

*Thematic Article*

# The Effectiveness of Indigenous African Values in Building the Resilience of Out-Of-School Suspended Learners

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## Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of indigenous African values in building the resilience of suspended learners in South African township schools. Schools often impose suspensions in response to a wide range of behaviour challenges established by legislators and officials to address problems related to school interruptions. Nevertheless, despite the established disciplinary procedures, students still exhibit difficult behaviour. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of African Indigenous values in building the resilience of suspended learners. The study comes from larger research that focuses on the experiences of suspended learners in the context of township secondary schools. This research study is qualitative in nature to provide a rich description of the parents' experiences in their natural setting. I used a purposive sample of parents of suspended learners based on the characteristics of the population and the objective of the study. I collected data using face-to-face interviews, field notes, and documents. The collected data was organised, organized, prepared systematically, and classified into themes and categories. The findings showed that given the increasing number of suspended learners in township schools, parents and the school community recognised the need to understand the risk factors that contribute to behaviour problems as a stepping stone to building the resilience of adolescents.

**Keywords:** African native values; out-of-school suspension; resilience; Ubuntu philosophy

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## Introduction

During the apartheid era, learners in South African township schools faced harsh discipline through corporal punishment (Veriava & Paterson, 2020; Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021). This kind of punitive discipline often led to a range of negative outcomes, both in the short and long term, such as disengagement from academics, lower academic performance, higher dropout rates, and increased interactions with the juvenile justice system (Skiba et al., 2018). Fortunately, traditional practices like corporal punishment have been outlawed in South Africa since the end of apartheid. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996) and the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA, 1996) uphold learners' rights to dignity, freedom, and security. Section 12(1) states that no person shall administer corporal punishment or subject a student to psychological or physical abuse in any educational institution. Instead, the law opted for the learners to be disciplined through suspension to maintain discipline in schools.

Although studies by Jacobsen et al. (2019) and Sanders (2022) have looked at suspension as a form of punishment, there seems to be a lack of research that focuses on behaviour modification techniques from an Indigenous African perspective that could help build resilience in suspended learners. Many of these learners appear to be misunderstood, often grappling with long-term, unrecognised challenges such as feelings of abandonment, despair, and extreme anxiety, or dealing with the consequences of being suspended from school (Wenham, 2019). The extent to which Indigenous African values contribute to discipline in township schools

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remains a concern. With that in mind, this study aims to shed light on how we can build resilience in learners who have been suspended, particularly by looking at how the African Indigenous perspectives of parents might help address challenging behaviour. These values serve as a foundation for social, moral, and ethical behaviour, guiding individuals and communities in their interactions with one another, the natural world, and the spiritual realm. African Indigenous values vary across different ethnic groups and regions, but they often emphasise collective identity, communal harmony, respect for elders, interconnectedness, spirituality, and a strong sense of community (Udom, 2024).

African Indigenous values are essential to our communication and self-expression (Sodi, Bopape & Makgahlela, 2021). Good communication is essential for our social and emotional health. When someone speaks, they are not only expressing their ideas; they are also embodying a portion of a culture that includes both personal and collective experiences. However, while there are existing studies on parenting (Zvomuya, 2020), there is currently little research on how well African Indigenous values might help suspended learners become more resilient. Culturally, parents have a responsibility to nurture their families and instil values that unite them. Therefore, learners facing suspensions must be equipped with resilience and self-sufficiency to navigate tough situations as they prepare for life beyond school. This can only be achieved if we identify behavioural problems early and empower parents, teachers, and caregivers to recognise and address them effectively. The study thus answers the following questions:

1. In what ways do African Indigenous support systems contribute to the adolescent resilience of out-of-school suspended learners?
2. How can the principles of Ubuntu be integrated into parenting frameworks to enhance culturally relevant and emotionally supportive environments for children and youth?

### **Review of the literature**

Preliminary studies conducted on challenging behaviour in various parts of the world employed out-of-school suspension as the ultimate disciplinary option (Curran & Finch, 2021). However, it is noted that despite their prevalence in the 1990s, exclusionary and punitive school discipline practices such as suspensions and expulsions have faced rising criticism (Girvan et al., 2021). Promoting resilience and emotional well-being in children and adolescents can yield long-term, intergenerational benefits, especially when grounded in Indigenous African disciplinary values that emphasise communal responsibility, respect, and holistic development (Balogun & Aruoture, 2025). For this study, the literature review focused on identifying core Indigenous African values rooted in the diverse cultures that serve as a foundation for social, moral and ethical behaviour modification strategies in building the resilience of out-of-school suspended learners.

