2024



AN INVESTIGATION INTO HARMFUL
TRADITIONAL CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS
PRACTICES IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS







Foreword

This important document addresses the complex and vital issue of ensuring a safe and inclusive school environment in the diverse cultural landscape of South Africa.

South Africa's schools serve as crucial pillars of society, providing sanctuary for countless young people and reflecting the rich tapestry of our nation's cultural and religious diversity. Yet, recent reports have highlighted challenges arising from behaviors perceived as 'strange,' often tied to traditional, cultural, or religious practices. These incidents, while disruptive, also present an opportunity for deeper understanding and proactive intervention.

Recognizing the sensitivity and importance of addressing these challenges, the Department of Basic Education, in collaboration with UNICEF, commissioned a rigorous research endeavor led by esteemed institutions such as the University of Johannesburg and the University of Pretoria, alongside the Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provincial education departments. This comprehensive investigation sought to delve into the root causes and impacts of these behaviors, laying the groundwork for evidence-informed protocols and responses.

This document serves as a repository of knowledge, outlining the research methodology, key findings, and policy recommendations derived from the study. The research insights are intended to inform stakeholders across the education sector, and aid in producing a guideline document to inform decision-making processes and foster a more inclusive and empathetic approach to handling such incidents. As we navigate the complexities of cultural and religious diversity in our schools, let us remember the fundamental principles of respect, understanding, and inclusivity.

Together, let us embrace the opportunity to contribute to quality education by creating safer, more nurturing environments for all learners and educators.

Dr G Whittle

Deputy Director-General: Sector Care and Support

Acknowledgements

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We are grateful to the Department of Basic Education for their logistical support and invaluable input. Their advice and steady hand throughout the study were critical in steering us towards our goals.

We owe much appreciation to the educational departments of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) for allowing us to access the schools in their provinces. This was integral to our ability to gather comprehensive data and cultivate the insights that have proven invaluable for our rigorous analysis.

The schools that welcomed us have our deep gratitude, as do the learners whose participation was eager and enthusiastic and the teachers whose contribution was supportive in facilitating our study. The insights from community stakeholders were also crucial, shedding light on the educational environment from various perspectives.

Our team of dedicated researchers and fieldworkers deserve immense praise for their unwavering commitment to data collection, which has been a cornerstone of this informative study. Their hard work preserved the integrity and heightened the quality of our data.

We extend our heartfelt thanks and recognition to Prof Bernardus Grobler from the University of Johannesburg for his expert input with the extensive quantitative data analysis. His precision and proficiency significantly bolstered our research's depth and efficacy.

We also thank Maham Hasan from Crescent Consultancies for her significant investment of time and expertise in analysing the gathered data and preparing this exhaustive report. Ms. Hasan's nuanced interpretation and coherent presentation of the data have been fundamental in framing the study's outcomes and proposed recommendations.

This report is a testament to the power of partnership and dedication. We are truly thankful for the opportunity to engage with such devoted individuals and entities, all of whom have been instrumental in enriching our knowledge and aiding in enhancing educational achievement within our communities.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

South African schools have been facing challenges with learners exhibiting unusual and 'strange' behaviours, potentially linked to 'harmful traditional, cultural and religious practices' or other phenomena. **This research aimed to comprehensively understand the root causes and impacts** of these behaviours from traditional, cultural, and religious perspectives. While not specifically addressing religion in public schools, the study delves into the complexity of these experiences and seeks to provide recommendations to manage them effectively.

Problem Statement

The rise of 'strange' behaviours in schools poses a challenge beyond typical disciplinary issues. Existing policies may not adequately address these unique issues, requiring a deeper understanding of the causes and implications to support affected educators and learners. **The study aimed to identify effective interventions** to ensure the well-being of all involved parties while respecting their rights and beliefs.

Aims

The research aimed **to investigate harmful traditional, cultural, and religious practices in South African schools**, offering recommendations to manage the 'strange' behaviours. By exploring the root causes, impact on learners and their communities, and potential solutions, the study seeks to inform policies and practices to address these encounters in educational settings effectively.

Research Methodology

Using a sequential explanatory mixed methods approach, the study involved quantitative surveys and qualitative data collection, including interviews and focus groups with learners, educators, and community leaders. Data analysis integrated findings from the Gauteng and KZN provinces, demographics, and stakeholders to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and provide actionable recommendations.

Sample

The research sample comprised a total of 598 individuals from 22 schools, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Specifically, the quantitative data sample included 352 online questionnaires, with 244 responses from learners (120 from Gauteng, 124 from KwaZulu-Natal), 52 from educators (35 from KwaZulu-Natal, 17 from Gauteng), and 56 responses from community or religious leaders (31 from Gauteng, 25 from KwaZulu-Natal). Additionally, qualitative data collection involved 72 focus group discussions and 174 individual interviews, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Distribution

Group	Online	Focus Groups	Individual Interviews	Total
Learners	244	38	72	354
Educators	54	17	71	142
Community Members	56	17	31	104
Total	352	72	174	598

Findings: Experiences of the 'Strange Behaviours'

In summary, the study reveals widespread witnessing of 'strange behaviours' in South African schools, with perceptions of such behaviours spanning a spectrum from harmful to beneficial. The impact of these behaviours is varied, influenced by cultural, spiritual, and demographic factors.

- A significant majority of learners (92.6%), educators (71.2%), and community members (92.9%) reported witnessing varied strange spiritual, psychological, or cultural behaviours in schools, suggesting a commonality across educational settings.
- Despite these high occurrence rates, no statistically significant differences were found in experiences based on demographics such as gender, language, and religious groups; however, some trends were notable depending on individuals' province, age, and educational level.
- Specific behaviours associated with 'harmful practices' include falling, screaming, making abnormal body movements, speaking in unfamiliar tongues or tones, and hallucinations. Learners sometimes reported awareness of an impending event which will manifest in 'strange behaviours'.
- The perception of these behaviours as harmful or beneficial varied greatly, with a significant portion of respondents viewing them as either psychologically damaging or spiritually enriching.
- Concerning the 'strange behaviours', there was a mixed perception of associated negative behaviours; where learners in higher grades had higher reports of discrimination and bullying against their peers who displayed the 'strange behaviours'.
- Qualitatively, 'harmful practices' were often regarded as disturbing, with some respondents associating them with demonic influences or witchcraft, particularly during school assemblies or among female learners.

The findings point towards a complex tapestry of beliefs and experiences relating to 'strange behaviours' in schools, most frequently associated with 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices'. These occurrences are widely observed across the South African schools approached in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal and invoke a spectrum of viewpoints on their impact—ranging from harmful to beneficial. The study underscores the need for inclusive and sensitive educational policies that consider the cultural and spiritual dimensions of learners' experiences, aiming to foster supportive environments for all members of the school community.

Findings: Impact of the 'Strange Behaviours'

Impact on Academic Success:

- Teachers (71.2%) and community members (73.2%) perceive 'strange behaviours' as more negatively impactful on academic success and well-being compared to learners (40.6%).
- Provincial differences exist, with KwaZulu-Natal learners reporting greater concerns than Gauteng learners.
- The negative impact is perceived as moderate overall, but varies by age and role in the school. The negative impact is perceived as significantly more negative by specifically the older educators in the educational community, and religious leaders from the community members. Religious leaders are community members who represent as the head of a religious group, such as a head of a Christian church or a chief of Traditional African Beliefs.

Psychological Impact:

- Learners feel the least psychological impact (mean score 2.61), while community members report the most (mean score 4.05).
- Teachers detect a moderate impact on their well-being.
- Community members, particularly those tied to school governance, display greater concern for learner welfare.

Emotional Responses to Behaviours:

- Sadness (39.5%) and fear (31.3%) were the dominant emotional responses to 'strange behaviours' across all groups.
- Learners from KwaZulu-Natal, females, and individuals associated with senior grades and Traditional African religious beliefs are more likely to experience sadness.

Effects on Learners:

- Learners experience difficulties in concentration due to the strange behaviours.
- The fear of adverse occurrences diminishes slightly in higher grades.
- Teachers in classroom roles report a greater fear compared to management.

Learners' Level of Comfort on Reaching Out:

• Learners' feelings of being listened to vary by province, gender, grade, and age, with younger learners in lower grades feeling more heard.

Qualitative Findings:

- Faux 'strange behaviours' are suspected due to avoidance of school tasks, lack of evidence, or non-alignment with familial beliefs.
- Educators and peers express confusion and fear over the possibility of contagious or fake manifestations.
- The psychological toll on the school community is multi-faceted, impacting friendships, education processes, and personal beliefs.
- There is a sense of responsibility among those claiming their 'strange behaviours' are linked to 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices' but also feelings of isolation and discrimination are reported.
- Class disruptions from manifestations cause widespread psychological distress and impact educational outcomes.

Overall, the presence of 'strange behaviours' believed to be related to 'harmful practices' has varied impacts on different stakeholders within the educational community. There is a pressing need for culturally sensitive policy interventions to support those affected and maintain a conducive learning environment.

Findings: Root Causes of the 'Strange Behaviours'

The attribution of peculiar behaviours in learners to religious or spiritual experiences is a complex and multifaceted issue that intersects with cultural, psychological, and attention-seeking behaviours. This study explores the perceptions of learners, teachers, and community members in South Africa regarding the causes of peculiar behaviours in schools, shedding light on the prevalence of attributing such behaviours to spiritual or religious phenomena. Understanding these perceptions is crucial for developing interventions to support learners and to address the underlying causes of these behaviours.

- Learners, teachers, and community members primarily attribute 'strange behaviours' to religious or spiritual experiences, followed by cultural experiences, psychological problems, and attention-seeking behaviours.
- Learners in senior secondary levels, particularly females from Gauteng of Nguni ethnicity with Christian beliefs, were most likely to attribute 'strange behaviours' to religious or spiritual experiences.
- Teachers, typically from KwaZulu-Natal, showed no significant differences in perceptions, while community members from Gauteng or KwaZulu-Natal in school governance or religious leadership roles were more likely to attribute the 'strange behaviours' to spiritual causes.
- 'Harmful practices' are evolving from traditional peaceful engagements to tumultuous and harmful experiences perceived as "attacks" on learners, compelling them to accept the calling.
- Rejecting the ancestral call for the practice of Christianity, parental neglect, unresolved paternity issues, and the use of umuthi (herbal medicine) at home are significant root causes of harmful ancestral practices.
- Learners may experience physical and mental trauma, pain, and impairment due to the compulsion to accept the 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices', especially during stressful exam periods.
- Escalating incidents in contemporary times are linked to competition among educators for teaching posts and unresolved paternity issues, indicating the complex interplay of societal, familial, and spiritual factors in manifesting these phenomena in schools.

Policy Recommendations

In the pursuit of crafting a learning environment that is both cognisant and accommodating of South Africa's rich cultural and spiritual diversity, the following research has formulated a set of comprehensive policy recommendations. These recommendations stem from a detailed analysis of learners' experiences with 'strange' behaviours—manifestations linked to 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices', which exert a multi-faceted influence on the learners, their families, educators, and the broader educational milieu. The proposed policies are anchored firmly within the context of understanding these unique experiences, pinpointing the root causes behind such behaviours, and providing actionable solutions to manage them effectively.

Policy recommendations based on feedback regarding the experiences and impact of strange behaviours:

A strategic initiative to bolster support services in schools has been outlined, prioritising recognising and addressing spiritual and cultural factors related to 'harmful practices'. The policy encompasses the integration of mindfulness programmes, the development of an inclusive curriculum addressing cultural and spiritual diversity, and the facilitation of learner-led discussions. Recommendations also call for training for educators, equipping them to recognise and address issues surrounding 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices' effectively.

Policy recommendations based on the root causes of the 'strange behaviours':

Future policies should aim to reinforce learner support services and emphasise educational programmes that address mental health, alongside cultural and spiritual diversity. The integration of such topics into the curriculum is encouraged, as are initiatives to promote respectful classroom environments. Community member engagement and education are also recommended, ensuring that all stakeholders understand and can sensitively manage issues related to 'strange behaviours'. However, amongst all recommendations, parental involvement is identified as the most crucial factor in managing 'harmful practices' and 'strange' behaviours.

Policy recommendations based on the management of the 'strange behaviours':

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) is encouraged to implement province-specific programmes and grade-level interventions. Central recommendations include increasing access to psychological resources, designating cultural liaison officers, and including policies on 'strange behviours' linked to 'harmful practices' within the DBE's guidelines. Developing referral protocols, maintaining a neutral education environment, and establishing support structures sensitive to gender and age diversities are also outlined.

In conclusion, the proposed policies aim to establish a comprehensive framework for understanding and managing the diversity of spiritual and cultural practices within South African schools, with a focus on creating an environment conducive to teaching, learning, well-being, and open communication across all levels of the educational community.

Policy Implications

Policy Implications based on feedback regarding the experiences and impact of strange behaviours:

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa faces a series of changes as it responds to the spiritual and cultural needs of learners exhibiting 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices'. Key considerations include financial investments in learner support services and the integration of dedicated counsellors with specific cultural knowledge. School curricula may need to be adjusted to accommodate stress-reduction programmes, requiring additional training for teachers and possibly new resources. An inclusive curriculum necessitates substantial revisions to include cultural and spiritual diversity education. Implementation strategies involve safe-space workshops, developing reporting channels with Information Technology (IT) support, and establishing regular interaction forums which could impact classroom management and academic scheduling.

Policy Implications based on the root causes of the 'strange behaviours':

Root cause analysis of these behaviours indicates heightened resource allocation for enhanced learner support, revision of educational programmes, and the specialised training of educators. School schedules may need adapting to make room for educational forums on cultural and spiritual diversity. Development and delivery of culturally competent teaching methods will require periodic support and adjustments, reinforcing a supportive and inclusive classroom environment. Engaging community members a stronger community link, necessitating formal communication and partnership strategies.

Policy Implications based on the recommendations on the management of the 'strange behaviours':

Broader policy recommendations underscore the need for a more inclusive school environment accommodating the cultural and spiritual heritage of learners. A robust policy and legal framework review is implied to ensure compliance with national and international standards concerning religious freedom and children's rights. The DBE must maintain a neutral educational space that respects all beliefs, with the introduction of specific response teams and protocols that could change how spiritual behaviours are recognised and managed. Policies must acknowledge cultural observances, suggesting a shift towards more flexible absence management. These approaches advocate for a systemic change across educational levels, promoting a culturally aware, responsive, and legally coherent approach for learners dealing with spiritual behaviours.

In summary, these policy implications demand careful planning, resource allocation, and comprehensive training to create a supportive, inclusive, and legally compliant educational system. The DBE's commitment to addressing cultural diversity and spirituality in the education sector involves the collective effort of educators, learners, and the broader community to foster a safe and accommodating learning environment.

SWOT Analysis of Policy Recommendations & Implications

A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis highlights the strengths of cultural sensitivity and community engagement, along with opportunities for education empowerment and inclusive advancement.

Strengths:

The proposed policies offer a means to create an educational environment in South Africa that is inclusive and respectful of cultural diversity and could significantly enhance learner mental well-being by acknowledging spiritual behaviours. The formation of a dedicated Task Force could ensure effective policy implementation, fostering a proactive stance towards learner well-being. Additionally, these policies present opportunities for professional development for educators, thereby enhancing their teaching skills.

Weaknesses:

Challenges include potential resistance to merging spiritual practices within a secular school system and the strain on resources in areas lacking adequate funding, which could hinder policy implementation. Substantive modifications to the curriculum and assessment methods are anticipated, demanding considerable investment of time and resources. There are also concerns about the difficulty in standardising cultural sensitivity training and the impact of integrating spiritual practices on traditional academic focus.

Opportunities:

Collaborations with cultural and psychological institutions have the potential to solidify community connections and combine resources effectively. These policies could signal a shift towards more contemporary and responsive teaching methods, improve learner engagement and retention, and prompt regular policy and behavioural reviews, fostering a culture of innovation. Furthermore, the introduction of well-defined crisis response plans could greatly improve overall school safety and readiness.

Threats:

Anticipated threats include possible legal disputes over state and religious boundaries, disparities in policy application across various provinces leading to inefficacies, and potential conflicts due to varying levels of buy-in from educators, parents, and community members. Additionally, rapid changes in policy may cause confusion and create added pressures on staff and learners to adapt, and politicisation of these issues risks derailing the policies entirely due to changes in the political climate.

In conclusion, while the policy recommendations possess significant potential to advance inclusivity and adaptiveness within the education sector, careful navigation through potential resistance, resource constraints, legal clashes, and the need for standardisation is required to capitalise on these strengths and opportunities and mitigate the associated weaknesses and threats.



Background & Introduction

South African schools have recently been in the spotlight following a spate of incidents where learners reportedly behave 'strangely'. According to Van Zyl (2022), the underlying concern about these developments is that teaching and learning have been disrupted in several schools all over the country as learners have been displaying what is considered 'strange behaviour' and others questioning whether this is an 'ancestral calling' or just a "TikTok challenge" or even "episodes of mass hysteria." Van Zyl (2022) describes the phenomenon as the "bizarre behaviour of learners" and notes that learners themselves claim that they "received a calling from their ancestors".

Added to this is the call from concerned parents and community members who are currently calling for the re-introduction of religion into our public schools. Often, these calls are clouded in a very specific and narrow definition of religion and threaten to exclude and demonise other religious or belief systems. While this research does not focus on the issue of religion in public schools, it considers the 'strange' behaviour among learners from several perspectives, including traditional, cultural, and religious practices.





Problem Statement

South African schools have increasingly reported unusual and 'strange' behavioural patterns among learners (Van Zyl, 2022). The exact reasons for these 'strange' experiences are not quite established, but they seem to go beyond simple matters of ill-disciplined learners at schools. They may lend themselves to spirituality and ancestral encounters.

The Department of Basic Education has established policies to address issues related to the behaviour of learners in schools. However, despite exemplary policies dealing with discipline and rights drafted and enacted by the Department which seeks to uphold the rights of all school- going learners, these policies do not seem to address how educators and learners would go about addressing some of the very specific challenges raised in this study without infringing on the rights of some of the other stakeholders. Though the current legislation is perfectly articulate in defining the parameters of the rights and responsibilities of everyone involved in the learning space, there does not seem to be any process on how to deal with this challenge beyond a discipline process, which could be seen as religious or cultural exclusion, which the act is adamant that these rights be protected.

Thus, this study hoped to comprehensively understand the complexity and sources of this 'strange' behaviour experienced by learners in the affected schools. This will allow adequate and proper interventions by the affected educators to maintain control of these situations and offer any necessary assistance to scholars experiencing these episodes. Once the source of these episodes is clearly understood and defined, the correct assistance can be offered to ensure the well-being of all concerned. The Department of Basic Education can be assisted appropriately in formalising the correct interventions to prevent future litigation, and to maintain a maximum amount of teaching time to best serve the schools, teachers, and learners under its care. Consequently, the study's primary aim was to investigate harmful, traditional, cultural, and religious practices in South African schools and to provide possible recommendations and solutions to manage the "strange" behaviours that occurred in certain schools. The study focused on the research questions noted below.



Significance of the Study

The burgeoning prevalence of unconventional behavioural outbreaks among learners within the confines of South African schools has galvanised concern and prompted probing into their aetiology. These phenomena, cloaked in ambiguity and often simplistically dismissed as mere indiscipline, hint at a more profound underpinning that treads into the realms of spirituality and ancestral engagement. Despite the Department of Basic Education's vigilant efforts in sculpting policies to bolster learner comportment, these delineated frameworks seem to be at a loss when faced with the idiosyncratic challenges brought to light by this study. Such challenges present a conundrum; how to address them without inadvertently encroaching upon the cultural and spiritual entitlements that the current legislation strives to preserve is a question unaccounted for within the existing disciplinary procedures.

In light of these considerations, the pertinence of this study emanates from its aspiration to unravel the intricate tapestry of these 'strange' behaviours. By demystifying their origins and nuances, the study sought to equip educators with the requisite understanding to adeptly navigate these instances, thereby ensuring the continuity of pedagogic processes and the welfare of those learners ensnared by such episodes. Clarity on these matters would enable the Department of Basic Education to architect interventions that are congruent with the legislative protections in place, steering clear of infringing upon religious and cultural boundaries. Indeed, a dual benefit was envisioned: to mitigate potential legal disputes and to optimise the educational experience. Thus, the essence of this research lay in its endeavour to dissect and offer pragmatic guidance to manage what had been dubbed as 'strange' behaviours, enabling a harmonious and unobstructed educational environment for all stakeholders involved.

Aim and Objectives of the Research



The primary aim of the study was **to investigate harmful, traditional, cultural, and religious practices in South African schools** and to provide possible recommendations and solutions to manage the "strange" behaviours that occurred in certain schools.

Research Questions

- 1. What are the experiences of learners displaying "strange" behaviours and how do these behaviours impact on the learners themselves, their families, peers, educators, and the school?
- 2. What are the root causes of harmful traditional, cultural, and religious practices in South African Schools?
- 3. What recommendations and solutions could be provided to different stakeholders in the affected schools to manage the "strange" behaviours?
- **4.**Can a critical analysis of the findings unearthed from the research conducted be presented?
- 5. How can the findings inform policies to address these new encounters in schools?

Objectives

- 1. Undertake comprehensive participatory research in selected schools to get to the root causes of these 'harmful practices'.
- 2.Conduct interviews with traditional leaders and healers and possibly faithbased leaders including the learners and their parents.
- 3.Describe the individual learners experiencing "strange" behaviours. Describe and analyse the 'strange behaviours' including e.g., onset, frequency duration, pattern of behaviour and drivers and causes. Further describe and analyse the impact of these behaviours and practices on affected learners and their families, their peers, educators, and the school.
- **4.**Provide a critical analysis of the findings unearthed from the research conducted.
- 5.Offer possible solutions and recommendations to address the strange behaviour of learners in schools affected and offer solutions for educators, principals, School Governing Bodies, and other relevant stakeholders.
- **6.**Suggest ways in which the findings may impact schools and education policies to address these new encounters in schools.



Ethical Clearance

The researchers were fully aware that they were dealing with very sensitive information from some of our most vulnerable population groups. Care was taken in both developing the questions and handling the data, i.e., that only a select group had access to this information and that the information gathered was stored under a code-protected digital platform controlled by the researchers in charge. Attention was also taken to ensure that everyone involved in this project was not on any "sexual offences" register and that the highest ethics were maintained throughout the project. The researchers also ensured that **the Five Principles of the DBE were followed** in this research, namely:

- 1.Respected the interests of other citizens, particularly those of learners in all learning sites.
- 2.All persons involved in this study strived to establish and maintain ethical conduct among their members, considering the interests of vulnerable learners and those of school-going age.
- 3. Protected learners and vulnerable learners, as far as possible from danger or harm to themselves or others.
- 4. Were accountable for exercising ethical conduct, especially concerning learners and vulnerable learners, ensuring that members undertook relevant training to improve their knowledge of any applicable codes of practice or standards of behaviour.
- 5. Upheld public trust and confidence in our organisations.

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Research Ethics Committees in the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg and the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria and the Gauteng and KZN Departments of Education. All participants gave consent for their involvement in the study. Parental or caregivers' consent were obtained for learners' participation. Also, learners gave consent or assent depending on their age. All protocols on adhering to ethical principles were rigorously maintained throughout the study.

Key Terms: 'Strange Behaviours' and 'Harmful Practices'

Definition of key terms

The phenomenon descriptions herein are based on the preliminary literature review and it is important to highlight that these terms are not from the research team. For purposes of this research, the key terms used were 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices' and the term was understood as follows:



Harmful practices are persistent practices and behaviours that are grounded on discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, age and other grounds as well as multiple and/or intersecting forms of discrimination that often involve violence and cause physical and/or psychological harm or suffering.

- National Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Centre (n.d., p. 1)

The research team, through a detailed consultative process with religious leaders, traditional healers, UNICEF, and the Department of Basic Education, established the use of 'harmful practices' and 'strange behaviours' as key terms for their study. In the context of this research, 'harmful practices' specifically refers to spiritual, religious, or traditional practices that interrupt learning and inflict trauma on other learners.

For the purpose of this report, the term 'strange behaviours' is referred to as the manifestation of disruptive behaviour that may be seen as odd or may be harmful towards those experiencing or witnessing the disruptive behaviour.



Phenomenon of harmful practices in South African schools

To understand the phenomenon of 'harmful practices', it is essential to understand that it is based within the African Traditional Religious (ATR) Beliefs. According to Njoh and Akiwumi (2012) one major feature regarding practices in African Traditional Religion (ATR) is that religion is a way of life for Africans. They have observed that Africans' modi operandi are inextricably intertwined with their religions and have noted that the difference between the more religious and the less religious individuals in terms of the frequency of their visits to the shrines and temples, or lack thereof, to consult with the diviners, perform rituals, or transmit messages to the ancestors.

While there is not much documented evidence to fully explain the 'strange' behaviour of the learners concerned, there are reported descriptions of these in the media and social media. About three media reports reviewed showed that issues related to 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices' create problems in the schools. Another report indicates that a female learner in the Western Cape committed suicide after she was called a witch due to spiritual manifestation in school based on 'harmful practices'. Responding to the question of whether this phenomenon should be considered as learners displaying 'strange behaviours' as a result of partaking in 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices', the eNews Channel Africa (ENCA) News report quoted Professor Ngubane, a cultural expert as describing this phenomenon as 'witchcraft' and employed a isiZulu traditional word 'ukuhayiza' [hallucinations] to suggest that;

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...the school needs to take the children back to their parents because there are many ways in which the child will be healed. Some will adopt a prayers approach, [or] a traditional healer and pray for the child...sometimes the spirits will leave for a while then return...Some will go for holy water or throw the water to cool it off...they can't handle the situation from school, the child must be taken back to the parents. (ENCA, 2022).



There is also the assumption that witchcraft causes this experience, orchestrated by bitter men who use love medicine against girls who refuse their love proposals. When the girls start manifesting the 'evil spirits', other girls around start to scream and shout. In other words, the evil spirit is infectious. In summary, this experience is not only common in South Africa. For example, in East Africa, specifically in Kenya, female learners have been found screaming, crying and scared that some spirits are coming to kill them (BBC 2024, p. 17). This attracted the government and parents' attention. Interestingly, some parents had complained about why the spirits inhabited only the girls and not the boys as well. This then corroborates Prof Ngubane's claims. However, the professor and cultural expert claimed there are cures for these problems.

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According to a recent report by Nokwanda Nowane (2022), Merebank is one of the latest schools to be affected as "[c]haos erupted at Merebank Secondary School on Friday [11 March 2022] where emergency services were called after learners displayed signs of being in pain and discomfort while screaming uncontrollably". The report describes this phenomenon as 'ancestral callings' and notes that this has been happening in other schools in different parts of South Africa and describes the intervention at Merebank in Durban as Practical Tactical (PT) tactical Units were called to the school and treated the female learners experiencing the discomfort and attempted to stabilise them. The affected learners were holding their ears and screaming in terror.



"School management took control of the situation and attempted to maintain calm, but scores of learners reacted to the situation by banging on the doors and gates and trying to push their way out of the school premises. Parents arrived at the school to fetch their children." PT Alarms

"

Some sections of South African society have made a "call for the return of religious education in schools as fainting spells, 'hallucinations' rise" (Moleya, 2022). This report attributed this phenomenon to 'fainting' and 'hallucinations' and highlights the return to religious education in schools as an intervention. According to James Mahlokwane (2022), classes were interrupted at Phelindaba Secondary School in Atteridgeville, where learners started fainting and hallucinating after 'seeing a snake'. In some sections of African communities, the snake is associated with ancestral spirits, and this could be the reason that some people interpret these developments as 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices'. However, it is uncommon that communities would talk of group manifestations of 'strange behaviours' outside of family structures because this usually takes place in households.

In Modilati secondary school in Hammanskraal, the learners disturbed schooling as they fainted after trying to dig unseen objects from the grounds.[1] This incident sparked tensions between parents and school management as parties held meetings to try and resolve the crisis. What was unique about this incident is that learners dug 'unseen objects' from the grounds as they screamed and fainted, throwing the teaching, and learning program into disarray in what some reporters have described as "mass hysteria" and a phenomenon that is growing in South African schools. While these media reports provide a description of what learners have been doing as 'strange' behaviour, they are unable to provide empirical evidence to understand the root causes of such encounters.

In another case, a teacher hinted that most learners' problems with manifesting 'strange behaviours' come up at assemblies. The impact of activities like school assemblies on these learners will thus need to be further investigated. According to (Mkalipi, 2022) one instructor suggested that these acts can be traumatising, thus it is important to examine how bad these acts impact the psychological wellbeing of the teachers and learners.

Spirituality, Religion and Rituals

Religion and spirituality could provide people with a sense of direction and morality and they play a key part in forming both civilisations and individuals. Religious rituals are deeply ingrained in many communities throughout South Africa, a nation renowned for its rich cultural variety. However, some religious activities within this complex environment are deemed 'harmful' or damaging and have wide-ranging effects, particularly when it comes to South African schools. For example, the phenomenon has been categorised and described in spiritual and religious or cultural terms- prompting debates on the complexity and posing a challenge in the definition of terms used. This was clearly visible in the preliminary conversations for this study.

As reflected in the section above, there are a few studies that have been conducted on religion, spirituality and traditional practices and some studies have explored the phenomenon of 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices'. However, nothing has been done to explore how these practices of so-called 'ancestral callings' or 'hallucinations' disrupt learning in schools as some South African schools have had to suspend learning. Under these circumstances, the phenomenon is considered harmful and deserves more scholarly attention so that there are recommendations which will inform the amendment of the schools' religious policy and provide guidelines for interventions. This was one of the main objectives of this study.

Ukuthwasa and 'Harmful Practices'

Media reports and opinions cited above show that the previous research emphasises ukuthwasa[1] and the effects of spirituality or 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices' as an intervention where learners are chosen by ancestors. The solution or understanding is that if such learners (like any person deemed to have a call) do not respond to a calling or does not respect the wishes of ancestors, they can be sick or harmed by the spirits.

