

# Dilemma of School Management Teams in Balancing Discipline and Multiple Deprivations among Learners through Integrated Management Approach

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## ABSTRACT

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has emphasized the paramount importance of ensuring the safety and protection of children globally. In alignment with this goal, the South African government took a proactive step by prohibiting corporal punishment as a means of disciplining learners within schools. However, this prohibition subsequently led to a resurgence of learner indiscipline within the educational system. The objective of this study was to delve into the experiences of School Management Teams (SMT) employing an integrated management approach to maintain discipline in an environment marked by multiple challenges. Through qualitative research methods involving interviews and document analysis, this study gathered insights from purposively selected participants, including teachers (2), SMT members who are also parents (2), and student leaders (4). Thematic analysis was conducted on the data and findings were categorized based on the emerging themes. The outcomes of this research shed light on several critical factors affecting discipline within schools. Firstly, the leniency exercised by teachers was identified as a significant factor undermining the enforcement of the school code of conduct. Secondly, overcrowded classrooms emerged as a substantial obstacle, making it arduous for teachers to offer individualized attention and promptly address behavioural issues. Lastly, inadequate support from the Department of Basic Education was recognized as a clear barrier to effectively upholding discipline in schools. In light of these findings, it is imperative to advocate for comprehensive training programs and adequate resource allocation for school management teams. These initiatives would equip SMTs to navigate the unique challenges associated with multiple deprivations and effectively manage disciplinary matters. Such investments are indispensable for fostering an environment conducive to effective education and overall growth of learners.

## KEYWORDS

School management team; discipline; multiple deprivations; integrated management approach; South Africa.

## INTRODUCTION

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 marked a significant shift in school governance by involving all stakeholders and granting them authority, including maintaining school discipline, to decentralize the education system (the Republic of South Africa, 1996). This approach emphasized a collaborative effort to enhance education quality across South Africa, particularly in the context of the new democratic era (Mnyende, 2013). While decision-making was dispersed to encompass various stakeholders (Spillane, 2005), the School Management Team (SMT) is legally obliged to guide the school's vision and actions, especially regarding maintaining discipline among students. The responsibility falls on the principal to ensure everyone comprehends their roles, especially concerning addressing student discipline amidst numerous challenges.

However, schools facing various forms of deprivation tend to perform worse than their more privileged counterparts. Studies indicate persistent issues related to class and cultural biases stemming from the apartheid era, including insufficient resources, socioeconomic challenges like HIV/AIDS, poverty, local vandalism, crime, disrespect, and violence within schools (Jacobs, 2014). Despite extensive efforts by the South African government to address historical educational imbalances, such as free education, school feeding programs, transport assistance, resource allocation to previously disadvantaged schools, standardized curricula, and examinations (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015), discipline in schools remains a pressing issue. School Management Teams, as leaders, cannot address this alone and need to collaborate with all stakeholders, encouraging diverse leadership roles to improve student performance and tackle discipline problems (Bojuwoye, 2009). However, maintaining discipline in deprived contexts is hindered by factors like unmet needs, poverty, and resource shortages (Barnes et al., 2007).

This paper critically examines the experiences of School Management Teams in utilizing an integrated management approach to maintain discipline within schools facing multiple deprivations in the King Cetshwayo District, KwaZulu Natal Province, South Africa. The objective is to identify gaps in discipline enforcement within these schools. Establishing and sustaining a conducive learning environment requires effective disciplinary programs, necessitating the commitment and contribution of all school stakeholders, including the School Governing Body (SGB). Given this insight, the researchers intend to emphasize the importance of collective action among stakeholders to ensure discipline in schools. The study also explores potential challenges that School Management Team members may confront when implementing an integrated management approach to discipline in deprived areas.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this paper, we examine the role of School Management Teams (SMTs) in employing an integrated management approach to address learner discipline within contexts of multiple deprivations. The analysis is grounded in two fundamental theoretical constructs: the Adlerian model and Dreikurs' model within the framework of positive discipline, and the whole-school

discipline model conceptualized by Durrant (2010). The Positive Discipline Parenting and Classroom Management model, pioneered by Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikurs, emerged in the 1920s in the USA. Adler emphasized the significance of treating children with respect, highlighting the adverse effects of spoiling on social and behavioural development. Dreikurs further disseminated these principles through classroom practices, advocating for a kind yet firm approach to teaching and parenting, aligning with democratic values. In our exploration, we endorse the positive discipline approach endorsed by the Department of Education (DoE), emphasizing the importance of imparting essential social and life skills, advocating for discipline as a taught concept, and promoting respect, warmth, and understanding. This approach envisions nurturing successful, contributing members of the community and is particularly pertinent in our democratic nation, steering away from punitive measures such as corporal punishment that harm learners.

