



Inequalities in the Cape Flats: Principals' perspectives on children's schooling



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Background: A separate, apartheid system of schooling in South Africa entrenched European racialised ideologies of white supremacy that left a legacy of social, economic, and educational inequalities. The 1995 White Paper for Education, the 1996 *South African Schools Act*, and the Revised National Curriculum Statement outlined steps for equalising education. However, inequalities within the schooling system remain.

Aim: The study aimed to understand how principals experience the lasting effects of apartheid-era segregationist policies in primary schools and to document principals' solutions.

Setting: A meeting of principals who work at primary schools in the Western Cape province.

Methods: Researchers purposively sampled four principals from the primary schools represented at the meeting, conducted semi-structured interviews with the principals chosen, and adopted an interpretive approach to analyse findings.

Results: This study finds from principals' perspectives that neighbourhood gang violence, and highly unequal funding for schools in different neighbourhoods adversely impact primary school children's education and principals' abilities to lead as a result of context, overcrowding and inequality. Principals note that when parent-led programmes such as the Walking Bus produce a positive effect, the government tends to undercut parents' efforts to work with principals to secure and equalise young children's schooling.

Conclusion: Giving greater governance power to parents and principals may help to equalise the extremes of inequalities in primary schools remaining from Nationalist Party policies of the pre-1994 apartheid era.

Contribution: This study contributes to primary school principals' ideas for improving primary schoolchildren's education.

Keywords: children; race; white supremacy; white nationalism; colonial legacies; gang violence.

Introduction

The history of schooling in South Africa started with the indigenous people who passed on the skills and knowledge required for their communities to survive and thrive (Seroto 2011). This way of life was distorted by the introduction of the colonists and further eroded by the apartheid system, which diminished the indigenous way of life (Seroto 2011).

After the end of the Anglo-Boer war, on 31 May 1902, the Boers or Afrikaners developed their own education system, Christian National Education, as they felt that the British education system was disparaging of Afrikaner cultural practices (Kallaway 2010; Lebeloane & Madise 2013).

According to Bauer (2018), in 1951 the Eiselen Commission defended the decision of the government, which came to power in 1948, that education be based on racial lines¹ (Bauer 2018). This laid the foundation for apartheid legislation, which introduced the *Bantu Education Act of 1953*, the *National Education Policy Act of 1967 (amended in 1982)*, and the *Constitution Act of 1983* (Seroto 2013). The curriculum of Bantu education was designed to prevent native South Africans from progressing thereby limiting the intellect of the students and teachers (Keswell 2010).

1. The references to diversity and race in this article, such as black, mixed race and Indian, follow the racial categories as listed in the *Population Registration Act, No. 30 of 1950*. This does not, however, indicate that the study accepts these racial categories. The researchers acknowledge the complexity and problematic nature of race and are aware that, despite the occurrence of these categories, and the references to diversity, they are not homogenous and fully representative of a participant's identity.

Note: Special Collection: Interrogating Coloniality in South African Primary Schools.

Under apartheid, the government controlled the separation of people according to their own identity and uniqueness to ensure harmony through the separation of different racial groups (De Clercq 2013; Wolhuter 2018). This separation extended to education under the apartheid system. Schools were divided by race, which exacerbated and reinforced the inequalities within a divided society (Tibbitts & Weldon 2017). The curriculum was designed to domesticate and indoctrinate people by building the white race at the expense of all others (Msila 2007), thereby maintaining the master-servant relationship between white people and all other races (Tibbitts & Weldon 2017).

Dr H.F. Verwoerd, the Minister of Native Education at the time (1950–1958), believed that black people could never be equal to white people; therefore, he emphasised the complete separation of the different racial groups (Legodi 2001; Seroto 2018). Verwoerd declared that the education system for Africans had to be decided by the white people, and in particular, the Boers, which resulted in black Africans only receiving a meagre education that would prepare them for various forms of labour, and consequently confine black Africans to low paying jobs and manual labour (Legodi 2001; Tibbitts & Weldon 2017).