This study, therefore, attempted to fill a research gap by providing information on the understanding of root causes of these 'harmful' occurrences in South African schools, as well as to provide strategies on how best these occurrences can be addressed in a manner that reflects South African cultural and religious diversity in the context of respect for all learners' religious beliefs. One can concur that these problems have a significant emotional and psychological effect on learners and some of these effects have a detrimental impact on their wellness and academic performance. There is no literature which suggests ways in which these 'ancestral callings' can be paused for learners to complete their studies or whether becoming a traditional healer is the only ultimate solution. Thus, this study seeks to examine the 'harmful practices' and explore interventions and guidelines which can be followed to avoid disruptions to the learning activities.

Dagher and Ross (2004, p. 464) conducted an interview with traditional healers about their opinions on 'ancestral callings' and how they affect the one who is called or chosen. They examined the religious causes of cleft lip as a focus effect. Eight out of the fifteen participants identified ancestor spirits, who exhibited their craving for blood and *utshwala* (sorghum beer) through the baby's illness, as the most common cause of cleft lip, cleft palate, or both. "Your *amadlozi* (ancestral spirits) remind you that a sacrifice for them is overdue, and the sickness is the result of the punishment,"

^[1] The initiation process of becoming a traditional healer.

This concurs with the idea that ancestors demand attention by enforcing something from the chosen one or within their family and in this case cleft lip was the enforced illness. Ancestors could either be complaining about one's wrongdoing or directing a person to a specific path of way when there is a sickness. Three of the 15 healers stated that the ancestors were singling out the baby with the facial disorder because they gave the child special abilities. An optimistic outlook was held toward such an encounter. One healer, however, had an unfavourable opinion of the situation and claimed that "the mother received a penalty as she attempted to steal another woman's child because she thought she could not fall pregnant (Dagher & Ross, 2004, p. 465).

Booi (2004, p. 2) conducted an in-depth study to determine what ukuthwasa (initiating or going to an ancestral school to become a healer) means and emphasised that it is common for people to become ill as a first step toward becoming healers. This understanding is consistent with what Dagher & Ross (2004) found regarding illness of learners. Their study found that in most cases, people get sick because their ancestors would be trying to give a message. Both Booi, (2004), and Dagher & Ross, (2004) agree that ancestors usually cause something to happen to get their messages across and the familiar way is through sickness. Additionally, for these writers the focus was ukuthwasa meaning the process of initiating and becoming a healer. However, Buhrmann (1982), who also concurs that ancestors are conveyed through sickness, dreams and visions explains ukuthwasa differently, he regards it as a new heavenly constellation and a new season, meaning the discovery of new potential and aspects of personality and self. His meaning does not only involve being a traditional healer, but more of finding one's true self which makes his definition distinct. Additionally, all these writers did not add literature on what happens during this process, which is regarded as ukuthwasa visits learners at school or how this process should be dealt with while in school.

Mlisa (2009, p. 2) states that the initiation process is regarded as inkathazo meaning its problematic, this is because it involves syndromic diseases and a plethora of contributing components that result in a variety of illnesses. This also includes mental illnesses such as 'illusions' and 'hallucinations'. Several writers (Van der Zeijst et al., 2021; Buhrmann, 1982; Sigida & Sodi, 2023; Bakow & Kathy, 2018; Burns & Tomita, 2015) contributed to a study on the psychological effects of ukuthwasa and in their finding they have alluded that traditional healers improve people's mental health before and after ukuthwasa and this whole process is linked with identity formation. However, in their literature none of them focus on school learners and how the process of ukuthwasa may heal them from 'harmful practices' such as 'hallucinations' and getting sick at school due to 'ancestral callings'.



Additionally, they do not give attention to the psychological impacts of these events on both the learners' experiencing the 'strange behaviours' and those surrounding them at school. The successful completion of ukuthwasa in certain persons may aid in their recovery from their disease and pave the way for them to enter a job where their typical perceptual experiences are accepted as valid and highly appreciated traits (van der Zeijst et. al, 2021). This proposes that ukuthwasa may be a culturally sanctioned healing process, that in communities today, which have undergone several socio political changes, moderates experiences that a Western psychiatric system might characterise as psychotic symptoms, giving some people a lucrative and respected role in society.

Since some people may perceive these 'strange behaviours' as social media trends (Baylor University Study, 2016), it is necessary to review literature on the influence of social media and religion. Social media may sometimes be compared to a double-edged sword attracting users rapidly. Not just adults but teens and even young learners utilise social media (Utami et al 2019, p. 235). The statistics from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2013, p. 47), shows that 28,000 tweets are sent per minute by Indonesians with learners included. This is not only seen in Indonesia but learners worldwide have access to social media. Therefore, social media has the power to circulate information quickly including religious motivated content.

Several scholars have contributed literature on religion and social media, focusing on the function of social media in advancing social ideals and the satisfaction of faith-based material using a variety of approaches (Mookgo, 2018). He investigated whether Facebook's influence in the rise of prophetic churches will be made easier using a missiological viewpoint or approach to social media and religion. However, out of all these scholars, it was Utami et al (2019, p. 235) who focused on how social media platforms such as Instagram may be used to influence good religious behaviours from learners, which is relevant to this study. His study, however, does not primarily focus on how school learners use social media to promote religious behaviours.

While there is not much documented evidence to fully explain the 'strange' behaviour of the learners concerned, there are reported descriptions of these in the media and social media. About three media reports reviewed showed that issues related to 'ancestral calling' create problems in the schools. Another report shows that a female learner in the Western Cape committed suicide after she was called a witch due to spiritual manifestation in school based on 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices'.

Since some people may perceive these harmful religious behaviours as social media trends (Baylor University Study, 2016), it is necessary to review literature on the influence of social media and religion. Social media may sometimes be compared to a double-edged sword attracting users rapidly. Not just adults but teens and even young children utilise social media. (Utami et al 2019, p. 235). The statistics from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2013, p. 47), shows that 28,000 tweets are sent per minute by Indonesians with children included. This is not only seen in Indonesia but children worldwide have access to social media. Therefore, social media has the power to circulate information quickly including religious motivated content.

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South African Policy on Religious Freedom

In South Africa, the landscape of religious freedom in schools is regulated by various policies that shape the rights and practices of learners, including those related to 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices'. The South African Schools Act and the Bill of Rights influenced the understanding and implementation of religious freedom within educational settings (Duma, 2009). However, the practical application of religious freedom within public schools in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal is challenged by obstacles such as educators' limited comprehension of legal frameworks and instances of bias and discrimination arising from teachers' Christian beliefs (Chidester, 2006). To address these issues, there is a recognised need to provide clear guidelines for school principals and School Governing Bodies on upholding learners' constitutionally entrenched right to religious freedom regardless of their diverse religious and cultural backgrounds (Duma, 2009).

Given the scarcity of data which explores the experiences of these learners and how their religious practices are accommodated within the educational context, this study is significant in that it will promote inclusivity and cultural acceptance. There is a need for more studies that delve into the intersection of 'harmful practices' with educational policies in order to generate more insights into creating a more inclusive environment that respects learners' diverse spiritual

The policy document (Asmal 2003) approved by the Council of Education Minister on August 4, 2003, emphasises the importance of fostering unity and appreciation of diversity in South Africa's democratic society, especially within the educational system:

46

beliefs.

...as a democratic society with a broad population of people from many cultures, languages, and faiths, it is our responsibility to make sure that our variety fosters a sense of unity and spirit that recognises and appreciates our difference. Our public schools, where no specific religious ethos should rule over and oppress others, should be a case in point for this. As we must guarantee and defend each student's equal right to attend school, so too must we value and respect their right to have their religious beliefs acknowledged (Asmal, 2003, p. 2).

"

The document underscores the necessity of ensuring that no specific religious ethos dominates over others in public schools, highlighting the significance of respecting each learner's right to their religious beliefs. The policy advocates for a pluralistic approach to religious practices in schools, where no single religion is favoured over others to maintain a harmonious and inclusive educational environment that values and acknowledges the religious diversity of learners. This approach is crucial for building a diverse educational milieu that encourages acceptance and understanding among individuals from varying cultural and religious backgrounds.

Research Methodology

The research project encompassed two distinct operational levels to ensure a comprehensive and diverse approach in executing the study. Firstly, at the national level, there existed an Advisory Body consisting of the principal investigators from the University of Pretoria (UP) and the University of Johannesburg (UJ), alongside representatives from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and UNICEF. Secondly, the operational level included the lead and co-investigators, academics from various universities, provincial officials from the DBE, religious organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), and practitioners. This diverse and inclusive composition aimed to uphold a multi- transdisciplinary, and multisectoral approach throughout the study process, ensuring comprehensive perspective and expertise.

The study employs a sequential explanatory mixed methods design within a pragmatic research paradigm. It integrates quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in three distinct phases: the quantitative phase, the qualitative phase, and the integrated analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data. This strategic approach allowed for the quantitative component to inform and complement the qualitative component at every stage of the research process, thereby enhancing the comprehensiveness and depth of the study outcomes.

Within the pragmatic research paradigm framework, emphasis was placed on addressing real-world challenges and facilitating the development of practical and applicable solutions. This research paradigm is particularly pertinent in mixed methods research, as it enables researchers to tackle intricate social issues effectively and devise strategies to solve complex problems. The chosen approach aligns with the selected research topic, emphasising the need for a method conducive to exploring diverse perspectives and generating meaningful insights (Allemang et al., 2022).



Phase 1 - Quantitative Data Collection

The initial phase of the research employed a quantitative approach, utilising a close-ended questionnaire to collect numerical data pertaining to 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices'. Quantitative methodology is selected when researchers seek to derive knowledge through the objective measurement of variables (Creswell, 2007), aiming to mitigate research bias. This study implemented a correlational research design to assess the association between two or more variables using statistical data. This research methodology is adept at identifying trends and patterns within the data; however, its analytical scope does not extend to establishing causality for these observed patterns.

There were three separate questionnaires—one each for learners, teachers, and community members. The DBE provided the schools in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal where incidents of strange behaviour had occurred, and from this list, 10 schools were selected using convenience sampling in each of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. The responses obtained facilitated the acquisition of numerical data, which was subsequently subjected to statistical analysis utilising SPSS 29.0 for further exploration.

Phase 2 - Qualitative Collection

The primary aim of the study was to investigate harmful, traditional, cultural, and religious practices in South African schools and to provide recommendations and solutions to manage the "strange" behaviours that have been reported to occur in certain educational settings. To achieve this aim, the second phase of the research adopted a qualitative methodology, which supported the exploratory, descriptive, and contextual objectives of the study.

As an exploratory endeavour, the qualitative design was instrumental in probing the under-researched and poorly understood manifestations of traditional and cultural practices in school environments. Such an approach was consistent with Creswell and Creswell (2018), who argue for the openness and adaptability of qualitative research in generating a nuanced understanding of phenomena. This explorative nature was essential in identifying distinct behavioural patterns, potential precipitators of such behaviours, and the contextual factors within the school settings.

In capturing the descriptive aspect, the study utilised in-depth individual interviews and focus groups. This method aligns with Merriam and Tisdell (2016), who emphasise the descriptive strength of qualitative methods in painting a complete picture of the phenomena under investigation. Through semi-structured interviews and discussion sessions, rich and detailed data were obtained, revealing insights into the participants' opinions, beliefs, and feelings related to the traditional and cultural practices in question.

Contextual understanding was pivotal, considering the influence of various factors, including cultural, environmental, and social dimensions on the behaviours observed within schools. By incorporating stakeholders from diverse backgrounds—learners, educators, parents, guardians, traditional healers, and community leaders—the study embraced the contextual framework outlined by Marshall and Rossman (2016), taking into account the multifaceted influences on the strange behaviours.

Data collection in the second phase adopted semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions across Gauteng and KZN. The semi-structured interview format allowed participants to share in detail about their experiences, spiritual views, and perceptions of how ancestral religious practices are managed within schools. The focus group discussions provided a collaborative space for stakeholders to articulate their views and to offer a collective understanding of the issues.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, measures were taken to maintain rigor and authenticity in the collection and analysis processes. Utilising ATLAS.ti software facilitated a systematic and comprehensive approach to analysing the qualitative data, aiding in the identification of emergent themes and patterns within the transcribed interviews and discussions.

Phase 3 - Integration of Quantitative & Qualitative Data

The lead investigators from UJ and UP integrated the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data collected and triangulated this data with the existing literature. A comparative analysis was conducted with the data collected from the two provinces in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), etc. Common findings were extracted to produce a report for addressing 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' among learners. Based on the findings several recommendations were made on support interventions and policy initiatives needed to manage 'strange behaviours' that are a result of 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices' in schools.



Sampling

The research sample consisted of a total of 598 individuals from 22 schools, incorporating a blend of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The quantitative data sample included 352 online questionnaires, with responses from 244 learners (120 from Gauteng, 124 from KwaZulu-Natal), 52 educators (35 from KwaZulu-Natal, 17 from Gauteng), and 56 community members comprising of parents, SGBs, religious leaders or traditional health practitioner (THP) (31 from Gauteng, 25 from KwaZulu-Natal). In addition to the quantitative data, qualitative data collection involved 72 focus group discussions and 174 individual interviews.

The sampling of participants was intentionally diversified based on various demographic factors such as age, gender, culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language, and urban-rural distribution. The selection criteria for the sample focused on identifying schools with reported incidents of learners experiencing 'strange behaviours' within the last academic year, as well as engaging with key stakeholders such as School Management Teams (SMTs), School Governing Bodies (SGBs), School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs), and religious organisations that had witnessed or experienced 'strange behaviours' which were considered to be linked to 'harmful practices'.

🛑 Convenience Sampling

Convenience sampling was used to collect data for both the quantitative and qualitative research approaches. This non-random technique enables researchers to target participants who can provide valuable insights relevant to the research questions without the need for underlying theories or a predetermined number of participants. As such, learners and educators were targeted for the online quantitative questionnaires and for the qualitative interviews and focus group discussions.

Convenience sampling was chosen as the nature of the study required feedback from key informants who were learners and educators who had either experienced or witnessed the phenomenon. By employing convenience sampling, the research focused on engaging individuals who could offer meaningful perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation, enhancing the depth and relevance of the data collected.

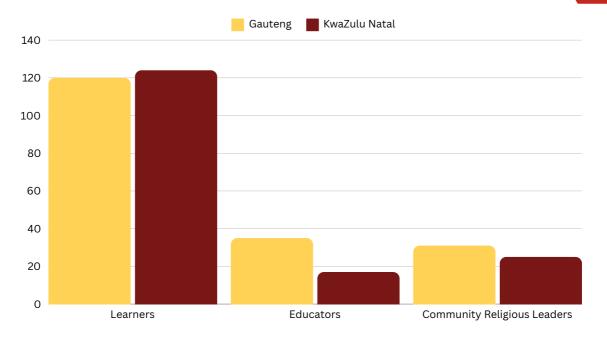


Figure 1: Online Questionnaire Sample Distribution

Research Sample

- 1.Interviews with individual participants who have experienced the phenomenon (n=174).
- 2.Focus group with learners who have experienced and witnessed the 'harmful practices' (n = 38)
- 3. Focus group with educators and SGB members who have witnessed to responded to harmful incidences (n = 17).
- 4. Focus group with parents, guardians, healers and community leaders who have experienced or attended to incidences (n = 17).

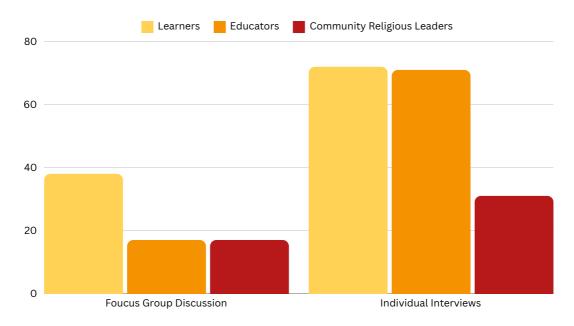


Figure 2. Qualitative Data Collection Sample Distribution

Pilot Phase

Given that the issue of the so-called 'strange behaviours' was pejorative, the researchers' engaged with learners, educators, and all stakeholders to agree on how to describe the events which they were trying to understand. Such a process of engaging to agree on a working definition before the study was conducted was a daunting task because different stakeholders had different definitions. Through the consultation process, consensus was reached on the use of 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices'. Harmful was viewed from the perspective that the 'strange behaviours' negatively affected teaching and learning because of the disruptions to the school timetable and the closure of some schools.

One school was randomly selected in each province to test the instruments that were designed for the study. This pilot study allowed the researchers to determine if the instruments were appropriate and easy for the respective participants to understand and complete. Based on the findings the instruments were refined where necessary before they were given to the actual study participants. The data from the pilot study was not included in the report.

Data Collection

For the data collection, a sequential explanatory mixed methods design following a pragmatic research paradigm was employed. As such, the quantitative component was first conducted and its findings were used to inform the qualitative component at each stage.

The pilot questionnaire was first administered in Gauteng and KZN through the local education district offices before extending to other affected provinces, considering variables such as age, gender, culture, ethnicity, SES, language, urban-rural demographics, etc.

To collect data for the study, researchers obtained a list of affected schools from the Department of Basic Education and selected those with the highest number of reported cases within the same district in both urban and rural areas. Trained fieldworkers conducted data collection at a total of 22 schools across Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.



The quantitative data was gathered through three separate online questionnaires developed by the research team – one each for learners, teachers, and community members. The questionnaire consisted of 30 close-ended Likert scale questions divided into three sections: Section A focusing on biographical data, Section B exploring perceptions and experiences of respondents, and Section C examining feelings associated with behaviours perceived as strange and unusual. This method was chosen to efficiently gather quantitative data on participants' insights and experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation.

Qualitative data was gathered through face-to-face focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, recorded for quality and transcription purposes. Real-time observations were also conducted by fieldworkers during the data collection process to enhance the qualitative interactions. The semi-structured interviews allowed for exploration of key areas while providing flexibility for indepth responses from participants. Open-ended questions were utilised to delve into participants' spiritual views, understanding of ancestral practices, and perceptions of how the school managed related cases. Interviews were conducted at the participants' convenience, lasting 1-1.5 hours without bias, judgment, or leading questions to ensure a safe and open environment for authentic responses.

Focus group interviews were planned to stimulate discussion and gain diverse insights from participants. Separate discussions were held with learners experiencing 'strange behaviours' and with School Management Teams, School Governing Bodies, and School-Based Support Teams sharing similar views to facilitate comfortable and open dialogue. While challenges were faced in organising all planned focus group discussions due to participant availability, a discussion with a subset of participants provided valuable perspectives on protective factors and challenges from learners' viewpoints.

In addressing the sensitivity of the study, the fieldworkers were trained to use the phrases 'harmful practices' or 'phenomenon under investigation' to prevent bias towards any specific description before the study's completion. The literature review was revised to include terms like 'ancestral calling', 'strange behaviour', 'demonic attacks', 'hallucinations', 'satanism', within quotation marks to acknowledge their common usage in diverse communities. The researchers ensured that these descriptions were empirically interrogated and tested due to their subjective, ontological, and traditional or religious implications from different worldviews.

Data Analysis

As discussed above, a comparative analysis method was employed to analyse data collected from the two provinces in terms of different participants, age, gender, ethnicity, SES, etc. Common findings were extracted to produce a national report for addressing 'strange behaviours' among learners. Specific guidelines were provided for support interventions that may be needed for the designing of a manual or handbook.

The data was analysed through SPSS 27.0 and relevant statistical tests. SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is a software program used by researchers in various disciplines to analysed and present quantitative data, which is usually complex to handle manually.

ATLAS.ti software was also employed for qualitative analysis in order to edit and refine the content of the technical report from the investigation. This software assisted in organizing the structure of collected data thematically through the use of codes to tag qualitative insights and embrace AI Coding. This also enhanced team collaboration and improved the reliability and validity of the research findings.

Integrative Data Analysis

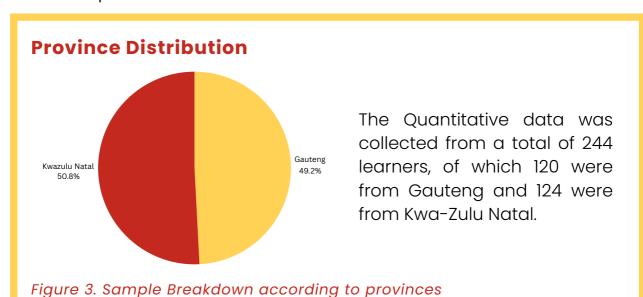
This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the findings gathered through the research questions, addressed by corresponding quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative section initiates the discourse by contrasting the three aforementioned groups, drawing comparisons to illuminate how each one perceives and engages with the phenomena of strange behaviours. If necessary, it then meticulously zooms in on the learners' responses to deduce more nuanced understandings of their unique experiences and responses.

Building on the quantitative analysis, the qualitative section enriches the discussion by unveiling thematic findings, substantiated with poignant quotes that encapsulate the essence of the individual viewpoints. Tying the section together, a distillation of the key qualitative findings is presented, providing clarity on the overarching narratives extracted from the data.

Sample Distribution PAGE 34

Learner Sample Distribution

Data for learners was collected from sampling schools in two provinces in South Africa. The study's data collection was limited to KwaZula-Natal and Gauteng as per the set specifications and limitations within the study's Terms of Reference with the Department of Basic Education and UNICEF.



Gender Distribution

Male 25.3%

In terms of the gender group responses, there were more female participants (n = 180) than males (n = 64).

Figure 4. Learner Sample Gender Distribution



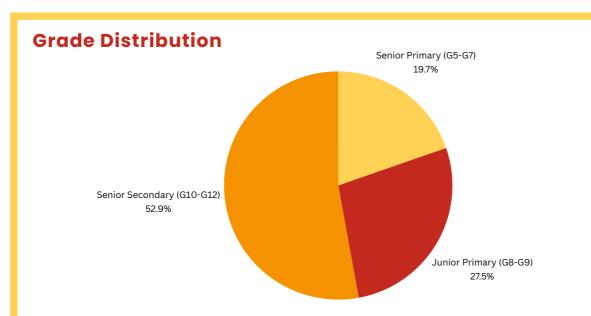


Figure 5. Learner Sample School Level Distribution

The participants in the sample were from Grade 5 to Grade 12. Primary school participants were thus represented by grades 5 to 7 (n=48), whilst Junior Secondary school respondents were from Grades 8 to 9 (n=67), and Senior Secondary School respondents were from Grades 10 to 12 (n=129).

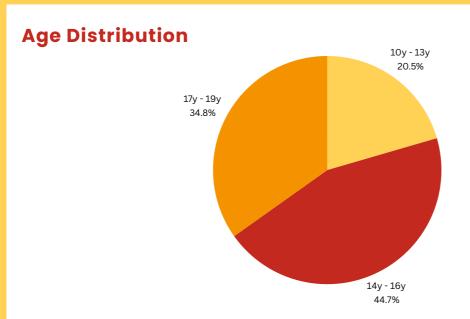


Figure 6. Learner Sample Age Group Distribution

The age groups of the participants in the sample vary from 10 to 19 years of age. The respondents' responses are divided into age groups of 10 to 13 years (n=50); 14 to 16 years (n=109) and 17 to 19 years (n=85).

Mother Tongue Distribution

The mother tongue groups were collapsed into three groups namely Nguni (which is mostly isiZulu and Xhosa), Sotho and Other. Most of the respondents belonged to the Nguni group (73.4%). The Sotho mother tongue speakers formed 20.5% of the sample whilst other languages in the sample two groups formed 6.1% of the sample.

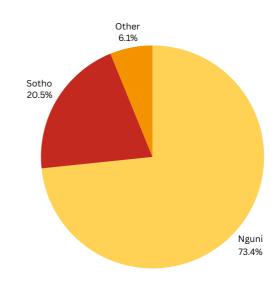


Figure 7. Frequencies of mother tongue groups in the sample.

Due to the sample being selected from Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, the majority of the respondents come from the Nguni mother tongue. As such, this may have implications to the generalisability of the findings. As such, findings and policy recommendations should be viewed as biased towards the Nguni mother tongue till further research is conducted on other cultural views. However, the findings will be an adequate representation for the schools populated in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.

Religious Affiliation Distribution

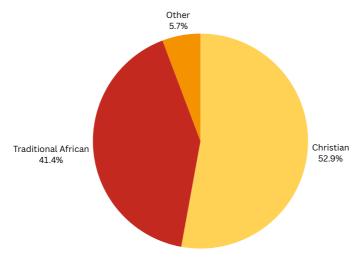
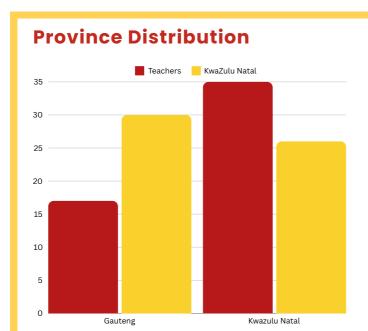


Figure 8: Frequencies of the religious groups in the sample.

The frequencies of the Christian (52.9%) were the highest followed by African Traditional Religious Beliefs (41.4%).

Teacher and Community Sample Distribution

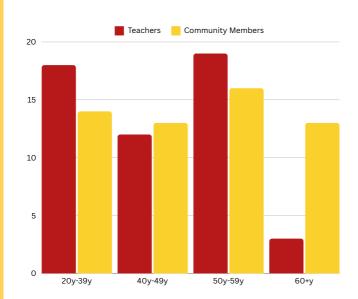
Data for learners was only collected from sampling schools in two provinces in South Africa.



The provincial distribution of the presented sample an overrepresentation of educators from KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), with 67.3% compared to 32.7% from Gauteng. In contrast, community members from featured Gauteng prominently at 53.6%. The sample ratio between KZN and Gauteng educators was disproportionately high at 2.1 to 1, which not reflective of the official ratio of approximately 1.09 to 1 as per 2016 government statistics.

Figure 9: Comparing the frequency of teachers and community members between Gauteng and KZN

Age Distribution



In the sample distribution, the age group with the most teachers is 50-59 years at 36.5%, while the least represented is the 60+ category at 5.8%. Community member participants are more evenly distributed across all age ranges, with the 50-59 years and 60+categories both having the highest representation at 23.2%.

Figure 10: Comparing the frequency of teachers and community members Age Group

Age Distribution Breakdown: Community

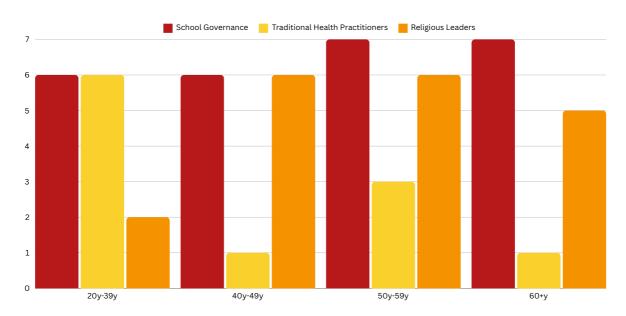
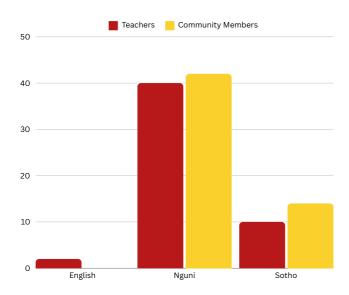


Figure 11: Bar graph showing the frequencies of each age group according to the role played in school governance.

Community members predominantly identified as Nguni, with a significant 75% speaking a Nguni language, notably isiZulu, as their home language. Regarding teachers, an overwhelming 76.9% spoke Nguni languages, and 19.2% spoke Sotho, aligning with provincial linguistic demographics. In contrast, a mere 3.8% of teachers identified English as their home language.

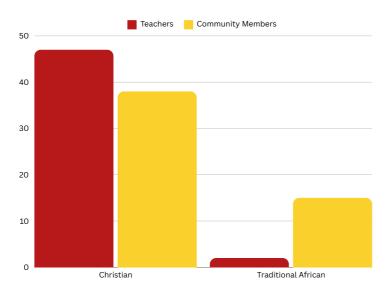
Age Distribution



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Figure 12: Comparing the frequency of teachers and community members home languages

Religious Affiliation Distribution



The majority teachers of (90.4%)and significant a portion community of (67.9%)members in the sample identified as Christian, while a smaller fraction of community members (26.8%) adhered to Traditional African religions, compared to just 3.8% of teachers.

Figure 13: Comparing the frequency of teachers' and community members religious affiliation

Teacher: Present Post Occupied

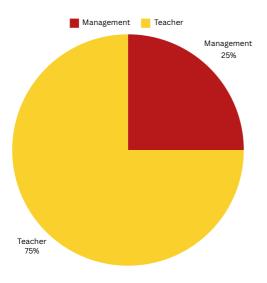


Figure 14: Distribution of Educators' Current Post in Schools

In the sample distribution, the age group with the most teachers is 50-59 years at 36.5%, while the least represented is the 60+ category at 5.8%.

Community Member Role in School Governance

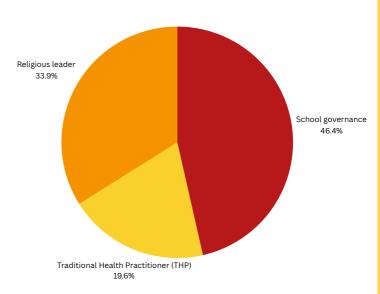


Figure 15: Distribution of Community Members' Role in School Governance

Community member participants are more evenly distributed across all age ranges, with the 50-59 years and 60+ categories both having the highest representation at 23.2%.

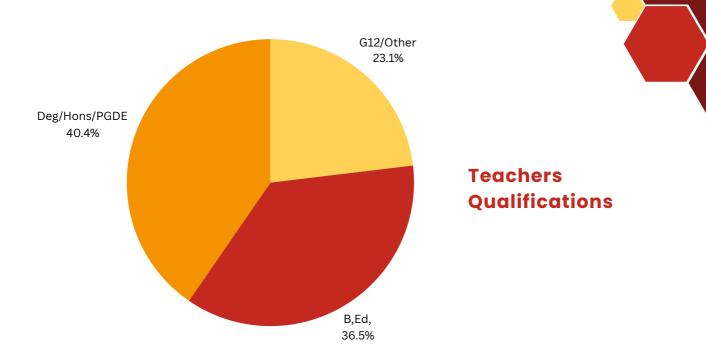
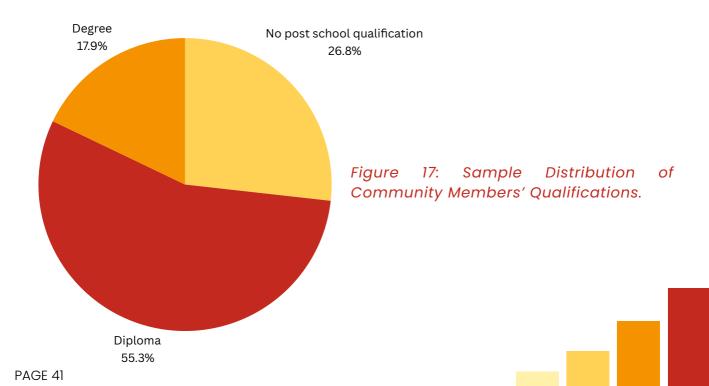


Figure 16: Distribution of Teacher Qualifications.

