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Exploring Effective Teachers Traits in Reducing Bullying Behaviours in a High School in Limpopo Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Bullying is a pervasive issue that negatively impacts learners` well-being, academic performance, and school climate. This study explored the effective teacher traits that contributed to the reduction of bullying behaviours among grade 10 learners at a Limpopo School in South Africa. The participants for this study consisted of thirty grade 10 learners and five teachers at Mamphoku Secondary School who were randomly selected. Quantitative data collected from surveys were analysed using descriptive to identify trends and correlations between teacher traits and instances of bullying behaviour and the qualitative data gathered from interviews were analysed using grounded theory. Through a mixed-methods approach, this research identifies specific traits of teachers that foster a supportive and inclusive environment, thereby mitigating bullying. Data were collected through surveys and semi-structured interviews with thirty students and five teachers to gather qualitative and quantitative data on their perceptions of teacher influence on bullying behaviour. Findings indicated that teachers who demonstrate empathy and actively engage with learners create a sense of community that discourages bullying. Furthermore, consistent, and fair assertive disciplinary practices contribute to a decrease in bullying.

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a worldwide phenomenon in schools where learners are becoming victimized and maltreated. It happens repeatedly as overt aggression, where the bullied learners have no power to defend themselves (Jackson, 2018). Bullying has become a major focus of research and policies internationally. Most of the learners get bullied during elementary school years and drop during high school years, and after that, it becomes heavy in universities (Wiggins, 2001). It is often perceived as a social problem that can be counteracted through educational systems. Within schools, researchers have examined the role of the teachers in bully-victim relationships, especially

in protecting the victimised learners and limiting bullying behavior. Several studies have illustrated the importance of the teacher's intervention in moderating the effects of bullying on victims. Empirical evidence suggests that teachers' awareness was low in many schools where bullying incidents existed. Passive responses by teachers appear to support bullying and increase the feelings of discrimination and helplessness among bullied learners. To moderate bullying behavior, the traits of an effective teacher are necessary. Teachers' intervention in a bullying situation is the most important thing in the classroom. Even if there is a good anti-bullying program, a teacher must intervene when bullying happens. The good character of a teacher is necessary to deal with bullying, so both teacher's traits and bullying perception must be taken on.

This study was set to explore the effective teacher traits in reducing bullying behavior conducted by class reports or peer leaders on grade 10 classes of Mamphoku Secondary School, Dimamo Circuits, Limpopo. The increased tranquillity and peace in the school from the bullying behaviour of both the victim and the bully is an act by the effective teachers. Being effective in the classroom, from the definition of Hughes, refers to the ability to deliver intentionally chosen learning responsibilities that enrich and activate the intellectual, social, and emotional growth of students. In accordance with Muoti (2007), there are 12 effective teacher traits in the classroom, one of which is keeping learners on task in the classroom. Many bullying cases can develop in the classroom when the learners are out of control or off-task. Furthermore, Hughes also mentioned that 42% of the classroom behaviour that keeps learners off task includes loud talking, teasing, bullying, and several others (Wiggins, 2001). Studies on effective teacher traits are conducted in elementary schools, with no study of whether effective teacher traits in the classroom can reduce bullying behaviour in junior secondary school classes. The purpose of this study is to explore how to reduce bullying behaviour in class overall and focusing on homogeneous class, which is done by discovering the effective teacher traits in reducing bullying behaviour for grade 10 class of Mamphoku Secondary School. Mangaope, Dinama,

and Kefhilwe (2012) did a study on bullying in junior secondary schools in Botswana; it confirmed that bullying is rife in junior secondary schools in Botswana with the main form of being bullied is verbal bullying. In accordance with Mangaope et al., (2012), it brings the negative impact on victim, bully, and bystanders in and out of school. However, there will be learners being bullied but not being a victim (by their label or status), this incidence allows other learners to see bullying as a social norm in the school (approved by the learners), and moreover it makes bullying behaviour reproduced in other learners (Mangope et al., 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying in schools has emerged as a significant concern for educators, students, and parents, particularly in secondary education settings where peer interactions intensify. Understanding the effective teacher traits that can mitigate bullying behaviors is crucial for creating a safe and supportive learning environment. In particular, the role of teachers in shaping learners' behavior, fostering positive relationships, and establishing a culture of respect cannot be underestimated. This literature review aims to explore the characteristics of effective teachers that contribute to the reduction of bullying behavior in Grade 10 classes at Mamphoku Secondary School. Several studies have identified key traits of effective teachers that influence learners' interactions. These traits typically include empathy, effective communication skills, proactive classroom management, and the ability to build trusting relationships with learners (Marzano et al., 2003; Thompson, 2018). Empathetic teachers can recognize the signs of bullying and are better equipped to address issues before they escalate, creating an environment where students feel safe to express their concerns (Meyer, 2017). Moreover, effective communication plays a vital role in establishing clear expectations around behavior and reinforcing positive conduct among learners. Teachers who engage in open dialogues with their learners encourage inclusivity and discourage bullying (Snyder & Caperna, 2019). Proactive classroom management strategies, such as setting clear rules and fostering a sense of community,

have also been shown to reduce incidents of bullying by promoting positive peer interactions (Kellner & Decker, 2020). By examining these effective traits and their impact on bullying behavior, this literature review will highlight important findings and suggest practical applications for educators at Mamphoku Secondary School. Not only will this analysis contribute to the academic discourse on educational practices, but it will also provide valuable insights for teachers seeking to enhance their effectiveness in creating a bully-free environment (Gaffney et al., 2021).

