

Collective ownership for learner discipline in South African schools: A policy perspective

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In this conceptual paper, I focus on collective ownership for learner discipline in schools. Learner discipline influences the quality of teaching and learning and is not solely the responsibility of schools. Education is most successful when there is collective responsibility regarding school issues. Collective ownership involves parents and schools both taking ownership of learner discipline and the regulation of issues in learner behaviour. At schools it is in the best interest of learners and teachers if teachers and parents work collectively using the existing policy framework to maintain discipline. The ideal is that schools should be safe spaces for teaching and learning. However, the reality is that learner misbehaviour and discipline issues continue to occur, threatening the safety of the school environment. Framed within an interpretivist paradigm, this qualitative study aims to explore collective ownership for learner discipline in South African schools. I investigate the *South African Schools Act* to explore to what extent it underscores collective ownership. The literature review highlights collective ownership and the policy framework that should inform collective ownership for maintaining effective discipline in schools. Collaborative governance, shared norms and values, and policy implementation underpin the notion of collective ownership for maintaining effective discipline in schools. This paper advocates effective discipline through the establishment of partnerships between parents and schools, nurturing a culture of parental involvement, and utilising existing policies to strengthen parent involvement.

Introduction

In South African schools, learner ill-discipline remains despite the crucial role education plays in developing democratic and disciplined citizens. As an essential condition for the successful delivery of this role for education is a safe and disciplined school environment, my article focuses on collective ownership for learner discipline in schools. In the South African context, a partnership between teachers and parents is strongly supported by the *South African Schools Act* (SASA) (DoE, 1996). The *Act* allows parents to serve on school governing bodies, and thus be collectively accountable for the governing of schools.

This democratisation of school governance in South Africa was formally established through Section 16(1), which mandated that every public state school must establish a *School Governing Body* (DoE, 1996). These school governing bodies serve as democratic institutions, bringing together key stakeholders, including parents, learners, teachers, non-teaching staff, and the school principal. This framework creates a significant collaborative platform in South African education, fostering a tripartite partnership between government authorities, individual parents, and community-elected School Governing Body representatives.

The *SASA* (DoE, 1996: Section 29) mandated school governing bodies to adopt a code of conduct (e.g. DoE, 2008) for learners as a way of “establishing a disciplined and purposeful school environment, dedicated to improving the quality of the learning process” (Mestry & Khumalo, 2012). Welsh and Little (2018) identified safe schools as having a high level of discipline, communication, culture, and environment conducive to teaching and learning, effective administrative practices, and a lack of crime and violence.

My article aims to explore collective ownership in maintaining learner discipline from a policy perspective. Various studies have shown that education is the most successful when there is collective responsibility regarding school issues. Davids (2017) contended that “collective ownership of schools and parents for maintaining discipline is of particular importance in the light of a young democracy in which we would like our children to become democratic and responsible South African citizens”. This is supported by the concern about the lack of discipline by parents and schools (Zondo & Mncube, 2024).

The term collective ownership is a complex construct that is multifaceted. Many authors define ownership in terms of property, land, or a product owned by people (Nancekivell, Friedman & Gelman 2019). Backus, Conlon & Sinkinson (2019) described collective ownership in terms of relationships between ownership of firms in the financial space. The notion of collective ownership to some extent may be understood as just a theoretical, legal construction. This is based on certain (theoretical) considerations on how a more cooperative world might be organised within the current legal system (Schovsbo, 2010). Various authors view collective ownership as a political idea that advocates a particular way of organising economic and political life (Gregory & Stuart 2014; Stone, Porto de Oliveira & Pal, 2020; Stewart-Ambo & Yang, 2021; Michener & SoRelle, 2022). On the other hand, it can be an actual economic system in which the state owns and controls resources, or it can be a system of property owned jointly by agreement (Gregory, 2016).

