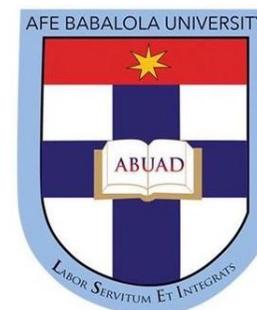




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MAKING SCHOOLING A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT: A CASE OF RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how schooling could be made a sustainable development project for rural secondary school learners whose drop-out rate is alarmingly high. The paper resulted from diverse discourses some of which regard current rural secondary school learners to be facing a bleak future considering how they prematurely exit the secondary schooling system in large numbers. This paper is conceptual and empirical in nature within the qualitative research paradigm. The research question guiding this paper is: what shall it take to transform the current public secondary school system to remain captivating and absorbing for rural learners never to be tempted to drop-out? Interviewing technique and documents review were employed to collect data. Out of the population of 16 secondary schools in one of the circuits in the Sekhukhune district in Limpopo Province, South Africa, three rural secondary schools were conveniently sampled. In each of the school, a science education specialist or head of department, a teacher serving in the School Governing Body and a Chairperson of the Representative Council of Learners, became research participants. Findings revealed that firstly, schooling could facilitate upward socioeconomic mobility of learners. Secondly, enduring schooling could be a key to escaping rural poverty. Thirdly, schooling could reduce inequalities. Fourthly, schooling could foster tolerance and peaceful societies. Fifthly, schooling could generate gender equity. Lastly, without schooling non-proficiency rates by learners could remain disturbingly high. The researcher recommends for the addressing of the gap between the rural under-connected, under-developed and the highly digitalised secondary schools to ascertain that no single learner is left behind as regards the sustainable development project through schooling. Furthermore, for the thriving of sustainable development project, governments need to be encouraged to prioritise schooling of all rural learners in policy and practice.

Keywords: Development, Inequality, Poverty, Rural, Sustainable.

1. INTRODUCTION

Rabichund & Steyn¹ stress that sustainable development of the schooling project for rural learners has a potential of improving the quality and standards of living for those learners. Where sustainable development of rural learners is ignored, it may not be surprising when such learners find it difficult to escape family hunger and poverty². Inculcating a spirit of sustainable development through schooling could serve as a mechanism of ridding society of children and youth whose future is gloomy. Nations aspiring to service Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG) which is about quality education for every learner, shall not relent in ascertaining that learner drop-out rates especially in rural secondary schools are addressed. This could be done through the improvement of monitoring and evaluation of the schooling process. Of essence is that monitoring and evaluation need to identify strengths and weaknesses of pupils as regards embracing schooling as a sustainable development project that benefits rural secondary school learners. Jabanyane³ and Ncube⁴ reason that monitoring and evaluation could promote learner accountability as regards keeping schooling a sustainable development project especially for rural learners. Succeeding to convert schooling into a sustainable development project for rural learners could minimise a situation whereby some rural secondary school pupils keep on neglecting their studies. That practice constitutes lack of dedication by those learners, a philosophy which sustainable development through schooling discourages⁵.

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¹ Shalina Rabichund and GM Steyn, 'The contribution of the Integrated Quality Management System to Whole School Development' (2014) 3(4), MJSS 348.

² United Nations, Impact of Covid-19 Virus on Education (United Nations Conference on World State of Education 2022)

³ MM Jabanyane, 'Model for Improving Monitoring and Evaluation of Integrated Quality Management System in Secondary Schools in North West Province' (Doctoral Thesis, Northwest University 2018)

⁴ M Ncube, 'Founders' dreams for Africa still alive as AU marks diamond jubilee' (Sowetan Live 2023, 2 June)

⁵ Msingathi Sipuka, M. 'African leaders' mediation in Europe is progressive despite our own conflicts' Sowetan Live 2023, 19 June) <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2023-06-19-msingathi-sipuka-african-leaders-should-invest-their-resources-and-time-to-resolving-own-conflicts/> accessed 2 July 2023

In the context of schooling, sustainable development relates to providing quality schooling or education to every rural child and youth as part of achieving a better and a more sustainable future for everyone⁶. This emphasises the need to acknowledge three types of sustainable development aspects, namely, the economic viability, the environmental protection and social equity. By implication, where schooling has successfully been turned into a sustainable development project for rural learners, such pupils are likely to grow up to be economically independent-minded and therefore, escape their original family hunger and poverty⁷ ⁸. Furthermore, such rural learners are likely to be energetic activists in avoidance of environmental degradation efforts. Furthermore, where schooling serves as a sustainable development project for rural learners, it could convert pupils into agents of social justice and equity in every space they occupy. Evidently, any nation whose schooling is able to take into confidence the involvement of its own rural learners in terms of supporting them to improve their lives and prospects against poverty, inequality and crime, has a bright future. Hence the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) resolution 8 of (2003) is emphatic for schools never to play down the importance of breaking down a circle of poverty surrounding myriad rural learners. Such a state of affairs in schooling could prepare an institution for organisational underperformance.⁹The notion of making schooling a sustainable development project is being enabled by the prevalence of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development¹⁰. Amongst others, Agenda 2030 stresses good health and well-being for children and youth as they are the future of this world. Furthermore, Agenda, 2030 accentuates a need for quality education for everyone. Some of the benefits of getting every school going child and youth to school is that they will learn knowledge and skills which will facilitate their contribution to the preservation and conservation of this world when they are adults. By implication, with learners especially from rural areas who have been to school and who were fortunate to be exposed to quality education, then the entire world