The level of education of educators and community members was considered an important sampling factor as it may add further insight on if the perceptions of 'harmful practices' differ based on the level of education. Community members predominantly hold diplomas (55.4%), whereas teachers are more academically advanced, with 40.4% possessing degrees or higher qualifications and 36.5% with a B.Ed, compared to 26.8% of community members with no post-school education.

Community Member Qualifications



Freedom vs Equality

Freedom vs Equality

In the ongoing effort to understand social values within educational settings, a study was conducted to assess South African learners' preferences for freedom versus equality. The perceptions on the importance of freedom versus equality was assessed as the African approach have a history of following a collectivist mindset, whereas the secular approach which the school systems follow are built on an individualistic mindset. In order to make more informed decisions regarding policy recommendation, it was important to identify the trend of the collectivist and individualistic approaches amongst learners. This section provides an analysis of quantitative data collected across various demographics, including gender, province, mother tongue, grade, age group, and religious affiliation. The results are pertinent for DBE policy considerations regarding the promotion of values reflective of a multicultural and democratic society.

The study utilised statistical tests (Chi-squared, Fisher's exact test, the Bayes loglinear test, and Odds Ratio) to determine associations between the aforementioned demographics and learners' value priorities.

Table 2: Analysis Summary of which Sample Group is Response Preference for Freedom or Equality

Sample Group	Freedom> Equality (I consider personal individual freedom as more important than equality namely everyone can live in freedom and develop without hindrance.) Equality> Freedom (I consider equality mo important than personal individual freedom nam nobody is underprivileged and social class different are not so strong)		
Province	Gauteng	Kwa-Zulu Natal	
Gender	Females	Males	
Grade	Grades 11 and 12	Grade 5 to 7	
Age Group	17- to 19 years or older	10 to 14 years	
Mother Tongue	Sotho	Nguni	
Religious Affiliation	TA>Christianity>Other	Other>Christianity>TA	

Key Findings: Freedom vs Equality

- **Province**: **No significant provincial differences** were found in the preference for freedom over equality, with respondents from Gauteng being 1.5 times more likely to choose freedom as more important than those from KwaZulu-Natal.
- **Gender**: Only the odds ratio test showed females to be 1.24 times more likely to favour freedom over equality compared to males.
- **Grade**: There was a **significant association between grade levels** and value preference. Learners in senior secondary (G10-G12) showed a stronger preference for freedom over equality when compared to junior secondary (G8-G9) and senior primary (G5-G7) grades, with the likelihood being 9.60 times greater in the eldest group.
- **Age Group**: Similarly, age was associated with these value preferences. The oldest age group (17y-19+y) was more inclined to value freedom over equality, with a steadily increasing preference ratio from younger to older age groups.
- Mother Tongue: Significant differences emerged among mother tongue groups, with the Sotho-speaking participants showing the highest preference for freedom over equality, followed by those classified under 'Other' languages, and the Nguni speakers displaying a greater inclination towards equality.
- **Religious Affiliation**: **No significant differences** were observed among religious groups regarding the preference for freedom over equality. All groups showed a tendency to favour equality.

Conclusion: Freedom vs Equality

The findings suggest variances in the preference for freedom versus equality across different demographic groups of South African students. Notably, an inclination towards valuing freedom appeared more prominently in older grades and age groups, possibly indicative of a growing sense of individualism. On the other hand, a proclivity for equality was observed among Nguni mother-tongue speakers and younger demographics, which may reflect collectivistic cultural tendencies. While these variables reflect only a segment of the complex constructs of individualism and collectivism, they do serve as significant indicators of the prevailing social values among the youth.

What are the Experiences of Learners Displaying "Strange" Behaviours?

Witnessing 'Strange Behaviours'

The first research question asked about the experiences of respondents as to whether they had experienced learners displaying strange behaviours. This "experience" was interpreted as having observed or heard about such experiences with the observed possibly being more objective than the heard about them. Experienced and witnessed are regarded as synonymous for purposes of analysis.

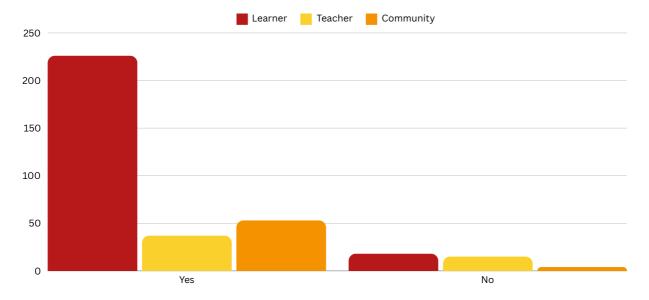


Figure 18: Responses to the item of personal experience of 'strange behaviours' while in school

The analysis revealed high percentages of experiences with strange spiritual, psychological, or cultural behaviours in schools: 92.6% of learners, 71.2% of teachers, and 92.9% of community members reported witnessing such behaviours. These findings indicate that these occurrences are prevalent in the sampled schools. The odds ratio of respondents witnessing 'strange behaviours' compared to those who did not was approximately 8.5 to 1. While various independent groups were not detailed in the graph above, the graph below illustrates the frequencies of yes and no responses across provinces for learners, teachers, and community members, suggesting differences in experiences based on location and potentially other variables.

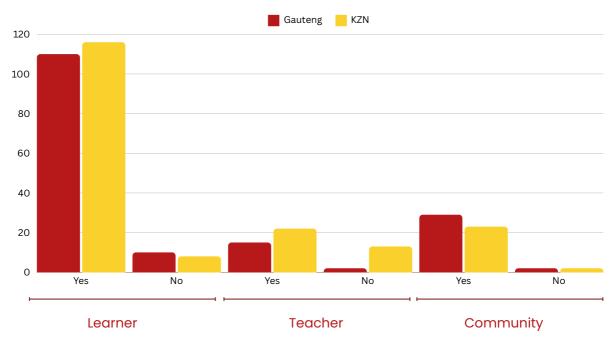


Figure 19: Graphical representation of the frequencies of strange behaviour experiences according to learners, teachers and community members and the province they are resident in.

The data in Figure 17, when analysed in conjunction with Figure 16, highlighted interesting findings. For instance, among the 226 learners reporting witnessing strange behaviours, 48.7% were from Gauteng and 51.3% from KwaZulu-Natal. In the teacher category, 40.5% of positive responses were from Gauteng compared to 59.5% from KwaZulu Natal. Conversely, community members showed a different trend, with 55.8% of affirmative responses coming from Gauteng and 44.2% from KwaZulu-Natal. While these frequency disparities across provinces were apparent in all respondent categories, it remained unclear whether these variations stemmed from sampling errors or differing cognitive and behavioural tendencies.

Statistical tests, including the Chi-squared test, Fisher's exact test for two categorical variables, and Cramer's V for more than three variables, were utilised to control chance factors in the analysis of categorical variables. The odds ratio (OR), helpful in illustrating effect size and comparing frequencies of categorical variables, indicated slightly higher odds of affirmative responses in KwaZulu-Natal than in Gauteng for learners and teachers, while the odds were greater in Gauteng for community members. However, despite these trends, statistically significant differences in provinces regarding experiences of strange school behaviours were not identified when all three tests were considered. Additionally, the reciprocal of the Bayes factor revealed a value between 1 and 3, suggesting limited evidential impact. Extending this analysis to the responses of various independent groups through the same methodology as in Table 3, no significant differences were found among these groups in witnessing strange behavioural episodes, prompting a reflection on the potential informativeness of the OR in understanding response patterns.

Comparative Findings between Learners, Community Members and Teachers: Witnessing Strange Behaviours

The analysis based solely on the odds ratio in the learner questionnaire responses unveiled significant findings. While no independent groups exhibited statistical differences in responses to experiencing strange behavioural episodes in school, distinct trends emerged. Females were twice as likely as males to report such experiences, and the likelihood increased with higher grade and age groups. Learners of Nguni ethnicity and Christian beliefs were more inclined to confirm witnessing strange behaviours, with Nguni speakers having the highest affirmative response at 73.9%. A potential profile of a learner who could have witnessed these behaviours included a female from KwaZulu-Natal, in grades 10 to G12, aged 17-19, from the Nguni ethnic group and the Christian religion.

The teacher questionnaire contained only 52 respondents. The most likely respondent to have witnessed a behavioural episode was a person acting as a classroom teacher (not in a management position), who had a degree or higher qualification, who had Nguni as their mother tongue, in the 20-49 year age group and belonged to the Christian religious group.

The community responses indicated significant differences between religious groups in witnessing strange behaviours, with traditional health practitioners (THP) reporting the highest frequency. The analysis encompassed 56 community members selected conveniently from the chosen schools, with the questionnaires condensed into three main categories: school governance, THP's, and religious leaders. Using a scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very often), parametric tests with 1000 bootstrapped samples were utilised, revealing significant disparities among the religious groups concerning encountering 'strange behaviours.' THP members reported experiencing such behaviours frequently (mean score: 4.18), compared to school governing body (SGB) members and religious leaders who reported experiencing them sometimes too often (3.73 and 3.32, respectively). The Nguni and Sotho/English language groups mentioned intermittent experiences of strange behaviours, with no significant difference detected. Notably, all qualification groups indicated occasional to frequent encounters with such behaviours but did not significantly differ from each other. Analysis by age groups indicated that the youngest cohort (20-39 years) reported the highest frequency (4.21) of experiencing strange behaviours, contrasting with the 40-49 age group's lowest mean score (2.92) which significantly differed from the younger age group. The correspondence analysis bi-plot presented a connection between the 20-39 age bracket and THP's, while the 40-49 age group showed an association with religious leaders. This alignment could signify the impact of South Africa's democratic era on the positioning of traditional healers and religious figures within different age cohorts, indicating diversified levels of exposure to unusual behaviours in school environments. Notably, all THP participants belonged to the youngest age group, suggesting potential economic incentives driving their involvement in traditional healing practices to maintain financial security and elevate community standing. What was also significant about these findings is that THP participants are more likely to cooperate with other stakeholders.



Learners' experience of 'strange behaviour'?

The inquiry about learners' encounters with strange spiritual behaviour was exclusively directed at learners, hence only their perspectives are presented in the subsequent section. This segment delves into the responses of South African learners regarding the occurrence of specific "strange spiritual behaviours" observed within educational settings. The data is meticulously segmented and evaluated with regards to demographic variables including gender, province, mother tongue, grade, age group, and religious association, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence of these encounters.

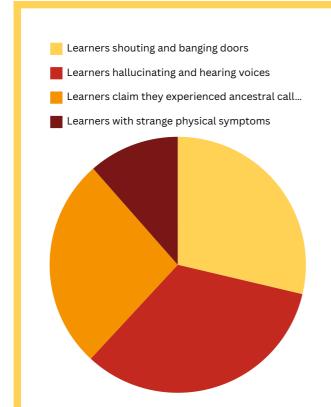


Figure 18 reveals that the most frequent way that the stranae behaviour revealed itself was via learners who claimed hallucinations and hearing voices (33.2%). This behaviour was followed by the action of learners shouting and banging doors without being told to do so (28.7%) and then learners who claimed that they had experienced 'strange **behaviours'** (26.6%). The various independent groups are now analysed to determine if these groups differ significantly from one another. The observed activities are discussed separately.

Figure 20: Responses regarding "what have you heard the most frequently in your school as learner "strange behaviour"?"

Key Findings

Key findings show that learners in secondary school grades (G10-12) were more likely to witness shouting and banging doors voluntarily compared to those in primary school grades. Males were 2.3 times more likely than females to observe this behaviour, with respondents from Gauteng more prone to witnessing it than those from KwaZulu-Natal. The Nguni ethnic group reported a higher likelihood of encountering these behaviours. For hallucinations and hearing voices as strange behaviours, females were 4.3 times more likely than males to witness them, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal. Younger learners in Grades 5-7 were more inclined to report these behaviours, while the Nguni ethnic group and the Traditional African religious group were more likely to have experienced them. These key findings highlight the prevalence and variations in witnessing 'strange behaviours' among learners in different demographic groups.

Table 3: Analysis Summary of Sample Group most Prevalent Responses on "Strange" Behaviours Witnessed Most Often

Item	Province Most Prevalent in	Gender of Prevalence	Grade and Age Group of Prevalence	Mother Tongue of Prevalence	Religious Group of Prevalence
Witnessing learners shouting and banging doors without being told to do so	Gauteng	Male	G10 - G12 17+ years	Nguni	Other religions
Witnessing learners who said they were hallucinating and hearing voices	KZN	Female	G5-G7 10y-14y	Nguni	Traditional African
Witnessing learners who said they had experienced 'strange behaviours'	Gauteng	Female	G 8- G12 15+ years	Nguni	Christian
Witnessing learners who were observed to have strange physical symptoms	No difference between province groups	Male	G10 - G12 17+years	Nguni	Christian

Conclusion: Learners' Experience of 'Strange Behaviour'

The study's findings underscore the widespread occurrences of 'strange behaviours' in South African schools, with significant variations related to gender, age, ethnicity, religion, language, and geographical location. The data suggests a need for increased awareness and understanding of these phenomena, especially regarding their potential impacts on learners and school communities. The research highlights the importance of incorporating the acknowledgement and acceptance of various African cultural beliefs (i.e., cultural sensitivity) and tailored interventions to address and support individuals who may be experiencing or witnessing unusual behaviours. Further research and collaborative efforts are warranted to explore the complex interplay of societal, educational, and individual factors contributing to the witnessing of strange behaviours, aiming towards creating inclusive and supportive learning environments for all.

Perceptions of Benefit vs Harm

The next item is also relevant to the first research question as it also asked about the possible impact of the strange behaviour on the person demonstrating the behaviour.

Extent that the "strange behaviour" was beneficial to the person experiencing it

In order to prevent a bias from incurring of viewing 'strange behaviours' as only harmful, respondents were also asked if they perceived any benefits to the 'strange behaviours'. The analysis of Figure 19 (below) data revealed contrasting perceptions among respondents regarding the benefits of 'strange behaviours' witnessed. A significant proportion, 36.0%, believed these behaviours offered no benefit to the learners involved. Conversely, 34.6% perceived spiritual benefits, 13.3% psychological benefits, and 5.5% cultural benefits. Moreover, 4.3% of community members believed the learners benefitted in all three aspects. Overall, a combined 57.6% held the view that individuals experienced spiritual, psychological, and cultural benefits. Statistical tests focused on the analysis of responses related to "benefit to no extent at all" and "benefitted in a spiritual way," revealing insights through categorical analysis and Odds Ratios.

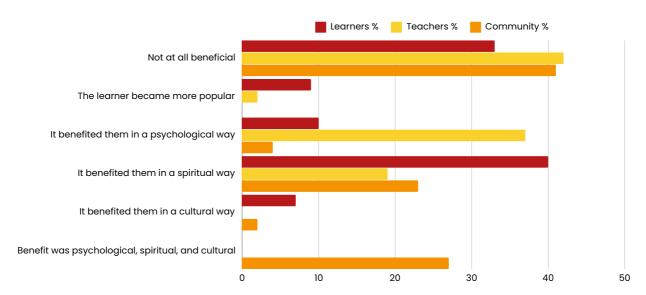


Figure 21: Responses(%) on perceptions of benefit of the 'strange behaviours' experience

Summary of Comparative Key Findings:

Analysis of the **learner** questionnaire revealed that while 60.0% of Christians believed no benefits were received, 34.6% perceived spiritual benefits. Additionally, statistical significance was observed in age group comparisons for spiritual benefits. **Teachers**, on the other hand, with 42.3% indicating that learners did not benefit at all, highlighted significant beliefs within the group. Notably, 19.2% of teachers saw spiritual benefits, reflecting a diverse range of viewpoints within the educational community. **Community members** echoed these sentiments, with 41.1% believing no benefits were received, and 26.8% acknowledging psychological, religious, and cultural benefits. These findings underscore the varied perspectives on the outcomes of strange behaviours, influenced by factors such as religious affiliation, age, and role within the school community.

Key Findings of Learner Feedback on Extent to Benefit

The following analysis delved into the analysis of learners' perceptions regarding the benefits and harms of religious or spiritual experiences witnessed in school settings.

- **Gender**: **Females** were 1.6 times more likely than males to believe the experiences were beneficial in a spiritual way.
- Province: Respondents in Gauteng were 1.3 times more likely than those in KwaZulu-Natal to perceive the experiences as not at all beneficial.
- Mother Tongue: Sotho respondents were 2.61 times more likely than Nguni respondents and 2.10 more likely than others to view the experiences as beneficial in a spiritual way.
- Grade: Senior secondary learners (G10-G12) were 1.6 times more likely than junior secondary learners (G8-G9) and 2.3 times more likely than senior primary (G5-G7) learners to perceive the experiences as beneficial in a spiritual way. The perception that the experience was spiritually beneficial is related to grade level and the higher the grade level the more likely that the experience will be perceived as beneficial.
- Age Group: Respondents aged 17 to 19 years were 2.1 times more likely than respondents aged 10 to 14 years and 1.9 times more likely than learners aged 15 to 16 years in believing that the experiences were spiritually beneficial. Such belief that the experience was spiritually beneficial depends on age and the higher the age group the more likely the perception is that the experience was spiritually beneficial.
- Religious Affiliation: Respondents from the Traditional African religious group were 1.5 times more likely than respondents from the Christian and Other religious groups to believe that the experience benefitted those involved in a spiritual way.

Summary of Findings on the Extent to Benefit:

Analysis demonstrated that a significant number of respondents (36.0%) indicated that they found no benefit from these behaviours, while a notable proportion attributed benefits of a spiritual (34.6%), psychological (13.3%), and cultural (5.5%) nature to those involved; a distinct group (4.3%) acknowledged the benefits across all three aspects. Statistical analysis highlighted demographics such as gender, province, mother tongue, grade, age group, and religious affiliation as influencing factors in the perceived benefits. The higher grade levels, the older age groups, and particularly those affiliated with Traditional African religion were more inclined to perceive the spiritual benefits of the experiences, while those from the Nguni mother tongue group were more reserved. This points to a complex interplay between individual background factors and their perceptions of the outcomes of spiritual or 'strange behaviours' within educational environments.

Extent that the 'strange behaviour' was harmful to the person experiencing it.

The key findings from the survey data indicated that the perceptions of the three respondent groups are centred on the nature of 'strange behaviours' and their impact. Out of 331 responses, the majority, constituting 39% (129 responses), perceived the behaviour as psychologically harmful, followed by 31.4% (104 responses) who felt there was a spiritual detriment. Only 16% (53 responses) believed the behaviour was not harmful at all. Given that each of the three separate questionnaires offered five potential responses regarding perceived harm, the analysis focused solely on the most significant concern: the negative psychological impact. This particular perception was subjected to further scrutiny using three statistical tests for categorical data and odds ratios (OR) to draw comparative conclusions.

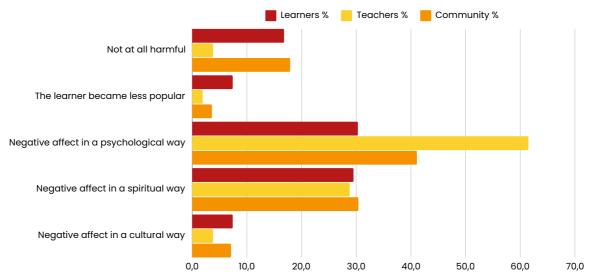


Figure 22: Responses (%) on perceptions of harm of the 'strange behaviours' experience



Comparative Findings on the Perceptions of Extent to Harm Between the Sample Groups

In the analysis of **learners**' questionnaires regarding the potential negative psychological impact of strange behaviours, significant differences emerged based on the province of residence. Specifically, learners from KwaZulu-Natal reported perceiving a greater psychological negative effect than their counterparts in Gauteng. The demographic profile most likely to associate psychological harm with strange behaviour comprised KZN residents who were female, in secondary school grades 10 to 12, aged between 17-19, from the Nguni ethnic group, and identified as Christian.

Teacher responses indicated that 61.5% saw negative psychological effects resulting from strange behaviours. Teachers from KwaZulu-Natal, particularly those in active teaching roles, with Nguni ethnicity and Christian faith, and within the age bracket of 20-49 were most inclined to perceive such harm.

Concerning community member perceptions, language differences presented statistically significant disparities. The Nguni-speaking group was notably more likely (5.9 times) to report psychological harm than the Sotho/English-speaking population. Community members from KwaZulu-Natal were twice as likely to acknowledge psychological harm relative to those from Gauteng. Additionally, Traditional Healers within the school community recognised psychological impacts more than members involved in school governance, with religious leaders being the least likely to do so. When examining religious affiliations, those belonging to Traditional African religions were 1.5 times more likely to observe psychological harm compared to Christians. Diploma holders predominantly perceived negative psychological impacts as opposed to those with higher degrees or no post-school educational background. Notably, the younger age demographic (20-39 years) exhibited greater concern. The typical respondent profile, highlighting concern for negative psychological effects, involved community members who were from KwaZulu-Natal, held the role of Traditional Healer at school, belonged to the Nguni linguistic and Traditional African religious group, possessed a diploma, and fell within the 20-39 years age bracket.

Key Findings of Learner Feedback on Extent of Harm

- **Gender**: **Males** were slightly more likely than females to believe that the experience resulted in psychological harm to those involved (1.03)
- **Province**: Respondents from **KwaZulu-Natal** were 1.91 times more likely than those from Gauteng to believe the experiences had a negative psychological impact.
- Mother Tongue: Nguni respondents were 3.3 times more likely than other mother tongue respondents and 1.6 times more likely than Sotho mother tongue respondents to suggest that the experiences negatively affected the learners in a psychological way.
- Grade: Senior primary learners (G5-G7) were 1.9 times more likely than junior secondary (G8-G9) learners and 1.1 times more likely than senior secondary (G10-G12) learners to believe that the experiences had a negative psychological impact on those involved with such experiences.
- Age Group: Respondents aged 17- to 19 years were 1.6 times more likely than those aged 15 to 16 years and 1.3 times more likely than learners aged 10 to 14 years to have perceived the experiences as having a negative psychological impact.
- Religious Affiliation: Christians were 1 9 times more likely than respondents from the Traditional African group and 1.4 times more likely than respondents from other religious groups to have perceived the experiences as having a negative psychological influence. negatively affecting the learners in a negative psychological way.

Conclusion Benefit vs Harm:

In conclusion, the survey data elucidate a clear sense of concern from learners, teachers, and community members regarding the psychological harm stemming from 'strange behaviours' in educational environments. A majority of the 331 participants identified these behaviours as psychologically damaging, with a significant number also recognising their potential spiritual harm. This concern was most prevalent among female learners from KwaZulu-Natal of higher educational levels, Nguni speakers, and individuals with Christian beliefs. Teachers with higher education levels and younger community members, particularly those involved in traditional healing practices, also exhibited heightened sensitivity to these behaviours' psychological implications. The study's insights reveal a complex landscape of perceptions, with demographic factors like gender, geography, language, education, and religion shaping attitudes towards both the benefits and the adverse effects of these occurrences. The array of beliefs around 'strange behaviours' underscores the need for an informed and multifaceted approach in addressing the impact on school communities, taking into account the diverse perspectives and potential influences on learners' wellbeing.

Negative behaviours associated with 'harmful practices'.

This section explores learners' perceptions of adverse behaviours associated with 'harmful practices' within the school context. As the inquiry into negative behaviours was directed exclusively at learners, the subsequent feedback and insights detailed below are derived solely from their responses.

'Harmful practices', which encompasses a range of traditional, spiritual and cultural beliefs, can manifest in behaviours that are often disruptive, misunderstood or stigmatised. As such, these behaviours can be viewed as 'negative behaviours'. To ensure that the phenomenon is investigated in its entirety, learners were asked about their perceptions of negative behaviours associated with 'harmful practices'.

Through quantitative analysis, this study aims to shed light on how such manifestations of 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' are perceived within the educational setting, focusing on bullying, discrimination, and the use of spiritual behaviours to bully others.

Key Findings of Negative behaviours associated with 'harmful practices'.

The study utilised a factor analytic procedure to aggregate responses related to the perception of negative behaviours associated with 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices', resulting in a factor named "negative behaviours associated with 'harmful' practices". The key findings are summarised below:

- **Province:** The analysis revealed no significant difference in the perception of negative behaviours between respondents from **Gauteng** (mean = 2.81) and KwaZulu-Natal (mean = 2.70), indicating a uniform perception across these provinces.
- **Gender:** Similarly, **no significant difference** was found between female and male respondents in their perception of these negative behaviours, suggesting a consistent view across gender lines.
- **Grade Level:** A significant association was found between grade levels and the perception of negative behaviours. Learners in **higher grades (G10-G12)** had a statistically significantly higher mean score (2.94), indicating a greater perception of negative behaviours, compared to those in lower grades (G5-G7, mean = 2.42).
- Age Group: There was a significant difference in perception across age groups, with older learners (17y-19y) more likely to perceive negative behaviours (mean = 2.89) compared to younger learners (10y-14y, mean = 2.39).
- Mother Tongue and Religious Affiliation: No statistically significant differences were found regarding the mother tongue and religious groups in relation to the perception of negative behaviours.



Analysis using the ANOVA test revealed significant age-related disparities in the observation of negative behaviours towards learners showing strange behaviours; older respondents noticed these behaviours more than younger ones. Specifically, the oldest age group (17-19 years) observed a notably higher incidence of negativity when compared to the youngest group, with statistical significance at p<0.05. No significant differences were identified among different ethnic or religious groups. The results highlight that perceptions of bullying and discrimination are more pronounced in older learners and stress the importance of understanding how these negative behaviours can affect learners' cognitive abilities, underpinning the need for further investigation into this area.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that perceptions of negative behaviours associated with 'strange behaviours' are more pronounced among older learners and those in higher grades. This could be attributed to increased social awareness or exposure to more diverse viewpoints as learners progress through their education. However, the lack of significant differences based on province, gender, mother tongue, and religious affiliation indicates a broad consensus on the presence and impact of these behaviours across various demographic lines.

Qualitative Findings on Experiences of 'Strange Behaviours'

The first research question looked into what forms of 'strange behaviours' the learners were displaying as a consequence of 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices'.

a)Physical Response to 'Harmful Practices'

According to various reports in the transcripts, when learners experienced the 'phenomenon under investigation', they would fall or scream and make various noises.

66

I don't know how I can explain it.
You may find sometimes they fall.
They are sitting, they can fall and sometimes they make a lot of noise or scream

"

44

"When you see doing funny things, are these signs they're making with their hands, with their feet, with their bodies." - FGD GP ED 1 According to the feedback, most learners would also display their bodies in abnormal ways, using their hands and feet to make signs.

77

"During these events of 'strange behaviours', learners have also been observed acting as a snake or something different and have certain actions that need to be done in a certain manner. For example, they always drink water from the floor.

44

"Having so-called attacks, the learner used to crawl like a snake with their stomach, and in most cases when they are in that state, they need water and whenever they drink the water, it must be the floor." – FGD GP ED 2

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b) Speak in a different language or tone.

There are also various incidences where learners have been seen shaking on the ground talking in different tongues. During such events, they may go into a trance and speak in a different tone.

"

"the way they speak will tell you that they are in that zone, they also get stiff... they scream with a deep voice... they also burp" - IGP Social Worker 1

"

66

"Like, maybe she's on the ground like shaking and you will hear the sound that you don't understand. Or is the language that they are using to communicate with their ancestors? I don't know. But those who have those ancestral... spirits ... Or whatever they understand and try to communicate." - FGD GP ED 1

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c)Possible seizures or fits

"

"These actions mentioned above by the learners where they have some form of abnormal physical action or response have speculated to look like the learners undergoing are seizures fits. These or seizures and fits affect them in various physical manners, and some may even go blind momentarily.

"And there is this other one who had to drop out, now that one she would have, I don't know if it is fits, but she would start kicking and she start that, and if she gets you with a kick, you will get harmed." – FGD GP ED 2

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"There was a girl called Mbali, there would be a time wherein Mbali goes blind, literally blind and the sister Pretty would ask or beg that we take her home, her eyes would be open, but she would not see a thing. the eyes would look ordinary, but she does not see a thing." – FGD GP ED 2

"

d)Hallucinations

In addition to the physical responses and possible seizures, learners are also reported to experience hallucinations where they are seen to be talking to someone or fighting with someone.

"

"She was in the toilet, and she was closing her eyes, and she was fighting something that was not there, now she was punching the wall, it was like there was something in her that wanted to come out." – FGD GP ED 2

"

"They might have hallucinations before or after experiencing the calling." – IGP ED 8

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A case study also indicated that hallucinations among learners can also have a social contagion effect, where one learner's vivid description of unseen entities, like snakes or people, leads others to also claim perception of these non-existent presences. Anecdotal evidence from a counsellor in Gauteng illustrates a scenario where the mention of a snake in a classroom caused a collective panic, leading learners to avoid certain areas of the room. The account further embellishes the situation by describing a learner associated with 'demons' due to her appearance and behaviour, which culminates in mass hysteria following her drawing of a snake on the board.



"There was a situation where certain learners were saying they wouldn't go to a certain class because there was a snake. And we asked those learners, we went to the class, and we looked and it was not there. So, now they would tell all these learners that they can see, and they would be believed. And then obviously being a child. I won't stay in a place where they say there is a snake, So I remember there was an incident where most learners were sitting on one side in the class and not wanting to go sit on the other side. And all because according to them, there was a snake. And because of this other learner – and that one I would say she had demons due to how she used to dress, and what she used to apply on her face –and she would like on a normal day go on the board and write, I can disrupt the class, the suddenly after she said that she would draw a snake then all learners in the class would just scream and go mad. They started screaming immediately after the sketch of the snake was done, and everyone could see it's a snake. Then that disruption would lead to other classes being dismissed" – IGP Counsellor 1

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e)Aggressive behaviour and physical altercations

During their 'strange behaviour' events, many learners would behave in an aggressive manner, where they end up biting peers, fighting with others and having other physical altercations.