My paper argues that in relation to education, collective ownership can be described as the involvement of parents and schools as concerned groups who take ownership of learner discipline. This is notwithstanding the requisite that they must ensure the regulation of issues of learner behaviour. Taking collective ownership of issues of learner discipline does not only mean taking responsibility for learner discipline. It also implies that schools and parents, as collective owners must agree on what actions will be taken to address disciplinary issues and how to do so effectively within a framework of educational policies. Subsequently, if parents and schools take collective ownership to seek solutions for problems to the benefit of learners, they should take responsibility to work together and use the *SASA* as the underpinning policy framework in maintaining discipline in schools.

The term collective ownership can be perceived as a collective action involving a group of people who take ownership of problems that could be regulated with legislation. In the South African context schools are facing challenges to create and maintain sound learner discipline that is necessary for effective learning and teaching (Wolhuter & van der Walt, 2020; Mohale et al., 2020; Maqoqa & Mvenene, 2023). Although the government provides

the necessary education policy framework to create a safe environment (DoE, 2008), learner ill-discipline remains a problem through schoolyard fights, bullying, and drug abuse for example (Ngoveni, Mofokeng & Khosa, 2024).

Discipline is a collaborative effort between schools and parents. When parents are not actively involved in their child's education, maintaining behaviour discipline becomes more difficult. Research suggests that the lack of discipline among learners could be ascribed to the continued decline in moral upbringing (Reyneke, 2015; Prins, Joubert, Ferreira-Prevost & Moen, 2019); Wollhuter & van der Walt, 2020). Bayaga & Jaysveree (2011) stated that parents are oblivious to their children's behaviour. Arguably, this arises from a lack of parental involvement in instilling discipline, in spite of studies indicating that parents are aware of their responsibility to be involved in schools to maintain discipline (Davids, 2017; Sesinyi & Gcelu, 2023). Parents also feel they cannot solve issues if they are not aware of them (Davids, 2017). In this regard, it is important that teachers and parents can collectively address the challenges of learner discipline.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that underpins this study is the social system theory. According to Morin, Olsson and Atikcan (2021), social system theory is a holistic theory which assumes that "*the whole is more than the sum of its parts*". Akahori (2021) asserted that this theory emerged to help different fields analyse complex systems and their effects on individuals. The theory provides a framework for understanding how interconnected system elements influence individual lives (Akahori, 2021). Social system theory views an individual as an organism and a member of society because of the interaction between the individual and his or her situation or environment (Coulshed & Orme, 2012). In my study, social system theory aligns with the view that individuals form part of interconnected systems, reflecting collective ownership in the context of the interdependence and interactions between parents, schools, and the wider community.

When the social system theory is applied to education, the interaction between learners, parents and schools impacts the learners and determines if the learner will develop positively or negatively (Ballantine, Stuber & Everitt, 2022). The effort to change outcomes will consequently not only be directed at learners themselves but would also be better directed at the system in which learners' function. This theory recognises the role of these systems in shaping learner behaviour and discipline and highlights the importance of a holistic approach that involves collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders. It underscores the significance of the environment in an individual's development and emphasises the need for collaborative efforts to address learner discipline challenges. By considering the broader context and involving all stakeholders, collective action and systemic change can be achieved to create safe, supportive, and positive learning environments.

Literature review

A scoping literature review aims to provide "a systematic, explicit, and reproducible procedure for identifying, evaluating and synthesising [an] existing body of recorded and completed work" (Fink, 2019) an explicit and reproducible means of identifying, evaluating, and synthesising. The literature in my study of published work on learner discipline and collective ownership was located through searches using Google Scholar and ResearchGate, as well as data from a variety of online (Internet) peer-reviewed journals article, and other relevant sources from electronic databases, such as Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Sabinet, and Sage Online. I specifically examined studies published from 2014 to 2024 using the keywords "learner discipline" and "collective ownership".

