



School Leadership and its Dexterity to Provide Access to Quality Instruction: A Case of a Private Academy in Masvingo, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The study explored school leadership practices in high-performing schools with reference to a private academy in Masvingo district. Literature suggests that leadership has a strong influence on the performance of any school organization. The nature of leadership is not always known but leaders need the tools to make things happen. The rationale for this study was to explore the hallmarks of leadership in high-performing contexts. The study applied interpretivist philosophy and qualitative methodology. The case study research design was employed as it could draw experiences from a high-performing school. Data was generated using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and open-ended questionnaires. The data was presented through themes that emerged from the data analysis process. Informed by the findings, the themes were discussed following the research questions. Major findings were that school leadership in high-performing schools must have vision and direction, it must capacitate teachers with pedagogical and instructional skills, as well as improving the quality of teaching through supervision. Instilling student discipline is important to allow smooth instruction in the classrooms. School leadership must influence responsible authority to provide adequate financial, material, and human resources to reduce large class sizes to increase teacher commitment. The study recommends that staff development programmes that capacitate teachers be put in place so that teachers are equipped with deep approaches to teaching.

Keywords: School Leadership, High Performing Contexts, Student Performance, Instructional Leadership, Distributive Leadership, Pedagogical Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Access to quality instruction and not to a schooling place is the main reason for the existence of school leadership in an education system. School leadership sets the conditions and expectations for excellent instruction and the building of a culture of ongoing learning for students in a school (Acton, 2021; Kyla & Karen, 2010). The Education for All policy that was put in place by the Zimbabwean government enabled all children to access schooling place to every Zimbabwean regardless of color, creed, or

political affiliation. Education was considered as a fundamental human right. By dint of this policy, many children went to school. However, the question that remains is whether the children have access to quality instruction, knowledge, and skills in the schools.

School leadership is broadly accepted as vital in achieving school growth (Bush, 2008), and as such, some schools are high-performing while others struggle. Leadership is central to the success of schools. It is argued that “leadership is a key ingredient to

school functioning” (Christie, 2001:11). In the same vein, Bush, Bell & Middlewood (2010) note that effective leadership is critical for a school to be successful. A school can thus reroute the trajectory of its pupil achievement in the presence of talented leadership. Education is deeply unequal in the United States of America, with students in poor districts performing at levels several grades below those of children in richer areas (Dynaski, 2016). This calls for leadership with craft literacy and craft competence for schools to perform well and change the status quo of these learners in society.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Schools are institutions whose daily operational smoothness and academic performance are influenced to a large extent by school leadership (Jay, 2014). To that end, the school head is the instructional leader who establishes the vision, mission, and core values for the school and these bear a direct influence on student achievement. School leadership ensures the internal efficiency of the education system which enables quality improvement in classroom teaching.

Internal efficiency is an important dimension of the concepts of success and quality of education. It is usually measured by indicators such as student input/output ratios or survival/ attrition rates, learning efficiency, teacher utilization and retention, and teacher effectiveness. It also shows the survival rate of a cohort of students as they go through the current education system (Caillods, Caselli, and Chau, 1999; Galabawa, 2003:4).

It is important to note that learning efficiency matters in instructional practices. There are many children in school who might be learning very little or nothing at all and most learners are not acquiring the basic level of mastery in reading, writing, and mathematics (Mupa & Chinooneka, 2015;

Msasa, 2016) because of a lack of learning efficiency. It is argued in educational theory and practice that only school leaders who are equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achievement (Acton, 2021; Fullan, 2016). School leadership that brings about the concept of the “great men” who are developmental and can “turn around” schools in difficult contexts (Van Rensbur, 2014) are the kind of situations that are needed.

Leadership determines the effectiveness of teaching, as the style of leadership affects how favorable the school’s culture is on teaching and learning (Carpenter, 2014). The practices of leadership include setting high-quality interpersonal relations that enable everyone to work hard (Shulhan, 2018). Batliwala (2007) notes that good leadership is the panacea to address specific development challenges. Several studies on the characteristics of effective schools have been carried out. Lezotte (1990) acknowledges the characteristics of effective schools as the 7 correlates to include: (1) safe and orderly environment, (2) climate of high expectation for success, (3) instructional leadership, (4) clear and focused mission/vision, (5) opportunity to learn and student time on task, (6) frequent monitoring of student progress, and (7) home-school relations. Additionally, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins, (2006) identify these characteristics as four core practices, namely: (1) creating vision and setting directions, (2) developing people, (3) restructuring the organization and redesigning roles and responsibilities and (4) managing teaching and learning.

The issue of providing quality education is cause for concern to the Responsible Authorities, parents, students and even the community at large. School leadership is viewed as agents of change and

expected to produce strategies to make teachers tour the global line of teaching conventions. School leadership that emancipates learners from mental slavery and creates bridges that enable effective implementation of the curriculum is quite critical (Mupa, 2020:77). It is against this background that the current study explores the ingredients of school leadership in high-performing schools, particularly private academy in Masvingo district.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There has been an increasing interest in the role that school leadership plays in providing quality education in various communities. In his work, Marsh (2015) contends that school leadership should be viewed as an activity that is inextricably linked to the task of improving student learning. It is further noted that the problem of how to improve teaching and learning in schools has bothered educators at least since the inception of modern schools. Early in the 20th century, Waller (1932: 4) presented his sociological analysis as ‘an attempt to find a new understanding of schools and to find such remedies for existing ills as that new understanding dictates’. The desire to ‘remedy existing ills’ continues into the 21st century (Day et al., 2008; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012), yet Darling-Hammond (2010) laments that many schools still suffer from weak teaching and impoverished learning. There is a gap in the literature on how school leadership influences the performance of schools in successful contexts. Strong emphasis is placed on the quality of school leadership which is suitable for improvement (Marishane, Botha & Du Plessis, 2011). Most schools still suffer from poor quality teaching as if there is a lack of leadership, yet others are doing very well. The problem can be stated as follows: To what extent is school leadership contributing to the successful context of a private academy in Masvingo?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This section addresses the research questions. The following research questions seek to address the research problem:

To what extent can school leadership bring about continuous improvement in schools in successful contexts?