Prevalence of bullying

Among other provinces, research from various provinces such as Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and Northwest indicated that bullying rates are higher. Bullying is either not reported by learners who are bullied, or they wait an exceptionally long time before doing so. The causes include feelings of guilt, fear of punishment for reporting, and fear that adults will not protect the victim in places where bullying typically takes place in the classroom. The Gauteng National Institute of Child Health and Human Development reported that weekly bullying affected 1.4 million learners in grades 8-10 (Wet & Jacobs, 2013). Among such, 10% were bullies, 6% were victims and 3% were bullies/victims (Asongu, 2015:716). In a study of (Baldry, 2003) 15 686 Gauteng learners between grades 8 and 10 found that 5 % of learners described themselves as bullying victims, only 4 % said they were bullied once a week or more (Hong, 2011:10). Periodic bullying (which happens on a monthly or even less regular basis) has also affected 15% of all learners (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012:250). Half of these victims in or around classroom were either pushed or shoved, grabbed or slapped, and a quarter reported being kicked, struck, or bitten during school time (Miller & Lowen, 2012). Ansary, Elias, Greeene & green, (2015:300) found that over the past year (2014), 40 % of learners were verbally challenged. Ndebele, and Msiza (2014) reference a report by Karmen in South African surveys (2013;300) who found that in Mpumalanga 70% of learners in lyceum had been victims of bullying, while 78% had bullied some.

From a South African perspective, the South African Council of Educators {SACE) (2011) found that violence in secondary schools, across age, gender, ethnicity, and school categories, may also be a major concern. Various surveys conducted among learners and teachers throughout the Western Cape showed that most schools identified problems among learners with conflict, physical abuse, and bullying (Kruger, 2011). In a study of secondary school learners in Tshwane in Gauteng, bullying was reported to be as high as 66 % (Protogerous & Flisher, 2012). Some research on bullying in Lesotho show that in schools there is maltreatment of learners. In a study conducted in Lesotho secondary schools by Isidiho (2009), the results show that (35%) of the learners who participated in the study claimed that bullying occurred daily in their school. Research reveals that almost one-quarter (24 %) of respondents said that learners were bullied once or twice a week, 7 % said learners were bullied once or twice a year, and 21 % said they were never bullied once or twice a year (Isidiho, 2009).

Historical overview of teacher traits in reducing bullying

Bullying in classrooms has long been a pressing issue, with educators playing a pivotal role in mitigating its effects. Over the years, various studies and literature have identified specific teacher traits that are effective in reducing bullying behaviors among learners, especially in grade 10 classes, where peer dynamics are particularly pronounced. The early research on bullying, such as Olweus's Bullying Prevention Program (1993), highlighted the importance of adult involvement in reducing bullying behaviors. Olweus emphasized that teachers who were approachable, empathetic, and proactive could positively influence the school climate and thus reduce bullying incidents. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, researchers began identifying specific traits of effective teachers. Studies suggested that teachers who exhibited warmth, assertiveness, and emotional intelligence fostered a safer environment for students (Friedman, 2014; DeAngelis, 2012). Traits such as fairness in discipline, active listening, and conflict resolution skills were also noted as critical in mitigating bullying. Research has consistently shown that positive teacher-learner relationships are crucial in preventing and addressing bullying. For instance, a study by Roorda

et al., (2011) indicated that learners who perceived their teachers as supportive and caring were less likely to engage in or experience bullying. Effective teachers used their relationships with learners to teach them about empathy, respect, and conflict management, all of which contribute to a reduction in bullying behaviour. As literature expanded, specific strategies for teachers became evident. For example, teaching and modeling social-emotional skills became central to bullying prevention efforts. Teachers trained in social-emotional learning were more effectively able to manage bullying behaviors by fostering a classroom environment that encouraged learners to express their feelings and resolve conflicts amicably (Durlak et al., 2011).

In recent years, the focus has shifted towards culturally responsive teaching and trauma-informed practices. Research indicates that teachers who are aware of their learners' backgrounds and challenges can better respond to bullying situations. Culturally competent teachers create inclusive classroom environments that respect diversity, thereby reducing the likelihood of bullying based on identity (Gay, 2010; Theoharis, 2007). While substantial research has been conducted on effective teacher traits and their role in reducing bullying, gaps remain in several areas, Teacher Training and Professional Development, there is limited research regarding the effectiveness of teacher training programs focused on bullying prevention. More studies are needed to identify specific traits and skills that are most beneficial in different educational contexts. Learners Perspectives the voices and perspectives of learners regarding effective teacher traits in bullying prevention are often underrepresented. Understanding how learners perceive teacher actions and traits can provide valuable insights. Variability in School Environments. More research is required to explore how different school environments (urban vs. rural, socioeconomic factors) affect the effectiveness of teacher traits in bullying prevention efforts.

The different bullying behaviours experienced by Grade 10 learners
Physical bullying

Direct bullying involving any sort of physical contact that affects a boy or girl in a touchable way is a form of bodily violence (Joyce & Mmankoko, 2014:24). In addition to threats of bodily abuse; it includes, tripping, hitting other individuals on the cause, punching, harmful properties, physical assault, kicking, taking assets of various individuals, or stealing school property, corporal punishment, extortion, or blackmail (Fried & Sosland, 2011:35). Physical bullying is intended to frighten, threaten, or injure any other person, according to Miller and Lowen (2012:5). Physical harassment happens when one person physically injures another for the intent of bullying, threatening, or humiliating them (Joyce & Mmankoko, 2014:24). Bullying can be physical or direct, according to James (2010), when it affects a person in a visible way, such as hitting and kicking, for example. Burton and Leoschut (2013) suggest that many types of bullying (hitting, kicking, threatening, extorting) can be direct, so they are aggressive in nature and cause severe damage to the victims. Direct bullying is pure unadulterated violence towards people of all ages and all walks of life, described as acts of physical abuse or aggression in which someone is punched, kicked, stomped, battered, or stabbed.