Conceptualising collective ownership

The concept of collective ownership is a complex construct that is multi-faceted, and many authors define ownership in terms of property, land, or a product owned by people (Nancekivell, Friedman & Gelman 2019: 102). Backus, Conlon and Sinkinson (2019) defined collective ownership in terms of relationships between ownership of firms in the financial space. The notion of collective ownership may be understood as just a theoretical–legal construction. This is based on theoretical considerations on how a more cooperative world might be organised within the current legal system (Schovsbo, 2010). Gregory (2016) regarded collective ownership as a political idea that advocates a particular way of organising economic and political life. It can be an actual economic system in which the state owns and controls resources, or it can be a system of property owned jointly by agreement (Pesci, 2020). Collectives assume many forms and manifestations of collective action (Su & Ng, 2019; Pesci, 2020; Barajas, 2021) and it seems that collective contexts and collective products require multi-actor collaboration. Gray (1985) referred to mutual interdependence regarding a problem, joint ownership of decisions, collective responsibility, and collaboration as critical to the process of multi-actor collaboration. According to Gerlak and Heikkila (2011), many of society's most troublesome problems must be solved through collaborative arrangements that involve various actors working collectively, and using a collective process, to solve a complex problem. Several authors (Gregory, 2016; Pesci, 2020; Barajas, 2021) have shown that collective contexts involve collective processes, and a collective product usually emerges from the process. Collective products might include shared ideas, strategies, rules, or policies to solve a complex problem. It can therefore be derived that when people collectively take ownership of problems, collective action, or collaboration is to the benefit of the group. Collective ownership involves the ideal principles of co-operation and collective action.

Key elements of collective ownership in school discipline include shared responsibility, where both parents and schools are accountable for learner behaviour; active participation, where parents are engaged in school governance and decision-making processes; collaborative problem-solving when disciplinary issues are addressed through joint efforts; and mutual support when parents and schools provide reciprocal support in maintaining discipline.

School discipline functions through collective ownership between parents and schools. This partnership manifests through shared accountability (Zondo & Mncube 2024). As parents participate actively in school governance, disciplinary matters are addressed collaboratively, and both parties work together to uphold disciplinary standards. This shared responsibility creates a unified approach to maintaining school discipline.

The South African context: Policies and procedures

It is in the best interest of learners if the school, including teachers, and parents work collectively using the existing policy framework to maintain discipline. The *Constitution* (Republic of South Africa, 1996) provides in section 28(2) that a ‘child’s best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child’. De Waal (2011) noted that it remains a challenge to motivate parents to accept personal responsibility for maintaining discipline in schools. Nevertheless, the *SASA* (DoE, 1996: section 16(1)) gives formal effect to the establishment of democratic structures of school governance in the form of school governing bodies. These comprise parents, learners, teachers, non-teaching staff and the school principal. It has legal authority to perform its governance of the school functions in terms of the *SASA*. Thus parents are official partners in the governance of their children’s school, as legally constituted in Sections 16 (1) and (2) (DoE, 1996) with the stipulations that “the governance of every public school is vested in its governing body” and “the governing body stands in a position of trust towards the school”.

As a school governing body acts on behalf of the school and in the name of the school, it should exercise its function to the best interest of the school and all its learners. The “governing body stands in a position of trust towards the school”. The *SASA* thus implies strongly that a partnership exists between the state, the parent (as individual) and the school governing body (as elected representative of the parent and school community). Section 20 (DoE, 1996) stated that the school governing body should promote the best interests of the school and strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school; adopt a code of conduct for all learners at school; support the principal, teachers, and other staff of the school in the performance of their professional functions; and encourage parents, learners, educators, and other staff at the school to render voluntary services to the school.

In alignment with constitutional values, the *SASA* mandated the establishment of democratic school governance structures. This mandate forms the foundation for effective partnerships between education authorities and school communities, enabling shared decision-making and collective responsibility in school management. Research shows that school governance structures create an opportunity for all stakeholders, including community representatives (Selamolela, 2019; Naidoo, 2019; Karlsson, McPherson & Pampallis, 2002) to develop a sense of ownership of the school. This view corresponds with the framework for collective ownership in the sense that ownership requires the collaborative involvement of stakeholders to collectively seek solutions for problems to the greater benefit of the group (Davids, 2017).

