have been given permission also by the Department of education and the district to conduct the interviews. The title of my research is: **The role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools**. The interviews will take more or less than an hour and will be recorded using a phone recorder and please note that if anything is not clear, I will be asking follow up questions.

Interview questions:

Questions to the principal:

1. Explain what a safe a school environment is?
2. Explain some of the legislation and policies that the school has to keep the school environment safe. Do you use these policies?
3. Does the school have a code of conduct for learners/teachers and what does it entails and do you used it when learners/teachers transgress it?
4. Does the school have a policy on bullying, access control, cell phone policy, a policy on the seizure of drugs and dangerous weapons and learner attendance. If so, explain how these policies are implemented in your school.
5. How does an unsafe school environment affect teaching and learning at your school?
6. How do you involve parents, the SMT members and the community in safety matters at your school?
7. Is there a positive/negative relationship and respect among staff and learners and how does it help/not help to keep the school safe?
8. Are there violent activities within or near the school and if so, how does it affect teaching and learning at your school?
9. Do learners/teachers share their concerns regarding school safety and if so what does management do about these concerns?

10. Is there a referral system and a counselling committee for learners/teachers who are suspected of being abused/ neglected. If so, explain how it works.
11. Is there a safety committee and who serves on such a committee and explain their role in school safety.
12. Does the school work with a police forum? If so, explain how does it works?
13. Does your school has safety, audit monitoring and evaluation plans for buildings, learners and teachers in place? How does it work?
14. Does the school have challenges with overcrowded classes, disciplinary problems, bullying, violent problems, learner/teacher attitude and behaviour and does it affect teaching and learning?
15. What does the school do to improve the security at the school?
16. How do you ensure that the school is running properly to keep learners, teachers and the rest of the staff safe at the school?
17. Does the school offers training opportunities for learners, teachers and the other staff members to create a safe school environment for all?
18. When a problem, for instance violence amongst learners occurs, do you as a principal react quick without understanding what the problem was?
19. Do you agree that the schooling system consists of systems and that one system influences the other systems in the school. If so, how do you prevent that one problem, for instance a burglary, from affecting the rest of the schooling systems?
20. How do your leadership approach as the principal influence teachers, learners and other stakeholders to react positively to safety in your school?
21. How do you make decisions in your school and do you think that your school environment is safe? Explain why/Why not?

Good day teachers.

My name is Nthabiseng Maluleke a master's student from North West University Vaal campus. Thank you for the opportunity you given me so that I can conduct my research at your school and please note that I have been given permission also by the Department of education and the district to conduct the interviews. The title of my research is: **The role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools**. The interviews will take more or less than an hour and will be recorded using

a phone recorder and please note that if anything is not clear, I will be asking follow up questions.

Questions for the teachers:

1. Explain what a safe a school environment is?
2. Explain some of the legislation and policies that the school has to keep the school environment safe. Do you use these policies?
3. Does the school have a code of conduct for learners and what does it entails and do you use it when learners misbehave?
4. Does the school have a policy on bullying, access control, cell phone policy, a policy on the seizure of drugs and dangerous weapons and learner attendance. If so, explain how these policies are implemented in your school.
5. How does an unsafe school environment affect teaching and learning at your school?
6. How do you involve parents, community and the SMT members in safety matters in your school?
7. Is there a positive/negative relationship and respect between you teachers and learners and how does it help/not help to keep the school safe?
8. Are there violent activities within or near the school and if so, how does it affect teaching and learning at your school?
9. Do learners share their concerns with you teachers about school safety and if so what do you as teachers about these concerns?
10. Is there a referral system and a counselling committee for learners/teachers who are suspected of being abused/ neglected. If so, explain how it works.
11. Is there a safety committee and who serves on such a committee and explain their role in school safety.
12. Does the school work with a police forum? If so, explain how does it works?
13. Does your school have a safety, audit monitoring and evaluation plans for buildings, learners and teachers in place? How does it work?
14. Does the school have challenges with overcrowded classes, disciplinary problems, bullying, violent problems, learner/teacher attitude and behaviour and does it affect teaching and learning?
15. What does the school do to improve the security at the school?

16. How do you ensure that the school is running properly to keep learners safe at the school?
17. Does the school offer training opportunities for learners, teachers and the other staff members to create a safe school environment for all?
18. When a problem, for instance violence amongst learners occurs, do you as a teacher react quick without understanding what the problem was?
19. Do you agree that the schooling system consists of systems and that one system influences the other systems in the school. If so, how do you prevent that one problem, for instance a burglary, from affecting the rest of the schooling systems?
20. How does the leadership approach of the principal influence teachers, learners and other stakeholders to react positively to safety in your school?
21. Do you think that your school environment is safe? Explain why/Why not?