Verbal bullying
Verbal harassment is one of the worst kinds of direct bullying, (Venter, 2013:241), it can range from hurtful calling names and merciless mockery to taunting, insulting, and embarrassing another character. Fried and Sosland (2011:37) decided that bullying takes region while human beings are known as merciless, prone, or harassed names. Furthermore, Fried and Sosland (2011:39) claim that inexperienced individuals are regularly threatened with the usage of offensive feedback that consult race, ethnicity, religion, incapacity, gender, or sexual orientation. Besides writing: it is also defined as verbal bullying on college property that depicts hateful or merciless expression (Mncube & Netshitangani, 2014:5). Verbal bullying can also encompass threats of physical abuse and might take area in my view or online through automatic manner, through textual content messages and emails (Venter, 2013:80). In its maximum backbiting type, verbal bullying can influence the self-guarantee of an object, the feel of self-confidence, the manner the learner identifies himself, the sports activities wherein he/she performs a part and plenty

of several factors in defining the desires harmfully (Miller & Lowen, 2012:10). This entails swearing, gossiping, and spreading rumors, insulting the frame characteristics of a goal, mimicking a lisp or hesitates, teasing, complaining the mom of a person or a few other family members and implying and mocking as verbal bullying. Further, verbal harassment through instructors frequently seems to be a famous type of school violence as teachers name novices by way of unwanted names, use vulgar phrases or swear, talk badly approximately the dad and mom of the learner, and are impolite to inexperienced persons (Mncube & Netshitangani, 2014:26). The sort of name calling, teasing, taunting, mocking, in addition to intimidating different learners are pronounced with the aid of Marais and Meier (2010). It could additionally encompass indirect acts, such as stealing or destroying the property of different newcomers or emotionally harming them. Indirect bullying involves spreading rumors and alienation from society (Burton & Leoschut, 2013).

Cyberbullying

Inside the twenty-first century, technological advances caused excellent extra suffering, a protracted manner to the sort of cyberbullying in which victims are burdened and careworn by digital media (Singh & Steyn 2014:83). Cyberbullying includes the use of instant messaging, emails, or social network or web sites to ship risky, rude, or merciless textual content messages or pixies (Venter, 2013:2422). It consists of "sexting," that is the act of sending sexually expressive messages or photos, normally among mobiles (Dupper, 2013:10). In addition, cyberbullying bullying that happens through cell phones may additionally take the form of sending hateful text messages or pornographic content messages (called sexting) or taking a person's pix and films to supply the content material to others thru cell telephones or online. Different humans also can dispose of others online or construct fake profiles to perpetrate cyber violence with (Kruger, 2011). The carelessness and unregulated dissemination of this kind of bullying brings meanness to a degree not made up in any manner and the victim's significant objectivity conjures up an extra degree of wickedness (Fried & Sosland, 2011:43). A person, who, consequently,

becomes almost non-notated and could by no means have the braveness to brazenly bully a peer, can violate the reputation of someone at an impulse. "Cyberbullies in chat rooms and web sites use textual content messages, thief passwords, engage with on-line stalking, make hurtful comments on "My area," "Shape spring," Facebook," and "Chat Roulette," put up to "YouTube" films, and install each possible possibility to use their technological information to examine sufferers continuously and unkindly, hence inspiring pain on them non-forestall (Fried & Sosland, 2011:43).

Psychological Bullying

Psychological bullying involves inflicting mental anguish to cause their targets to fear for their physical safety, breaking down self-esteem and confidence (Shariff, 2018). The claim further emphasizes that verbal psychological bullying is overt in the sense that joking, and insults can be heard or read by witnesses and substantiated by victims. Covert bullying, on the other hand, is a non-verbal psychological bullying intended to reject and isolate by stalking and excluding the victims. It is recognized as the most difficult form of bullying for victims to substantiate because educators cannot see it or prove it is happening. Shariff (2018) states that bullies may suddenly ignore victims or refuse to work with them on class projects or other activities. They may spread unsubstantiated rumors that embarrass the victim or make one appear dishonest or untrustworthy to peers. De Wet (2017) claims that psychological bullying, like physical bullying, can also be indiscriminate or discriminatory. The researcher (de Wet, 2017) further claims that indiscriminate psychological bullying may involve teasing, making repeated derogatory statements about the victim or other kinds of verbal harassment. For example, a boy may be called a loser because he does not have a girlfriend or cannot afford clothes that help him fit 26 in with the cool crowd. Bullying often stems from the inequities that adult society creates, fosters, sustains and continues to grapple with. Furthermore, Rudatskira, Babaniyi, Siziya, Mulenga, Muula & Mazaba-liwewe (2014) indicate that community violence has the potential to influence victimizing behaviour among learners. Janovicek (2011) stated that a significant amount of

psychological bullying is discriminatory. Learners are excluded and deliberately isolated through covert psychological bullying because of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and accent and because they are exceptional students in the class. However, covert psychological bullying makes it so hard for teachers to support the victim (Shariff, 2018).