To what extent does school leadership influence teacher effectiveness in high-performing schools?

In which way does school leadership enhance the provision of instructional resources by the responsible authority in successful contexts?

What are the experiences of school leadership in successful contexts?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

This study is guided by two main concepts, school leadership and schools in successful contexts.

School in Successful Contexts

Schools in rich communities are in successful contexts and are characterized by high performance in terms of learner achievement (Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2015), and those schools in advantaged areas that do not suffer a myriad of socio-economic problems (Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll & Russ, 2004). They possess essential resources and basic items needed to function well. School leadership is central to driving success in such schools (Hallinger, 2011).

Schools that are in high-performing contexts are further described by Maringe & Moletsane (2015) as being those schools that are not in multiple deprivation. Maringe & Moletsane (2015) explain that the concept of multiple deprivation resulted from a concern involving the influence of poverty on

communities in different parts of the world. Furthermore, they conceptualize multiple deprivation as, "a confluence of factors which depress learning and place unique challenges on leadership and which act in combination rather than in isolation" (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015:1). Schools that are in successful contexts do not suffer from multiple deprivation.

School leadership

School leadership is about the ability to give a road map, pointing direction to be followed and encouraging other staff members to start off journeying towards a new and improved state of the school (Davies, 2005). Leadership is a person's ability and readiness to influence, encourage, and invite to be monitored and, if necessary, to force others to accept their influence, and then do something that can help achieve a certain purpose and goal (Shulhan, 2018).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This study is guided by the instructional/pedagogical leadership theoretical framework. It was relevant in this study since it looks at the competencies school leadership requires in building up high-performing schools.

Instructional/pedagogical leadership

Southworth (2002:79) says that "instructional leadership...is strongly concerned with teaching and learning, including the professional learning of teachers as well as student growth". Bush & Glover's (2002:10) definition stresses the direction of the influence process: Instructional leadership focuses on teaching and learning and on the behavior of teachers in working with students. Leaders' influence is targeted at student learning via teachers. The emphasis is on the direction and impact of influence rather than the influence process

itself. Instruction is a way of imparting knowledge and skills to learners. Bush (2008) views instruction as information given to learners on what to do and how to do it. Therefore, instructional leadership focuses on creating an enabling environment in which both teachers and learners thrive. The leader in all this plays a pivotal role in charting the way for all in the school to follow (Heck & Hallinger, 2009). Bush & Glover, (2014) propose that the main mission should be to improve the teaching and learning in the organization. Spillane et al., (2004) define instructional leadership as the identification, attainment, provision, and use of the community material and cultural resources needed to create the environments for conducive teaching and learning. Similarly, Bush et al. (2003:10) state that instructional leadership focuses on teaching and learning and on the behavior of teachers in working with students. Cotton (2003) contends that effective instructional leaders are intensely involved in curricular and instructional issues that directly affect student achievement. Burch (2007) asserts that the main idea of instructional leadership is that there is a possibility of improving staff quality and hence, instruction by developing professional communities of educators and focusing on instructional roles.

Southworth (2002) considers instructional leadership a powerful strategy used for teaching and learning including staff development and empowering of students academically. Instructional leadership is a very important dimension because it targets the school's central activities, teaching, and learning. Joyner, Ben-Avie & Comer (2000) argue that instructional leadership is a crucial component in improving student accomplishment. According to Pansiri (2008), instructional leadership strives to improve the teaching staff's quality of classroom activities for the definite purpose of increasing student achievement as well as

cultivating positive attitudes and behaviour towards schoolwork and their personal. Therefore, instructional leaders should focus on creating environments that allow learners to be able to fully participate in their own learning experiences thereby improving performance quality results.

Blasé and Blasé (2004) are of the opinion that instructional leadership consists of monitoring staff empowerment. Correspondingly, Blasé & Blasé (2004) concur those instructional leaders, discuss with their staff about their instruction encourage unity and sense of purpose among teachers, and empower them to foster decision-making, professional growth, staff leadership, status, self-sufficiency, impact and self-efficacy. School leaders ought to embrace such ideal situations as these will result in excellent performance from the learners. The learners in turn will have benefitted from such school structures which will be viable and allow for creativity.

According to Horng and Leob (2010) there are characteristics of instructional leadership that are expected of a school head. Setting clear goals and managing curriculum are elements at the core of instructional leadership. Being able to monitor lesson plans and allocating necessary resources are some of the characteristics of instructional leadership. Hornng & Loeb (2010); Jenkins (2009) argue that monitoring and evaluating teachers regularly to promote learning and growth is something expected of an instructional leader. Such behaviour is focused on control, coordination, and supervision of all teaching and learning activities and is linked to instructional leadership Marishane et al (2011). Jenkins (2009) shares the same view that instructional leaders prioritize instructional quality. Instructional leadership is increasingly recognized as the most powerful approach to bring about school improvement

and enhanced student outcomes. A strong focus on instructional vision, monitoring of classroom teaching, modelling good practice, and mentoring teachers, contributes to the 'academic press' and improved student learning (Kaparou & Bush, 2020).