The collaborative involvement of parents and teachers through democratic structures creates a strong sense of ownership in school affairs, leading them to embrace accountability for school activities and outcomes. This shared ownership, developed through active participation in school governance, cultivates a deeper commitment to maintaining discipline. When parents and teachers feel invested in the school's success, they contribute more effectively to creating and sustaining a disciplined and purposeful learning environment. The value of participation lies in enabling collective decision-making for school discipline. The *SASA* emphasises cooperation and collective ownership by engaging parents as stakeholders in promoting school and learner interests. Through section 8(2), the school governing body plays a crucial role in maintaining discipline by developing a code of conduct. This highlights the important role of the school governing body in the establishment and maintenance of sound discipline by compiling a code of conduct that “must be aimed at establishing a disciplined and purposeful school environment, dedicated to the improvement and maintenances of the quality of the learning process” (DoE, 2008).

Section 8(2) of the *SASA* emphasises the crucial role of the school governing body in establishing and maintaining school discipline through a code of conduct. This code serves a dual purpose by creating a disciplined environment, while supporting quality education. The provision specifically requires that the code of conduct must foster a purposeful school environment dedicated to enhancing the learning process. This establishes a clear link between disciplinary measures and educational outcomes, suggesting that effective discipline is not merely about punishment but about creating optimal conditions for teaching and learning. Therefore, the *SASA* positions discipline as a tool for educational improvement rather than just behavioural control. The school governing body is responsible to develop and implement a code that balances maintaining order with promoting academic excellence. The provision specifically requires that the code of conduct must foster a purposeful school environment dedicated to enhancing the learning process.

As representatives on the school governing body, parents must play an active role in the establishment and maintenance of sound discipline through their involvement in compiling a code of conduct. Parents as collective owners must ensure that a code of conduct (DoE, 2008) has, as its primary goal, the establishment of a disciplined and purposeful school environment that enhances the quality of the learning process. Therefore, in maintaining discipline, the *SASA* (DoE, 1996) compels parents as individuals or representatives of the community serving on the school governing body to compile a code of conduct to establish a disciplined and safe school environment. The *SASA* underscores collective ownership when parents compile a code of conduct which serves as a collaborative document representing all stakeholders.

One can therefore derive that the *SASA* encourages collective ownership and that parents should be involved in the governance of schools based on active participation, shared decision-making, and mutual accountability. Parents' role in school discipline as collective owners is defined through their school governing body representation. As members, they are legally authorised to shape disciplinary policies while bringing their unique perspective

as primary stakeholders in their children's education. This representation ensures that disciplinary measures align with community values and address local needs. Active participation is ensured when parents are regularly involved in school governing body meetings and decisions. This allows for parents' direct input into school policies and procedures and for ongoing monitoring of disciplinary practices. Through shared decision-making and collaborative development of disciplinary policies, parents take joint responsibility for implementation and have an equal voice in disciplinary matters. Therefore, shared decision-making in school discipline operates through collaborative policy development where their inputs help shape policies that reflect both school needs and community values. This collaborative approach ensures that school discipline is not solely the responsibility of educators but represents a partnership between school and community stakeholders.

Parents play a key role in maintaining discipline and upholding the ideals of a school's code of conduct to ensure a safe environment conducive for effective teaching and learning (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2024). The *Act's* requirement for a code of conduct suggests a structured approach to discipline. In this regard, parents need to take co-ownership of learner problems in schools. Parents' roles and responsibilities become imperative in terms of maintaining discipline in schools (Davids, 2017; Wolhuter & van der Walt, 2020; Wolhuter et al., 2023).