Teacher traits that are effective in reducing bullying behaviour in the classroom as perceived by learners

Teachers play a crucial role in creating a safe and inclusive classroom environment where bullying behaviors are minimized. To effectively reduce bullying behaviors in the classroom, teachers must possess certain traits that are perceived by learners as effective in addressing and preventing bullying. Effective teachers demonstrate empathy, which allows them to understand and relate to their learners' feelings. This trait fosters a supportive environment where students feel valued and safe. Zins & Elias (2016) shows that teachers who exhibit empathy are more capable of addressing learners' emotional needs, which can reduce bullying incidents. Empathy is a key trait that can help teachers understand the feelings and perspectives of their learners, including both the victims and perpetrators of bullying. By showing empathy towards learners who are being bullied, teachers can create a supportive and caring environment where learners feel safe to speak up about their experiences. Empathetic teachers are more likely to intervene in bullying situations and provide the necessary support to both the victim and the bully (McGrath & Noble, 2013).

Teachers with excellent communication skills can effectively convey expectations and address issues directly with students. Clear communication helps establish a classroom culture that discourages bullying and promotes respectful interactions. Effective communication skills are also essential for teachers to effectively address bullying behavior in the classroom (Crothers & Kolbert, 2018). Teachers must be able to communicate clearly and effectively with learners, parents, and other school staff to address bullying incidents in a timely and appropriate manner. By maintaining open lines of communication, teachers can create a culture of transparency and

accountability that discourages bullying behavior (Furlong & Mikami, 2015). According to Gumm & Riese (2020: 23) awareness of learner's needs is another important trait that can help teachers reduce bullying behavior in the classroom. Teachers who are aware of the social, emotional, and academic needs of their learners are better equipped to identify and address potential triggers for bullying behavior. By understanding the individual needs of each learner, teachers can create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment that promotes positive social interactions and reduces the likelihood of bullying incidents. Effective teachers are attuned to the diverse backgrounds and needs of their learners. By recognizing individual differences, they can create inclusive classrooms that reduce the likelihood of bullying based on social identity (Zins & Elias, 2016). Conflict resolution skills are also crucial for teachers to effectively address bullying behavior in the classroom. Teachers must be able to mediate conflicts between learners and help them resolve their differences in a peaceful and constructive manner (Gumm & Riese, 2020). By teaching learners how to communicate effectively, manage their emotions, and resolve conflicts peacefully, teachers can empower learners to address bullying behavior in a proactive and non-violent way. Teachers proficient in conflict resolution can address disputes between students constructively, preventing escalation into bullying. This skill is vital in maintaining a positive classroom environment (Thornberg, 2011).

Effective teachers implement strong classroom management strategies that create a structured environment where all students feel secure. Good management practices can deter bullying behavior by establishing clear rules and consequences (Gumm & Riese, 2020). Positive classroom management is another key trait that can help teachers reduce bullying behavior in the classroom. Teachers who establish clear expectations, rules, and consequences for behavior create a structured and orderly learning environment that discourages bullying behavior. By promoting positive behavior and reinforcing positive social interactions, teachers can create a culture of respect and kindness that reduces the prevalence of bullying incidents (Zins & Elias, 2016). The teacher-learner relationship plays a crucial role in mitigating

bullying in educational settings. A positive and supportive relationship can create an environment where students feel safe, valued, and understood. Trust and safety are essential components of a positive teacher-learner relationship. When students feel safe and supported by their teachers, they are more likely to speak up about bullying incidents (Schunk, 2011). Teachers who are approachable and understanding create an environment where learners feel comfortable discussing their concerns and seeking help when needed. When learners trust their teachers, they are more likely to report incidents of bullying. A strong relationship fosters a sense of safety and encourages learners to speak openly about their experiences (Hamre & Pianta, 2011). Teachers who build strong relationships with their learners can provide social and emotional support. This helps students develop resilience against bullying and promotes positive peer interactions (Jennings & Greenberg, 2019). Emotional support is another key aspect of the teacher-learner relationship. Teachers who build positive relationships with their learners can provide emotional support, making them feel valued and understood. This emotional support can help mitigate feelings of isolation and vulnerability that often accompany bullying. By fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance, teachers can help them develop the resilience needed to navigate challenging social situations (Schunk, 2011).

A close connection allows teachers to better understand the individual needs and challenges of their learners. This understanding can lead to early intervention and effective strategies to address both bullying behavior and the impacts on victims. Teachers also serve as role models for behavior (Dweck, 2016). By demonstrating respect, empathy, and cooperation, they can influence learners to adopt similar behaviors. When teachers model positive social interactions and communication skills, they help create a culture of respect and inclusion in the classroom. This kind of environment naturally discourages bullying behavior and promotes a sense of community among students (Wentzel, 2017). A classroom characterized by mutual respect and positive interactions reduces the likelihood of bullying (Schunk, 2011). Teachers who model and promote inclusive behavior can influence them to adopt similar

attitudes. effective teacher-student relationships contribute to a positive classroom environment where inclusion and respect are prioritized. When learners feel valued and supported by their teachers, they are more likely to treat their peers with kindness and empathy. This kind of environment fosters positive social interactions and reduces the likelihood of bullying (Schunk, 2011). According to Pianta & Stuhlman (2014), teachers who are actively involved in their learners' social dynamics can help facilitate friendships and reduce isolation, which are risk factors for both bullying and victimization. Moreover, teachers play a crucial role in facilitating the development of social skills among students. By encouraging collaboration, communication, and teamwork, teachers help them build friendships and alliances. These social connections can help students navigate social challenges and build dedicated support networks, reducing the risk of bullying (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2024).