Black South Africans were initially despondent and then rebellious as they felt that the education system had dehumanised them. University students and school students joined the anti-apartheid struggle uprisings and protests of 1976 (Legodi 2001; Houston 2016), which brought students of mixed race in South Africa to the forefront of the struggle against apartheid through school boycotts and protest marches (Davis 1989; Molteno 1987). The protest of teachers, expedited by unions and students, against poor infrastructure, violence and preventable deaths of students (Ramrathan 2020) resulted in vandalised school buildings.

The separate education systems had severe consequences for all South Africans and in particular education. The apartheid social control (Msila 2007) left a legacy of bitterness and a backlog in the maintenance of infrastructure (Legodi 2001; Tibbitts & Weldon 2017). After democracy in 1994, the democratic education system dismantled the apartheid education of 19 racially and ethnically divided departments into one national department with nine provincial departments (Department of Education [DoE] 2001).

On 26 May 1994 while addressing the National Assembly, Professor Bengu, then Minister of Education, claimed he would prioritise the transformation of education (Legodi 2001). He insisted that the education department would ensure equal education for all people, thereby renewing society and uplifting all people. Bengu and the government may have been successful in offering access to education to all students in South Africa, but they were not successful at ensuring the quality of education: the government inherited a poor education system that required radical transformation to be accessible to all South Africans (Christian 2023).

New policy documents were developed, which were meant to ensure the democratisation and equalisation of education, namely the 1995 White Paper for Education and Training (Tibbitts & Weldon 2017) and the 1996 *South African Schools Act (SASA)*. Despite the new policies and Acts, the new education department after 1994 had to address the fact that many adult South Africans were functionally illiterate, and that conditions at many schools, notably those that served learners of mixed race, were extremely poor. In addition, within the first 5 years in particular, the education department had to address high crime rates and other obstacles, which prevented the cultivation of a productive culture of teaching and learning (Mestry & Ndhlovu 2014).

The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) was produced to develop standards for crafting a better system for all teachers and students and formed the base for the values that are honoured and valued in the *Constitution of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996* (Tibbitts & Weldon 2017), namely, values of ‘*democracy, social justice, equality, non-racism and non-sexism, Ubuntu (human dignity), an open society, accountability, rule of law, respect and reconciliation*’ (Msila 2007:152). The national curriculum resulting from the RNCS was meant to give equal opportunities for all students through democratic pedagogy in all schools. However, the inequalities within the schooling system, such as poor infrastructure and a lack of resources, regardless of the policies by the democratic government, have not been done away with (Tibbitts & Weldon 2017).

Despite the attempts by the government to improve the quality of and access to education for all students, in 2019 ‘100 schools [were] still to be built, 9000 schools [were] still using pit latrines, 300 schools [were] without electricity – which must be corrected’ (Reddy & Zulu 2019:2). De Wet and Wolhuter (2009) and De Clercq (2020) suggest that little has changed since 1994; the African National Congress (ANC) vision for all students to have access to education, although documented and passed as law, sits on paper only. Within the broad changes after the 1994 democratic elections was the increase in the number of students per class leaving teachers overburdened in very different contexts.

Methodology and sample

This qualitative ethnographic study builds on a broader, years-long phenomenological study utilising semi-structured interviews that Christian conducted with teachers, on the topic of teachers’ motivation to teach in challenging school contexts in the Cape Flats, Western Cape, South Africa (Christian 2023). That study documented and analysed the implicit legacies of apartheid-era policies that continue to adversely affect teachers’ motivation. Informed by Christian’s phenomenological study of *teachers’* motivations, this article considers the inequalities that *principals* perceive continue to persist within South African schools (De Clercq 2020), specifically within the Cape Flats area of the Western Cape, as a result of the colonial pre-apartheid era and the apartheid era.

In conducting research presented herein, both researchers attended a meeting of principals and teachers who work at schools in the Western Cape. Owing to her prior and ongoing work with principals and teachers at these schools, Christian convened the meeting and introduced Stambach to the attendees as a visiting lecturer at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and a researcher from the University of Wisconsin. Stambach observed a portion of the meeting, then immersed herself in teachers' and principals' activities to observe their interactions, before finally speaking directly with a subset of principals, one at a time (Caulfield 2023; Christian 2023; Kramer & Adams 2017).