Instructional leadership is also called pedagogical leadership. Pedagogy may be commonly defined as "the art and science (and maybe even the craft) of teaching" (Menon, 2016:9). Pedagogy is explored from the context of accompanying learners, caring for learners, and bringing learning to life (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2015). The term pedagogy is further defined by Barton (2019) as the study of teaching, and how content is presented and delivered to a learner. It is the creation of an educational process that leads to knowledge gain in the learner. This is the purpose of instructional leadership, to see to it that teaching and learning is going on with the learner at the centre stage of the process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study that was carried out by Sebring and Bryk (2000) in a rural area in New South Wales on the effects of school leadership on school improvement found that school principals who interacted with teachers and learners empowered them both in their teaching and learning processes. Students performed well and scored good grades.

Byrk et al., 2010 stated that effective leadership, acting as a catalyst, is the first essential support for school improvement that nourishes the development of additional core supports like collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environments, and ambitious instruction (Byrk et al., 2010:64).

Effective leadership is critical for a school to be successful (Bush et al., 2010). Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins (2008) emphasize that as an influence on pupil

learning, school leadership is second only to classroom teaching. They further argue that there is no documented case of a school successfully rerouting the course of its student achievement without the presence of talented leadership. The process designed to produce the best possible leadership for schools must be deliberate and not left to chance (Bush, 2008). In many developed and developing countries around the world, there are two increasing realizations which are (1) the role of school leadership is different from teaching, and it requires separate and specialized preparation, and (2) to provide the best education for learners, schools require effective leaders and managers (Bush et al., 2010). Effective school leadership becomes the panacea to improving schools in successful contexts. NCLS (2007:17) insists "leadership must grow by design, not by default".

Christie & Potterton (1997) carried out a study that focused on finding out the role played by school principals on the well-being of schools. They found out that school principals who were responsible and had the willingness and ability to take initiative improved the well-being of the whole school. In another study on dimensions of effective leadership in schools, Ngcobo & Tikley (2010) found that school leaders who worked hard brought noticeable change in their identified schools. They were resourceful in mobilizing additional teaching and learning material. The school heads invested a lot of their time and purchased equipment for learners. The points of being resourceful and managing time effectively are critical mirrors.

In a study to understand effective leadership in schools, the Wallace Foundation emphasized team power and noted that school leadership remains the central source of leadership influence (Wallace Foundation, 2013:8). Leadership

that facilitates effective teaching yields high pass rate in schools. The concept of effective teaching and learning has long been looked at by various authorities. Kyocou (2001:5) defines effective teaching as teaching that successfully achieves the learning by pupils intended by the teacher. R.S Peters (1973:39) defines teaching as a complex authority that unites processes, such as instructing and training by the overall intention of getting pupils not only to acquire them in a manner that involves understanding and an evaluation of the rationale underlying them but mastery of skill to the understanding of principles for the organization of facts. Eisner (1979) defines teaching as an array of activities the teacher employs to transform intentions and curriculum materials into conditions that promote learning. Leadership has a bearing on the effective teaching and learning of students (Curzon, 1994).

Effective leaders are said to provide adequate teaching and learning time for students to master concepts. If there is little time to expose students to a wide range of concepts in a particular subject, then students are likely to suffer content deficiency. A great deal of research shows that the amount of learning time is a good predictor for the effectiveness of teaching (Anderson et al., in Houtveen and van de Grift, 2006). Time, however, has no meaning but the way time is used is the most important thing. Time is an instrument to measure, for instance, the opportunity pupils get to learn the curriculum, to measure the efficiency of classroom management, or to give struggling learners better opportunities to master the basics of the curriculum or subject. Leadership must ensure the effective use of time by teachers and learners.

Leadership should ensure the teaching of relevant information, the provision of knowledgeable teachers and

teacher commitment (ILO and UNESCO, 2006).

Leadership effects are primarily indirect, and they appear primarily to work through the organizational variable of school mission or goals and through variables related to classroom curriculum and instruction. While quantitative estimates of effects are not always available, leadership variables seem to explain an important proportion of the school-related variance in student achievement (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003:13).

Effective teaching requires teachers who possess professional knowledge and skills (Santrock, 2011). Traveling on an educational route without adequate teaching and learning resources is moving on a rocky road (Mupa, 2012). It is argued that if the impression on the senses is vivid, arresting or striking, our learning is more effective (Jacinta and Regina in Thungu et al, 2008:111).

A study conducted by Klar and Brewer (2013) investigated the principles of the method in high-needs schools used to enact core leadership practices together with their immediate contexts to institutionalize comprehensive school reforms and support student learning. Their findings showed that each principal built a shared vision, created high-performance expectations, and communicated the direction of the school.

An inductive exploratory study by Leigh Sanzo, Sherman, and Clayton (2011) explored the leadership best practices of successful middle school principals as they lead accountability and standards-driven school environment. The finding revealed five themes including sharing leadership, facilitating professional development, leading with an instructional orientation, and acting openly and honestly.

A study by Mulford (2005) in Tasmanian and South Australian schools found that successful school reform was linked to distributive and transformational leadership, development and learning, context, and a broader understanding of student outcomes. Day et al. (2005) note that there will never be a simple manner in which to precisely define successful leadership as it does not consist of a singular or even a series of values, qualities or skills held or applied; but it is the combination of these through which school leaders have the ability to “make a difference” in their schools and communities. Consequently, Hallinger (2003) proposes a theoretical model of integrated leadership as a way for organizations to learn and produce at the highest levels and to achieve sustainable change. He strongly suggests that transformational leadership is a key element for principals in obtaining the commitment of teachers. Moreover, he asserts that teacher participation is essential in sharing leadership functions and teachers adopting the role of effective instructional leaders themselves.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Philosophy

This study is informed by the post-positivist philosophy. Post-positivism gave formal birth to more radical paradigms which include interpretivism, among others (Onwuegbuzie, 2002).