Research method

In this conceptual paper, I employ a qualitative methodology that encompasses the collection and analysis of non-numerical data such as texts in documents and policies (Bhandari, 2020). According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018), research methodology refers to the approach the researcher takes when conducting a specific type of study. A combination of primary and secondary sources was consulted. Data was collected through a careful and thorough literature review and an analysis of the *SASA* policy document specifically addressing learner discipline. In keeping with the paper's objective, I investigated how *SASA* might support collective ownership. This was done to explore collective ownership to maintain learner discipline in South African schools. I regard a conceptual research design as applicable as it refers to research related concepts and ideas about a phenomenon to solve real-world problems (Hirschheim, 2008). In policy studies, an application of conceptual research design may assist researchers to analyse policy content, enabling them to excavate possible policy solutions to address issues (Farrell & Coburn, 2017).

A discussion follows on the findings of themes that emerged in analysing whether the *SASA* underscores collective ownership.

Findings and discussion

As this study aims to focus on collective ownership for learner discipline in schools it is not within the scope of this article to analyse the entire *SASA* in detail. The focus is on

the extent to which the *SASA* underscores collaborative governance, shared norms and values, and policy implementation.

Collaborative governance

The *SASA* (DoE, 1996, section 23(1)) has underscored collaborative governance in the education system that was enacted shortly after the end of apartheid, to reform and democratise the South African education system. The *Act* emphasised collaborative governance through several key provisions, including school governing bodies, the decentralisation of power, parental involvement, and democratic processes. It mandated the establishment of school governing bodies for all public schools. These bodies include parents, teachers, non-teaching staff, and (in secondary schools) learners (Section 6(2)), ensuring that multiple stakeholders have a voice in school management. The *Act* delegates significant decision-making authority to the school level, allowing local communities to have more control over their schools' operations and policies. Since school governing bodies have legal authority to perform their functions in terms of the *SASA*, parents and teachers should form a partnership for collective decision-making based on mutual trust and respect. Parents, through school governing bodies, are in an official partnership with schools regarding their children's discipline. The *SASA* shows considerable responsiveness towards collective ownership based on democratic governance, implying participation, transparency, and accountability. Furthermore, the *SASA* (DoE: 1996, Preamble) underscores collaboration amongst parents and teachers to accept responsibilities concerning organisation, governance, and funding of schools.

Research confirmed that parental involvement is associated with learner academic success, higher attendance rates and lower suspension rates (Wolhuter et al., 2023; Jacobs, le Roux & Davids, 2020), affirming parents as a vitally important part of the school system. Moreover, when parents and teachers work together to address learner discipline issues, it leads to a more cohesive school community (Brown, 2017). With disruptions kept to a minimum, learners benefit from a focused learning environment that allows for more effective implementation of the curriculum. As a result, learner engagement increases, and the peer environment becomes a positive force, reinforcing responsible behaviour.

The *SASA* supports decentralisation of educational governance as it provides the platform for parents to actively participate in school decisions. By law, parents are co-accountable with education partners to address school related issues (Serfontein & de Waal, 2015; Davids, 2017). When both parents and teachers act upon their respective roles and responsibilities (Jacobs, le Roux & Davids, 2020) it can be assumed that parent involvement and collective ownership will be enhanced.

As a democratic process, collective ownership can foster and strengthen feelings of ownership of learning that contribute to the establishment of a disciplined and purposeful school environment. The value of participation subsequently lies in the potential that it holds for involvement in collective decision-making and collective action to address school discipline. Moreover, the *Act* stipulates that school governing body members must

be elected “democratically”, which ensures representation and accountability (Sections 23(2), 28(1)).

These aspects of the *SASA* reflect a shift from a centralised, authoritarian education system to a more inclusive, participatory model of school governance. This collaborative approach aims to promote democracy, accountability, and community involvement in education through shared norms and values.