⁶ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals (African Union's Summit on Agenda 2030, 2015)

⁷ Ibid (4)

⁸ Ibid (5)

⁹ Ibid (6)

¹⁰ Ibid (6)

is likely to experience tolerance and peace¹¹. This is the case because quality schooling has a potential of enabling its recipients to foster co-existence in a peaceful world for everyone¹². The concept of sustainable development project becomes more relevant in view of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. For instance, Covid-19 pandemic caused a global education crisis. Reports from the United Nations¹³ unveil that most education systems were affected by disruptions in the form of closures of schools. It is no exaggeration to state that that had devastating results for children's learning and well-being. Closure of schools compromised the concept of sustainable development.

United Nations reports that it is estimated that 147 million children missed more than half of their in-class instruction over the past two years¹⁴. Apart from affecting rural learners more than urban pupils, closure of schools created a schooling disaster. The outbreak of Covid-19 virus triggered the school closures which negatively affected girls, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, children living in rural areas, children with disabilities and children from ethnic minorities more than their peers. It is in the above sketched context that the concept of sustainable development schooling especially for rural learners, becomes more necessary¹⁵ ¹⁶. By April 2020, close to 16 billion children and youths were out of school. Sustainable development schooling and learner drop-out rate are not in sync with each other. Where schooling has successfully been made the sustainable development project, the practice and habit of learner drop-out rate has to cease to exist¹⁷ ¹⁸.

¹¹ Ibid (2)

¹² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (The continuum 1990)

¹³ Ibid (2)

¹⁴ Ibid (2)

¹⁵ EJ Van Niekerk and PD Van Niekerk 'Managing change in education through a model of long-term leadership and short- term leadership' (2009) 8 (1), *Journal of Educational Studies*

¹⁶ Cas Olivier, *The DNA of Great Teachers* (Learning Designs 2012)

¹⁷ Anusha Naidu and Others, *Education Management and Leadership: A South African perspective* (Oxford University Press 2012).

¹⁸ Mabila Mathebula, 'Are Africans drifting back into servitude?' (2013) 50 (50) *The Thinker*

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Of the existing theoretical perspectives, the Contextual Intelligence Model was found to be the most relevant one for this paper. This is on the basis of the focus and the problem which this paper pursues. This paper concentrates on unravelling the challenge of rural secondary school learners rebuffing schooling and indirectly the sustainable development project. The sustainable development concept is being rolled out through schooling whose focus is to break the back of hunger and poverty which rural secondary school learners are trapped in. The problem manifests itself in many ways like when rural secondary school learners neglect their studies. This is difficult to countenance considering that failure to embrace schooling is the antithesis of sustainable development through schooling. Approaching the mentioned problem by rural secondary school learners from the angle of sustainable development project, necessitated the choice of the Contextual Intelligence Model¹⁹. The chosen model reasons that every problem occurs in a particular context and that its successful resolution has to consider the context of occurrence. One of the key reasons why this model is being preferred to others, is because of its emphasis of intelligence to recognise changes especially in schooling. For instance, in the past, rural pupils were not neglecting their studies that much, they were simply being denied schooling owing to colonialists and apartheid policies of that era. A solution has to be constructed as a way of eradicating the challenge of neglect of schooling by rural pupils²⁰. So, the application of intelligence in resolving schooling problems like neglecting one's studies, truancy and drop-out by rural learners, is what the Contextual Intelligence Model is propagating. Whatever steps are being taken in dealing with learners who do not embrace schooling to use it to escape hunger and poverty in future, neglect of schooling, has to include contextual awareness.

¹⁹ M Levin and J Banjies, *Enjoy economics* (Heinemann 2011)

²⁰ Matt Kutz, 'Contextual intelligence: Overcoming hindrance to performing well in times of change' (2011) 25(3) *Development and Learning in Organizations*

That would assist the problem-solver in being mindful of the entirety of the context^{21 22}.

The Contextual Intelligence Model reminds that nothing happens for the first time under the sun. This signifies that, in dealing with the problem of rural learners neglecting schooling and sabotaging sustainable development, it is essential for the researcher to have the historicity of the problem so that he has a firm grasp of its dynamics. The Contextual Intelligence Model reminds that the present has an influence on the future. This suggests that, how a problem like learner neglect of own schooling is being dealt with in the present, shall determine whether such a problem will recur in future or not. Evolving environment matters within the Contextual Intelligence Model. It is an environment that shall serve as an enabler or a disabler in unravelling the problem faced like this of pupils neglecting schooling yet wishing to escape hunger and poverty of their families²³. The Contextual Intelligence Model pushes for the sustaining of good teaching so that it does not become one of the contributors to learner neglect of own studies. The model regards a school just like a human life to be ever dynamic and whose dynamism ushers in a changed learner behaviour such as from taking one's studies seriously to neglecting them^{24 25}. The selected theoretical perspective for this paper is in complete zinc with the sustainable development project through schooling practices to be performed in secondary schools to aid them to contribute to the eradication of hunger and poverty. The concept of sustainable development through schooling is grounded on change diagnosis in education. This is to imply that sustainable development checks on whether there is growth, improvement, forward movement and maturity in schooling. This can be detected when a researcher applies the Contextual