Although researcher bias can be a drawback of observational and interview-based studies (Caulfield 2023; Kramer & Adams 2017), in this case, Stambach, the person conducting the interviews, did not know, and was not known to, the participants, thus minimising any long-term bias established through multiple interactions between the interviewer and interviewees. Given that this study sought to understand whether, if so, how principals experienced lasting effects of South African white nationalists' apartheid-era segregationist policies, Christian purposively selected a sample of four principals from the schools represented at the meeting.

The sample included a principal and a teacher from four different schools. Three of the school principals indicated that their schools sat at the intersection of rival gang territories, namely Signal Hill Primary School, Lion's Head Primary School, and Robben Island Primary School, while the fourth, Riverside Primary School, is located in a 'leafy, historically white' suburb.

Mr Simon, the principal of Signal Hill Primary School, indicated that his school is situated where three rival gangs' territory, namely the American, the Hard Livings, and the Fancy Boys, intersect and where the gangs all enrolled their children.

Lions' Head Primary school is located 'a stone's throw' from Signal Hill Primary School. Mr Milnerton, a principal with little more than a year's experience in the position, indicated that after taking time to get to know the school and the community, the trenchant structural inequality mapped the legacy of apartheid-era racial classifications against extremes of wealth apparent in lifestyle disparities.

Mr Richards, the principal of Robben Primary School, described the school's catchment area as 'calm' compared to Signal Hills' and Lion's Head's, but that the area consisted of many unemployed people who had been evicted from the District Six area, near the city centre of Cape Town, as a result of the National Party's apartheid policies.

The principal of Riverside Primary School, Ronald, indicated that his school does not have the same challenges of gang

involvement and/or poverty as it is situated in an affluent formerly white-only catchment area. The school's major safety issue was overcrowding because of the high demand for a place at the school. The wealthier alumni donate to the school and the school engages in outreach programmes.

The names of the schools and the participants have been changed to ensure confidentiality. The contact with the participants allowed for confirmation of the data on their lived experiences, which is transferable to other schools in the Cape Flats. The researchers adhered to the do-no-harm principle thereby offering the participants minimal risk.

Ethical considerations

An application for full ethical approval was made to the Cape Peninsula University of Technology Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee on 9 June 2020. The ethical clearance number is EFEC 2-2/2020.

Findings

The meeting occurred in early 2022 at Signal Hill Primary School, located in the Cape Flats, Cape Town, an area that the South African apartheid government created in 1966 to house low-income 'mixed race' families. Across the street from Signal Hill Primary School, parents, walking in the park the previous Saturday, had discovered two dead bodies. Responding partly to that event, the four principals and one teacher from each school gathered to compare their health and safety regulations. Stambach asked principals about their role as school leaders in maintaining a safe environment for teachers and students.

Mr Simon, leaning forward in a metal chair, hands and elbows on the table, spoke first. He responded to community violence, he said, by creating a safe zone at school. Simon drew a map to make his point. He indicated his school, Signal Hill Primary, at the centre of the picture, around which gangs claimed territories. American territory lays on the western side, Hard Living's patch to the south, and Fancy Boy's region to the east. A highway bordered the north fence of the school. To keep the peace, Simon said he brought rival gang members together at parent meetings and reminded them that they too had been students at this school. 'You don't want your children to be killed at school by a stray bullet because you're fighting, do you?' he rhetorically asked gang parents.

'We also rely on the Walking Bus', he mentioned; parents who walked kids to school provided class assistance, checked the toilets and lockers for drugs and weapons, and combed the playground for spent cartridges. 'These parents know the gangs and will warn our teachers and students if the gangs are planning to shoot'. The Walking Bus began in 2015 as a group of mothers protecting their children in gang territories, but in recent years had partly disintegrated. In 2016, the Cape Town mayor equipped and employed these parents. By 2021, citing budget constraints, the city appealed to private

'sponsors, stakeholders and partners who can assist in equipping the Walking Bus members' and discontinued it by the end of that year. 'We've lost our volunteer patrol because the city wanted to privatize and formally regulate it', said Mr. Simon, adding that the city's plan to privatise and regulate the Walking Bus had driven a wedge between parents and the city government.