## Annexure F: Change log



Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education (EduREC)

### CHANGE LOG TEMPLATE

Ethics number	NWU-01219-20-S2	
Study/project title	The role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools.	
Investigator/Study Leader name	Dr A VanWyk	
Student name (if applicable)	Nthabiseng Maluleke	
Date of meeting (from which feedback was provided)	07/09/ 2020	
Date of resubmission (to EduREC)	14/09/2020	
Document (E.g. application form, informed consent form, letter, etc.) Also indicate the section numbers.	Comments from the committee (Provide a list of the changes suggested by the committee; editorial suggestions do not have to be described in detail.)	Feedback (Indicate clearly how the changes were made if not explain why the changes will not be made.)

<b>TITLE AMENDMENT</b>	Current title: The role of the principal in a creating safe school environment in the secondary school.	Amended title: The role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools.
------------------------	---	---

**Take note that the process of ethical clearance can be delayed if not all the suggested changes are made and/or the change log completed with sufficient detail.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature: Investigator/Study Leader



Annexure G: Turnitin Report

final\_Nthabiseng\_My dissertation 6.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

20% 18% 4% 12%  
1 20/0

CHAPTER 7 SIMILARITY INDEX INTERNET SOURCES PUBLICATIONS STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

repository.nwu.ac.za 1%

Internet Source

www.education.gov.za 1%

Internet Source

Submitted to North West University 1%

Student Paper

Submitted to Mancosa 1%

Student Paper

uir.unisa.ac.za 1%

Internet Source

hdl.handle.net

Internet Source

1%

Internet Source

8

Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Student Paper

1%

9

researchspace.ukzn.ac.za  
Internet Source

<1%

Scanned with CamScanner

The Examiners

25 Mar. 21

Subject: Turnitin report: NY Maluleke (21247390)

I hereby, as the study leader of the above-mentioned student stated that the 20% of the dissertation as reflected in the turnitin report, are only similarities and no signs of plagiarism were detected in the entire document. The document was put through turnitin five (5) times and after thorough scrutiny for plagiarism, the final outcome was 20%.

Thank you



---

Dr A van Wyk

Study leader

## Analysis of quotations identified by Turn-It-In

**Name of student**

Nthabiseng Maluleke

**Student number**

21247390

**Title of document**

The role of principals in creating safe environments in schools

**Study leader / promoter**

Dr Arrie Van Wyk

### INTRODUCTORY COMMENT:

The NWU adheres to the principle of original research and respect for the intellectual property of others. At NWU Turn-it-in is used to analyse the similarity of a document to present an analysis of similarities that do not constitute plagiarism. The aim is to draw students to an appropriate academic writing style and reporting of sources before submission for examination.

This process ensures that to the best of our knowledge no plagiarism was detected in the relevant document discussed here.

**OVERALL similarity index observed in the report**

This is the similarity index reported at 20% quotations and published papers by Turn-It-In.

Interpretation of the similarity index for this document	Impression of similarity	Action to be taken
A) DIRECT longer quotations without " " but with source reference		<b>PROBLEMATIC:</b> (a) Immediately add " " if a direct quotation is necessary. (c) Revise text if not sustained in your text.
B) Appropriate brief quotations		No action necessary
C) Jargon from the discipline		No action necessary
D) Everyday use of language		No action necessary
E) Direct matches to previous versions of this dissertation/thesis or published papers on the same work		No action necessary. Should actually be removed.

### Report by student and/or supervisor/promoter

To the best of my knowledge no plagiarism was detected in the relevant document discussed here.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initials and surname of MA candidate

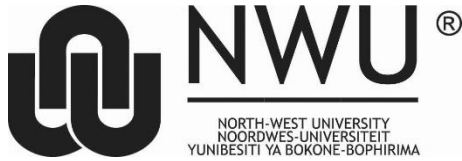
NY Maluleke

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initials and surname of supervisor A

**Report by entity director / school director / leader or chairperson of CAD in school**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initials and surname of director / leader / CAD chair

Date 25 March  
2021



The Chairperson of the School Governing Body

## **Annexure H: Letter of goodwill permission SGB**

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom  
South Africa 2520  
Tel: 018 299-1111/2222  
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

**Faculty of Education**

**(Research entity details)**

Tel: 018 111 1111  
Email: Name.Surname@nwu.ac.za

Date:

## **GOODWILL PERMISSION: SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY**

I am a Med student and wants to do research in five secondary schools in the Vanderbijlpark area which fall under the Sedibeng district, two in town and three in the township and I have selected your school as one of the school where I would like to conduct my research. I herewith wish to request your consent to conduct the research described below with you as the school principal. Prior to granting permission, please acquaint yourself with the information below.