Research Paradigm

The study employs the interpretivist paradigm. The central endeavor of the interpretivist paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This approach tries to ‘get into the head of the subjects being studied’ and to understand and interpret what the subject is thinking or the meaning s/he is making of the context. The researcher tries to

understand the viewpoint of the subject being observed, rather than the viewpoint of the observer. Emphasis is placed on understanding the individual and their interpretation of the world around them. Hence, the key tenet of the interpretivism paradigm is that reality is socially constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The study is appropriately located in the interpretive research paradigm which sees reality as subjective and built from a person's life experiences and interactions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

Qualitative Methodology

In considering the methodology for this research, I asked myself the question: How shall I go about obtaining the desired data, knowledge, and understandings that enable me to answer my research question and thus contribute to knowledge? The study thus employs the qualitative research methodology. Mouton (2005:270) points out that in qualitative research, "the researcher is seen as the main instrument in the research process". The researcher is key and plays an active part throughout the qualitative research process. Cresswell (1998) describes the qualitative research methodology as:

an enquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem...and "the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of information and conducts the study in a natural setting (Cresswell, 1998:115).

Qualitative research is a loosely defined collection of approaches to inquiry, all of which rely on verbal, visual, tactile, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory data. These data are preserved in descriptive narratives like field notes, recordings, or other transcriptions from audio and videotapes,

other written records, and pictures or films (Erickson, 2011:43; Silverman, 2006:33).

According to Henning *et al* (2011), qualitative research is defined as

... a broad umbrella term that covers a wide range of techniques and philosophies, thus it is not easy to define. In broad terms, qualitative research is an approach that allows you to examine people's experiences in detail, by using a specific set of research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation, content analysis, visual methods, and life histories or biographies Henning *et al* (2011:8).

Qualitative research places emphasis on understanding by looking closely at people's words, actions, and records (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994:16). The researcher employed the qualitative methodology because using the subjects' words better reflects the postulates of the qualitative methodology. Qualitative research looks to understanding a situation as it is constructed by the participants. Qualitative research attempts to capture what people say and do (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994).

Case Study Design

Qualitative studies employ various methodologies and for this study, the case study methodology was employed to sun the characteristics of the private academy that was selected for the study. A research design is defined by Jakaza (2013) as an overall plan for a piece of research including four main ideas; the strategy, the theoretical framework, the questions for who or what will be studied, and the tools used for collecting and analyzing materials. Design situates the researcher in the empirical world (Kivunja & Kuyini (2017:37). The choice of the case study method is in line with Kivunja & Kuyini, (2017) who advance the argument that a case study is a design suited to the

interpretivist paradigm. In another context, a case study is defined as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context” (Yin, 2014:16).

Population

The population targeted for this study was school leadership, responsible authority, and teachers at a private academy in Masvingo Province. Population refers to a group of individuals that has one or more universal features of concern to the researcher for the purpose of gaining information and drawing conclusions (Creswell, 2007; Briggs, 2012). The population is defined by Welman, et al (2011:52) as the study of objects, which consist of individuals, groups, organizations, human products, and events, or the conditions to which they are exposed.

Sample and sampling procedure

The private academy selected for this study was suitable because of its high performance over the years. A sample according to Strydomm, (2011:223) comprises elements or a subset of the population considered for actual inclusion in the study. Lindegger (2011:468) describes a specific type of sample as any subjects who are available to participate in a study. Sampling refers to the points of data collection or cases to be included within a research project (Gibson & Brown, 2009:56). Durhheim (2011:49) defines sampling as a selection of research participants from an entire population and involves decisions about people, settings, events, behaviors and/or social behaviors. For this study, purposeful sampling was employed as the sampling procedure. The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in-depth (Patton, 2002). These are the teachers, school leadership, and the responsible

authority at the sampled private academy in Masvingo district. This is supported by Christensen et al., (2011:162) who posit that a researcher concentrating on a specific case should utilize purposive sampling to identify members that he/she believes have required data and characteristics.

Data generation tools

In this section, tools that are used to generate data are the focus under discussion. These include, among others, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, and open-ended questionnaires.

Semi-structured interviews

Borg & Gall (1989:452) say that the semi-structured interview has the advantage of being reasonably objective “while still permitting a more thorough understanding of the participant’s opinions and reasons behind them.” They further argue that the semi-structured interview is generally most appropriate for interview studies in education. It provides a desirable combination of objectivity and depth and often permits gathering valuable data that could not be successfully obtained by any other approach. The semi-structured interview was used as the major tool for this study. I used the semi-structured interview in line with the thinking that it captures the “emic” perspective, that is, taking the view of the participants being studied by probing their frame of inner meaning (Strauss & Cobin, 2017). The view is also shared by Patton (2015) who explains that semi-structured interviews are helpful in reading the contents of someone else’s mind and permit the investigator to collect information that would be implausible to be collected by means of other tools. The selected participants were subjected to this type of interview while the interviewer and interviewee’s words were recorded by phone.

Focus group discussions

A focus group can be defined as “a group interview, centered on a specific topic (‘focus’) and facilitated and coordinated by a moderator or facilitator, which seeks to generate primarily qualitative data, by capitalizing on the interaction that occurs within the group setting” (Sim & Snell, 1996:189). Kitzinger (1995:299) sums up the essential role of the focus group technique as follows:

The idea behind the focus group method is that group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one-to-one interview...When group dynamics work well the participants work alongside the researcher, taking the research in new and often unexpected directions.

When setting up a focus group, it is generally felt that 8-12 is a suitable number of participants (Stewart & Shandasani, 1990). It is an economical way of tapping the views of several people, simply because participants are interviewed in groups rather than one by one (Krueger, 1994). Focus group also provides information on the dynamics of attitudes and opinions in the context of the interaction that occurs between participants (Morgan, 1988). Focus groups provided a safe forum for the expression of views, participants were not obliged to respond to every question (Vaughn et al., 1996). In light of the above advantages, this research employed a focus group as a data generation tool.