### **Parental Involvement and Parental Behaviour**

Parental involvement is generally defined as all forms of support given to school-age children by parents, guidance teachers, or caregivers to ensure the achievement of a particular academic programme. Parenting is all about the journey of raising children and goes beyond just a biological connection. Parents have an important role to play in nurturing their children, meeting their basic needs, and creating a supportive environment (Masten, Lombardi & Fisher, 2021). They are there to protect, teach, and instil traditional values, while also guiding and motivating their children to grow socially and emotionally (Lephoto, 2021). Ceglédi, Alter, Godó and Papp (2024) highlight the importance of ongoing communication between parents and teachers, as well as reaching out to each other, not only helps to foster a trusting relationship in which information about the child's behaviour, development and education can be shared, but also provides a space for discussing uncomfortable and difficult topics. Studies show that when learners possess strong social-emotional skills, they are better equipped to resolve conflicts, manage stress, make responsible decisions, and establish positive relationships (Martinez-Yarza, Solabarrieta-Eizaguirre & Santibáñez-Gruber, 2024).

Msila (2012) posits that the absence of participation by parents could be attributed to poverty running many of the marginalised schools, as they are indigent and usually live from hand to mouth due to unemployment. Mampane (2014) argues that unemployment is a threat to family functioning, considering the negative impact it has on family members. Unemployed parents often cannot afford school-related expenses, and children are more likely to experience school suspensions due to unmet basic needs and entrenched systemic inequities (Sanders, Mishna, Fallon, & McCready, 2022). These challenges not only limit their educational

opportunities but also increase the likelihood of behavioural problems, as schools often respond with punitive measures rather than supportive interventions.

Parents' actions to their children's misbehaviour are shaped by their own characteristics, which in turn influence the quality of their interactions with their children and the outcomes for those children (Livingstone & Byrne, 2018). This highlights the importance of recognising that children's behavioural and emotional challenges are closely tied to how parents perceive their misbehaviour. When parents gain insight into their child's external behaviour, it can lead to better engagement and improved outcomes for both the children and their families (Ogg & Anthony, 2019). The behaviours of learners who face suspension often stem from external factors in their environment rather than internal struggles. While it seems logical to think that early intervention is more effective than waiting for problems to escalate, there is actually no strong evidence to support this idea. From an African Indigenous viewpoint, positive parenting behaviours are rooted in the cultural philosophy of Ubuntu, which comprises all elements of human existence, including habits, beliefs, arts, and social behaviours that bind people together in a community (Balogun, Aruoture, & Haruna, 2024). Effective parenting practices that foster early development include showing affection, being responsive, providing encouragement, and engaging in cognitive stimulation or teaching. In addition, family values encompass the socioemotional, sociodemographic, and socioeconomic aspects of parenting, which will be explored in the next section.

Fortune (2024) argues that the absence of a two-parent family structure has negatively impacted many Black families, increasing their vulnerability to daily stressors, a challenge further compounded for out-of-school suspended learners who often lack stable adult guidance. Indigenous practices emphasise intergenerational mentorship. To mentor these learners, schools can collaborate with regional elders, religious leaders, and traditional healers (Onwuatuegwu & Paul-Mgbeafulike, 2023). Mentors provide cultural grounding, emotional support, and practical wisdom, fostering resilience and identity. Onwuatuegwu and Paul-Mgbeafulike (2023) strongly promote this collaboration because African Indigenous education emphasises the development of the whole person, including their intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions.

