

Understanding Distributed Leadership Practice in the Context of High Performing Primary Schools in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to examine the perceptions of school heads on how the distributed leadership practice was enacted in high performing primary schools in Zimbabwe. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and a case study research design to collect data. Three school heads were purposively selected as participants for this study. Structured interviews and document analysis were used to gather data. The distributed leadership theory by Spillane (2005) informs this study which examines school heads' perceptions on distributed instructional leadership practices in high performing Zimbabwean primary schools. The findings from the study indicated that school heads who practised instructional leadership effectively enacted distributed leadership. The distributed leadership practice was enacted through various ways such as through staff development and teacher involvement in leadership activities at the schools. This study concludes that school heads enactment of distributed leadership practices suggests a positive impact on the performance of their schools. The concept of heroism by school heads must be avoided and replaced by the distributed leadership practice.

Keywords: distributed leadership, high performing primary schools, Instructional leadership, leadership practices.

INTRODUCTION

The amount of attention school heads pay to instructional leadership activities sends an important message to teachers on the importance of teaching and learning at schools. Leithwood *et al* (2019) advocate that school heads set directions through communicating school visions and goals to staff members. By defining their positions on instructional priorities school heads alert teachers on the standard expectations at their schools. Through such strategies, instructional activities can be effectively carried out in schools. Day *et al.* (2016) believe that school heads must respond and act according to their school contexts if they are to raise the academic performance of learners. For successful improvement of school activities, school heads create positive school climates that increase learning (Bhengu *et al.*, 2014). Such climates enable members to partake in school activities, lead others and share their knowledge with others. Martin (2018) observes that leadership requirements are far too much for one individual to be effective hence, school heads must work in collaboration with teachers.

Leadership works best when stretched to all members with the school head sharing the school vision with other members (Tian and Risku, 2019). When teachers serve as mentors to other teachers, Velarde (2017) believes distributed leadership exists. Such teachers are experienced personnel with expertise and skills and are assigned to the task of leading other members at their grade levels. Those teachers assigned leadership roles in schools are instructional leaders in their own context, they connect with other teachers to promote shared ideas and practices for quality instruction (Bush, 2018). Content knowledge and leadership practices make teachers contribute a great deal to their area of speciality, resulting in improved performance at school (Seobi and Wood, 2016). Teachers with expertise and content mastery usually are leaders and can be key resource persons for other teachers when addressing problems and issues of instruction (Ghavifekr and Ibrahim, 2014). Instructional leadership by other teachers create a platform for teaching and learning which indirectly develops teachers'

professional competency, their motivation and teaching practices as members help each other as workmates. The aspect of having teachers leading some functions in the school signifies distributed leadership, with teachers either working on the same or different tasks and having constant communication and interaction (Jita and Mokhele, 2013). It is believed that making use of distributed leadership at school presents "... an ideal opportunity to explore turnaround strategies to enhance performance at institutional level and create greater synergy between the different levels of staff" (Badenhorst and Radile, 2018: 4). Distributed leadership is regarded as the appropriate means to improve school performance to greater heights. There is likely to be an increase in school performance when instructional leadership activities are distributed. The question is whether school heads understand this and enact distributed leadership in their schools. With the aim of contributing to educational scholarship on distributed leadership, this research was undertaken to provide answers to school heads' perceptions on distributed leadership practices and how they are enacted in high performing primary schools.