In brief, the *SASA* (section 23(1)) provides direct evidence of the *Act's* emphasis on collaborative governance in the education system. This section demonstrates how the *Act* establishes structures and processes for involving multiple stakeholders in school governance, decentralises decision-making, promotes parental involvement, ensures democratic processes, and outlines shared responsibilities. Thus, collaborative governance requires consultation on important matters, as stated in section 8(1): "... a governing body of a public school must adopt a code of conduct for the learners after consultation with the learners, parents and educators of the school."

Moreover, the findings align with the social system theory which posits that organisations function as interconnected systems where changes in one component invariably affect the entire structure. This principle aligns with *SASA's* emphasis on collaborative governance, as demonstrated through the *Act's* focus on shared responsibility among stakeholders, interconnected decision-making processes, and mutual accountability structures. The systemic approach acknowledges that school discipline cannot be addressed in isolation but must be understood within the broader context of educational and social systems.

Shared norms and values

A fundamental aspect of social system theory is the maintenance of stability through shared norms and values, which directly corresponds to *SASA* regarding the importance of collective behavioural expectations. The *Act's* implementation framework emphasises the development of common disciplinary standards that reflect community values while maintaining educational objectives. This normative integration is crucial for creating a coherent disciplinary approach that resonates with all stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents and learners. The alignment of organisational values with community expectations creates a strong foundation for sustainable disciplinary practices.

The *SASA* stands as a pivotal piece of legislation that fundamentally emphasises shared norms and values in South Africa's educational landscape. The *Act* aligns with constitutional values, embedding principles of human dignity, equality, and freedom throughout its framework. It confirms the constitutional values for collective ownership, namely partnership, mutual trust, and respect in that it legally constitutes collective decision-making in Section 16 (1) and (2) (DoE, 1996) with the stipulations that “the governance of every public school is vested in its governing body” and “the governing body stands in a position of trust towards the school”. The *Act's* commitment to shared norms is particularly evident in its establishment of democratic school governance through school governing bodies. This structure creates a collaborative platform where

parents, teachers, and learners participate in decision-making, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and community ownership of education. Furthermore, the *SASA* sets uniform standards and benchmarks across all schools, ensuring consistent quality while promoting equal access to education regardless of socioeconomic status.

The *SASA* also demonstrates a deep recognition of South Africa's diverse cultural heritage. It promotes multilingualism and protects religious freedoms while maintaining secular education principles. Through these provisions it carefully balances the need to respect individual cultural identities while building a shared educational framework that unites rather than divides. This approach, coupled with its emphasis on addressing historical inequalities through measures like fee exemptions, underscores the fundamental role in promoting both shared values and social justice in South African education.

The *SASA* significantly emphasises shared norms and values in aiming to provide a uniform education system that would unite rather than divide society. It also emphasises democratic values and equal educational opportunities (DoE, 1996). The *SASA*'s constitutional alignment reflects the values enshrined in the *Constitution* (1996), which promotes human dignity, equality, and freedom. This alignment is evident in the *SASA*'s fundamental principles of non-discrimination and educational inclusivity (DoE, 1996). It translates these constitutional ideals into practical educational policies by ensuring all learners have access to quality education regardless of their background. As such, the *SASA* establishes a framework for collective ownership in disciplinary matters. This framework ensures that when maintaining learner discipline, all stakeholders' rights and responsibilities are protected and exercised in a manner that upholds human dignity. The emphasis is on non-discrimination which means that disciplinary procedures must be applied fairly and consistently, with all stakeholders having equal voice in the process regardless of their background.

The principle of inclusivity under the *SASA* strengthens collective ownership by ensuring that disciplinary approaches accommodate diverse perspectives and needs. This is reflected in how schools must develop and implement disciplinary policies that respect cultural differences while maintaining consistent standards. Parents and school communities are empowered to participate in creating and enforcing disciplinary measures that align with both constitutional values and local community contexts. Moreover, the constitutional value of freedom, as embedded in the *Act* supports collective ownership by allowing schools and their communities to develop disciplinary approaches while operating within protective legal boundaries. This balance ensures that while schools have autonomy in managing discipline, they must do so in ways that respect learners' rights, promote accountability, and foster shared responsibility between schools and families. Through this alignment, the *SASA* creates a framework where maintaining discipline becomes a collaborative effort that upholds constitutional principles while engaging all stakeholders effectively.

