

School Safety in Township Schools: Case Study of Secondary Schools in the Tshwane North District in Gauteng Province of South Africa

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Abstract

Crime is a global challenge, and regrettably affects all sectors of the society. The education sector is not spared from this scourge. South Africa, just like many other countries is constantly facing multiple crimes that overlap into schools and threaten school safety. The problem is that a lack of adequate safety and security measures is causing a variety of crimes to thrive in South African schools. The South African government legislated school safety measures to mitigate the challenge. This study investigates the perceptions of secondary school teachers on school safety measures in the Tshwane North district in Gauteng province of South Africa. This qualitative study used an interpretive paradigm. A case study design was employed in the study. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Thematic data analysis was employed. This study is underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory. Findings revealed that community factors play a huge role, since public schools are often located in disadvantaged communities that are characterized by higher crime rates or prevalent gang activity, where substances such as alcohol, drugs, and firearms are readily accessible. To make the public secondary school in Tshwane safer, the researcher suggested installing surveillance cameras, engaging the community more, implementing restorative discipline strategies, and promoting safe reporting mechanisms by ensuring that reported incidents are investigated promptly and without bias.

Keywords

School Safety, Safety Measures, Safety and Security, Township Schools

1. Introduction and Background

South Africa is ranked high among countries with the highest crime rates. According to the statistics, there were 82 murders per day in South Africa in 2023 (Koko, 2023). According to the Gauteng provincial quarterly report, the October/November in 2023-2024 shows that 1787 people lost their lives through crime (Ngoveni, Khosa, & Mofokeng, 2024). Teacher unions in South Africa like South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) and National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA) call for strict safety measures in schools following the killing of teachers (Mahome, Mphahlele, & Malatji, 2024: p. 29). Crime and violence seem to be on the rise in South African schools despite existing legislation, such as: the South African Schools Act, 1996 (84 of 1996). The types of crimes prevalent in schools range from assault, sexual abuse, rape, substance abuse, murder, and bullying among others. The question that this study asks is: How do secondary school teachers perceive school safety measures in the Tshwane North District? The former Minister of Basic Education Mrs. Angie Motshekga responded to the killings of teachers by highlighting how the Department of Basic Education (DBE) continues to place a high premium on school safety and concentrating on creating a supportive atmosphere for teaching and learning (Republic of South Africa, 2022). Given the magnitude of this challenge, the Department of Basic Education (DBE), under the guidance of the School Safety Directorate, is tasked with ensuring the safety of educators and learners. The National School Safety Framework (NSSF), an upgrade of the Hlayiseka Early Warning System, was introduced and implemented in 2015 by the DBE, the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, and UNICEF South Africa in response to a growing number of safety concerns for both students and educators (Department of Basic Education, 2016). The NSSF forms part of several national and international rules and regulations that acknowledge student and teacher safety as a fundamental component of high-quality education (Makota & Leoschut, 2016). According to Kutjwayo, Mabetha, Naidoo, Mahuma, Njobe, Ronelle Hlongwane, & Mullik (2023), the NSSF is a crucial tool for establishing, implementing, and monitoring minimal standards for school safety and for holding schools, districts, and provinces accountable. According to Republic of South Africa (2016), the National School Safety Framework is based on four pillars, namely: 1) *Creating a safe and responsive learning environment*; 2) *early identification and early intervention*; 3) *reporting*; and 4) *support and care*.

In addition to these measures, The South African government has enacted legislative measures to protect learners and teachers in public schools in response to safety concerns. Section 61 of the South African Schools Act, 1996, requires the implementation of safety measures to guarantee a safe learning environment for everyone (South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, s 61). The legislation incorporates measures such as officially designating public schools as areas where drugs and dangerous objects are strictly prohibited, as well as regulating the entry of visitors onto school grounds (South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, s 61). In ad-

dition, the National School Safety Framework offers guidelines to improve current safety policies and practices (South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, s 61).