Distributed leadership provides a systematic framework to study leadership in schools. When we analyse high performances in schools using the distributed framework, it can help clarify the different roles that are done by school heads and teachers and explain how their actions improve learner performance (Billingsley, 2012). In a distributed framework, leadership is spread across an organization and involves concerted action across various formal and informal leaders. It goes beyond the simple act of delegating to deeper levels of interactions and cooperative action. The distributed leadership perspective essentially presents a post-heroic alternative and incorporates conceptual discussions. Spillane and Healey (2010) advocate that, theoretically, distributed leadership emphasises two key features of successful leadership which are "leadership plus" and "leadership practice" aspects. Initially, principals must distribute leadership to individuals who can lead and those with technical expertise needed to complete given tasks. The "leadership plus" aspect makes use of expertise of different individuals that occupy various structural positions in schools. This model does not remove the principal from the prime leadership, rather it emphasises a deliberately managed process where leadership is purposefully distributed by the principal. The strategic distribution of leadership to people with knowledge and expertise help increase autonomy and interdependence among teachers, thereby allowing teachers to manage challenges they encounter at their work. Spillane (2005: 144) advocates that, "... leadership practice (should be) viewed as a product of interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation." Principals and teachers interact in their situations with an aim of seeing what activities people do, how they do the activities and why they do them (Spillane, 2005). Followers, in this instance represent individuals who do not have formal positions but take part in working over tasks and making sure, they are completed. The Leadership plus and leadership practice aspects offer a critical framework for studying principals' daily working activities instead of concentrating on the structures of leaders, their functions, or their roles. Distributed leadership practice is found in different leadership actions, and in different school contexts.

Distributed leadership, which dates to the mid-1920s, came into prominence because of the complexity of current school leadership. Its emergence can be explained in two ways, the failure of the hero aspect and the demands on school leaders for accountability on learner performance by stakeholders (Lynch, 2012). It is more concerned on the interactions of school members than their actions (Spillane *et al.*, 2004; Harris and Spillane, 2008). Today's schools face over crowdedness, teacher attrition, new technology, a change in government focus, all which cannot be handled by lone individuals, thus requiring distributed leadership. How effective distributed leadership practices are in enhancing instruction depends on how well school heads stretch instructional leadership activities to staff members. Since the impact of school heads on learners is rated as second when compared to classroom teaching, it makes sense that those who have the most impact on learners get involved in school processes. This results in teacher leadership in different school activities. Though what individual members do in schools is important to leadership, it is crucial to know how distributed leadership practices are enacted for improved school performance.

Research Question

The question guiding the research was: What are school head's views on the distributed leadership practice in Zimbabwean schools and how was it effected?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The distributed leadership theory by Spillane (2005) informs this study. The theoretical framework describes fundamental traits in leadership as a process that is stretched to all members in a school organisation. Distributed leadership is of the view that multiple leaders exist in schools where leader activities are stretched within members of the organisation. The theory views leadership as a practice of managing learning and teaching that involves people working collaboratively with some interdependence (Spillane and Diamond, 2007b). It is a diagnostic tool that makes use of artefacts to focus on core tasks. Using distributed leadership, school leaders can coordinate teaching activities at school and effect changes where there is underperformance. To curb underperformance, it needs the collaboration of school leaders and teachers to initiate programmes that enhance learning. It is also a design tool which focuses on leadership practices that take place in schools. There are different school contexts in which distributed leadership exists. Context signifies the existing available circumstances for school leaders and learners. It determines the level of interaction that may exist in schools between principals and teachers and among teachers in schools. Varied members are expected to put their efforts towards achieving school goals irrespective of them being formal or informal. When members work as a team, they have higher chances of achieving school goals.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Method

This study is conceived within the interpretive research paradigm. It lays emphasis on the meanings that people attribute to their world. Klenke (2016) advocates that interpretivists believe that people are not machines; they have many realities that must be understood while in context. School heads and teachers carry out instructional activities within the context of their schools. It is while in these natural school environments that we interviewed the school heads to understand whether the distributed leadership practice was enacted in their schools.

Participants

The research participants were comprised of three primary school heads. They were purposively selected from high performing primary schools. Leaders and followers are important elements in the distributed leadership framework, so we selected school heads who are the leaders and who worked with followers that is the teachers and collected data on how the distributed leadership practice was enacted in their schools. The selection of school heads from different schools provided a variety in background of the school heads and school contexts. They had varied lengths of stay at their schools, each of which was more than three years which was the minimum expected by the researchers.