Mr Milnerton, principal at Lion's Head Primary, was new to Lion's Head and not from the community. He monitored classes every day for a year before he made any changes to administration. 'You don't go into a gangland shooting. You go inside and learn things first', he said. Asked what the most difficult challenge he faced as principal was, he drew an equilateral triangle indicating the population of the City of Cape Town. At the top, he showed a tiny triangle and labelled it 7% white people. Below, he drew a parallel line marking the segment 3% Indians, then another line below that one, indicating 10% mixed race, 'that is us, at Lion's Head', he said, pointing to the sliver he had labelled in a demographically and financially minimal space. Then he labelled the remaining 80% black.

Below the first equilateral, he drew a second triangle with its base at the top. He labelled the 80% majority the poorest, the poor-middle class next, then a middle-class, and the tiniest triangle representing the upper class. The race-based demographic categories he named for the first triangle mapped almost inversely onto the second. 'Most of the poorest of the poor are black South Africans', he said, 'living in informal settlements and shack-townships; most poor and lower middle class live in the greater Cape Flats of Cape Town'.

Mr Richards, principal of Robben Primary, added, 'No one knows about us, the poor and lower-middle coloured class, or what we're going through until you see it. See that white car there?' He pointed to a dented Corolla parked near the school in front of an ordinary house. 'That's a drug den. That's where one of the gangs sells their stuff', he added. Stambach asked why he did not call the police:

'We work with the police and with the gangs. The school, police, and parents. It's a three-legged stool that keeps the peace. People here have to live here; the nationalist party evicted them from District Six.' (Male, principal, Robben Primary School)

A downtown neighbourhood whose 'mixed race' residents were forcibly evicted in 1966 by the white-controlled apartheid government. Most people are unemployed, have no money, rely on clothing and food donations.

Richards mentioned a non-governmental organisation (NGO), Simunye,² which assisted in the school. A US 501(c)(3) non-profit organisation that operates jointly with a South African NGO named Simunye stopped coming to the school at the start of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic 2 years ago. Simunye volunteers held raffles and

2. Viewed 11 April 2022, from <http://simunyeprojectus.org/> Accessed.

fundraisers, purchased food hampers for students and students' families, built playgrounds, and constructed and renovated classrooms. The NGO assembled volunteers from the United States and South Africa to work together in poor communities. 'Shirts for students, paint for classrooms – we appreciated everything', Richards said. 'But in the end, even though we need it, it doesn't keep us going. We don't need donations. We need to do things ourselves'. Stambach asked Mr Simon whether the school where they met provided students with books and computers. The books were locked in the principal's office and 'computers would not survive in gangland', he said, pointing to the classroom, furnished only with tables and chairs.

The only principal who did not sit with the others, Ronald, from Riverside Primary School, led a school in an affluent formerly white-only catchment area. He did not introduce himself as Mister but wanted the researcher to call him by his first name. A major safety issue Riverside faced was overcrowding; the school had too few seats to admit all applicants. During the first two COVID-19 years, Ronald said his school relied on its recently installed Google Classroom system to connect students to the school. Wealthy alumni donated computers. 'You can't socially distance and wear masks yet expect teachers to keep students on track', Ronald said of provincial health and safety requirements for schools that mandated students to work from home:

'Yet the provincial-level Department of Education treats all of us the same, they give us a fixed budget, fixed number of teachers, and a fixed curriculum. But it's not so; we're different. The disparities are huge.' (Male, principal, Riverside Primary School)

'What are the disparities?' Stambach asked. He mentioned the obvious: income distribution, health disparities, inequalities in infrastructure and informatics. 'But we do what we can do', he said. 'What is that?' Stambach asked.

In addition to using alumni funds to buy students' computers, Ronald provided two examples. Firstly, individual gifting, concerned personal assistance. Students at Riverside Primary volunteered at Simunye. 'They used to play with students here at Signal Hill but that stopped because of COVID-19'. Secondly, form of charity, foundation philanthropy, involved Riverside teachers, students and alumni, all of whom volunteered with an organisation called Christel House,³ a not-for-profit charity registered with the Western Cape government and established to provide social services, day care, and welfare services to poor children.

