BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE SAFETY AND HEALTH MANAGEMENT AT SEFULA SECONDARY SCHOOL IN WESTERN ZAMBIA

Kaiko Mubita

Lecturer, Department of Language and Social Sciences Education, School of Education,
The University of Zambia, Lusaka, ZAMBIA.

mubita016@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Safety and health management in schools is a growing concern in Zambia. Media reports on dilapidated infrastructure, unhealthy conditions and other cases of insecurity in schools have been on the rise. School administrators have tried to put safety and health measures in place. However, school administrators still face safety and health challenges. One such school that has been reported in Zambian media to have poor safety and health conditions is Sefula secondary school of western Zambia (Zambia Watchdog, May 14, 2014). This school was reported to have poor safety and health conditions. Therefore, this study sought to determine barriers to effective safety and health management at Sefula secondary school of Western Zambia. The study employed case study research design. Purposive sampling technique was used to obtain the needed sample of 15 stakeholders who are in school management at Sefula secondary school. Data was collected using unstructured interviews and focus group discussion. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The study established that the school faced barriers to effective safety and challenges management such as poor funding, lack of time, poor safety culture, lack of training in safety and health issues and so on.

Keywords: Barriers, Safety and health management, Safety culture, School management

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to education and the right to be safe (United Nations, 2012). Despite this mandate, Kozik et al., (1999) observed that injuries among children are replacing infectious diseases as the leading cause of mortality in developing countries. Therefore, school safety and health should be effectively managed and prioritised because children spend more time in school during their formative years. Safe and health schools must be a priority and never an option for school managers. Learners must learn in a safe and healthy environment free of intimidation, harassment, violence, abuse and bullying (Khomola, 2012). Moreover, schools should also take care of safety and health of staff and visitors in school environment. Literature overwhelmingly suggests that meaningful teaching and learning can only occur in a safe and secure school environment which is every community's desire for its children (Xaba, 2006:565; Pinsloo, 2005:10; Trump, 2008:240).

Despite the importance of safe and health schools as explained above, schools in Zambia still have dilapidated infrastructure and therefore expose learners and staff to insecurity and unhealthy conditions. Media reports highlight this poor state of safety and health of some schools in Zambia. For instance, the Daily Nation newspaper in Zambia reported the deplorable state of Towe School in Kanyama west as follows:

> *"Towe community school in Kanyama West area has appealed to Government and well-wishers to come on board and help them rehabilitate the school infrastructure which is in a deplorable state"* (July 18, 2016).

The following Zambian media reports also bear testimony to poor state of safety and health conditions in Zambian schools: *"Poor infrastructure forces school to close early due to onset of rains"* (Lusaka Times, November 21, 2012). "*Poor sanitation at Mbala Secondary School worries DC"* (Lusaka Voice, May 13th, 2014). One such school that has poor safety and health conditions apart from those quoted above is Sefula secondary school of western Zambia. The poor state of safety and health at this school was reported by the Zambia Watchdog on May 11th, 2014 under the title, *"Deplorable Sanitation conditions at Sefula Secondary School"*. Against this background, this study explored barriers to safety and health management at Sefula secondary school in western Zambia. Sustainable mitigation measures have been suggested to this effect. The management barriers are key issues requiring attention if Sefula secondary school is to effectively implement and sustain a focus on safety and health issues.

AIM

The aim of this study was to establish barriers, to initiate effective safety and health management at Sefula secondary school in western Zambia, and to suggest sustainable mitigation measures to address the identified barriers of that school.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The above aim was addressed through the following specific questions:

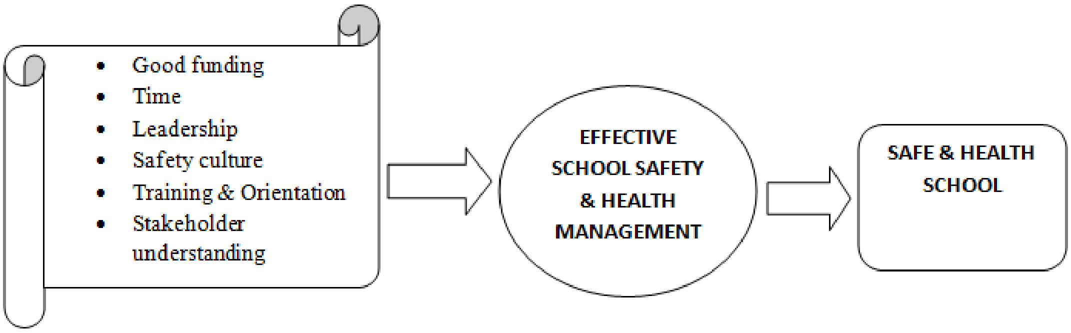
(a) What are the barriers to effective safety and health management at Sefula secondary school ?