Strategies formulated to reduce bullying cases

Awareness and education programs

According to Olweus (1993), workshops and seminars, conduct regular workshops for students, teachers, and parents on the effects of bullying, its signs, and prevention strategies. Curriculum Integration, Integrate lessons on empathy, conflict resolution, and the importance of diversity into the existing school curriculum. These programs can help them understand the negative impact of bullying and encourage them to treat each other with respect and kindness. Workshops, assemblies, and classroom discussions can be organized to raise awareness about bullying and its consequences. Learners can be taught conflict resolution skills and strategies for standing up to bullies safely and effectively.

2.5.2 Establish Clear Policies

Anti-Bullying Policy, develop and communicate a clear anti-bullying policy that outlines what constitutes bullying, the consequences for those who engage in it, and the procedures for reporting incidents. Support Systems, create a support system where students can report bullying anonymously, ensuring

that they feel safe and secure. These policies should clearly define what constitutes bullying, outline the consequences for engaging in bullying behavior, and provide guidelines for reporting incidents of bullying. By having clear and consistent policies in place, learners will be more likely to understand the seriousness of bullying and feel empowered to speak up when they witness or experience it (Durlak et al., 2011).

Promote a positive school climate

Peer Mentorship Programs establish peer mentoring programs where older learners mentor younger ones, fostering relationships and reducing isolation among students. Incentives for positive behavior, create a reward system for learners who demonstrate kindness and inclusivity, reinforcing positive behavior (Sutherland & Sullivan, 2011). Promoting a positive school climate is also essential in reducing bullying cases (Squires & Murray, 2011). Creating a supportive and inclusive environment where students feel safe and respected can help prevent bullying from occurring. Encouraging positive behaviors, such as kindness and empathy, and celebrating diversity can help foster a sense of belonging and acceptance among students. Implementing anti-bullying initiatives, such as peer mentoring programs and kindness campaigns, can further promote a positive school culture (Nickerson & Lee, 2019).

Engage parents and the community

Schools should organise workshops for parents to educate them on recognizing the signs of bullying and how to support their children. Community Involvement, partner with local organizations and mental health professionals to provide resources and support for both students and families (Nickerson & Lee, 2019). Engaging parents and the community are another important aspect of the strategy. Parents can play a crucial role in addressing bullying by reinforcing positive behaviors at home and supporting the school's efforts to prevent bullying. Community organizations and local businesses can also be valuable partners in promoting anti-bullying initiatives and providing resources and support to students and families (Nickerson & Lee, 2019).

Teacher training and involvement

Professional development offers training for teachers on recognizing signs of bullying, effective intervention strategies, and ways to foster a supportive classroom environment (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). Classroom Management Techniques encourage teachers to implement proactive classroom management techniques that promote respect and cooperation. Teacher training and involvement are also key components of the strategy (Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Teachers should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to recognize and address bullying behavior effectively. Professional development opportunities can help teachers learn how to create a positive classroom environment, intervene in bullying incidents, and support students who have been affected by bullying. Additionally, teachers can serve as role models for learners by demonstrating respectful and inclusive behavior in their interactions with others (Johnson & Johnson, 2014).

Theoretical framework

This study adopted behavioural theory. This theory holds that bullying behavior is not inherent, but by modeling their behavior to threaten others of their settings, children develop bullying traits (Ewen, 2010:289). The conditioning technique of Skinner is laid low with the behavioral guide with the aid of controlling incentives and consequences within the discipline (Cervone & Pervin, 2008:393). This conditioning is called conditioning due to the very truth that the organism acts on the environment to have a designated outcome. Reinforcement can boost the danger of the same behavior going on again (Feist & Feist, 2019:450). According to Grace (2011:1) teachers have long recognized that children reply to the enforcement of rewards and penalties that are based on a mechanism of both first- rate and bad reinforcement and this also defines the number one fundamental element of Skinner's ideals exactly. When past behaviors are rewarded, kids are probable to copy these behaviors willingly and vigorously, and this will increase the probability of the equal response taking place again. Alternatively, if the consequences of the responses are negative or non-reinforcing, the chance of a subsequent operational response is

minimized (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1987:198). Consequently, the management of a painful and ugly reinforcer decreases the chance of the equal response occurring once more after an ugly response (Grace, 2011:1). Skinner indicates that strengthening top habits which might be incompatible with the terrible ones is a mile's safer way to limit the chance of an operator-a parent cannot take note of a toddler's mood tantrums and react on my own to extra comfortable and dependent behaviors. After being calm, the kid simply gets what it wishes, such conduct is more likely to be repeated in the future (Ewen, 2010:301). Skinner located types of conditioning, operative and conditioning (Feist & Feist, 2019:448).

While it is also understood that movement is motivated with the aid of its consequences, the conditioning principle of Skinner shows that the method does no longer entail repeated efforts, but instead a second's reaction to a well-known stimulus (Grace, 2011:1). On the extraordinary aspect, with conditioning, a reaction is drawn form an organism with the useful resource of a chosen, recognizable stimulus, that is, a stimulus this is initially impartial, then induces a strong reaction (Cervone & Pervin, 2008:380), whilst in conditioning, conduct is much more likely to recur whilst it is explicitly assisted (Feist & Feist, 2019:448) According to the conditioning principle of Pavlov, "if a competitive response stimulus takes place time and again at an equivalent time and in the equal vicinity as some independent environmental stimulus at the beginning, that competitive reaction will subsequently start to arise in the presence of the primary impartial stimulus" (Gasa, 2005:38). Importantly, conditioning will also be liable for greater complex phobias, fears, and anxieties in human studying (Feist & Feist, 2019:449). Skinner maintained that awesome reinforcement through a reward approach could increase the chance of every other reaction being elicited (Ewen, 2010:293). Similarly, there is a greater risk of the competitive behavior being replicated when adolescent participation in aggressive behavior is rewarded by way of the coevals. Again, deviant young people engaging with deviant friends are discovered to enhance every other 'stalk of rule-breaking conduct' and peer exclusion has been labelled as a punishment