Open-ended questionnaire

According to Foddy (1993:127) “Open-ended questionnaire has open-ended questions which include the possibility of discovering the responses that individuals give spontaneously, avoiding the bias which may result from suggesting responses to

individuals.” When the open-ended question is being asked, there will occur some broad, general categories that cannot be matched with any specific category from other data generation tools. Open-ended questions give room to respondents to express their feelings freely towards a given situation. Opperheim (1992:56) posits, “The open-ended questionnaire is a very attractive device for smaller-scale research or for those sections of a questionnaire that invites an honest personal comment from the respondent.” The questionnaire simply puts the open-ended questions and leaves a space for free responses. In this study, it was a relevant tool to generate data from the case of a private academy in Masvingo province.

Ethical and Legal Considerations

Many people fear volunteering information because they feel information may be used inappropriately. To safeguard the rights of the research participants, in this study permission was sought from the Responsible Authority to conduct the study. Research participants were briefed on confidentiality, anonymity, and beneficence as ethical considerations. Letters of acceptance to participate in the study were sent to the participants and signed before the process of data generation began. Consequently, the research’s ethical concern is to ensure that participants experience freedom from coercion (William, 2005:345).

Trustworthiness/credibility/dependability

Guba (1981) suggests that in research conducted within the interpretivist paradigm, the criteria should be based on trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness and authenticity include four critical pillars which are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Thus, to make the data believable, member checking was done.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

In qualitative research, data presentation and analysis happen at the same time. As eloquently stated by Hatch (2002):

Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories. It often involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesizing, comparison, and pattern finding. It always involves what Wolcott calls “mindwork” ...Researchers always engage their own intellectual capacities to make sense of qualitative data (Hatch, 2002 cited in Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007:564).

Data from interviews formed the base of the research findings whilst that from focus group discussions and open-ended questionnaires complemented and reflected upon it (Silverman, 2004). The transcriptions of interviews, focus group discussions and open-ended questionnaires were made and formed into the analysis towards forming the emerging themes. The constant comparative method was used in analyzing data in this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Leadership with efficiency

Participants echoed the issue of efficiency as characterizing effective school leadership in high-performing contexts and had this to say:

FGD1: Effective school leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity

of schooling. Within each individual school, leadership can improve student learning by shaping the conditions and climate in which teaching and learning occur. School leadership involves steering the school by shaping students and staff's attitudes, motivations, and behaviours to influence them to adapt to the desires of the vision of the policy makers. The bed rock of continuous improvement of a school hinge on effective leadership, management, and administration.

P4: School leaders ensure that teaching and learning are done properly. They ensure that the school becomes a community where each member plays his or her role perfectly to achieve the common goal and the good results.

P1: School leadership brings about continuous improvement as unproductive conflict gets smothered, and attention becomes directed to beneficial professional practice.

Supervision of educational personnel is the fountain upon which effective instruction is based and requires connoisseurship or some art for it to be effective. To that end, some minimum level of proficiency is required by the school leader so that he/she can see over and beyond the events in the classroom and assist the teacher in improving (Berruga, 2020:4). The major goal of supervision is to improve the teaching and learning process. School leaders must base their supervisory practices on theoretical frameworks so that their supervision is informed and brings in improved change in the school. Leadership for supervision is not about compliance but is about one's ability to identify what works at a given context. It is also about being aware of the instructional needs (Bhengu & Myende, 2016).

Leadership with a Vision

Schools need leadership with a vision to be high-performing schools. The issue of visionary leadership was raised as an important factor that makes schools qualify in the high-performing context group. This was said by some participants as follows:

P1: Effective school leaders clearly define the school vision and values so that all members follow with no doubt.

P2: Leaders assist by setting examples of commendable professional etiquette to challenge subordinates to emulate productive behavior.

P3: Leaders who uphold the values of the institution challenge both teachers and learners to work towards the improvement of moral standards, social relations, and academic excellence.

Participants have clearly shown that effective school leaders provide a clear vision and sense of direction for the school. They prioritize critical tasks to be done. They focus the attention of staff on what is important and do not let them get diverted and sidetracked with initiatives that will have little impact on the work of the students. They know what is going on in their classrooms. They have a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of their staff. They know how to build on their strengths and reduce their weaknesses. They gain this view through a systematic program of monitoring and evaluation. Their clarity of thought, sense of purpose, and knowledge of what is going on mean that effective school leaders can get the best out of their staff, which is the key to influencing work in the classroom and to raising the standards achieved by students (National College for School Leadership, 2001).

Distributive leadership

Participants raised the issue that leadership in high-performing contexts can distribute responsibilities to staff. They had the following sentiments to share:

P1: School leadership can encompass people occupying various roles and functions such as heads, deputy heads, leadership teams, heads of departments (H.O.D.s), school staff, school governing boards and other members of the school with a responsibility portfolio. Therefore, the success of any school depends on its leaders who distribute responsibilities.

P4: HODs are overseers, they ensure that there is peace, trust, and meaningful teamwork among members. HODs are experienced teachers who can coordinate and provide teaching materials to new teachers.

P3: At the department level, the HOD serves as the exemplary torch bearer in terms of professional practice so that other members may pass the pride down to learners and, thus, ensure hard work that keeps results improving.