The second theoretical framework, whole-school discipline, as outlined by Durrant (2010), aligns with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It underscores fundamental rights related to education, non-discrimination, human dignity, play, expression of views, and protection from all forms of violence. Our paper advocates for the alignment of discipline strategies with these rights within a democratic context, emphasizing the importance of an integrated management approach over punitive measures. In post-apartheid South Africa, SMTs are expected to adopt a transformational-collegial stance. However, most SMT members were trained within the apartheid education system, which did not equip them adequately for implementing an integrated management approach. Moreover, SMTs in deprived contexts grapple with numerous challenges such as famine, malnutrition, inadequate infrastructure, and issues of equity and access. Despite policy initiatives aimed at redressing historical imbalances, SMTs in these contexts face the constraints of 'unfreedom' (Sen, 1999). This paper delves into the experiences of SMTs as they navigate the complexities of employing an integrated management approach to maintain discipline within contexts of multiple deprivations.

### **Research Question**

What challenges do School Management Team members encounter when implementing an integrated management approach to discipline within schools located in areas characterized by multiple deprivations?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The South African Schools Act Republic of South Africa in Section 8(2) delineates the school's Code of Conduct, aiming to create an environment conducive to purposeful learning and discipline. However, the multifaceted challenges faced by School Management Teams (SMTs) and other stakeholders in maintaining discipline within schools are exacerbated by various deprivations, significantly impacting the quality of education and teaching. The notion of multiple deprivations highlights that a combination of factors can significantly hinder learning

and present distinct challenges in maintaining discipline within educational institutions (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). SMTs leading schools grappling with multiple deprivations are confronted with the difficult task of exercising leadership and management roles while striving to make informed decisions in the best interest of teaching and learning. These challenges encompass extensive time loss during the school day, high rates of absenteeism among both educators and learners, inadequate teaching and learning resources, inefficient utilization of available resources, underprepared educators teaching outside their field of expertise, and issues of learner indiscipline (Moletsane et al. 2015). It is essential to note that these challenges are not limited to South African schools; similar issues are experienced by school stakeholders globally (Fleisch, 2008; Jansen, 2005).

Despite the unique challenges posed by multiple deprivations, the leadership role of an SMT is intricate in this transformative era. SMTs have seen a shift in their authority, with the power to make final decisions now resting in the hands of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) as per the Schools Act, Section 12, Schedule E, "Suspension and expulsion," and "Due process," sections 13,1; 13,2 (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). SGBs are mandated to conduct disciplinary hearings following the guidelines specified in Section 8(1a) of the Schools Act within seven days of a learner's suspension. However, the SGB can only recommend learner expulsion, subject to review by the Head of Department (HoD) of the province within 14 days, adding complexity to the disciplinary process and potentially prolonging instances of misconduct within schools. Furthermore, SMTs not only grapple with the stress of dealing with undisciplined learners but also face challenges collaborating with SGBs who often lack legislative knowledge (Mestry & Khumalo, 2012). SGB members may be untrained and unavailable when needed, hindering their effectiveness. In certain instances, the SMT may have to formulate and adopt the Code of Conduct without input from the SGB, although disciplinary measures cannot be autonomously implemented. As Masitsa (2008) emphasized, disciplinary measures require the involvement of various stakeholders, including SGB members who may not always be present at the school. Thus, school authorities cannot exercise discretion independently, emphasizing the principal's role in ensuring all SGB members comprehend their responsibilities. Brumley (2012) asserts that an effective SMT can positively impact lives by promoting democratic policies, fostering strong relationships, and empowering individuals to become more empathetic and aware of others. This underscores the need for SMTs to cultivate a sense of community in their leadership for schools to prosper. However, achieving this necessitates effective leadership styles that equip SMTs with the knowledge and skills for an integrated management approach when addressing learner discipline (Stanely, 2014). Despite the turmoil SMTs face in assuming SGB responsibilities, the principal remains accountable for all activities within the school. The management of the school, however, is a shared responsibility with the SMT, which lacks final accountability. This viewpoint is supported by Kanjere (2001), who underscores that ultimate accountability rests with the principal. The evolving focus is shifting towards a collegial, participative, and distributed leadership approach, with the principal leading alongside the SMT