Shared governance through school governing bodies embodies collective ownership by creating formal structures where parents, teachers, and learners jointly develop and implement disciplinary policies. This participatory approach ensures that disciplinary

measures reflect community values while establishing clear accountability channels for all stakeholders in maintaining school discipline (Davids, 2017). Common educational standards support collective ownership of discipline by providing consistent behavioural expectations and disciplinary procedures across schools. This uniformity helps parents and teachers understand their roles and responsibilities in maintaining discipline, while ensuring fair and standardised approaches to behavioural management.

Cultural recognition strengthens collective ownership by ensuring disciplinary approaches respect and incorporate diverse cultural perspectives (Eden, Chisom & Adeninyi, 2024). This cultural sensitivity in discipline management encourages greater parental involvement and community support, as families feel their values and traditions are acknowledged in disciplinary processes.

Social justice in maintaining learner discipline ensures that all stakeholders, regardless of their socioeconomic status, have an equal voice in disciplinary matters (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2024). This inclusive approach promotes collective responsibility by ensuring that disciplinary policies and their implementation consider the diverse circumstances of all learners and their families, leading to more equitable and effective behavioural management strategies.

Policy implementation

One way schools address the prevalence of violence and learner misconduct is through the implementation of legislation, policies, and regulations enacted by the Department of Education. The *Constitution* (1996) forms the basis of the policy framework and upholds the principles of collective decision-making, participation, and partnerships in the education sector. Being the supreme law of South Africa, it provides the foundation for collective ownership in maintaining discipline. It sets out the underlying principles and values that promote collaboration between parents and schools. These principles include shared decision-making, co-responsibility, and co-accountability for the maintenance of school discipline, all of which are protected and promoted within the *SASA*.

Moreover, within the social system theory school leadership must embrace collaborative decision-making processes and meaningful stakeholder engagement. School leaders must facilitate the development of shared values while maintaining clear operational frameworks (Nadeem, 2024). This approach requires balancing autonomy with accountability, ensuring that disciplinary measures are both effective and equitable. The management structure must support both preventive measures and responsive interventions while maintaining consistency with system-wide objectives.

The existing South African policy and legal framework for learner discipline serves as a guide for collective ownership, as put forth by Davids (2017). Davids argued that parents, as democratic citizens, should engage with schools through collaborative participation. The policy framework emphasises the shared responsibility of parents and schools in maintaining discipline (Bell, 2020), guided by principles of openness, accountability, and respect. It is important that parents have a thorough understanding of policies and

procedures for learner discipline in the South African School context. Parents' understanding of policies and discipline procedures emphasise the importance of collaboration, shared responsibility, and mutual support among all stakeholders. As such, parents' involvement in understanding discipline policies and procedures reflects a recognition of their essential role in shaping learners' behaviour and attitudes (Gregory, 2016; DoE, 1996).

The *SASA* encourages effective parent involvement and highlights the importance of collective ownership in maintaining discipline. The *Constitution* (RSA, 1996) and the *SASA* provide a solid foundation for promoting collaboration, participation, and partnerships between parents and schools. By adhering to these principles and values, parents and schools can work together to create a conducive environment that supports positive learner behaviour and academic success.