The need to make use of distributed leadership is reiterated for successful school performance. Distributed leadership is best understood as practice distributed over leaders, followers, and their situation which incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals (Spillane et al., 2004). Work that offers a view of distributed leadership as a positive channel for change notes that organizations most successful in managing the dynamics of loose-tight working relationships meld strong personalized leadership at the top with distributed leadership (Graetz, 2000). In Australia, a comprehensive study of leadership effects on student learning collected survey data from over 2,500 teachers and their principals and

concluded that student outcomes are more likely to improve when leadership sources are distributed throughout the school community and when teachers are empowered in areas of importance to them (Silins & Mulford, 2002a). The findings from the current study resonate very well with the Australian study.

Leadership is the engine to school success.

Participants raised the issue that leadership is the engine propelling school success. It is the heart of the school that makes things happen. They had this to say:

P1: A school leader contributes immensely to the continuous improvement in school success. School leadership is the engine behind the success of the school in formulating policies that guide the day-to-day running of the school which ranges from pupil's welfare, teaching staff welfare, and non-teaching staff's welfare. It is the duty of the school leadership to formulate policies that must be adhered to for the success of the school.

FDG4: Teaching staff, non-teaching staff and the learners each contribute to the success of the school hence the need of their own supervision for the successful running of the school. It's the role of the school leadership to supervise these areas through their subordinates like heads of departments. Some of the responsibilities include ensuring consistently good teaching and learning; integrating a sound grasp of basic knowledge and skills within a broad and balanced curriculum; managing behavior and attendance; strategically managing resources and the environment; building the school as a professional learning community; and developing partnerships beyond the school to encourage parental support for learning and new learning opportunities.

School leadership requires a proper understanding of all the processes that influence high performance in a school. Without an understanding of the knowledge necessary for teachers to teach well such as content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, content-specific pedagogical knowledge, curricular knowledge, and knowledge of learners, school leaders will be unable to perform essential school improvement functions such as monitoring instruction and supporting teacher development (Spillane & Louis, 2002).

Improving the Pedagogical and Instructional Capacity of the Teachers

Participants clearly showed that the teacher's pedagogical and instructional capacity enables leadership to achieve school effectiveness. The following ideas were reiterated:

P1: The teacher's pedagogical beliefs and instructional leadership behaviors are two important variables in understanding the role a teacher plays in leadership effectiveness in schools.

FDG2: Teachers will serve as role models to students. Their passion for their subjects naturally helps students to like the subjects taught. Teachers help pupils to channel their energy and effort towards good performance.

FDG4: Teachers are key participants in the education system as they maintain direct contact with learners and serve as leaders whom learners must emulate. Cooperation from teachers in upholding school values is cardinal for ensuring that the values become cherished and upheld by learners. That way, disruptive behavior is limited, and results maintain an upward trend. If a school secures teachers who work hard, learners will benefit and remain challenged to work hard to beat competitors.

Hence, results will always be good. Teachers will serve as good examples of leaders at their level as classroom practitioners.

The quality of the instruction by the teacher plays a significant role in enhancing high performance in schools. The capabilities and competencies of the teacher are key variables in enhancing school performance. It is also argued in educational theory and practice that:

Without effective teacher guidance and instruction in the classroom, learning and progress cannot be achieved. The underlying rationale is that while organizational aspects of schools provide the necessary preconditions for effective teaching, it is the quality of teacher-student interactions that principally determines student progress (Antoniou, 2013:126).

This shows that instruction requires enough knowledge of what to teach, to whom, how, when, with what depth and breadth, and why so that it becomes effective. This is the reason why pedagogical and didactic skills are needed for effective instruction.

Teaching experience

Teachers with many years of teaching experience are a great resource who improve the context of the school. This was raised by participants who strongly feel that school leadership who works with experienced teachers find life easy to make schools perform high. In their deliberations, participants raised teaching experience as a key component in school effectiveness. This is what they said:

FDG 3: In particular, gender, ethnicity, educational obtainment, classroom teaching experience, primary subject taught as a classroom teacher, years of experience at their current location, and overall years as

a teacher contribute effectively to school leadership performance. The teacher's role is to implement, assess, and help pupils achieve the shared mission and clear goals. This is the factor that affects the instructional leadership of schools where teachers are responsible for sharing these school goals with the school community.

P2: The teacher contributes to the effectiveness of school and student performance directly and indirectly with the ways he/she uses to influence classroom and school conditions.

FDG4: The teacher factor contributes greatly to school leadership effectiveness in high-performing schools. Schools staffed by credentialed and experienced teachers who work together over an extended time generate the largest student achievement gains. Students who have access to the most accomplished colleagues make the greatest achievement growth gains. Obviously, less-experienced teachers have the greatest margin for improvement. The experienced teachers spread their expertise to students. They have time to lead and learn from their peers, either informally or through structured professional development experiences.

Teaching experience helps teachers with the power of evaluation of lesson development and content mastery by learners. It is argued that teachers with relevant experience in lesson delivery have the:

art and the ability to judge when children have had enough of art, math, reading, or free time is a judgment made not by applying a theory of motivation or attention, but by recognizing the wide range of qualities that the children themselves display to those who have learned to see (Eisner as quoted in Cross, 1977:9).

Quality of instruction given in the classroom

The issue of the quality of instruction was raised as a critical factor in bringing about high-performing contexts. Participants raised the following issues:

P4: High-performing contexts are achieved through the teacher's quality of instruction and how it is passed in the classroom as well as outside the classroom.

P1: Purposeful teachers will make an indefatigable effort to offer counseling services to students when the need arises. In the case of this academy, some of whose students' hail from the diaspora or other schools are known as academic wildernesses and moral deserts, individualized instruction, and counseling, offered by mature teachers, is highly useful as it redirects behaviour to align it to a sense of purpose. The circumstances become conducive to learning and good results become a norm.

