

Fostering Social Responsibility and Reducing Delinquency among High School Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Learners: A School-Level Intervention Study

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ABSTRACT

High school period is critical for social and emotional development of learners, especially those who are poised to become leaders in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics disciplines. However, many high school learners struggle with delinquent behaviour resulting in ultimate abuse of Mutoriro, Nyaope, Broncleer, Musombodia among other drugs which negatively affect their academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being. Promoting social responsibility and reducing delinquent behaviour are essential for fostering a positive school climate and supporting learners' long-term success. This paper was based on a study that answered what are the main causes of social irresponsibility among high school STEM learners? What are the effects of social irresponsibility on learner performance? And what are the promising interventions to forestall social irresponsibility? The study was anchored on Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility theoretical framework and it employed a qualitative approach, in which a micro-case study, grounded on the interpretivist paradigm to investigate the impact of School-level interventions on promoting social responsibility and reducing delinquent behaviour among Gweru District High School STEM learners. This paper has established that school-level intervention programs like self-monitoring, community service projects, use of sanctions and punishments, use encouragement, affirmation and reward, Guidance and counselling and all-stakeholder participation including guardian participation were effective in promoting social responsibility and reducing delinquent behaviours in Gweru District High School. The findings confirm that school-level interventions play a significant role in preventing juvenile delinquency and promoting positive social responsibility among High School STEM learners.

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Introduction

The high school years are a critical period for social and emotional development, particularly for Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) learners who are poised to become leaders in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics disciplines. However, many high school learners struggle with delinquent behaviour which negatively affect their academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being. Promoting social responsibility and reducing delinquent behaviour are essential for fostering a positive school climate and supporting learners' long-term success. A School as social institution is bound to develop social responsibility in the youth of a particular society. Youth social responsibility plays a critical role in societal

cohesion, organising societal life, and increasing interdependence and coherence among individuals within the community. Conversely, the Zimbabwean media has recently been awash with stories of drug abuse tearing the youth apart. It is imperative that schools intervene to build social responsibility network and at the same time break the drug culture and possibly save society from further depreciation. The primary aim of this paper was to unveil the impact of School-level interventions on promoting social responsibility and reducing delinquent behaviour among High School STEM learners at a particular school in Gweru District, Midlands Province of Zimbabwe.

Statement of the problem

Delinquent behaviours and social irresponsibility have been a worldwide problem (Nawi, et al., 2021). In Cameroon Schools, indiscipline during school time was reported to have cost learners their academic time through unnecessary activities, and disciplinary hearings which they could have used the time to read, study or perform given work (Ngwokabuenui, 2015). Another study carried out in Nyanga District of Manicaland province in Zimbabwe found that indiscipline was caused largely by bad company within and outside the school, lack of discipline at home and in school, irresponsible parents and guardians, use of drugs and alcohol, family problems, poor teacher-student relationships and failure of the school to effectively enforce school rules and regulations (Gutuza & Mapolisa, 2015). It is on record that some youths in Zimbabwe have developed a culture of using Cocaine, Cannabis, Mutoriro, Nyaope, Broncleer and Musombodia (Marimba, 2021) and correspondingly, developed various forms of delinquency behaviours and social irresponsibilities such as demonstrations, unrest, mass disobedience, deliberate breaching of school rules (Madziyire, 2010), drunkenness, stealing, truancy, absenteeism, lateness, bullying and laziness (Marimba, 2021). From the experience that we have gained, learner irresponsibility has resulted in an unquestionable decrease in STEM learner performance, hence we are guided by Marga Klompe to develop School-level interventions that promote social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviour among High School STEM learners now than later.

Critical Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What are the main causes of social irresponsibility among STEM learners?
- ii. What are the effects of social irresponsibility on learner performance?
- iii. What are the promising interventions to forestall social irresponsibility?