Nevertheless, despite these endeavors, occurrences of violence and safety hazards endure, suggesting a disparity between the execution of policies and the implementation of efficient safety precautions. Therefore, it was essential to examine secondary school teachers' perspectives on school safety measures to address these issues and promote a secure and conducive learning environment for everyone. Moreover, conducting this research was crucial to understanding secondary school teachers' perceptions of school safety measures in the Tshwane North district.

2. Methodology

This study followed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The selected research paradigm for this work was interpretivism. The interpretivism research paradigm is based on the conviction that human events and interactions significantly shape society and help to form reality (Pulla & Carter, 2018). Particularly about how individuals view and interpret their surroundings, interpretivism emphasizes the need to grasp the subjective meanings and the complex realities people experience (Pulla & Carter, 2018).

A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit the participants for this study. This included three teachers from five different secondary schools in the Tshwane North District, for a total of 15 participants. The selected schools are classified under quintiles 1 - 3. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were preferred because they did not adhere to a predetermined question order, allowing for adaptation and supplemental questions to clarify and probe participants' responses (Creswell, 2014). Thematic data analysis was used in this investigation as it was a suitable method for organizing and analyzing the collected data.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Legislation Governing School Safety

Makota and Leoschut (2016) state that one of the most important instruments for combating school violence in South Africa is the National School Safety Framework (NSSF). The Minister of Education endorsed the NSSF in April 2015. This framework is based on national and international laws and policies and emphasizes the protection of teachers and students for high-quality learning environments (Goodness, 2025). A study by Makota and Leoschut (2016) emphasizes the NSSF's dedication to protecting children's rights and promoting the goals set out in the National Development Plan. To guarantee safe and fair access to education, the framework provides a methodical approach to implementation, monitoring, and accountability, along with minimum safety requirements for schools.

The NSSF's early application has brought to light problems and insights that require further study. Notwithstanding the framework's comprehensive approach to reducing violence, many schools inaccurately believe that school safety is primarily the responsibility of law enforcement or educational authorities (Makota

& Leoschut, 2016). This myth impedes efficient execution and overlooks the complex measures required to address violence in educational contexts. Furthermore, non-physical interventions meant to change behavior and improve school climate have been underutilized while physical security measures like police presence and reinforced infrastructure have been given priority (Stavrevska, Bohardsingh, Hernández Montoya, Cecilia Martínez, Mawby, & Carns, 2023). According to Le Mottee and Kelly (2017), school safety is still a significant issue in South Africa, and violence there has a detrimental effect on the learning environment. Education laws intended to improve school safety are essential to reducing violence and creating environments conducive to learning. However, it is important to consider how well these regulations enable educators to address violent situations in the classroom.

To investigate how the NSSF affects teacher agency in South African schools, Hanaya, McDonald, and Balie (2020) conducted research. According to their research, even while the NSSF provides guidelines for lowering violence and guaranteeing safety, these guidelines frequently fall short of fully enabling educators to deal with violent incidents in the classroom. The study found that, when it comes to putting pedagogical techniques that address disruptions caused by violence into practice, the NSSF mechanisms and the larger school environment fall short of supporting teacher agency, according to Hanaya, McDonald, and Balie (2020). Even while teachers are supposed to take on several responsibilities in enhancing school safety, such as gathering information and developing plans, the NSSF does not offer instructions on how to put appropriate teaching strategies into practice. As such, educators are left to deal with violent situations on their own without enough assistance, which makes it more difficult for them to keep the classroom productive.

3.2. Infrastructure and Facility Standards

To ensure the safety and security of both staff and students, Mohlala (2021) emphasizes the legislative requirements and standards for school infrastructure and facilities. According to a study done in Oyo State, Nigeria, following such guidelines is crucial to reducing security risks in public secondary schools (Dairo, 2020). Among the many things covered by these standards are accessibility standards, maintenance procedures, safety features, and building codes. The minimum structural standards for school buildings are outlined in building codes, which ensure they are earthquake- and flood-resistant. Effective emergency response depends on safety features such as first-aid kits, emergency exits, and fire alarms (Babatunde, Oche, & Paul, 2020). Regular inspections and repairs are required by maintenance procedures to keep facilities in top shape and reduce risks to occupants (Dahal & Dahal, 2020). According to Dairo (2020), accessible restrooms, elevators, and ramps make sure that schools are accessible to all students, including those with disabilities.