Quality instruction can only be achieved if school principals provide for such conditions in the school. School leaders are the life-forces that animate the schools they lead. School principals are expected to play a pivotal role in enhancing quality teaching and learning in their schools (Huong, 2020). An expanding base of research and practice shows that school leaders exert influence on student achievement by creating challenging environments, caring for students, and providing supportive conditions conducive to each student's learning. They are expected to relentlessly develop and support teachers, create positive working conditions, effectively allocate resources, construct appropriate organizational policies and systems, and engage in other deep and meaningful work outside of the classroom that has a powerful impact on what happens inside (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2020). In a 1977 U.S.

Senate Committee Report on Equal Educational Opportunity, the principal was identified as the single most influential person in a school. The committee had the following to say:

“If a school ... has a reputation for excellence in teaching, if students are performing to the best of their ability, one can almost always point to the principal's leadership as the key to success” (U.S. Congress, 1970:56).

Resource availability enables effective curriculum/syllabus implementation.

The issue of availability of resources was pointed out as a key variable in enabling teachers to effectively implement the syllabus in the school. Responsible authorities that provide adequate resources make the work of school leadership and teachers easier. Participants echoed the following:

FDG1: The Responsible authority make funds available for practical materials in time, this makes teaching interesting, and pupils enjoy learning as they have more hands-on experiences. There has been provision of projectors that made teaching easier, and projection of power points made teaching easier and interesting.

FDG2: Resources can either be human, financial, or physical (technical or material). The provision of resources is fundamental to leadership effectiveness in any organization. Without sufficient resources, laws will not be enforced, and services will not be provided therefore resources are considered fundamental and undoubtedly necessary for any policy implementation and are recognized as essential factors in the effectiveness of policy implementation.

FDG 3: The sufficiency of human resources is an important factor that affects implementation effectiveness. For example, the availability of manpower with the necessary knowledge base in competency-based teaching such as lesson planning, lesson delivery and evaluation, will facilitate the renewal of and provide diverse leadership skills. As a result, financial resources are a key factor for successful implementation, and they come from the allocated funds from the responsible authority.

P3: Technical resources are, for example, a high-quality curriculum, books, and other instructional materials, assessment instruments, laboratory equipment, computers, and adequate workspace to help in the effective delivery of duty.

Resources are the key variable that enables effective curriculum implementation in schools. They must be available in large quantities and be of the right quality. Effective school leadership is expected to possess key competencies for school improvement. These include, among others, ensuring consistently good teaching and learning, integrating a sound grasp of basic knowledge and skills within a broad and balanced curriculum, managing behavior and attendance, strategically managing resources and the environment, building the school as a professional learning community, and developing partnerships beyond the school to encourage parental support for learning and new learning opportunities (Day & Sammons, 2016).

Resources help students to master concepts.

Participants reiterated the importance of teaching and learning resources in concept formation and concept mastery. They highlighted that resources help students to master concepts taught easily. To that end, they said the following:

P3: Provision of resources such as stationery enables teachers to work with minimum interruption and administrators are saved the hustle of responding to persistent demands by teachers.

P2: There has been provision of projectors and that has added to the resources meant to assist learners in mastering concepts and succeeding in their examinations. Administrators find their work quite fluid if there is no attrition related to scarcity of resources.

A high level of concept mastery enables students to perform in their day-to-day schoolwork and in the final examinations as well. Highly effective principals understand this trajectory and constantly diagnose their school's practices against it. They have a clear picture of their current state, future goals, and the path in between. Principals use this information to identify the few, focused, and highest impact actions they can take to move their schools into the next stage and achieve breakthrough outcomes for children. They recognize that key dimensions of leadership in an early turnaround situation are quite different than in a highly successful, well-functioning school (New Leaders for New Schools, 2007:7). Increase in enrolment must be commensurate with the available resources so that learners do not share resources like textbooks, computers, practical tools, among others.

Incentivised and motivated teachers

The issue of teacher motivation through incentives also ranked high among the quality of resources needed to come up with a high-performing school. Teachers are a great resource, and their motivation is being talked of as a fundamental factor. Participants had this to share:

FDG 1: Incentives in the form of remunerative power such as salaries,

commissions, fringe benefits, among others, is usually the most effective means of inducing in policy implementers the willingness to achieve a satisfactory standard of enforcement and compliance and hence promotes effective leadership in schools. Sufficient incentives, both monetary and non-monetary provided by the RA will likely make teachers more willing to comply with school policy.

The issue of the need for incentives also ranked high in this study. High-performing schools are characterized by teachers who get incentives to increase the maximum productivity. School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions. A key task for leadership, if it is to influence student learning and achievement, is to improve staff performance. Such performance is a function of staff members' motivations, commitments, capacities (skills and knowledge), and the conditions in which they work (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Leadership with direction and influence

Leadership with direction and influence are critical experiences that are needed to come up with high performance. This was raised by some participants when they said:

P2: Leadership is all about organizational improvement; more specifically, it is all about establishing widely agreed upon and worthwhile directions for the organization and doing whatever it takes to support people to move in those directions.

P1: My generic definition effective leadership is about direction and influence. Stability is the goal of what is often called "management." Improvement is the goal of leadership. Both are very important. Indeed, instability is one of the most powerful

explanations for the failure of most school improvement initiatives and it takes many forms.

P3: Good leadership in schools helps to foster both a positive and motivating culture for staff and a high-quality experience for learners. Leaders at all levels in schools can contribute to this by developing the top skills needed by school leaders.

In a national study, it was shown that effective leaders exhibit profiles such as self-awareness, current knowledge, competence, and the ability to influence success in schools (Scott et al., 2008). In the same vein, Bryman (2007:697) analysed international literature and identified 13 forms of leader behavior associated with school effectiveness and concluded that leaders should focus on "vision, integrity, consideration and the use of direction". Individuals in leadership positions who are effective demonstrate emotional intelligence and a consultative and collaborative style that supports academics to perform effectively (Bryman, 2007).