### **Socioemotional, Sociodemographic and socioeconomic variables and parenting**

Socioemotional development is all about how adolescents begin to figure out who they are, learn to express and manage their emotions, and build meaningful relationships with others (Palaologou, 2010). Zartler (2021) conceptualises parental divorce and separation as the first step in a series of family developments that lead to instability and adverse effects on the developing adolescent. Research suggests that during this stage, adolescents increasingly seek independence and autonomy from parents (Wang et al., 2024). In the meantime, parents start to have less authority and control over their teenage children. The principles of socioemotional development, which emphasise the value of controlling and expressing emotions in a healthy way, are essential to foster interpersonal connections (Antonopoulou, 2024). Indigenous African values play a foundational role in the development of socioemotional skills, offering culturally grounded approaches to emotional intelligence, empathy, and communal responsibility. In many African societies, child-rearing is a collective endeavour, where children are socialised through communal interactions that emphasise respect, cooperation, and empathy. These values are transmitted through storytelling, proverbs, rituals, and daily routines, which serve as informal yet powerful educational tools. Onwuatuegwu & Paul-Mgbeafulike (2023) posit that traditional African education fosters resilience and leadership by embedding moral and emotional instruction within cultural practices. Similarly, UNICEF (2025) highlights that social-emotional development in Sub-Saharan Africa is nurtured through embodied learning rooted in family and community life. These practices not only support individual emotional regulation and interpersonal skills but also reinforce social cohesion and intergenerational continuity. Integrating such Indigenous frameworks into modern educational systems can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of socioemotional learning, particularly in African contexts. (Sanders & Turner, 2018). Additionally, from an African Indigenous perspective, a key socioemotional skill involves finding better ways to express oneself in various situations (Choudhury, 2021).

A combination of social and demographic factors is used to define individuals within a particular group or population, which is known as sociodemographic (Piscitello et al., 2022). Sociodemographic factors such as low socioeconomic status, limited parental involvement, and poor school connectedness are linked to early sexual debut and multiple sexual partners. For example, the findings presented in Wakhley (2024) do not mean that children from broken families are bad or toxic, but that they are vulnerable to learn those ill behaviours to raise their declining self-esteem. Moreover, the occurrence can result in detrimental long-lasting health consequences, such as unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. In several studies,

adolescents are found to use drugs because they want to fit in and they are searching for their identities (Mokwena et al., 2020; Sedibe & Hendricks, 2021; Sibanda & Batisai, 2021). South Africa, after all, has higher rates of drug and alcohol abuse than other African nations, according to Sibanda and Batisai (2021). The prevalence of substance abuse among young people, including learners in educational institutions, is alarming (Chinake, 2017). Additionally, young people are beginning to experiment with drugs at increasingly younger ages (Olawole-Isaac et al., 2017). This trend means that more and more young users are facing serious repercussions physically, socially, and academically. Wakhley (2024) contends that once the stakeholders grasp the children's vulnerability and their needs, it will be easier for the school to plan suitable activities for them.

Socioeconomic status (SES) of a person or a family is determined by several factors, including their income, level of education, and type of employment (Pasha et al., 2018; Sosu et al., 2021). To ensure that they can care for their children, every family requires some degree of assistance, particularly in the areas of finances, healthcare, and education. However, family dissolution is becoming a major problem, especially in low-income areas, despite research showing that the relationship between parents and children is essential for the well-being of adolescents (Gumbi, 2019). In this situation, factors such as poverty in the family, neighbourhood, and school can present significant difficulties. Research shows that children of lower-income and less educated parents are more likely to have behavioural problems (Hartman et al., 2017). Teens in these circumstances often experience a variety of financial, social, and psychological challenges. Poor social awareness, difficulty judging, struggling to empathise with others, problems interacting with others and making friends, family dynamics issues, and relationship struggles at school are all examples of social problems.

### **The philosophy of Ubuntu and family connections**

Ubuntu is about developing your fullness of being through your relatedness and relationship with others (Seroto, 2021). The central concept of connectedness inherent in the notion of Ubuntu is expressed in the Southern African saying "a person is only a person through others" (Aubel & Coulibaly, 2023, p. 4). In this context, culturally responsive parenting becomes essential, acknowledging and respecting the cultural backgrounds, values, and lived experiences of families, ensuring that parenting practices are aligned with the social and emotional realities of the children being raised (Smith, Yzaguirre, Dwanyen, & Wieling, 2022).