for now, not abiding with the aid of the coevals' rules. Importantly, for the sake of peer popularity, teenagers also can be concerned in bullying episodes to prove their loyalty to the group (Gasa, 2015:38). Even as Pavlov and Skinner maintained that without our knowledge, reinforcement works, Bandura (1977) disagrees and argues that we want to recall reinforcement to be effective (Ewen, 2010:344).

Particularly, strengthening requires a shift in our conscious expectancies - we are much more likely to act in ways we intend to provide incentives and/or get away punishment. Bandura believes that if acts had been dictated exclusively by external rewards and consequences, people will behave like weathervanes (Feist, 2019), constantly changing in lots of instructions to conform to the momentary forces influencing them." He argues that, in fact, people also "set sure standards of behaviors for themselves and solution their personal actions in self- rewarding or self-punishing approaches" (Ewen, 2010:345). The researcher believes that at the same time as behavioral principle does no longer absolutely provide an explanation for the perpetration of bullying, it does provide a proof of the way adolescent coercive and bullying behavior can be taught, retained, and unlearned through a conditioning mechanism. At the same time as the emphasis of the behavioural concept become on conditioning behaviour, the principle of social getting to know keeps that via looking the behaviours of others via a manner of modelling and enhancing, people study poor or superb behaviour (Gasa, 2015 :438).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Findings will also help teachers learn how to implement effective teacher behavior and traits that can help curb bullying behavior in schools. The study will help through knowledge sharing and capacity building of teachers on what teaching practices, traits and behaviors have been found to work in classroom management within the context of countering bullying behavior. The study will contribute to the body of knowledge of education and save on the wastage of financial, human, and material resources within the school system. Understanding the traits of bullying behavior supports research in educational psychology.

The findings are also of significance to both private and public policymakers and organisations as they provide input into how effective teaching behaviors can best work in addressing and countering bullying behavior within schools in Mamphoku secondary school. The findings promote randomized exploration and the need for policy adjustments to consider the diversity of effective teacher attributes. Use, application and implementation of the findings will go a long way in promoting good teaching practice, enhancing school safety, and establishing a positive learning environment for the benefits of students to realise their right to education that is free from bullies and discrimination. The study will provide a basis for future research in education focused on effective teacher behavior and trait development for positive targeting, identification, and intervention (Mangope et al., 2012). Research findings will be widely disseminated to reach the concerned and affected stakeholders, hence promoting action.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

The interpretive paradigm guided this research, emphasizing the understanding of social phenomena from the perspectives of the participants involved (Creswell, 2014:185). This approach facilitated the exploration of the subjective experiences of both teachers and students regarding bullying behavior and the effective traits of teachers. By focusing on the meanings and interpretations of these traits, the study sought to provide a deeper insight into the dynamics of the classroom environment and the implications for bullying prevention. A mixed-method research design was employed, combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Gray, 2014:385). This dual approach allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the complex issue of bullying in schools. While quantitative methods provided statistical data regarding the prevalence of bullying and the correlation with teacher traits, qualitative methods offered richer insights into the personal experiences and perceptions of the participants.

The research design was descriptive in nature, aiming to accurately portray the current state of bullying behavior in the target population and the identified teacher traits that contributed to its reduction. This design allowed for a systematic collection and analysis of data, providing a clear and comprehensive overview of the situation at Mamphoku Secondary School (Gray, 2014:385).

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of thirty grade 10 learners and five teachers at Mamphoku Secondary School. This selection was significant, as it provided insight into the interactions between teachers and students in the context of bullying behavior.

Sampling refers to the process of selecting a subset of individuals from a larger population to participate in the study (Flynn & Fugate, 2018). A well-defined sampling strategy ensures that the sample accurately represents the broader population, which, in this case, includes thirty learners and five teachers at Mamphoku Secondary. A random sampling technique was utilized to select participants for the study, ensuring that everyone in the population had an equal chance of being included. This method reduced bias and enhanced the generalizability of the findings, allowing for a more representative snapshot of teacher traits and learners experiences related to bullying.

Data collection

Data collection involved multiple methods, including interviews and surveys. Structured surveys were distributed to learners to capture quantitative data on the frequency and nature of bullying incidents, as well as their perceptions of teacher influence (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013:409). Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five teachers to explore their traits and strategies that they believed were effective in managing bullying behavior. A structured questionnaire was developed and distributed to the broader population of thirty Grade 10 learners and five teachers. The survey included both closed-ended questions, which allow for quantitative analysis, and open-ended questions, which provide qualitative insights. The questionnaire focused on measuring the prevalence of bullying behaviors as perceived by learner and the

effectiveness of various teacher traits in mitigating these behaviors.