Khalid and Tadesse (2024) clarified that the laws governing school buildings

and amenities in Punjab, Pakistan. The research emphasizes the importance of these laws in improving school security and advancing educational fairness. Student and staff safety largely depends on building codes and safety features, and maintenance procedures ensure that facilities are kept up to date and safe. Accessibility requirements help ensure that all students, regardless of physical ability, can use educational facilities and resources. Securing safe and welcoming learning environments that promote student achievement and well-being requires adherence to these rules (Khalid & Tadesse, 2024).

Ensuring infrastructure standards are followed greatly enhances the general security of Tshwane North District secondary schools. Therefore, schools can reduce different safety hazards and guarantee the welfare of staff and students by following legal requirements and standards. For instance, maintenance procedures guarantee that facilities are safe and operational, and appropriate building codes and safety features help avoid accidents like building collapses and fires. Standards for accessibility ensure that all students can use educational resources and facilities, fostering diversity and equal learning opportunities. Furthermore, by offering favorable learning conditions that promote student development, adherence to infrastructure standards raises the standard of education generally (Dairo, 2020; Khalid & Tadesse, 2024).

3.3. Security and Emergency Readiness

Khalid and Tadesse (2024) clarified the state of the law about security protocols and emergency preparedness in educational institutions. They stress the value of strong legal frameworks that specify how to put access control systems, security cameras, and emergency response plans into practice. Dairo's (2020) study on public secondary school security in Nigeria provides additional insight into the significance of legislative provisions in addressing security issues in educational settings. Although Dairo (2020) focuses on a different geographic setting, the results highlight the importance of laws in enhancing school security and safety. Thus, within the framework of these studies, the general security posture of schools in the Tshwane North District was improved, in part, by legislative measures requiring security assessments, emergency response planning, and cooperation with relevant stakeholders.

3.4. Student Well-Being and Support Services

Legislative requirements and recommendations are essential to ensuring the provision of support services and student well-being in schools, as Khalid and Tadesse (2024) argue. These laws provide a framework for addressing several aspects of student welfare, such as counseling services, mental health support, and social-emotional problem interventions (Khalid & Tadesse, 2024). Such mandates are crucial in creating an organized strategy to enhance student well-being in educational institutions, as Khalid and Tadesse stress. Legislative frameworks clearly influence the support systems available to students, as evidenced by provisions

related to mental health support and counseling services (Peterson, 2024). To properly address students' psychological issues, Benso et al. (2024) stresses the need for qualified professionals, such as counselors and mental health practitioners, in schools. These services must frequently be available by law, guaranteeing that students have the tools they need to deal with problems like stress, anxiety, and depression. Legislation, then, facilitates the creation of school settings that prioritize students' physical, emotional, and psychological needs by outlining precise standards and requirements.

According to Peterson (2024), legislative actions can also support a comprehensive approach to school safety by addressing a broad spectrum of student needs. This method, as Khalid and Tadesse (2024) do, acknowledges that student well-being has several aspects and calls for all-encompassing strategies. Laws push educational institutions to combine mental health support services with physical security measures to foster learning environments where pupils feel secure, encouraged, and in control. Legislative requirements emphasize interventions to address social and emotional problems among students, as well as mental health care. Peterson (2024) covers laws that improve students' social and emotional skills, such as empathy, conflict resolution, and communication. With these initiatives, a constructive school culture emphasizing inclusion, diversity, and respect for one another is sought to be created.

3.5. Enforcement and Compliance Mechanisms

3.5.1. Perceptions of School Safety among Secondary School Teachers

For communities and educators globally, ensuring school safety is a top priority. Research consistently shows that a favorable school climate strongly influences academic performance, overall school success, and student well-being (Bradshaw et al., 2014). In their study of more than 25,000 high school students, Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, and Johnson (2014) found that students' academic engagement and sense of school connectedness were strongly correlated with their perceptions of safety, including perceptions of bullying, drug use, and security.