46

"Sometimes they are aggressive and fight because I remember the other one was bitten by the other one who was having these attacks." - FGD GP ED 1

"

"This child would display sudden bursts of aggression towards other kids, and it seemed to be linked to what was assumed as ancestral calling. There were moments when she exhibited quite intense behaviour – rolling her eyes and making sounds like a roaring lion, eventually leading to physical altercations with her peers." – IGP ED 1

77

66

"They can even try to attack you while you are trying to intervene. She can dance with you or he can even try to attack you, there are some learners who can be so violent during that time, so that's what I'm saying is demonic" - FGD GP ED 1

The aggression of these learners is also considered to be very unpredictable and violent, where in some cases if one tries to intervene, they do not know if they will be attacked or not.

77

f)Awareness of an oncoming "attack" of 'Strange Behaviours'

Lastly, some learners have reported that they can feel an attack coming soon and try to isolate themselves or inform their teachers so they can be ushered out of the class to minimise disruption.

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"So, sometimes a child will say I want to leave the classroom and the teacher made a fuss for them to leave the classroom. And then they start making the songs and then they start shaking and doing you know, you basically it starts manifesting at that time."

- IKZN ED 2

77

g)Experience Manifestations as Demonic or a Part of Witchcraft

Some educators, peers and community members who practice Christianity view the aggressive manifestations as a curse, witchcraft or a form of demonic possession.

"To be honest these things are real, and you can even see it in their eyes. you can also see the person's body is here, but the spirit is a different one from the owner." - FGD GP ED 2

"It could be a curse. It could be witchcraft." -FGD GP ED 1

- 77

Various community members and educators also indicate that they believe the effects of the 'harmful practices' and the 'strange behaviours' to be demonic due to the learners being "controlled" by spirits who influence them into acting out in harmful manners.

"Evil spirits, when these children come to school, they are mostly controlled by these spirits which mislead them into wrongdoings" -FGD GP ED 1

In addition to the viewpoints of some who follow Christianity, community leaders who

believe in or practice 'harmful traditional,

cultural or religious practices' also seem to

find the episodes demonic since the

learners cannot communicate with their

"I will not be sure if it is ancestral, but you see a child being possessed by something They will call maybe somebody to try and assist." - FGD GP ED 1

"During the episodes, the ancestors can be communicated with or be seen by the person experiencing the episodes." -FGD KZN COM 1

In addition to the above, the most commonly reported reasons for considering the 'harmful practices' as demonic was due to how learners would "manifest" the demons during assembly prayers.

ancestors.

"Maybe I can give a little bit of testimony in 2013. I used to preach there with the assembly. And almost half of the Assembly, they manifested the demons. And then there were some of them, they fall." - FGD GP ED 1

"It used to happen when we had an assembly point. Where we heard the pastor's been busy. And then you have some kind of disturbances within the learners and then they will tell you that someone is affected." - IGP ED 6

The last concern for why some educators considered the 'harmful practices' to be demonic was due to the phenomenon predominantly taking place with girls.

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"I think it's demonic because and. My surprise is only happening to two girls. I've never experienced it happening to a boy here. So, I think that's why I'm saying. I think it's demonic. since it attacks girls only" -FGD GP ED 1

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Key Findings: Experience "Strange Behaviour"

- Commonly reported physical responses to 'strange behaviours' include falling, screaming, abnormal body language, and acting out in a specific manner or like an animal.
- During manifestations, learners speak in different languages or tones indicating they are in a trance. Some may even roar like an animal on occasion.
- May be experiencing seizures during their 'strange behaviour' manifestations.
- Many learners experience hallucinations of people or animals or ancestors during the manifestations.
- Social contagion effect observed where descriptions of hallucinations lead to collective panic and avoidance of certain areas among learners.
- Various reports have been made of learners becoming unpredictably aggressive and partaking in physical altercations during their episodes of 'strange behaviours'.
- Learners may be aware of an oncoming manifestation of their 'harmful practices' perceived to be a 'calling' from the ancestors and try to excuse themselves from their class.
- 'Harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices' are perceived as demonic or linked to witchcraft by some, with educators and community members expressing concerns about curses, possession, and evil spirits influencing learners' behaviours.
 - Episodes during assembly prayers and the predominance in girls contribute to the belief that 'harmful practices' are demonic in nature.

What is the Impact of these "Strange" Behaviours?

Impact of 'Strange Behaviours' on Academic Success

This section provides an analysis of the perceptions surrounding the impact of 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' on learners' academic success and general well-being. The phenomenon of 'harmful practices' can be a traditional, cultural or religious concept prevalent in some communities, which is believed to influence individuals' lives profoundly. Understanding its impact on the educational environment is crucial for the development of inclusive educational policies. The data was collected by learners, teachers and community members using a five-point interval scale to assess the perceived negative impact of 'strange behaviours' on learners.

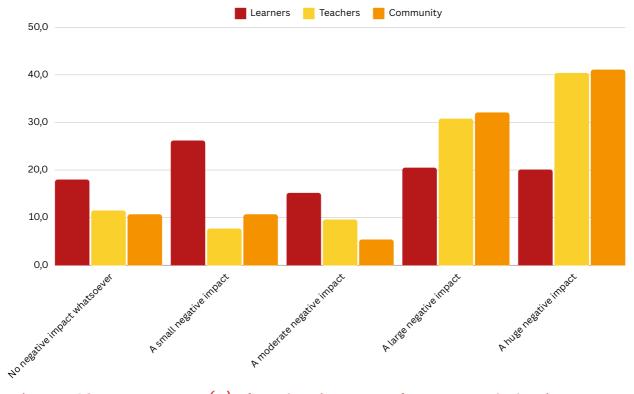


Figure 23: Responses (%) for the impact of 'strange behaviours' on academic success

The data in Figure 21 show that teachers (71.2%) and community members (73.2%) were more concerned than learners (40.6%) about the large and huge negative impact of the behaviour on academic success and general well-being.

Comparing Key Findings on the Impact on a Learner's Academic Success.

The survey findings present an insightful overview concerning the perceived ramifications of 'strange behaviours' on the academic progress and overall well-being of learners as seen by learners, teachers, and community members.

For **learners**, the results indicate provincial variances, with those from KwaZulu-Natal reporting significantly higher concerns about the negative impact (average score of 3.17) compared to their counterparts in Gauteng (average score of 2.79) with p<.05.. Moreover, the negative consequences of such behaviours seem to weigh more heavily on younger learners in senior primary school (Grades 5-7), who rated the impact as larger than the older learners in junior and senior secondary grades. Notably, the analysis did not reveal any significant differences in perception when evaluated against the language spoken at home or religious affiliations among learners, highlighting a potential area for further research. The overall mean score of 2.98 and median of 3.00 suggests that most respondents view the impact of 'harmful practices' on academic success as moderate.

Teachers, on the whole, tended to view the 'strange behaviours' as considerably detrimental to learners, as reflected by a mean score of 3.81. Age emerged as a differentiator; teachers over the age of 50 perceived the negative impact to be more pronounced compared to those in the 20-49 age bracket.

In the context of **community members**, there was a consensus on the serious negative impact on learners involved in such behaviours, with an average score pointing to significant concerns (3.82). A deeper look at these community members' roles within the school ecosystem revealed that religious leaders felt the most significant negative impact (mean rank of 37.42), distinctly more than individuals involved with school governance. This discrepancy was statistically significant and was underscored by an effect size approaching moderate importance (r=0.43), a finding supported by bootstrapping techniques. Despite the predominance of Christian respondents in the community sample, the current research did not surface significant differences in viewpoints between the two religious groups, highlighting a potential area for further investigation.

Collectively, these insights underscore a shared acknowledgement among different stakeholders within the education sector of the harmful impact that 'strange behaviours' can have on learners. The varying degrees of this perceived impact are coloured by factors such as geography, age, and the nature of the respondent's involvement with the school, painting a complex picture of the situation's gravity.



Conclusion: Impact of 'Strange Behaviours on Academic Success

The survey data culminate in a striking conclusion: the 'strange behaviours' reported within schools are not only observed but also perceived to have significant negative impacts on the academic and personal well-being of learners. This consensus cuts across the board—from learners to educators and community members.

Learners from KwaZulu-Natal particularly stand out, perceiving a significantly greater negative influence than their peers in Gauteng. Younger learners further amplify this sentiment, indicating an increased sensitivity to the repercussions of these behaviours at an early educational stage. Despite these findings, the lack of significant variance based on language or religious background among learners suggests an area ripe for further study.

Teachers generally agree on the detrimental effects, with those more advanced in age attributing even more considerable harm to these strange behaviours. Community members confirm this viewpoint, assigning a significant degree of impact, particularly among religious leaders as opposed to other roles within school governance. Statistical support makes these observations more compelling, even in the absence of notable religious differences in perspectives within the community responses.

Altogether, the survey highlights a critical need to understand and address the complex interplay of cultural, spiritual, and behavioural factors affecting learners. A concerted effort to explore these dynamics further could lead to more effective interventions and support systems within educational environments calibrated to meet the nuanced needs of learners as they navigate their academic and social landscapes.

Psychological Impact of 'Harmful Practices'

This section examines the psychological impact on individuals within educational settings exposed to 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices'. Understanding these impacts is crucial for fostering a supportive educational environment that accommodates diverse cultural and spiritual expressions.

Comparing Responses of Perceptions of Psychological Impact

An analysis of responses provided insights into how individuals perceive the psychological effects of witnessing or experiencing 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices'. The findings are presented below:

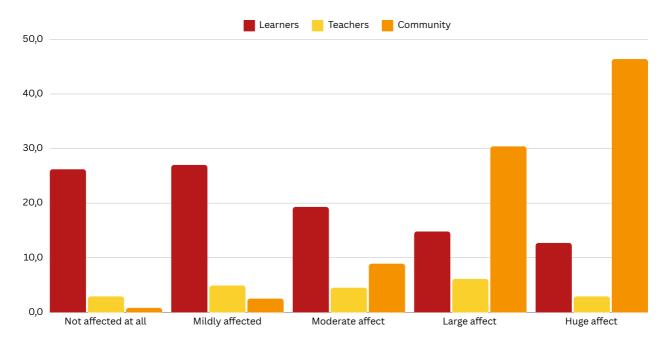


Figure 24: Responses (%) for the psychological impact of 'strange behaviours'.

The survey's findings unveil contrasting perceptions among the three groups—learners, teachers, and community members—regarding the psychological impact of 'strange behaviours' witnessed within the educational setting.

Learners reported that they were **least affected by the 'strange behaviours'**, with a majority (53.2%) feeling that the impact on them was non-existent or mild. Their perception aligns with a mean score of 2.61, indicating a mild impact, and a median value of 2.0 hints at skewness in their responses. This data suggests learners are either less aware of the long-term implications or perhaps more resilient to these occurrences.

Teachers, on the other hand, **perceived the psychological impact to be more pronounced** with a mean score of 3.06, reflecting a moderate impact on their well-being. Their median of 3.0 reinforces the viewpoint that 'strange behaviours' have a more significant effect on them compared to learners, implying that teachers might be more sensitive to the disruptions these behaviours cause in the learning environment.

Community members involved in the school system reported the **most substantial impact from these behaviours**, with 76.8% indicating the impact was large or very large. This is further emphasised by a mean score of 4.05 and median of 4.0, pointing towards a substantial perceived impact. The high scores among community members suggest a deep concern for the welfare of learners and possibly a broader understanding of the implications these behaviours may hold for the school community as a whole.

These variance in perspectives may be a product of the different roles and experiences each group has within the school context. Non-parametric tests revealed differences among the groups, affirming the significant variation in how 'strange behaviours' are perceived to affect individuals associated with the school. The findings highlight a clear gradation in perceived psychological impacts across the school community spectrum, requiring targeted approaches to address concerns effectively.

Comparing the Responder Profile and significance levels of the Perceived Psychological Impact

Among **learners**, individuals from KwaZulu-Natal (mean = 2.93) perceived a significantly higher personal psychological impact of 'strange behaviours' as compared to their Gauteng counterparts (mean = 2.28), indicating notable provincial variations in the experience or perception of these practices. No notable gender differences were detected, despite females reporting higher concerns, suggesting that gender does not play a significant role in the perception of psychological impact. Age and grade level, however, displayed a distinct pattern; the youngest learners in senior primary school (G5-G7) perceived themselves as more affected compared to secondary school learners, reflected in moderate effect sizes (r = 0.43 between G5-G7 and G8-G9, and r = 0.31 between G5-G7 and G10-G12). Similarly, the youngest age group (10y-14y) perceived a stronger impact than the elder cohorts, corroborated by moderate effect sizes. On the language front, significant differences were seen between the Nguni and Sotho language speakers, with the former being more affected, albeit with a small effect size (r = 0.16). Religious affiliations did not yield any significant disparities.



In the domain of **teachers**, the psychological effects of 'strange behaviours' were felt on varying levels. Teachers from KwaZulu-Natal reported a higher mean rank than those from Gauteng, but this did not achieve statistical significance. Classroom teachers experienced a larger psychological impact than those in managerial positions, although this was not statistically significant. Differences in qualification levels and home language groups amongst teachers revealed no substantial variance, with even the highest score in the Nguni group not differing significantly from the lowest in the Sotho group. Age emerged as a factor; older teachers (50+y) felt more affected than their younger colleagues, a result supported by a power analysis indicating a high probability (p<.05) of correctly identifying this distinction.

Community members' perceptions were aligned with provincial trends observed amongst learners and teachers. Those in KwaZulu-Natal reported feeling more psychologically impacted by 'strange behaviours' than their counterparts in Gauteng. This sentiment was characterised by a moderate effect size difference (r = 0.32). Within the community member group, religious leaders particularly felt a greater personal

Summary: Perceptions of Psychological Impact

The survey's findings revealed differences in the perception of the psychological impact of 'strange behaviours' within schools among learners, teachers, and community members. Learners generally felt a milder impact, with more than half reporting negligible to mild effects. However, those from KwaZulu-Natal believed the influence to be more considerable than their Gauteng peers. Age and grade also played a role, as did language, with younger learners and Nguni speakers, indicating a stronger effect. Teachers experiencing a moderate psychological impact overall did not exhibit significant differences based on province, role, or qualifications but highlighted an age-related disparity, with older teachers feeling more affected. Community members, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal and among religious leaders, reported a notably stronger personal psychological impact from these behaviours.

Conclusion: Perceptions of Psychological Impact

The gradation in perceived psychological impacts suggests that a combination of demographic and provincial factors shapes responses. Learners are seemingly less affected than adults, who ascribe deeper concern and awareness to the implications of strange behaviours. The distinction between the perceptions of learners, teachers, and community members underscores the complexity of interpreting and addressing such behaviours within the educational environment. It points to the need for a nuanced approach to supporting affected individuals, with particular attention to provincial contexts and varying sensitivity across different age groups and professional roles. Developing a comprehensive understanding of these impacts can inform strategies aimed at mitigating the negative consequences of 'strange behaviours' on the school community.

Feelings experienced when observing 'strange behaviour'.

This section presents an analysis of the emotional responses experienced by individuals when observing 'strange' and unusual behaviours, possibly linked to 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices', within educational environments. Understanding these emotional responses is crucial for addressing the needs of both the individuals exhibiting these behaviours and those witnessing them.

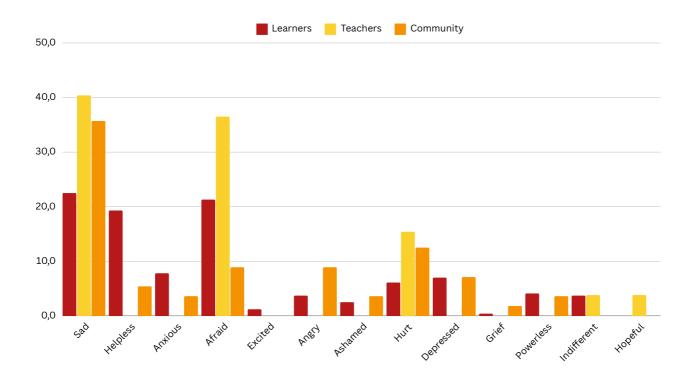


Figure 25: Response distribution of feelings experienced when observing 'strange behaviours'.



Summary of the key findings across the learners, community members and educators sample groups

The data in Figure 23 shows that the predominant feelings experienced by all respondents were sadness (96/243=39.5%) and fear (76/243=31.3%). Although most of the feelings provided appear to refer to unpleasantness or avoidance, the most prominent feeling or emotional impact experienced by respondents was analysed, namely sadness. As the independent variables in the questionnaire differed from the questionnaires, the three sets of data were analysed separately.

A closer look at the learners' data, reveals a range of emotions experienced by respondents, with sadness (22.5%) and fear (21.3%) being the most prevalent. These emotions reflect a significant emotional impact on witnesses, indicating a need for supportive responses from educational institutions. Other notable emotions include feelings of helplessness (19.3%), anxiety (7.8%), and depression (7.0%), underscoring the complexity of witnesses' emotional landscapes. Conversely, emotions such as excitement (1.2%), anger (3.7%), and indifference (3.7%) were less commonly reported, suggesting that negative emotions predominate in reactions to witnessing unusual behaviours.

The prominence of sadness and fear among respondents highlights the emotional toll that observing strange or unusual behaviours can have within educational settings. These findings underscore the importance of recognising and addressing the emotional well-being of all learners—those who exhibit unusual behaviours and their peers who witness such incidents.



Sadness experienced when witnessing 'strange behaviour'.

The survey explored how different groups within the school community experience feelings of sadness related to observing or hearing about learners displaying strange behaviour at school.

Comparing Perceptions of Learners, Educators and Community Members on Sadness Experienced

Among **learners**, statistical analysis including methods such as Chi-squared and odds ratios did not reveal any significant differences between various groups. However, profiling based on the highest odds ratio indicated that the learners most likely to report being impacted by feelings of sadness were those from KwaZulu-Natal, female, in the senior secondary school age bracket (G10-G12), aged between 17 to 19 years, belonging to the Nguni ethnic group and the Traditional African religious group.

For **teachers**, the data similarly showed no statistically significant differences amongst the independent groups assessed. The odds ratio suggested that those most likely to feel sadness were teachers from KwaZulu-Natal, classroom teachers specifically, from the Nguni ethnic background with isiZulu as their home language, affiliated with the Christian faith, and within the 20-49 year age group.

In the case of **community members**, the analysis found no significant differences between the varied groups. Nevertheless, the odds ratio drawn from the responses indicated the typical community member profile affected by sadness consisted of individuals from both Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal (each with 50.0% affirming feelings of sadness), involved in school governance, identified with the Nguni ethnic and Christian groups, and holding a diploma as their highest educational qualification.

Recognising that learners are central to the educational ecosystem and most frequently exposed to strange behaviours, their perspectives on the causes are vital for crafting policies that cater to their educational and well-being needs. Consequently, research must focus on understanding the belief systems of learners to inform targeted policy revisions addressing the manifestations of such behaviours in schools. This imperative to concentrate on the learner experience is precisely why a detailed breakdown of key findings from the learners' feedback was undertaken.

Key Findings: Learners' Experience of Sadness

The analysis focused on the relationship between experiencing sadness and various demographic factors, utilising chi-squared tests, Cramer's V, the reciprocal of Bayes factor, and odds ratios to assess significance:

- Province: Individuals from KwaZulu-Natal were 1.6 times more likely than those from Gauteng to report feelings of sadness, though this difference was not statistically significant.
- Gender: Females were 2.2 times more likely than males to experience sadness, highlighting a gender difference in emotional response, albeit without statistical significance.
- Grade Level: A positive correlation was found between grade level and reported sadness, with learners in higher grades more likely to feel sad upon witnessing unusual behaviours. Statistical significance was not achieved.
- Age Group: Older learners (ages 14-19) showed a greater propensity towards sadness compared to younger ones (ages 10-13), mirroring the grade-level findings without reaching statistical significance.
- Mother Tongue: Nguni speakers reported a significantly higher likelihood of experiencing sadness compared to Sotho speakers and other language groups, suggesting cultural influences on emotional responses.
- Religious Affiliation: While Traditional African and Christian groups reported similar levels of sadness, no statistically significant differences were found among religious groups.

Conclusion: Learners' Experience of Sadness

The emotional response of sadness to witnessing unusual behaviours in schools varies across provinces, gender, grade levels, age groups, mother tongue, and religious affiliation, with notable trends despite a lack of statistical significance in some areas. These findings underscore the need for culturally sensitive and emotionally supportive educational policies.

Impact of experiences on learners

This report section presents an analysis of the effects 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' have on individuals within South African educational environments, specifically focusing on personal life disruptions and communication challenges faced by those who attempt to share their experiences. The findings draw attention to the need for policy interventions by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to address these issues effectively.

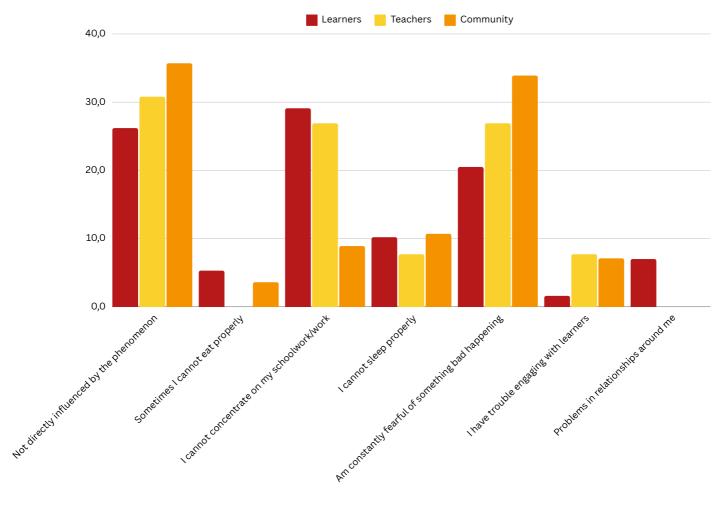


Figure 26: Response distribution of regarding the impact of the 'strange behaviours' on their personal life.

The bar graph presented distinct variances in the frequency of how different groups experience the impact of strange behaviours. Among learners, the most prevalent effect was on their capacity to concentrate, with 29.1% (71 individuals) reporting difficulty focusing on their studies. In contrast, teachers and community members were less directly affected by such disruptions in concentration, with 30.8% (16 individuals) and 35.7% (20 individuals), respectively, reporting no direct impact.

Considering all respondents collectively, 28.4% (100 out of 352) reported no direct impact from the strange behaviour, while 25.6% (90 out of 352) experienced impediments in their ability to concentrate on their work or school tasks. Additionally, 23.6% (83 out of 352) expressed a persistent fear that something adverse might occur.

Given that this pervasive sense of fear is intrinsically linked with the emotion of fearfulness, it was singled out for more detailed analysis across different independent groups.

Fear experienced when witnessing 'strange behaviour'.

Regarding the impact of fear of something adverse happening on the **learners**' personal lives, there were no statistically significant differences, however, a significant negative correlation was detected between increasing grade level and the experience of fear among learners, with 34.6% in grades 5-7 exhibiting fear, which then decreases slightly in higher grades. This trend was also reflected across age groups, where 14-16-year-olds reported the highest occurrence of fear at 50%, with a reduction noted among older learners. The learner profile most likely to experience fear included females from KwaZulu-Natal, at lower educational levels, aged 10-13, speaking Nguni languages, and identifying as Christian, a trait shared with female learners from Gauteng in grades G8-G9 and the same age bracket. These observations, although not supported by significant statistical correlations, offer valuable insights into the emotional well-being of learners within educational settings who are exposed to strange or spiritual behaviours.

For **teachers**, the only significant variable affecting the fear of something bad happening was their role within the school. Teachers were approximately ten times more likely to report fear compared to individuals in management positions. The likely profile of a teacher responding affirmatively based on the odds ratio included those from KwaZulu-Natal, possessing a degree or higher educational qualification, affiliated with the Christian religious grouping, and aged 20-49 years.



With **community members**, residence in a province was the sole significantly distinguishing factor. Those from Gauteng were 2.8 times more prone to express fear about future negative events than those from KwaZulu-Natal. The community member likely to report fear was associated with the school governance, part of the Nguni rather than Sotho ethnic group, Christian, possessing a diploma qualification, and within the 50-59 age bracket.

Conclusion: Learners' Experience of Fear

In conclusion, the bar graph analysis has elucidated the varying degrees to which 'strange behaviours' affect the school community, with learners being the most impacted in terms of concentration. The examination of responses indicates a significant negative correlation between learners' grade levels, age, and the experience of fear, pinpointing younger female learners, particularly from KwaZulu-Natal and speaking Nguni languages, as the most affected demographic. While teachers are generally less impacted, their role in the school significantly correlates with their likelihood of experiencing fear, and for community members, the province of residence stands out as a defining factor for their fear response. These findings, taken together, underscore the multifaceted impact of 'strange behaviours' on the school community and call for a tailored approach in addressing the needs and emotional well-being of all those involved, be it learners, educators, or community partners.

Learners experiences when reaching out to discuss 'strange' experiences

The question under consideration was exclusively administered to learners; therefore, the results and feedback obtained pertain solely to their responses and experiences.

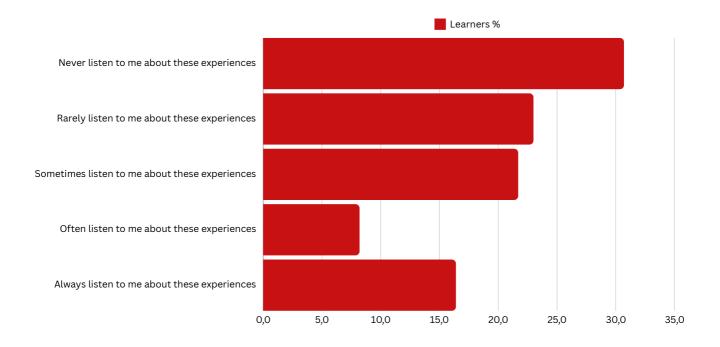


Figure 27: Frequency of learner responses regarding their experience to reaching out to discuss the "strange behaviour"

Learners rated their perception of how attentively others listened to their accounts of strange experiences on a five-point scale, ranging from 'to no extent at all' (1) to 'to a very large extent' (5). The average score stood at 2.57, indicating that most respondents felt that their narratives were listened to 'rarely to sometimes'. The data exhibited a slight positive skew, and bootstrapping was employed to assess the mean of each bootstrap sample for the parameter of interest.

Key Findings: Learners experiences when reaching out to discuss strange experiences

- **Provincial differences:** KwaZulu-Natal respondents felt more listened to (mean = 2.77) than Gauteng respondents (mean = 2.36).
- **Gender differences:** Female respondents felt more listened to (mean = 2.69) compared to males (mean = 2.21).
- **Grade level differences:** Grades 5-7 (mean = 3.17) felt significantly more listened to than grades 8-9 (mean = 2.37) and 10-12 (mean = 2.44).
- **Age group differences:** Younger respondents (10-13 years, mean = 3.08) felt more listened to than older ones (14-16 years, mean = 2.39).
- **Mother tongue** and religious groupings: No significant differences were found in perceived attentiveness to accounts of strange behaviours.

Research indicates significant provincial, gender, grade level, and age-related differences in how much respondents feel listened to regarding their experiences with 'strange behaviours,' with no notable disparities based on mother tongue or religion.

Conclusion: Learners experiences when reaching out to discuss strange experiences

The findings clearly delineate a pattern where factors such as provincial origin, gender, education level, and age significantly influence the perceived attentiveness of listeners to individuals' accounts of strange experiences. Particularly, individuals from KwaZulu-Natal, females, and those in lower educational levels and younger age groups report feeling more acknowledged. These insights highlight the need for culturally and demographically sensitive approaches to communication and support within communities discussing unusual behaviours.

Emotional Responses to hearing of someone behaving strangely

The relevant question delved into the emotional responses elicited from learners upon hearing about instances of 'strange behaviours' or 'harmful practices' among learners in South African schools. The question under consideration was exclusively administered to learners; therefore, the results and feedback obtained pertain solely to their responses and experiences.

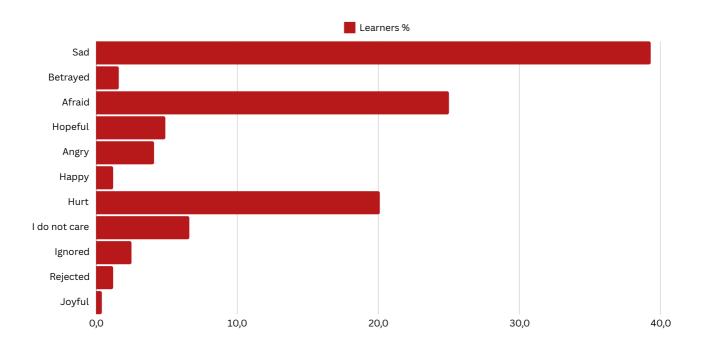


Figure 28: Frequency displaying Emotional Responses of learners to hearing of someone behaving strangely

Key Findings: Emotional Responses to hearing of someone behaving strangely

- **Predominant Emotional Responses:** The most common feelings reported upon hearing about 'strange behaviours' or 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices' were **sadness** (39.3%), **fear** (25%), and **hurt** (20.1%). This highlights the predominantly negative emotional impact these stories have on listeners.
- **Provincial Differences:** Respondents from **KwaZulu-Natal** were 1.53 times more likely to report feelings of sadness compared to those from Gauteng, indicating provincial variances in emotional impact.
- **Gender Differences: Female** respondents were 3.36 times more likely than male respondents to feel sad upon hearing about these behaviours, suggesting gender disparities in emotional responses.
- Grade and Age Group Variations: Learners in higher grades (G10-G12) and older age groups (14-19 years) were more likely to report sadness, pointing towards increased empathy or understanding with age and educational level.
- Mother Tongue and Religious Groupings: The Nguni mother tongue group was significantly more likely to report sadness, whereas no statistically significant differences were found among religious groups, highlighting the role of cultural background in emotional reactions.