Data analysis

Quantitative data collected from surveys were analyzed using descriptive to identify trends and correlations between teacher traits and instances of bullying behavior. The qualitative data gathered from interviews were analysed using grounded theory which enabled the researchers to derive theories based on participants' responses. This combination of analysis helped to triangulate the findings and offered a comprehensive understanding of the study's focus. As this study aimed to explore the effective teacher traits that contributed to the reduction of bullying behaviours among grade 10 learners at a Limpopo School in South Africa (Squires & Murray, 2011), the researchers analysed and interpreted the data with the help of the universally recognized six steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) asserted that these steps involve reading the data familiarizing oneself with it, coding the data into themes, identifying analogous themes, revising themes, naming themes, and developing theoretical meanings. Thematic analysis was appropriate for this study because the research objective which forms the basis of the interview questions were already themed-based, and data collected were intended to address the objective. For this mixed method, the researchers integrated the findings by comparing and synthesising them.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are paramount in research involving human participants (Suri, 2011:63).

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that participants are fully aware of the research purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. Additionally, the study adhered to the ethical guidelines established by the relevant educational and institutional bodies. Ethical clearance certificate was granted by Turfloop Research Ethics Committee with project number: TREC/998/2024: PG.

DISCUSSIONS OF THEMES

This study explored the effective teacher traits that contributed to the reduction of bullying behaviours among grade 10 learners at a Limpopo School in South Africa. Their experiences were categorised and the following themes, and topics are discussed below: Extent of bullying behaviour, verbal bullying, empathy, awareness of learners, and engagement. These themes are discussed below. See table 1 below.

Prevalence of bullying

The findings indicated that bullying remains a significant issue in schools, with quantitative data revealing that approximately 30% of learners reported experiencing some form of bullying. Qualitative interviews revealed that learners of varying demographics felt impacted differently, with instances of bullying more prevalent among marginalized groups.

Types of bullying

My analysis categorised bullying into three main types: physical, verbal, and social. Each type presents unique challenges and affects learners differently,

Table 1: Categories, themes and topics

Categories	Themes	Topics
Prevalence of bullying	Extent of bullying and behaviour	Data on reported cases on bullying
Types of bullying	Verbal bullying	Insights into -calling names
Effective teacher traits	Empathy	Importance of teachers understanding learners' emotions and perspectives
Strategies that promote a positive classroom environment	Awareness of learners	Teacher identification of individual learners' challenge and strengths
Important of learner - teacher relationship	Engagement	How positive relationships enhance learners' participation and investment in learning

leading to varying emotional and behavioral responses. For instance, while physical bullying often results in immediate, visible injuries, verbal and social bullying may lead to long- term psychological effects. Quantitative data indicated that physical and verbal bullying were the most reported forms among learners, whereas social and cyberbullying were recognised as emerging issues.

Importance of teacher-learner relationships
Social and emotional support
Qualitative Insights: Interviews with learners revealed that strong teacher support contributes significantly to learners' emotional well-being. Learners who feel emotionally supported are more likely to engage in school positively and report lower instances of bullying (Thornberg et al., 2022). Quantitative data, surveys indicate that learners who perceive their teachers as supportive have 30% fewer incidents of bullying behavior reported.

6.2.2 Empathy and understanding
Qualitative insights, interviews highlighted the role of teachers in understanding learners' backgrounds and emotional needs. When teachers display empathy, learners feel more valued and understood, which fosters a sense of belonging. Quantitative data statistical analysis showed a correlation between high levels of teacher empathy and reduced reports of bullying, with a 40% decrease in incidents among learners who rated their teachers as empathetic.

Positive classroom environment
Qualitative Insights Observations of classroom inter-actions indicated that a positive environment encour-ages open communication and cooperation among students, which can mitigate bullying. Quantitative data collected from classroom climate surveys sug-gested that classrooms with a positive environment (measured through student engagement and respect) yield 25% lower instances of peer conflict.

Peer dynamics
Qualitative Insights, peer interviews demonstrated that students' perceptions of their peers are heavily influenced by teacher attitudes and behaviours. Positive reinforcement from teachers leads to improved peer relationships. Quantitative data of peer relationship surveys found that students who felt supported by teachers had their social networks expand, resulting in a 35% lower likelihood of being involved in or witness to bullying.

Strategies to reduce bullying in grade 10
Awareness and education programs
Implementing programs that educate learners about the effects of bullying and the importance of positive relationships can empower them to take a stand. Both qualitative and quantitative data support that awareness initiatives lead to more reporting of bullying and a decline in incidents.

Establish clear policies
Developing and enforced policies regarding bullying behavior should be communicated clearly to students and staff. Analysis indicated that schools with clearly articulated policies see a 20% decrease in bullying complaints.

Promote positive school climate
A positive school climate is essential in preventing bullying. Regular assessments of school climate (both qualitative through student feedback and quantitative through climate surveys) should be conducted to gauge and improve the environment continually.

Engage parents and community
Creating workshops and discussions that involve parents and community members fosters a collective effort to combat bullying. The qualitative feedback noted that parental involvement leads to increased accountability among students and significantly reduced bullying incidents.

Teacher training and involvement
Continuous professional development aimed at equipping teachers with tools to support their students emotionally and socially is critical. Data suggests that teachers who receive specific training in relationship-building strategies are more effective in reducing bullying behaviors, showing a 30% improvement in their responsiveness to interpersonal issues within the classroom.