(b) What sustainable mitigation measures can be proposed to address barriers to effective safety and health management identified at the school ?

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The study was guided by what was thought to be a logical process of managing safety and health issues in the context of Sefula Secondary School, herein used as a case study. It is argued that for Sefula Secondary school administration to manage safety and healthy properly, the following should be in place: The school should be well funded, pupils and staff well trained and oriented in school safety management, more time devoted to safety and health management, good stakeholder understanding, good communication and improved school safety culture among others. Figure 1 summarises the conceptual framework for school safety and health management in the context of this study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for school safety and health management



Source: (Field data, 2016)

As presented in figure 1 above, Sefula secondary school needs to have the following in place in order to effectively manage safety and health issues: good funding, enough time, good and strong leadership, good safety culture, staff and pupil training on safety and health issues and good stakeholder understanding. Each of these components can be described independently, but in reality, they are inextricably linked.

This study was operationalised through the Invitational Theory of Education. Invitational Theory of Education as propounded by Purkey (1999) in his book entitled "*Creating safe schools through invitational education*" provides a framework for making schools a more exciting, satisfying and enriching experience for everyone, that is; all pupils, all faculties, staff and all visitors. The main focus of "invitational education theory" is to revitalize schools and to encourage pupils and staff to want to go to school (Myers and Monson, 1992). According to this theory, there are five factors that affect the appeal of schools. These five factors are *people*, *places*, *policies*, *programs*, and *processes*. This theory contends that the five factors make schools more socially appealing and safe (Purkey and Schmidt, 1996). It can be argued that the five factors of invitational theory (people, places, policies, programmes and processes) are all under the management of Sefula secondary school. Therefore, for this school to be inviting and appealing, the school management should strive for excellence in all the five aspects. The Invitational Education Theory helped in assessment of whether policies, people, processes, programmes and places at Sefula Secondary School were inviting and friendly as stipulated by the theory. Figure 2 is an illustration of the Invitation Education Theory with the 5 Ps (*people, places, policies, programs* and *processes*).

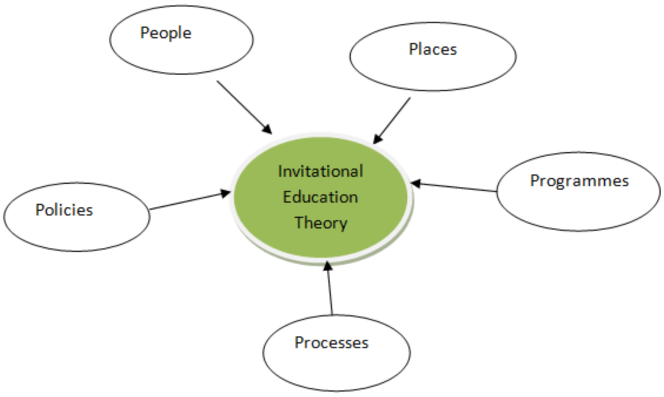


Figure 2: Invitation Education Theory

Source: (Mubita, 2016)

AN OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

Teaching and learning cannot take place in a disorganized environment. The school management team alone cannot do without partnership with parents and other stakeholders in making the school safety and health (Khomola, 2012). Therefore, every school should develop better and effective strategies to curb safety and health challenges which hinder educational development and management. According to Kennedy (2006) education administrators have many tools available to them as they strive to establish a safer climate for learning. School administrators should provide learners, staff and the community with a safe and healthy environment without intimidation, harassment, violence, abuse and bullying. Stakeholder involvement and support for teaching and learning programmes in schools must be encouraged at all times. School administrators and staff in general must be consistent in the application of safety and health regulations and policies within the school. All stakeholders and community must promote safe and secure schools.

Srichai et. al. (2013) conducted a research on *'Managing School Safety in Thailand: Assessing the Implications and Potential of a Lean Thinking Framework'.* This research came up with seven management barriers to effective safety in Thai schools. These are time, finance, leadership, culture, commitment, communication and stakeholder understanding. It can be argued that some of these seven barriers to effective safety in Thai schools could also be faced by management of Sefula secondary schools in safety and health management.