and teachers, rather than as an autocrat. However, as Bush (2007) observes, although SMTs offer potential for participative leadership in South African schools, empirical evidence does not strongly indicate a replacement or even supplementation of the principal's singular leadership.

Realizing predetermined goals becomes challenging if the SMT's leadership is not supportive of the principal. Principals are expected to adopt a transformational-collegial stance in post-apartheid South Africa, yet many SMT members were trained as teachers within the longstanding apartheid education system, lacking preparation for an integrated management approach. The shift from a top-down educational approach to site-based management of schools has presented challenges. The collegial leadership stance is desirable in schools, but ultimate accountability is borne solely by the principal. Implementing a collegial approach necessitates collaborative efforts, yet Lethoko et al. (2001) observe a lack of interest and support from both teachers and learners, adding to the burdens of the SMT. Furthermore, SMTs, like other educators, often lack training in Alternatives to Corporal Punishment (ATCP) and struggle to advise or implement alternatives effectively. Nene (2013) highlights the poor capacitation of teachers in ATCP by SMTs. Consequently, the prevalence of corporal punishment remains a concern in South African schools and is also a global issue, as evidenced by studies in the US (Gershoff & Font, 2016) and Tanzania (2018). The reliance on corporal punishment in South African schools underscores the need for comprehensive measures to address this deeply ingrained disciplinary approach. In addition to disciplinary challenges, the physical school environment poses another hurdle for SMTs. The quality of the teaching and learning environment is crucial for the physical and intellectual development of learners (Quan-Baffour, 2006). Inadequate funding leads to overcrowded classrooms, contributing to disciplinary issues (Sekiwu, 2013). Overcrowded classrooms, high learner-teacher ratios, and inadequate resources hinder individualized attention to learners, impacting discipline (Naidoo, 2019; Thompson, 2009). Large class sizes make effective teaching difficult and close monitoring of learners challenging (Asodike & Onyeike, 2016; Chimbi, G., & Jita, 2021; Ssekasanvu, 2009). The physical state of the school, including neatness and adequate facilities, correlates with learners' behaviour (Preble & Gordon, 2011). Additionally, government activities, particularly the lack of provision of necessary facilities, contribute to indiscipline among secondary school learners (Idu & Ojedapo, 2011). Overall, addressing the multifaceted challenges within the South African educational system requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach involving all stakeholders, with a focus on transforming the leadership style, enhancing teacher training, and improving the physical learning environment to promote effective teaching, learning, and discipline.

## METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative methodology, focusing on a diverse group of stakeholders, including school principals, teachers, parents, and learners within the King Cetshwayo District of KwaZulu-Natal Province, specifically targeting Secondary school Senior Management Teams

(SMTs), teachers, Representative Council of Learners (RCLs), and School Governing Bodies (SGBs). The research sample consisted of a total of eight participants, comprising two teachers, two SMT members who are also parents, and four student leaders. The selection of participants was purposeful, aiming to gather perspectives that represent an integrated management approach to address learner discipline, as outlined by Henning et al. (2004).

To gather data, the researchers employed semi-structured interviews, following the framework proposed by Leedy and Ormrod (2010). These interviews encompassed a predefined set of questions while allowing flexibility for additional inquiries, probing participants' reasoning, and seeking clarifications. The interview questions were designed to explore topics such as the implementation of a school code of conduct, classroom dynamics, and the level of support provided by the Department of Basic Education.

Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the school management. The semi-structured interviews were conducted over three sessions, each lasting approximately 45 minutes. During these sessions, responses were recorded with the consent of the participants and later transcribed into a notebook. Subsequently, a thematic analysis was applied to the data, involving the identification and categorization of significant themes in accordance with their characteristics, following the approach advocated by de Vos et al. (2011). To streamline the analysis process, unique codes were assigned to each of the eight participants (e.g., R1 to R8), serving as identifiers throughout the analysis. These codes facilitated the organization and presentation of the data in alignment with the emergent themes.

## RESULTS

The challenges experienced by SMTs in using an integrated management approach to maintain good discipline. Under this broad theme, three sub-themes generated include inconsistency towards the implementation of a school code of conduct, overcrowded classrooms, lack of resources, and lack of support from the Department of Basic Education.

### **Inconsistency towards the implementation of a school code of conduct**

*R1 said in my view, when the school rules aren't the same for everyone, it gets confusing. We all need to know what's expected and what happens if we don't follow the rules. When some students get different treatment, it makes it hard to trust the system and can be frustrating.*

*R2 said as a teacher, I think it's super important that we're all singing from the same song sheet when it comes to the school rules. If we're not consistent, it's like telling the students two different stories about what's okay and what's not. It's gotta be fair and clear for everyone.*

*R3 opined as a parent, it worries me when the rules at school seem to change depending on who's enforcing them. It's confusing for my kid and for us as parents too. We all just want a fair system that holds everyone accountable in a way that we can all understand.* According to

*R4, I can't stress enough how important it is for us to stick to the plan and enforce the school rules consistently. If we don't, it's like shaking the foundation of the school's discipline.*

*We're working hard to make sure our team is on the same page and applying the rules fairly for everyone.*

*R5 said from what I've seen, it's just not right when some students get off easy for breaking the rules and others get hit hard for the same things. It just brews resentment and messes up the vibe in school. Rules should be like a level playing field for everyone, with no exceptions.*

*R6 postulated I've noticed that when we're consistent with the rules in the classroom, things just run smoother. Students know what to expect, and it feels fair to everyone. Inconsistency just confuses things and can lead to a lack of respect for the rules.*

*R7 noted I've talked to other parents too, and we all agree that when the school rules aren't consistent, it's frustrating. We want our kids to learn responsibility and accountability, and that can only happen if everyone is held to the same standards. Consistency is key to a good learning environment.*

*According to R8, it's my job to make sure everyone at the school follows the same set of rules. If we don't, it's like playing a game with changing rules—nobody knows what's what. We're putting in the effort to train our staff well so that everyone's on the same page, making sure the rules are fair and square for all.*

The data above represent the views of Teachers, students and SMT on the multifaceted issue of inconsistency in implementing a school code of conduct. The data highlight the crucial role of a school's code of conduct while acknowledging challenges such as teacher leniency and inadequate enforcement. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of educating students about school governance and the code of conduct for more effective implementation.

### **Overcrowded classrooms**

**R1:** *Dealing with overcrowded classrooms puts a real strain on teachers trying to manage student behaviour. When there are so many students for each teacher, it's tough to give everyone the attention they need and address any behavioural problems in a timely manner. Plus, when resources are lacking, it just makes things even more challenging for teachers to create a good learning environment.*

**R2:** *Based on my own experiences, having too many students in a classroom makes it hard to keep things in order. It's difficult for teachers to keep track of everyone and manage behaviour effectively. And when resources are scarce, it only adds to the difficulty of maintaining a positive and controlled classroom atmosphere.*

**R3:** *From what I've seen, overcrowded classrooms really affect how discipline is maintained in the school. It's a struggle for teachers to keep things in check and deal with behavioural issues when the class is too packed. When resources are limited, it makes it even more of a challenge to keep students engaged and prevent disciplinary problems.*

**R4:** *Imagine being in a classroom that's bursting at the seams; it's tough for both students and teachers. Establishing a good rapport between teachers and students becomes a real challenge*

*due to the crowd. On top of that, lacking enough resources just adds to the difficulty of maintaining discipline and managing student behaviour.*

**R5:** *Having experienced overcrowded classrooms myself, I can say it's not easy to maintain discipline in such an environment. It's hard for teachers to keep everyone on track and address individual needs when the class is overflowing. And when there aren't enough resources, it only compounds the issue of maintaining proper discipline.*