This emphasizes the need of establishing secure and encouraging settings for the development of efficient teaching and learning methods. Furthermore, thorough strategies emphasizing enhancing school climate are necessary to address issues related to school safety. According to Bradshaw, Cohen, Espelage, and Nanton (2021), a comprehensive school climate strategy should be implemented so that it successfully handles school safety issues. It has been demonstrated that programs that emphasize good relationships between students and between students and teachers, for example, help lower bullying and violent incidents and create safer learning settings.

Measuring school climate and the understanding of its various aspects, however, is a challenging task. The Key dimensions of school climate, as reported by students, were systematically reviewed by Lewno-Dumdie, Mason, Hajovsky, and Villeneuve (2020). Thus, safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional

environment, and school improvement procedures. Lewno-Dumdie et al. (2020) discovered that even when different measurement instruments are available, different studies define and quantify these dimensions differently. Practical evaluation and improvement of school climate are hindered by this lack of standardization, underscoring the need for more coherent measurement techniques. Practical manuals have been created in reaction to these issues to help schools enhance their climates. VanLone et al. (2019) offer high schools a detailed manual on how to improve their climates inside an MTSS (multitiered system of support) framework.

Furthermore, studies indicate that the school environment can influence the relationship between academic success and family structure. Positive school climate perceptions were linked, in a study by O'Malley, Voight, Renshaw, and Eklund (2015), to higher self-reported GPAs in various family structures. This suggests that students, particularly those from low-income families, can benefit from a favorable school climate. Interventions to improve school climate, however, may not always be as successful as they could be, given circumstances such as family structure and socioeconomic level. Thus, several factors, including the school climate, intervention techniques, measurement difficulties, and contextual factors, affect secondary school teachers' perceptions of school safety.

3.5.2. Factors Contributing to Lapses of School Safety in Schools

According to research, several significant factors contribute to lapses in school safety. These factors include issues with students' code of conduct, institutional policies, the school climate, and external influences. According to DiMeo (2015), inappropriate school climate, which can be defined as things like bullying, insecurity among students, and incompetence on the part of teachers, can fail safety precautions. According to the findings of one study, for instance, Kwong and Davis (2015) found that negative student perceptions of the school environment, particularly regarding safety, were associated with lower academic performance and more behavioural issues. Moreover, Wang and Degol (2016) underscored that a poor school climate increases the likelihood of delinquent behavior, which can jeopardize school safety.

The students' actions are another factor contributing to potential breaches in school safety. In the workplace, behaviors such as violence, bullying, and drug abuse can create a potentially hazardous environment for both the staff and the students. Lewno-Dumdie et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of addressing specific aspects of the school climate, such as relationships and safety, to reduce the frequency of harmful student behavior. Furthermore, Daily et al. (2020) proposed that a favorable school climate can improve student behavior, which in turn can lead to increased safety. This would be in addition to their emphasis on the significance of school climate in improving attendance and grades.

In addition, the institution's rules and procedures are very important for the safety of the school (Dairo, 2020). Policies about discipline, security, and crisis

response all have an impact on the overall level of safety that the school provides (Berkowitz et al., 2022). According to Kwong and Davis (2015), the overuse of security cameras and metal detectors can foster mistrust among students and make them feel insecure or threatened. On the other hand, harsh disciplinary actions, such as zero-tolerance policies, can unfairly single out specific student groups and heighten tensions within the school (Wang & Degol, 2016).

Concerns about the community and societal issues are external factors that can affect school safety. Inequality in socioeconomic status, access to firearms, and the rate of crime in the surrounding neighborhood are examples of external factors that have the potential to permeate the school environment. According to Kwong and Davis (2015), schools in high-crime neighborhoods may face additional challenges in ensuring the safety of their students. This is because students in these neighborhoods may be exposed to gang activity and violence outside of the classroom. It is also important to note that societal issues such as racism, poverty, and the stigma associated with mental health are a factor that undermines school safety initiatives.