Founded by Christel De Haan, German emigree to the United States and co-founder of Resort Condominiums International, Christel House operates in locations significant to De Haan's commercial success in the high-end international tourist industry and receives support from other foundation philanthropies including Dell Technologies. Its public-facing web design displays marks of success and generosity,

3. Viewed 11 April 2022, from <https://sa.christelhouse.org/about-us/founder-and-board/1/christel-dehaan-1942-2020/>.

including an image of Simunye-T-shirted South African students riding the cable car to the top of Table Mountain.

Discussion

The analysis of data collected in this qualitative study saw the emergence of the following main themes: the context, overcrowding, and inequality. Each theme will be discussed individually next.

Context

A school's social context influences the extent to which the curriculum is delivered as a result of the level of effectiveness of instructional time. Where attitudes and behaviour of students and parents are not conducive to teaching and learning, principals have to work with teachers to control and discipline students before teaching can take place. In addition, high-poverty schools often have a negative effect on the processes within a school as the school often faces unpredictable situations (Raffo et al. 2007). The beliefs and traditions of a school, also referred to as the school ethos, can also play a role in determining the level of academic achievement of students (Rumnarain 2016). Teachers and the leaders of schools are expected to improve academic focus, lead powerfully and create a positive ethos despite the context of the school they serve (Van der Berg 2008; Raffo et al. 2007; Sukandar 2018).

Teodorovic (2009) states that the context of a school consists of different variables that all affect the teachers in different ways. These include the qualifications of the teachers, the infrastructure and the location of the school, while the processes at the school are affected by the behaviour of the teachers, the control at the school, and the curriculum (Chisholm 2019).

The physical, social and cultural aspects of the environment affect the ways principals perceive their schools and the ways teachers experience their work situation (Rumnarain 2016). These are regarded as external or extrinsic aspects of curriculum delivery and are significant to the effectiveness of the teachers (Onjoro, Arogo & Embeywa 2015). The physical aspects include actual equipment, including learning and teaching support materials, needed to be an effective teacher. The effectiveness of principals and teachers is impacted by the work environment, which includes the ethos of the school, policies, staff relationships, and all external environmental factors (Nyakundi 2012), which in the Cape Flats include high levels of poverty because of a lack of schooling, substance abuse and the negative effects of gangsterism.

The work environment is an important determinant of principals' decisions and teacher motivation. Studies in Nigeria describe the working environment for educators as the most impoverished of all sectors, which has a negative effect on the quality of teaching (Nyakundi 2012). A working environment that is safe and clean motivates educators,

while an unsafe working environment has a demotivating effect. However, there are educators who are able to cope within difficult teaching environments, particularly if they understand the culture of the students in the school (Bester & Du Plessis 2010). Poor physical conditions or systems that do not support teaching and learning have a negative effect on the performance of teachers (Nyakundi 2012; Department of the Presidency 2012).

Areas on the Cape Flats, where three of the four schools included in this study are situated and that were developed according to apartheid policies are plagued with poverty, substance abuse and unemployment. Compounding this is the high rates of violent gang activity that plagues the area that serves the Hard Livings, Clever Kids, Fancy Boys and Americans gangs. Where students abuse alcohol or narcotics, arrive at school under the influence of alcohol or narcotics and are part of a gang, it is difficult to manage their poor behaviour and engaging in teaching and learning is not possible. Students who are members of a gang often do not associate authority with anyone other than the gang hierarchy (Alleyne & Wood 2010).

Overcrowding

West and Meier (2018) indicated that the South African education system is experiencing overcrowding as a result of too few schools and an infrastructure that is ill-equipped to cope with the number of students. A large number of the students in schools are not from the community the school is based in, with many coming from different provinces in South Africa. A large number of students are from other countries in Africa, as indicated on the Western Cape Education Department's (WCED) [EduInfoSearch] site. According to the Western Cape Government's Audit Report for 2019–2020 Financial Year (WCG 2020:7), at least 130 000 students from the different provinces in South Africa and other countries in Africa, have migrated to schools in the Western Cape, which negatively impacts class sizes (West & Meier 2018). Many of the students do not speak the language of teaching and learning (LOLT) at home, which places them at a disadvantage as they first have to learn the LOLT before they can begin to learn the subject contents (OECD 2004). A further disadvantage for these students is that the parents are not able to assist the students in the LOLT and are therefore not able to assist with homework exercises (Makoelle 2014). This places additional stress on the teachers to assist the students to learn to speak, read and write in the LOLT.