Ubuntu embodies a set of values and practices such as caring, reciprocity, sharing, compassion, hospitality, cohabitation, cooperation, and tolerance that people of African descent see as a true representation of the deep connections within the African community (Zvomuya, 2020; Ngubane & Makua, 2021; Seroto, 2021; Ajitoni, 2024). Ajitoni (2024) contends that by emphasising the importance of community, shared values, and mutual support, Ubuntu provides a framework to foster social harmony and collective well-being in diverse contexts. Adolescents are protected from the detrimental effects they might experience on their own by close family networks and protective resources, which serve as a barrier against challenging social situations (Perveen, Khatoon, & Haider, 2025). Love and care from a parent, sibling, spouse, or partner within the family provide crucial emotional support during stressful times. Classic studies of resilience in children and youth identified family protective assets as those elements that enhance the family's ability to thrive even in the face of challenges (Masten, 2018; Ajitoni, 2024). Additionally, Magezi & Khlopa (2021; Letseka, 2022) regard acts of hospitality, generosity, and kindness as highly valued and often seen as expressions of Ubuntu.

Among the main roles of parents in times of disruption or disaster is to maintain or restore family rules and routines that provide a sense of coherence, stability, and well-being in the midst of adversity (Masten, 2018). Reuben and van Breda (2024) argue that relationship-centred resilience aligns well with African ubuntu values, which emphasise social connections as the crucible of personhood. This approach encourages us to engage in empowering activities that bring stability and comfort, promote self-awareness, and help us cultivate a positive self-image. It also reminds us to keep things in perspective and maintain a hopeful outlook (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019; Zvomuya, 2020). It is evident from the studied literature that Ubuntu is frequently explained in a way that emphasises the necessity of individuals coming together in relationships that are respectful and mutually supportive.

### **Research Design and Methods**

A qualitative research design was used to describe the parents' experiences in their natural settings. School A is a former Model C (White only) school in a predominantly white community, but almost none of the learners registered at that school reside in the area. School B is located in a marginalised township with many illegal taverns located near schools and no recreational facilities. According to Zwane (2022), the lived experiences of

learners in incongruent social and cultural school environments can significantly influence their psychological well-being and participation in learning. The selection of School A allows the study to examine how these factors manifest in a school that, while historically privileged, now serves a demographically different and potentially underserved population. The population consisted of the parents of all the students in grades 8 and 9 who had been listed in the discipline file. Data were taken solely from a purposeful sample of parents of the 12 learners who had received multiple school suspensions. This sampling technique is appropriate for qualitative research, where the goal is not to generalise the findings to a larger population, but to gain an in-depth understanding of specific experiences and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The selection criteria for parents over teachers or learners were to provide first-hand knowledge of their family circumstances and cultural values that influence the coping skills of the learners. The following table shows the demographic background of the parents:

**Table 1.** Demographic background of parents

| School A  | Relationship                            | Work       | School B  | Relationship    | Work            |
|-----------|---|------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Parent 1A | Single mother                           | Unemployed | Parent 1B | Single mother   | Unemployed      |
| Parent 2A | Married mother                          | Employed   | Parent 2B | Divorced Mother | Domestic worker |
| Parent 3A | Married mother but not staying together | Employed   | Parent 3B | Single mother   | Unemployed      |
| Parent 4A | Widower                                 | Employed   | Parent 4B | Single mother   | Unemployed      |
| Parent 5A | Widow                                   | Unemployed | Parent 5B | Single Mother   | Unemployed      |
| Parent 6A | Grandmother                             | Unemployed | Parent 6B | Grandmother     | Pensioner       |

Data were collected through a face-to-face interview with identified learners' parents using open-ended semi-structured questions with the help of an interview schedule. The interview questions focused on the participants' family history and the perceptions that elicited their life stories at home and school. The interview sessions took 30 minutes each, and the data were recorded audio to capture rich and accurate qualitative data that might otherwise be lost by manual note taking (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Field notes were systematically collected during classroom observations to capture real-time behavioural patterns, interactions, and contextual factors that influence the conduct of the learner. These qualitative insights were complemented by a review of the school's discipline record file, which provided documented evidence of behavioural incidents, interventions, and disciplinary outcomes over a defined period. Additionally, the SASA (1996) and related policy documents were perused to ensure that the analysis was grounded in the national legislative framework governing learner behaviour, rights, and disciplinary procedures. This triangulated approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of both the lived experiences within the school environment and the formal structures that guide disciplinary practices.

I personally transcribed and manually analysed the audio-recorded data and the field notes. Listening to the recordings of each participant repeatedly helped me become familiar with their experiences and different perceptions of culture. This immersion helped identify initial patterns and gain an understanding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Using a manual coding process, meaningful segments of the data were highlighted and labelled. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was employed (Adler, 2022). For example, field notes captured nonverbal cues and contextual observations. School discipline records also provided paper documentation of behavioural incidents.