Conclusion: Emotional Responses to hearing of someone behaving strangely

The analysis uncovers a clear trend towards negative emotional responses among the school community members when confronted with stories of 'strange behaviours' or 'harmful practices'. These findings underscore the psychological toll such incidents can have, not only on those directly experiencing them but also on those within their social and educational circles. The variations in response across different demographic factors further accentuate the need for a culturally sensitive and inclusive approach in addressing these matters within the educational sector.

Qualitative Findings on Impact of 'Strange Behaviours'

a)Learners are not in control.

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"And then you can see by his or her behaviour during that time, and the person who is undergoing that thing, she or he does not understand what is going on. Because if you can ask her or him or what was going on, she cannot. Explained to you. What was really going on during that time?" - FGD GP ED 1

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Learners exhibiting the 'strange behaviours' as a consequence of their 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices' are not aware of their actions. During this loss of awareness phase, learners can partake in various harmful actions both to themselves and their peers. This loss of awareness or control is seen as one of the root causes of what makes the traditional practice harmful to the receiver and others around them.

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"They are harmful to the because the child is out of control, they start banging the tables and desks, they start running around and those seating next to them can be injured." – FGD KZN ED 1

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b)Learners are Faking the 'Strange Behaviours', Hence Disrupting School

According educators. to other learners and believe counsellors, many learners are faking their behaviours' 'strange to disrupt classes, receive attention or to get out of completing their homework or writing tests.

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"Learners often use the claim of 'ancestral callings' as an excuse to escape from responsibilities, such as not doing homework or tests. This not only affects their academic progress but also creates challenges in maintaining a focused and productive classroom." – IGP ED 9

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"in the past I used to have this, Learner. She was just faking it I cannot remember the year but should be attacked and then there was this day where I screamed and I said to her, stop that and I called her mother. Her mother came here and. The mother told us she's faking." - FGD GP ED 1

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"I would say 80% fake and 20 % are real." -IGP Counsellor 1

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Many peers of learners who are "faking" the 'strange behaviours' say they can tell after an extended period who is faking their 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices'. because those learners not display the gift prophecies.

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"Some of the learners you could tell that they were experiencing these things because they genuinely had a gift but with others, You could tell that they were doing it because they were seeking attention" – IKZN L1

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"Some parents will say to us, I don't know why this child is behaving like this. Because we go to church and we do things like this, and we believe in God. And I don't know why my child is doing this. Some parents even disbelieve what the girls are. But obviously they're not at school to witness how serious it is, and how aggressive okay" – IKZN ED 2

Christianity do not think their child's 'strange behaviour' is linked 'harmful to traditional, cultural or religious practices', due to the faith they practice and believe that the child is just faking the 'strange behaviours' to receive

attention.

Parents who practice

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According to the community members who follow Traditional African Practices, if the 'strange behaviours' were truly linked to what this study defined as 'harmful practices', the learners would be direct and would speak to their ancestors in tongues. The learners will not harm themselves.

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"This thing is really confusing because when you encounter a learner that keeps screaming and rolling on the floor you really don't know what is wrong with them because if they have an ancestral calling they should start talking in tongues then you will know it's their ancestors talking. So in most cases we have had in the school we have been really confused because you will see learners doing such behaviour and you just think they are doing it because they see other learners or because they just want to disturb that lesson. Nevertheless learners with direct ancestral calling are very straight forward. They speak in an understandable manner, they are direct and their ancestors speak and communicate in a way that we all see that this child as a calling, I would just leave it there." – IKZN COM 1

77

c)'Strange Behaviours': Interconnected or Fake Manifestations?

Incidents of the connected 'strange behaviours' across the school have also been recorded or described as mass hysteria due to the number of learners affected by it and how they manifested the 'harmful practices'.

"We had an absolutely unforeseen situation where we had over 100 girls involved in this kind of episodes. So, it was sort of like a mass hysteria, and it was triggered by one girl, and then it sort of like spread like wildfire to, I would say at least about 30% of the girls. So, in that particular instance, we didn't know how to control the situation." – IKZN ED 2

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"

d)Emotional impact on Peers and Educators

Peers and other learners have been reported to be scared and confused by the sudden outbursts that come with the manifestations. Educators find it challenging to keep the learners calm and the environment supportive.

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"The other kids were often scared or confused by her sudden outbursts, but we did our best to explain the situation and maintain a supportive atmosphere in the classroom." - IGP ED 1

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"she was in class, then she was held by these things, she fainted and woke in a sick room and asked to see a pregnant learner which was in the same and asked everyone to go out, and she started prophesising the learner. and the learner when she got out there, she was crying." – FGD GP ED 2

Incidents of the connected 'strange behaviours' across the school have also been recorded or described as mass hysteria due to the number of learners affected by it and how they manifested the 'harmful practices'.

"

Fellow peers who are not educated in the African of history 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices' are scared that the manifestations of the practices' 'harmful are contagious, as they have experienced the mass hysteria of the manifestations. and fear that they would be next to receive a manifestation of 'harmful practices'.

"Yeah, you know. I can't say it is contagious, but there is a suspicion that if you have one or two learners who display such a character, other learners might feel that maybe this thing is contagious. It will move from one learner to me. Learners start to be uncomfortable." – IGP ED 6

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"Afraid when such things were happening because I had this fear that It was going to start happening to me too." – IKZN

Peers do not feel comfortable maintaining friendships with the learners who may be manifesting their 'strange behaviours' due to how their manifestations lead to inappropriate behaviour or personal beliefs against the manifestations.



"And it also breaks the relationship between learners because. Sometimes these learners will continue to study as friends or as classmates, but immediately when the other learner displays a character that is not acceptable, then it means that the other learner will then close doors so that the relationship should stop." – IGP ED 6

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"They're caught in between.
They don't know what to
believe in. They don't know if it
is real." - IGP Counsellor 1

whether the 'strange behaviours' are real or not. Many feel confused due to the 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' being against their Christian belief system, while others are unsure if they can believe the 'strange behaviours' fake or a manifestation of 'harmful practices'.

Peers and educators are confused between

e) Impact on Parents and Community Members

Parents and community members reported that they were scared of the learners being influenced by the 'harmful practices' or becoming aggressively attacked when the 'strange behaviours' manifest in other learners. However, parents also felt helpless that they could not take their child out of the school when they were scared as they had to prioritise their studies.

"I was also one of the people who assisted during the episodes. It's a very scary and unpleasant experience. I even wanted to take my child out of the school, unfortunately, it was mid-June and other schools are quite far from home. The kids who displayed this behaviour had so much power. Our kids or all the kids that were experiencing this issue claimed to have been seeing something within the school toilet, however, if you ask them to define it they wouldn't and only emphasise that it's inside there." – FGD KZN COM 1

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f)The Psychological Effects on Educators

Many educators admit that they do experience some negative psychological impact, but it is not too much to bear.

"Psychologically I can say it has affected me, but not that much." – IGP ED 4

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"Yeah, the only thing is, remember to me is like such things become a parasite in my workspace. They eat, they eat on my plants. They affect my performance drive so it becomes a problem because it means then I must go back and look at Plan B because Plan A is not working." – IGP ED 6 Educators are frustrated because they feel the 'strange behaviours' are like a parasite in the workplace, constantly disrupting their plans to educate their learners.

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Some negative psychological impact experienced by educators is that they feel helpless when it comes to alleviating the learners' pain when they experience a 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices', or the fear other learners face.

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"To us, it is so painful to see a helpless child. and you know deep down You can never do anything." IGP ED 7

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"mostly I help them and after I did, I just get tired to a point where in I don't even want to see myself, I just want to go home. when I get home pray for these kids especially anything that could be a harm" – FGD GP ED 2

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Educators who practice Christianity or do not believe in the phenomenon 'harmful of practices' and feel mentally emotionally exhausted when dealing with the manifestations of 'strange behaviours'. They seem to experiencing an be internal struggle between protecting their learners and their personal belief systems.

g)Psychological Effects on Peers

Overall, the thematic analysis paints a picture of a fraught psychological landscape where the impact of 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' on observers can range from harm and disturbance to a valued source of guidance and support.

The experiences of learners exposed to their peers' 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' emerge as psychologically complex, with potential for trauma stemming from the observed behaviours. One educator from Gauteng, articulates that while the 'strange behaviours' may not be inherently harmful, the manifestations can indeed be distressing:

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"because it disrupts some of them, learners having these manifestations become traumatised. Maybe the actual calling is not harmful but the manifestation and the behaviour, the outburst tears could be harmful to the learner who's experiencing it and to the other learners who are watching and the staff members." - IGP ED 11

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Some learners may feel different traumatised bv the reactions of their peers who are experiencing the effects of 'harmful practices' after hearing the news of a fellow learner passing away. The responses, which can include going into trances, are out of the ordinary and evoke fear and confusion, as articulated by a Social Worker from Gauteng.

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"Last time here, there was a learner who passed on and these other ones started having these episodes after finding out. They got emotional and some were in a trance." - IGP Social Worker 1

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The same social worker from Gautena observed instances where young girls, experiencing manifestations of 'harmful practices' exhibit did not conventional reactions to trauma such as the death of a fellow learner. Their atypical responses suggest the possibility that the profound mental or emotional impact of the manifestations of 'harmful practices' could desensitise them to additional traumatic events. The social worker reflects on this reaction:

"

"it's confusing and traumatising, look with the incident of those girls on how they reacted after hearing about the death of their peer, I expected people to cry and there they acted different now you ask yourself what's going on?" - IGP Social Worker I

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"it's a good thing to be with the spiritually gifted learners because in case there are children who do not perform well, these spiritually gifted children will tell you what the problem is and what you should do in order to deal with the problem." -FGD KZN L1 Nonetheless, the analysis also uncovers a counterpoint where the spiritual manifestations are perceived positively. A learner from KZN highlights the perceived benefits of being in the company of spiritually gifted peers, who can offer insights and solutions:

h) Peer Pressure to Follow Trends

Learners may feel a form of peer pressure to join in on the trend of 'harmful practices' and to act out in the manner they see fellow peers acting out, or to adopt the traditional practice belief system.

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"Most of the time, I think is there is peer pressure from other children. and other have 'ancestral callings'." – IGP ED 3 44

"Nevertheless, parents also need to install strong morals and values in their kids in order to build their character and their selfesteem so that they won't be easily influenced by other learners or the trends that keep popping up at schools." – IKZN COM 2

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Feedback from some learners indicated that there may be a growing influence to visit the sangoma to confirm if they are also experiencing manifestations of 'harmful practices' based on symptoms of depression.

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"I used to feel like I can always sit alone in my room at home. I didn't like being around people. I would cry a lot and feel like everyone was against me. My life felt miserable and I didn't have friends and also people disliked me. So when children at school started hallucinating and screaming I also started screaming, hence I didn't know why I was doing this but I could not stop. My mother took me to sangoma and they found out that our ancestors were trying to communicate with my parents and they had used me to get the attention of my parents." – FGD KZN L2

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i)Psychological Effects on the Learners Experiencing 'Strange Behaviours'

Due to the unexpected manners in which learners act out during their manifestations, many learners become isolated and lose their friends.

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"the child becomes isolated after the incident. So, there was an incident where the child would drink water from the floor when they are possessed. so, when you give the child water in a cup the child will never drink till you pure the water on the floor." – IGP ED 7

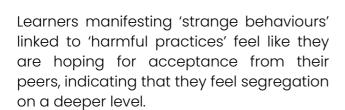
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"Unfortunately, some of my peers get scared and avoid me. This, in turn, leads to feelings of isolation and being misunderstood, which is painful for me." – IGP L1

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Due to their peers isolating from them after their manifestations, the learners manifesting 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' feel segregated, lonely and unaccepted. This leads them to feel emotionally hurt, and they may at times be bullied or discriminated against.



"My ancestral calling is a part of who I am, and I hope for acceptance and support from my peers, even if our beliefs differ."

"

"Having an ancestral calling is a significant part of who I am, and I've accepted it as a responsibility." – IGP L1

Despite being segregated and isolated, learners who manifest 'strange behaviours' and partake in 'harmful practices' feel like they have an added responsibility to work with their spirits and to keep their African culture and beliefs alive.

"I believe I was chosen to help others spiritually." – IGP L1

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j)Other learners' studies are affected

The manifestations of the 'strange behaviours' have led to multiple disturbances in the classes over the years.

"But the past. but the past five years it was hectic, I have experienced learners in class disturbing me during my period." - FGD GP ED 1

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When the classes are disrupted due to the manifestations, other learners get curious about how the manifestations are being presented. This ends up disturbing an entire period, also affecting the principal and teachers, who feel they are unable to implement rules and policies.

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"Suppose it starts at the beginning of the period. So, it means that the class will be disrupted for the entire period, and that could also affect the next period, so that is where I have a problem. Because my focus is to make sure that the policies of the department are implemented fairly without any disturbance of any kind or any threat. But once you've got a situation that hampers the implementation of the policies, that is why I start to. Have a problem. So, I'm giving an example of this learner. Who will normally say no? Gogo is calling me. Gobela is calling me and then the other learners then start to have an interest in that because they want to know who this is, Gogo. So, in the process the teacher is unable to teach. So that is what used to happen, and I am really against it." – IGP ED 6

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In some cases, teachers cannot continue to teach after an episode due to the level of aggression or destruction that took place. It is reported that it is also due to the psychological stress of watching the manifestations.

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"due to the destructiveness that comes with it. Some of the teachers were too scared to come to class and resume teaching. So, this means that the for that subject we no longer had lessons. And that is in a way would affect our marks." IKZN L1

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"I look at the past how they used to perform, and you would find that after a while when these things had happened, their marks drop. or let me say when you try to teach after a specific incident, they do not focus nor listen properly. So, in a way the whole lesson is disturbed." IGP ED 4

All learners have poor performance after witnessing 'strange behaviours' due to their focus being divided. However, learners who experienced the manifestation perform more poorly as they take time to refocus.



Learners who experience the effects of 'harmful practices' have to dedicate extra time after school to ancestors and helping others, leaving less time to study.

"It does impact my school progress. When I come back from school, I dedicate time to working for the ancestors and assisting people. It's a commitment that requires my attention and energy, so it does affect the time I have available for school-related activities." – IGP L1

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Key Findings: Impact of 'strange behaviours'

- Learners are faking their 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' for the following three reasons:
 - To get out of doing homework, writing tests or exams.
 - They are unable to communicate with their ancestors and do not show evidence of the gift after an extended time.
 - Parents from a Christian household say that their learners do not believe in ancestors or manifestations, so they must be faking it.
- There are occasions when the manifestations come to a large group of learners at one time. Witnesses question whether it is fake.
- Some peers and educators hold the following perceptions:
 - Scared and confused of how the manifestations take place and the prophesising.
 - Worry that the 'strange behaviours' are "contagious" and they may be next.
 - Feel like they may be fake and disruptive.
 - Peers are not comfortable maintaining friendships.
- Some parents and community members are afraid of their learners being negatively influenced by the 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices'.
- Psychological impact on educators is not somewhat present, but not overbearing. The educators do feel distressed over the following:
 - Inability to help the learners when they are in pain during their manifestations.
 - Frustration in not being able to educate their learners or apply the policy rules on the class disruptions.
 - Some Christian believers feel exhausted after dealing with the effects of the manifestations on their learners. They seem to be experiencing some inner battle regarding what to believe and how to help.
- Some peers feel traumatised psychologically by the manifestations and how their peers behave in different and unusual manners.
 - One benefit psychologically to some peers is that they feel the prophecies are helpful.
- Some peers may be giving into the peer pressure to follow trends of manifesting 'strange behaviours' and participating in 'harmful practices'; or they go see traditional healers to see if they are manifesting 'strange behaviours' based on symptoms of psychological strain and fatigue.
- Some learners participating in 'harmful practices' feel it is their responsibility to speak to the spirits, but it has left them feeling isolated, discriminated against and lonely.
- Studies of all learners are impacted due to how manifestations disturb classes and leave learners psychologically distressed.

Exploring the Root Causes of the 'Harmful Practices' in South African Schools

Causes of the 'Strange Behaviours' Witnessed.

This section delves into the reasons behind 'strange behaviours' observed among learners in schools. It examines demographic variations in perceptions to inform policy implications for addressing 'harmful practices' at school.

Respondents were asked to mark the number of statements they agreed with. The statements and frequencies provided are given in the figure below.

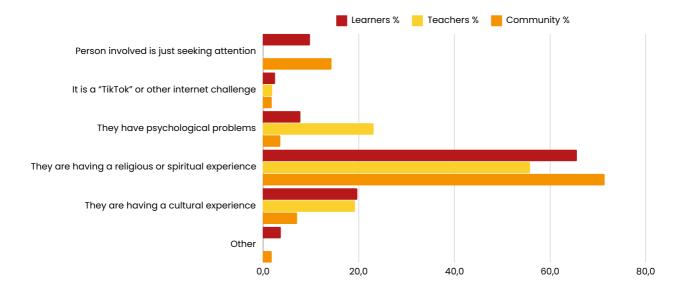


Figure 29: Responses of learners, teachers, and community members to the probable causes for the 'strange behaviours' experienced.

The predominant view across learners, teachers, and community members is that 'strange behaviours' are primarily the result of religious or spiritual experiences (61.2%). Cultural experiences are the next most common perceived cause (16.6%), followed by psychological problems (8.8%). This accounts for 86.6% of respondents attributing these behaviours to non-conventional explanations. However, there is a notable perception among 24.1% of learners and community members that some of the behaviours may be attempts at seeking attention, which could indicate a cry for help rather than mere theatrics.

Comparative Findings between Learners, Community Members and Teachers

Analysis of the learner questionnaire responses revealed significant differences based on grade and age. As learners progressed from senior primary to senior secondary levels, there was an increasing belief in spiritual or religious causes for behaviours, with higher percentages in the older age groups (14-19 years compared to 10-13 years). The likely respondent profile for attributing behaviour to spiritual or religious causes included females from Gauteng, secondary school learners aged 14-19, of Nguni ethnicity, and with Christian beliefs.

Conversely, the teacher questionnaire analysis did not show any significant differences using statistical tests. The typical teacher profile consisted of individuals residing in KwaZulu-Natal, classroom teachers with a B.Ed. qualification, Nguni ethnicity, Christian beliefs, and aged between 20-49 years.

Community member questionnaire responses also did not yield significant differences across statistical tests but indicated certain profiles based on odds ratio. The most likely respondents were from Gauteng or KwaZulu-Natal, involved in school governance or religious leadership roles, 2.6 times more likely to belong to the Nguni ethnic group, with a diploma as their highest qualification, and aged between 50-59 years.

Table 4: Comparing the Respondent Profile of Beliefs of the Root Causes for 'strange behaviours' being due to spiritual experiences between learners, teachers, and community members.

community members.					
Item	Province	Gender	Role/Education and Age	Mother Tongue	Religious Group
Most Likely Learner Profile	Gauteng	Female	Grades 8 – 12 (secondary school) 14 - 19 years	Nguni	Christian
Most Likely Teacher Profile	KZN	Not Specified	Classroom teacher, with a B.Ed. qualification, 20-49 years	Nguni	Christian
Most Likely Communi ty Member Profile	Gauteng (50%) / KZN (50%)	Male	Role: School governance or Religious Leader (37,5% said yes) Highest education: Diploma Age: 50 – 59 Years	Nguni	Traditional African

The following section delves deeper into learners' responses to their belief systems regarding the origins of the 'strange behaviours' manifested within their educational environment to further understand their perspectives on the root causes of these behaviours.

Key Findings: Respondents who felt they were having an "African Traditional Religious (ATR) experience".

- **Gender**: **Females** were 1.7 times more likely than males to attribute the behaviour to a religious or spiritual experience (65.6%).
- **Province**: Respondents from **Gauteng** were 1.4 times more likely than those from KwaZulu-Natal to believe the behaviour was due to a religious or spiritual experience.
- Mother Tongue: Nguni respondents were 3 times more likely than Sotho respondents to attribute the behaviour to a religious or spiritual experience.
- **Grade: Senior secondary learners** were 4.99 times more likely than senior primary learners to attribute the behaviour to a religious or spiritual experience.
- Age Group: Respondents aged 14 to 16 years were most likely to attribute the behaviour to a religious or spiritual experience.
- Religious Affiliation: Christians were 10.9 times more likely than others to attribute the behaviour to a religious or spiritual experience.

Key Findings: Respondents who felt they were having a "cultural experience"

- **Gender**: **Females** were 2.43 more likely than males to attribute the behaviour to a cultural experience.
- **Province**: Respondents from **Gauteng** and KwaZulu-Natal were equally likely (50%) to associate the behaviour with a cultural experience.
- Mother Tongue: Nguni respondents were 3.2 more likely than Sotho respondents to believe the behaviour was due to a cultural experience.
- Grade: Senior primary learners (grades 5 to 7) were 6.1 times more likely than junior secondary learners (grades 8 to 9), and were 3.8 times more likely than senior secondary learners (grades 10 to 12) to associate the behaviour with a cultural experience.
- Age Group: Learners in the **10y to 14y age group** were 4.4 times more likely than learners in the 14y-16y age group and 2.8 times more likely than learners aged 17y-19y to attribute the behaviour to a cultural experience.
- Religious Affiliation: African Traditional religious groups were 1.8 times more likely than Christians and 1.2 times more likely than other religions to link the behaviour to a cultural experience.

Key Findings: Respondents who felt they were just "seeking attention."

- **Gender**: **Males** were 1.6 more likely than females to associate the behaviour with seeking attention.
- **Province**: Respondents from **KwaZulu-Natal** were 2.1 times more likely than those from Gauteng to believe the behaviour was related to seeking attention.
- Mother Tongue: Other mother tongue respondents were 1.4 times more likely than Sotho mother tongue- and 1.5 times more likely than Nguni respondents to ascribe the behaviour as mere attention seeking.
- Grade: Junior secondary learners (grades 8 to 9) were 2.1 times more likely than senior secondary learners (grades 10 to 12) and 1.94 times more likely than senior primary (G5-G7) learners to attribute the behaviour to just seeking attention.
- Age Group: Respondents aged 14 to 16 years were 2.6 times more likely than those aged 17- to 18 years and 1.8 times more likely than 10- to 13 years to connect the behaviour to seeking attention.
- Religious Affiliation: Christians had the highest percentage of yes to no answers (14.2

Summary of Findings:

This section delved into the reasons behind 'strange behaviours' observed among school learners, exploring demographic variations in perceptions to inform policy implications for addressing 'harmful practices' at school. Most respondents attributed the 'strange behaviours' to either having a religious or spiritual experience (65.6%) or a cultural experience (19.7%). Other reasons cited included seeking attention (9.8%) and psychological problems (7.8%). Gender, province, mother tongue, grade level, age group, and religious affiliation significantly influenced how these behaviours were perceived.

Qualitative Findings on Root Causes of 'Harmful Practices'

a)Current displays of 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' are seen as an attack or compulsion.

Community narratives concerning the nature and experience of 'harmful practices' within educational contexts have unveiled significant shifts in how these spiritual phenomena are perceived. Focusing on the subjective experiences of the community members, the analysis seeks to uncover the underlying themes that characterise the changing dynamics of ancestral interactions, especially their impact on young learners. The following quotes encapsulate these emergent themes, highlighting a departure from traditional, peaceful engagements with ancestral spirits to a more tumultuous and seemingly harmful experience perceived as 'attacks'.

"When we are growing, the ancestral spirits were not there, to persecute people, to kill or to put their life in danger. When we were growing, they were there, and we were knowing that this one is got ancestors. But it was not like this. We would tell those spirits to say 'our child is still young, let the child finish school', when the child grew up, that is where they turn into healers." IKZN COM 3

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"Nowadays it seems as if it is an attack. Because if this one start, then the other one as will start."
IKZN COM 3

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The forceful compulsion of a learner to accept the effects of the 'harmful practices - for example, to attend to a 'calling' by their ancestors - is also a root cause of why it can be considered harmful as the learner has no choice and is compelled in various ways, even if it means they endure pain.

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"it is better if people understand it because nobody wishes to inherit it voluntarily. However, the ancestors have a way of compelling a person to accept it. The manner in which ancestors reveal themselves is very forceful. Hence, the learner displays the behaviour of someone possessed." – IKZN COM 2

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"I felt like there was something entering my body, I would feel weak and then I would start screaming. It is a painful experience to go through, you lose yourself and you always get tired." – FGD KZN L2 Learners have equated the compulsion to something invading their body and making them weak. also reported that They the compulsion makes them lose awareness, hence makina harmful to the learner.

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b)Learners feel pain and experience trauma.

Psychologically, the child goes through severe pain to be able to manifest and accept their ancestors.

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"I used to feel my body feeling heavy and I would get a bad headache, while all of this was happening the pains became unbearable therefore, I would start screaming, this used to happen in the morning when I woke up and every time when I am at school and when something upset me." – FGD KZN L2

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In addition to the psychological pain, if other learners are using muthi (African Traditional Medicine) or are using something the ancestors may consider harmful to the learner, they manifest themselves and put weight on the child so they feel a lot of pain.



"They scream because this thing is painful to them and the reason why at times they feel heavy or as if much weight has been put on them it's that you find that the person sitting in front or behind her is using strong muthi or else her spirit is much stronger or its evil one." - FGD KZN L1

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"I was overthinking, and I ended up feeling like there was a heavy load on my shoulders and I started screaming. My parents took me to the doctors, and they said they didn't see anything so we also went to see a traditional healer. The traditional healer said that it was my neighbours who were doing bad things to me." – FGD KZN L2

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Sometimes the attacks or pains are due to "attacks" from others who are in the learners' life and are trying to harm the learner using traditional practices. The ancestors are sensitive to the attacks and the learner bears the pain of the attack.

c) Rejecting the 'Strange Behaviours' linked to 'Harmful Practices' for the Practice of Christianity

According to community members and educators who believe in traditional practices, parents moving towards churches and neglecting to initiate their learners has led to the manifestation of traditional practices in a 'harmful' manner. For example, ancestors are now 'fighting' or 'attacking' and 'compelling' the learners to accept their manifestations linked to 'harmful practices'.



"Ok let me begin here, some may take it as bad spirit, and somehow you would ask yourself how is it that a small child is being attacked by ancestors, so you would find in a family there was someone who was supposed to go initiate, but now because it is not a must anymore, you would find a person only going to Apostle church only, because that church deals with visions and dreams. So, because of this, Parents are not really taking their children to initiate because they depend more on churches, that is why you would find these things coming to bother the kids. and mind you this time when they come, they will come fighting due to the fact that the child is not doing what they are supposed to do." - IGP ED 5



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"It is the parents' negligence for not assisting their children in accepting the call and doing the necessary rituals." – FGD KZN ED 2

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Due to the shift towards Christianity, many parents don't believe in the 'harmful practices'. It is denying the original traditional beliefs that has angered the ancestors and has led to the compulsion to accept the manifestations of the 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices'.

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"With the advent of Christianity came a point where we denied our originality in cases where conflicts where parents don't believe in a calling." – IKZN COM 2

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d)Avoiding the inheritance of the manifestations linked to 'harmful practices' leads to it attacking the next generation.

Manifestations of the practices' 'harmful are inherited. However, if the parents did not accept the manifestations of the 'harmful practices', then the learners will be 'forced' accept the manifestations.



"Saying it's inheritance, you might find out that maybe her mom was supposed to have initiated it and maybe she ran away from that and it's affecting the child. You know, I think we do have a learner, of which her mother, I think, passed on avoiding that and then now it's attacking the learner" - FGD GP ED 1

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According to the beliefs rooted in 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices' of Africa, ancestors choose who to work with; as such the 'calling' toewards 'harmful practices' is inherited. The person who is chosen has no choice but to accept the manifestation of the effects of the 'harmful practices', or the manifestations will become disruptive and the child will not be able to live a normal life.

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"The calling is about a certain ancestor who chooses to work with any person in their chosen family to pass on any messages. Sometimes, they themselves had the calling but didn't accept it, but they wanted to pass it on to the next person. If you are the chosen one, you must go through initiation and take any traditional herbs that best suit your calling so that you can live a normal life."

— FGD KZN ED 2

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One of the manifestations of the 'harmful practices' is that reporting of ancestors communicating through the 'calling', however, during their communication, the child becomes impaired physically and sometimes mentally, leading them to bodily harm or to failing in school.

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"An ancestral calling is a way ancestors communicate with us. In that way, they guide and protect us from all evil. But most importantly they help us with our achievements. Unfortunately, children in our school get distracted with their learning by experiencing physical impairment, e.g., inability to walk properly and painful knees and feet. They then end up failing as this leads to absenteeism." – FGD KZN ED 2

e)It is a belief practiced at home.

Educators believe the harmful belief practices are practiced at home, where the children learn about these traditional practices. However, they are unaware of what triggers the harmful behaviour.

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"It's a normal aspect in my family; my mother is a traditional doctor and also has ancestors." – IGP L2

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"I think maybe these are the situations that these learners they live with, at home, where they come from, but I cannot like explain as to what cause is what is it that triggers them when they are here to scream and to those behaviours." – IKZN ED 1

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"

"It is kids coming from homes with traditional backgrounds and using all kinds of umuthi and coming to school with all these bad spirits." – IKZN COM 1

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"Then you see that these things are made from umuthi which kids come with from home. The school has nothing to do with these things." – IKZN COM 1 Community members indicate that some 'strange behaviours' linked to the 'harmful practices' are not linked to the ancestors or the schools, but the use of umuthi in their homes.

f)Learners are not properly educated on how to practice safely.

Community members have noted that the learners undergoing harmful attacks are not correctly practicing their safety practices. Many learners are mixing beads, ropes and other safety tools used traditionally to call off 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices', which is leading to the harmful experiences that others have witnessed

"It is mostly the learners that wear protection robes around their waist that usually get affected by these harmful spirituals. It is so unlikely you get a learning stream and make these sounds when a learner does not have a robe around their waist. You get a learner with more than two ropes around their waist, you start to question what is wrong with the learner to have so many robes around their waist and you also get that their sister or brother who is in the same school also has a number of robes in their waist as well. Therefore, you get that when learners start screaming and getting out of control it is because of these ropes these kids have around their waist because all of them are different and each carries its own power and strength. Therefore, there is a clash in spiritual power therefore it ends up affecting the learners and becomes too unbearable

wear these ropes don't get affected at all b because they don't wear any ropes around their waist." – IKZN COM 1

for the learners and they start making sounds. And you find that the learners that don't

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"They use umuthi to influence such behaviour. This ends up with learners and teachers starting to see weird short people in the toilets and it affects the normal functioning of the school." –

IKZN COM 2

Community members have also noted that some learners come from homes where traditional practices are practiced using umuthi, which is seen as a negative and harmful substance and not a safe practice.