Relevance of the study

Social responsibility involves a commitment to the betterment of the community, respect for societal and global ethics (Hawala and El-Shorbagy, 2015), values and norms (Shazly, 2019), and commitment to laws and systems and standards of a given society. In our view, Marga Klompe encourages Learner social responsibility through the skills that allow Zimbabwean youths to infer the intentions, desires, and emotions, and tolerate the other members of the community (Rakan and Ayman, 2020). Justifiably, there is an absolute need to develop these three elements of social responsibility in the quest to promote social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviour among High School STEM learners in Gweru District, Midlands province of Zimbabwe.

Since time in memorial, many rural and urban communities have utilized the idea of village banking (also known as crowd-funding) as a way of managing funds, indigenous seeds, cattle and farms. Traditionally, this idea goes beyond helping one another to acquire necessary basic needs but it is also anchored in building relationships, trust and uplifting one another. While it is beyond doubt that village banking has evolved, the idea remains as an indigenous financial system in many rural communities which in many instances is a circle embed with strong social values anchored on satisfying solidarity and identity building aspirations. For those involved in rural informal market, the idea relies on sharing knowledge, tools and customers (Dhewa, 2020).

The contemporary society has embraced and significantly advanced the concept of village banking as a vital tool for promoting financial inclusion, particularly among marginalized populations. Originally designed to support women, village banking now plays a transformative role in empowering them economically by enhancing both the availability and accessibility of affordable financial resources, enabling them to start or grow small businesses (Nyamongo, 2016). Over time, the model has evolved to become more inclusive, with many community-based groups now integrating men into their membership. This expansion has strengthened the sustainability and collective impact of village banking initiatives across diverse communities.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Literature has it that a theory later known as the *Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility* (TPSR) model was propounded by Hellison (1985) who argued that learner social responsibility behaviours can be taught as they develop into adulthood. The theory is rooted in Marga Klompe's idea that one young person who acquire life-appropriate behaviours, knowledge, attitudes, ethics and norms such as respect, tolerance, self-direction and hard work in a school environment will be able to transfer them to the after-school setting. The TPSR model has been reported to have had a positive impact on the behaviours of youths in the classroom, sports (Lee and Choi, 2015), summer camps (Wright, Whitley, and Sabolboro, 2012), and cultural gatherings among other settings. It follows that it is grounded in the ethical practice that it is every learner's responsibility to behave or act in a way that benefits the larger community (Bordia, 2022).

Likewise, social responsibility is an ethical framework that entrusts learners to act in the best interest of the community. To this end, the concept of social responsibility theory in STEM learning is multidimensional, sometimes more ideological, and more pragmatic, because every generation has its pursuit although particular interest correlate. As a result, it is urgent that families and Schools, as institutions of social order, seed in STEM learners an ethically sound culture of developing

perennial solutions to the existing societal problems which are perpetuated throughout their life after school. However, the social responsibility theory has inherent weaknesses of propaganda tendencies, resulting in people being taken

advantage of in the name of the greater good of society, overloading responsibility on one person resulting in conflicting roles and ultimate confusion.

Methodology

The present research employed a qualitative approach, in which a micro-case study, grounded on the interpretivist paradigm to investigate the impact of School-level interventions on promoting social responsibility and reducing delinquent behaviour among Gweru District High School STEM learners. This approach was the best suitable means to explore the persistence of learners' indiscipline and to achieve an in-depth analysis of how the various factors prevailing in pupils' homes, environment and Schools influence learners' behaviour at School. This micro-case-based method utilised narrative interviews consisting of open-ended questions related to social responsibility and delinquent behaviour which were asked to an experienced disciplinarian educator whose identity was protected by a pseudonym, Mr BIG. A non-probability convenient sampling technique was used to select Mr BIG from an anonymised High School in Gweru District of Zimbabwe. The key advantage of using convenience sampling was to find a teacher volunteer who is punctuated with in-depth knowledge of disciplinary issues and an educator who interacts with learners daily (Sikalumbi, 2023). The other key factor was the availability and voluntary participation of the educator in the narrative interview. The interpretivist paradigm was chosen to observe and collect information about events in real life. While interpretation of these events was made based on the meaning of the collected data by drawing inferences or by judging the match between the information and some abstract pattern (Anyon, Nicotera, & Veeh, 2016).