²¹ Vusi Mncube and Clive Harber, 'Learner's involvement in democratic governance of schools: A comparative study between Britain and South Africa' (2009) 8 (1) *Journal of Educational Studies*

²² MP Sebola and TD Tonga, (2009). The effective management of public schools: reflecting on the role of the parent component in the Ximhungwe Circuit of Limpopo Province (2009) 8(1) *Journal of Educational Studies*

²³ Mike Bottery, 'Refocusing educational leadership in an age of overshoot: Embracing an education for sustainable development' (2011) 39(2) *International Studies in Educational Administration*

²⁴ Kholeka Constance Moloi, *The school as a learning organisation* (Van Schaik 2002)

²⁵ Philip Higgs and Jane Smith, *Rethinking Truth* (Juta 2006)

Intelligence Model in a flexible manner and in line with the functioning of a school as an organisation²⁶. In secondary schools where the concept of sustainable development exists, those institutions could be improvement-minded in the form of ensuring that all learners entrusted to those schools end up having the bright future and contributing to fostering tolerance in a peaceful world. The Contextual Intelligence Model thrives in institutions embracing the concept of sustainable development and where every practice there is being subjected to reflexive praxis to ascertain that sustainable development issues are never compromised^{27 28 29 30}. The Contextual Intelligence Model does not regard human beings as technocrats who have to be controlled like objects when constructing data from them. The selected theoretical perspective enabled the researcher to learn the purpose of individual actors and the social meaning they share with others and their implications for excellent schooling results that prepare learners for a sustainable future. Since caring less for one's studies by pupils retards meaningful involvement in the teaching and learning enterprise, it was the chosen theoretical perspective that better explicates the basis for such strange behaviour and how to overcome that utilising schooling to trigger sustainable development of every learner without leaving any single learner behind^{31 32 33 34}.

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- ²⁶ Matt Kutz and Anita Bramford-Wade, 'Understanding contextual intelligence: A critical competency for today's leaders' (2013) 15(3) *Emergence: Complexity and Organisation*
- ²⁷ Shirley M Hord and William A Sommers, *Leading Professional Learning Communities: Voices from Research and Practice* (Corwin Press 2008)
- ²⁸ Fumane Portia Khanare, 'School Management Team's Response to Learners who are Orphaned and Vulnerable in the Context of HIV and AIDS: A study of Two Rural Secondary schools in Kwazulu Natal' (Masters Dissertation, University of Kwazulu-Natal 2008)
- ²⁹ H Mueller, 'Advocate's scandal just a tip of the iceberg' (*The Star*, 2011 5 October)
- ³⁰ Angela Thody, 'The more things change, the more they stay the same? Nineteenth-century education leadership in Tasmania' (2011) 39(2) *International Studies in Educational Administration*
- ³¹ *Ibid* (28)
- ³² David P Ngidi, 'Black educators' resilience in teaching as a career' (2009) 8(1) *Journal of Educational Studies* Carolyne Adhiambo Kokeyo and John Oluoch 'Self-evaluation: A case study of a school in Dar Es Salam, Tanzania' (2015) 6 (21) *Journal of Education and Practice*
- ³³ T Khumalo, 'Our kids are pawns in this power game' (*Daily Sun* 2011, February 21)

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature indicates that societies of the world where pupils neglect schooling as a sustainable development project, are facing a bleak future^{35 36 37}. This is visible from the figures of close to 16 billion children and youths having dropped out from schooling by April 2020. Reversing this problem requires strengthening and revolutionising schooling and unreservedly making it a vehicle of sustainable development for every rural learner trapped in poverty which has to be addressed. Literature study confirms that neglecting of schooling, especially by rural learners could be explained in terms of pupils possessing fettered minds. Ramphela³⁸ and Mosele³⁹ demonstrate that due to being mentally colonised, the bright future of scores of rural African public secondary school learners ends up being stolen away. This is buttressed by Bernstein & McCarthy⁴⁰ when averring that scholastic underperformance by rural secondary school learners due to dis-embracing schooling as a sustainable development project, deserves to be combatted before becoming legendary in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Sustainable development through schooling aims at inspecting teaching and learning in schools⁴¹. Where the problem of snubbing schooling is quickly detected, mechanisms could be tried to overcome it⁴². Research ascribes learner neglect of their schooling to the absence of sufficient captivating and absorbing practices in schooling. At times lack of interest, absence of support and involvement of

³⁴ Makabelo Lelida Lehlaha, 'Leadership and management of classrooms with orphans and vulnerable children: A study of three primary schools in Lesotho' (Masters Dissertation, University of Kwazulu-Natal 2011)

³⁵ Carolyne Adhiambo Kokeyo and John Oluoch 'Self-evaluation: A case study of a school in Dar Es Salam, Tanzania' (2015) 6 (21) *Journal of Education and Practice*

³⁶ *Ibid* (4)

³⁷ Msingathi Sipuka, M. Trustworthy leadership key in building a developmental state. (Sowetan Live, 2023 14 July) <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2023-07-14-msingathi-sipuka--trustworthy-leadership-is-key-in-building-a-developmental-state/> accessed 15 August 2023

³⁸ M Ramphela, 'The culture of impunity' (City Press 2011, 14 August)

³⁹ Nhlanhla Mosele, 'No transformative activities for youth, so why celebrate' (Sowetan Live 2023, 21 June) <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2023-06-21-nhlanhla-mosele--no-transformative-activities-for-youth-so-why-celebrate/> accessed 15 August

⁴⁰ A Bernstein and J McCarthy, Teachers' Poor Value for Money (The Star 2011, 6 October)

⁴¹ Centre for Development and Enterprise, 'Teacher professional standards for South Africa: the road to better performance, development and accountability' (CDE 2017)

⁴² *Ibid* (5)

parents in the education of the young ones, is cited as contributing factors towards the integration of sustainable development project into the schooling enterprise, especially for rural secondary school learners where hunger and poverty are at their alarmingly high levels^{43 44}.