Sampling Techniques

Three school heads were purposively sampled, the major reason behind being to have individuals with information on the phenomena under study, which was distributed leadership. Creswell and Creswell (2018) advocate that, qualitative researchers select participants that help them to answer the question under research. It means that the selected participants can provide relevant information. Schools were selected basing on their grade seven-examination results and their reputation in the district for their distributed leadership. Selected participants had the requisite characteristics that the researchers were looking for (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). The purposive sampling technique was quite relevant since it enabled researchers to select participants who contributed to an understanding of how instructional leadership activities are distributed in schools.

Research Instruments

Interviews, and document analysis were used to gather data from the participants. We interviewed the principals and analysed documents that were relevant to our study. Semi-structured questions were used in interviews because they enabled researchers to explore participant's lived experiences with distributed leadership in their schools. Interviews made it possible for researchers to ask the participants questions and get responses. Interview protocols were used and each interview lasted at least forty-five minutes.

To understand why certain activities were done, we interviewed the participants and cross-checked the data from documents. School documents were analysed to complement the data gathered through interviews. Document analysis is likely to produce authentic data since the documents are meant for the schools' records and not for the researchers (Yin, 2014). The documents that were analysed included circulars from the Ministry, supervision reports at the school, staff development programmes and minutes from meetings. The researchers believed that through analysing these documents more data on the distributed leadership practice would be obtained that would help in crosschecking on data that had been collected during interviews.

Data gathering procedures

We interviewed the participants on a one-on-one basis, and all interviews were electronically voice recorded. We also took notes during the interview sessions. We analysed documents to complement the data that was gathered through interviews. The digitally voice recorded interviews were later transcribed and analysed. Also analysed were the data gathered through document analysis. The interpretation and analysis of data started by considering emerging themes and then classified data into categories for coding. The interpretation and analysis of data started by considering arising themes, then classified data into categories for coding. The themes that were used for coding in this study were formed from the research question and framed by the distributed leadership theoretical framework whose key tenet is that leadership is stretched to different members in the school (Spillane, 2005). To ensure the credibility of my study, we used a multi-case study design which was made up of appropriate participants. Credibility focuses on how realistic and convincing research results are. The use of two research tools was a strategy that we used to enhance the reliability of the study. To get dependable results, the research process is clearly stated in a logical manner and in such a way that it can be traceable.

FINDINGS

This section presents the data gathered from the three principals who participated in the study. The data is presented under the following topic in answer to the research question.

School Head's Views on The Distributed Leadership Practice and How It Was Effectuated in Zimbabwean Schools

Staff development at Matanga Primary School

Mrs Muzuwa, the principal of Matanga Primary School, is a qualified primary school teacher who holds a Certificate in Education, a Bachelor, and a Master of Education degree. She participated in the study because of her instructional leadership prowess. It appears her level of education coupled with her experience made her see the importance of staff development in her school. She emphasised the development of teachers at the school. Seong *et al.* (2015) are of the opinion that the provision of opportunities for continuous staff development is an aspect that characterises a conducive environment. Investing in teachers through staff development is an advantage for the teachers themselves and their schools since this contributes to improving instructional practice (Slegers *et al.*, 2014). It is, therefore, an important instructional leadership practice for principals to support staff development at their schools. Mrs Muzuwa supported the continuous learning by teachers at her school. This was evident when she said:

We conduct staff development at grade level. If it is in the Infants Department, we usually combine grades one and two teachers. So, we normally do the Infants Department on its own, grades 3 to 5 on their own then grades 6 and 7 on their own. At times, we conduct staff development for all teachers. For an example, when the new curriculum was introduced, those teachers who had an idea of how it was done helped in making clarifications for other teachers.