4. Theoretical Underpinning

This study uses Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory better to understand the multilayered systems of the human dimension. The theory works well to help understand the construct of teachers' perceptions of school safety, as it concerns teachers who are at the center of a multitude of personal, organizational, community, and societal relationships. The school setting is an ecosystem where factors such as violence, discipline issues, lack of resources, policy expectations, and community violence influence and form the everyday experience. Earlier school studies presented in the literature suggest that issues, such as bullying, weapon possession, drug abuse, emotional problems, poor school facilities, and lack of safety measures, are issues that transcend an ecosystem and are not caused by a single variable (Siddique, Khan, & Rauf, 2023; Tshatshu, 2016; Aşor & Benbenishty, 2019). Thus, the ecological model best suits the study's aim of exploring teachers' perceptions in relation to a holistic, integrated, and contextual theory. Almughyiri (2025) discusses Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Ecological Systems and how it tackles the complex conditions of human reasoning and the behaviours that stem from those reasoning patterns. Teacher and classroom safety encompasses many systems and structures and is undoubtedly not a straight-line or isolated phenomenon. The day-to-day experiences of teachers are shaped by classroom dynamics, as well as by administrative practices, family structures, community safety, the district, and national legislative frameworks. The complexity of these variables highlights the ecological framework's control, emphasizing the interrelationships between a person and multiple structures and systems. Bronfenbrenner's theory supports examining these variables and situates teachers' perceptions within a complex milieu of socio-relational structures, socio-institutional impositions, and socio-cultural frameworks (Almughyiri, 2025). The ecological paradigm of Bron-

fenbrenner's theory also aligns well with the interpretive paradigm of this study. Interpretivism is concerned with the meaning that an individual/self attributes to an experience, whereas Bronfenbrenner's theory explains how such meaning is constructed through interaction with systems (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). Teachers' perceptions of safety are not constructed in isolation. They are the result of many factors, including the behaviours exhibited by learners, the level of support from the administration, access to safety tools, the community's level of crime and poverty, and the legitimacy of the policies of the actors in control at a national level. The theory thus enhances the methodological consistency of the research and strengthens its potential to provide rich, contextually grounded insights into teachers' lives.

5. Presentation of Findings and Discussion

5.1. Teachers' Perceptions of School Safety Measures

For communities and teachers globally, ensuring school safety is a top priority. Research consistently shows that a favorable school climate strongly influences academic performance, overall school success, and student well-being (Bradshaw et al., 2014). In their study of more than 25,000 high school learners, Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, and Johnson (2014) found that learners' academic engagement and sense of school connectedness were strongly correlated with their perceptions of safety, including elements such as bullying, drug use, and perceived security.

5.2. Personal Feelings of Safety While on School Premises

Across all fifteen participants, it emerged that the group retains a persistent, if qualified, sense of vulnerability while at school, a judgment shaped by influences that are at once institutional and social. A widely shared, prominent code, "insufficient security personnel," appeared in the remarks of numerous respondents. For instance, Participant A observed, "*The school budget does not extend to permanent security staff, and the provincial mandate seldom allocates guards.*" At the same time, Participant M added, "*Without an adequate security structure, visitors can enter and act without restraint.*" Participant D emphasized that, while guards are nominally deployed, "*the outcome is ineffective,*" suggesting that a mere security presence without professional training offers little effective deterrence. Such gaps in coverage, or the intermittent supply of inadequately qualified staff, cultivate an atmosphere in which teachers and learners alike are left to negotiate, essentially on their own, the risks posed by both the student body and external visitors.