This paper placed super focus on neglecting of one's studies by rural secondary school learners as caused by inadequate monitoring and evaluation in those institutions^{45 46 47}. Cunningham and Gresso⁴⁸ and Coetzee, Van Wyk & Wydeman⁴⁹ lament that pupils ought not misuse schooling opportunity. Abuse of schooling time by pupils gets, parents instantly stressed-up. This suggests that parents could care more about learner progress more than rural secondary school pupils themselves. This is not entirely strange, especially this century. It is slightly becoming an unstoppable trend with the kind of rural secondary school pupils, populating learning institutions. Parents are being caught off-guard whenever their children fail to perform due to artificial obstruction such as little devotion to schooling. Jabanyane⁵⁰ and Sepuka⁵¹ stress that monitoring and evaluation maintain a high quality teaching and learning. The researcher agrees and contends that an element of the colonised mind is at play here as regards being a rural secondary school pupil that neglects one's studies⁵². Quality teaching that triggers quality learning at school needs to mitigate learner neglect of one's

⁴³ Alan Clarke, *The handbook of school management* (Kate McCallum 2007)

⁴⁴ Ibid (4)

⁴⁵ Gordon L Lippit, *Organisational renewal: Achieving viability in a changing world* (The George Washington University 1989)

⁴⁶ John Dlmabule Nxumalo, 'Leadership as a key responsibility of the school principal' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Johannesburg 2001)

⁴⁷ RN Marishane, RJ Botha and P Du Plessis, *School leadership in a changing context: A case for school-based management* (Van Schaik 2011)

⁴⁸ William G Cunningham and Donn W Gresso, *A cultural leadership: The culture of excellence in education* (Allyn and Bacon 1993)

⁴⁹ SA Coetzee, EJ Van Niekerk and JL Wydeman, *An educator's guide to effective classroom management* (Van Schaik 2011)

⁵⁰ Ibid (3)

⁵¹ Ibid (5)

⁵² SD Moore, FK Kochan, M Kraska, & EH Reames, 'Professional Development and Student Achievement in High Poverty Schools: Making the Connection' (2011) 39(2) *International Studies in Educational Administration*

studies. Hence the Centre for Development and Enterprise⁵³ identifies effective teachers as being a critical factor in determining learner achievement. Monitoring and evaluation in a school could reveal the need for the improvement of teaching or learning which could neutralise learner neglect of schooling. The thesis of monitoring and evaluation is to maintain high quality schooling for learners which will be a boost to the concept of sustainable development. When applied with devotion monitoring and evaluation have a potential of altering learners to begin to depict urgency with their studies⁵⁴. Where monitoring and evaluation are missing, neglect of studies by pupils could be aggravated by teachers who could be less dedicated to their teaching responsibilities as a result of being as mentally shackled as their pupils. Hence Maake⁵⁵ remarks that the conduct of myriad teachers is commensurate to “hunting- with the hounds and running with hares”. This signifies a paradoxical context within which some teachers who are anticipated to emancipate learners to be totally devoted to schooling to benefit sustainable development, are as mentally shackled as learners entrusted to them. With some teachers, such an occurrence is inadvertent while with others it is conscious and planned. Improving teaching and learning in rural secondary schools through the utilisation of monitoring and evaluation could lessen learner neglect of schooling⁵⁶ ⁵⁷. There are teachers who resist monitoring and evaluation which could elevate their teaching prowess and enhance sustainable development of rural secondary school learners. Evidently, teacher emancipation is closely tied to learner liberation. Literature review divulges that pupils in many rural secondary schools are not able to be mentally free to stop neglecting their studies, because they are under the tutelage of teachers who are as mentally imprisoned as them⁵⁸ ⁵⁹.

⁵³ Centre for Development and Enterprise, ‘Teacher evaluation in South African schools’ (CDE 2015)

⁵⁴ Christine Wise, Marion Cartwright and Pete C. Broadshaw, *Leading Professional Practice in Education* (Sage Publishers 2013)

⁵⁵ Nhlanhla Maake, *Barbarism in higher education: Once upon a time in a University*. South (Ekaam Books 2011).