From the quote, it can be suggested that Mrs Muzuwa focused staff development activities to concerned people only. The idea of departmentalising their staff development activities appeared to aim at effectiveness. The strategy of staff developing small groups suggests an understanding of the benefits of small group training. This staff development strategy signifies an important instructional leadership practice that suggests that the school head found helpful. The minute books that we analysed indicated records of staff development activities that were held. The records indicated that targeted training was effective. Important to note was the acknowledgement

by Mrs Muzuwa of the knowledge about the new curriculum that some teachers had. Such teachers were made use of as resource persons in explaining about the new curriculum. This suggested distributed leadership by the principal; she enabled other teachers to take lead besides herself. This practice suggested a characteristic of an effective leader who made use of skills in other members (Chan, 2019). After hearing that staff development activities were enacted at the school, we further probed to find out how they came up with the topics for staff development. She responded saying,

These come from both the supervisors and the teachers. I usually encourage teachers to staff develop each other in their departments, so it means they come up with their topics. If topics come from supervisors, they usually concern all teachers, so we find someone to staff develop all teachers.

An outstanding feature about the staff development activities was that the topics for staff development were generated either by supervisors or the teachers, thus indicating a shared responsibility. An important approach found in the response is targeted staff development where the principal talked about staff development in departments. Also important is the fact that topics were not centrally generated, even teachers came up with topics for staff development, thus indicating the enactment of distributed leadership.

Opportunities for leadership

The adage “Two heads (or more) are better than one,” by Cole (2004: 178) suggests that different people working on a task are geared to produce credible results than sole individuals. In a similar lane, principals need teachers for the successful implementation of the curriculum. To find out more about distributed leadership at Matanga Primary School, we asked Mrs Muzuwa about leadership opportunities for teachers to which she responded saying:

Yes, for example, we have the sports director, when doing catering, we have someone responsible for catering, we have someone responsible for subject coordination and we have someone responsible for the social club, for the social life of the school. If I were to do all those things, I would end up exhausted, so I try to delegate, at the same time I will be building leaders.

Her response indicated that she involved teachers in leadership activities at the school. The practice of having teachers leading different programmes such as sports, catering, and subject coordination at the school suggested distributed leadership. Mrs Muzuwa explained that teacher leadership of certain programmes in the school was necessary since it was not possible for her to effectively carry out all the tasks single-handed. This then brought in distributed leadership as other members carried out different instructional tasks. She also regarded her leadership practice as involving the nurturing of talent among teachers for future leadership positions.

Staff development at Bepura Primary School

Mr Shama is an elderly man with vast teaching and school leadership experience. He holds a Master of Education Degree as his highest qualification. As a person who has been a school head for several years, he so much places value on staff development at school. This could be a result of him having high qualifications. In an explanation of how the school came up with topics for staff development he said:

Topics come from the heads of committees and in addition from the administration team depending on issues to be addressed. If it is feedback of information from workshops that we would have attended, that session would be from the administration team. If there are teachers who would have attended workshops other than us, then staff development would come from those who would have gone for the workshops.

A collaboration existed between committees and the administration team in coming up with staff development activities at the school. Committees had opportunities to contribute topics through committee leaders and in addition, teachers had the opportunity to staff develop others. The practice portrayed the school head's interest in distributing leadership. By having the administration team staff developing teachers indicated the enactment of instructional leadership at the school. The aspect of having feedback sessions from workshops attended outside the school suggested that the principal was a leader who kept teachers updated with current information. Beverborg *et al.* (2015) advocate that staff developing teachers improve their instructional practice and

ultimately learner performance. This, therefore, points at the focus the principal had towards the staff development of teachers at Bepura Primary School and the subsequent benefit this had on learners.

When we asked about the frequency at which the staff development activities were held at the school, he said:

Nowadays, there are many new things that we are doing so we do not have a clear-cut calendar for workshops, but we have many. The last staff development meetings we had were on the teaching of Physical Education and content reviewing of a new Shona textbook to find its suitability with the curriculum. I usually do not facilitate, but if need arises, I will participate and advise accordingly. This is to staff develop juniors so that they have confidence in presenting.

Though a calendar of staff development activities was not available, records showed that two workshops had been held in the previous term. It emerged in the interview that teachers also facilitated in staff development activities while the principal joined as a participant. This was meant to develop teachers for leadership positions. This practice indicated the school head's willingness to distribute leadership and to nurture teachers as they engage in leadership activities.