The details of the research are as follows:

### **TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:**

The role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools.

### **ETHICS APPLICATION NUMBER**

**NWU-01219-20-S2**

PROJECT SUPERVISOR: Dr A van Wyk

CO-SUPERVISOR: n/a

ADDRESS: North West University

Cnr of Esselen & Hoffman str

Building B11, Room G53

Potchefstroom

2531

CONTACT NUMBER: 018 299 4584

MEMBER OF PROJECT TEAM MEd-Student: Miss Nthabiseng Yvonne Maluleke

ADDRESS: Iballi Estate, house 48 Maclare street, Vanderbijlpark, 1911.

CONTACT NUMBER: 0833168009.

## FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Contact person: Ms Erna Greyling, E-mail: Erna.Greyling@nwu.ac.za, Tel. (018) 299 4656

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the North-West University and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines of this committee. Permission was also obtained from the provincial Department of Basic Education.

### **What is this research about?**

The aim and the objectives of this research are: To determine the role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools.

- To determine what a safe school environment entails.
- To determine challenges and limitations faced by principals in creating safe environments and minimising school violence.
- To determine the role and responsibilities of the principal on how to create a safe school environment.

### **Participants**

- Principals and teachers

### **What is expected of the participants?**

Principals and teachers should avail themselves to participate in an hour long interview each about school safety.

### **Benefits to the participants**

There will be no benefits to the participants but the outcomes of the research can be beneficial to the schools and the communities that the school served.

### **Risks involved for participants**

There will be no risks to the participants.

### **Confidentiality and protection of identity**

Consent must be given before the interview starts and I will explain that the interview will be audio recorded so that the participant can decide whether they will participate or not. The responses of the participants will be regarded as private and confidential and their names will not be mentioned. However, to make the participants aware of the confidentiality clause, the researcher will appeal to participants, before the interviews, to keep the information that will be shared in the interviews, confidential.

**Dissemination of findings**

The findings of the research will be reported in a true and honest manner, without intentionally misleading others.

If you have any further questions or enquiries regarding your participation in this research, please contact the researchers for more information.

**DECLARATION BY SGB CHAIRPERSON/RELEVANT RESPONSIBLE PERSON:**

By signing below, I ..... agree to give permission for the research to take place with the identified participants in the study entitled:

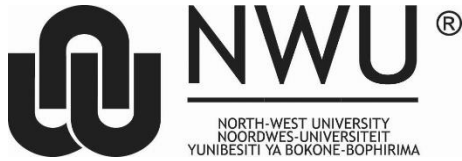
**The role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools.**

**I declare that:**

- I have read this information and consent form and understand what is expected of the participants in the research.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and participants will not be pressurised to take part.
- Participants may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- Participants may be asked to leave the research process before it is completed, if the researcher feels it is in their best interests, or if they do not follow the research procedures, as agreed to.

Signed at (place) \_\_\_\_\_ on (date) \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/20\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of SGB Chairperson**



## **Annexure I: Letter of permission principal**

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom  
South Africa 2520  
Tel: 018 299-1111/2222  
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

**Faculty of Education**

**(Research entity details)**

Tel: 018 111 1111  
Email: Name.Surname@nwu.ac.za

Date

### **PERMISSION LETTER: PRINCIPAL**

I am a Med student and wants to do research in five secondary schools in the Vanderbijlpark area which fall under the Sedibeng district, two in town and three in the township and I have selected your school as one of the school where I would like to conduct my research. I herewith wish to request your consent to conduct the research described below with you as the school principal. Prior to granting permission, please acquaint yourself with the information below.

The details of the research are as follows:

#### **TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:**

The role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools.

#### **ETHICS NUMBER: 01219-20-S2**

PROJECT SUPERVISOR: Dr A van Wyk  
CO-SUPERVISOR: n/a  
ADDRESS: North West University  
Cnr of Esselen & Hoffman str  
Building B11, Room G53  
Potchefstroom  
2531

CONTACT NUMBER: 018 299 4584

MEMBER OF PROJECT TEAM MEd-Student: Miss Nthabiseng Yvonne Maluleke  
ADDRESS: Iballi Estate house 48 maclare street, Vanderbijlpark, 1911.  
CONTACT NUMBER: 0833168009

FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Contact person: Ms Erna Greyling, E-mail: [Erna.Greyling@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Erna.Greyling@nwu.ac.za), Tel. (018) 299 4656

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the North-West University and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines of this committee. Permission was also obtained from the provincial Department of Basic Education/other relevant body.