⁵⁶ A Alpha, *Every manager’s desk reference*, (Penguin Group 2002)

⁵⁷ Abraham Zaleznik, ‘Managers as leaders’ (1999) 16(4), *The Harvard Business Review*

⁵⁸ P Senge and Others, ‘The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organisation’ (Doubleday 1994)

Exposing pupils to teachers whose minds are liberated helps. That could lead to learner transformation and learner accountability to their studies, something which boosts sustainable development project. This implies that it takes the liberated to liberate another of-course not ruling out the likelihood of mutual liberation. Neglecting one's schooling by the current rural secondary school pupils is an invitation to take sustainable development concept seriously⁶⁰. In rural secondary schooling, sustainable development is likely to meet diverse challenges one of which is the number of teaching periods which could meddle with its enforcement. Another hurdle associated with the implementation of the concept of sustainable development is when rural secondary school learners resist it by resenting schooling. A good indicator that rural secondary school learners are not always supportive of schooling and therefore not the concept of sustainable development, could be the perpetual engendering of low educational outcomes by a school⁶¹. The review of literature indicates that where pupils are neglecting their studies and teachers are found to be resisting the project of sustainable development, then a school has double trouble⁶². This is the case because both teachers and learners would be blind in the game of utilising schooling to capacitate learners to escape their family hunger and poverty. Had at least teachers have a sight in the form of being mentally free, then the challenge of total commitment to their studies by learners would have been surmountable. Review of literature demonstrates that persisting to neglect schooling by learners could orchestrate learner underperformance⁶³. Literature review attests that monitoring and evaluation could guide as regards performance measurement of both teachers and pupils as well as depicting how the concept of sustainable development is being utilised to benefit learners. This is necessary in terms of quickly identifying pupils who persist to snub schooling and the sustainable development project and to attempt to correct them when time still allows⁶⁴ ⁶⁵. Succinctly, the topic of this paper

⁵⁹ Ibid (41)

⁶⁰ Benjamin Kutsyuruba, Keith Walker and Brian Noonan, 'Restoring Broken Trust in the Work of School Principals' (2011) 39(2) (2011)

⁶¹ Nasser Salim Alghanabousi, Muhammad Faizal A. Ghani, Faisal Elham, 'The power of developmental performance appraisal'. (2013) 7 (1), Journal of Education and Learning

⁶² MJ Mosoge, and MW Pilane, 'Performance management: The neglected imperative of accountability systems in education', (2014) 34 (1), South African Journal in Education

⁶³ Ibid (4)

⁶⁴ WJ Levin, 'Why our education system is failing' (The Star 2011, 5 October)

signifies providing quality schooling or education to every rural child and youth as part of achieving a better and a more sustainable future to everyone⁶⁶.

4. OBJECTIVES AND THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This paper explores how schooling could be made a sustainable development project for rural secondary school learners whose drop-out rate is alarmingly high. Rural secondary school learners have an inclination of ignoring that schooling could be an escape route from family hunger and poverty. This is a serious contradiction by pupils in view of their working class status. The second objective relates to devising means to eradicate the neglect of one's schooling by rural secondary school learners. On the basis of the expressed objectives, the research question guiding this paper is: what shall it take to transform the current public secondary school system to remain captivating and absorbing for rural learners never to be tempted to drop-out? Incessant neglect of one's schooling by public rural secondary school pupils could increase the number of underperforming institutions^{67 68 69 70}.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper is a qualitative case study. The problem which this paper pursues, namely, incessant neglect of one's schooling by rural secondary school pupils, necessitated the design of this paper. Furthermore, the objective of this paper which is to explore how schooling could be made a sustainable development project for

⁶⁵ Ibid (33)

⁶⁶ Ibid (2)

⁶⁷ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical research planning and design*. (9th edn, New Pearson Publishers 2010)

⁶⁸ Margaret Diane LeCompte and Judith Preissle, *Ethnography and Qualitative design in Education Research* (2nd edn, Academic Press 1993)

⁶⁹ Equal Education 'School Infrastructure' <https://equaleducation.org.za/campaigns/school-infrastructure/> accessed 5 October 2023

⁷⁰ Derrick Meador, 'The role of the principal in school' (ThoughtCo 2019, 19 November) <https://www.thoughtco.com/role-of-principal-in-schools-3194583> Accessed on 22 February 2019

rural secondary school learners whose drop-out rate is alarmingly high, necessitated that this paper follows a qualitative research paradigm as against the quantitative one⁷¹. The choice of the qualitative methodology was triggered by the reality that this paper is being undergirded by the Contextual Intelligence Model⁷². The researcher saw a need to create a synergy between the qualitative research approach and the Contextual Intelligence Model. The combination of the two helped immensely in terms of illuminating issues of neglecting one's schooling and the utilisation of the sustainable development concept to mitigate the mentioned problem. The researcher utilised the theoretical perspective to explore the relationship between neglecting one's schooling and resisting the sustainable development idea to free rural secondary school learners from hunger and poverty⁷³. The researcher applied the mentioned theoretical framework, to explore how low educational outcomes in rural secondary schools could be curbed with pupils who are neglecting their schooling activities. Amalgamating the Contextual Intelligence Model and the qualitative research approach, aimed at maximising the comprehension of the pursued problem of neglecting one's schooling in view of its peculiarity and to determine its elimination⁷⁴. The combination of the two enabled the researcher to make an in-depth understanding of how despite many years of independence in South Africa, there are still rural secondary schools whose learners snub schooling. Such an in-depth understanding is necessary in order to operate from an informed position with regard to ultimately dealing with the problem in line with the sustainable development ideal.

Out of the population of 16 secondary schools in one of the circuits in the Sekhukhune district in Limpopo Province, South Africa, three rural secondary schools were conveniently sampled⁷⁵. In each of the secondary school, a science education specialist or an HOD, a teacher serving in the School Governing Body and a

⁷¹ Ibid (63)

⁷² Ibid (20)

⁷³ Ibid (34)

⁷⁴ Labby Ramathan, 'Learner poor performance: Provoking Bourdieu's key concepts in analysing school education in South Africa' (2017) 23 (1) Southern Africa Review of Education

⁷⁵ John W Creswell, *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (Sage Publishers 2010).