**R6:** *"I've witnessed firsthand how overcrowded classrooms can disrupt discipline in schools. It's a struggle for teachers to effectively manage behaviour when there are too many students in one class. The lack of resources further complicates efforts to create a focused and disciplined learning space.*

**R7:** *Being in an overcrowded classroom, I can vouch for how challenging it is to maintain discipline. It's a struggle for both teachers and students to stay focused and maintain respectful behaviour. The shortage of resources makes it even harder for teachers to implement strategies that would otherwise promote better conduct and engagement.*

**R8:** *Overcrowded classrooms certainly present a hurdle in maintaining discipline at school. With many students per class, giving individual attention and addressing behavioural concerns becomes an uphill battle for teachers. Additionally, the shortage of necessary resources amplifies the difficulty in implementing effective disciplinary measures, impacting overall discipline within the school.*

The data under this theme clearly indicate that overcrowded classrooms pose a significant challenge in upholding discipline within a school setting. The abundance of students per class makes it notably difficult for teachers to provide personalized attention and promptly address behavioural issues. Consequently, this predicament is likely to impede effective management functions and hinder optimal teaching and learning experiences.

#### **Lack of support from the Department of Basic Education**

**R1:** *It's really disheartening to see how the lack of support from the Department of Basic Education directly affects discipline within our schools. When schools don't get the help they need, it's like trying to build a house without the right tools - you can't get it done properly. This lack of support makes it harder for teachers and students to keep things organized and focused, making the whole learning experience suffer.*

**R2:** *From what I've seen, the Department of Basic Education not giving enough support really hits discipline hard. It's like being in a game without knowing all the rules - you're at a disadvantage. When schools don't have the resources and guidance they need, it's a struggle to maintain a structured and disciplined environment. It affects the way students behave and ultimately how they learn.*

**R3:** *I've seen firsthand how the Department of Basic Education's lack of support affects discipline in schools. It's like trying to drive a car without fuel - you just can't go far. Without proper funding, training, and guidance, schools find it tough to establish effective disciplinary strategies.*



*This lack of support affects the whole education environment, influencing student behaviour and the quality of learning.*

**R4:** *The Department of Basic Education not providing enough support hits schools right where it hurts. It's like setting sail without a compass - you're lost. When schools lack the resources and training, they need, maintaining discipline becomes a big challenge. It's like trying to steer a ship without a rudder, making it hard to create a focused and conducive learning environment.*

**R5:** *I've experienced the struggle when the Department of Basic Education falls short in providing support. It's like trying to bake a cake without all the ingredients - it just doesn't turn out right. The scarcity of resources and proper guidance makes it incredibly difficult to maintain discipline. It's a ripple effect, affecting both teachers' effectiveness and how students behave in the classroom.*

**R6:** *Seeing the impact of insufficient support from the Department of Basic Education is disheartening. It's like playing a game with one hand tied behind your back - you're at a disadvantage. When schools lack the necessary resources and guidance, it's a real challenge to uphold discipline. It's like trying to conduct an orchestra without a conductor, leading to a chaotic learning environment.*

**R7:** *I've witnessed the repercussions of inadequate support from the Department of Basic Education on school discipline. It's like trying to build a strong structure without a solid foundation - it's bound to collapse. The shortage of resources and guidance makes it harder to implement effective disciplinary strategies, ultimately affecting the overall discipline in the school. It places an additional burden on educators and hampers a conducive learning environment.*

**R8:** *Seeing the real impact of the Department of Basic Education not providing adequate support is concerning. It's like trying to run a marathon without proper shoes - you're not equipped for success. Without sufficient resources, training, and guidance, schools struggle to establish and enforce effective disciplinary measures. This lack of support adds stress to the educational system, affecting how we manage student behaviour and potentially hindering the quality of teaching and learning.*

It can be said that the insufficiency of support from the Department of Basic Education poses a clear barrier to upholding discipline in schools. The inadequacy of resources, training, and guidance has a falling effect, making it highly difficult for teachers to establish and enforce effective disciplinary actions. Bridging the collaborative efforts of the Department of Basic Education and schools with aligned objectives, although different approaches, is crucial. Teachers actively engaged in the Department's initiatives aimed at enhancing teaching and learning should encounter fewer obstacles, as these endeavours are designed to offer practical solutions and support.

## DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher presents a discussion of data as per the themes that emerged. The emerging themes include inconsistency towards the implementation of a school code of conduct, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of support from the Department of Basic Education. The details are presented as follows.

### *Inconsistency towards the implementation of a school code of conduct*

Inconsistency towards the school's Code of Conduct refers to not keeping with the set of rules, norms and responsibilities of the organisation. It was found that almost all the respondents indicated the Code of Conduct for Learners was crucial for ensuring discipline in schools. The significance of a robust Code of Conduct cannot be overstated, as it serves as a fundamental tool in upholding discipline and order among students (Daniel, 2018). Deviation from a school's Code of Conduct signifies a failure to comply with the stipulated regulations, norms, and responsibilities governing conduct within the educational institution (Plessis, 2015). The consensus among respondents affirms the pivotal role of the Code of Conduct in shaping learner behaviour by explicitly defining boundaries and expectations. It comprehensively covers a spectrum of potential misconduct, such as bullying, theft, involvement in drug-related activities, possession of weapons, and smoking within the school premises (Wolhuter & Walt, 2020). Nevertheless, despite the exhaustive provisions outlined in the Code of Conduct, research findings reveal a notable inconsistency in adherence and enforcement within the school environment.

A conspicuous issue stemming from the lack of adherence to the Code of Conduct is the observed leniency displayed by teachers in implementing disciplinary measures. This leniency might inadvertently foster a permissive disciplinary atmosphere, wherein students perceive a lack of repercussions for their actions. Additionally, a deficiency in educating learners regarding school governance and the Code of Conduct intensifies the problem, impeding a comprehensive understanding of the significance and implications of these directives. Consequently, this cycle of misconduct may persist, leading to an overall decline in discipline standards. This resonates with Thompson's (2009) assertion that overlooking learner concerns can induce disinterest and a decline in conduct within the school community.

To mitigate these challenges and cultivate a culture of discipline and respect within schools, it is imperative to take heed of the recommendations put forth by scholars like Nieuwenhuis et al. (2007). They advocate for a Code of Conduct firmly rooted in human rights principles and natural justice rules. An effectively implemented Code of Conduct should encompass a wide array of school rules, guidelines, sanctions, and disciplinary procedures, all administered equitably and consistently. By doing so, schools can foster an environment that gives precedence to discipline, upholds learner conduct, and ensures the holistic well-being and progress of the educational community (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2007).

### *Overcrowded classrooms and lack of resources.*

Overcrowded classrooms present a significant obstacle to effective disciplinary measures within school environments, as highlighted by various studies. Research conducted by Zenda (2020) emphasizes the necessity of a teacher-to-learner ratio of at least 1:30 to facilitate personalized attention and educational support. However, it is evident that a considerable number of schools fail to meet this recommended standard, leading to a surge in learner indiscipline. The repercussions of overcrowding manifest in heightened noise levels, learners evading disciplinary actions, and even students dozing off in class due to the stifling heat (Marais, 2016). This distressing reality indicates that learners within these overcrowded school settings are denied the fundamental right to learn in a conducive and enriching environment.

The consequences of overcrowding extend beyond mere inconvenience and disruption within the classroom. The mismanagement of crowded classrooms gives rise to an array of behavioural issues, preventing educators from fully assuming their role as leaders and mentors. Maintaining discipline becomes an arduous task for teachers due to the overwhelming pressures imposed by overcrowded classes. Despite these challenges, educators are expected to uphold discipline as it plays a pivotal role in enhancing the teaching and learning experience. Botha (2015) underscores the necessity for sustained motivation and collaborative efforts among educators in overcrowded classroom settings to boost their self-esteem and foster a positive school culture. Moreover, Naidoo (2019) argues that overcrowded classrooms, coupled with a high learner-teacher ratio and inadequate resources, impede teachers from providing the individualized and quality attention that learners need for effective learning. Dreikurs (1964) emphasizes the importance of valuing students' perspectives in maintaining discipline within the constraints of overcrowded classrooms. In essence, addressing the challenges posed by overcrowded classrooms necessitates a multifaceted approach that involves optimizing teacher-student ratios, improving resource allocation, and encouraging collaboration among educators. By acknowledging the adverse effects of overcrowding and taking proactive measures, educational institutions can create a more conducive learning environment, promoting discipline and enhancing the overall educational experience for both teachers and learners.