"However, this umuthi does not do what you thought it will do to me, it becomes the opposite. I suddenly have bad luck; things start getting bad for me and people start hating me for no reason because of your spell that has gone wrong because it does not get along with me." – IKZN COM 1

g)Stressors increase the attacks, especially near exam time.

The association of these episodes with academic assessment periods suggests a link between the pressures of testing and the occurrence of such behaviours, bringing to light the role that examrelated stress might play in the manifestation of these 'strange behaviours' as noted by educators and community members.

"These episodes usually take place just before exams or during exams, so you see that children are usually under pressure and sometimes are scared of exams and also once they hear that this has started in one school they will also wanna follow that trend." – IKZN ED 4

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"

"Before exams or during exams.

Hence, I agree with one of the
members here that this is a sickness
which takes place solely before
exams. " – FGD KZN Com 1

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The pattern identified by community members as recurring around exam times supports this notion and raises questions about whether this timing influences the intensity or frequency of the manifestations.

Amidst this suggestive timing, education professionals and members of the community are left to ponder the authenticity and connectedness of these occurrences, as simultaneous manifestaions of 'strange behaviours' raise doubts about the genuineness of each case and the possibility of communal a psychosomatic response.

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"They are connected or what? Because sometimes you'll find out like in the other class, A learner is having that attack and suddenly in the other class you'll hear the noise of another learner having that thing. Maybe they are faking?" - FGD GP ED 1

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h) Competition between educators increases 'harmful' manifestations of 'strange behaviour'

Community perceptions indicate that an increase in incidents of 'strange behaviours' in contemporary times, as compared to the past, may be due to heightened competition among educators for teaching posts. The perceived link was that an increase in competition in the educating environment acts as a catalyst for attracting disturbances in 'harmful practices'. The reason linked for an increase in more disruptive 'strange behaviours' was due to the profound 'spirituality' inherent in African cultures, which get disrupted with an increase in competition or stress.

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"Unusual...in the past we had very few incidences, today it's too much. Where is it coming from? In the 80s there were no fights for teaching posts, now its competition...this attracts spirits because Africans are spiritual beings..." (CRLRC Chair).

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i)Unresolved paternity issues are also a cause.

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"...child carrying the surname of mother, paternal and maternal tensions manifest in children...we have called on the government to do something but nothing has been done..." (CRLRC Chair).

Family dynamics and unresolved paternity issues are indicated as another root cause:

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This statement brings attention to the potential psychological and spiritual impact of carrying the mother's surname on learners, implying that the tensions between paternal and maternal lineages could have significant repercussions. The interviewee voices a call to action directed towards the government, indicating persistent oversight in addressing these familial challenges. Both themes underscore the complexity of the factors at play, ranging from societal competition to familial relations, and their potential role in the manifestation of the phenomena within schools.

Key Findings: The Root Causes of 'Harmful Practices'

- Learners are not in control of themselves, nor are they aware.
- 'Strange behaviours' come as an attack due to the learners or parents trying to reject the manifestations of 'harmful practices'.
 - Due to learners rejecting the manifestations of 'harmful practices', the ancestors compel the learners to accept the manifestations.
- The compulsion and forcefulness of manifesting 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' endanger the learner where they feel extreme physical and psychological pain, hence the acting out.
- Parents who try to reject the call towards 'harmful practices' due to their Christian faith are putting their child in danger as the ancestors attack more.
- Parents avoiding the inheritance of the manifestations of 'harmful practices' leads to ancestors attacking the next generation more fiercely.
- It is a belief practiced at home, but some homes use umuthi, which has negative effects on the learners using it, as well as on learners who manifest 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices'.
- Learners are not educated on how to practice their traditional faith safely, so they end up using the incorrect protection charms or umuthi, which leads to more painful manifestations or evil spirits.
- Stressors, especially exam stress, play a role in the frequency and intensity of the manifestations.
- Learners are faking their 'strange behaviours' to get out of doing homework, writing tests or exams.
- Increased competition among educators for teaching positions is perceived to be linked to attracting spiritual disturbances due to Africans' deep spiritual beliefs.
- Family dynamics, particularly unresolved paternity issues, have been identified as contributing factors.
 - The psychological and spiritual impact of learners carrying the mother's surname reflects underlying tensions between paternal and maternal lineages.
 - The need for government action has been expressed in response to these familial tensions, with current efforts deemed insufficient.
 - The interplay between societal competition and familial relations is complex and believed to influence the presence of strange phenomena in schools.

Feedback on Recommendations and Solutions to Manage "Strange" Behaviours

Management of 'Strange Behaviours'

The investigation into perceptions concerning the handling of "strange spiritual behaviours" observed focused solely on learners. Thus, only their viewpoints are outlined in the following section. This segment evaluates South African learners' perspectives on managing "strange spiritual behaviours" witnessed in educational settings. The study sought to assess the efficiency of managing these incidents by employing an interval scale to measure the level of management as perceived by the respondents.

Respondents reported on the management of witnessed spiritual behaviour with the following percentages:

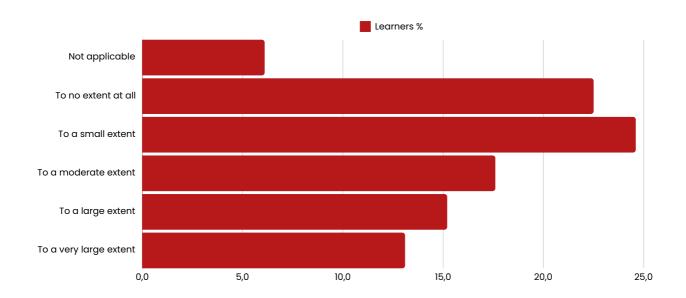


Figure 30: Frequencies of responses on the management of "strange" spiritual behaviours.

The mean score of 2.53, with a standard deviation of 1.48, indicates that on average, perceptions were that behaviours were managed to a small extent. Nearly half of the respondents (47.1%) felt that the management was insufficient (to no or small extent), while 28.5% believed it was effective (to a large or very large extent).

Key Findings: Management of 'Strange Behaviours'

Further analysis, using bootstrapping due to skewed data distribution, revealed variations among demographically diverse groups:

- **Province**: Respondents from **Gauteng** (mean=2.23) perceived the management of spiritual behaviour as significantly less effective compared to those from KwaZulu-Natal (mean=2.81), with a mean difference of -0.586 (p=0.006).
- **Gender**: **No significant differences** were found between gender groups in perception of management effectiveness.
- **Grade Level**: Significant differences were observed among grade levels, with **senior primary (grades 5-7)** learners perceiving management to be more effective (mean=3.42) than both junior (grades 8-9) and senior (grades 10-12) secondary learners.
- Age Level: Younger learners (10-13 years) perceived better management (mean=3.30) compared to older learners (15-16 years, mean=2.23; 17-19 years, mean=2.45).
- Mother Tongue and Religion: No significant differences were identified in management perceptions across mother tongue and religious groups.

Conclusion: Management of 'Strange Behaviours'

Disparities exist in learners' perceptions of how 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' are managed in their schools, influenced by factors such as grade level and province. Strikingly, younger learners and those in primary school grades reflected a more favourable view of management compared to older and secondary school learners.

Learners' comfort in communicating about 'harmful practices'

This section investigates learners' comfort levels and preferred individuals for discussing 'harmful practices' and 'strange behaviours' observed at school. The question under consideration was exclusively administered to learners, therefore, the results and feedback obtained pertain solely to their responses and experiences. By analysing demographic variations in comfort levels and trusted confidants, the study aimed to provide insights for policy implications in addressing 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices', and propose guidelines for supporting learners' well-being in South African schools.

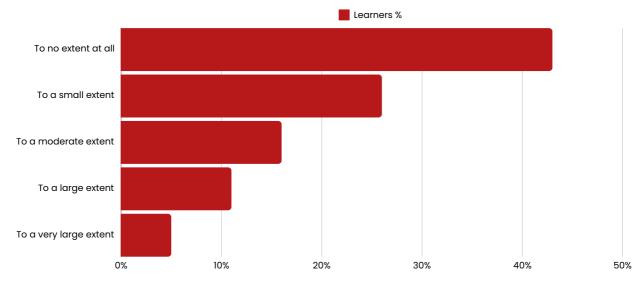


Figure 31: Frequency Distribution of learners' level of comfort when discussing 'harmful practices' with teachers or other staff members

Key Findings: Learners feel at ease when discussing witnessing or manifesting 'harmful practices' with teachers or other staff members

The mean score on the five-point interval scale was 2.1 indicating that most respondents felt comfortable to only a small extent in discussing harmful experiences with teachers or other staff members. **None of the independent groups differed statistically significantly** in their perceptions about feeling at ease to discuss such harmful experiences with teachers or other staff members.

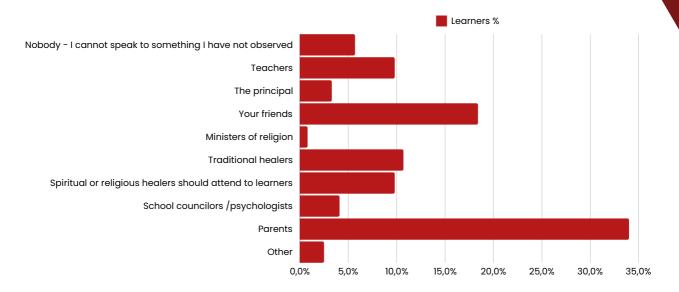


Figure 32: Bar graph indicating who learners are most comfortable with in confiding regarding their experiences of witnessing the manifestations of 'harmful practices'.

Key Findings: Who are learners most comfortable talking to regarding the manifestations of 'harmful practices'.

- Parents were the **most trusted** confidants, with 34.0% of respondents feeling most comfortable discussing 'strange behaviours' with them.
- **Friends** were the **second most trusted** group, with 18.4% of respondents preferring to share their fears with friends.
- Traditional healers (10.7%) were considered more trustworthy than spiritual or religious healers (9.8%) and teachers (9.8%) in discussing strange behaviours.
- Other key individuals included school counsellors/psychologists (4.1%) and the principal (3.3%).

Conclusion

The data reveals varying levels of comfort among learners in discussing 'harmful practices' and preferences for trusted individuals when addressing strange behaviours. Parents and friends emerge as significant sources of support for learners, highlighting the importance of involving trusted individuals in facilitating open conversations around these sensitive topics. While comfort levels differed based on demographics, no significant differences were observed across independent groups.



What Role the DBE Should Play?

This section presents an analysis of public perceptions regarding the role of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in addressing the needs of learners who exhibit 'strange behaviours' associated with 'harmful practices'. The focus on the effects of 'harmful practices' reflects a broader interest in how educational policies and practices can accommodate cultural and spiritual diversity within the school environment. The question under consideration was exclusively administered to learners, therefore, the results and feedback obtained pertain solely to their responses and experiences.

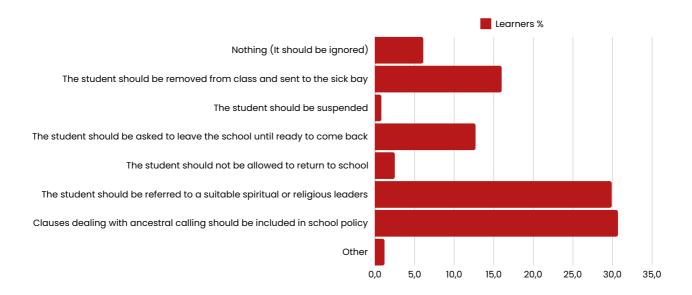


Figure 33: Bar graph indicating learner feedback on what role the DBE should play

Key Findings: What Role the DBE Should Play?

The survey solicited opinions on various actions the DBE could take when a learner is "behaving strangely" due to 'harmful practices'.

- Inclusion in School Policy: A significant portion of respondents (30.7%) believe that school policies should explicitly address 'harmful practices' and their manifestations, indicating a need for formal recognition and guidelines.
- **Spiritual or Religious Guidance:** Close behind, 29.9% of participants recommend referring the learner to a suitable spiritual or religious leader, suggesting a preference for culturally sensitive support mechanisms.
- Removal to Sick Bay: Some respondents (16%) feel that learners exhibiting 'strange behaviours' should be temporarily removed from class and sent to the sick bay, potentially for immediate support or assessment.
- **Temporary Removal from School:** A smaller group (12.7%) advocates for the learner to be asked to leave school until they are deemed ready to return, emphasising a break or period of recovery.
- **Permanent Exclusion:** Only a small percentage believe that learners should be permanently excluded from school (2.5%) or suspended (0.8%), indicating limited support for punitive measures.
- Gender, Province, Mother Tongue, Grade, Age Group, Religious Affiliation:
 The report highlights the largest agreement among Christian respondents for including 'strange behaviours' liked to 'harmful practices' in school policy, but it does not specifically break down responses by gender, province, mother tongue, grade, age group, or religious affiliation beyond this.



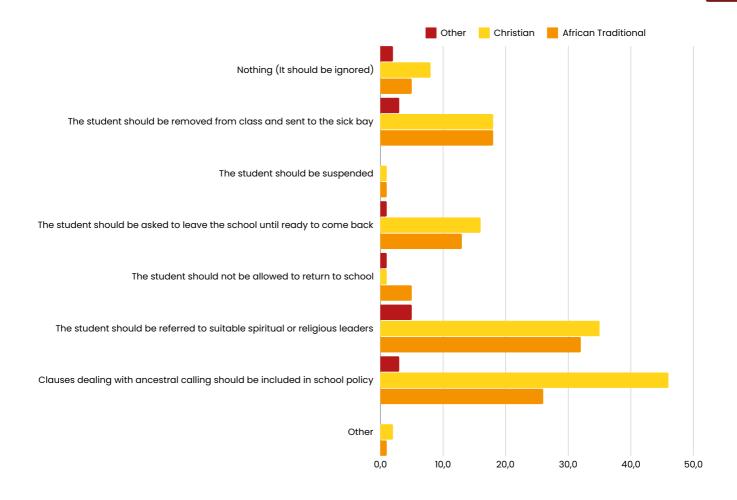


Figure 34: A bar graph showing the frequencies of the responses of the three religious groups to the roles which the DBE could play.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate a clear preference for the DBE to adopt culturally sensitive and inclusive policies that recognise and accommodate 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' within the educational environment. The emphasis on formal policy inclusion and referral to spiritual or religious leaders suggests a community-oriented approach to supporting learners experiencing the manifestations of 'harmful practices'.





This section evaluates the presence of school codes of conduct or policies specifically addressing 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful traditional, cultural and religious practices' within educational institutions. 'Harmful practices', as part of a broader spectrum of cultural and spiritual experiences, can influence learners' behaviour and interaction within the school environment.

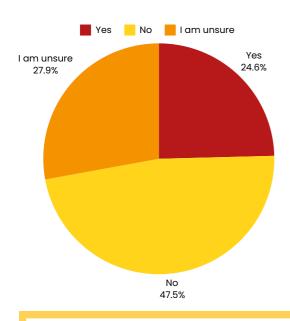


Figure 35: Learner perceptions on the presence of the availibility of appropriate school policies

Key Findings: What Role the DBE Should Play?

Data collected from respondents reveals a notable gap in the formal acknowledgment and guidance for handling 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices' within schools. The responses are categorised as follows:

- Lack of Regulations: A significant majority of respondents (47.5%) reported the absence of any codes of conduct or policies addressing 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices' in their schools.
- **Uncertainty Regarding Policies:** Nearly a third of the participants (27.9%) were unsure whether their schools had any relevant regulations or guidelines, indicating a lack of communication or awareness of existing policies, if any.
- Existence of Policies: Only a minority of respondents (24.6%) confirmed the presence of regulations or guidelines that deal with 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices', suggesting limited formal recognition and support for such issues.

The data does not provide detailed breakdowns by gender, province, mother tongue, grade, age group, or religious affiliation regarding awareness or the presence of such policies.

Conclusion

The findings underscore a significant gap in the formal recognition and handling of 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices' within school environments. Most respondents indicated either the absence of such policies or uncertainty about their existence, pointing to a need for greater clarity, communication, and inclusivity in school policy development.

Support for Individuals Experiencing 'Strange Behaviours'

This section presents findings from an analysis aimed at understanding the extent to which educational environments foster a caring atmosphere for individuals experiencing 'strange behaviours'. Furthermore, 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices', often manifesting in ways that may appear unusual or strange within a classroom setting, requires a supportive response from educational institutions to ensure the well-being of affected learners.

Key Findings: What Role the DBE Should Play?

The analysis focused on responses to items B15, B16, and B17, with the goal of identifying attitudes towards creating a supportive environment for learners dealing with 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices'. A factor analysis led to the consolidation of these items into a single factor named "FB2.0 - Creating a caring atmosphere for 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices'," with key insights as follows:

- **Province**: Respondents from **KwaZulu-Natal** (mean = 3.60) showed a significantly higher agreement with the need for a caring environment than those from Gauteng (mean = 3.30), highlighting provincial variations in the perceived importance of support for learners experiencing 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices'.
- **Gender**: While **females** (mean = 3.55) had a higher mean score compared to males (mean = 3.32), this difference was not statistically significant, suggesting similar attitudes across genders towards supporting learners with 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices'.
- **Grade Level:** Significant differences were observed across grade levels, with **lower grades (G5-G7)** showing the highest level of agreement (mean = 3.92) for creating a caring atmosphere. This indicates a stronger inclination towards supportive measures among younger learners.
- Age Group: No significant differences were found among the age groups, although the youngest group (10y-14y) showed the highest mean score (3.83), suggesting a trend where younger learners are more supportive of a caring environment.
- Mother Tongue and Religious Affiliation: No statistically significant differences were observed based on mother tongue or religious group affiliations, indicating consensus across these demographics regarding the importance of a supportive school environment.

Conclusion

The findings reveal a recognition of the need for educational institutions to provide a supportive and caring atmosphere for learners experiencing 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices', with variations observed across provinces and grade levels. The overall positive inclination towards creating a caring environment underscores the importance of addressing cultural and spiritual needs within educational settings.

Findings and Recommendations from Qualitative Data

The following section discusses thematic points based on a critical analysis of the interviews and FGDs. The following recommendations are based on practices or attempts parents, educators and learners have made at schools and have noticed that they had a positive influence in handling the manifestations.

a)The Department of Basic Education has a role to play

Educators, learners, and community members all feel that the best solution to manage the 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' would be to have a policy that encompasses education on and the management of the traditional 'harmful practices' and its effects. A policy ensures that best practices are used and that educators and schools are protected from parents who want to sue.

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"We need to have an all inclusive system for the organisation or other committee. And we need to have a policy in place on how best we can educate, and also at the same time dealing with those learners that are affected" – IKZN ED 2

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"I can speak in many languages on what can be done by the department, but I'm telling you what, what the legislature decides? Normally they don't take our views. So, I can say this and this and there are so many things that we have. That in the past, but the legislature knows what, what to write for implementation. So, I think even if I can normally explain our views at the school level, especially myself, it is nullified somewhere all the way." – IGP ED 6

Educators feel that the policy can only be implemented if the educator's and community's feedback is heard and implemented as they have had ground-level experience with the manifestations.

b)Parental Involvement is Key

Educators stress parental involvement and the modes of their involvement in various areas in the following section.

"

"Parents play a crucial role in understanding and accepting their children's 'ancestral callings'." – IGP ED 8

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"I don't see the department changing this, other than their own parents. They have more power." – IGP ED 3

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community members is that the DBE cannot assist further than creating a policy. Parents, however, have more power in controlling and aiding in the management of the manifestations of 'strange behaviours'.

The most important belief of all educators and

The policy should ensure parents are called when the first attack takes place so they are aware that their child is manifesting 'strange behaviours' and they can be informed.

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"You should in fact call the parents. The reason for calling the parent. There are a number of reasons for that. But the most important reason for calling the parent is to inform them about this situation of his or her child because the parent has to be informed." IKZN ED 1

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"I heard about a case wherein the teacher tried to help, and the parents blamed the teachers for what was happening. I think the parents need to intervene more in each meeting. we need to brief them." -

Schools and educators have had various experiences where the parents may blame or sue a teacher if they are not informed about their child's manifestations from the first manifestation.

"

To avoid conflict, and to gain more insights on how to protect the learners, communication with parents is essential and should be the first step.

"Social media as well has influenced a lot; we just don't know where all these callings are. but I think communication with the parents is key." - IGP Social Worker 1

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The first benefit of communicating with parents is that they may be able to give feedback on whether the 'strange behaviours' is really linked to 'harmful behaviours' or if the learner is faking it to stay on trend or to get out of class.

"

"When dealing with these things we must involve the parent and know whether they are real or not." – IGP ED 4

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"And then when that thing happens, it is then that the parent will then advise us as to what is it that we need to like to do because we have just learned that you don't have to take him to the hospital, to find that when you follow the parent, the parent will tell you that he has gone to she has got maybe his water that has to be used in a certain way for her that she got from transition" – IKZN ED 1

The second benefit to parental involvement is that due to many of them practising their beliefs at home, they may know of methods they can use to calm their child when they experience a manifestation.

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For example, some parents may guide educators on how to handle the child, or how to hold them or where to touch them to ease the effects of the 'harmful

"

"When we contacted her parents for guidance, they suggested pulling the middle hair until she stopped. It was a traditional method they believed would help in such situations. So, as unconventional as it might sound, we followed their advice to prevent further harm and maintain a safe environment for all the learners." - IGP ED 1

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practices'.

"So, us as teachers when the situation is like that, we call parents because they understand their children better. So, the parents when they got here, they came with a cloth, a sniff and began to speak with her in the bathroom and immediately after the conversation she collapsed, then they took her, and they lifted her in a very different way because they said she was too heavy. Then the next day she was back to school and ok." – FGD GP ED 2

Other parents may come to the schools themselves with protective cloths and herbs to ease the 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices', and to take their child home.

"

Parents need to instruct the educators on how to handle their child when they manifest 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices'.

"the parents should instruct the teacher on what to do whenever these incidents happen." - IGP Social Worker 1

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"So, we regard this as a fighting ancestor. And at home they need to do a ceremony to speak to the ancestors, ask them nicely that the child is still in school and will initiate as soon as the child is done with school and that way those things will never bother the child."

— IGP ED 5

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"parents can play a role in practicing rituals for their children to negotiate and plead on their child's behalf to continue well with their studies." – IKZN COM 2

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Parental involvement is also kev certain as ceremonies can be conducted at home. Conduct relevant ceremonies at home to openly communicate with ancestors that their child will be going to school and they do not disrupt them during the school day.

c)School Educator, Counsellor and Staff Education is Essential

The policy needs to implement education not just for learners, but also for school staff. Many staff members and educators approach the 'strange behaviours' and the phenomenon of 'harmful practices' with various misinterpretations and negative thoughts.

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"I'm just an ordinary person, so. I'm not sure, but my suspicion is that. Which is based on what the learners used to say. OK, that these things are practiced at home, and they will continue to say that they are given spiritual names. so, it looks like this is a practice that is happening at their own homes and now, because they are used to it. If they take it along when they come to school and they want it, they want to practice it here at school." – IGP ED 6

One such thought is that since learners partake in 'harmful traditional, cultural or religious practices' at home, they want to bring their belief system to school so they can openly practice their beliefs at school too.

Educators also feel negatively towards the traditional practices and feel that any religion that threatens policy implementation should not be tolerated in Through education and the schools. awareness, there may be a chance that they develop some tolerance towards the 'strange behaviours' 'harmful and practices'.

"Any religion that hampers education, any religion that disturbs or threatens the policies of the department will not be tolerated." – IGP ED 6

"So, I wonder if it is the community or evil spirits. And kids are ok at home and certain things only start when they go to school." – FGD GP ED 2

Educators also feel like they do not have enough information and need some information on whether manifestations are an evil spirit or not.

In addition to basic awareness, teachers also want to feel empowered enough to be able to distinguish between 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' and a learner faking it.

"And one final thing that I want to add is how do we distinguish between someone that is really having a calling. And someone that is faking it. That's for me, is the dilemma." – IKZN ED 2

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"We've observed that these attacks, or whatever they may be, seem to affect girls exclusively. The reasons behind this genderspecific pattern are unclear, and it's an aspect that requires careful consideration and investigation." – IGP ED 10

Teachers need to know why girls are more affected than boys.



Teachers and principals need to be educated on the safety practices some learners may be implementing at schools, so that they do not remove garments or beads that assist the child in warding off the manifestations of 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' at school.

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"I was always at the gate watching children coming in when I saw this child with a shawl over a uniform and yeah, so all I did was I tried to remove it because we wear very strict uniforms, not knowing that it has an effect on children that were affected by ancestors. So, I took the shawl when she handed it to me and I put it on top of the wall. And I also saw that she had a purse with all our beads here as well, but eventually, our teachers in our school saw this child to be very disturbed and emotional." – IKZN ED 3

"

Staff also need to be educated on certain conditions that need to be met when assisting those learners, for example, women need to be pure, or does the child need a cloth to protect them.

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"The child needs to have a cloth they use for protection for when these things wake and those who have the same thing need to tell the person inside to leave the child since the child is in school and normally, I would prefer the child to be helped by someone who is clean. by clean I mean someone who is not in their periods is it is a woman" - IGP ED 5

"

d)Interactive education or workshop between educators, parents and community

There is a distinct call for policy development that incorporates interactive education or workshops to bridge the cultural understanding gap among educators, parents, and community members.

Educators have put forward the suggestion of having a peer—a teacher experienced in traditional African practices—integrated within the school staff to assist with managing these spiritual occurrences:

"If we had one teacher who is coming from those backgrounds so that they may give us a clear picture in terms of what we are trying to understand." -FGD GP ED 1

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"What I've realised is that in every class, you have more than two learners who understand these practices, and immediately when one is affected by this, you will have the other learners assisting that other one... teachers are now afraid because if a teacher is not assisting in this process, the teacher could be charged." -IGP ED 6

"

However, given past instances where legal actions have been threatened, there's a push for a policy that doesn't pressure teachers into assisting with the management of manifestations of 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices'. Instead, clear guidelines are sought to ensure their protection should they choose to intervene:

The proposal extends to **parent-teacher educational sessions**, emphasising the necessity of mutual learning and knowledge exchange:

"

"Education sessions for parents on understanding 'ancestral callings' and how to support their children responsibly would be a good starting point." -IGP ED 9

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"It can be done through conducting workshops on how people with the calling behave. Parents who have a child with a calling should be encouraged to engage more with teachers." - IKZN COM

Conducting **workshops** not only facilitates a dialogue between teachers and parents but also equips educators with protective strategies:

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The dissemination of information through various media channels is proposed as a crucial step to destigmatise and educate about these cultural practices, creating a consistent message across platforms:

The department should find a way of communicating with the learners and teachers through radio, through TV, through the print media; there should be special programs where they try to teach people about these religions and how it should be treated." - IGP ED 6

"To employ school counsellors, each and every school for people who are trained to become school counsellors. So that they'll be able to handle these incidents when they happen." - IKZN ED 1

Moreover, to provide direct support within schools, there is an appeal for counsellors who are specifically trained in handling incidents of 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices', reinforcing the need for qualified professionals who can navigate these complex situations:

e)Make some special allowances for learners to reduce disruptions

Educators and learners advocate for special allowances within the education system to accommodate those undergoing such spiritual experiences, with an emphasis on reducing classroom disruptions and supporting the individuals affected.

Educators and learners indicated that it may be beneficial to allow learners official leave in the policy for their initiation so that they can learn protective measures and come back to school when they are able to focus on school.

"I'm suggesting maybe if the Department of Basic
Education can come up with something that if a
learner is having that maybe have something like.
Maybe a learner is given a chance to go and practice
until she's OK and then maybe come back informing
the school that the learner won't be available at
school until she completes her course of his." - FGD GP

"

"So I would say that either the child completes their journey at home and comes to school when they are ok." - IGP Counsellor 1

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Learners who are navigating the demands of their 'harmful practices' alongside academic responsibilities express the need for flexibility, particularly regarding deadlines: "

"Some flexibility in terms of assignments or deadlines would also be appreciated, considering the additional responsibilities I have." (IGP L1)

5,

"

"The child needs to have the cloth they use for protection for when these things wake." (IGP ED 5) The practical aspects of daily initiation practices, such as wearing traditional beads and protective cloths, pose a challenge to school uniform policies. Learners and educators call for discretion and incorporation of cultural elements into the dress code:

recommendation suggests

accommodating initiation preferences, allowing learners to choose between prolonged absences for traditional ceremony or daily practices compatible with school attendance, but raising concerns regarding uniform adjustments:

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"What I've realised is that in every class, you have more than two lea"...There are two kinds of initiation schools... the child can go to the one where they can go home, the only problem with that one is the uniform, the child will need to wear a lot of beads." (FGD GP ED 1)

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"If they wear beads, have a code of conduct on the uniform... we encourage them to wear a shirt with long sleeves to hide them."

(FDG GP ED 2)

The integration of traditional attire within school uniforms is discussed, advocating for non-disruptive compliance:

"...We always advise them to put their pieces of clothing underneath their normal school clothes. So it's not visible to everyone because initially, learners wanted to put these shawls around their shoulders and wear headbands and beads... So we said to parents... we expect your child to put the cloth underneath the clothes... just make sure if you can under your clothes and so forth so that it's not clearly visible." (IKZN ED 2)

f)Create a peer support system or assign a class assistant

Within South African educational institutions, situations where learners experience 'strange behaviours' linked 'harmful practices' are rising to the forefront of educational policy considerations. One approach under discussion involves leveraging the cultural competencies of peers to assist those undergoing such spiritual expressions. This peer support system hinges on allowing learners versed in 'harmful practices' to step in as aides during episodes of 'strange behaviours' linked to such 'harmful practices'.