Chairperson of the Representative Council of Learners became research participants. A choice of a science education specialist or HOD was precipitated by the reality that learners normally develop a hatred of some kind against science subjects due to these subjects frequently being poorly delivered inside the classrooms⁷⁶. Literature review unveils that when pupils snub schooling that frequently starts from their dissatisfaction of how science subjects are being delivered by teachers. This ultimately compromises the plan of making schooling a sustainable development project. To conclude this item of research design, it has to be divulged that an interviewing technique and documents review were utilised to generate data for this paper⁷⁷. Altogether, a total of nine research participants were interviewed regarding the utilisation of schooling as a sustainable development concept to stop pupils from neglecting their schooling activities. Interviewing responses were audiotaped for transcription purposes later-on and relevant documents containing the requisite information were accessed and perused. Both the interviewing technique and documents reviewed were helpful in terms of accessing information germane for making schooling a sustainable development project for rural secondary school learners^{78 79 80 81 82}.

6. FINDINGS

Findings arrived at in this paper, are in relation to the research topic whose focus is exploring how schooling could be made a sustainable development project for rural secondary school learners whose drop-out rate is alarmingly high. The basis of the findings is the analysed data which were generated through the interviewing technique and documents review⁸³. Responses of the nine research participants were explored as regards how schooling

⁷⁶ Ibid (35)

⁷⁷ Pamela Maykut and Richard Morehouse, 'Beginning Qualitative Research: A Philosophical and Practical Guide' (1st edn, Routledge 1992)

⁷⁸ Earl Babbie, *The practice of social research*. (6th edn, Wadsworth Co 1992)

⁷⁹ Johann Mouton, *Understanding social research* (Van Schaik 1996)

⁸⁰ J Nieuwenhuis, *Qualitative research and Data Gathering Techniques* (Van Schaik 2007)

⁸¹ Ibid (71)

⁸² Ibid (66)

⁸³ Ibid (63)

could be utilised to get rid of hunger and poverty more prevalent with rural secondary school learners than with urban ones⁸⁴. As part of discussing the findings in a clear and free from ambiguity fashion, the nine research participants interviewed in this paper are being referred to as Respondent A of School 1, who is a Science Education Specialist, Respondent B of School 1, who is the teacher serving in the School Governing Body and Respondent C of School 1 who is the Chairperson of the Representative Council of Learners. So, the differentiation of research participants were in terms of either School 1, School 2 or School 3. This suggests that in School 2, there were Respondents A, B and C the same as in School 3. Respondents A, B and C in School 2 and in School 3 were similar to those in School 1 in the sense that Respondent A represents a science teacher, Respondent B represents a teacher serving in the SGB and Respondent C represents a Chairperson of the RCL in that school. That was done to protect the actual identities of those research participants⁸⁵.

The researcher sampled those research participants for interviewing in the area of snubbing schooling by rural secondary school pupils as well as their resentment of sustainable development concept which aims at preparing those rural secondary school learners to defeat hunger and poverty in future through quality schooling. Concentrating only on the science education specialists, teachers serving in the SGB and the Chairperson of the RCL ought not create an impression that every time there is a problem of pupils snubbing schooling and therefore, preventing the operationalization of sustainable development thinking, those identified for interviewing could be the ringleaders^{86 87}. The problem of snubbing schooling by rural pupils is likely to affect almost everyone associated with schooling, including those pupils themselves. The context of this paper necessitated that the focus of the paper be placed on neglecting of their schooling by rural pupils coupled with the difficulties of making schooling a sustainable development project for rural secondary school learners to empower them to break the

⁸⁴ Ibid (35)

⁸⁵ Ibid (71)

⁸⁶ S Tshingilane, 'SADTU bad for Black children' (Sowetan Live 2015)

⁸⁷ Ibid (37)

spine of poverty, inequality and unemployment engulfing them⁸⁸
⁸⁹ ⁹⁰. The Contextual Intelligence Model in partnership with the qualitative research paradigm, have been sufficiently instrumental in assisting in the analysis of data to ultimately emerge with these findings. Findings and discussion for this paper are the following: facilitating upward socioeconomic mobility, a key to escaping rural poverty, reduction of inequalities, fostering peaceful societies and non-proficiency rates that are disturbingly high.

7. DISCUSSIONS

This paper explores how schooling could be made a sustainable development project for rural secondary school learners whose drop-out rate is alarmingly high. Rural secondary school learners have an inclination of ignoring that schooling could be an escape route from family hunger and poverty. This is a serious contradiction by pupils in view of their working class status. The second objective relates to devising means to eradicate the neglect of one's schooling by rural secondary school learners. On the basis of the expressed objectives, the research question guiding this paper is: what shall it take to transform the current public secondary school system to remain captivating and absorbing for rural learners never to be tempted to drop-out? Incessant neglect of one's schooling by public rural secondary school pupils could increase the number of underperforming institutions⁹¹ ⁹² ⁹³ ⁹⁴.