The records of the workshops indicated that all staff members attended the staff development meetings and that they were successful. An important leadership practice noted was the involvement of teachers in staff developing others rather than centralising all activities on the principal. The school head showed interest in sharing leadership tasks with staff members.

Opportunities for leadership at Bepura Primary School

Spillane (2005) points out that school heads do not lead schools to greater heights as lone individuals, but that various individuals are involved. In line with this, Spillane (2009) states that staff members play central roles in the workday of the school head as they take over some responsibilities at the school, thus indicating the distributed leadership practice at play. In an effort to find out from the principal whether he made available leadership opportunities for teachers at his school, we asked him and he responded saying:

I do because leadership is not only about leading teachers. It also involves leading children in various disciplines. We have got co-curricular disciplines where teachers are in charge, so yes, we do. As I have said, we have chairpersons in different committees, so leadership positions exist for teachers.

The head's perception of leadership appeared to have been, a leader is a leader irrespective of leading teachers or learners. He indicated that leadership opportunities existed in the school since teachers led different co-curriculum activities. He reiterated the existence of committees, thus suggesting leadership opportunities for teachers in the school.

When we asked how teachers were allocated to the leadership positions, he said,

We, assign based on the teachers' flair, those that are keen in health, catering, sport, gymnastics, chess, girl guides, we assign them to those. As for committees, teachers choose areas they are interested in then others join them. We have the examinations committee, subject committees, welfare committee, sports committee, and the catering committee.

Co-curricular activities pointed out by the head were made up of different categories led by different teachers, thus providing teachers with opportunities to lead. The teachers' interest in a discipline took centre stage in deciding an area they were allocated to. It thus showed that teachers were not just allocated to a discipline, they had to display interest in the discipline before being allocated to it. As for committees, teachers joined basing on their choice. The different committees at the school suggest the head's interest in stretching leadership opportunities to other teachers.

Staff development at Chrim Primary School

Mr Kanyo is one of the three principals that participated in the study. He is a well-experienced teacher and school head whose knowledge can be attributed to him being asked to come back from retirement to lead Chrim Primary

School, a private school. He holds a certificate in education and a bachelor's degree in education management. His knowledge and wide experience can be attributed to his leadership practice.

Mr Kanyo indicated that the school conducted staff development training and the topics were derived as per his explanation below;

As I supervise teachers, I notice some gaps or areas that need more attention, so we take those. I also consult the teachers before preparing the schedule on areas of their concerns and weaknesses and then we come up with topics for discussions.

Mr Kanyo's response showed the importance of supervising teachers through lesson observations. As he pointed out, it was through this practice that he identified gaps for staff development. In addition to areas he identified, he also consulted teachers on needy areas that required staff development. The idea of consulting teachers suggests a sharing of instructional responsibilities with other members. This indicated the value he placed on teachers who spend more time with learners than heads themselves. This is in line to Leithwood *et al.*, (2004) who advocates that principal leadership come second to classroom instruction among the factors that relate to what is learnt by students at school. This portrays that, teachers are an important force in the school who need to be highly respected if improved performance in schools is to be realised.

When we probed further to find out the level of teacher participation in the staff development activities, Mr Kanyo indicated that teachers highly participated in the activities. He revealed this when he said,

It (teacher participation) is very high. As the head, I believe every teacher who was recruited in the school has something special to bring in, I involve them so much. At times, I even give them topics to research on. I even ask teachers to present papers and staff develop others in their areas of strength.

Mr Kanyo indicated that there was high teacher participation in staff development workshops. He believed that each individual teacher had something important to contribute to the development of the school hence he involved them in different school activities. The giving of research topics to teachers and present to other members of staff is an important leadership practice where teachers are nurtured to be future leaders. In analysing the school documents, we discovered that this practice was in line with the school policy, which encouraged teachers to be involved in research activities. Bland *et al.* (2014:1) have echoed the importance of staff development when they said, "Once recruited, qualified teachers must be improved through on-target, on-time, and on-task staff development programmes ..."