The themes were reviewed against the coded data and the entire dataset to ensure coherence and distinctiveness. Each theme was clearly defined, and its scope was described according to the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2021). The final themes that captured the essence of the effectiveness of African Indigenous values in building the resilience of out-of-school suspended learners. The themes identified included family dynamics, socioeconomic status, and parental involvement. Below is a discussion of the themes identified.

### Family Dynamics

In this sub-theme, participants revealed contextual family dynamics relating to their family circumstances as affected by single parenting and poor socioeconomic status. I noticed that learners with the most challenging behaviours stay with a single parent, a guardian, or an extended family member. Of the 12 parents interviewed,

only one came from a nuclear family; nine were single-parent families, and two were grandparents. The following extracts reflect the family history as presented by the participants: *"He is my grandchild... their mother is someone who does not live at home."*, *"She likes to make a lot of noise when she is drunk."*, *"I care for my grandchildren because their mother is irresponsible"* (Parent 6, School B); *"My son stays with his grandmother and uncles because I had moved out to stay with my partner (boyfriend)"* (Parent 5, School B); *"She talks back while being angry and shouting. She does not answer the question; she just gets disrespectful the way she does it"* (Parent 1, School A); *"He does not have a school uniform, and when we try to contact his father, we cannot get hold of him. I think that is what contributes to his behaviour because he is short of a lot of things"* (Parent 4 School B).

The findings reveal that most of the students who are suspended from school are affected by family circumstances, with various contextual factors. Not all families who experience adversity in life are affected in the same way. From the data gathered, it was evident that the transgressions of suspended learners originated from the emotional instability prevailing in their families and their lack of capacity to deal with it. Although the alleged transgressions are unacceptable and pose a danger to other learners and teachers, they continue to happen.

Most of the learners identified with behaviour problems were found to have anger issues caused by the absence of a father figure in their lives. Parent 4 School A; Parent 2 School B & Parent 5 School B cited separation and divorce as the main problem: *"He is short-tempered and violent towards other children at home since our divorce"* (Parent 2 School B). Another parent said: *"When I was pregnant, the father was there and supportive, but since he passed away, my son has been a difficult child"* (Parent 5, School A). In a different context, the father who lost his wife admitted: *"After my wife passed away, I thought I was strong...I met another woman...but unfortunately she fell sick and passed away"* (Parent 4 School A). *"My son told me ...he is angry because of the loss of his mother and stepmother"* (Parent 4 School A). From a cultural perspective, one parent pointed out that unmarried couples are not allowed to stay together until certain rituals are performed. She said: *"He would stay there, and I would stay here"* (Parent 3 School A). The participant agreed that the arrangement somehow contributed to her child's behaviour problem at school. She added: *"...maybe interrupted his life and not having his father with him all the time, especially for a boy... it then hurt because he would act out"* (Parent 4 School A).

Humans do not break attachments lightly, and children often persist in holding on to their bonds, even when their parents have abandoned them.

All participants received many school complaints about their children's behaviour problems. Complaints about learners, especially those living with single parents or non-biological parents, include being involved in drugs, arriving at school late, and skipping classes. Parents unanimously indicated that: *"He bunks classes most of the time"* (Parent 2 School A; Parent 4 School A; Parent 6 School B; & Parent 2 School B, Parent 6 School A).

The irregular school attendance of these learners was clearly reflected in their learner profiles and school discipline records. It was also noted that 8 of the children of the participants were suspended due to behavioural problems and had repeated a grade twice. According to the Gauteng Department of Education Assessment Policy, learners should not repeat a phase more than twice. As a result, learners tend to take advantage of this and do not make any effort with their schoolwork, knowing that they will be promoted to the next level.

Although the study findings suggest that the behaviour of learners is different when they are at home, parents strongly believe that those children who behave differently at school are negatively influenced by peers or friends when they engage in unethical behaviour. This is supported by parents who believe that peer pressure is a factor that contributes to bad behaviour: *"I think he is associating himself with bad friends. He behaves well at home, but when he is at school, he starts to behave funny"* (Parent 4 School A; Parent 3 School B); *"I think it's the kind of friends he associates himself with. Whenever I am called to come to school, I meet the parents of my friends. I also found out that they have done the same thing, so I think he is influenced by his friends"* (Parent 2 School A; Parent 2 School B).