The study conducted by Kirui, Mbugua and Sang (2011) on *"challenges facing head teachers in security management in secondary schools in Kisii County in Kenya"* established that schools in Kisii County faced security challenges such as strikes, arson, theft and fighting among students, but the majority of head teachers and security personnel were not versed with strategies useful in handling security issues. The study also established that head teachers were highly aware of measures required in improving secondary school security. In view of the foregoing, it can be argued that some of these challenges facing head teachers in security and safety management in Kenya could also be faced by school management team at Sefula secondary school.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH APPROACH

This study is situated in the interpretivism paradigm. The central endeavour in the context of interpretivism paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen et al., 2007). According to Creswell (1994) interpretivism is directed at understanding phenomena from an individual's perspective and at investigating interactions among individuals as well as the historical and cultural contexts that people inhabit. Interpretivists argue that only through the subjective interpretation and intervention in reality can that reality be fully understood. Therefore, within Sefula secondary school environment, in relation to safety and health management, there are many interpretations of reality and these interpretations are in themselves a part of the knowledge being pursued in this study.

The study utilised a case study research design that mainly used qualitative research methods. Unstructured interviews and focus group discussions were used as data collection methods. Using purposive sampling technique, a sample size of 15 school administrators of Sefula Secondary School was targeted. The sample comprised the school head teacher, deputy head teacher and heads of departments. Thematic data analysis was utilised for this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Barriers to Effective Safety and Health Management at Sefula secondary school

Using semi structured interviews, this study sought to find out the barriers to effective safety and health management at Sefula secondary school. The barriers to effective safety and health management are key issues that require attention if safety and health issues at Sefula Secondary School were to be effectively implemented and sustain a focus. According to the collected data, administrators at this school noted the following as barriers to effective safety and health management: financial problems, limited time, limited stakeholder understanding, poor safety culture, and lack of training and orientation. Their responses were as presented on table 1.

Table 1. Barriers to effective safety and health management at Sefula secondary school

Safety and health barrier	*Frequency*	*Percentage (%)*
Financial problems	6	40
Limited time	3	20
Limited stakeholder understanding	1	6.7
Lack of training and orientation	3	20
Poor safety culture	2	13.3
Total	15	100

Source: (Field data, 2016)

As presented on table 1, financial problem (40%) was noted as one of the main barriers to effective safety and health management at Sefula secondary school. This was followed by limited time and lack of training and orientation (20%). Poor safety culture was noted by 13.3 % of respondents while 6.7 % of respondents explained that the stakeholders may have had poor safety and health understanding. This kind of distribution shows that managing safety has considerable financial implications because of completion faced with other school needs such as buying teaching and learning materials.

The Barriers to effective safety and health management at Sefula Secondary School as noted by stakeholders are discussed as follows:

(a) *Financial problems:* A good number of respondents (40%) noted that the school received little funding from the government and the church. Therefore, managing safety and health at the school had considerable financial implications. This was mainly in terms of the intrinsic cost and nature of safety and health related activities in the school and the opportunity cost of spending on safety and health, versus other school needs such as staff or academic development. The intangible nature of risk minimization adds to the financial burden because Sefula Secondary School management would prefer to spend in more visible ways. One respondent simply put it as follows:

> *"Due to poor funding, the school opted to spend money on more tangible things like buying desks, chairs, food for pupils and reading materials, unlike spending limited resources on intangible things like safety issues. This affects management of safety and health issues at Sefula Secondary School".*

Poor funding as a barrier to effective school safety and health management was also noted by Srichai et al (2013) in some research carried out in schools in Thailand.

(b) *Time:* The other notable barrier to effective safety and health management at Sefula Secondary School was time. Managing safety and health required a significant investment in time. This was set against a backdrop of existing time constraints faced by school leadership, staff, teachers and pupils. Teachers had big workloads such as teaching and extracurricular activities. This big workload meant that pupils and staff were overwhelmed with work and therefore had little time to spend on safety and health issues. This lack or limited time as a constraint to safety and health management in school was also noted in a research conducted by Srichai et al (2013) in Thailand schools.

(c) *Limited stakeholder Understanding:* Effective safety and health management requires the commitment and participation of all school stakeholders. While some stakeholders like parents would be more willing to align themselves with school safety and health policy, others like auxiliary staff and other members of the school community may not fully understand the justification for safety and health at Sefula secondary school, or may feel it adds to their workload. This notion acted as a barrier to effective safety and health management at Sefula Secondary School.

