

Educational perspectives on learner awareness of hazards and disasters

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“As we go about our daily business, the solid Earth seems safe enough, but there’s far more going on beneath the surface than meets the eye. Things can change in a devastating flash through floods, earthquakes and other disasters that displace or kill the whole communities of people. The more we understand the natural forces that control the familiar landscapes of water, rocks and soils the better we can calculate – and minimise – the risks to people and property.”
(Frost-Killian, 2008: 28)

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I Thank You

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ABSTRACT

The global community is experiencing an increasing number of disasters that ranges from earthquakes, floods, storms, epidemics, fires, landslides, hurricanes, tsunamis and social conflicts that result to loss of life and properties. South Africa is dominated by localised incidents, such as wild fires, seasonal flooding, droughts and accidents in the mining industry. Resource-poor communities such as those residing in many parts of South African informal settlements, currently live with a range of stresses and risks including climate risks, HIV/AIDS and access to insecure land.

While disaster relief has been at the forefront for quite a long time, communities are increasingly looking at disaster risk reduction as the best solution to safeguard human lives and property. Scholars and policy makers are relying on disaster preparedness and resilience as strategies to ensure disaster risk reduction. Disaster education has emerged as a pinnacle for both the preparedness and resilience by teaching communities about the prevalence of hazards and associated vulnerabilities.

The aim of this investigation was to determine how education in particular, curriculum and instructional design contributes to learners' awareness of hazards and disasters. A mixed method research was used to address the question combining questionnaires, interviews and document study as data collection strategies. The questionnaires were distributed to 150 educators from schools located in informal settlements of Ivory Park in Gauteng, Brits in North West Province, Isipingo in KwaZulu-Natal, Bizana in the Eastern Cape and Khayelitsha in the Western Cape. Interviews were conducted with 5 curriculum specialists, 3 disaster specialists and 2 disaster lectures.

The findings of the investigation is that the South African National Curriculum Statements explicitly prescribe hazards and disaster learning outcomes only for Grade 7 Social Science and is silent in other grades and learning areas. Some scholars pointed out that there is no adequate translation of curriculum policy provisions to classroom practice in South Africa, which raises questions on the extent to which learners from South African schools are taught about hazards and disasters as prescribed in the National Curriculum Statements. The investigation also found that educators are overburdened with administrative work and would not be in the position to collaborate with one another

to develop learning programmes and to teach indigenous knowledge or hazards and disasters.

In this study, it is argued that for education to make effective contribution to learners' awareness of hazards and disasters, the national curriculum should focus on the broad learning outcomes used as guideline to develop learning programmes for disasters and hazards that are provincial, district and local areas specific. The development and teaching for hazards and disasters should be specified in all grades across all learning areas. Another argument presented in this study is that the National Disaster Management Centre should play a crucial role in mobilising other stakeholders involved in disaster risk reductions to develop learning programmes as they have hands-on experience of managing disasters so that alleviate the burden for educators to be gathering data for learning programme development.



Concepts

1. Curriculum
2. Instructional Design
3. Hazards
4. Disasters
5. Vulnerability
6. Resilience
7. Informal Settlements
8. Indigenous Knowledge
9. Local Knowledge
10. Integrated teaching and learning

Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune deficiency Syndrome
DBE	Department of Basic Education
FIFA	Federation for International Football Association
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICSU	International Council on Science previously known as the International Council for Scientific Unions
IKS	Indigenous Knowledge Systems
IOM	International Organsiation for Migration
ISDR	International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
NCS	National Curriculum Statements
NDMC	National Disaster Management Centre
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OBE	Outcomes-Based Education
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
TB	Tuberculosis
XDR TB	Extreme-Drug Resistant Tuberculosis
MDR TB	Multi-Drug Resistant Tuberculosis
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United States of America
UK	Unite Kingdom

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