This theme reflects the various contextual risk factors experienced by suspended learners and how they are differently affected. Adolescents strive for a positive social identity because they derive a part of their self-esteem from membership in the group. Belonging can materialise in forms that satisfy the motivation to belong but threaten the healthy functioning of the individual and the cohesion of society, unfortunately resulting in anti-social behavioural norms that reinforce delinquent behaviour.

### Socio-Economic Status

Families need some support in terms of finances, access to health care, and education to provide for their children. During the analysis of documents, it was discovered that of the six parents interviewed in School B, only one was employed; however, all six parents in School A were reported to be employed. Having an education is one of the best methods to achieve financial security, and a lack of access to education is a significant predictor of poverty passing from generation to generation. Poor nutrition, chronic illness, and mental health problems are just a few of the many health problems children born in poverty are more likely to encounter. Teens who grow up in such situations run the risk of developing psychological, social, and economic problems. Poor social perception, lack of judgment, difficulty in judging others' emotions, and other social issues may be features of poverty-stricken surroundings.

According to my observations, there is a difference between schools A and B in terms of students' socioeconomic condition. Participants in School A appeared to be less affected by poverty. Parents are employed and seem to be able to pay school fees and transport for their children. One parent said: *"I don't see any challenges that we have at home... what we do not have, we do not need"* (Parent 1, School A); *"My family environment is okay in the sense that we are there for our children"* (Parent 2 School A). Extracts that depict the participants' concerns include *"being disrespectful"* (Parent 1, School A) and *"he wants to fit into his group"* (Parent 2, School A).

From the data collected, it is evident that the behaviour problems of the learners of School A are less serious than those of School B. The assumption is that parents feel that they are often called to school to enhance parental involvement. The participant said: *"I think they are trying to inform us that we may need to talk to them regularly about discipline"* (Parent 2 School A).

In contrast, parents from School B appeared to possess characteristics of people from a low socio-economic background; they rely mainly on pensions and child grants for survival. The parents of the participant from School B confirmed that: *"...they get a child grant; I use the money to buy food so that they have something to eat after school. But I cannot give them money to carry to buy something to eat at school with the grant money..."* (Parent 3, School B); *"They don't go to bed hungry... When they come back, they have something to eat because I get grant money for my 3 children"* (Parent 1, School B); *"His mother gets SASSA money for them... but spends it on herself. I (grandmother) personally don't use their money because I work"* (Parent 5, School B).

Poverty can significantly undermine parenting and decrease the chances of children in life and appears to be a barrier that contributes to the suspension of learners. According to my observations and the study's findings, there is a difference between schools A and B in terms of cultural or socioeconomic differences, limited education of parents, and parental attitudes toward the school.

### Parental Involvement

Parents have a great influence on their children's achievement. It is the prerogative of parents to support their children and take care of their biological needs; provide an optimal environment; protect them; to teach and educate them about their traditional norms and values; provide guidance, direction, assistance, and help; motivate them; and develop their social and emotional skills. However, it was noted that some parents were not aware of the rights of their children.

During the interviews, parents were asked the following question: *"How do you address your child's challenging behaviour?"* Parent 2 from School B indicated that *"I shout at the child"*, Parent 4 from School B *"I will beat him if he misbehaves"*, Parent 2 from School A *"I just talked to him"* and Parent 4 from School A said: *"I deprive the child of what he likes the most"*.

Social relationships represent an important influence on development, scaffolding neural development and shaping how children respond to and interpret their environment later in life (Smith & Pollak, 2021).

### Discussion

This study explored the efficacy of Indigenous African values in fostering resilience among out-of-school learners. The study identifies various etiological factors related to the suspension of learners, notably family dynamics, socioeconomic status, and behavioural issues (Jacobsen et al., 2019). In the present study, single-parent families outnumbered nuclear families, underscoring the complexity of single parenting in contemporary society (Rees et al., 2023). Studies revealed that behavioural problems in schools largely stem from broken

homes, unstable relationships, and a lack of basic security (Wakhley, 2024). According to Wakhley (2024), a broken family includes those whose parents have divorced, passed away, or abandoned them. Researchers have found that children from broken families may experience higher levels of emotional distress, behavioural problems, and academic challenges compared to those from intact families (Anderson, 2014).