⁸⁸ B Macupe, 'Teachers bear brunt of bullies' (Sowetan Live 2015, 25 September)

⁸⁹ A Nair, A. 'Varsity students riot over new funding rule (Mail and Guardian 2015, September 15)

⁹⁰ RJ Botha, 'The role of the school principal in the case study of various members' perceptions' (2017) 30(3) *Journal of Social Sciences*

⁹¹ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical research planning and design*. (9th edn, New Pearson Publishers 2010)

⁹² Margaret Diane LeCompte and Judith Preissle, *Ethnography and Qualitative design in Education Research* (2nd edn, Academic Press 1993)

⁹³ Equal Education 'School Infrastructure' <https://equaleducation.org.za/campaigns/school-infrastructure/> accessed 5 October 2023

⁹⁴ Derrick Meador, 'The role of the principal in school' (ThoughtCo 2019, 19 November) <https://www.thoughtco.com/role-of-principal-in-schools-3194583> Accessed on 22 February 2019

7.1 Facilitating upward socioeconomic mobility

Behaviour modification is necessary for rural secondary school learners to cease to neglect schooling. However, what aggravates the problem is being born under conditions of poverty that arrest them in an environment of hopelessness^{95 96}. One of the findings in this paper is about the power and strength of schooling to facilitate upward socioeconomic mobility of rural secondary school learners. On this finding, Respondent A of School 3 contends that “it can only be pupils who have not yet realised the significance of schooling who could continue to take quality education less seriously, despite it containing sustainable development benefits of providing an upward mobility of every learner, be he or she from rural or urban settlement”. Respondent B of School 2 reasons that “the day our rural secondary schools admit only pupils who are not at school to while away time, then will schools become places of meaningful learning not waiting centres for directionless and futureless pupils who fail to notice that schools could empower and facilitate their upward mobility in the social ladder”. Respondent C of School 1 remarks that “the bad behaviour shown by public rural secondary school pupils of neglecting schooling could be addressed through emphasising to those rural secondary school learners that being born in the rural environment is not their choice but dying in those deplorable conditions is their choice”. Responses of research participants are emphatic that yes, snubbing schooling by rural secondary school pupils happens where learners ignore the power of using schooling as a sustainable development project to climb the social ladder of human prosperity^{97 98 99}.

7.2 A key to escaping rural poverty

From early childhood, pupils need to be taught to be accountable for their deeds including taking schooling seriously. Quality schooling as part of Agenda 2030 could prepare learners to be accountable adults^{100 101}. This happens when every learner

⁹⁵ Ibid (33)

⁹⁶ Ibid (85)

⁹⁷ Joyce Meyer, *Never give up: Relentless determination to overcome life's challenges* (NavPress 2008)

⁹⁸ Ibid (37)

⁹⁹ Ibid (35)

¹⁰⁰ Ibid (84)

especially those from poverty-stricken households display desire to overcome their living conditions through embracing the sustainable development concept propagated by schooling. One of the findings in this paper is that making schooling a sustainable development project enables it to serve as a key for rural learners to escape rural poverty. On this aspect, Respondent A of School 2 asserts that “where rural secondary school pupils who are expected to be exemplary to the primary scholars, show lack of accountability to their studies and the absence of a burning desire to escape rural poverty, they are then not likely to inspire the primary school learners to wish to overturn their undesirable living conditions of hunger and poverty”. Respondent B of School 1 submits that “the value of schooling is on a daily basis declining, considering the lack of commitment and devotion to their studies by rural secondary school pupils and how much they care less about the power of sustainable development project that brings hope that being born in poverty is no licence to die in hunger and poverty that can be overturned through demonstrating unrivalled devotion to quality schooling”. Respondent C of School 2 reminds that “the spirit of pleasure-loving engulfing rural secondary school pupils, prevents those learners from seeing the difference between sense and nonsense considering that they regard snubbing schooling and its twin partner of sustainable development project to be disturbing their much loved pleasurable life-styles”. Responses of the research participants confirm that the bulk of learners especially those from the rural households appear not to be aware that with quality schooling coupled with sustainable development mentality, they could ultimately escape their rural hunger and poverty^{102 103 104}.

7.3 Reduction of inequalities

Disobeying some of the school rules and regulations such as failing to take one’s schooling seriously could be a form of attention-seeking by pupils^{105 106 107}. Furthermore, this is one of

¹⁰¹ Ibid (39)

¹⁰² Ibid (12)

¹⁰³ Gary Yukl, *Leadership in organisation* (University of Albany 2006)

¹⁰⁴ Ibid (82)

¹⁰⁵ Ibid (58)

¹⁰⁶ Ibid (86)

¹⁰⁷ South Africa Tourism, ‘Tourism survey reveals future alive with possibilities for youth’ (Sowetan Live 2023, June 23).

the impediments in an effort to ensure that as a result of quality schooling, all genders in rural secondary schools have an opportunity of receiving equitable education. That is why, one of the findings in this paper relates to schooling as a sustainable development project being capable of reducing the experienced social inequalities in a society. On this issue, Respondent A of School 2 narrates that “in view of how much today’s rural secondary school pupils are spoilt, whenever they are protesting and one of their demands at school is not met, they could begin to indirectly boycott their schooling activities despite their benefits and contribution to reducing the witnessed forms of inequalities in a society”. Respondent B of School 3 argues that “the generation of the present day secondary schooling, requires to be handled with care to spur them on to embrace schooling or else the nation runs the risk of carrying on with inequality because of sabotaging its remedy, namely, quality schooling being supported by the sustainable development concept”. Respondent C of School 1 emphasises that the concept of sustainable development as driven by quality schooling ought not be sacrificed especially in rural secondary schools because through the sustainable development concept, rural secondary school pupils learn social equity which is enviable in every society”. Responses of the three research participants advise how tactful secondary schools have to be, to cope with the nature of the current rural secondary school pupils who with the slightest opportunity received, end up neglecting schooling at their own peril and that of their society¹⁰⁸