Reliability of the findings from this micro-case-study was ensured through measuring the accuracy of the interview transcript and paraphrase the information to reflect the educator's response since Mr BIG used both English and vernacular during the interviews. Reliability was also ensured by using a consistent interview protocol and questioning approach to minimise bias (Sikalumbi et.al, 2025). WhatsApp audio and chats were stored to allow for later review as a way of promoting the reliability of the collected data. The findings presented in this paper were valid as researchers shared the findings with Mr BIG who was allowed to verify the accuracy of the presented responses. In some few occasions Mr BIG corrected the and aligned the presented responses into his own meanings which also helped researchers to eliminate researchers' bias during the interpretation of data as a measure of validity. Consequently, the interpretivist paradigm utilised in this study permitted a high level of validity in the findings since the respondent clarified certain misconceptions and misrepresentations.

Findings

It was necessary to picture the ways used by educators to control mischievous behaviours by learners at their schools by enlisting the school-level interventions and quantifying the frequency of which they are being used in the Gweru District. The findings are based on the narrative interview and professional experience of Mr BIG in dealing with learner-delinquent behaviours in High Schools. Mr BIG was then asked to rate the frequency at which He has used each School-level intervention per year. The illustrative table 1-1 indicates that Mr BIG utilise school-level interventions such as Teacher advisor programs, development resiliency skills, stress management and mentor programs to control learner indiscipline.

Table 1-1 School-level interventions that reduce delinquent behaviours

School-level interventions that reduce delinquent behaviours	Frequency per year
Democratizing Prefects selection system	1
Use of encouragement, affirmation and rewards	1
Working with parents/guardians and community leaders	9
Guidance and counselling	36
Use of sanctions	72
Child-friendly committee	3
Support groups	9
Teacher advisor programs	270
Establishment of a school-wide behaviour support system	1
Stress management	270
After-school programs	1
Mentoring programs	270
Self-monitoring	15
Suspension and expulsion	3
Corporal punishment	2
Developing resiliency skills	270

As indicated in Table 1-1, after-school programs, the establishment of a school-wide behaviour support system, democratizing Prefects selection system, use of encouragement, affirmation and rewards, suspension and expulsion, Child-friendly committee, and democratisation of prefect selection systems are rarely used to reduce delinquent behaviours. While these findings cannot be generalised into other Zimbabwean school contexts as they are from a single source, it was worth noting the decrease in the cases of corporal punishment

Guidance and counselling

Findings have shown that one of the school-level interventions used in Gweru District to maintain learner discipline is through learner guidance and counselling. Mr BIG conceded that the primary purpose of guiding and counselling learners is to promote individual self-direction and facilitate personal development. Asked how he used guidance and counselling to promote positive social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviour, Mr BIG explained:

... guidance and counselling are used to build a relationship with learners through empathy and active listening, ensuring they feel safe and comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings

... it also provides coping strategies that help learners handle their issues in a healthy and productive manner, rather than resorting to delinquent behaviour

... I have used it to identify potential underlying causes of problematic behaviour, such as family issues, peer pressure, or stress...

(Mr BIG, interview, WhatsApp, 19 April 2025)

Analysis of the findings in the illustrative Table 1-1 indicates that guidance and counselling sessions are being used once per week to promote social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviours among High School Learners. And interview findings have uncovered school level interventions which were used to promote positive social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviours among High School Learners. Similar findings reported by Kochhar (1990), acknowledge the use of guidance and counselling in schools by asserting that learner guidance does not aim at solving his/her problems but rather helps him/her to solve the problems. As a result, we concluded that guidance and counselling are school-level interventions that promote social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviours among High School Learners (Sikalumbi, 2019).