The study revealed that circumstances such as death, divorce, or separation often disrupt family structures, forcing many parents to raise children alone (Zartler, 2021). Divorce, in particular, leaves children feeling insecure and blaming themselves for their parents' separation (Zartler, 2021). The emotional toll of losing a significant figure becomes evident through behavioural problems that require intervention. Studies also reveal that children in single-parent households are at increased risk of physical and mental health problems than those in two-parent homes (Gupta & Kashyap, 2020). However, Masten and Barnes (2018) argue that even children from two-parent households face challenges, including substance abuse. Additionally, Ebersöhn and Bouwer (2015) opine that the absence of both parents negatively affects children's education, often leading to behavioural challenges.

Socioeconomic status (SES), which encompasses income, education, and occupation, significantly influences children's behavioural outcomes. Studies confirm that economic strains contribute to behavioural challenges, and this could be due to insufficient goods and services, which are the primary causes of impairment in children's neurobiological development, resulting in poor social, emotional, psychological, and physiological outcomes (Hartman et al., 2017). Protective factors such as family and social support mitigate these risks and promote resilience in adolescents (Masten, Lombardi & Fisher, 2021). Targeted parenting programs, especially in low- and middle-income countries, could benefit families that require additional support (Sanders et al., 2022). Research shows that children raised in two-parent families tend to exhibit superior cognitive and behavioural outcomes compared to their single-parent counterparts (Fortune, 2024). Thus, Phasha (2021) highlights the increased need for resilience-building support in township schools due to increased family disintegration.

Like the study by Theron (2023), this study reported a variety of human connections. For instance, experiences of affective support were facilitated by grandparents, aunts and uncles. Grandparents' involvement frequently acts as a protective buffer, allowing some families and children to flourish in spite of hardship (Masten & Barnes, 2018). Grandparents play a pivotal role in the social and emotional development of children, particularly in contexts where traditional family structures are disrupted. In an African context, social assets that grandmother carers could access include support groups, respite care, access to services, and spirituality as forms of social support (Mhaka-Mutepefa, Cumming & Mpofu, 2014). These practices, often rooted in Indigenous values, emphasise reconciliation, accountability, and communal healing (Ajitoni, 2024) found that emotional self-regulation and caregiving confidence among grandparents were significant predictors of psychological well-being and quality of life, both for themselves and the children in their care. This suggests that when grandparents are actively engaged in caregiving and community-building, they not only provide emotional stability but also model and reinforce key socioemotional skills in children. Moreover, the presence of grandparents in these roles provides continuity, emotional security, and cultural grounding, which are essential for learners navigating the challenges of exclusion or disciplinary action. For suspended students who might feel cut off from the educational system, the presence of grandparents provides a sense of continuity and belonging.

Sociodemographic risks are mediated by parental involvement, which highlights the value of independence and connection in parent-adolescent relationships, particularly when it comes to candid discussion of life's obstacles (Martinez-Yarza, Solabarrieta-Eizaguirre & Santibáñez-Gruber, 2024). Children's resilience is influenced by social support networks, which mould how they interpret negative experiences (Smith & Pollak, 2021). Notably, Martinez-Yarza et al. (2024) also found that family involvement significantly influences students' social-emotional development, especially in economically vulnerable populations. Their study showed that this influence is fully mediated by school engagement, which is itself shaped by parental involvement at home. This highlights how parental engagement can buffer the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage by promoting emotional and academic resilience. Epstein (2009), in Ceglédi, Alter, Godó and Papp (2024), highlights the importance of active communication between parents and the school, shared responsibility and community involvement in supporting a child's education. In addition to creating a trustworthy relationship in which details about the child's behaviour, development, and education can be shared, constant communication and mutual relationship-building from both parents and teachers also creates a safe space for talking about sensitive and challenging subjects (Ceglédi et al., 2024).