A smaller but consequential group of responses coded as "*presence of structured safety protocols*" suggested that some teachers recognized targeted and sustained interventions. Participant E noted, "*The school fencing has been reinforced, and we maintain a robust partnership with the Community Policing Forum,*" while Participant L observed, "*We have the electric perimeter, visitors must*

obtain prior authorization from a teacher to gain access.” Such developments provided a measure of reassurance; nonetheless, the teachers unanimously agreed that the protocols remain hollow without ongoing supervision and a comprehensive suite of behaviour-management practices. Their accounts consistently assert that educator safety remains contingent and tenuous, dependent on both ongoing infrastructural upgrades and a stringent, coherent disciplinary framework to establish an authentically safe school climate.

5.3. Perceived Adequacy and Reliability of Existing Safety Measures

Collectively, the perspectives of all fifteen participants highlight a prevailing view that existing safety protocols within their schools are both inadequate and unreliable, calibrated not by policy but by geographical and institutional variations. Emergent thematic coding identified the phrase “inconsistent or insufficient security measures” as a recurring motif. Participant A offered a salient illustration: “*The department has deployed safety security for the previous month or two, which has helped, but we do not know how long they will last,*” neatly capturing the policy’s impermanence, which undercuts its effectiveness. Participant B added nuance by stating, “*A school running without sufficient infrastructure or enough security guards will have safety issues,*” thereby situating security within a broader lattice of resource scarcity. Participant M succinctly characterised the pedagogical fallout: “*Our environment is not suitable for teaching and learning,*” explicitly linking structural neglect to educational harm. A guarded facility did not guarantee protection. Participant D noted, “*Even though we have a big gate for security and security guards, it is ineffective,*” signifying that the mere presence of barriers and personnel is insufficient when their competence and coordination remain unassured.

5.4. General Attitudes towards the School’s Ability to Ensure Safety

The collective accounts of all fifteen participants convey a pronounced distrust in their institutions’ capacity to safeguard staff, articulated through pervasive scepticism about the sufficiency, uniformity, and equity of current protections. A prominent thematic code, “*leadership inattention,*” signals a widespread conviction that administrators do not elevate safety to a deliberate, strategic agenda. Participant J expressed profound discontent: “*The school management team... simply does not regard the well-being of the teachers as a serious concern,*” while Participant K unambiguously remarked, “*In my view, school safety is simply not part of the calculation at all.*” Participant O provided further scrutiny of administrative fragmentation, stating, “*The SMT does not articulate a coherent message... that is precisely why we struggle to manage discipline.*” These evaluations are reinforced by reports of slow administrative reaction to security breaches, a notable shortage of monitoring, and the intermittent application of published regulations. Collectively, such deficiencies foster an atmosphere in which educators experience

pervasive vulnerability and inattention. The secondary thematic code identified, “*perception that policies favour learners over teachers*,” encapsulates widespread irritation with the existing statutory apparatus related to school safety. A significant number of respondents contend that the prevailing regulatory landscape confers overly broad rights on learners, thereby constraining teachers’ ability to enforce order. Participant F crystallized this sentiment by remarking, “*Teachers are not that safe... those policies tell the teacher that if you just touch a child, you are going to face serious misconduct.*” Participant I echoed the observation, remarking, “*The only one that is protected in the school is the learners,*” whilst Participant L supplemented the critique by observing, “*The legislation is always accommodating learners... we are not protected.*” Such statements substantiate a prevailing conviction that, notwithstanding the detection of imminent safety risks, the procedural and statutory restrictions imposed upon teachers effectively weaken their disciplinary authority and compromise the integrity of the entire safety configuration within the educational institution.

5.5. Awareness of Department of Education Safety Policies

There is a notable divergence in the degree of awareness and comprehension of Department of Education (DoE) safety policies, with a prevailing theme of constrained or fragmented knowledge. The recurring code “*general awareness without detailed understanding*” surfaced in nearly every transcript. Several respondents acknowledged the existence of safety policies yet confessed to a lack of familiarity with their comprehensive provisions and associated procedures. Participant C, for instance, remarked that “*the government has established safety guidelines; however, schools do not consistently adhere to these protocols,*” indicating a cursory awareness without knowledge of the policies’ operational intricacies. Participant O disclosed, “*I do not understand it at all... most of the principals are struggling a lot with implementing that policy,*” while Participant N characterized the situation by stating, “*I am unaware of what is happening with the school legislation, especially in our school.*” Such limited comprehension was frequently coupled with exasperation at what respondents deemed excessive procedural intricacies, which they perceived as obstructing the effective implementation of policy in their schools.