Working with parents/guardians and community leaders

When behaviour problems escalate at a school, it is urgent that the school and parents communicate regularly. The findings have shown that schools in Gweru District engage parents or guardians and community leaders once in a while to promote social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviours among High School Learners. The primary assumption is that educators assume responsibility for the learner's behaviour at school but in case the learner's behaviour continues to deteriorate, there could be a need to involve parents or guardians (Bosma, Komro, Perry, Veblen-Mortenson, & Farbaksh, 2005). Accordingly, Mr BIG divulged that communication between parents or guidance and the schools may take different number of forms including phone calls, communication books, emails, and communication monitoring forms. Mr BIG confirmed that

..yes I have worked with community leaders to implement initiatives that support positive social responsibility through after-school activities, mentorship programs, and youth leadership opportunities ...

... I have encouraged parents/guardians to engage in regular, open communication with their children, providing a safe space for children to discuss any issues or challenges they may be facing ...

By working collaboratively with the parent and guardians, the behaviour difficulty can be dealt with effectively

(Mr BIG, interview, WhatsApp, 20 April 2025)

and as a result, we concluded that Schools in Gweru District are working with parents and guardians to promote social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviours among High School Learners.

Working with parents or guardians and community leaders

The research findings from the micro-case study have shown that there was a need to work with parents and community leaders to curb indiscipline in High schools. Asked to explain the main reasons behind working with parents and guidance, Mr BIG responded:

Learners will by all means hide their delinquent behaviours to their parents and community elders as most parents disapprove and punish for such behaviours (Mr BIG, interview, WhatsApp, 20 April 2025)

Comparable findings were corroborated by Ozeiner (2006), who uncovered that parental monitoring has a protective effect on many adolescents' risk behaviours in both male and female learners living in middle-class and poor urban environments, whereas unsupervised time, exposure to sexual possibility situations, and out of home care increase sexual behaviour, improved parent-child communication reduces sexual risk behaviours (Sikalumbi, 2025).

Developing resiliency skills

Outcomes presented in Table 1-1 have disclosed that Gweru District High Schools develop resiliency skills daily. Consequently, Mr BIG revealed that developing resiliency skills inculcate the learner's ability to bounce back from any behaviour adversity that overcomes the negative influence of the retard academic success. Mr BIG was asked to explain the strategies He has used to support and develop resiliency skills in learners and said:

Sometimes I give them an opportunity to participate and contribute, develop supportive relationships with other students...

In other circumstances I use delinquent learners to counsel their colleagues as a lesson in which they explain the consequences of their actions... (Mr BIG, interview, WhatsApp, 22 April 2025)

Consequently, the strategy reduces the development of social, emotional and behavioural problems in learners and promote social responsibility competences.

Corporal punishment

The findings in Table 1-1 have indicated that corporal punishment was rarely being used to promote social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviours among High School Learners in Gweru District. Mr BIG admitted that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Policy Circular 35 forbids the use of corporal punishment by educators but indicated that educators have to obtain a written school head's approval to use it. Mr BIG alluded that:

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Policy Circular 35 strictly forbids educators from using corporal punishment without written approval from the head of the station ...

There are cases in which educators over reacted and ended up inflicting wounds on learners when using corporal punishment in behaviour adjustment ...

Using corporal punishment does not develop a sense of social responsibility in learners as they are treated in a dehumanising way ...