According to Onwuatiegwu & Paul-Mgbeafulike (2023), integrating indigenous African values into educational programs improves resilience by providing a comprehensive framework that addresses the intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of learners. These principles act as buffers against hardship by promoting a feeling of cultural identity and belonging. Studies revealed how indigenous African values place a strong emphasis on community cooperation and holistic education. These values can have significant positive effects by establishing networks of support that include families, local communities, and Indigenous leaders. From an African Indigenous perspective, for example, communities and parents reward and punish children without the assistance of professionals, courts, or juvenile detention facilities. According to Mugumbate and Chereni (2019), children can receive mentorship, counselling, and support from their uncles and aunts without the assistance of professional case workers or other professionals. Additionally, in many African communities, when a child's biological parents pass away, it is customary for extended family or community members to assume custody and caregiving responsibilities (UNICEF, 2025). This is a deeply rooted practice stressing that the child-rearing be done by the community, reinforcing kinship obligations, and instilling collective responsibility for the well-being of children (Onwuatiegwu & Paul-Mgbeafulike, 2023). This approach underscores the idea that a person becomes truly human through their interactions and connections within their community. "A person is a person through other persons," according to the African adage "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu," which captures this idea (Udom, 2024). It fosters resilient learning environments that contribute to the general well-being and success of out-of-school learners. The principle of Ubuntu exemplifies the value of family cohesion and mutual obligation within families and communities (Ajitoni, 2024).

The study's findings showed a lack of parental cooperation among the parents under study in addressing their children's behavioural issues, which is frequently characterised by parental blame-shifting and disengagement from schools, despite the fact that the literature shows a variety of African measures of discipline. The decline of traditional African cultural education, which was mainly passed down orally, through storytelling, apprenticeships, and initiation rituals, is highlighted by this neglect. Historically, these methods encouraged close family networks and proactive parenting as barriers against social adversity (Onwuatiegwu & Paul-Mgbeafulike, 2023). Additionally, Mhaka-Mutepfa & Maundeni (2019) believe that community connection, hope, and altruism, elements that are highly regarded among Christian values, are necessary qualities to enhance the resilience of suspended out-of-school learners. By showing how Indigenous African values can be successfully used to support out-of-school suspended students who are dealing with serious socioemotional and behavioural issues, this study adds to the expanding corpus of research on resilience. Letseka (2022, p.13) argues that "the notion of Ubuntu is an indigenous African worldview or philosophy; it represents a moral theory and the normative foundation upon which concepts of personhood are built". Additionally, research suggests that parents have the right to support their children and meet their biological needs to create the best possible environment for them, protect them, teach and educate them about their traditional norms and values, guide, direct, assist, and motivate them, and help them develop their social and emotional skills (Ajitoni, 2024; Magezi & Khlopa, 2021; Letseka, 2022; Balogun, Aruoture & Haruna, 2024). Onwuatiegwu and Paul-Mgbeafulike (2023) posit that Indigenous African education gives people the knowledge and abilities they need to fulfil their responsibilities as contributing members of society while also fostering a sense of community, cultural identity, and belonging.

### **Limitations of the study**

Findings from diverse settings may not apply universally. For example, suspension patterns in urban schools with high minority populations can differ significantly from those in marginalised areas. This limits the ability to generalise results in different educational settings. Although this study tracks the suspension of learners in 2019, it does not capture long-term results. This makes it harder to assess how early suspensions affect future academic achievement, behaviour, or life trajectories. Therefore, this study must be interpreted with caution due to its lack of longitudinal insight.

### **Conclusions**

The study explored how indigenous African values are crucial in improving the resilience of suspended out-of-school students. The family backgrounds of the learners in both former model C and marginalised township schools are differentially exposed to suspension as a disciplinary measure, and this experience is associated with an increase in challenging behaviour. It was discovered that the Black cultural principles and values that are intended to reinforce morality and discipline within families are seen to be neglected. In order to improve

their children's resilience and reduce the number of out-of-school suspensions, parents should adopt and instil their African cultural alternatives, according to the Ubuntu philosophy. Home is where charity starts. In addition to teaching and educating their children about their traditional norms and values, parents should create the best possible environment for their children's protection and motivate them to develop their social and emotional skills.

The success of integrating Indigenous values into the process of strengthening the resilience of suspended out-of-school students is contingent on several contextual factors, such as the quality of implementation and the diversity of Indigenous communities. It is revealed that in order to ensure that Indigenous values are applied correctly and meaningfully, true cooperation of contextual family dynamics, such as single parenthood and socioeconomic factors, along with cultural sensitivity and respect, is essential. An inclusive and empowering learning environment that supports each learner's academic success and overall well-being can be established by respecting and embracing the knowledge and customs of indigenous communities.

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