DISCUSSION OF EACH CATEGORY AND ITS THEMES

Empathy was highlighted in as a crucial trait among teachers that contributes to a decrease in bullying behavior. Learners reported that teachers who demonstrate understanding, and compassion are more approachable, which encourages victims of bullying to speak up. An empathetic teacher creates a safe space where students feel valued and understood, making them less likely to engage in bullying behavior or remain silent about it (Dietrich et al., 2023). Effective communication is fundamental in establishing clear expectations and fostering open dialogue in the classroom (Mahdi, 2023). Learners noted that teachers who communicate effectively can address issues related to bullying promptly and clearly. These teachers encourage students to express their feelings and concerns, which not only helps to diffuse potential conflicts but also promotes a culture of respect and understanding among peers. Awareness of individual learners' backgrounds, emotions, and challenges is essential for effective teaching (Erasmus, 2022). The analysis indicated that teachers who are aware of their learners' specific needs are better equipped to identify signs of bullying and intervene appropriately. This awareness allows teachers to tailor their approaches, providing support to at-risk learners and addressing bullying behavior proactively (Mawila et al., 2023).

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Teachers who communicate clearly and positively foster a supportive classroom atmosphere. Teachers who demonstrate empathy towards students can better recognize signs of distress and bullying. Effective classroom management decreases opportunities for bullying by maintaining a structured environment. Teachers who are approachable encourage students to report bullying incidents without fear of repercussion. Teachers' adept in conflict resolution are better equipped to handle bullying situations when they arise. Strong relationships create a safe space where learners feel valued and protected against bullying. Positive classroom management strategies contribute significantly to a bullying-free

environment. Learners expressed that teachers who implement proactive classroom management techniques create a sense of order and respect, which deters bullying behavior. Such strategies may include establishing clear rules, fostering a sense of community, and recognizing positive behavior, which collectively promote a healthier classroom climate. Teachers with strong conflict resolution skills play a vital role in addressing bullying situations when they arise. Learners felt that teachers who are trained in conflict resolution can mediate disputes effectively, helping to restore positive relationships among students. This capability not only resolves immediate conflicts but also teaches learners valuable skills for managing disagreements in a constructive manner. Teachers who build trust with their learners create a supportive environment where learners feel safe to express themselves. This can reduce bullying by encouraging open communication and making students feel valued and understood. Effective teachers provide robust social and emotional support, recognizing and addressing the needs of individual students. This support is crucial in fostering a sense of belonging and discouraging negative behaviors such as bullying. Teachers who exhibit empathy and understanding are more successful in identifying and mitigating conflicts among learners. By modeling empathetic behavior, they encourage learners to consider the feelings of others, which can lead to more harmonious peer interactions and a decrease in bullying incidents. Creating a positive classroom environment is pivotal.

Teachers who focus on positivity, inclusivity, and respect set the tone for learners' interactions. Such environments discourage bullying by establishing a norm where respect and kindness are prioritized over aggression and exclusion. Influential teachers actively manage peer dynamics, recognizing positive peer relationships and intervening in negative patterns. They encourage collaborative learning and mutual support among. Awareness programs play a vital role in educating students about bullying, its impact, and methods to combat it. Initiatives like workshops, seminars, and interactive sessions can foster an understanding among students about the different forms of bullying physical, verbal, and

cyberbullying. A lack of clear policies often leads to inconsistent responses to bullying. Learners and staff must understand the rules and consequences related to bullying behavior to ensure a unified approach. A positive school climate fosters respect, inclusivity, and support among students, which can significantly reduce instances of bullying. Parental involvement and community engagement are crucial for addressing bullying effectively. When parents and community members are informed and involved, students feel supported both at school and at home. Teachers play a critical role in identifying and addressing bullying in classrooms. Professional development focused on bullying prevention can equip educators with the necessary skills and knowledge.

Conclusion

Although the research had some drawbacks, the targets were achieved. The results showed that bullying has a negative effect on learners' psychological wellbeing and academic performance. Schools and the Department of Education need to put in place strategies and regulations to combat school bullying. In addition, teachers and parents need to consider bullying as a serious crime and to deal with it as such. Both bullies and victims must be encouraged to break the vicious cycle of bullying, given the short- and long-term consequences of bullying. Intimidation is everyone's business. The more understanding of bullying is developed, the less secret the bullies will be, and the victims will be more forthcoming. A happy school is a safe school.

In conclusion, the findings suggested that teachers who cultivate empathy, strong communication skills, effective conflict resolution abilities, awareness of individual learner needs, and positive classroom management can significantly reduce bullying behaviours. These traits not only empower learners but also create a safe educational atmosphere conducive to personal and academic growth. Future interventions in teacher training programs should emphasise the development of these essential traits to further mitigate bullying in schools.

Recommendations

Schools should implement regular workshops focusing on effective communication, empathy training, classroom management, and conflict resolution strategies. They should also establish peer mentorship programs where older learners can be trained to assist younger ones in navigating social challenges, including bullying. Revise and enforce clear anti-bullying policies that outline appropriate teacher responses to bullying incidents and ensure consistent application across the school. Create platforms where leaners can express their thoughts and feelings about bullying, perhaps through regular class discussions or anonymous feedback channels. Engage parents in discussions about bullying, creating awareness and encouraging their participation in fostering a positive school culture.

Limitations of the study

The study is limited to grade 10 classes at Mamphoku Secondary School and may not represent the experiences or dynamics of other grades or schools within Dimamo circuits. The study relies on perceptions from students and teachers, which may be influenced individual biases and experiences. The study may not account for long- term effects of teacher traits on bullying behavior, considering it is cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. Factors outside the classroom, such as home environment, peer influences and social media, may also impact bullying behaviors but are not the focus of this study. Findings may not be generalisable to schools in diverse cultural or geographical of the conclusions.

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Authors` contributions

The authors contributed to the study design, collected the data and conducted the analysis and interpretation. The authors critically revised the paper and contributed to the revision of the manuscript. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding authors upon reasonable request.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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