(Mr BIG, interview, WhatsApp, 18 April 2025)

The findings of the undercurrent research concur with the findings reported by Mugabe and Maposa (2013) that corporal punishment was viewed, as a necessary method of curbing learner delinquent behaviour, by only 35% of the educators who participated in their research. However, the Education Amendment Act no. 15 (2020) prescribes that under no circumstance is an educator allowed to beat a learner and does not permit any learner treatment which amounts to physical or psychological torture, or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Education Amendment Act no. 15, 2020). However, it commends disciplinary interventions that are moderate, reasonable and proportionate in the light of the conduct, age, sex, health and circumstances of the pupil concerned and the best interests of the child shall be paramount. Consequently, Mr BIG did not hide to mention that the prevailing constitution outlaws the use of corporal punishment in Zimbabwean Schools but argued that,

the threat of corporal punishment is widely used which in most cases culminate into its use because the abolishment of corporal punishment disempowers the educator's ability to maintain discipline

(Mr BIG, interview, WhatsApp, 18 April 2025)

In our view, other school-level interventions here discussed will prevent the urge by educators to use corporal punishment in the 21st Schools.

Suspension and expulsion

Although a learner's social responsibility is a prerequisite to almost everything a school has to offer its learners, Mr BIG admitted that the school may suspend or expel learners whose indiscipline exceeds the limit. The use of suspension and expulsion in Zimbabwean schools is above the law and was prescribed by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Circular number P35. Mr BIG explained that in order to bring about effectual learner responsibility, the schools formulate a set of rules to guide the conduct of learners using Ministerial Circulars such as P35. A local online newspaper, *Bulawayo24* of 3 June 2025, reported an incident in which the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) granted authority to Tredgold primary school in Bulawayo to suspend a grade

seven learner who was found guilty of verbally abusing a teacher, physically assaulting fellow learners and using highly offensive language. Mr BIG admitted that suspension provides the learner with an opportunity to think about what has led to his or her suspension and that suspension also provides the school and staff with an opportunity to re-group and re-tool for the student's return. He stated that:

We used suspension when infractions of school rules occur where the learner will be removed from school for a short period of time...

Sometimes in-school suspensions are more efficient as it allows us to keep monitoring if there are any observable behaviour change ...

(Mr BIG, interview, WhatsApp, 18 April 2025)

Similarly, Mugabe & Maposa (2013) reported that 11% of the educators who participated in their research used suspensions and exclusions as last-resort interventions. However, some suspended learners still enjoy missing classes and do not regard suspension as a consequence but the concept of in-school suspension may be applied to remove a learner to a designated area away from their peers (Zibaida, 2009).

Use of encouragement, affirmation and reward

Gweru District High School employed encouragements, affirmations and rewards to promote positive social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviours.

They are used to recognize and praise instances of positive social responsibility, such as volunteering, participating in community events, or demonstrating kindness to others.

... offer supportive feedback to participants, highlighting their strengths and acknowledging their efforts to make positive changes in their behaviour

It reinforces positive behaviour and motivates participants to continue acting in a socially responsible manner...

Findings have indicated that in some learners, token or reward systems can be effective in teaching the student social responsibility and reducing delinquent behaviours. A learner chooses a reward from a list provided by the educator and target behaviour is specified over a period of time. If the learner could demonstrate to the educator that the behaviour is improving, then the token or reward is given to that learner. Once the

behaviour has been internalized, the teacher will move from an external to an internal reward system. Conversely, Mr BIG cued that the use of sanctions and punishments aim at stopping and correcting learners' bad practices only. Mugabe & Maposa, (2013) reported that punishments such as manual work were used to deter delinquent behaviours in Zimbabwean High Schools by 70% of the educators who participated in their research. However, disciplinary processes that rely on sanctions will end up promoting submission and manipulation rather than the intended development of learner social responsibility.

Stress management

The present findings indicate that educators in Gweru District educate Stress management lessons at school level to deter learners from delinquent behaviours. In a personal communication with Mr BIG, he lamented that:

many learners struggle with the stresses of school and everyday life as they grow up hence, we teach them the positive ways of managing their stress like regular exercising, mindfulness, meditation, walking and yoga ...