#### **What is this research about?**

The aim and the objectives of this research are: To determine the role of principals in creating safe environments in the secondary schools.

- To determine what a safe school environment entails.
- To determine challenges and limitations faced by principals in creating safe environments and minimising school violence.
- To determine the role and responsibilities of the principal on how to create a safe school environment.

#### **Participants**

- Principals and teachers

#### **What is expected of the participants?**

Principals and teachers should avail themselves to participate in an hour long interview each about school safety.

#### **Benefits to the participants**

There will be no benefits to the participants but the outcomes of the research can be beneficial to the schools and the communities that the school served.

#### **Risks involved for participants**

There will be no risks to the participants.

#### **Confidentiality and protection of identity**

Consent must be given before the interview starts and I will explain that the interview will be audio recorded so that the participant can decide whether they will participate or not. The responses of the participants will be regarded as private and confidential and their names will not be mentioned. However, to make the participants aware of the confidentiality clause, the researcher will appeal to participants, before the interviews, to keep the information that will be shared in the interviews, confidential.



**Dissemination of findings**

The findings of the research will be reported in a true and honest manner, without intentionally misleading others.

If you have any further questions or enquiries regarding your participation in this research, please contact the researchers for more information.

**DECLARATION BY PRINCIPAL/OTHER RELEVANT PERSON:**

By signing below, I ..... agree to give permission for the research to take place with the identified participants in the study entitled:

**The role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary school**

**I declare that:**

- I have read this information and consent form and understand what is expected of the participants in the research.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and participants will not be pressurised to take part.
- Participants may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- Participants may be asked to leave the research process before it is completed, if the researcher feels it is in their best interests, or if they do not follow the research procedures, as agreed to.

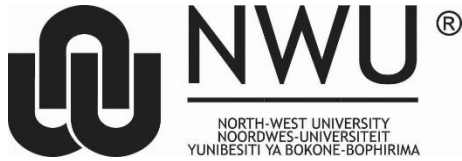
Signed at (place) \_\_\_\_\_ on (date) \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/20\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Nthabiseng Maluleke

**Signature of Principal**

**Researcher**



## **Annexure J: Principal consent letter**

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom  
South Africa 2520  
Tel: 018 299-1111/2222  
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

**Faculty of Education**

**(Research entity details)**

Tel: 018 111 1111  
Email: Name.Surname@nwu.ac.za

Date:

### **PRINCIPAL: CONSENT FORM**

I am a Med student and wants to do research in five secondary schools in the Vanderbijlpark area which fall under the Sedibeng district, two in town and three in the township and I have selected your school as one of the school where I would like to conduct my research. I herewith wish to request your consent to conduct the research described below with you as the school principal. Prior to granting permission, please acquaint yourself with the information below.

The details of the research are as follows:

#### **TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:**

**The role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools.**

#### **ETHICS APPLICATION NUMBER**

**NWU-01219-20-S2**

PROJECT SUPERVISOR: Dr A van Wyk

CO-SUPERVISOR: n/a

ADDRESS: North West University  
Cnr of Esselen & Hoffman str  
Building B11, Room G53  
Potchefstroom  
2531

CONTACT NUMBER: 018 299 4584

MEMBER OF PROJECT TEAM MEd-Student: Miss Nthabiseng Yvonne Maluleke

ADDRESS: Ibali Estate house 48 maclare street, Vanderbijlpark, 1911.

CONTACT NUMBER: 0833168009

## FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Contact person: Ms Erna Greyling, E-mail: Erna.Greyling@nwu.ac.za, Tel. (018) 299 4656

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the North-West University and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines of this committee. Permission was also asked from the provincial Department of Basic Education/other relevant body (please describe) as well as the school principal (if relevant).

### **What is this research about?**

The aim and the objectives of this research are: To determine the role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools.

- To determine what a safe school environment entails.
- To determine challenges and limitations faced by principals in creating safe environments and minimising school violence.
- To determine the role and responsibilities of the principal on how to create a safe school environment.

### **Participants**

- Principals and teachers.

### **What is expected of you as participant?**

Principal should avail themselves to participate in a less than an hour long interview about school safety.

### **Benefits to you as participant**

There will be no benefits to the participants but the outcomes of the research can be beneficial to the schools and the communities that the school served.

### **Risks involved for participants**

There will be no risks to the participants.