Stability in leadership for culture development

It was noted that there is a need for stability in leadership so that the smooth continuity of those in leadership would help to build a culture of high performance in the school. This is what participants raised:

P3: One of the most obvious and arguably the most frequent experiences is instability of leadership in the form of frequent head, deputy, and general turnover. Effective school leadership is rooted in continuity, retaining the human resources with experience, and having the school culture flowing in their veins.

School leadership should help to build a culture of tenure in the school for

continuity purposes. Staff tenure is a recipe for culture building. Effective leadership profiles that build a culture of excellence are central to the success of educational institutions (Jais, Yahaya & Ghani, 2020). A leader who shows concern for excellence lays emphasis on creativity and innovation, sets trends, push benchmarks, pursue boundary management, be a visionary, build network and culture, mentor and counsel, and multiplies employee excellence through empowerment, possesses the rightful profiles that make things happen in higher education (Halder, 2010).

Continuous staff development programmes and orientation of new staff.

Leadership must provide continuous staff development programmes to both old staff and new staff. Orientation of new staff on how the job is done at that school is important. It is an experience that helps schools to be high performing. These concerns were raised by participants when they said:

P3: Leaders also must be on the lookout the behavior of other members and students.

P2: Leadership has a duty to make life easier for new teachers by showing them how things are done. For example, how to manage weak students and students from rich families.

FDG2: The major obligation of leadership in successful contexts is to uphold success while exploring avenues for improvement of performance to further polish the image of the institution. School leadership must constantly assist new learners to adjust to the requirements of the institution in terms of classroom approach, need for self-discipline, fitting in among other learners, and adopting acceptable moral values.

P4: Leadership has a duty to assist new staff in adjusting to the demands of the institution so that tried and tested practices will remain essential in the institution.

For high performance to be achieved, leadership requires competencies and “skills that contribute to superior performance” (Mohamead Rohana & Abdullah, 2017:1). In the same vein, Burns (1978:46) concludes that “the ultimate test of ... leadership is its capacity to transcend the claims of the multiplicity of everyday needs and expectations, to respond to the higher levels of ... development and to relate leadership behavior, its roles, choices, style and commitments, to a set of reasoned relatively explicit, conscious values”. This points to the need for leadership to demonstrate excellence and satisfy customer needs and requirements on daily basis by injecting and fueling activities that give the basis of high performance in schools. Southworth’s (2002) qualitative research with primary heads of small schools in England and Wales shows that three strategies were particularly effective in improving teaching and learning which are modeling, monitoring and professional dialogue and discussion.

Managing student discipline

It must be the norm that school leadership manages student discipline all the time. Discipline is key for student success in all cases. Leadership that manages student discipline will see improvement in the accomplishment of tasks. They had this to say:

P4: In successful contexts, leaders manage to work with few hustles as work goes on smoothly. Teachers and students will be busy trying to beat set targets.

P1: Leaders also must be on the lookout for naughty learners who act against school rules during odd times.

School leadership must manage the discipline of students for effective learning to take place. Indiscipline by students is one of the current issues that is totally affecting student performance. It is the responsibility of school leadership to manage such indiscipline and put students in the limelight. School principals have long been thought of as important figures within a school and community but today school principals are facing tremendous pressures from both inside and outside the school building, particularly indiscipline by students (Hansen, 2016). It is also argued that:

Only principals who are equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement the reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achievement (Fullan, 2002:1).

School leadership should thus manage indiscipline for the smooth process of teaching and learning to take place. The need to focus on student discipline resonates with the findings by Amstutz (2015) who notes that discipline socializes learners into school culture and trains them to take responsibility for their own behavior. Discipline helps students to take class work seriously, helps them to keep occupied with productive activities and keep to time schedules.

CONCLUSIONS

The issue of efficiency and visionary leadership was raised as an important factor that makes schools qualify in the high-performing context. Leadership in high-performing contexts distributes responsibilities to staff and effectively makes use of the distributive leadership theory. High-performing schools are characterized by leadership with knowledge and skills of effective pedagogical and instructional practices. The responsibility of leadership is to ensure that teachers possess such skills to

make instruction effective. Leadership equips teachers with deep approaches to teaching since they are at the centre stage of the learning process. Contemporary teaching methods are employed in high performing schools.

A key task for leadership, if it is to influence student learning and achievement, is to improve staff performance and commitment through incentives of various forms. School leadership in the school has built a culture of hard work. Leadership provides continuous staff development programmes to both old staff and new staff. Orientation of new staff on how the job is done at that school is done. It is the norm at the school that leadership manages student discipline all the time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the above conclusions, the following recommendations are put forth:

Leadership must continuously carry out staff development programmes to capacitate teachers with the requisite skills for effective teaching and learning.

School leadership must ensure that students are disciplined so that they can concentrate on school tasks with a high level of commitment.

Teachers must be continuously trained in the use of technical media for teaching and learning to keep abreast with contemporary teaching methods that involve ICT.

School leadership must emphasize didactic conversations between teachers and students so that learning is highly productive.

Several workshops must be conducted on syllabus interpretation and use as well as issues to do with quality of

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teaching and marking as this helps teachers to become more competent.

Teachers must be encouraged to conduct research to gain adequate content to teach effectively and without poverty of knowledge.

Teachers must be encouraged to prepare their work thoroughly through supervision because the greatest resource in any school is the teacher so teacher quality matters in high performing schools.

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School leadership must remove weak teaching that makes students suffer by ensuring that teachers build learning bridges and teach all students and attend to their individual needs.

Teachers must be incentivized so that they commit themselves to school tasks.

School leadership must show prowess in attending to discipline issues by students.

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