5.6. Interpretation of Legislative Guidelines for School Safety

The collective respondents exhibit marked divergence in their application of statutory provisions governing school safety, with several characters portraying the requirements as distant abstractions that do not adequately cohere with the situated practices of pedagogy. A recurrent thematic strand, identified as “*perceived learner-centered bias*,” epitomises the conviction that current legal stipulations privilege the protective interests of pupils at the expense of the safety of instructional staff. Participant F, for instance, contended, “*It is more child-centered... it makes it less friendly to teachers because it is more about if you do this to a child... but nothing if the child does this to an educator.*” Participant I offered an analo-

gous appraisal: “*The only one that is protected in the school is the learners,*” while Participant L corroborated this assessment, stating, “*The legislation is always accommodating learners... we are not protected.*” Such commentaries manifest a pervasive sentiment among educators that statutory codifications are not neutral guarantors of safety but asymmetrical architectures that curtail the scope of pedagogical authority and render staff susceptible to learner-perpetrated misconduct.

5.7. Perceptions of the Implementation of Safety Legislation in Schools

Across the interviews, a clear consensus emerged: existing safety regulations in schools are poorly applied, often mere formalities, and undermined by capacity limitations and contextual pressures. The recurring phrase “*policies in theory but weak in practice*” captures the pervasive disappointment with the disparity between codified rules and field realities. Participant C observed, “*The central authorities lay out safety guidelines, yet actual compliance at the school level remains erratic.*” At the same time, Participant G asserted, “*In practice, the safety policy is absent.*” Participant O elaborated, “*Many principals are overwhelmed by the expectation to enforce a policy that... the systematic steps and roles are rarely articulated.*” Collectively, these testimonies indicate that, despite statutory frameworks, sustained and systematic operationalisation is absent, mainly because compliance liabilities are neither adequately scrutinised nor uniform across the district and school levels.

5.8. Inadequate Infrastructure and Maintenance Issues

A recurrent theme articulated by all fifteen interviewees was “*school infrastructure as a barrier to safety,*” denoting a pervasive conviction that deteriorating facilities and a failure to sustain them expose both learners and educators to preventable risk. Respondents frequently attributed instances of compromised safety to identifiable frailties in the built environment, including jagged fences, gates that remain unlatched, and buildings showing signs of neglect. Participant D observed, “*We may have a large gate and guards on the premises, but that does not matter when the design and upkeep are neglected,*” thereby illustrating how ostensibly protective elements operate in practice only when actively maintained and correctly conceived. Participant G expressed frustration with the lack of systemic facility maintenance, remarking, “*When the infrastructure is neglected, the message is clear: the environment is unsafe for all of us.*” Participant H added that structural gaps invite intrusion: “*When the fence is breached, and entry is unmonitored, here is how fraud, theft, or even violence appears on campus.*” Taken collectively, the testimonies indicate that a secure, regularly attended environment is a prerequisite for safeguarding the educational community; without that condition, the campus remains a predictable target.

5.9. Absence or Inconsistency of Permanent Security Personnel

The irregular availability of dedicated security personnel emerged across inter-

views as a persistent vulnerability in school safety protocols. Respondents reported that sporadic guard shifts leave campuses defenceless during highly sensitive periods, early-morning arrivals, the hours immediately following dismissal, and large extracurricular gatherings. Participant G noted, “*Sometimes the guard is not here... when that happens, anything can happen*,” conveying the heightened sense of risk when oversight vanishes. Participant H added that inadequate supervision of entryways poses an additional hazard: “*People can just walk in... there is no proper control of entry*.” Participant D underscored the collective effect by observing, “*Even though we have a big gate for security and security guards, it is ineffective*,” revealing how irregular monitoring undermines even physical barriers. In the absence of a continuous, dependable guard presence at critical ingress and egress points, the school cannot maintain a secure perimeter.