(Mr BIG, interview, WhatsApp, 18 April 2023)

From the experience we gained from interacting with Mr BIG, we discovered that there is a dire need to develop positive ways of reducing learner stress to promote social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviours. This is because many learners get in trouble both in school and in the community when their anger takes control resulting in emotional decisions. Therefore, social responsibility can be achieved by offering small-group instruction and/or relevant print materials, like pamphlets on the management of anger, bullying and harassment. We therefore concluded all learners at the school, regardless of having behavioural problems or not, should be taught the skills necessary to manage their anger as a school-level intervention to promote social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviours (Hamilandu, 2025).

Democratizing Prefect selection system

The way in which prefects are selected in schools has an impact on influencing social responsibility and reducing delinquent behaviours. Mugabe & Maposa (2013) noted learners are more likely to behave in a manner that mirrors the conduct of the prefect presented in front of them. This implies that school authorities should promote the participation of pupils in the selection of their school leaders instead of imposing them as the common practice in many schools. As Kipron (2012) advises, when pupils are involved in the selection of their leaders (prefects), they are most likely to work harmoniously with them and not against them and this may reduce cases of indiscipline. Schools were also encouraged to use encouragement, affirmation and rewards to promote good behaviour.

Support groups

The illustrative table 1-1 has indicated that schools in Gweru District are employing support groups to promote social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviours. Asked how support groups are used to promote social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviours, Mr BIG mentioned that:

Organize and facilitate regular group sessions that provide a safe space for learners to share their experiences, struggles, and successes in their journey towards positive social behaviour

Encourage learners to support and encourage each other within the group, creating a sense of community and accountability.

(Mr BIG, interview, WhatsApp, 23 April 2023)

In support groups, small numbers of learners are often formed by counsellors or educators to address issues of positive behaviour support, gender issues, girl child support issues, and drinking or drug issues. These groups are formed at a school and be led by a staff member who has training in group facilitation, to redeem learners with behaviour problems (Brady, Insler, & Rahman, 2015). Although results indicate that support groups are used once per month to promote social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviours it is imperative that other school-level interventions are therefore employed proactively (Abudetse et. Al, 2025).

Establishment of school-wide behaviour support system

School-wide behaviour support system anchored on school rules, teaching programs that incorporate appropriate behaviour, intervention plans, positive behaviour reinforcement and developing social responsibility skills. School-wide behaviour support systems such as *teacher advisor programs* foster a sense of belonging and social responsibility in learners. Learners are assigned to a teacher advisor who acts as a model, a support and a personal advisor to particular students assigned. Mr BIG emphasised that;

the teacher advisor programs become effective when there is a bond between the advisor and the learner advisee

(Mr BIG, interview, WhatsApp, 18 April 2023)

When the teacher advisor gets to know the assigned learners at a personal level, it becomes easier to assist learners with personal problems, monitor their behaviour and provide constructive advice as expected. This kind of personal bond has a significant effect on reducing delinquent behaviours. The educator uses a reward system with students for good

behaviour, communicates with learners using positive language, provides individual notes to learners to remind them of their behaviour goals or to applaud their use of a replacement behaviour and provides positive feedback when rules are followed and behaviour is appropriate.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As raised in the introduction, High School learners from the age of 12 are being involved in delinquent behaviours that deprive them the time to study which negatively impacts their outright performance in school work. This paper has established that school-level intervention programs like self-monitoring, community service projects, use of sanctions and punishments, use encouragement, affirmation and reward, Guidance and counselling and all-stakeholder participation including guardian participation were effective in promoting social responsibility and reducing delinquent behaviours in Gweru District High School. The findings confirm that school-level interventions play a significant role in preventing juvenile delinquency and promoting positive social responsibility among High School STEM learners. In light of the findings of this study, we recommend that educators employ these school-level interventions to promote social responsibility and reduce delinquent behaviour and that future research explore the long-term impact of school-level interventions on learner development beyond High School.

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