The advocacy for peer assistance is captured by educators' observations:

"But those who believe in that they know, and they know how to respond... like... begging their ancestors trying to communicate with them on their behalf." (FGD GP ED 1)

"

"What I've realised is that in every class, you have more than two learners who understand these practices, and immediately when one is affected by this, you will have the other learners assisting that other one." (IGP ED 6)

The realisation that many classrooms have learners familiar with ancestral practices means that these learners are often already providing support informally:

This model of peer assistance is advantageous not only in terms of cultural relevance but also for protecting teachers from potential legal repercussions should they choose to intervene or not:

"Teachers are now afraid because if a teacher is not assisting in this process, the teacher will not be charged." (IGP ED 6)

"

"More often than not, there are few girls that will try to assist this particular learner that is affected." (IKZN ED 1) Instructors have identified a gender-based sensitivity to who should provide aid, observing that other girls in the classroom often possess the required experience:

Cultural beliefs influence the selection of those who assist, as it is preferred that helpers comply with specific purity standards:

"I would prefer the child to be helped by someone who is clean. By clean, I mean someone who is not in their periods if it is a woman." (IGP ED 5)

g)Establishing Safe Spaces for Manifestations of 'Strange Behaviours'

The recurring instances of 'strange behaviours' perceived to be linked to 'harmful practices' among learners in South African schools have prompted discussions surrounding the creation of safe spaces where affected individuals can explore and address their experiences without interrupting the educational process. This proposal has been met with varying degrees of urgency and perspective, highlighting the multifaceted nature of integrating cultural practices within the modern classroom.

A supportive environment is deemed crucial for learners encountering 'strange behaviours', prompting suggestions for specialised areas that cater to their needs:

"Provide a supportive environment for those experiencing 'ancestral callings', perhaps through designated spaces or activities that allow them to address these experiences without causing a major disruption in the classroom." (IGP ED 8)

"

"I would say that if it was up to me, they should have their own school so that they can disturb themselves and it will become a normal thing to them." (FGD KZN L1) Some learners express that 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' significantly disrupt class activities and suggest the establishment of separate educational settings:

The inability of parents to swiftly attend to their learners during such experiences further supports the need for schools to have measures in place. Providing isolated areas, like a sick room, is a practical response to this issue:

"We isolate the affected learner and keep them at the sick room until the situation is a bit calm because when we call their parents they usually do not come to the school to attend to the situation." (FGD GP ED 3)

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"Children go through these 'harmful practices' because of a lot of things they go through.
Children are mostly stressed because of many things they encounter, life challenges and family problems... So children in schools need support... and a safe space they can confide in." (FGD KZN L2)

Facilitating access to educational psychologists, counsellors, and trustworthy programs represents more than just an accommodation for 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices', but a holistic support system for learners's mental and emotional health:

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h)Embracing Cultural and Spiritual Diversity in South **African Education Policy**

The Department of Basic Education in South Africa is considering policy revisions aimed at curriculum transformation. This initiative seeks to integrate African cultural practices and beliefs while promoting respect for diverse religions within the educational system.

"We need to review our curriculum, e.g., Life Orientation, and ask ourselves, is it really talking about us as Africans? Are the values thought speaks to ours? Why can't the traditional ones be added? Maybe coming up with a subject to address or educate the phenomenon because it is there". - IGP L1

Underpinning the curriculum reform is a commitment to the freedom of religious practice. Educators in Gauteng assert that "public schools may not violate...the religious freedom of learners and educators," creating a legal framework that supports the policy's objective. Furthermore, learners from Gauteng (IGP L2) remind us that true freedom means that "no religion should suppress the other," advocating for a curriculum that de-emphasises any historical religious biases.

Finally, the findings highlight a critical response to the **neglect of African cultures** identified by an educator (IGP ED 7), who decries the loss of cultural identity due to over-adoption of Western cultures. Addressing this issue within the curriculum not only corrects a historical oversight but also reclaims a space for African narratives and knowledge systems in the educational discourse.

"It (African culture) is neglected in some way because I feel we have adopted western culture too much." - IGP ED 7

ike in a sense that I feel we have lost who we are, we don't know ourselves anymore due to adopting foreign or western cultures." - IGP ED 7

"..it's all western, this is why they see this as mockery...no implementation, nothing goes into the syllabus... government should work closely with traditional healers..." - (CRLRC Chair)

i)Fostering Open Communication in Cultural and Spiritual Matters within Educational Settings

The importance of open communication emerges as a central theme in discussions about accommodating cultural and spiritual practices within schools. Key findings from various viewpoints stress the need for dialogue among educators, learners, and their families to foster a supportive environment that respects and integrates learners' cultural heritages into their educational experience.

Emphasise the value of open communication as a strategy for educational institutions. This approach is aimed at developing a collaborative understanding of the learners' needs and cultural backgrounds.

"We engage in open communication with the learners, their families, and, when appropriate, seek guidance from spiritual leaders to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the situation." - IGP ED 1

The need for learners to be explicit about their commitments is also highlighted, with a learner advising them "to communicate openly with their teachers about their cultural or spiritual commitments." - IGP L1 Such transparency is critical to ensuring that education systems respect and accommodate the complex interplay between acquiring knowledge and upholding cultural traditions.

Moreover, the role of parents is identified as pivotal in providing insight into home practices, with various educators asserting that "Parents should assist us with understanding the type of cultures that are practised at home..." - FGD GP ED 3. This partnership is crucial in constructing a foundational understanding of the learner's background and the cultural practices that shape their identity and daily life.

Lastly, the significance of learners' comprehension of their own cultural practices is underlined by an educator who observes that "In a way, they would like to understand this thing better, like some of them. They really don't understand, OK." – IGP ED 7. This points to an educational gap whereby learners themselves may lack clarity about their cultural practices, suggesting an additional need for educational content that clarifies and explores the significance of these traditions.

j)Consider changing the diet for school lunches.

In reconsidering its policies on school nutrition, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa is recommended to re-evaluate the provision of meals within educational institutions. According to suggestions from local communities, as voiced by a community member in KZN, there is an opportunity to diversify and enhance the nutritional offerings in schools: "I think the government must try and change the diet and food they provide in schools." - IKZN COM 1.

notable proposal includes introducing specific meat varieties, such as pork and crocodile, believed by some to possess qualities counteracting the use of 'muthi,' a term referring medicine. traditional recommendation highlights the potential intersection of health, cultural beliefs, and school policies, proposing:



""Give children a healthy diet, provide them with pork meat and crocodile meat because it kills muthi and might help to reduce the use of muthi in schools."

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This perspective offers a divergent angle on the DBE's approach to learner nutrition, warranting consideration in the policy revision process.

Key Findings: Recommendations

• The Department of Basic Education's Role:

- Development and implementation of an inclusive policy to manage 'strange behaviours' in schools.
- Need for policy to reflect ground-level experience and educator/community feedback.
- Educators and community members believe parental involvement is more powerful than DBE intervention.

• Parental Involvement is Essential:

- Parents are pivotal in managing their children's 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices'.
- Teachers recommend calling parents at the first manifestation to inform them; and to get guidance.
- Parental advice is key in handling manifestations, with some providing traditional methods to calm their children.

• Education for Educators, Counsellors, and Staff:

- Policy should include education for school staff to correct misinterpretations and negative attitudes towards 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices'.
- Empower teachers to distinguish between real and fake manifestations of 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices', and understand genderspecific patterns.

• Interactive Workshops for Understanding:

- Encourage workshops involving educators, parents, and the community for mutual education and understanding of cultural practices.
- Suggested integration of a teacher experienced in traditional African practices within school staff.
- Outlined the need for qualified counsellors trained in handling 'strange behaviours'.

• Special Allowances for Affected Learners:

- Advocacy for official leave in the policy for initiation practices.
- Greater flexibility in school policies to accommodate cultural attire and practices, such as wearing beads or protective cloths.

• Peer Support Systems and Safe Spaces:

- Support for a peer assistance system wherein culturally competent learners aid those manifesting 'strange behaviours' or participating in 'harmful practices'.
- Recommendations for creating safe spaces in schools where learners can manage their 'strange behaviours' without disrupting classes.

• Cultural and Spiritual Diversity in Education Policy:

- Curriculum revisions to include and respect African cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.
- The need for increased cultural representation and awareness in the Life Orientation curriculum.
- Emphasis on balancing the educational curriculum with respect for individual freedoms of belief.

• Open Communication in Schools:

- Necessity for open communication among educators, learners, and parents on cultural and spiritual matters.
- Collaboration for a deeper understanding of learners' backgrounds and respect for their cultural beliefs and practices.

• Re-evaluating School Nutrition:

- Suggested change in school lunch diets to include meats like pork and crocodile which some believe counteract traditional medicine ("muthi").
- A diversification of meal offerings to reflect cultural beliefs and potentially influence the use of traditional medicine in schools.

Possible Challenges in Policy Implementation

Qualitative Findings: Possible Challenges

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) is tasked with implementing policies that accommodate various religious practices to support learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, this process is not without challenges. This thematic analysis considers stakeholders' concerns and challenges in policy implementation, focusing on the complex dynamics between traditional ancestral beliefs, religious practices, and school regulations.

a)Conflict Between Diverse Religions

In multi-faith educational environments, it's common to find a melting pot of religious beliefs, which can often lead to tension. This sub-theme explores the various challenges that arise within schools when learners and faculty with differing religious backgrounds interact within the same space.

Educators have identified contention within schools due to the presence of different religious belief systems. The quote below underscores the challenge of navigating this delicate matter, suggesting a need for thoughtful consideration in policy-making.

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"clearly there's a contention between different religious belief systems. I'm bringing this to your attention so that we... we... I don't know how it could be." - FGD GP ED 1

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"We have neighbours who are traditional healers... They do exactly what these learners are doing... that's the only challenge I have around this issue because we will try to Christianise the whole school whereas... they are community issues." - FGD GP ED 1

In addition, the influence of community practices, including those of traditional healers, is reflected upon, emphasising the complexity of religious interactions within the educational system.

"

Similar to the concerns of the educators in Gauteng, it emerges that the Chair of the CRL Right Commission is concerned with what he interprets as an overrepresentation of Christian educators within schools. This concern is vocalised through his remark on "..too much of Christian teachers in schools...", which implicitly questions the religious diversity of the teaching workforce and highlights a tension between actual practice and the Commission's ideal of cultural and religious plurality.

However, the data further uncovers a paradox within the actions of the CRL Rights Commission compared to its intended function. Despite being an institution that is presumed to champion a multifarious approach to culture, religion, and language, Chair's statements suggest discrepancy. He illustrates this by condemning schools for engaging Christian pastors, while simultaneously advocating for a secular approach in pedagogy, indicated by:

"

"..schools are wrong when they invite abefundisi (pastors) to pray...they call these spirits demons...department should prepare teachers to be neutral..." - (CRLRC Chair)

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In conclusion, to create an inclusive and harmonious learning environment, it is crucial to acknowledge and navigate the contention between different religious belief systems. Educational policies need to reflect an understanding of these dynamics and strive to accommodate diverse practices without favouring any particular belief.

b) The Role of Prayer in Schools

Prayer in schools remains a contentious topic, with varying opinions on its impact on learner behaviour and the school atmosphere. This sub-theme presents differing viewpoints on the efficacy of prayer as a tool within the educational system.

There are conflicting views on whether prayer assists or exacerbates spiritual episodes in schools. Some educators feel the lack of prayer contributes to problematic behaviour.

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"But now, since we are no longer praying in our school, we are experiencing all those things." -FGD GP ED 1

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"

"Since this happens seasonally maybe the school can suggest prayers more often because every time there is a prayer everything becomes normal." – FGB KZN COM 1

Meanwhile, others have observed what appears to be a calming effect following prayer sessions.

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Yet, there are accounts suggesting that prayer might provoke adverse reactions in some learners.

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"Even me personally I want to help them but... some of them when you do that, they get worse." – FGD GP ED 2

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In conclusion, the divisive nature of prayer in educational settings suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach may not work. As such, school policies should consider the differing impacts that prayer has on learners and look for an inclusive approach that respects all religious perspectives.

c)Deciphering Authenticity of 'strange behaviours'.

Distinguishing between true 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' and feigned behaviours is a nuanced issue that educators often need to address. This sub-theme delves into educators' experiences and the possible solutions to discern the authenticity of these spiritual episodes.

Evaluating whether learners are genuinely experiencing 'strange behaviours' or pretending is a debated issue. Instances of fabricated events are a concern for educators.

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"in the past, I used to have this, Learner. She was just faking it... The mother told us she's faking."

- FGD GP ED 1

"

"there needs to be a system in place to distinguish between genuine experiences and attempts to avoid responsibilities." – IGP ED 9

The possibility of implementing a verification system is proposed to better identify sincere episodes.

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Some believe that intuitive cues, such as changes in voice tone, can reveal the truth behind these episodes.

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"We are also able to tell from the children's signs like the change of tone in their voices that we are used to and then can tell that this is a genuine ancestor calling." - FGD KZN ED 1

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However, the belief in the phenomenon of 'harmful practices' is challenged by those unfamiliar with the practice.

"It's a difficult thing to understand especially if you grew up in a household that doesn't believe in ancestors." – FGD KZN ED 2

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"Encourage your young girls to believe in themselves... monitor what our kids eat."

Christian educators suggest that attention to personal belief, strict school rules, and monitoring diet could have a positive impact.

In conclusion, issues surrounding 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices' necessitate culturally sensitive approaches and possibly the development of systematic protocols. Educational institutions must therefore consider policies that equip educators with the ability to support genuine cases while maintaining academic integrity.

d)Teacher Involvement in Spiritual Episodes

The extent to which educators should engage with learners during spiritual episodes raises questions about role boundaries and professional training. This sub-theme explores the complexity educators face when confronted with such circumstances.

Debate surrounds the teacher's role when spiritual episodes occur. Some advocate for a hands-off approach, leaving it to more knowledgeable persons.

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"I think teachers should not be involved; they should let people who has knowledge to deal with these things." - IGP ED 3

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"We do not have any form of training for such situations... it seemed to have not been too helpful." – FGD GP ED 3 Others point out the lack of training in managing such incidents.

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Recognition of the need for teacher preparedness is paired with concerns about legal liability.

"

"Teachers intervened... made to go for a hearing... Practices that are displayed by this learner... might cause us work." – IGP ED 6

"

The discussions reflect a clear need for guidance on teacher involvement in spiritual matters. Policies should focus on training teachers to provide adequate support, while also considering legal and ethical implications. Additionally, the involvement of external expertise could be a potential solution.

d)Sensitivity and Policy Implications toward 'Harmful Practices'

In addressing the 'strange behaviour' of learners in educational settings, it is pivotal to navigate these matters sensitively, given the deeply personal nature of spirituality and religion. This sub-theme emphasises the importance of sensitivity and mindful consideration in policy formulation and implementation.

Educators express caution about viewing 'harmful practices' through a single lens, striving for sensitivity to maintain a neutral stance.

"I don't know if you decided to give it to the caption as harmful as such or there's a reason behind it. But I just wanted to be neutral around this issue because I've realised it's a very sensitive issue." - FGD GP ED 1

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"we might see those... actions that the kids are... as being harmful, but from the background of those who believe in that... it's a normal thing." - FGD GP ED 1

The necessity to consider varying perspectives is noted, particularly from those who view such practices as normal.

"

Efforts are made to ensure religious practices aren't demonised or unfairly judged.

"we are trying to avoid... trying... To completely demonise the other religions." - FGD GP ED 1

"

"we cannot trust anyone these days." -IKZN COM 1 Lastly, the exclusion of religious leaders due to trust concerns and the debate over segregating schools based on spiritual gifts highlight the complexity faced by educational policymakers.

Opinions on segregation vary, with some learners finding it disruptive to education and others advocating for inclusion.

"I see it as very disturbing to the teaching and learning process... if it was up to me, they should have their own school so that they can disturb themselves." - FGD KZN L2

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"We are the same people, only they're gifted spiritually doesn't make them different, we just need to adapt to the situation." - FGD KZN L1

Conversely, another learner voices against segregation, calling for adaptation and acceptance.

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Key Findings: Concerns or challenges in policy implementation

• Conflict Between Diverse Religions:

- Different religious belief systems lead to contention within schools.
- Educators highlight challenges in navigating these delicate matters.
- The influence of community practices complicates religious interactions in schools.

• The Role of Prayer in Schools:

- o Conflicting views on prayer's impact on spiritual episodes in schools.
- Lack of prayer is seen as contributing to problematic behaviour by some.
- Calls for inclusive approaches that respect all religious perspectives regarding prayer.

• Deciphering Authenticity of 'strange behaviours':

- Educators face challenges in distinguishing genuine 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' from fabricated ones.
- Suggestions for implementing verification systems to identify sincere episodes.
- Need for culturally sensitive approaches in discerning authentic 'harmful traditional, cultural and religious practices'.

• Teacher Involvement in manifestation Episodes:

- Controversy surrounding the extent of teacher engagement during manifestation episodes.
- o Calls for training teachers to handle such situations.
- Concerns about legal liability and the need for external expertise in managing spiritual matters.

• Sensitivity and Policy Implications toward 'Harmful practice':

- Emphasis on the importance of sensitivity and mindful consideration in policy formulation.
- o Caution against demonising or unfairly judging religious practices.
- Challenges faced by educational policymakers regarding trust issues and the debate over segregating schools based on spiritual gifts.

Critical Analysis of Findings and Study Limitations

Critical Analysis of Findings

When evaluating the findings regarding the management and experience of 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices' in South African schools, integrating quantitative and qualitative data provides a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. Triangulation of these datasets can offer insights into the prevalence and manifestation of strange spiritual behaviours and the effectiveness of their management and the perceptions of their impact on learners.

Critical Analysis of the Experience of 'strange behaviours'

Prevalence and Perceptions:

The quantitative data robustly indicates a prevailing incidence of what respondents deem "strange behaviours," with significant percentages across learners (92.6%), teachers (71.2%), and community members (92.9%). Notably, these figures suggest that such behaviours are a common occurrence rather than rarities within educational settings. Despite variations in responses across provinces, the lack of statistical significance means these discrepancies could arise from sampling limitations rather than genuine geographic variation. However, they still warrant consideration given the cultural diversity of South Africa.

Qualitative contributions detail the manifestations of 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices', ranging from physical convulsions and speaking in tongues to aggressive outbursts. These episodes are not only disruptive but also carry implications for the psychosocial well-being of the learners, adding a layer of complexity to the already intricate educational milieu.

Demographic Influences:

Data shows distinct demographic trends. For instance, females and older learners were more likely to report witnessing strange behaviours, with Nguni ethnicity and Christian beliefs also being predictors of such observations. This knowledge is crucial for policy as it highlights specific groups that might require more attention and lend credence to gender and age-specific educational interventions.



Perceptions of Benefit versus Harm:

The split in perceptions between harmful and beneficial impacts of 'strange behaviours' suggests a deep ambiguity in understanding these phenomena. With many seeing no benefits while others see spiritual, psychological, and cultural gains, policies must respect and reconcile these contrasts. Interventions could include educational programmes to improve awareness and comprehension among both those experiencing 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' and those observing them.

Profile of Respondents Most Affected:

'Harmful practices' are associated with adverse behavioural changes such as aggression, hallucinations, and physical altercations. Policies should target support for the profiles most affected—female learners in higher grades from KwaZulu-Natal, Nguni speakers, and Christians as per the quantitative data, and community members holding specific cultural roles based on qualitative feedback.

Negative Behaviours:

Quantitative data show that negative behaviours associated with 'harmful practices' are perceived more acutely by learners in higher grades, which could be due to the increasing social dynamics and complexities that come with age. Qualitatively, aggressive behaviours and the influence on peers amplify the disruptive potential of these spiritual episodes. Reports of mass hallucinations driven by influential individuals suggest that 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' not only affect the individual but have a potential domino effect on the peer group.

Critical Comparative Points:

For Learners:

- Older learners in higher grades disproportionately witness or experience these behaviours, indicating a developmental or educational stage-related phenomenon.
- Gendered experiences suggest a disparity in how males and females perceive or are exposed to strange behaviours, which could also reflect societal attitudes towards gender roles within spiritual or cultural practices.
- Variations in perception based on ethnicity and religion highlight the intersection of cultural practices and belief systems that may shape learners' experiences in school.

For Educators:

- The majority of teachers reporting these 'strange behaviours' underscores the need for professional development that equips educators with the understanding and skills to handle such occurrences in an inclusive and culturally sensitive manner.
- The limited number of teacher respondents may hinder the generalizability of the results and call for a broader representation to fully understand the educator's perspective.

For Community Members:

- Traditional health practitioners' frequent witness to 'strange behaviours' points towards their expertise and potential role in culturally appropriate interventions.
- The variation in perceptions among community members based on age groups could reflect generational shifts in belief systems and attitudes towards traditional practices or psychological phenomena.

Conclusion:

Both the qualitative and quantitative findings illustrate the complexity of 'strange behaviours' in schools, necessitating a multi-faceted approach to policy development. By incorporating cultural sensitivities, educational initiatives, psychological support, and clear communication protocols, schools can better manage these occurrences. In essence, a balanced, respectful, and informed policy framework can substantially aid in accommodating 'strange behaviours' within educational institutions, ensuring the safety and well-being of all learners.



Critical Analysis of the Impact of 'strange behaviours'

The collated critical analysis from the two sources provides a holistic view of the impact of 'strange behaviours', 'harmful practices' and cultural beliefs on learners, educators, and community members within the educational landscape.

Quantitative Analysis and the Impact of 'Strange Behaviours' Linked to 'Harmful Practices' on Academic Success:

The quantitative analysis suggests a cultural divide in the perception of the impact of 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' on academic success. Educators and community members perceive a larger negative impact compared to learners. This could be indicative of generational or role-based differences in how the cultural concept of 'harmful practices' is understood and valued. Such differences must be considered in policy development, ensuring that educational policies do not dismiss cultural beliefs but rather integrate respect for them while promoting academic success.

Psychological Impact:

The perceived psychological impact has significant variations among different groups. While learners appear more resilient or possibly less aware of long-term implications, teachers and community members report greater concern. This may reflect the adult groups' responsibilities for providing stable learning environments, or it could signify a broader awareness of the potential long-term effects of cultural and 'harmful parctice' on individuals. It is essential that educators and community members are equipped with resources and training to address these challenges robustly and sensitively.

Emotional Response to Observing Strange Behaviour:

The prevalence of sadness and fear among observers indicates a substantial emotional toll on witnesses, underlining the importance of emotional support in educational settings. Policies should consider the implementation of support systems, such as counselling services and culturally sensitive education programmes, to help learners process and understand their emotional responses.

Complex Impact on Learners:

Learners experiencing 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' face difficulties that can lead to harmful behaviours, isolation, and disruptions. These manifestations not only affect academic progress but also result in emotional distress, peer pressure, and discrimination. The impact on concentrating on their studies due to these behaviours can be severe, affecting their overall educational experience.

Challenges for Educators:

Educators are faced with the challenge of managing disruptive behaviours resulting from learners experiencing manifestations of 'harmful practices'. They may feel psychologically burdened by the constant disruptions in their classrooms and may struggle to maintain a supportive and focused learning environment. Educators who do not share the same beliefs as the learners may experience emotional conflict between their personal belief systems and their duty to support and protect their learners. The disruptions caused by manifestations of 'harmful practices' can affect the performance of educators and learners alike, leading to increased stress and challenges in delivering quality education.

Concerns of Community Members:

Parents and community members express concerns about the influence of 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' and their aggressive manifestations, leading to apprehensions about their learners's well-being and academic success. Varied perspectives on 'harmful practices' within different cultural and religious contexts contribute to the complexity of addressing and understanding these behaviours.

Conclusion

In synthesis, the collated critical analysis accentuates the necessity for a comprehensive, culturally sensitive, and collaborative approach to address the complex challenges associated with 'harmful practices' and 'strange behaviours' within educational settings. By implementing targeted policy recommendations and fostering inclusive practices, stakeholders can create a supportive learning environment that respects diverse beliefs, promotes understanding, and fosters well-being for learners, educators, and community members impacted by 'harmful practices' and associated behaviours. Continued research and evaluation of the effectiveness of these interventions are crucial in ensuring sustainable and impactful support systems for all individuals involved in navigating these complex cultural and educational dynamics.

Critical Analysis on Feedback on Root Causes of 'strange behaviours':

Quantitatively, the investigation reveals a striking consensus across different groups, attributing 'strange behaviours' to religious or spiritual experiences. The nuanced differences between age groups, with older learners exhibiting a greater inclination toward spiritual explanations, juxtaposed with younger learners attributing behaviours to cultural experiences, suggest **that belief systems evolve with age and understanding.** This developmental trajectory reflects not only individual maturation but potentially the influence of societal norms transmitted through education and community interaction.

The gender discrepancies, with females more likely to attribute behaviours to spiritual or cultural causes and males to attention-seeking, point to the **intersectionality of gender and cultural belief systems that might be reinforced by different societal expectations and roles for men and women.** The provincial differences, with Gauteng having a higher likelihood of associating behaviours with religious experiences compared to KwaZulu-Natal, hint at the **possibility of provincial cultural idiosyncrasies influencing perceptions.**

Qualitatively, the shift in community narratives from peaceful ancestral interactions to aggressive compulsion and attacks provides a stark contrast to the quantitative findings, imbuing them with emotional depth. The experiences of compulsion, described as forceful with an association of pain and psychological trauma, highlight the **potential adverse effects these episodes have on the well-being of learners.** This sense of violation of agency may reflect broader societal tensions between traditional practices and modern pressures, including education and religion.

The qualitative narratives also reveal a complex web of familial, social, and spiritual dynamics that cannot be distilled into mere numbers. Elements such as the shift towards Christianity and the subsequent neglect of traditional initiatory practices suggest a cultural dissonance that may provoke a backlash from ancestral spirits. This insight underlines the role of religious and cultural syncretism, or the lack thereof, on the lived experiences of these learners.

Confronted with these multi-layered explanations, policymakers face the challenging task of reconciling the need for respecting cultural beliefs with the requirement to safeguard the well-being of learners. Policies designed to address 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices' in schools must navigate the waters of cultural sensitivity, educational integrity, and psychological health.

The variance amongst the perceptions of stakeholders is telling. Learners' embracing 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' as a spiritual or cultural experience contrasts with the educators' and community members' perspectives, potentially calling for differentiated approaches within the school context. The stress associated with academic performance, as implied by the increased frequency of these episodes during exams, indicates a need for holistic wellness programs in schools.

For **educators**, the findings suggest the importance of cultural competency in their professional development. They would need to be supported to understand and navigate these phenomena without bias, ensuring the right balance between cultural understanding and maintaining an effective learning environment.

Community members play a pivotal role in how their learners understand and deal with 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices', and their views may heavily influence the learners. Therefore, engaging with them is crucial in creating educational policies that account for their cultural narratives and practices. This community engagement can help prevent exclusions or marginalisation of those learners experiencing 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices'.

Conclusion

While qualitative and quantitative data shed light on the nature and potential root causes of 'strange behaviours', any responsive policy must acknowledge the complexities of the environment, involving learners, educators, and community members. Such policies must recognise the importance of incorporating cultural understanding into the educational fabric to ensure that interventions are appropriate, respectful, and targeted towards holistic child development and well-being.

Critical Analysis on Feedback for Policy Change Recommendations:

The quantitative and qualitative data provided offers valuable insights into the perceptions, preferences, and needs of learners, educators, and community members regarding the management of spiritual behaviours, communication about 'strange behaviours', the role of the Department of Basic Education (DBE), school policies addressing 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices', and support for individuals experiencing such 'strange behaviours' within educational settings. By triangulating these data sets, we can draw a comprehensive picture of the areas that may require attention and potential policy recommendations to address the identified disparities and needs.

Quantitative Analysis:

The quantitative analysis highlights disparities in learners' perceptions of how spiritual behaviours are managed in educational settings. Key findings indicate that management of such behaviours is perceived to be less effective, especially in Gauteng compared to KwaZulu-Natal. Moreover, younger and primary school learners hold a more positive view of the management, suggesting a need to address varying perceptions across grade levels.

Regarding learners' comfort in communicating about 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices', the data shows that most learners feel only a small extent of comfort discussing these topics with teachers or staff. Preferences for trusted confidants highlight the importance of involving parents and friends in conversations about 'harmful practices', indicating a need for creating supportive mechanisms within schools.

The data also sheds light on the desired role of the DBE in addressing 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices'. A significant portion of respondents advocate for inclusive school policies recognising 'strange behaviours' and its link to 'harmful practices', referral to spiritual or religious leaders, and creating a caring atmosphere for affected learners. However, the lack of detailed breakdowns by demographic variables limits a comprehensive understanding of diverse perspectives.

Qualitative Analysis:

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Critical Analysis on Limitations or Challenges in Policy Implementation:

Several complexities and intricacies emerge when examining the thematic analysis on limitations or challenges in policy implementation regarding the management of 'strange behaviours' and the effects of 'harmful practices' 'ancestral callings' within the context of educational settings. The findings underscore the nuanced nature of accommodating diverse spiritual practices 'harmful parctice' in schools and highlight the need for comprehensive policy considerations that address these challenges effectively. Triangulating the qualitative data presented, along with the quantitative insights from previous sections, can offer a more holistic perspective on the barriers to policy implementation and provide insights for developing a robust new school policy.



Conflict Between Diverse Religions:

The data reveal a fundamental challenge in managing the coexistence of diverse religious beliefs within educational environments. The presence of various religious systems, including traditional ancestral beliefs, can lead to contention and tension among learners and faculty. Educators express concerns about navigating these delicate dynamics, highlighting the need for thoughtful policymaking to ensure inclusivity and respect for differing belief systems. This data emphasises the imperative of developing a policy framework that acknowledges the complexity of religious interactions within schools and promotes a harmonious learning environment. Recommendations for policy should focus on fostering cultural sensitivity, promoting dialogue among stakeholders, and accommodating diverse practices without bias.

The Role of Prayer in Schools:

The discourse surrounding prayer in schools introduces a contentious issue that reflects varying perspectives on its impact on learner behaviour and the school atmosphere. Educators' conflicting views on the efficacy of prayer highlight the divisive nature of this practice in educational settings. The data suggest that a standardised approach to prayer may not be effective due to the diverse impacts it has on learners. Thus, policy recommendations should prioritise an inclusive approach that respects all religious perspectives, acknowledges the impact of prayer on learner experiences, and seeks to maintain a balanced environment that accommodates differing beliefs.