The concept of collective ownership in maintaining learner discipline in schools is when parents and teachers both understand their significant roles and responsibilities to maintain discipline at home, and their role in assisting schools to enhance positive learner behaviour (Tshabalala et al., 2024). Within the framework of social system theory, roles and responsibilities are recognised as interdependent elements crucial for maintaining social order. In schools, this translates to teachers providing guidance and leadership, while learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and contribute to a positive learning environment (Ballantine, Stuber & Everitt, 2022). In the context of maintaining learner discipline, social system theory underscores the significance of shared norms and values in educational environments. Through collective ownership, parents and teachers prioritise mutual respect, responsibility, and cooperation among learners, fostering a sense of communal responsibility for discipline. By establishing clear rules, effective two-way-communication channels, and support systems, teachers empower parents to have a voice in decision-making processes related to discipline (Davids, 2017). As social system theory is the theoretical framework that underpins this study, parents and teachers as individuals form part of interconnected systems. This aligns with the concept of collective ownership in the context of the interdependence and interactions between parents, schools, and the wider community.

As indicated earlier, the existing South African policy and legal framework for learner discipline serves as a guide for the proposed framework of collective ownership. Parents, as democratic citizens, should engage with schools through collaborative participation (Ngozwana et al., 2024). Parents and schools share a collective responsibility in maintaining learner discipline, which aligns with the principles of the social system theory. This theory underscores the interdependence of parents and teachers in the school community, which emphasises their roles in shaping learner behaviour and maintaining learner discipline. Within this framework, parents and teachers as individuals serve as crucial components, working together to instil appropriate norms and expectations in learners. Parents lay the foundation for discipline at home, while teachers reinforce and expand upon these norms within an educational context. Effective two-way communication and collaboration between parents and teachers is essential for identifying and addressing behavioural issues (Davids, 2017). By fostering a supportive environment

and providing consistent role models, both parents and teachers contribute to the development of disciplined and responsible learners. Through their collective efforts, parents and teachers uphold a sense of collective ownership in maintaining learner discipline, thereby contributing to the overall stability and success of the social system.

Within the framework of social system theory, policies must be formulated through participatory processes that engage all stakeholders (Rijal, 2023), with regular reviews and adaptations based on practical experience and community feedback (Gerrard & Savage, 2023). The implementation strategy should incorporate collaborative approaches, preventive measures, and support systems for behavioural management. These elements must work in concert to create a comprehensive disciplinary framework that serves both corrective and developmental purposes.

Moreover, within the social system theory, the findings of collaborative governance, shared norms and values and policy implementation demonstrate that effective school discipline requires a holistic systems approach supported by strong collaborative structures and clear policy frameworks. This comprehensive understanding emphasises that successful disciplinary systems depend on shared ownership, consistent implementation strategies, and regular evaluation and adaptation.

Conclusion

This study argued that discipline is not solely the responsibility of schools. It emphasises the importance of collective ownership, where parents actively participate and collaborate with schools to maintain discipline. By embracing the concept of collective ownership, parents and schools can work together to address these challenges. Within the social system theory framework, parents and teachers as part of the community form integral parts of the larger social system (Rapp & Corral-Granados, each playing a role towards collective ownership in maintaining learner discipline (Backus et al., 2019). This collaboration involves joint decision-making, shared responsibility, and mutual support, all of which are fundamental aspects of maintaining discipline in the schools (Gray, 1985; SASA, DoE, 1996). By collectively taking ownership of disciplinary challenges, parents and schools can engage in collaborative efforts that benefit the entire school community.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of parental involvement, effective communication, and the utilisation of existing policy frameworks in maintaining discipline. While this study employed a qualitative approach to conceptualise collective ownership for learner discipline in South African schools through a policy perspective, future research could complement this by conducting qualitative studies with semi-structured interviews and quantitative studies. Surveys or questionnaires could be used to gather data from a larger sample size, allowing for generalisation of findings and statistical analyses. Furthermore, conducting longitudinal studies can provide insights into the long-term effects of collective ownership and parental involvement in maintaining discipline. Importantly, studies including the perspectives of learners themselves in future research can provide a holistic view of discipline in schools. Understanding how learners perceive

and experience discipline, as well as their suggestions for improvement, can inform the development of more inclusive and effective disciplinary approaches. By addressing these implications for practice and pursuing further research, stakeholders can work together to develop effective strategies for maintaining discipline in schools and promoting positive learner behaviour.

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