(d) *Poor safety culture:* Poor safety culture was cited as a barrier to effective safety and health management at Sefula secondary school. A safety culture is an organisational culture that places a high level of importance on safety beliefs, values and attitudes and these are shared by the majority of people within the company or workplace. It can be characterised as ‘the way we do things around here’ (The State of Queensland, Department of Justice and Attorney-General, 2013). Risk perception and safety policies vary according to cultures (Hofstede, 1991). At Sefula secondary school, safety culture also varied among stakeholders. Others were more committed than others. The notion of health and safety at Sefula secondary was generally still relatively nascent. This often meant that school management faced resistance when attempting to implement safety in a culture where it was not traditionally considered important or necessary.

(e) *Lack of training and orientation:* According to administrators at Sefula secondary school, one of the barriers to effective safety and health management at Sefula secondary school was lack of training for pupils and staff. The staff and pupils were not trained in safety and health issues. This hindered overall safety and health management in school. Safety and health training for staff and pupils would help to improve the school environment with effective job analysis and application of hazard reduction techniques. By implementing safety and health training for staff at the school, many injuries can be prevented with the understanding of how these accidents occur. Safety training helps pupils and staff to give safety and health its due importance and shift beyond common sense in the application of preventive techniques. This scenario can develop a positive health and safety culture in school, where safe and healthy working becomes second nature to everyone.

Proposed sustainable mitigation measures to address barriers to effective safety and health management identified at the school

In order to effectively address barriers to effective safety and health management identified at Sefula secondary school, this study suggests the following measures:

(a) The Ministry of Education and the church should improve funding to the school. This would help the school in funding projects related to school safety and health, pay security personnel and buy certain safety and security equipment. If enough funding is realised, the school could also use it to refurbish sanitation infrastructure that seemed dilapidated. Moreover, the school administration could set aside funds for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of school safety and health programmes.

(b) Personnel responsible for managing school safety and health require a wide array of knowledge and skills. Therefore, all school administrators, staff and pupils at Sefula secondary school should be inducted or trained in safety and health issues. The administrators should take initiative to be well versed with all safety and health policies and disseminate the same to other teaching staff, pupils and stakeholders. Moreover, the school administration should post safety and health information in strategic areas of the school like notice boards for others to read. Teachers' professional training should be conducted to ensure that teachers know and understand school safety and health related policies and practices.

(c) It is important that the school respect the values, traditions, beliefs and customs of the pupils, staff and the community if safety culture is to be upheld. This is also highlighted by the second assumption of the "invitational theory" used in this study. The second assumption of this theory is on "respect". It is argued that people are talented, worthy and responsible, and that they should be treated accordingly. In the school environment, sharing responsibilities among stakeholders with mutual respect is an indispensible component of a democratic environment and healthy environment. Moreover, in school environment, respect may be displayed, formed and maintained through people's behaviors as well as policies, programmes, places and processes. Respect may also be indicated through the provision of equal opportunities and equal sharing of power in school environment (Purkey, 1991).

(d) Review all safety and health communication systems Sefula secondary school with all stakeholders. This should also address how and where the stakeholders will be informed in the event of an emergency.

(e) Since the school administrators bemoaned lack of time against heavy teaching loads, the school could come up with a safety and health committee. This committee could oversee school safety and health issues overally. This is in correlation with the Occupational Health and Safety Act of 2010 of the Republic of Zambia Part III, section 11 which records that a workplace of ten or more persons shall establish a health and safety committee. Moreover, the school could even appoint a school safety officer to coordinate safety and health issues in school.

CONCLUSION

The study set out to establish barriers to effective safety and health management at Sefula secondary school. The findings showed that the school had challenges related to financial constraints, limited time, limited stakeholder understanding, poor safety culture and lack of training and orientation for stakeholders. The study recommends that the school should be well funded so as to cater for safety and health issues well. The study also proposes that all school administrators, staff and pupils at this school should be inducted or trained in safety and health issues. There is also need to review all safety and health communication systems within the school and with all stakeholders. Since the school administrators bemoaned lack of time against heavy teaching loads, the school should come up with a safety and health committee to take charge of safety and health issues in the school. If all the proposed mitigation measures to effective safety and health management are followed, Sefula secondary school may manage safety and health issues sustainably.

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