Leadership opportunities at Chrim Primary School

Nawab (2011) posits that one strategy to lead schools to effectiveness is through giving authority to teachers and trusting them. This is somehow a pointer to distributed leadership. When we asked Mr Kanyo whether he afforded teachers leadership opportunities at Chrim Primary School, he said these were available through varied activities. This is what he said,

Yes, we do. We have various committees like the tours committee, entertainment committee and chairpersons are fully responsible for their committees. If we are going to have a speech and price-giving day at the end of the year, we say to the committee, look, this is what we expect, we want this, do this.

The school had different committees, which focused on different areas suggesting that leadership opportunities were available for teachers, thus indicating distributed leadership. The different committees that existed had different chairpersons who presided over each committee, indicating shared responsibilities with other staff members.

Mr Kanyo's wide teaching and school leadership experience might have taught him that leadership did not lie in people with formal positions only, but that it included those occupying informal positions. His remark concerning factors that contributed to the high instructional performance at the school suggested this. He said:

We believe that parents should be well informed in the education of their children, so we always try to bring them in. They must manage, monitor, and help with the children's homework.

The inclusion of parents in the activities of the school signifies their importance in the education fraternity. Asking parents to manage, monitor and assist their children with their homework suggests a leadership strategy of sharing the responsibility of the learners' education.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Leadership of organisations in today's changing world cannot be left to lone individuals and expect excellent outcomes (Jamail and Don, 2016). Collaborative efforts are the order of the day if organisations are to improve their performance. The leader-plus characteristic of distributed leadership recognises the presence of different members in leadership and management practice. The idea behind leadership practice is that lone individuals cannot single-handedly drive organisations to high performance (Spillane, 2005) it needs other leadership players to build up a unified force.

Effective school leaders provide opportunities for professional growth to their teachers, this they do through enabling staff development activities in their schools such as existed in the three schools studied. Kosgei (2015) advocates that education is dynamic, thus the curriculum and the education system always re-orient to meet the current demands. Hence, for teachers to remain competitive in such a dynamic environment there must be continuous staff development for them to be able to address emerging issues in society. While staff development took place in different ways, depending on school context, a common observation among the school heads was their commitment to staff developing their teachers. Their commitment started with their deliberate efforts to know the performance levels of their teachers through lesson observations. There was time and effort investment by school heads to develop leadership capacities of their staff members. This practice enhanced teachers' leadership skills and their ability to work on different tasks and get satisfaction from completing the tasks.

Mrs Muzuwa staff developed teachers for them to meet the school's performance standards. To ensure the effectiveness of the staff development programmes, she involved teachers in coming up with topics for staff development. This proved effective since teachers were staff developed in areas of their interest. This was an important practice, which showed a shared responsibility among school members. The principal could have solely come up with staff development topics but as Leithwood *et al.* (2004) state that leadership effects on student learning amount to a quarter of all school effects, it suggests the school head's recognition that teachers spend more time with learners, thus understood the challenges they experienced in classes more than her.

The findings from Bepura Primary School concerning staff development programmes indicated that they were collaboratively developed by teachers and the administration team. Mr Shama's revelation that staff development topics came from heads of committees and the administration team indicated the principal's interest to staff developing teachers and his commitment to stretching leadership roles to teachers. All was not centred on the school head. Committees were made use of as the medium through which teachers suggested topics to the supervisory team.

All school heads showed commitment to professionally developing their teachers and distributed leadership practices. Enacting distributed leadership practice in schools by the school heads is important in improving the school performance since it embraces different ideas from staff members. This is healthy for the schools. Such a leadership practice by the school heads could have been the reason behind the hundred percent pass rate that was obtained at Chrim primary school.