A former member of the Executive Council for Education in the Western Cape, Ms D Schäfer, claimed that the WCED was not able to employ newly qualified teachers because of budgetary constraints (Nortier 2020), despite overcrowding in schools from an influx of children from other provinces (Schäfer 2020b). In the case of previously white and independent schools, the challenges of employing suitable teachers are minimal as they offer a more attractive school environment, and therefore are more attractive for prospective teachers (Eyal & Roth 2011; SACE 2010). Within the South

African context, according to research, generally larger class sizes result in poor educational outcomes (Köhler 2020). Schäfer suggests that the education situation is not conducive to offering all students a quality education, which should be the top priority (Mlambo & Adetiba 2020; Schäfer 2020a).

According to Matsepe, Maluleke and Cross (2019), overcrowding in schools affects educators' management of discipline, academic achievement, student and teacher motivation, and contribute to teacher stress and burnout. Overcrowded classrooms can be classified as disordered and out of control. Where teachers have to spend time disciplining students before they can teach them, the teachers are not able to manage their time effectively thereby reducing the time teachers have available to teach and manage tasks (Matsepe et al. 2019; West & Meier 2018).

Principals in our study echo Matsepe et al. (2019) findings. Overcrowding, budget constraints, poor resources, and parents and teachers trying to help their children but without adequate city support to do so, lead to principal stress and burnout. Where principals are not able to create an environment that engages parents in their children's schooling, or that can support teachers in their efforts to instil skills that encourage critical thinking and problem solving, the students no longer pay attention, which compounds discipline issues within the classroom (Matsepe et al. 2019). As a result of the large number of students in spaces that are not designed to accommodate large numbers, educators struggle to stir students' interests that could bring about critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which is further compounded by a lack of resources (West & Meier 2018). Studies in Latin America show that favourable teacher-to-student ratios, available teaching and learning materials, a proper library and effective teacher training have positive effects on teachers' classroom delivery (Teodorovic 2009).

According to Lali (2018), the Western Cape Education Department expects schools to accept more students, but they do not supply additional teachers or classrooms to house the students. Principals find this frustrating. More than 21 000 students enter the Western Cape annually without the relevant financial input from the National Treasury to build additional classrooms and employ more teachers (Lali 2018). In the event that sufficient classrooms or additional schools are built, this will allow for smaller class sizes, which will allow principals to work better with teachers and make them more creative in their lesson presentations thereby increasing the students' achievement (Matsepe et al. 2019).

Inequality

Welby-Solomon (2022), in her research, compared a school in a disadvantaged area with a school in a 'leafy' suburb. The students in the poor school have to contend with overcrowding, a lack of running water and electricity, and a shortage of teaching and learning materials. In contrast, the school from the previously white-student catchment area not only has access to running water and electricity but also to

quality facilities and quality teaching. The poor students have to compete with these more affluent students for places within tertiary education facilities, and for employment, but they have not been given the tools to do so despite any aspirations they may have for a better future. These two types of schools are what Spaul (2015) and De Clercq (2020) indicate as the bifurcated education system of South Africa, which indicates the inequalities within South Africa. According to Spaul (2015) and De Clercq (2020), a fifth of the South African student population attends affluent functioning schools while four fifths attend underperforming schools.

Infrastructure needs to be addressed urgently to ensure the safety of students at schools. Many schools, particularly those in disadvantaged areas, have not been maintained properly. Despite the poor infrastructure, many of these schools experience overcrowding, have insufficient teaching and learning materials, and are vandalised or burglarised because of a lack of security (Amnesty International 2020).

The disparity between student safety at the three Cape Flat schools in our study and the school near CPUT and the University of Cape Town (UCT) baldly indicates that the national system of schooling today fails to serve all South African students equally. Certainly, inequalities arise from high student-to-teacher ratios and poor resources in the three Cape Flat schools compared to the fourth school in our study (cf. Branson et al. 2012). However, as principals in our study explicitly state, it is the legacies of apartheid that continue to challenge their administrations.