5.10. Limited Community Engagement and Support

The limited degree of community engagement emerged as a decisive factor contributing to the observed lapses in school safety. Interviewees uniformly observed that parents and residents seldom participate in school safety initiatives, thereby weakening the shared moral and operational obligation to cultivate a secure environment. A common theme arose when Participant H remarked, “*Many community members are illiterate... they do not see the need to participate in school meetings*,” highlighting the interrelated barriers of educational deficits and limited information. Participant N illustrated the broader social ecology by noting that “*children manage numerous households... drug and substance abuse run rampant*,” thereby situating the school hazard in a household and neighborhood context. Participant D framed the surroundings even more starkly: “*Our community is violent*,” underscoring the extent to which the external environment not only neglects to buttress but actively erodes the conditions for school safety.

5.11. Low Parental Involvement in Safety Matters

The participants consistently indicated that minimal parental engagement in safety initiatives presents a persistent obstacle in all sampled schools, thereby attenuating the impact of even well-conceived safety protocols. Respondents commonly observed that notices for safety workshops, policy review gatherings, and general school assemblies are routinely disregarded. Participant H commented, “*Many community members are illiterate... they do not see the need to participate in school meetings*,” drawing attention to the interplay of low educational attainment and probable scepticism toward institutional processes as barriers to constructive participation. Participant O corroborated this by stating, “*When we call for meetings about safety, only a handful come*,” thereby documenting the chronic, narrow attendance that shifts decision-making authority to a limited, potentially unrepresentative segment of the parental body. The resulting gap in broader community consultation compromises the procedural legitimacy and substantive relevance of safety protocols, which may consequently be formulated on perceptions that do not accurately reflect the students’ domestic environments.

5.12. Presence of Outsiders Posing Threats to Staff and Learners

The presence of external individuals on school grounds is consistently identified as a significant security hazard, with respondents reporting recurring breaches that undermine overall safety. Many accounts attribute vulnerability primarily to structural failures and deficient visitor management, conditions that render control of access virtually non-existent. Participant H articulated, *"The broken fence and the absence of proper entry supervision allow anyone to stroll in,"* implicating both dilapidated physical barriers and the absence of deliberate oversight. Participant G echoed this sentiment, asserting, *"The school is in constant disrepair, and the surrounding area is anything but secure,"* arguing that the degradation of both the site itself and its immediate neighbourhood compounds the risk. Participant D further remarked that, *"A large gate and the presence of security staff operate but still fail to deter unauthorized access,"* emphasising that hardware measures, in isolation, fail without constant, vigilant application of policy and personnel evaluation.

Several respondents connected the intrusions to wider patterns of community crime, gang intrusion, and substance use, which intensify the perception of danger to an alarming degree. Participant N explained that dominant social determinants impact the school environment, asserting, *"Drug abuse and substance abuse are significant contributors,"* and observed that these patterns frequently extend to school grounds when outsiders engage with the campus. Participant D bluntly commented, *"Our community is violent,"* suggesting that the volume and gravity of hostile episodes are closely tied to the prevailing socio-political context. Participant M observed, *"We only see the police when something bad has already happened,"* revealing that official security actions are predominantly reactive. This cycle of delayed response permits recurrent exploitation of the same weak points, effectively consigning both educators and students to a perpetual atmosphere of instability.

6. Limitations of the Study and Future Research Direction

This study acknowledges a methodological limitation and therefore suggests that future research adopt a quantitative design while considering all available options. To collect data, semi-structured interviews were used.

7. Recommendations

This study recommends that: school infrastructure needs to be reinforced; school safety policies require review; and reinforcement of community engagement and partnerships; leadership and governance.

8. Conclusion

This study concludes that there is a need for external collaboration to improve school safety, and they highly encourage the active participation of the School Governing Body to present parents. Furthermore, Basic Department of Education

should allocate sufficient funds for structural maintenance at schools, train teachers regularly on safety issues, and hire highly trained security personnel.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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