School heads have the latitude to come up with instructional leadership positions that teachers can occupy at their schools. Findings from the study showed that such positions existed in the three schools that we studied. The schools had committees whose leadership were teachers. This offered teachers the opportunity to practice leadership skills and to be involved in school activities. Such a practice motivates teachers to improve performance (Ghavifekr *et al.*, 2015). The committees covered different sections in the schools from examinations, subject areas, sports, fundraising, catering, health, and social welfare. Besides motivating teachers, the idea of committees in schools lessened the loads on school heads as was evident when Mrs Muzuwa acknowledged the importance of stretching instructional leadership activities to other members. Her comment that if she were to do all tasks at the school, she would end up exhausted signified the reason behind her enacting the distributed leadership practice. Through taking leadership roles in committees, teachers developed their leadership skills. The distributed leadership practice was thus enacted through such arrangements. The school

heads created leadership opportunities for teachers thus showing an understanding of the importance of distributed leadership in improving school performance. Leadership opportunities for teachers existed at Bepura primary school where the use of committees was also made use of. The remark by Mr Shama that there were varied co-curricular disciplines that were led by teachers signified the existence of opportunities for leadership positions for teachers. The existence of committees suggests interactions between the school head and the teachers in the context of their schools. This might also suggest that the school head was an effective leader who recognised the skills and expertise in staff members and tapped them for improved school performances. The increased use of committees by the principal appeared to answer Jamail and Don's (2016) call for increased opportunities for teachers to become leaders in varied areas in the schools.

The operations of committees in the three schools depended on the context of each school. Mr Kanyo indicated that opportunities for leadership existed at Chrim Primary School when he indicated that his school had various committees such as the tours committee, the entertainment committee that were responsible for all the activities that fell under those committees. The records we analysed showed minutes of meetings by different committees. One such example was by the fundraising committee that wanted to raise funds to electrify the school. The record suggested a distributed leadership practice in the school. The wide experience of the school heads is highly believed to have made them recognise the value of the distributed leadership practice and to enact the distributed leadership practice. Spillane and Diamond (2007b) argue that by enabling different members in the schools to take part in leadership and management activities shows an enactment of distributed leadership.

CONCLUSION

Distributed leadership practices are perceived as contributing factors to high performance of schools. This study concludes that the concept of heroism by school heads is believed to have been replaced by the distributed leadership practice, which incorporated deputy heads, teachers in charge, and staff members in instructional leadership activities. In such environments where there was the enactment of distributed leadership, teachers took leadership responsibilities. Instructional leadership practices underpin the instructional performance of teachers. School leaders created opportunities for teachers to hold leadership positions. The study concludes that school heads understood the importance of distributed leadership and enacted it in their schools through enabling teachers to undertake different leadership activities at their schools. Accountability and complexities in the improvement of schools made school heads enact the distributed leadership practice to achieve school goals. It made sense for school heads to closely tie instructional leadership to distributed leadership through engaging multiple individuals.

The study established that there was a wide use of committees in the three schools. This increased the academic performance of the three schools and alleviated the burden of workloads on school heads leaving them with time to play other school roles. The distributed leadership practice was enacted in the three schools with multiple players leading instructional activities thus improving the performance of the schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The distributed leadership practice does not hold principals alone as accountable for the leadership of schools. Accountability is shared with other members of staff whose joint actions determine school outcomes. We recommend, therefore, that teachers take active roles in instructional leadership activities. The practice of sharing instructional leadership practices indicate active teamwork between principals and teachers on curriculum and assessment matters.

Principals' direct and indirect involvement in instructional activities make a difference to teaching and learning. We therefore recommend that principals create conditions and structures that allow interactions between teachers and the supervisory team and among teachers themselves. This is a significant way of indirectly contributing to teaching and learning by principals. Since this study was carried out in three schools in one district in Zimbabwe and yet districts differ in their approaches to instruction, it is recommended that further study be carried out on a wider scale in other districts to find out how the distributed leadership practice is enacted in other districts.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained for this research

Conflict of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability

Data is available when requested for.

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