Deciphering Authenticity of 'Strange Behaviours':

The challenge of distinguishing between genuine 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' and simulated behaviours emerges as a significant barrier to effectively managing spiritual episodes in schools. Educators' experiences with fabricated events underscore the need for protocols to verify the authenticity of these occurrences. The proposal for a verification system and reliance on intuitive cues to discern genuine experiences suggest the necessity of establishing systematic protocols within educational institutions to support educators in addressing these 'strange behaviours'. Policy recommendations should focus on providing educators with the tools and resources to differentiate between genuine and feigned spiritual episodes while upholding cultural sensitivity and academic integrity.

Teacher Involvement in Spiritual Episodes:

The debate surrounding the extent of teacher involvement in spiritual episodes highlights a crucial aspect of professional boundaries and preparedness in managing such circumstances. Educators' concerns about lacking training and uncertainty regarding legal liabilities underscore the need for clear guidance on teacher roles and responsibilities in spiritual matters. The data suggest that policy initiatives should prioritise teacher training to provide adequate support for learners during spiritual episodes, while also considering legal and ethical implications. Collaboration with external experts may offer additional support in navigating complex spiritual situations within the educational context.

Sensitivity and Policy Implications toward Harmful practice:

The thematic analysis emphasises the importance of sensitivity and mindful consideration in crafting policies that address the diverse 'harmful parctice' of learners within educational settings. Educators' caution about viewing 'harmful parctice' through a singular lens underscores the necessity of policies that respect and protect the diversity of learners' beliefs while nurturing a supportive learning environment. The complexities surrounding trust concerns, segregation based on spiritual gifts, and differing opinions on inclusion suggest the need for policy frameworks that strike a delicate balance between accommodating diverse practices, respecting cultural complexities, and fostering a respectful educational community. Recommendations for policy should emphasise inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and the promotion of a conducive learning environment that supports all learners' beliefs and backgrounds.

Conclusion

The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data on the limitations and challenges in policy implementation surrounding 'strange behaviours' and the effects of 'harmful practices' underscores the need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach in developing a new school policy. By considering the complexities of diverse religious beliefs, the role of prayer, authenticity verification, teacher involvement, and sensitivity toward harmful practice, educational institutions can create a supportive and respectful environment that upholds the cultural diversity and spiritual well-being of all learners. Through thoughtful policy formulation and implementation, schools can navigate the intricacies of managing 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' effectively and foster a harmonious learning community that embraces and respects the rich tapestry of 'harmful parctice' among its learners.



Study Limitations

- **Geographical Scope:** The study was limited to two provinces, which may not fully capture the diversity of languages, cultures, experiences and perceptions across South Africa. One such limitation observed was that majority of the respondents were from the Nguni mother tongue, which is more prominent in the chosen provinces.
- Sample Size and Composition: While the sample was diverse, the distribution of respondents across grade levels, mother tongue groups, and religious affiliations may influence the generalizability of the findings. For example, majority of our learner sample were females from the Nguni mother tongue, which may bias the response pool towards their cultural beliefs and practices.
- Subjectivity in Reporting: The reliance on self-reported data introduces a level of subjectivity, particularly in interpreting and classifying experiences as spiritual, cultural, or attention-seeking.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** The study's approach to categorising and analysing spiritual and cultural experiences may not fully account for the depth and complexity of individual belief systems.
- Cross-sectional Study: This study may be limited in that a longitudinal study would have allowed further observation. There should be a recommendation to indicate that learners who experienced this phenomenon need to be observed for longer period than the study permitted.

Policy Recommendations and Implications

Policy Recommendations: Experiences and Impact of 'Strange Behaviours'

The comprehensive policy recommendations outlined below are a direct result of the meticulous examination of data findings and critical analysis anchored in the research question: "What are the experiences of learners displaying 'strange' behaviours and how do these behaviours impact on the learners themselves, their families, peers, educators, and the school?"

Recommendations for Learners:

- Establish learner support services that recognise and address the spiritual, cultural, and psychological factors associated with 'strange behaviours', with dedicated counsellors trained in culturally sensitive approaches.
- Integrate mindfulness and stress-reduction programmes into the school day to aid concentration and coping mechanisms for those affected by disruptions due to 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices'.
- **Develop an inclusive curriculum** that educates learners about the significance of cultural and spiritual diversity, specifically including the topic of 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices'.
- Introduce workshops and discussions that enable learners to understand and respect diverse belief systems, reducing fear and stigma.
- Create safe and anonymous reporting channels for learners to share their experiences or concerns regarding 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices'.
- Implement regular 'circle time' or forums for learners to talk about their experiences, ensuring facilitation by trained staff members.
- Introduce peer-mentorship programmes where older learners can be trained to provide emotional support and guidance to younger learners.

Recommendations for Educators:

- **Provide training for educators** to recognise the signs of distress in learners which might be related to 'strange behaviours' and respond effectively.
- Offer cultural competency training to help educators understand the implications of 'strange behaviours' and the effects of 'harmful practices' in the educational setting.
- Adopt teaching methods that are sensitive to the needs of learners who
 might be experiencing distractions or other impacts related to 'strange
 behaviours'.
- **Use differentiated instruction** to assist learners who may be struggling to concentrate due to personal disturbances of a spiritual or cultural nature.
- **Promote a classroom environment** that is inclusive and supportive, where learners feel comfortable discussing their cultural practices and behaviours without fear of embarrassment or retribution.

Recommendations for Community Members:

- Engage religious and community leaders in dialogue to foster a shared understanding of how 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' affects learners.
- Invite community members to participate in school-based forums and outreach programmes to build a supportive network around the issue.
- Ensure that School Governing Bodies (SGBs) include 'strange behaviours' and manifestations of 'harmful practices' in their **policy reviews** and that they are **trained to manage such issues** with sensitivity and awareness.
- Provide educational seminars and resource materials for parents to educate them about the psychological and academic impacts of 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' on learners.
- Conduct workshops for parents and families that offer strategies for supporting learners who may be experiencing 'strange behaviours' or are affected by it within the school community.

General Policy Recommendations:

- **Establish a task force** of an assessment team of multicultural and religious committees in school clusters or education districts. The task force must be trained with prerequisite skills for assessing and managing 'strange behaviours' in schools.
- Implement school-wide educational programmes focusing on mental health awareness, recognition of diverse cultural and harmful practice, and the importance of understanding and respect in the school environment. Social media can be one of the tools considered to spread awareness in a learner friendly platform.
- **Conduct ongoing research** to monitor the prevalence of such behaviours and their impact on the school environment, using data to inform and adjust policy and practice.
- Analyse trends and address disparities in 'strange behaviours' in different provinces, informed by quantitative and qualitative research.
- **Develop and disseminate a clear emergency response plan** for incidents involving 'strange behaviours' to ensure a structured response reduces panic and harm.
- Schedule periodic policy reviews to reflect emerging research findings and community feedback on the efficacy of implemented programmes.
- Develop feedback mechanisms for learners, educators, and community members to voice their experiences and concerns regarding the policies' effectiveness in real-time.
- Incorporate culture-specific curricular enhancements that are responsive to the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of learners, such as incorporating literature and history lessons that explore the concept of freedom from a Sotho linguistic cultural perspective

By focusing on detailed policy recommendations that cater specifically to the varying needs of learners, educators, and the community, the DBE can work towards creating an environment that is respectful, knowledgeable, and supportive of the diverse cultural and spiritual backgrounds represented in South African schools. These recommendations should be implemented in consultation with legal and ethical guidelines and in collaboration with cultural, religious, and mental health experts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the comprehensive policy recommendations emerging from the analysis of learners' experiences with 'strange behaviours' underscore the importance of addressing the multifaceted impacts of such occurrences on individuals across the educational spectrum. By delving into the intricate interplay between spiritual, psychological, and cultural dimensions and their effects on learners, families, peers, educators, and the school community, these recommendations epitomise a thoughtful and evidence-based approach to promoting inclusivity and support networks. Through a nuanced understanding of the research question at hand and its implications for educational practice, the Department of Basic Education in South Africa sets the stage for an environment that values diversity, fosters empathy, and prioritises the well-being of all individuals navigating the complexities of 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' within the educational milieu.

Policy Recommendations: Root Causes of 'Strange Behaviours'

The comprehensive policy recommendations outlined below directly result from the meticulous examination of data findings and critical analysis anchored in the research question: "What are the root causes of harmful traditional, cultural, and religious practices in South African Schools?"

Recommendations for Learners:

- **Support Services:** Reinforce learner support services focusing on spirituality and cultural diversity, including dedicated personnel.
- **Educational Programs:** Emphasise the importance of educational programs that underscore mental health, cultural, and 'harmful parctice' within the school environment.
- **Curriculum Integration:** Intensify efforts to educate learners about cultural and spiritual diversity, emphasising 'harmful practices' within the existing curriculum.
- Workshops and Forums: Initiate school-based forums and workshops designed to cultivate mutual respect for different belief systems and reduce the associated stigma.

Recommendations for Educators:

- **Professional Development:** Solidify training programmes for educators that cover cultural competency and the ability to recognise and offer guidance on issues related to 'strange behaviours' or 'harmful practices'.
- **Teaching Methodology:** Develop and deploy teaching methods that accommodate the varying cultural backgrounds and possible spiritual distractions learners may experience.
- Classroom Environment: Further cultivate an environment where learners feel valued and supported in discussing their cultural and spiritual lives.

Recommendations for Community Members:

- **Engagement and Training:** Bolster the engagement of community and religious leaders to enhance understanding and provide insight into the educational impact of 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices'.
- Offer training for School Governing Bodies to ensure culturally sensitive management of issues related to 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices'.
- **Parental Involvement:** Heighten efforts to provide parents and families with strategies and support to help learners navigate issues of 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices' within the learning environment.

General Policy Recommendations:

Task Force and Monitoring:

- Instigate a Task Force to execute and oversee the broad spectrum of educational programmes and monitor behavioural impacts within schools.
- Commit to ongoing research and analysis of trends and disparities regarding the manifestation of 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices'.

Policy Adaptation and Feedback:

- Develop a fluid and adaptable emergency response plan for incidents associated with 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices'.
- Ensure regular policy revisions to reflect current research and integrate community feedback on programme effectiveness.

• Crisis Intervention Policies:

- Establish a clear protocol for immediate action when a'harmful practice 'incident is reported or observed, taking into account the nature of the incident and ensuring the safety of all learners.
- Train key staff members in crisis intervention techniques to manage emergencies effectively.

• Psychological Assessment:

- Implement a policy for psychological evaluation of learners displaying severe 'strange behaviours' to differentiate between cultural, spiritual, psychological, and attention-seeking behaviours.
- Develop partnerships with healthcare providers for prompt expert assessment and intervention where required.

Conclusion

The proposed policies are tailored to provide comprehensive support to learners, equip educators with necessary skills, engage community stakeholders, and establish a responsive educational environment which respects cultural and harmful practice. Through careful implementation, the DBE can enhance the well-being and educational success of learners while acknowledging the rich diversity within South African schools. Additionally, recognising the potential stress linked to examinations, there is an implicit need for programs that specifically address exam-related anxieties. This could include study skill workshops, relaxation techniques, and establishing a network of peer support during assessment periods.

Policy Recommendations: Feedback to Manage 'Strange Behaviours'

The following comprehensive policy recommendations outlined below are a direct result of the meticulous examination of data findings and critical analysis anchored in the research question: "What recommendations and solutions could be provided to different stakeholders in the affected schools to manage the "strange" behaviours?".

The policy recommendations are additional or new recommendations based on the findings of the section. Any duplicate recommendations from the policy recommendations listed above have been removed.

Management of Spiritual Behaviour:

- **Province-Specific Programmes:** Develop targeted programmes in provinces like Gauteng where learners perceive a lower level of management effectiveness, to improve understanding and handling of spiritual behaviours.
- **Grade-Level Interventions:** Implement specific interventions for different grade levels to ensure all learners feel supported and understood, regardless of their age.
- **Psychological Support:** Ensure access to mental health resources and counselling services for learners experiencing spiritual behaviours to address their emotional well-being.
- **Cultural Liaison Officers:** Designate cultural liaison officers in schools to serve as points of contact for community members who wish to provide input on cultural matters or raise concerns.

Learners' Comfort in Communicating about 'Strange Behaviours':

- Parental Engagement: Encourage parental involvement in discussions around 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices' by providing resources and guidance to facilitate open communication.
- **Teacher Training:** Develop training programmes to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge to engage in sensitive conversations with learners about 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices'.
- **School Counsellors:** Increase the availability of school counsellors and psychologists to offer support to learners struggling with witnessing or experiencing 'strange behaviours' or other effects of 'harmful practices'.
- **Supportive Environment:** Foster an environment where learners feel comfortable discussing 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices' with trusted individuals by promoting open dialogue and understanding.

Additional Recommendations on the Role of the DBE:

- Inclusion in School Policies: Incorporate explicit policies in the DBE guidelines that address 'strange behaviours' and other effects of 'harmful practices' to provide formal recognition and support for learners.
- **Referral to Guidance:** Establish protocols for referring learners exhibiting unusual behaviours to appropriate spiritual or religious leaders for culturally sensitive support.
- **Neutral Education Environment:** Reaffirm the DBE's commitment to maintaining a neutral environment in secular schools, making it clear that all religions or lack thereof are respected, and that no single belief system is privileged over another.

Presence of School Policies Addressing 'Strange Behaviours' and 'Harmful Practices':

• **Inclusive Prayer Spaces:** Schools should provide designated prayer areas for various faiths, ensuring that learners from different religious backgrounds can practice their faith respectfully and privately during school hours.

Support for Individuals Experiencing 'Strange Behaviours' and 'Harmful Practices':

- **Provincial Support:** Tailor support programmes based on provincial variations in perceptions of the importance of a caring environment for learners experiencing 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices'.
- **Gender-Inclusive Support:** Ensure that support mechanisms are gender-inclusive and sensitive to the unique needs of all learners.
- **Age-Specific Interventions:** Develop interventions that cater to the specific needs of different age groups, considering the varying levels of support required.

Additional Recommendations and Solutions:

- Legal and Ethical Framework: All policies should be regularly vetted for compliance with national laws and international conventions regarding freedom of religion and the rights of the child, ensuring that ethical standards are upheld in all policy actions.
- **Special Allowances:** Advocate for official leave and flexible policies to accommodate cultural practices associated with 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices', including traditional attire and practices.
- **Peer Support and Safe Spaces:** Establish peer support systems and safe spaces within schools to empower learners to manage their 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices' in a supportive environment.
- Spiritual Episode Response Team: Formulate a Spiritual Episode Response
 Team (SERT) at each school, comprised of trained educators, a school
 psychologist or counsellor, and a cultural liaison officer to manage such
 events effectively.
- Verification Protocols for 'Strange Behaviours': Develop a clear protocol, possibly involving psychological assessment and cultural specialists, for verifying genuine 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' to safeguard both the integrity of spiritual experiences and academic diligence.

By implementing these detailed recommendations, the Department of Basic Education can create a more supportive, inclusive, and culturally sensitive educational environment that recognises and accommodates the diverse spiritual and cultural needs of learners experiencing 'strange behaviours' and effects of 'harmful practices'.

Overall, these policy recommendations aim to create a supportive, culturally sensitive, and inclusive educational environment that acknowledges the rich tapestry of spiritual and cultural practices among learners in South Africa's schools, contributing to their holistic well-being and academic success.

Policy Implications:

The following section delves into the policy implications arising from our recommendations, providing actionable steps for the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to consider in their efforts to meet the laid-out goals. The structure mirrors the headings found in the policy recommendations section, serving as a bridge from theoretical frameworks to practical execution. For each recommendation, we outline the requisite actions and considerations that the DBE must account for to translate these recommendations into tangible results in educational settings.

Each heading corresponds to a facet of the broad-spectrum approach that we advocate, encompassing the establishment of task forces, the implementation of educational programmes, and the development of sensitive curricular content, among others. The success of each recommendation inherently depends on the DBE's ability to operationalize these considerations effectively and adaptively.

The purpose of detailing these implications is not only to set a clear pathway towards achieving the objectives but also to anticipate challenges and resource requirements that the implementation may entail. The DBE's commitment to action in pursuit of these recommendations will be pivotal in actualizing a more inclusive, balanced, and responsive education system.

Policy Implications: Experiences and Impact of 'Strange Behaviours'

Policy Implications for Learners:

- Integrating learner support services for 'strange behaviours' linked to 'harmful practices' will require the DBE to allocate funding and resources for dedicated counsellors. This will necessitate partnerships with cultural and psychological training institutions to ensure counsellors are equipped with culturally sensitive methodologies.
- Introducing mindfulness and stress-reduction programmes into the school curriculum implies adjustments to the school schedule and teacher training to deliver these programmes effectively. Resources for programme materials and possibly external specialists will also have to be considered.
- Developing an inclusive curriculum that addresses cultural and spiritual diversity, including 'harmful practices', will involve curriculum experts and may require extensive review and revision of existing educational materials.
 This will call for a consultation process with cultural advisors and educational specialists.
- Implementing workshops and discussion groups will require creating a safe and respectful environment. Guidelines will need to be established to ensure that interactions are positive and constructive. This implies training for those who lead these discussions to manage diverse viewpoints and potential conflicts.
- Creating learner reporting channels will require developing a secure and confidential system, potentially increasing the need for IT infrastructure and monitoring capabilities. Procedures and protocols to address the reports must also be clearly defined and communicated.
- Regular 'circle time' or forums will lead to changes in classroom management strategies and may reduce academic instruction time. Preparing for these sessions will involve preparing facilitators with appropriate training and conflict resolution skills.
- Peer mentorship programmes will require older learners to take on additional responsibilities, and as such, they will need support and continuous training. There will be implications for their own academic schedules and responsibilities.

Policy Implications for Educators:

- **Training educators** to recognise signs of distress related to 'strange behaviours' and the effects of 'harmful practices' will require professional development programmes, which involves time, planning, and resources.
- **Cultural competency training** will mean that education faculties will have to design and include new components in their teaching qualifications, or the DBE will have to offer additional in-service training.
- Adopting culturally sensitive teaching methods may necessitate additional resources for classrooms to cater to diverse needs, as well as ongoing support for educators to refine their teaching practices.
- **Differentiated instruction** to assist learners affected by 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices' may reduce the pace of curriculum coverage and necessitate re-evaluation of assessment methods to accommodate diverse learning needs.
- **Promoting an inclusive and supportive classroom environment** will need to be underpinned by clear guidelines and behaviour management policies that are sensitive to cultural practices.

Policy Implications for Community Members:

- **Engagement of religious and community leaders** will require the establishment of formal communication channels and ongoing dialogue, which could involve developing partnerships or agreements.
- Inviting community members to school-based forums necessitates logistical planning and potentially raises issues of confidentiality and privacy. These events will need clear objectives and structures to ensure they are productive.
- School Governing Bodies (SGBs) including 'strange behaviours' and effects of 'harmful practices' in **policy reviews** imply a need for training in the nuances of cultural sensitivity and possibly legal considerations surrounding these matters.
- Educational seminars for parents will require resources and the ability to reach out effectively to the parent community, which could demand translation services and flexible scheduling to maximise attendance and impact.
- Workshops for families will similarly require resources, planning, and an understanding of the family dynamics within different cultural groups.

General Policy Implications:

- Establishing a Task Force will involve cross-sectoral collaboration, potentially expanding the obligations and workload of DBE staff. For the task force to be effective, accountability structures and clear mandates will need to be defined.
- School wide mental health awareness programmes will necessitate ongoing staff training and adjustments to school curricula, which could have implications for existing academic programmes.
- Ongoing research to monitor behaviours will require a budget for research activities, data collection, analysis, and the development of mechanisms to adjust policies accordingly.
- Analysing trends and addressing disparities implies a commitment to equity and may require targeted interventions in different provinces, potentially shifting resources and focus.
- Developing a clear emergency response plan for incidents will lead to the need for staff training and possibly the involvement of external emergency services.
- **Periodic policy reviews** to reflect emerging research findings will require the creation of a review panel or committee, and mechanisms to incorporate community feedback into policy development.
- Feedback mechanisms for stakeholders must ensure real-time efficacy, which would necessitate a dynamic and responsive approach to policy implementation and adjustment.
- Incorporating a culture-specific curricular enhancement into the school
 policy will ensure that education is relevant and resonant with all learners,
 according to their cultural backgrounds. This requires an investment in the
 development of teaching materials and teacher training to ensure
 understanding and sensitivity, leading to a more inclusive, understanding,
 and cohesive learning environment. These steps also call for the DBE to
 consider cultural dynamics within their mental health and safety strategies,
 recognising the significant role that cultural

Conclusion

The implications of these comprehensive policy recommendations are extensive and will require significant planning, funding, and coordination. The diligent execution of these policies, taking into consideration legal and ethical guidelines, and collaboration with experts, signifies a substantial commitment by the DBE to enhance the educational environment. By addressing the diversity of cultures and spiritual beliefs within South Africa, the DBE sets a precedent for inclusivity and sensitivity, aiming to enrich the educational experiences of all learners and create a school environment that respects and acknowledges the varied backgrounds of its learners.

Policy Implications: The root causes of the 'strange behaviours'

Policy Implications for Learners:

- The **reinforcement of learner support services** will require the DBE to allocate resources for additional staff or training existing personnel to handle spirituality and cultural diversity issues effectively.
- Emphasising the importance of educational programs will necessitate integrating new materials and content into the existing curriculum, potentially leading to curriculum revisions and additional teacher training.
- Intensifying efforts to educate learners about cultural and spiritual diversity may call for specialised training for educators in delivering this content sensitively and effectively.
- **Initiating school-based forums and workshops** will require planning and coordination with school staff, potentially involving external facilitators or experts, and setting aside time in the school schedule for these events.

Policy Implications for Educators:

- Solidifying training programmes for educators on cultural competency
 will require professional development resources and time for teachers to
 participate in training sessions.
- Developing and deploying teaching methods that accommodate various cultural backgrounds will necessitate ongoing support for educators to implement these methods effectively, potentially leading to adjustments in lesson planning and delivery.
- Further cultivating a supportive classroom environment may involve the
 implementation of policies and practices that encourage open discussion
 of cultural and spiritual issues, as well as ongoing professional
 development for teachers in creating inclusive spaces.

Policy Implications for Community Members:

- **Establishing communication channels** and partnerships will strengthen engagement with community and religious leaders, potentially necessitating resources for training and awareness campaigns.
- Offering training for School Governing Bodies will involve designing and implementing training programmes, as well as creating policies and guidelines for culturally sensitive management of ancestral callingrelated issues.
- **Heightening efforts to involve parents and families** in supporting learners dealing with ancestral calling may require resources for workshops, seminars, and informational materials, as well as outreach strategies to ensure participation.

General Policy Recommendations Implications:

- Instigating a Task Force to oversee educational programmes and monitor behavioural impacts will necessitate the allocation of roles and responsibilities, potentially increasing the workload of existing staff or hiring new personnel.
- Committing to ongoing research and analysis will require funding for research activities, data collection, and analysis, as well as the development of monitoring mechanisms to track trends and disparities.
- **Developing a fluid emergency response plan** will necessitate the creation of clear protocols and procedures, as well as training for staff on crisis management and intervention techniques.
- Ensuring regular policy revisions will require the establishment of a review process, potentially involving stakeholders in providing feedback and input, as well as mechanisms for incorporating community feedback into policy adjustments.
- Establishing a clear protocol for crisis intervention will involve the development of policies and procedures for reporting and responding to 'harmful practices', as well as the training of key staff members in crisis intervention techniques.
- Implementing a policy for psychological evaluation of learners displaying severe behaviours will necessitate partnerships with healthcare providers, as well as resources for assessments and interventions where needed.

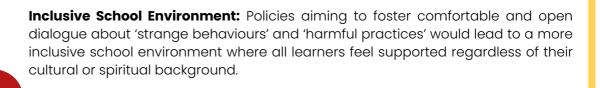


Conclusion

In conclusion, the implementation of these policy recommendations will require a coordinated effort from the Department of Basic Education, educators, learners, and community members. The implications outlined above highlight the need for careful planning, resource allocation, training, and ongoing monitoring to effectively implement policies that address harmful traditional, cultural, and religious practices in South African schools. By prioritising the well-being and cultural sensitivity of all stakeholders, the DBE can work towards creating a safe and inclusive educational environment for all learners.

Policy Implications: Recommendations on the management of the 'strange behaviours'.

The implications of new policy recommendations for managing and supporting spiritual behaviours in the educational sphere encompass several dimensions. These implications focus on policy proposals that extend beyond the existing recommendations derived from respondent experiences, the impact of such behaviours, and their root causes. These novel recommendations hint at a broader and more proactive approach within the educational policy framework, aiming to systemically address the complexities of spiritual behaviours in a supportive, culturally responsive manner.



Policy and Legal Framework: The recommendations imply a robust review and development of school policies to ensure they are ethically sound and legally compliant with national and international standards on religious freedom and the rights of children.

Neutral Educational Space: The DBE's commitment to a neutral educational environment filled with respect for all beliefs underlines the separation of religious practice from state-run educational mandates, supporting secularity in public schools.

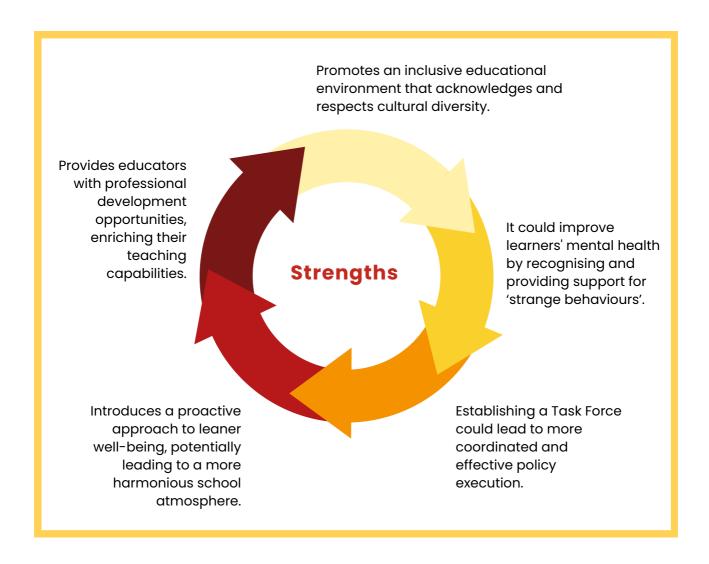
Protocol and Compliance: The formation of teams like the Spiritual Episode Response Team and protocols for verification of 'strange behaviours' being linked to 'harmful practices', suggest a standardised approach to handling these matters, ensuring fair and equal treatment of all learners.

Absence Management and Flexibility: Advocating for special allowances and flexible policies for learners to observe cultural practices suggests a change in how schools manage attendance and participation, valuing cultural observance as legitimate.

Overall, the implications of implementing these recommendations are profound, calling for a systemic change at multiple levels, from individual schools to the overarching education department, to craft a more culturally conscious, supportive, well-rounded, and legally compliant educational experience for learners grappling with 'strange behaviours' and 'harmful practices'.

Recommendations SWOT Analysis

A comprehensive SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of these policy recommendations is essential to understand the potential outcomes for the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa. These policies, based on managing 'strange behaviours' connected to 'harmful practices' and spirituality among learners, aim to integrate these considerations into the educational environment. We will explore the strengths and opportunities these recommendations present, the weaknesses and challenges they might encounter, and the potential threats that could undermine their successful implementation.



May face resistance due to the complexity of integrating 'harmful practices' into a secular educational framework.

The integration of non-academic elements like spiritual behaviours might detract from conventional academic learning time and objectives.

Weaknesses

Existing

Resources could be stretched thin, especially in underfunded areas, limiting the effective implementation of these policies.

Cultural sensitivity training might be hard to standardise across diverse educational settings. Existing curriculum and assessment methods may need significant modification, requiring substantial time and effort.

Creating partnerships with cultural and psychological institutions could strengthen community ties and resource pooling.

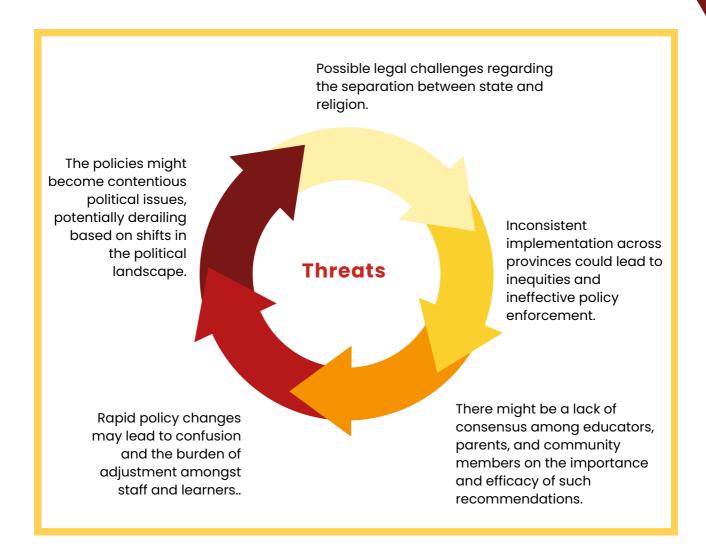
Establishing clear crisis response protocols and emergency plans enhances the safety and preparedness of schools.



It paves the way for modern pedagogical practices, making the educational system more dynamic and adaptive.

Regular policy reviews and research into behaviours provide avenues for continuous improvement and innovation within the educational sector.

Supporting learners' spiritual and cultural needs could lead to improved student retention and success rates.



In conclusion, the policy recommendations for the DBE in managing 'strange behaviours' related to 'harmful practices' offer an opportunity for educational reform that is culturally inclusive and responsive to the needs of learners in South Africa. The strengths of these recommendations lie in their potential to create a supportive, well-rounded, and legally sound educational environment. However, careful consideration must be given to addressing the weaknesses and the possible inequity in resource allocation that could pose significant challenges. Leveraging these opportunities calls for innovation, collaboration, and sustained research efforts. It is vital to remain vigilant about the potential threats that could jeopardise the successful adoption of these policies. Ultimately, if these considerations are strategically managed, the recommendations could greatly improve the learning environment and embrace the cultural diversity that defines South Africa. This SWOT analysis provides a clear lens to navigate the complexities of integrating these policy recommendations within the existing educational framework.



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