For education to bring about a more equitable society, more resources need to be made available to all (Branson et al. 2012). While post-apartheid schooling has seen an increase in the average years students attend school, mainly within the primary school sector, not enough of them manage to complete secondary schooling, but this can only be achieved through improving the quality of education (Branson et al. 2012).

A major reason for poor performance is the quality of teaching offered because some teachers are underqualified and not able to manage the curriculum framework as they lack content and pedagogical knowledge (De Clercq 2020), as a result of the inferior schooling and teaching training they received (Bauer 2018; Legodi 2001; Seroto 2011, 2013, 2018).

Conclusion

Racial segregation was done away with in 1994, but schools that served the white areas under apartheid continue to be functional, while those that served the predominantly black areas remain dysfunctional and have made very little progress in developing literacy and numeracy skills of the students (Mestry & Ndhlovu 2014; Spaul 2012), thereby supporting this thesis which suggests that little has changed since the colonial pre-apartheid and the apartheid eras. In many of the dysfunctional or disadvantaged schools, 'disorder, distrust, rebellion, and a lack of cooperation have undermined efforts to create an appropriate culture of

teaching and learning' (Spaull 2012:2). Many of the more dysfunctional schools are underperforming, have high failure rates, high dropout rates and poor teacher attendance (Mestry & Ndhlovu 2014; Spaull 2012). These schools tend to serve the socio-economically disadvantaged, which likely accounts for the aforesaid, but ill-discipline, poor administration and low intellectual demand play a significant role.

There is a direct link between privileged circumstances and the quality of education offered in South Africa, as the quality of education in low socio-economic areas is inferior to wealthier schools (Mestry & Ndhlovu 2014; Spaull 2012; Stryzhak 2020). This perpetuates poverty as many struggle to enter the labour market. The inequality of apartheid education lingers, with enormous discrepancies between schools, mainly along racial lines, resulting in the students from disadvantaged, poor and marginalised families not receiving the quality of education that will extend to higher education (Mestry & Ndhlovu 2014; Sayed 2016). There is a direct correlation between the context of a school and the academic outcomes of its students and between the quality of the education offered at a school and the fees the school charges. In disadvantaged schools, there tends to be a broader age range of students in classes as many repeat grades, which gives rise to bullying, violence, and student insecurity, factors with which teachers must contend. Inequalities are evident in the difference between the physical facilities and the management of previously whites-only schools and disadvantaged community schools (Meyer & Chetty 2017; Tibbitts & Weldon 2017).

According to De Clercq (2020:7), 'the relationship between education, poverty, and inequality are dominated by the fact that educational inequality is driven by poverty'. This is because students do not have the support at home to assist in their education, the lack of resources within poor schools, and the lack of strong leadership within poor schools (De Clercq 2020). The bifurcated education system and its structures bring about unequal educational opportunities thereby reproducing the socio-economic inequalities that occur in the country. This occurs through, among others, unequal distribution of resources, unequal distribution of quality teachers and principals, and the manner in which teachers approach the curriculum, thereby disadvantaging those who were disadvantaged by the apartheid system even more (De Clercq 2020).

The South African education system, according to Amnesty International (2020), is 'characterised by crumbling infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms and relatively poor educational outcomes, is perpetuating inequality and as a result failing too many of its children, with the poor hardest hit' (Amnesty International 2020:1). In order to address the widespread faults in the system to bring about 'decent education' for all students, major change is required. The education system is plagued by blatant inequalities, resulting in poor academic performance, as a result of the long shadow of apartheid (Chibba & Luiz 2011; De Clercq 2020).

A student's experience of schooling is dependent on the colour of their skin, and the legacy of their birth (Amnesty International 2020).⁴

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

D.C. contributed to the following: conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, writing of the original draft, visualisation, project administration, software, validation, data curation, and review. A.S. contributed to investigation, review and editing, and funding acquisition.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

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⁴We acknowledge the limitations of our article, which represents a snapshot in time. However, our findings are substantiated by additional research, especially Chisholm (2019), Christian (2023), DeClercq (2020), Makoelle (2014) and Mestry and Ndhlovu (2014). Our work contributes to others' by focusing specifically on principals.

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