#### *Lack of support from the Department of Basic Education*

The participants of the study expressed significant concern and distress due to the limited support provided by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). Two critical areas of concern were highlighted: inadequate assistance for teachers and a noticeable oversight of learner responsibilities. Mpuangnan et al. (2022) agree that when teachers lack essential support their ability to deliver high-quality education will be hampered. Additionally, the disregard for learner responsibilities can detrimentally impact academic performance and overall discipline within the school environment. These observations underscore the vital need for comprehensive support from all education sector stakeholders, including the DBE, School Management Teams (SMT), and School Governing Bodies (SGB).

Effective teaching and learning hinge on discipline within the educational setting. However, upholding discipline is challenging without the necessary backing and collaboration from educational authorities and stakeholders. The DBE, SMT, and SGB must fulfil their roles and obligations in providing vital support to school stakeholders, especially teachers and learners. As noted in Bezuidenhout's (1998) report, the persistent issue of insufficient support from the DBE in addressing disciplinary challenges has troubled teachers for many years, dating back to 1999. This lack of support has hindered educators in managing disruptive behaviour and taking appropriate disciplinary action, impeding the creation of a conducive learning environment.

Establishing a cohesive and comprehensive whole-school discipline approach requires active engagement and collaboration from all stakeholders, encompassing the DBE, schools, SMT, SGB, teachers, parents, and learners. Although the DBE and individual schools may have varying strategies and approaches to achieving discipline and other educational objectives, aligning these approaches and fostering a stronger partnership between the DBE and schools can lead to a more effective and supportive system. This alignment will ultimately enhance the quality of education and promote discipline within schools.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations could be made.

- i. Ensuring the active involvement and consensus of all stakeholders in the development of the Code of Conduct for learners is crucial. This approach ensures that diverse perspectives and concerns are considered, ultimately leading to a more impactful and inclusive code.
- ii. Based on the insights gathered from this study, it is advisable for educational policymakers, school administrators, and various stakeholders to recognize the significance of implementing comprehensive management approaches in schools experiencing multiple challenges.
- iii. Tailored training programs and sufficient resources should be developed for school management teams to adeptly navigate and address the distinct challenges associated with multiple deprivations. This investment is vital for effective management.
- iv. Further research and evaluation are necessary to refine and optimize integrated management approaches for maintaining discipline in schools grappling with multiple deprivations. This ongoing examination will enhance their effectiveness.
- v. Future research endeavours could delve into specific strategies, best practices, and policy frameworks that can be embraced to enhance discipline and overall educational outcomes in contexts marked by multiple deprivations. Such studies will guide informed decision-making and policy formulation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The challenge that school management teams face in navigating discipline and addressing the diverse struggles of learners is deeply embedded in the fabric of the South African educational system. The impact of overcrowded classrooms is substantial, making it difficult to enforce discipline effectively and provide the individualized attention each student deserves. Striking a balance between maintaining a nurturing learning environment and dealing with behavioural issues becomes a noteworthy struggle in this setting. The inconsistent application of a school code of conduct compounds the issue by preventing the establishment of clear behavioural expectations and consequences, resulting in a lack of fairness and consistency in disciplinary actions.

Moreover, the lack of substantial support from the Department of Basic Education amplifies this challenge, adding another layer of complexity. The scarcity of necessary resources, guidance, and training from the central educational authority hampers the school management teams' ability to handle disciplinary matters effectively and address the unique needs of students grappling with multiple deprivations. A comprehensive integrated management approach is crucial in addressing this challenge, recognizing, and addressing not only disciplinary concerns but also the broader socio-economic, cultural, and psychological aspects of each student. This approach calls for a collaborative effort involving educators, parents, community members, and the Department of Basic Education to develop well-rounded strategies that nurture an inclusive and supportive educational environment.

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