### **Confidentiality and protection of identity**

Consent must be given before the interview starts and I will explain that the interview will be audio recorded so that the participant can decide whether they will participate or not. The responses of the participants will be regarded as private and confidential and their names will not be mentioned. However, to make the participants aware of the confidentiality clause, the researcher will appeal to participants, before the interviews, to keep the information that will be shared in the interviews, confidential.

**Dissemination of findings**

The findings of the research will be reported in a true and honest manner, without intentionally misleading others.

If you have any further questions or enquiries regarding your participation in this research, please contact the researchers for more information.

Yours sincerely  
Nthabiseng Yvonne Maluleke

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**DECLARATION BY PARTICIPANT:**

By signing below, I ..... agree to take part in a research study entitled:

**The role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools.**

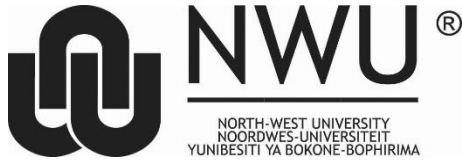
**I declare that:**

- I have read this information and consent form and understand what is expected of me in the research.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the research process before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the research procedures, as agreed to.

Signed at (place) \_\_\_\_\_ on (date) \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/20\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Principal**

Nthabiseng-Maluleke  
**Researcher**



## **Annexure K: Teacher consent letter**

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom  
South Africa 2520  
Tel: 018 299-1111/2222  
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

### **Faculty of Education**

#### **(Research entity details)**

Tel: 018 111 1111  
Email: [Name.Surname@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Name.Surname@nwu.ac.za)

Date:

### **TEACHER: CONSENT FORM**

I am a Med student and wants to do research in five secondary schools in the Vanderbijlpark area which fall under the Sedibeng district, two in town and three in the township and I have selected your school as one of the school where I would like to conduct my research. I herewith wish to request your consent to conduct the research described below with you as the school principal. Prior to granting permission, please acquaint yourself with the information below.

The details of the research are as follows:

#### **TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:**

**The role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools.**

#### **ETHICS APPLICATION NUMBER**

**NWU-01219-20-S2**

PROJECT SUPERVISOR: Dr A van Wyk  
CO-SUPERVISOR: n/a  
ADDRESS: North West University  
Cnr of Esselen & Hoffman str  
Building B11, Room G53  
Potchefstroom  
2531

CONTACT NUMBER: 018 299 4584

MEMBER OF PROJECT TEAM MEd-Student: Miss Nthabiseng Yvonne Maluleke  
ADDRESS: Iballi Estate house 48 maclare street, Vanderbijlpark, 1911.  
CONTACT NUMBER: 0833168009

## FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Contact person: Ms Erna Greyling, E-mail: Erna.Greyling@nwu.ac.za, Tel. (018) 299 4656

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the North-West University and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines of this committee. Permission was also asked from the provincial Department of Basic Education/other relevant body (please describe) as well as the school principal (if relevant).

### **What is this research about?**

The aim and the objectives of this research are: To determine the role of principals in creating safe environments in the secondary schools.

- To determine what a safe school environment entails.
- To determine challenges and limitations faced by principals in creating safe environments and minimising school violence.
- To determine the role and responsibilities of the principal on how to create a safe school environment.

### **Participants**

- Principals and teachers.

### **What is expected of you as participant?**

Teachers should avail themselves to participate in a less than an hour long interview each about school safety.

### **Benefits to you as participant**

There will be no benefits to the participants but the outcomes of the research can be beneficial to the schools and the communities that the school served.

### **Risks involved for participants**

There will be no risks to the participants.

### **Confidentiality and protection of identity**

Consent must be given before the interview starts and I will explain that the interview will be audio recorded so that the participant can decide whether they will participate or not. The responses of the participants will be regarded as private and confidential and their names will not be mentioned. However, to make the participants aware of the confidentiality clause, the researcher will appeal to participants, before the interviews, to keep the information that will be shared in the interviews, confidential.

**Dissemination of findings**

The findings of the research will be reported in a true and honest manner, without intentionally misleading others.

If you have any further questions or enquiries regarding your participation in this research, please contact the researchers for more information.

Yours sincerely  
Nthabiseng Yvonne Maluleke

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**DECLARATION BY PARTICIPANT:**

By signing below, I ..... agree to take part in a research study entitled:

**The role of principals in creating safe environments in secondary schools.**

**I declare that:**

- I have read this information and consent form and understand what is expected of me in the research.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the research process before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the research procedures, as agreed to.

Signed at (place) \_\_\_\_\_ on (date) \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/20\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Teacher**

Nthabiseng Maluleke  
**Researcher**