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7.4 Fostering peaceful societies

Making schooling a sustainable development project requires that the context at schools be enabling¹¹⁰ ¹¹¹. This is in alignment with the theoretical framework of this paper, namely, the Contextual Intelligence Model. One of the findings in this paper is that schooling that drives the sustainable development project is capable of fostering peaceful societies. This is what most societies currently miss in view of civil hostilities characterising those

<https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2023-06-23-tourism-survey-reveals-future-alive-with-possibilities-for-youth/> accessed 5 October 2023

¹⁰⁸ Ibid (89)

¹⁰⁹ Ibid (56)

¹¹⁰ Ibid (57)

¹¹¹ Ibid (3)

societies. Schooling is anticipated to provide long term remedies in those kinds of hostile conflicts. In the context of this paper, such remedies come about in the form of sustainable development of learners who will grow up to be adults of peace unlike the current adults that are ever at each other's throats. On this matter, Respondent A of School 2 praises that "quality education or schooling gives people knowledge and skills to stay healthy, foster tolerance and devote their lives to the creation and maintenance of peaceful societies". Respondent B of School 1 asserts that "the reality on the ground is that members of a society at rural areas are more prone to conflict instigated by amongst others poverty and hunger in comparison to people in urban areas and that upon utilising schooling to capacitate and empower rural secondary school learners, this rural problem of violence could be mitigated". Respondent C of School 3 observes that "where rural secondary school pupils notice that every teacher is committed to teaching new life values such as inclusion, harmony and peace, rural secondary school learners end up imbibing those learnt values and govern their lives by them to the benefit of the society at large". The review of literature has shown that despite the business of fostering peace being carried out through schooling as part of the sustainable development concept, other sectors of a society have an equal role and space to play to the creation of a harmonious and peaceful country^{112 113 114}.

7.5 Non-proficiency rates that are disturbingly high

Educational institutions are established for quality schooling and learner achievement^{115 116 117 118}. One of the findings in this paper is about the number of learners who are not proficient in many aspects of their schooling, something which is disturbingly high. Non-proficiency problem by learners was triggered by the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic where schools for some time had to face closure. On the said finding, Respondent A of School 2

¹¹² Ibid (23)

¹¹³ A Mngxitama, 'Poor performances reflect the state of the SA nation' (Sowetan Live, 2013, February 5)

¹¹⁴ Ibid (35)

¹¹⁵ Ibid (22)

¹¹⁶ Ibid (30)

¹¹⁷ Frank Chikane, Eight days in September: The removal of Thabo Mbeki (Picardo Africa 2012)

¹¹⁸ Ibid (16)

reminds that “most education systems were affected by education disruptions of closure of schools with devastating results for children’s learning and well-being”. Respondent B of School 3 recounts that “it is estimated that 147 million children missed more than half of their in-class teaching and learning over the past two years, something that contributed to myriad learners not being proficient with much of their schoolwork despite their progression to the next level”. Respondent C of School 1 concludes that “non-proficiency rates of rural secondary school learners which is disturbingly high has to be traced to school closures that affected girls, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, children living in rural areas, children with disabilities and children from ethnic minorities more than their peers”. Clearly, it takes dedicated and direction-seeing rural secondary school learners to stop low educational outcomes in schools, irrespective of whether that resulted from the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic or not^{119 120 121}.

8. CONCLUSION

As displayed in the discussion of findings of this paper, both the review of literature and the theoretical framework, played a critical role in talking to the findings of this paper. In addition, the interviewing technique and the documents review together with the theoretical perspective, provided the better context within which the entire paper has to be located and comprehended. Small wonder that rural secondary school pupils were exposed by the findings to be neglecting their own schooling and thus somewhat blocking the successful roll out of the sustainable development project to enable them to escape hunger and poverty using schooling. The conclusion arrived at in this paper, is in the context of the relationship between neglecting schooling by current rural secondary school pupils and the need for those rural secondary school learners to embrace the sustainable development concept and to apply it to push back the frontiers of hunger and poverty in

¹¹⁹ Ibid (25)

¹²⁰ Ibid (15)

¹²¹ Ibid (51)

Limpopo Province, South Africa. Vividly, the objectives of this paper as shown in the preceding discussions have been achieved.

9. RECOMMENDATION

The basis of these recommendations is the discussed findings which are as follow: there is a need to sensitise rural secondary school learners about the power of schooling to shift them to a better social status than the one they currently occupy. In addition, rural secondary school learners need to be supported more to endure schooling as a vehicle to enable them to escape rural hunger and poverty. Furthermore, rural secondary school learners require to be alerted that schooling could contribute to the reduction of inequalities and foster tolerance and peaceful societies within the citizenry. Equally, rural secondary school learners need to contribute to overcoming lack of proficiency by the bulk of learners as a result of closure of schools during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, there is a need to address the gap between the under-connected, under-developed and highly digitalised secondary schools. Finally, for the thriving of the sustainable development project, governments need to be encouraged to prioritise schooling of rural secondary school learners in policy and practice.